



## **Working with Local Traveller Communities to Develop Inclusive Practice and Cultural Awareness in Lincolnshire**

### **Report 1 – Identifying and Sharing Good Practice<sup>1</sup>**

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#### **Key Points**

- Overall, Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative (LTI) are championing good practice regarding their engagement with Travellers locally, leading to various outcomes for the Traveller communities they work with.
- Evidence from LTI highlights that building and maintaining trust is key to engaging and working with Travellers but that an ability to be flexible in approach is also important.
- Knowledge transfer often takes place between Travellers engaged in LTI's services and Travellers who are not engaged, and there is value in harnessing this.
- Being culturally aware and challenging unconscious bias and prejudice is vital. LTI play a role here but there is also a need for this cultural awareness and commitment to work with Travellers to be embedded at an organisational level within services.
- Funding ultimately impacts LTI's capacity and resources, and they also recognise two gaps in their service concerning the engagement of Traveller men as well as Housed Travellers. It is acknowledged that other local services may very well experience these same challenges.

#### **Context**

The historical and contemporary marginalisation and stigmatisation of Traveller communities and the inequalities they face are well evidenced (Cemlyn et al. 2009<sup>i</sup>). Problems have been raised, for example, concerning Traveller communities' abilities to access mainstream services and support organisations (Gill et al, 2013<sup>ii</sup>), and evidence suggests that few services make serious attempts to include Traveller communities in service development (Robinson and Martin, 2008<sup>iii</sup>). Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative (LTI) is a charity that engages Traveller communities to address the various challenges they experience, committed to creating opportunities for Lincolnshire's Traveller communities, fostering community cohesion and creating positive futures. Their main aim is to empower families by providing trusted, high-quality services. LTI provide: information, advice and guidance; support with home learning; adult training; professional development and education; and

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health education to help Traveller communities improve their uptake of preventative health services. Outcomes and impact from LTI's work include:

- Support and accessing help for Travellers,
- Getting children into school,
- Employment opportunities provided to Travellers working for LTI,
- Successful completion of various adult training courses by Travellers,
- Empowerment of Travellers (through, for example, the Well Woman groups, adult training, and education of children),
- Through their Well Woman groups, they have helped women gain various qualifications and 26 women into employment. These groups have also led to 7 women having their first smear tests, and increased fitness levels and knowledge about healthy cooking amongst the women.

This report emerges from a research project led by Dr Laura Way, University of Roehampton (UK) in collaboration with Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative, funded by a British Academy Innovation Fellowship (February 2023 – February 2024). The project comprised two core data collection techniques – interviews with LTI staff, and peer research interviews with Travellers. Informal observations also took place through the shadowing of LTI staff. The research aimed to explore how both local and national mainstream services and support organisations can: 1) include Traveller communities in their service development, 2) make themselves easier to access for Traveller communities, and 3) engage more fully in inclusive professional practice, underscored by improved cultural awareness.

This is the first of two reports which share the findings and recommendations from this research project. This report focuses on 'Identifying and Sharing Good Practice', highlighting the good practice being championed by LTI (noting too, some challenges experiences) and offering recommendations for organisations on engagement with and/or supporting Traveller communities.

## **Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative (LTI)**

### **Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative – Championing Good Practice**

#### *○ Relationships Built on Trust*

LTI are well known by Travellers in Lincolnshire and there is a good degree of trust in LTI amongst the communities. The peer interviews, as well as informal observations made whilst shadowing LTI staff, highlighted how LTI are valued by the Traveller communities they work with. Recommendations for building and maintaining trust based on LTI's good practice are found in the next section of this report but one thing to note here is the role longevity can play in building relationships based on trust. As one interview participant said:

“...all the way through from the last 25 years LTI have helped us, with schools and things like that. If we've got any problems in school LTI go in. If we pull the children out - obviously we pull them out at 10, 11 years old - LTI home tutor them, they send the bus and that round. Before the bus [LTI staff] used to come years ago to the babies... And now they help *us* by doing weekly well-being groups”.

This very much speaks to the length of some of the Travellers' relationships with LTI. Quite a few of the Travellers who are now adults and/or parents recall LTI supporting them back when they themselves were children. The various support and engagement activities LTI offer - e.g. education for school-aged children, Well Woman groups, adult education and so forth - means this support of Travellers across the life course can take place and such longitudinal relationships no doubt contributes to the trust built between them.

- *Including Travellers in LTI service development and offer*

LTI and its staff are continuously responding to the needs of the Travellers they engage with and/or support. As a LTI staff member explained:

“Nothing is too big, if we can help we will. If we can't, we will get the help in or point into the right direction, we continuously work on our skills to be able to give a greater service. We are passionate and want to make a difference.”

Travellers are included in the development of LTI's services and work in several ways. LTI ensure there is a good representation of Travellers on their trustee board, for example, and employ Travellers. LTI continuously seek feedback from the communities they engage with, both through formal and informal means and emphasise how everything they do is driven by the needs of the Travellers they work with. As a result, LTI are flexible in their offer, sometimes also needing to adapt and respond quickly.

LTI do not work in isolation; developing partnerships and working in partnership with other services and support organisations is an important part of their strategy. This includes linking up with services for adult training; working with community nurses, cancer nurses and dentists; building a partnership with the Scouts and partnering with local universities. LTI put in a great deal of effort to strengthen and build a partnership with the NHS, which has resulted in the appointment by the NHS of a specific Traveller Communities Wellbeing Link Worker, something that is quite unique in the NHS and is attracting a lot of attention – this has also led to various positive outcomes for LTI and the Travellers they work with.

- *Responding Flexibly to Resources Available*

LTI, despite their relatively small size, offer support in various areas and a variety of activities in addition to operating across various parts of Lincolnshire. Staff have adapted to work flexibly with regards to roles and responsibilities as illustrated by the quotes from staff below.

“I'm a playworker/cleaner and also a family support worker as well. A couple of roles in my job, not just one.”

“We're literally teacher, pastoral, everything and anything.”

Whilst this might reflect the multitude of the work LTI engage in, this need to be flexible and adaptable is also indicative of the funding constraints LTI are operating under with staff needing to 'wear many hats', given that capacity for employing a wider body of staff is limited. Furthermore, this might also reflect the way Traveller communities can operate as closed communities, meaning that once an organisation has built and gained a trusting relationship with them, the organisation then does need to become a catch-all in terms of their offer.

Having designated spaces and places to offer different activities, or just to be present in, is important. LTI have a main office and use of a community space attached to this to be able to offer workshops, training events, hold staff meetings and so forth. In another location they have use of a community space for the weekly Well Woman group that they run with the Travellers in that area. Some of the Traveller sites have their own buildings which LTI can use for playgroups, running training and so forth, but this is not the case for all and tends to be the exception rather than the norm. With regards to their educational provision with children, LTI have a minibus which has been converted to mirror a classroom environment, and they take this to various sites and students. In relation to having a space or place, one LTI staff member commented that having a dedicated space made it easier to be present on the Traveller sites rather than just “turning up on site and feeling like you're wandering around in their space.”

- *Knowledge Transfer amongst Travellers – a ‘Trickle Through’ Effect*

LTI were aware that there is a transfer of knowledge between Travellers who are engaged in services, support and/or activities, and those who are not. Staff highlighted examples whereby learning which had taken place by young children who had attended LTI’s weekly school bus had then been passed on to parents and/or extended family members. Similarly, both LTI staff and Travellers who attended the Well Woman group raised that the women who attended would take what they gained from these sessions (e.g. health education) and use this to support their own family, with this then spreading further throughout their community. As one staff member noted:

“Everything we do trickles through the Traveller community, new skills are shared with family and friends, and new knowledge is discussed and shared between them. A lot of this is built on trust e.g. if we have got one child into school their family and friends will then contact us for the same support.”

Again, thinking about the point raised above concerning how Traveller communities can sometimes feel closed off to outsiders, there is value here to reaching larger numbers within the community through engaging with a smaller number of individuals. This could also be beneficial in terms of reaching men indirectly, responding to a challenge LTI noted (below).

- *Bringing together Travellers and non-Travellers*

Whilst LTI is a service for Travellers in Lincolnshire, they do bring Travellers and non-Travellers together in some of their activities. Their Well Woman group is a key example of this and, though predominantly Travellers in attendance, it is also attended by some non-Traveller women. Additionally, LTI hold local family fun days which are open to the wider local community and non-Travellers. LTI see the importance of this as located in terms of Traveller’s integration as well as being a way of increasing the visibility of Travellers in their local areas in a positive way.

LTI were mindful of how their services and support might also contribute to Travellers’ integration more broadly as well as addressing marginalisation through increasing education and employment opportunities:

“Supporting adults with adult education, interview skills etc encourages people back into work, mixing with society.”

“Through supporting and encouraging families to allow their children/young people to attend school, nursery or college.”

## Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative – Challenges

The interviews with LTI staff also identified some of the challenges they felt in carrying out their roles and the work LTI was engaged in more broadly. Funding was identified as a key, ongoing challenge. This impacted on capacity of LTI as well as capacity of the staff working for LTI and resources. One LTI staff member said they felt their approach to work tended to be reactive rather than proactive due to pressures on time and workload which can be seen as a knock-on effect of such funding constraints. Due to lack of capacity, LTI staff felt they struggled to engage in legal matters, campaigning on behalf of Travellers, and were unable to train and employ more Travellers than the numbers currently.

As outlined above, LTI work in partnership with various local services and organisations but there are challenges with this. Particularly, it was felt that working in partnership could be reliant on one person within an organisation being interested in working with LTI, rather than at an institutional or organisational level. There had also been experiences of working with professionals and practitioners where LTI felt they were being treated as a 'tick box' experience.

LTI recognised gaps in their offer which they trying to address, particularly their lack of engagement with Traveller men and difficulties in identifying and reaching 'housed' Travellers.

## Key Recommendations

### ○ *Building and Maintaining Trust*

A key theme that emerged from interviews with LTI staff and Travellers was the importance of building trust. Various points were raised in relation to this:

- The value of building a relationship with a trusted person on site, or where LTI are already working with the site in question, LTI's role as a gatekeeper,
- Being seen and being present is important,
- Not looking/behaving like an authority figure,
- Demonstrating a genuine desire to help,
- Not making promises that cannot be kept.

Furthermore, the value of engaging with the same professional was raised:

“Consistency is always best so trust can be built, seeing different people all the time does not work as well.”

It was raised in both interviews with LTI staff and with Travellers themselves that it was important for organisations to 'take their services to' Travellers.

### ○ *Cultural Awareness*

In-depth cultural knowledge concerning Gypsies, Roma and Travellers is not typical amongst professionals and practitioners the communities encounter. Being open-minded and being aware of unconscious bias is key to ensure professionals' engagement is not underpinned by damaging stereotypes and negative judgements. The value of asking, rather than assuming, was raised here. In

terms of thinking about cultural differences, some things needing consideration which were raised by LTI staff and Travellers in interviews included:

- Communication – not relying on reading and/or writing. Looking at other ways of communicating such as telephone calls, voice notes, speaking in person. Additionally, being sensitive to the fact there can be shame felt by Travellers at not being able to read and/or write.
- Language - e.g. not using jargon but also being aware of what things might be acceptable or not acceptable to say. For example, words associated with taboo subjects (see below) might be considered unacceptable even when not used in that context.
- Taboo subjects – this can include pregnancy and sexual matters. Whilst not necessarily taboo, mental health can still be considered something to not be discussed.
- Recognising that not everyone will have a fixed or registered address, or possess things like a passport, utility bills with address on and so forth.
- Particular ideas might be held about gender roles and what is expected of girls/women, boys/men.

It is important to be sensitive to how some Travellers might need their confidence building in engaging with professionals due to previous bad experiences they have had and that they might be wary of some services.

**To find out more about Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative (LTI), get in touch: <https://lincsti.co.uk/>**

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### **Work cited in this report**

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<sup>i</sup> Cemlyn, S., Greenfields, M. Burnett, S., Matthews, Z. and Whitwell, C. (2009) Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review. Research report: 12. Equality and Human Rights Commission. Available at: [https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research\\_report\\_12inequalities\\_experienced\\_by\\_gypsy\\_and\\_traveller\\_communities\\_a\\_review.pdf](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research_report_12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Gill, P., MacLeod, U., Lester, H. and Hegenbarth, A. (2013) Improving access to health care for Gypsies and Travellers, homeless people and sex workers. An evidence-based commissioning guide for Clinical Commissioning Groups and Health & Wellbeing Boards. Published by The Royal College of General Practitioners, September 2013.

<sup>iii</sup> Robinson, M. and Martin, K. (2008) Approaches to working with children, young people and families for Traveller, Irish Traveller, Gypsy, Roma and Show People Communities. A literature review report for the Children's Workforce Development Council. National Foundation for Education Research (NFER).