



the Traveller
Movement

**Women's
Empowerment
Network**
Annual review
2018/19

March 2019

Foreword

Welcome to our second annual review for the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) Women's Empowerment Network (WEN). The network was launched in 2017 as a platform for GRT women to raise awareness of issues affecting their respective communities with support, administration and resources provided by The Traveller Movement (TM).

So who are we and what are we about?



We are a small group of members from across the UK: all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women who care passionately about the empowerment of women and girls from our communities.

WEN aims to create a platform to harness these skills and hear our voices while also supporting other GRT women and girls to build their skills and confidence, develop collective strategies to challenge discrimination and inequality, and fulfil their potential as leaders and activists working for the rights of GRT communities.

We continue to work both independently of each other and together to improve the outcomes of our communities across the UK.

We aim to:



- Develop and enhance the skills and capacity of GRT women and girls to work collectively to challenge racism and sexism and all forms of discrimination experienced by their communities.
- Identify, document and respond to the particular experience of inequality for GRT women and girls.
- Support GRT women in their voluntary and paid roles as activists for their community.
- Provide appropriate resources and training to GRT women and girls in leadership roles to respond to the issue of violence against women within their community/work.
- Facilitate discussion/debates on gender equality and sensitive topics such as sexuality and LGBT issues within GRT communities.
- Create safe spaces for open and structured dialogue.
- Become a representative authority and voice for GRT women and girls.

Our achievements



It's been another busy year for the Women's Empowerment Network (WEN). Our members have developed their skills and gone on to thrive in their respective areas of work, taking the message of equality and anti-racism to the mainstream and delivering these important messages to many diverse audiences.

This year some of our WEN members participated in the filming of ***Never Going to Beat You***, an important play about domestic abuse, as experienced by an Irish Traveller woman. Filming took place in London in November 2018, with actors from the Irish Traveller community and the settled community. The film was produced by Crispy Biscuit Films, and Giants Theatre. It will be launched in autumn 2019, so watch this space!

We recruited several new members to the network, some of whom are proactively trying to get more GRT pupils into third level education. It's important that children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds feel welcome in third level institutions, which is why this type of outreach work is so important.

Many of the members now deliver cultural competency training, and have been delivering training to frontline workers across the United Kingdom. This work is so important if public services are to work effectively with our communities. Some of the members worked almost exclusively with local authorities, while others made a point of working with police forces to tackle the barriers to engagement, particularly in relation to reporting domestic abuse or hate crime.

Some of our members are now working in frontline services, and doing their best to break down the barriers to engagement between GRT and frontline professionals. Other members have gone global with their work, and have been speaking at conferences and events across Europe and beyond.

Over the next pages of this review we are going to break down in a little more detail what we, individually, have achieved over the last year.

WEN members – profiles

WEN member: **Lisa Smith**

My name is Lisa Smith. I am 26-year-old Romani woman based in Worcestershire. I am currently Youth Editor at Travellers' Times and a Global Leader for Young Children at the World Forum Foundation. I also work on a freelance capacity for the Council of Europe on the INSCHOOL project aimed at promoting the educational Inclusion of Roma Children.

It's been a busy 12 months! A few things I have been up to include: working with Roma international youth organisation TernYpe <http://www.ternype.eu/> to help facilitate '**Dikh He Na Bister**',

Look back and don't forget, a Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative located in Poland <http://2august.eu/events/2016-krakow/>. Aimed at raising awareness about the Roma Genocide among young Europeans, civil society and decision-makers, as well as about the mechanisms of antigypsyism in a challenging context of rising racism, hate speech and extremism in Europe.

In the last year I was also happy to be elected into the position of chair for a small but committed education charity, the Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers (ACERT) <https://acert.org.uk/>. In September 2018 our annual AGM and mini conference put the spotlight on women's activism, the day was a celebration of the strength and resilience of Romany and Traveller women across the UK. Inspiring and thought-provoking testimonies, films, speeches and poetry was heard including members of WEN. These can all be found on the ACERT [website](#).

I am a member of WEN because I believe Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women must stand together in solidarity to challenge fascism and sexism. We have to reject the popular representations of Romani and Traveller women as victims lacking their own agency and self-advocacy, in both internal and external contexts.

I have enjoyed being part of WEN and taking part in public speaking and political lobbying workshops. I look forward to continuing to work side by side with other strong and courageous females creating change both inside and outside of our communities and making varied contributions to British society. I hope that together in 2019 we can continue to support, celebrate and promote the achievements of women in our communities.



WEN members – profiles

WEN member: **Chrissie Browne**

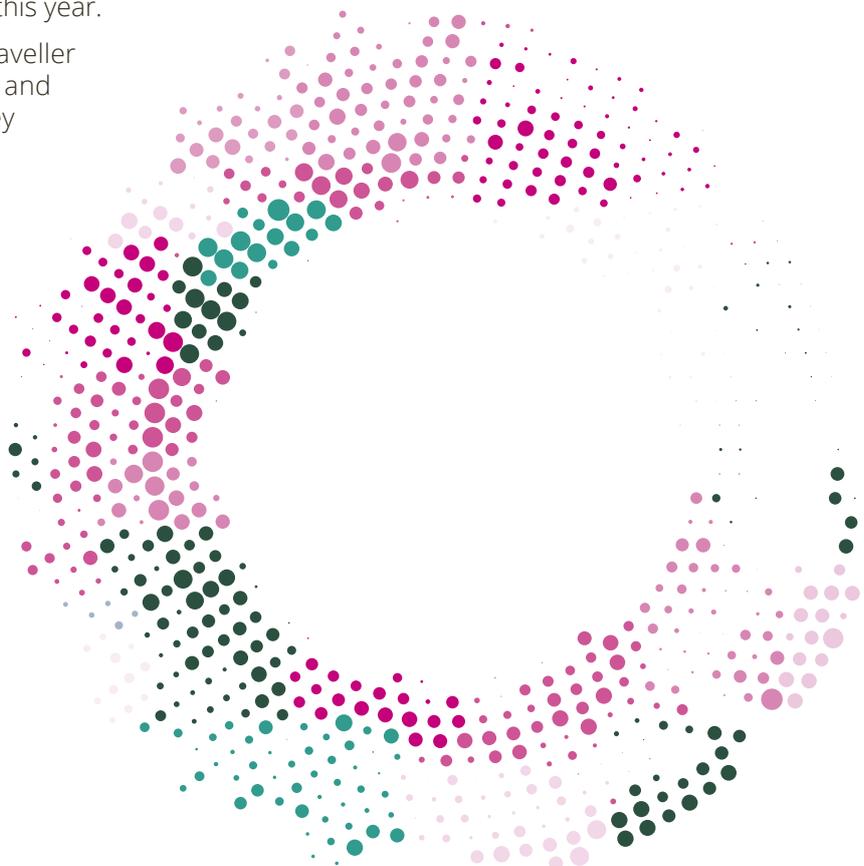
I got involved with The Traveller Movement through my work for King's College London's Widening Participation (WP) department. I went to University as a mature student and did an internship with the department last summer. Their work is to increase diversity in top universities by levelling the playing field in education. Although Gypsy, Roma and Travellers are a group that the WP department can help, our programmes and services weren't reaching them. After my internship finished, I sat down with them and we discussed ways that we could reach the communities, and that is what I do for the team now!



In the few short months that I have been involved in this work I have met so many powerful, dedicated and inspirational people that have helped me realise my own strengths. That's why I think that the Women's Empowerment Network is so important because we can help build fortitude and support each other.

I've always been proud of my heritage as a Traveller, but get tired of the stereotypes about the community, and some of the stereotypes of women from within the community. Maybe I just don't like stereotypes. I'm new to this network but I am excited about what they have achieved last year and what we can achieve this year.

It's a really positive time to be a Traveller and there are some great activists and organisations leading the way. They are showing us that we don't have to accept the status quo, and I am incredibly proud to be able to connect with them.



WEN members – profiles

WEN member: **Danielle O’Donoghue**

My name is Dannielle O’Donoghue, I am 21 years old and I am a member of the Irish Traveller community. I am the Community Development Intern at the Traveller Movement. I was an early leaver at secondary school. I went on to study hair and beauty in college when I was 16 years old where I got my NVQ level 1.

I have known the Traveller Movement for many years and my first involvement with them came when I attended an introduction day tea party. We discussed and introduced new courses that would be of interest to Traveller women. The more I learnt about the work at TM the more interested and passionate I became. I started at a very busy time, as they had their big annual conference, which was amazing and I was so glad to be a part of it.

Something I have been involved with more is delivering cultural awareness training to schools, health workers, councils etc. It is so important that professionals are culturally aware and act around the rights of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

We launched a campaign “Travelling 2 Equality” the message of the campaign is that education is power and Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) members need to have full access to education to obtain qualifications. Without formal education the GRT community members will continue to be socially and economically marginalised. Therefore a key objective of the campaign is to increase educational attainment and employability of GRT women through access to training and education which is something I feel very strongly about. I believe it is essential and I believe it’s something that will empower my community.

Becoming a member of the women’s empowerment network (WEN) is very important to me. I was given great support from my family involving educational opportunities and most importantly I was given independence in whatever I decided. My passion is to see young women better themselves in higher education, break the barriers we face in everyday life, and make a real change inside and outside of the GRT communities.



WEN members – profiles

WEN member: **Kealey Sly**

I am a member of the Gypsy and Traveller community and I started my career as a frontline social worker. Prior to this I was the lone project worker at a Gypsy and Traveller community project with the responsibility of engaging with Gypsies and Travellers of all ages and working between them and service providers to support understanding and best practice.

Due to the nature of my work I support families who are experiencing difficulties in many areas including, health, employment, education and accommodation, and families experiencing a relationship breakdown.

The experiences that inform my practice the most are being part of a Romani family who has grown up on local authority sites and travelled around the country. Yet even though I am now settled in housing, which brings its own difficulties and dilemmas, I am still part of a family who regularly travel and experience all the difficulties that face many Gypsy, Traveller and Nomadic families who live and work in the UK and Europe today.

I believe that being a social worker supports the skills I need to work in a person centred and community focused way which recognises the differences in people's identities and customs. But it is my own life experiences which give me the determination and insight into why those customs, traditions and way of life must be recognised, respected and supported to continue. I believe the current generation of Gypsy and Traveller children are facing greater challenges than many generations before them.

I want to be part of the Women's Empowerment Network to set a positive example to young Gypsy and Traveller people. Supporting their choice to live their life in a way that makes them happy, to have their voices heard and their experiences valued and protected. I also want to help others understand the importance of supporting their sense of self identity and belonging in the world.

I believe that this can be achieved by recognising the sheer resilience and determination which exists within these communities, people who despite hundreds of years of poor treatment and oppression continue to thrive and fight for what they believe is right.

The only way this can be supported is by working together both locally and nationally and ensuring that Gypsies and Travellers themselves are actively involved in any decision that is made about them and their children.

I hope that as a member of the Women's Empowerment Network that I will learn to inform policy and support best professional practice. Ensuring that all decisions made about the Gypsy and Traveller communities will identify the potential impact on their children and continue the invaluable work of the many generations of strong women who have gone before us.



WEN members – profiles

WEN member: **Sabrina Stewart**

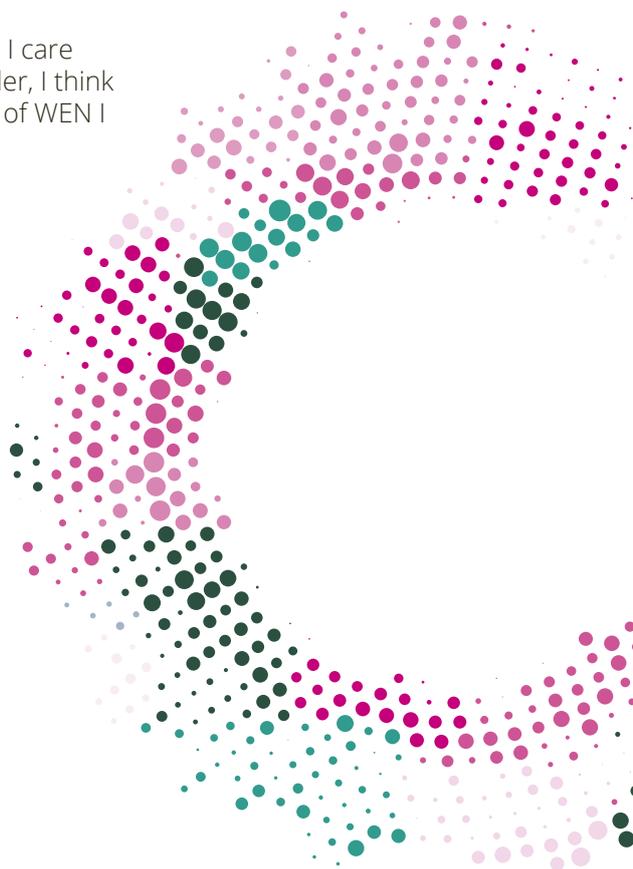
I am a Scottish Traveller and a former intern at the Traveller Movement. In 2016, I worked as a Legal Development Intern with the Equality and Social Justice Unit (ESJU), helping with casework and the development of resources and information leaflets. I also delivered cultural competency training and took part in a three-day workshop on political participation, organised by the Forum of European Roma Young People in Strasbourg. I also participated in and was one of the leading actors in the play ***Never Going to Beat You***, Traveller Movement's successful co-produced play on domestic violence created by Gypsy and Traveller women and directed by a professional theatre company, Giants Theatre.

In my capacity as a Traveller activist I set up first aid and adult literacy courses in Carlisle.

I also have a degree in nursing from Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen.

I now deliver talks with regards to the GRT community, such as domestic violence and domestic abuse. I explain the difference between women who suffer domestic violence in Traveller communities and those from outside our community. I work with local authorities to explain how they can improve their work to work more effectively with women from Traveller backgrounds. I recently joined the Gypsy, Roma Traveller Police Association (GRTPA) to help raise awareness of the historical injustices the police have inflicted upon my community. It is important to me that this issue remains on the agenda, and in the spotlight, as Travellers have continued to be marginalised by the police.

I am a member of Women's Empowerment Network (WEN) because I care passionately about the rights of my community. As a Scottish Traveller, I think the rights of GRT people deserve to be fought for and as a member of WEN I would like to make the most of this national platform.



WEN members – profiles

WEN member: **Christina Kerrigan**

My name is Christina Kerrigan I am the Community Development and Partnerships officer in the Traveller Movement. I am an Irish Traveller and a mother of two children.

I became a member of the Women's Empowerment Network because I support and I am really impressed by the powerful women in our communities who have made a difference and done well through their education and careers. There are many powerful and strong voices among the GRT community and they have been an inspiration to us all.

I started in the Traveller Movement when I attended an advocacy course on domestic violence. I have now been part of the team since October 2017. I have really enjoyed working at The Traveller Movement and being part of fighting for the issues our communities face.

I have attended many meetings and events, such as the TM conferences. On International Women's day 8th March 2018 I launched a campaign Travelling2Equality in parliament with other WEN members. I have had many projects such as delivering cultural competency training with Solace Women's Aid (SWA). I have delivered training to social workers, VAWG leads and all multi agency professionals including student social workers in Portsmouth University. I am also a member of the Department of Education GRT stakehold group.

I have now joined the women's aid law in the making project. I will be trained about how laws are made and opportunities to influence the Domestic abuse Bill and debates around it. I will meet and work with other survivors of domestic abuse from different cultures and ethnicities. I'll meet MPs and share what I've learned with survivors and the wider public. I will gain a certificate at the completion of this project.

In January this year I was invited to the MECOPP Gypsy/Traveller women's voices project conference in Edinburgh, Scotland. I spoke about the Women's Empowerment Network and what inspired us women to start the WEN. I spoke about my life experiences and the good the Traveller Movement and WEN has done for my life and how I want to empower other women from the Gypsy, Roma Traveller communities to do the same.

I am most passionate about raising awareness and helping to fight against discrimination and many issues our communities face. I am also very interested in helping women who may be victims of domestic violence and helping to advocate for their needs.

I think WEN will continue to increase in women and projects in the next year. I believe with further courses and training groups for women from the GRT communities that this will empower them to go further and give them the confidence to take a leading role in their community.



WEN members – profiles

WEN member: **Tina McInerney**

I am the women's worker with the Traveller Movement and a proud member of the Women's Empowerment Network. I first joined the Traveller Movement in 2008 as a volunteer, before joining the staff team in 2010. Since then I have been involved in the development of a number of projects. I have worked on **Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month, Travellers Got Talent** and numerous other health and wellbeing/economic inclusion projects. I also sit on a local independent advisory group with the Metropolitan police in my local borough.

I am a mother of five and one of the first divorced women in the Traveller community. I am a strong advocate against domestic violence. I led the Traveller Movement's drama project on domestic violence called **Never Going to Beat You** based on Traveller women's real life experiences of domestic violence. This year the play has been made into a film and I was the lead actor, which was an amazing experience. On International Women's Day we are launching this film in parliament where we will show some clips. I am excited and proud to be a part of it.

The film was produced by Crispy Biscuit Films, and with the late, great Jennie Buckman from Giants Theatre. Jennie, who passed away in January 2019, was a great friend to us all. She will be dearly missed and may she rest in peace.

This year, as part of my work for the Traveller Movement, I delivered cultural competency training to student social workers in Portsmouth University. I delivered many other trainings and presentations to women's refuge staff, social workers, teachers and all multi agency professionals. I was invited to speak on Prison Radio where I spoke about my experience of domestic abuse. I submitted evidence in parliament and attended a roundtable and took part in the Greenwich Inclusion Project during Hate Crime Awareness Week.

I also took part in a video we filmed this year on Social Care and how to engage better with services such as social workers. We filmed how to engage and how not to engage which I think will be really helpful for the GRT community and for services. This video will be launched in parliament in May this year.



WEN members – profiles

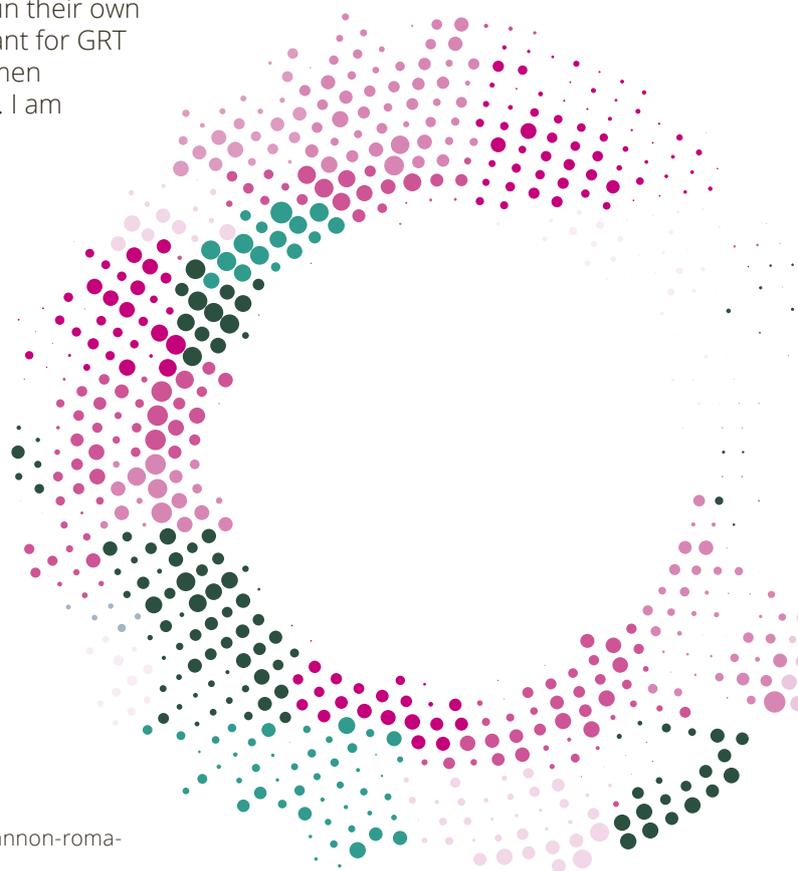
WEN member: **Denisa Gannon**

I am the first qualified Roma lawyer in the UK. I am a social justice lawyer and I work at the Coventry Law Centre as one of their lawyers. I was part of a scheme called Justice First Fellowship funded by the Legal Education Foundation. This scheme provides an opportunity to trainee lawyers to pursue careers in the field of human rights and social justice.

I have represented victims of domestic violence in court, helping them to get protective injunctions against their partners. I have helped to prevent homelessness by defending possession orders at courts. I also provide legal advice for people with debt problems and immigration¹. In 2017 I was elected to be co-chair of the National Roma Network (NRN) where I was admitted to the role of solicitor. I took the Law Society's Immigration Accreditation exam and passed with 70%.

Two years ago I registered with the Law Society as an immigration lawyer. I also established the Leicester Roma Community Services which is a Roma support organisation in Leicester. At the organisation's launch, in Leicester, we had more than 30 attendees including Leicester City Council representatives and other public and statutory organisations that were interested in Roma community there. Going forward I would like to provide legal and immigration advice to the Roma community and any other community that needs help, especially in terms of upcoming Brexit issues after March 2019.

Being a member of the WEN is very important to me. I would like to see women in the GRT communities empowered to run their own businesses. I think that their empowerment is important for GRT communities and I would like to see independent women that are able to support themselves and their families. I am delighted to say that I had a baby daughter in 2018.



¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/mar/20/denisa-gannon-roma-people-not-getting-justice-solicitor>

What's next for WEN?



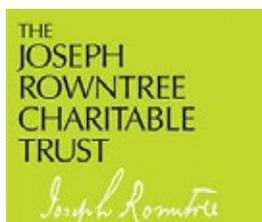
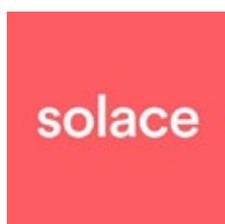
The last year was a very busy year for our members, and 2019 will be no different. While each member will undoubtedly be tackling their respective area of work, we will also work together to co-produce a plan of action to take forward into 2019/20.

There will be a series of workshops to upskill WEN members, co-delivered by the Traveller Movement. We will also seek out new members from across the UK to ensure the WEN platform is accessible to all GRT women. The WEN will also devise a new strategy for engagement to help identify the key areas we care most about. Our new members will no doubt bring added enthusiasm, energy, and additional skills to target as many platforms as possible.

Finally, WEN members will be targeting high level events, such as international conferences to discuss the educational attainment of GRT pupils, and expanding their remit to raise awareness of everything from barriers to social care, access to justice, Brexit, domestic abuse, suicide and mental health, challenging hate speech and discrimination, including antigypsyism. There is so much work to be done, but we are ready.

Thank you

We would like to thank a range of Traveller Movement funders who contribute in various ways to the development and delivery of this important project but especially the Aziz Foundation and Solace Women's Aid (SWA) who contribute towards the salary costs of our project workers.



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