

the Traveller Movement

Women's Empowerment Network Annual review 2019-2020



Foreword

Welcome to the third 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.

The 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 our 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 a productive and an inspiring year for the Women's Empowerment Network (WEN)! Our members have contributed to law making, set up ambitious projects, produced high quality resources, presented at national and international conferences, and most importantly continued challenging the discrimination, stereotypes and misconceptions of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women and communities.

Some of our members attended and presented at the 7th International Roma and Traveller Women's Conference in Finland. New networks and links were made with Roma and Traveller women from around the world and we can't wait to capitalise on those connections.

This year the film *Never Going To Beat You* (NGTBY) was finally launched in a glamorous pre-view event at Cine Lumiere in London. WEN members who were involved in the film spoke about the devastating effects of domestic abuse and how to escape and survive it. The underlining message of the members involved was that NGTBY is a film for everyone affected by domestic abuse, not only for Travellers.

WEN organised the first ever Gypsy Feminism event in co-operation with the recently established Traveller Pride. We will continue raising the issues of LGBT+ Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in 2020.

Several of our members spoke at the Traveller Movement Annual conference and hence fed into the Government's new GRT strategy.

We also campaigned for #OperationTravellerVote, encouraging our communities to register to vote and to vote. Some of our members spoke at party conferences and raised awareness about the issues affecting Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in the UK.

We recruited several new members to the network; strong and inspirational women who will bring their expertise and experience in various different areas to the network.

Some of our members are still working in frontline services, and challenging stereotypes and trying to break down barriers between professionals and GRT people from the inside.

Members have also continued delivering training for service providers across the country. Our members' training aims to make professionals aware of their public sector equality duties, and better equipped and more culturally sensitive towards GRT people. We refuse to be tick box trainers but instead expect our training to have an impact on perceptions, behaviour, policy and practise.

The shocking levels of suicides within GRT communities this year meant that several members have delivered projects and campaigns around mental health by producing ground-breaking films and research and opened up discussions about difficult subjects within our own communities. This work will continue in 2020.

This Annual review will introduce the individual and collective achievements of WEN members in between April 2019 – March 2020.

WEN members – profiles

Lisa Smith

My name is Lisa Smith. I am 26-year-old Romani woman I currently work as Travellers' Times Youth Editor and Creative Producer for Rural Media. I worked for eight years in Worcestershire's Traveller Education service. I have a BA in Education Studies and a Masters in Inclusive Education. I am a Global Leader for Young Children at the World Forum Foundation and Chair of ACERT the Advisory Council for the Education of Romany and other Travellers. In 2016, along with my brother Jason, I produced 'Hotchi' a short drama for Channel 4.



Through my role at Travellers' Times I support young Gypsy and Traveller people through our journalism, training and information programmes. In 2019 I founded the Its Kushti to Rokker education and community filmmaking project to highlight some of the challenges that young Gypsy and Travellers are up against both inside and outside of school.

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.



Christine 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 our communities, my small idea has now turned into the RomBelong programme. The RomBelong programme is still finding its feet but we have recently started the RomBelong scholars programme which we have been piloting in some primary schools with great success. To see young Travellers especially girls, so passionate about learning is incredible. Their interests range from eagles to video making and we can't wait to see what they achieve. Stay tuned for more!



Through 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 am excited about what this network 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.



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.

Denisa Gannon

My name is Denisa Gannon, I am the first qualified Roma lawyer in the UK I am a social justice lawyer and I Work at the Central England 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 people they wish to pursue a career in the field of human rights and social justice.



I have represented victims of domestic violence in courts, helped them to Get protective injunctions against their partners. I have helped to prevent Homelessness by defending possession orders at courts. Currently, I am working as immigration lawyer and I help vulnerable Europeans and their family members to apply for Settled Status.

In addition, I established an organisation that is registered with OISC to provide legal immigration advice to Roma community that needs help with Pre - Settled and Settled Status.

I also attended a forum organised by the Ministry of Justice to raise voice for the Roma community in Criminal Justice System.

Being a member of the Women's Empowerment Network (WEN) is very important

To me. I would like to see women in the GRT communities empowered to run

Their own businesses and be financially independent.

I think that women empowerment is important for GRT

Communities and I would like to see independent women that are able to support themselves and their families.



Tina Cooper

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.

I am a mother of five and one of the first divorced women in the Traveller community. I am a strong advocate against domestic abuse. 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. Last year the play was made into a film and I was the lead actor which was an amazing experience. On 7th March 2020 we had its first screening at Ciné Lumière, London. 'Never Going to Beat You' threads together the varying and different stories of the 18 Gypsy and Traveller women, and it will raise awareness about domestic abuse within all communities. The screening was followed by a panel discussion about domestic abuse, mental health and well-being within the Gypsy and Traveller communities. 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.

Last year I've delivered numerous training sessions and presentations to social workers, teachers, health professionals and all multi agency professionals. I took part in a 'Train the trainer' course and earned a level 2 certificate from it. I am always looking to improve my skills as a trainer and as a Women's worker.

I was a crucial part in making a video 'Navigating the Social Services System' at the Traveller Movement. The video will help Travellers to better engage with social services and vice versa.

In 2019 I also visited a fashion factory to see the possibility of setting up an internship program for young Travellers. I sit on a local independent advisory group with the Metropolitan police in my local borough.



Christina Kerrigan

My name is Christina Kerrigan I am the Community Development and Partnerships Officer at the Traveller Movement, I am an Irish Traveller and a proud mother of two beautiful children. I became a member of the Women's Empowerment Network when it was first set up in February 2017 and on International Women's day 8th March 2018 I launched our #Travelling2Equality campaign in parliament.

The last year has been so busy and rewarding for me in many ways, I attended and presented our #OperationReportHate campaign at the 7th International Roma and Traveller Women's Conference in Espoo, Finland. It was a three day conference organised under the Finnish Presidency and the Council of Europe. The year's theme was 'Roma and Traveller women's access to justice and rights'. There were Roma women from all over Europe attending and it was interesting and heart-breaking to hear their stories and the injustices and discrimination they face in their countries.

I received a Certificate of achievement for my contribution to the Women's Aid Law in the making project as an Expert by Experience. I was trained about how laws are made and had opportunities to influence the Domestic abuse Bill and debates around it. The group is made up of 18 women from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences - including those who face multiple forms of discrimination and barriers in reporting domestic abuse, such as women with disabilities, LGBT women, and women from black and 'minority ethnic' communities. Through many workshops, networking and events through the year we, as a group, have learned more about the legislative process and how to influence it. It has all been done to ensure that the new Domestic Abuse Bill is shaped by the voice of experience and that it will improve the support for survivors and their children in the future.

I have continued to do education casework, advocating for Traveller families who need help in education. I sat on the 'Nothing about us, without us' panel at the Traveller Movement's 2019 Annual Conference. The panel consisted of community members only, who discussed what needs to be included in the new Government national GRT strategy being rolled out across government. I also sat on the panel at the première of 'Never Going To Beat You', a film which I am so proud to be a part of. There has and continues to be many strong and inspiring GRT Women in the Women's Empowerment Network. They continue to empower other Traveller women and girls to go further in their lives also give them the confidence to take on leading roles in their communities.





Chelsea McDonagh

My name is Chelsea McDonagh and I am a 23 year old Irish Traveller from London. I have a first class degree in Physical and Sport Education from St Mary's University Twickenham and am currently doing my Masters in Education at King's College London.



I am currently working as the Education Policy and Campaigns Officer at the Traveller Movement, having joined them in the summer of 2019 as a Communications and Admin assistant. I am also on the ACERT executive committee, and act as an ambassador for KCL's Rom Belong programme which is a widening participation programme for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. Prior to this I worked with disengaged young people in many ways including as a lecturer, mentor and coach. I am currently working on the publication of research which explored Gypsy and Traveller experiences of Higher Education.

I was the lead peer researcher at Traveller Movement's Mayor of London funded Citizen Led programme. We trained up 11 young Travellers in basic qualitative research skills and they interviewed 44 of their peers about barriers in education. We then produced a video and a booklet based on the data collected by the peer researchers.

I have recently joined the Women's Empowerment Network because as an Irish Traveller woman and feminist, I believe that we have to empower the next generation of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women and girls.

Lois Brookes-Jones

I am a Romany Gypsy activist based in the North West, I am the founder of Roma and Sinti Holocaust Memorial and education initiative, The Phyllis Foundation.



I am the co-founder of the LGBT+ GRT lead campaign Traveller Pride and an activist in residence for YWCA GB, and EYF Representative for The European YWCA women's NGO.

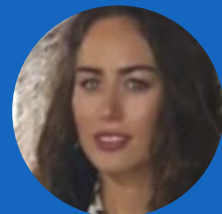
I work on a local, national, and international platform for raising awareness of GRT rights and intersectionality regarding my Jewish, LGBT+, Working Class, and female identity. In fact, I was delighted to win the Ron Todd Foundation's Inspirational Young Person's Award this year.

I am happy to be a new member to WEN and will continue through my work and through the Women's Empowerment Network to raise awareness for our Communities



Rosaleen McDonagh

I am an Irish Traveller, I'm 27 and a single mom to three daughters. I am a former intern at the Traveller movement. I first attended the Traveller Movement conference 2016. Soon after I applied to become an intern, and I was a Women's worker and Education officer intern. I took part in advocacy Domestic Violence training and delivered cultural awareness training. I spoke on BBC radio about Traveller voting, helped advocate for parents of children in primary and secondary schools, and attended WEN meetings at parliament, just to name a few. In the short few months I had been there, my confidence grew in leaps and bounds. I felt so very proud to be part of the Traveller Movement team. Whilst I was there I met so many wonderful people who have helped the lives of many including myself, it inspired and helped shape the path that I have continued on since my internship.



Since then I moved onto the Irish community centre, helped at the drop in's and took part in mental health training days. After that I went on to further education.

At the moment I am at a women's domestic violence charity. Every day is rewarding knowing that I can return some of the support I have received. I am very interested in advocating for domestic violence survivors, children and adult educational needs.

As an Irish Traveller woman I am very proud of my culture but tired of the endless stereotyping, the hate crimes and hate speech. I feel uneasy and uncomfortable knowing that my children could at some point read racial and discriminatory comments about our culture online. It's just not right.

To be part of the Women's Empowerment Network (WEN) is exactly what it says, "Empowering women" we then can empower our children and our community.



What's next for WEN

Year 2020 will be a busy year for WEN not least because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the changes it will bring to our personal and professional lives.

We will continue organising off and online workshops and training days to upskill our members. This year we will specifically look into leadership and politics training. We want all our members to be confident and knowledgeable in taking part in political discussions.

As always, we will be identifying new members from across the UK to ensure the WEN platform is accessible to all GRT women and has experience and interests from as many fields as possible.

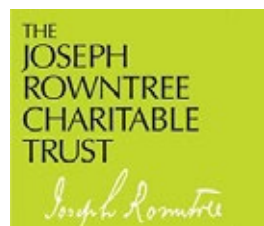
We will consult our members on their preferences on key areas of work and design training, media statements and event/conference participation in the lines of the chosen themes. Some of the already identified areas of interest are mental health and suicide, GRT in higher education, domestic abuse, women's leadership, LGBT, and barriers in education. Challenging racism, sexism, discrimination, misconceptions and harmful stereotypes is always a part of our members' work.

Finally, this year we will start introducing the original names for Irish Travellers: Minceir/Pavee and also raising awareness about the pejorative nature of the word 'Gypsy' in rest of the Europe. We will also speak more loudly about the often forgotten and ignored majority of Gypsies and Travellers, those who live in bricks and mortar who are still faced with the same prejudice and discrimination.



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 Solace Women's Aid (SWA) who contribute towards the salary costs of our project workers.





**The Traveller Movement would like to say
THANK YOU to our funders for their support**

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