



# Women's Empowerment Network Annual review 2017/18

March 2018



# Foreword

Welcome to our first annual review for the Gypsy Roma 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.

## So who are we and what are we about?

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Contrary to the sometimes misleading perception that all GRT women are disempowered, there are many powerful, diverse and strong voices from within the GRT women's sector leading the charge in challenging discrimination and inequality toward the communities. We are some of these voices.

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 fulfill their potential as leaders and activists working for the rights of GRT communities.

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.

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

## We aim to:

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- Develop and enhance the skills and capacity of GRT women and girls to work collectively to challenge racism & 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



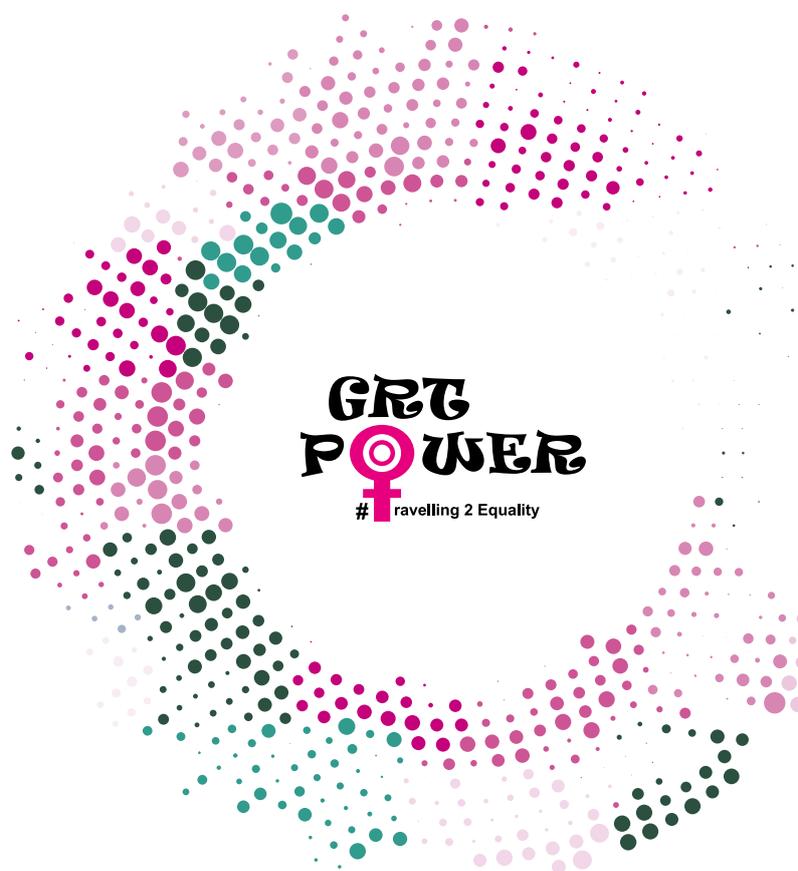
With support from The Traveller Movement over the past twelve months, WEN members have received and participated in various training and development workshops including media training by a leading expert in the field, public speaking, public sector equality duties, professional advocacy and political engagement in order to allow us to harness and develop our skills.

As members, we are proud to say that we have taken centre stage to raise the voice of GRT women. The support network that WEN provides through contact with strong Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women is invaluable and empowering.

Amongst our achievements are TV and radio interviews and appearances (which was a first for some of us), public speaking engagements at key conferences, roundtable discussions in parliament, delivering training to a wide range of stakeholders, participating in research, writing and contributing to policy submissions, engaging with policy makers, commissioners and securing representation on key forums... and the list is set to go on in the coming year!

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.

We could not have done this without the excellent support from trained facilitators and other organisations who gave their time so freely and willingly



## WEN member: **Cassie-Marie McDonagh**



I have known the Traveller Movement for many years. I first joined the organisation as a worker in 2009 and worked as a support officer until 2011. I then joined back in 2017 with my work now focusing on partnerships, hate crime and community engagement.

As an Irish Traveller woman I have experienced racism and discrimination first hand, so I am passionate about empowering the GRT community. In the last year I have spoken at a series of events, including the Roundtable event in Parliament promoting positive experiences in education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children. I have also written a children's book called "I'm not allowed to play with you anymore" It's a story about a Irish Traveller girl who's friend suddenly doesn't want to play with her anymore because she is from the Traveller community. This story was based on my experience in education when I was a child. I was also delighted to be given the opportunity to have my book featured on the primetime Victoria Derbyshire TV programme.

During National Hate Crime Awareness week, I helped to organise a workshop on racist bullying at Emirates Stadium with children from Islington schools. Also as part of National Hate Crime awareness week I am happy to say that myself and other community members worked along with Flexible Films and the Traveller Movement to make Hate crime animations, letting people know their rights when it comes to hate crime and hate incidents. These have been released and I know that many Travellers have found these useful. With each video, there is a fact sheet telling you the rights that come with our recognised ethnic status as an ethnic minority.

I have been part of the Women's domestic violence advocacy course since my first day back and we are now going on to earn our level 3 in advocacy. Along with all this we have been doing a lot more but the one thing I am so proud of is being part of is the LGBT videos that were launched in the House of Parliament at the end of National Hate Crime week. I think these will help a lot of people.

I was an early school leaver due to the racism I experienced at school. Therefore I feel strongly about promoting positive experiences for GRT children in school so that no one has to go through what I experienced. I am very passionate about Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTHM) which is celebrated in June and I am campaigning strongly to get it on the National curriculum.

I am also a very proud mother of a beautiful little girl, and this also drives me forward to making a difference.



## 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 on 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.

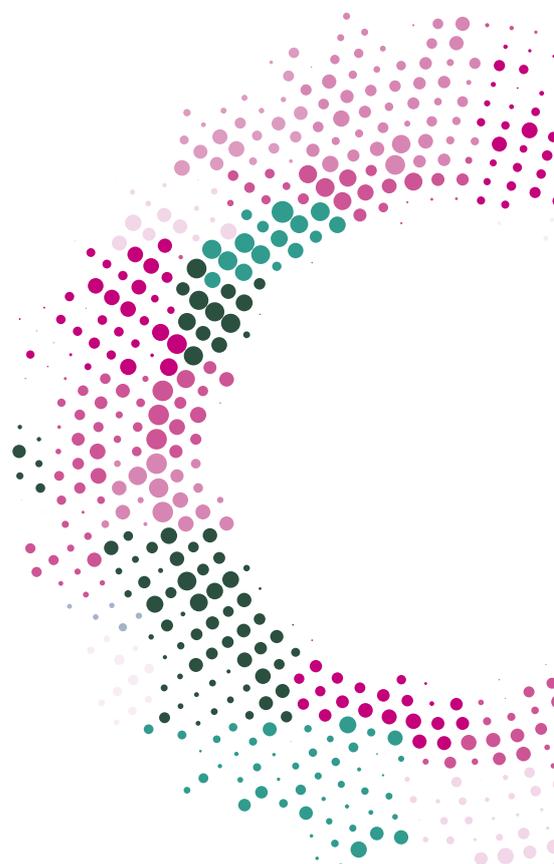
Something I have been involved in more recently is delivering cultural awareness training in schools in Greenwich. It's so important that schools are culturally aware and act appropriately around the rights of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

This year, as part of my work for the Traveller Movement, I was invited to sit on the parents' advisory panel at the Family Rights Group, which I have found really interesting and really worthwhile.

I would like to see the WEN become a strong national voice promoting the rights of GRT women across the UK. I think we are well on our way to doing that. I would like to see Traveller women become strong leaders in their communities. I am most passionate about breaking the cycle of domestic violence in GRT communities.

I'm working towards a world where no woman will ever suffer in silence.

Finally, I proudly voted for the first time in 2017.



## WEN member: Christina Kerrigan



My name is Christina Kerrigan I am a community development intern 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 am really impressed by the powerful women in our communities who have made a difference and done well through 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 the Traveller Movement when I attended an advocacy course on domestic violence. The opportunity to apply for an internship came about so I applied. I was successful and I started in October. I have really enjoyed working at The Traveller Movement and being part of fighting the issues our communities face. I have been working on the education project reaching out to schools and offering cultural awareness training. I have attended many meetings and events, such as the TM conference. I have also taken part in delivering a presentation on youth sentencing guidelines, WEN training and I am also a member of the Department for Education GRT stakeholder group.

I have many projects coming up, including cultural competency training with Solace Women's Aid, and delivering cultural awareness raising to schools.

I am most passionate about raising awareness and helping to fight against discrimination and many issues our communities face. I am passionate about delivering training to schools and communities and helping GRT children get the right education they need. I am also very interested in helping women who may be victims of domestic violence and helping to advocate to their needs.

I think that 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, they will become empowered to go further and give them the confidence to take a leading role in their community.

I would like to see even more women in the GRT communities better themselves in higher education, and to work alongside wider communities breaking the barriers we face in everyday life, whether it be in schools or in general.



## WEN member: Kealey Sly

I am a Project worker at Leicestershire Gypsy and Traveller Equalities. In my role I am the lone project worker with responsibility for engaging with a wide range of Gypsy and Traveller community members.

I am responsible for engaging with community members, offering direct support to family units, signposting where appropriate and assisting professionals and wider society to have a greater understanding of the barriers faced by the Gypsy and Traveller communities in a wider context, in areas including, but, by no means limited to; health and social care, employment, education and housing.

Being a qualified social worker, I naturally work in a person-centred and community focused way. It is important we remain transparent so that the community feels empowered and a part of what we are striving to achieve.

We want to give reassurance to the communities we work with that we are challenging poor practice and getting the “real life” stories heard at the highest possible level to make real and sustainable positive change.

Being a part of the Women’s Empowerment Network gives me valuable professional support, not only from professionals who work in the same field but from other Gypsy and Traveller women who like myself have a strong understanding of the daily struggles faced by the communities we now support, because we also face the realities of living and working as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women.

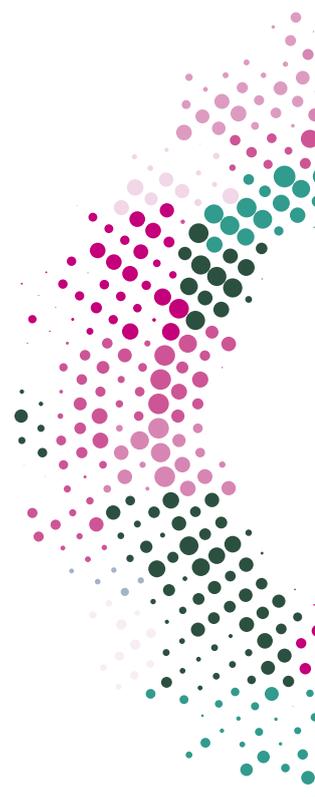
Since beginning to work with the WEN I have continued to work towards improving outcomes elsewhere, most noticeably in education which included planning and facilitating a conference for teaching professionals. At this event we not only informed the attendees understanding of GRT communities but actively asked “what are you and your organisation doing to improve outcomes for and to engage more GRT children in education?” This, amongst similar events, has contributed to an increase in the number of GRT parents welcoming support in education.

We have also started a women’s wellness project, which will give GRT women the opportunity to spend time with other women experiencing the same levels of isolation and levels of physical and mental health, engaging in talking therapies and physical exercise.

With kind funding from Leicestershire Police, LeicesterGATE will be operating as a third party hate crime report centre. This again was one of the biggest concerns for the community.

It is difficult to work towards improving outcomes in education and employment unless a family has a clean and safe place to live. That is why in this coming year, we will be continuing to raise awareness of the often-poor living conditions on many local authority run sites and the lack of site pitches overall.

We have also put together a youth panel which will talk to organisations about the lack of opportunities for their generation and to explain that opportunities are worse for them than previous generations. It’s been a busy year!



## WEN member: Lisa Smith

My name is Lisa Smith I am Youth Editor at Travellers Times and a Global Leader for Young Children at the World Forum Foundation. I am a Trainer/Advisor at The council of Europe on the INSCHOOL project aimed at promoting Roma Inclusion.

In the last 12 months, I've been involved in many different things.

I have taken part in various local radio shows. I also attended the International Step by Step Association Annual Conference in Ghent Belgium, which was a great opportunity.

I participated in a piece for Aljazeera News 'How Romani women's art is challenging stereotypes', which can be accessed here: <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201802070119-0025585>

I am a Member of the Department for Education GRT stakeholder group and I am also Vice-Chair at ACERT.

For the Traveller Movement's 2017 conference, I was a speaker in the workshop on economic inclusion for GRT young people. I have also been a keynote speaker at various education conferences this year.

One of my proudest achievements this year was creating and co-writing a short film for channel 4 based on Romani identity – I'm so proud of the final product that we managed to create (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLOqPKkzzjQ>).

I also achieved my first IMDb, taking part in a documentary called 'Searching for The Travelling People' (<https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/heritage/find-out-more-about-exciting-new-project>).

I became a member of WEN to stand in solidarity with other Roma and Traveller women in the fight against fascism, sexism and racism. I am passionate about education and representation of female identity and how both can be used as a powerful tool to overcome obstacles and challenge institutionalised stereotypes.

I have enjoyed being part of WEN and I look forward to continuing to work side by side with powerful and strong females making a real change both inside and outside of the Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities. I hope that together, we can continue to support, celebrate and promote the achievements of women in our communities.



## 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 immigration.

In the last 12 months I was elected to be co-chair of the National Roma Network and I was admitted to the role of solicitors. I took the Law Society's Immigration Accreditation exam and passed with 70%. Last year I registered with the Law Society as an immigration lawyer. I also established a Roma support organisation in Leicester (Leicester Roma Community Services). 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 in Leicester. Going forward I wish 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 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. 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.



## 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.

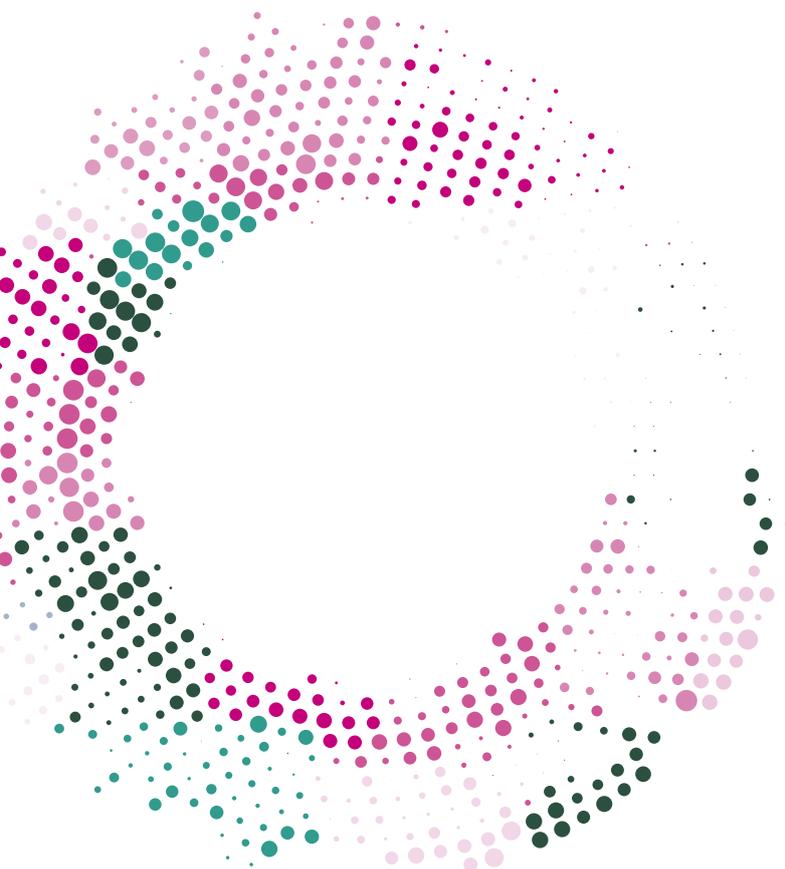
I also participated in and was one of the leading actors in 'Never Going to Beat You', Traveller Movement's successful play on domestic violence created by Gypsy and Traveller women and directed by a professional theatre company Giants Theatre.

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

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

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.

As a member of WEN, I would like to see the platform expand to develop into regional branches across the United Kingdom.



# What's next for WEN?



This women's day, we've launched our new campaign to promote economic success for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women. As highlighted in a Traveller Movement briefing<sup>1</sup>, the world of work has changed for Gypsies and Travellers across the UK.

In the last 50 years traditional Gypsy, Roma and Traveller work practices and culture have been under extreme pressure and seen significant change, in many cases having a negative impact on the education, skills and employment opportunities open to GRT people. At the same time in recent years significant opportunities for improving skills and employment prospects have arisen, influenced by a tradition of self-employment and entrepreneurship amongst GRT, greater educational participation, more GRT women entering work and the development of third sector agencies working with these communities.

As it stands, however, more needs to be done by relevant bodies in order to help GRT people to progress in terms of employment. A recent LSE study<sup>2</sup> has shown that currently, 'over half of GRT children (age 0-15) are living in workless households, more than three times the proportion of children in other ethnic groups.' The WEN sees real potential in the ability of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women everywhere to change this.

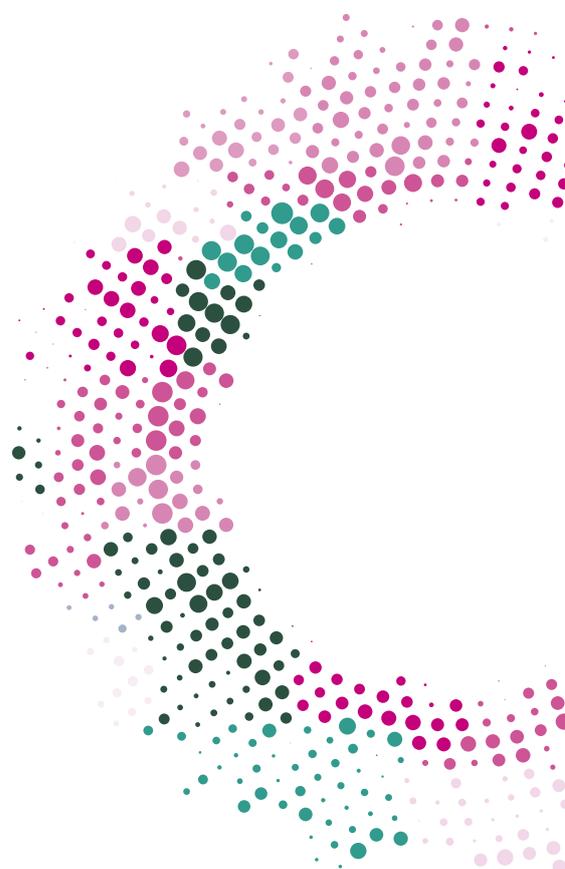
With support from The Traveller Movement the WEN are calling on the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to implement targeted provision to increase the employability of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller women.

Our new campaign is called Travelling to Equality.

Over the coming year, we will be working towards this ourselves through community engagement.

We will hold a series of workshops to upskill our WEN members and seek to recruit new members from across the UK.

In 2018, we are #Travelling2equality.



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1 The Traveller Movement 2014 <http://www.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Traveller-Movement-note-on-challenges-and-opportunities-for-Gypsies-Roma-and-Travellers-in-education-skills-training-and-employment.pdf>

2 Tania Burchardt, Polina Obolenskaya, Polly Vizard and Mario Battaglini <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/casepaper208.pdf>



# GRT POWER

#ravelling 2 Equality

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The Traveller Movement



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