

EVALUATION OF THE SOUTH TIPPERARY TRAVELLER MEN'S PROJECT

A Project by the Steering Committee of the
South Tipperary Traveller Men's Project
2009-2011



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Margaret Casey (Chairperson of South Tipperary Traveller Men's Steering Group and Co-ordinator of Tipperary Rural Traveller Project.)

On behalf of Tipperary Rural Traveller Project, I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to the great support that we have received from the different agencies on the steering committee. Without their support the outcomes from this project would not have been achieved.

These include Clare Curley (South Tipperary County Council), Claire Grace (South Tipperary County Council), Paul Fearon (South East Men's Network), Ann Ryan (South Tipperary County Council), Deidre Clancy(FAS), Kay Mullaney (South Tipperary VEC) and in particular Mary Roche (South Tipperary VEC) who has been a great supporter of the project and who in her role has made a great contribution to the Travelling Community in Clonmel.

I would like to extend our appreciation to the Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Pobal for the opportunity to fund this worthwhile project. It gave us an opportunity to work with Traveller men to build their capacity in the community. Although it is early days and much work needs to be done much has been achieved to engage with and support the development of Traveller men in South Tipperary over the last two years.

Without the commitment of local agencies to match fund this project it would not have happened. I would like to acknowledge the huge commitment of South Tipperary VEC, Fionuala McGeever (CEO) and the VEC's Adult Education team to fund and co-ordinate a huge range of training for the Traveller men over the last two years especially in the area of literacy. Their creative approach to developing relevant and accessible training for the Traveller men needs to be commended. Many thanks also to Director of Services, Sinead Carr, South Tipperary County Council who facilitated the coordination of the Dept grant payments to us in TRTP and to Clare Curley, Director of Services in Housing, South Tipperary County Council for her commitment and matching funding allocated to the project. Many thanks also to the HSE for their matching funding contribution and to the ongoing support of Travellers in South Tipperary.

I would also like to extend a thank you to all the voluntary Board of management and staff of TRTP and in particular our administrator, Carol, who has put in immense work and a lot of time into administrating this Project.



I would like to extend a deep thanks to Eugene O'Donnell, the Traveller Men's Development Worker. His commitment and interest in the men's development has been a key factor in the success of the project and he quickly gained the trust of the Traveller Men who were happy to work closely with Eugene over the course of the project.

I would like to thank the Evaluator of the project, Petra Elftorp for her time and the South Tipperary Volunteer service for identifying Petra as a volunteer for the evaluation.

I am very pleased that we have developed and commenced a worthwhile piece of work with the Traveller men in our community. We are however still only at the start of a process and continued commitment is going to be required from all of us to ensure supports are in place to engage with and support the development of Traveller men in our community. This support will lead to real outcomes for the men, their families and the whole community. We have built many bridges, made many connections and have still lots of more work to do.

Early in 2012, the steering committee will examine the recommendations of this evaluation report and will hopefully begin the process of developing the next plan for Traveller Men's development in South Tipperary.

I am looking forward to seeing the impacts of this work and the ongoing work with traveller men in the community over the coming years.

Thanks again to all for their support.

Mags Casey

TRTP Co-ordinator

Summary

The South Tipperary Traveller Men Project has been funded by Pobal on behalf of Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform with matching funding from other local agencies. Funding was allocated for a two year project which commenced in 2009 and which is now in its final stage in December 2011. The project was originally proposed as a reaction to the identified barriers to education and employment and lack of opportunities available to Traveller men in the county. The main barriers identified are: discrimination, low literacy and lack of education, low levels of employment and poor health.

The Tipperary Rural Traveller Project (TRTP) is the operational lead organisation which co-ordinates the project on behalf of the lead agency, South Tipperary County Council. An interagency Steering group has been in place for the period of the project and has met on a very regular basis to direct and over see the project. The project Development Worker is the person who has conducted the outreach work and who continuously has interacted with the Traveller men on a weekly basis. The target groups for the project are the core groups of Traveller men from the areas of Cashel, Cahir, Clonmel, Killenaule and Tipperary Town.

The evaluation methods used are focus groups, interviews and questionnaire which have been conducted by an external evaluator, on a voluntary basis. The evaluation focuses on the experiences and opinions of the participating Traveller Men, but also the steering committee. The set objectives and the views of the participants and of the steering committee have informed the evaluation and from the findings, a number of recommendations have been made. The objectives set for the project are:

- 1. To undertake outreach work with Traveller men throughout South Tipperary,*
- 2. To engage in Prior Learning with the Men*
- 3. To Provide Education and Support for Traveller men in South Tipperary*
- 4. To engage in Personal Development and Capacity Building with the Men*
- 5. To undertake a Local Training Initiative in Year 3 and Year 4*

In order to achieve those objectives, a large number of Traveller men in the county have been given the opportunity to partake in e.g. literacy classes, welding, wood work, fitness training and personal development. The project is largely described as a success and while the barriers to education and employment still exist, this interagency project has certainly helped in breaking down parts of some of those barriers by giving the participating men

the opportunity to learn in an environment free from racism and discrimination.

Abbreviations

TRTP	Tipperary Rural Traveller Project
STCC	South Tipperary County Council
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
TIG	Traveller Interagency Group
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning

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1. Introduction

The South Tipperary Traveller Men Project has been funded by Pobal on behalf of Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform Pobal and other local agencies. Funding was allocated for a two year project which commenced in 2009 and which is now in its final stage in December 2011. This document is an attempt to evaluate both the learning and the practical outcomes of the project.

The project was originally proposed as a reaction to the identified barriers to education and employment and lack of opportunities available to Traveller men in South Tipperary. A Steering Committee for the South Tipperary Traveller Men's Project was established with the main local service providers represented. It was the first time that an interagency group has worked together on a project for Travellers in South Tipperary and this adds to the significance of the evaluation. In addition to the positive outcomes for the participating Traveller men, the project is seen as a first step towards long-term working relationships between agencies and Travellers in South Tipperary.

To describe the specific context of the project, the first section gives some background information and describes the most prevalent barriers. The structure, vision, objectives and important stakeholders of the project are then presented. This is followed by a brief outline of the evaluation and data collection methods.

The participating Traveller men took part in evaluative group-discussions (focus groups) where they expressed their views on the success and challenges of the project. Members in the Steering group have also contributed with their particular perspectives through both a questionnaire and an evaluative discussion meeting. The findings from that data collection are presented, along with an outline of the progress on the project objectives.

Finally, conclusions are drawn and a number of recommendations for the future are made in the hope that the successes of the project can be built upon and essentially, that various aspects of Traveller men's lives will be improved.

2. Project Background

The South Tipperary Traveller Men's Project is run by a Steering Committee made up of a number of different agencies. It received funding from the HSE, South Tipperary County Council, Tipperary Rural Traveller Project, Pobal as well as funding in kind from South Tipperary VEC. The project started in 2009 and has been running for the past two years and is now coming to an end. The background and the rationale for the project are outlined below.

Local Context: Traveller Men in South Tipperary

As the lead operational agency for this project, the Tipperary Rural Traveller Project (TRTP) is an organisation which aims to improve living conditions for Travellers in the county. In South Tipperary, there are approximately 147 Traveller families. Traveller women and Traveller youth have been participating increasingly in education, community programmes and initiatives in South Tipperary. However, Traveller men have not taken part in those activities to the same extent and this has also been noted by South Tipperary VEC and other agencies and service providers working in the area. They identified a lack of opportunities and also a number of social barriers which prevent Traveller men from participating in areas such as education and employment.

In **a** large study called 'All Ireland Traveller Health Study' (2010), health and living conditions of Travellers were reported. It states that while the health of settled men in Ireland has improved since 1987, no improvements have taken place for Traveller men, who have a life expectancy of 62 years, compared to 77 years for settled men.

According to TRTP, Traveller men were not engaging with the service providers in South Tipperary to the same extent as Traveller women or youth and this is seen as a serious threat not only to the wellbeing of Traveller men, but also the wider Traveller Community. It is recognised that women from minority communities will engage first and that the men follow. Traveller girls also tend to stay **in** school longer than Traveller Boys which has serious impacts on their education. The local Traveller Interagency Group acknowledged the barriers that Traveller men face, the lack of opportunities available to them, and the gap between Traveller men and the service providers. Furthermore, Traveller men were not taking up what is considered mainstream employment opportunities within South Tipperary.

Many reports have highlighted concerns in relation to mental health issues and drug misuse amongst Travellers in Ireland, and South Tipperary is not an exception. A lack of opportunities and other social barriers continue to enforce inequality and social exclusion and this project is an attempt to improve the living conditions by increasing literacy levels, personal development and essentially build a relationship between the Traveller Community and local service providers. The South Tipperary Traveller Men's Project was seen as an opportunity and a starting point for Traveller men to take a more proactive role in their own lives.

Barriers

Before the project was initiated, barriers were identified in relation to Traveller men in South Tipperary engaging with mainstream services, including education, employment and support services. Both Traveller men and the local agencies/service providers took part in identifying the barriers and they found that Travellers in South Tipperary face the same barriers that impact on Travellers in other parts of Ireland.

Discrimination

Discrimination of Travellers is present on individual and interpersonal level and at an institutional level and is affecting Travellers in their day to day life. On an individual level, discrimination is most common in relation to accessing facilities or services. Many Travellers face discrimination on an institutional level too, where procedures and policies reflect a lack of understanding and acceptance of Travellers' culture and identity. The discrimination may be either direct or indirect and with or without intent. Nonetheless, any form of discrimination is damaging. A negative stereotyping of Travellers often lead to negative self-perception and self-esteem which in turn may lead to poor mental health or increased substance abuse. Discrimination as a barrier needs to be recognised to allow for appropriate actions to be taken.

Low Literacy and Lack of Education

There are numerous figures and statistics that describe the vast difference between Travellers and settled people, in relation to education. According to the 2006 census, 63.2% of Traveller children under the age of 15 had left school, compared to 13.3% nationally. The reasons behind these figures are debatable. The advantages with having formal education may be difficult to see for Travellers, especially so when your peers or parents have poor literacy.

Literacy and numeracy are core skills which must be attained before further learning can take place. Low literacy level is a huge barrier to accessing information and services. The Traveller men targeted for this project had literacy levels which varied from none to poor. The lack of education amongst Traveller men also has the implication that many Travellers do not feel comfortable accessing education services such as the VEC.

More than half of the recommendations made by the 1995 *Task Force Report on the Travelling Community* related to education. Several of the recommendations focused on the need to engage with the parents and some focused on the potential of interagency work. Some, but not all, of those recommendations have been followed, however, as the majority of the men in this project are over 18, they are likely to have experienced huge disadvantage in relation to education.

While lack of education is a barrier for adults, there are also “sub-barriers” to accessing adult education, such as lack of childcare provision, lack of resources and funds for school material, difficult entry requirements and transport.

Low levels of Employment

Very few Travellers are in mainstream employment. In the 2006 census the rate of employment among Travellers aged over 15 years was 14%. Travellers face discrimination when looking for work and the low literacy levels and lack of education is an obvious barrier to gaining employment as almost all jobs in today's society require at least a basic level of literacy. Additionally, some work areas that are traditionally associated with Travellers are now increasingly difficult to find, e.g. recycling, waste disposal and horse trading.

Factors that lead to low levels of participation in employment by Travellers have been identified in the All Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010):

- Lack of understanding and recognition of the specific Traveller culture.
- Lack of outreach efforts to recruit Travellers
- Lack of recruitment procedures which meet the needs of Travellers.
- Lack of supports such as childcare.
- Fear of losing welfare and/or other benefits.

Poor Health

Poor health is perhaps a result of other barriers and social determinants, such as discrimination, low levels of literacy and lifestyle. According to the '*All Ireland Traveller Health Study*', suicide rates in male Travellers is 6.6 times higher than in the general population and accounts for 11% of Traveller deaths. Depression is still somewhat a taboo topic within the Traveller community and mental health issues are prevalent.

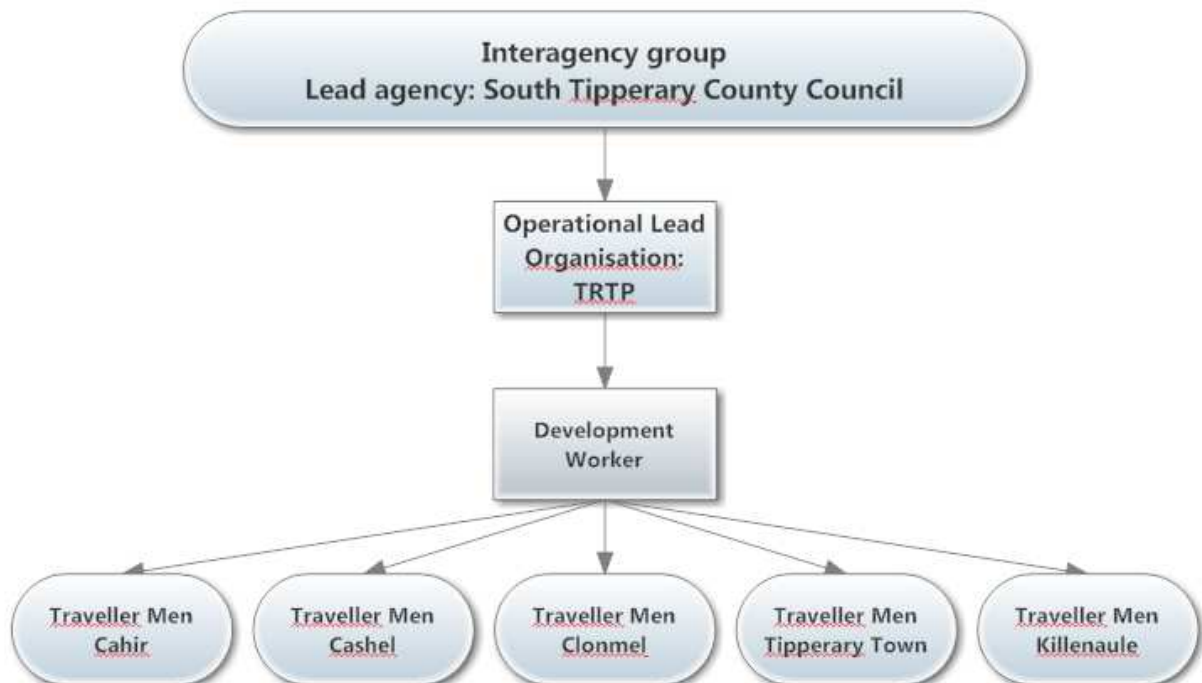
A holistic approach

As a result of these barriers being identified, the project objectives were shaped. The strengths of the project may indeed be that the objectives are not purely educational or not purely health related. There are personal, educational and vocational aspects to the project which allows for a more holistic approach to such a complex set of barriers. Please see next section for an outline of the project structure and objectives.

3. Structure & Project Objectives

The Tipperary Rural Traveller Project is the Operational lead organisation which co-ordinates the project on behalf of the Lead Agency, South Tipperary County Council who had nominated members of their staff on to the steering group of the project. The project Development Worker reports back regularly to the Project Coordinator and Voluntary Board of Management of TRTP, South Tipperary Traveller Men's Steering Committee and the South Tipperary Traveller Interagency Group which in turn report to South Tipperary Social Inclusion Measures Group. The target groups for the project are the core groups of Traveller men from the areas of Cashel, Cahir, Clonmel, Killenaule and Tipperary Town.

The South Tipperary Interagency Group is a group involving all the different agencies in South Tipperary that have the Travelling Community as their target group. Agencies that are involved include: South Tipperary County Council and Clonmel Borough Council, Knockanrawley/Millennium/Spafield Resource Centres, County Childcare Committee, Department of Social Protection, HSE, VEC, Gardai, Men's Network, South Tipperary Development Company, Tipperary Regional Youth Service, National Education Welfare Board, Clonmel Youth Training Enterprise, South Tipperary Sports Partnership, MABS, Social Welfare and Tipperary Libraries.



Steering Committee

The steering committee's role is to oversee the project. It is made up of a number of agencies that work with Traveller men in South Tipperary.

Margret Casey - Tipperary Rural Traveller Project – Operational Lead Partners

Clare Curley – Director of Services, South Tipperary County Council

Claire Grace- Social worker for Travellers for South Tipperary County Council

Mai Gillman- Public Health Nurse for Travellers for the HSE

Mary Roche – Adult Literacy Organiser with the VEC

Kaye Mullaney – Back to Education Coordinator

Ellen/Ann O Reilly– South Tipperary Development Company

Paul Fearon – Men's Development Network

A member from an Gardai

Ann Ryan – Administrator with South Tipperary County Council

Deidre Clancy – FAS

Project Vision

The following vision for the project is stated in the Project Plan:

“South Tipperary Traveller Men's Project promotes the empowerment of Traveller men at every level to negotiate and create their own solutions to the issues that affect their lives on a daily basis.”

Project Objectives and Anticipated Long Term Outcomes

These are the 4 objectives of the South Tipperary Traveller Men Project, stated in the Project Plan, 2009:

- 1. To undertake outreach work with Traveller men throughout South Tipperary*
- 2. To engage in Prior Learning with the Men*
- 3. To Provide Education and Support for Traveller men in South Tipperary*
- 4. To engage in Personal Development and Capacity Building with the Men*

Alongside this, a core part should consist of the development of leadership skills, personal development, capacity building, negotiation skills and Group Dynamics.

These are the anticipated long term outcomes, as stated in the Project Plan, 2009:

- *Traveller men will be actively involved in dealing with issues that affect their lives*
- *Traveller men will have increased opportunity for meaningful employment*
- *Increase the number of Traveller men in South Tipperary in Training and Employment*
- *Traveller men will participate in decision making processes that affect their lives*
- *Traveller economy will gain recognition and value within Irish society as a whole*
- *5-7 Traveller Men in strong Leadership positions within the community*
- *The employment and training aspirations of Traveller men will be developed and responded to in an appropriate way*
- *Traveller men will develop significant tools to assist them in ensuring that the Project is sustainable by the Traveller community into the Future*
- *Development of a Boxing club in Cahir*

It is also stated in the Project Plan that in order “*to ensure sustainability and progression into meaningful employment, a Local Training Initiative will have to be started in Year 3 and year 4 building on the participants existing skills*”.

Identifying stakeholders and Partnerships

The following agencies were identified as stakeholders of this project:

- ***Men’s Development Network:*** *Working with Traveller Men in South Tipperary fulfilling their commitment to work at a regional level.*
- ***FAS:*** *Involvement in the Prior Learning and the establishment of an LTI with the focus on Progression into Employment.*
- ***South Tipperary VEC:*** *Providing adult literacy and numeracy tuition, Committee Skills classes, E-learning classes, Personal Development classes, FETAC accreditation options and Adult Education Guidance to Traveller men.*
- ***Gardai:*** *Engaging with Traveller men on a different level to their “normal” engagement.*
- ***DSFA:*** *Engaging with the Men in Training and Education and participating in FAS, the LTI in year 3 and working closer with the Men to disengage them from their dependency on social welfare.*
- ***HSE:*** *Very strong Health element in the Project, also supportive of the Health work being carried out with Traveller women in the Country.*

4. Evaluation methods

The evaluation method used is a summative, participant-oriented, evaluation the focus of which was on the experiences and opinions of the main stakeholders of the project, namely the participating Traveller men, but also the Steering Committee and all the identified stakeholders.

The evaluator is external and has not been a part of the project other than during the past few months with the objective to evaluate the project. No conflicts of interests exist as the evaluator is conducting the work on a voluntary basis and has no bias towards any of the stakeholders.

No names of the participating Traveller men have been recorded as they are to remain anonymous. Anonymity of the members of the steering group can however not be guaranteed as they are representing different agencies which can be identifiable.

Data Collection

The following data collection methods have been used:

- **Review of project documentation**

This was necessary as I, as an evaluator, am an *outsider* who did not have pre-existing knowledge of the project, as I have not been part of any of the agencies. The initial project plan provided information about the background and context of the project and the Steering group meeting protocols have provided some information about the on-going process. The project reports written by the development worker to Pobal have also given me a better understanding of the continuous work of the development worker and the participants.

- **Focus groups with groups of participating Traveller Men:**

The participating Traveller men took part in focus groups where they were asked to discuss positive and negative aspects of the project. It was the first time that they met the evaluator and they were informed that their identity would not be recorded. The focus groups took place in the various locations where they would normally meet for their literacy and computer classes to ensure that they were in a familiar setting. The focus group sessions were recorded, which the Traveller men were informed of and consented to.

- **Questionnaire to the Steering Group members:**

A questionnaire with open ended questions was emailed to all members of the steering group, in which they were asked to discuss initial expectations, positive aspects, challenges and what direction they would like to see the project taking in the future. All members responded.

- **Interviews with Development Worker, Coordinator of the Tipperary Rural Traveller Project and a Literacy Tutor:**

Informal interviews with above mentioned persons helped inform the evaluation on a number of issues, such as the context of the project, their role and the learning progression of the Traveller Men. The development worker was also very helpful in answering questions in relation to the project outcomes.

- **An evaluative discussion meeting with the steering group members:**

A meeting was held where I asked open ended evaluative questions regarding learning outcomes for the agencies involved, successful aspects, barriers identified in relation to working with Traveller Men and also how to build on the learning and how to progress into the future.

5. Project Outcomes

The outcomes of the project are described in this section. An overview of the work done in relation to each objective is presented and is then followed by the participating Traveller men giving their perspective of the project. Please see Appendix A for photos taken during the project.

5.1 Objectives

Objective 1: To undertake outreach work

The following description of the outreach work which has taken place during the past two years is written by the Development worker:

- Trust has been developed between the Development worker and the Men and between the men and different services such as Tipperary Rural Traveller Project and South Tipperary VEC.
- A strong relationship has been built between the Development worker and the men which has led the men to talk to the worker around different issues like mental health, accommodation etc. The worker has in turn supported the men with their issues and linked them to other services over the two years of the Programme.
- South Tipperary Travellers Men's Project and relevant agencies have a better understanding of the needs of Traveller Men
- A programme was put in place to address identified needs of Traveller Men which ensures greater retention of participants and increased opportunities for Traveller men to engage in further education and training.
- 40 Traveller Men have engaged in adult Education and Training over the 2 years
- 50 Traveller Men have been aware of the services available and throughout the 2 years have accessed the project in some format.
- Agencies have made good use of the project to raise awareness of their services.
- The Development Worker has been a link between Traveller Men and the Service Providers, increasing the opportunity for services to assess how their service can relate to Travellers and specifically Traveller Men.
- 50 Traveller Men have an increased sense of ownership of the Men's Project

Objective 2: To engage in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

This objective was set early and was later found to be inappropriate. When the development worker and the VEC had gained a better understanding of the literacy levels among the Traveller men, it was decided that this objective would not be achievable during the time period set for the project:

“RPL is identified by the VEC as being of a higher level when a lot of the generic skills such as Literacy/Numeracy and Computer Literacy are of an adequate standard to allow the learner to progress onto an accredited course such as FETAC level 5” (development worker)

It was noted that many of the Traveller men had difficulties with accredited learning as they were not ready to follow a set syllabus with time constraints. Community Education was seen as better suited as the syllabus was set by themselves which allowed them to focus on basic literacy/numeracy and computer skills. RPL is expected to take place when the progression of the participants is at a suitable level and when courses of their interests have been identified.

However Personal learning plans were developed for the men outlining their interests, experience and education and what they hoped to get from the project. Each of the men has a portfolio representing their skills, knowledge and competences in particular fields.

Objective 3: To Provide Education and Support

The development worker has summarised the various activities related to education, support and sport:

- 50 Traveller Men have participated in Literacy and Numeracy, Computer Literacy and/or Health and Fitness Classes
- Measurable progress in Literacy and Numeracy skills for 40 Traveller Men
- 50 Traveller men have engaged with local service providers e.g. VEC, FAS, HSE, S.T. Sports Partnership, South Tipperary County Council
- 5 men from Cashel received certificates in Level 3 welding
- 8 men from Killenaule received certificates in Level 3 welding
- A group of Cashel and Clonmel men were involved in woodwork classes where various objects were made such as dog boxes, chicken hatches and coffee tables. They were also engaged in the restoring of horse trailers and small trailers.
- Driver Theory Test instruction and literacy is being carried out on an individual basis with the men in Tipperary Town
- There has been a Measurable increase in personal fitness levels and understanding of the importance of warm up, cool down and lifting weights among Traveller Men
- 2 men received their Theory test in driving. A further 5 men are being helped to achieve their Provisional License.
- 3 men passed their full driving license

Objective 4: To engage Traveller Men in Personal Development and Capacity Building

Again, the development worker has outlined the work undertaken with the aim to increase personal development and capacity building.

- 40 Traveller Men have participated in Sports Activities on a weekly basis. This has varied from Gym activities, swimming, handball and included soccer.
- 20 Traveller Men have undergone a Medical Check with their GP
- 12 men from the Cashel area were involved in the making of a stone table for the EU charter weekend in Cashel 2011. This was done in conjunction with Philip Quinn of Stonemad.ie. Over the course of the weekend different delegates and the public were involved in designing and constructing the Table along with the artist and the men.
- 20 Traveller men have engaged in a Capacity Development/Practical Education programs called the Sulky Program. Short inputs were integrated into the sessions in relation to capacity building around Leadership, health and safety which was carried out by Bernard O' Connor in the workshop, team work and personal development.
- 8 men from Killeanaule were involved in a 10 week stone carving course
- 6 men from the Clonmel area and two from Cashel progressed onto caretaker training to become caretakers of their sites. This progression would not have been possible were it not for the men's project in which the men were involved in.
- 2 of the groups went on a Day trip. This provided a chance to build on the relationship with the men and provided a chance for group building
- Workshops were also carried out with Thomas McCann of the Pilot Counselling Service in Dublin along with Martin Collins of Pavee Point around Traveller Culture, mental health as well as discrimination and racism.
- Tommy Fitzgerald who is a qualified counsellor and working in the area of addiction with Travellers also met the men and discussed addiction with them.
- The men were involved in setting up a handball club. They learnt about the different roles of a club and what is involved. They improved their communication and leadership skills in the process.
- A group of Men were also involved in A DIY project where they received training in carpentry and plumbing. They worked on renovating an old building.
- All of the men that engaged with the Project received 1/1 support where it was needed.

5.2 Additional work carried out by the Development Worker

- Meetings took place on a regular basis with the VEC tutors that worked on the Project around planning, engagement as well as a number of different issues that arose over the course of the Project.
- Meetings also took place on a regular basis with the various agencies that worked with the men such as Claire Grace, a social worker with the county council, and Mary Roche, the Adult Literacy Organiser around Education in the VEC.
- Numerous meetings were attended over the course of the Project which impacted on the work of the Project. These included the Traveller Men's Regional Health meetings held in Waterford where a precedent was set at a regional level in terms of engaging with Traveller men. Meetings in Pavee Point around Men's Health as well as attending meetings of the South Tipperary Advisory Committee on Substance Misuse which examined mental health issues **in the Travelling Community**. This advisory committee was set up as a result of the work that was ongoing with the men by the Development Worker who had developed a relationship with them and was aware of the need for more specific work in the area of addiction.
- Meetings were held with the Coordinator of T.R.T.P on a weekly basis discussing various issues that arose in the Project over the two years. The Development worker also attended various team meetings with the staff of T.R.T.P. and was also involved in staff supervision meetings with the voluntary Board of Management of T.R.T.P.
- The Development Worker also worked with the Traveller FAS Enterprise and Development workers in linking the men from the different areas in with the service being provided and in planning a Local Training Initiative for the men which would have been a progression for a number of the men.
- He also worked with a number of Traveller men who had been granted early release from prison. This involved one-on-one support and ensured that any difficulties they had were being worked upon.
- Numerous office duties were carried out over the two years of the Project. To give some examples, this work involved making phone calls, helping the men to set up appointments, writing reports, supporting the men to write letters to different agencies, booking venues and arranging transport.
- Publicity was gained for the Project through the development worker being on local radio and the writing of various newspaper articles highlighting the men's achievements.
- Funding was also secured from the HSE for 2012 to continue the work in relation to improving Traveller men's health. This funding was secured due to the work of the South Tipperary Traveller Men's Project
- A Local training Initiative has also been secured that will progress the work that has been achieved with Traveller Men.

5.3 Participants' Perspectives

Group interviews (focus groups) have been conducted with the participating Traveller men and their views on the project are described below. The groups were asked to express and discuss their experiences, which gives us a better insight into what this project has meant to the individuals who took part in it.

To stay as true as possible to the reflections and opinions of the Traveller Men, I have chosen to use their own words to a large extent when reporting on their perspectives of the project.

What did you expect from the project initially?

The Traveller men expressed how the trust in the group was important and that the fact that they felt equal and safe with each other's company was central to them taking part in the project:

Coming in here first was difficult. But we were all together and in here we're all equal. More of us were excited about going but some were anxious.

It was nice to know I wasn't the only one that couldn't read properly.

We're only all learning here. All together. There's no one here to say how bad we are 'cause we're only here with each other you know.

In relation to specific learning outcomes, the Traveller men were unsure what to expect and were more excited about getting an opportunity to learn in a safe and local setting. Some said that they decided to give it a try as there was nothing else for them to do, but that they did not expect the project to be as beneficial as it has been.

Did you feel that your opinions were heard?

When asked if they felt that they had an input and if their voice was heard regarding the formation of the project objectives, one person answered:

He [the development worker] asked what we were interested in.

Otherwise we probably wouldn't have joined in, or we would have left after the first week!

Similar comments were made by others and it is clear that it was important that the participants had an input and that they helped shape the objectives. Some groups mentioned that the Development worker had been very trustworthy and a good listener and that he had become "one of ourselves".

What have you enjoyed most, so far?

The participants expressed how they have enjoyed the various activities that they have taken part in. Working on computers, learning how to read and write, stone carving, wood work, welding and recreational activities were all mentioned.

*My favourite thing was the sculpture. The stone carving in Holy Cross.
It's very interesting.*

*The welding was good for us too, 'cause we all learned something. We
learn something every week. Bit by bit.*

The value and importance of having a routine and something to look forward to every week was also noticeable from many of the men:

*That we're here every week. Working on our project. You would miss it
if it wasn't there.*

Some also mentioned that if they were not part of the project they would sit around and do nothing, that going to the different sessions “*kept us on the right path and kept us out of trouble*”.

What motivates you?

The following comments reflect what the project has meant for the participants and what has motivated them to attend the various aspects of the project:

We have learned stuff now that we didn't know was possible.

*Getting that chance is great, you know. We didn't get the chance
before.*

We know now that we aren't stupid. We can actually do this.

*It's nice having something to do in the week. Otherwise we'd only be
sitting around doing nothing.*

It gives us Travellers a chance to do something, you know.

It gets us all together. The swimming is great all together!

All groups showed enthusiasm and were happy with their choice to be part of the project. All participants answered that they would recommend the project to their friends and that it was a great opportunity for them.

Are there any issues with the project?

When asked about issues with the project or if they wanted anything to change for the better, they commented on the time for the project and also concerns about the future:

If the ball alley is still available to us we want to keep going there. But it could be very expensive if we're to pay ourselves, you know.

There were also questions about what was going to happen to them after the project and if they would still have some place where they could meet and learn together.

Have your lives changed since the start of the project?

The comments below show that the project has ultimately led to increased independency for the participants but also an increased self-confidence.

There are certain things we can do now that we couldn't before we started. Now we don't need to ask for help all the time.

We might think that we can't do anything before we try it. Like the welding.

Just being able to sign your name or fill out a form, you know! That's a big, big change. Before, we needed help with absolutely everything!

To be able to read a small bit. It doesn't have to be a full newspaper, but to be able to read some things in the Star or so, you know.

The wood work was great and we learned numbers and how to measure things so now we could build something. Before, we wouldn't know how to do that.

These are only a few, of many, comments on how life changing the project has been and how beneficial it has been for them.

The opinions and experiences that came across most strongly during the focus groups were:

- The value of learning together and not feeling "stupid" in an educational setting.
- The importance of having a routine and something to do every week.
- The enjoyment of taking part in the various activities and learning new skills.
- The worry about future support, especially in relation to accessing sport/health venues
- The new found self-confidence and a stronger sense of independency, especially as a result of being able to read and write or use a computer.

6. Outcomes Discussion

6.1 Learning outcomes for the agencies

The outreach work took longer than the agencies originally expected and planned for. In hindsight, steering committee members believe that more time should have been allocated to outreach work as this was the first project of its kind in South Tipperary. The TRTP coordinator, who has been working closely with the Development worker, believes that the workload may have been too big for just one development worker. Furthermore, the budget for the project could have been more realistic. However, the agencies have learned a great deal in terms of designing and budgeting such a large project.

The VEC literacy organiser has expressed how they now have a better understanding of the predevelopment work needed when working with Traveller men. Accredited learning was difficult as the men needed to learn the basic literacy, numeracy and computer skills first and that took longer than anticipated. It has been a good learning curve in terms of how to build trust and strong working relationships. A solid foundation for further work has begun with this project and the agencies believe that it was necessary that it was a slow and steady process. Previously, the VEC has only had a relationship with Traveller women, but now, while there is still a gap there for men, the first important steps towards a lasting relationship have been taken.

The work of the Development worker has been brought forward by all members of the steering committee as one of the key factors to the success of the project. The Development worker has been commended on his ability to build good rapport and trusting relationships with the participating Traveller men, and also with the agencies involved in the project. The County Council has learned the importance of having the right personnel and that the personal qualities of a development worker is key to success in a project such as this. It has been obvious to all involved that the Development worker has had a genuine interest in the wellbeing of the participants and been flexible in terms of working hours. He has checked in regularly on Traveller men that he knows suffer from mental health issues and his training in mental health and suicide issues have been relevant and very valuable.

The VEC noted how the participation by Traveller men in different locations varied and also the educational and literacy levels differed remarkably within the groups. As an example, the Killenaule group has been described as very organised, largely due to the support from the local school and the experienced tutors. It has been more difficult in Tipperary Town, most likely due to the fact that there has not been as much engagement with the Travellers in Tipperary Town prior to this project. More predevelopment work was needed there and it took longer to build the necessary trust and relationships. The County Council points out that it is significant that the first steps have been taken towards a lasting working relationship. The differences in levels of participation and skills amongst the Traveller men is described as vast and the Steering Committee members have learned to always keep an open mind and to meet each individual at their level.

6.2 Challenges

While the project is being described as a success by all involved, issues and challenges have also been noted during the project. One disappointment has been that there were difficulties in accessing sport and school facilities and racism in the wider community is assumed to be a factor. Discrimination is still a huge barrier to be overcome, but there are some examples of communities where this has not been an issue. For example, the school in Killenaule was very accommodating and did not discriminate against the Traveller men.

Other issues that were mentioned by the members of the Steering Committee were that the participants' portfolios were not as robust as one could have hoped for. The learning and personal development in the Traveller men is apparent to anyone involved in the project, but perhaps not tangible and therefore more difficult to record.

The main issue, mentioned by all respondents of the questionnaire, was the short time frame that was set for the project and the restricted funds. Not having enough time to work on employment and self-employment possibilities was a prominent issue according to some. Fears of what impact this may have was expressed by one steering group member:

“The development worker put a lot of effort into relationship building and modeling for the men. If the gap between this project and the next is short this work can be built on, otherwise it has the potential to be damaging to the relationship building to date”.

Another steering group member stressed that *“for this work to be successful, it needs to be ongoing”*.

The planned Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) did not take place as a result of the Traveller men not being ready for that type of learning yet (*see 5.1 Objectives*). Also, FÁS has not had the resources to take a very active role in the South Tipperary Traveller men's Project which may have impacted the implementation of RPL further. However, the TRTP coordinator highlights the need for the Traveller men to acquire basic literacy skills first and states that this needs to be a rigorous and not rushed process. An important step in the right direction is that the Traveller men now feel that they can and want to learn.

6.3 Interagency Success

The interagency group has been largely successful and therefore added to the success of the project as a whole. The valued interest from all agencies, and the fact that there is no conflict of interest, has meant that they work well together in a trusting and supportive manner. However, no Traveller men attended the Steering Committee meetings of the South Tipperary Traveller men's Project meetings. While the men were not discouraged to go to the meetings, they were not greatly encouraged or pressurised either, as the men may not have been comfortable in a room of different professionals.

The regular meetings have been valued by the members and there has been a synergy effect by having all local agencies on board this project. The TRTP coordinator mentioned that she initially was somewhat hesitant to the interagency structure but that she has been impressed with the genuine interest shown from all agencies and the positive effects of working together towards the same goals. Links have been made between the various service providers in South Tipperary and the positive effects of this will ultimately be beneficial for the Traveller Community.

6.4 Progression for Traveller Men in South Tipperary

The level of participation from the Traveller men has exceeded the expectations of most Steering Committee members, both in numbers and in the range of activities that they have partaken in. Again, some argue that the high participant rate was a result of the initial work of the Development worker and the extensive outreach work conducted at the early stage of the project. Some of the steering group members mentioned that the active participation **has** helped develop capacity, trust and healthy working relationships.

The steering group had noticed an increase in ‘sense of ownership’ and self-esteem in many of the participants. Fitness and literacy levels have also noticeably increased, as well as the links with various services in the county. One Steering Committee member said that the outcomes of the project have been *“invaluable to the entire community and effects have been felt by the women and children also”*.

The VEC has noticed that Traveller men are now increasingly coming to the premises and accessing the services, which they have not been doing before. The Tipperary Town Traveller men would not have come as a group before but they are now prepared and interested in taking part in an LTI. They may not be ready for that yet, but their interest shows an immense progress on their behalf.

Today, a lot of men are going to classes, and that **is** very good progress. The TRTP coordinator highlights that it has been uplifting to see how the Development worker allows the Traveller men to sit down and to come to their own solutions. This project is not about agencies sorting out problems for Traveller men but rather to give them the opportunity that they have not had before.

In the progress reports of the project it states that 50 Traveller men have been engaged in various activities. The TRTP coordinator claims that this is not a true reflection of the extensive and intensive work carried out. The TRTP coordinator believes that the work has had an indirect influence on at least 90% of all the families in the area. The children would benefit from seeing their father involved in groups as he would be giving a great example to his children. It would also encourage their wife’s in engaging with women’s groups and their children to engage in after-school and youth groups. Leaders have also emerged among the different groups which will impact on other men and the wider community as these men will be approached when the need arises. The positive benefits that have arisen out of this project

in relation to the Men's health will also have indirect benefits on their own families as they are more aware of a healthy lifestyle.

The Traveller men in the Cashel area were involved in building a commemorative table as part of the EU Charter weekend in Cashel in July 2011. See photos of this in the appendix. This type of practical art work is a great achievement as it is a showcase of their contribution to the community.

The VEC has seen how the Traveller men have benefited from the project as many of the men now want to continue the literacy and numeracy training, even after the project. The project has given them the opportunity to work in clusters and groups which in turn allowed them to continue to support each other and this is something that the VEC is hoping can be built on further.

6.5 Where do we go from here?

The South Tipperary County Council would like to see a continuation of the training and development work conducted in this project. They hope that some of the men will be willing to come on board to committees which would give them a voice. Traveller women have been active in this area and that has proven very successful. The county council also hopes that work placements and work schemes that are relevant and of interest to Traveller men will be available in the future.

The TRTP coordinator believes that the way forward is Local Training Initiatives and continued training. However, the same level of commitment from the agencies in South Tipperary cannot be expected with less or no funding and resources. Furthermore, one cannot assume that *all* Traveller men who took part in the project will want to participate in further training, but those who do want that should certainly be given the opportunity.

Literacy classes will continue in three locations until Christmas through the VEC. The VEC believes that the Traveller men will find it easier to access education as they have now built relationships with services and tutors. The increased literacy among the Traveller men is a direct outcome but indirectly, it will also benefit the children of those Traveller men as they become role models in the community **as** they can support and help their children. The VEC emphasise the importance of having a long term vision and states that they are committed to an on-going programme.

FÁS has unfortunately not been able to take a very active role in the Steering Committee as a result of lack of resources but all agencies, including FÁS, expressed an interest in continued cooperation.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The South Tipperary Traveller Men's project has ultimately had a major impact on the lives of the participating Traveller men, with positive effects also reaching their families and their community. The learning outcomes for the Traveller men have been life changing and increased independency, especially in relation to the increased literacy and numeracy skills.

The barriers that were identified prior to the project are being broken down bit by bit in South Tipperary, albeit a slow process. The importance of the work that has been carried out cannot be underestimated and it has provided a foundation for continuous work for equality and the improvement of the lives of Travellers in the county.

Some objectives were not met for various reasons; however, this becomes somewhat less important considering the overall learning outcomes and the high participation level and commitment to the project, from both the Traveller men and the local agencies.

Based on the findings in this evaluation, the following recommendations are made by the evaluator and by the agencies in the steering committee:

- If work can continue, all agencies should be urged to take an active part. Also, a stronger emphasis on, and encouragement to the participants taking part in a steering committee may be advisable.
- Realistic and achievable goals need to be established in relation to continued literacy training and education. Ownership of this work should be taken by appropriate agencies to ensure that the trust between the Traveller men and agencies is maintained.
- The Development worker has gained the trust of the Traveller men which is a big achievement and has helped in breaking down the barriers between Travellers and mainstream facilities such as the VEC. The importance of having the right personnel should be recognised and this evaluation could possibly help shape future job descriptions for similar positions.
- A big fear amongst the Traveller men is that learning opportunities, such as this project, are temporary and that it can be taken away from them. The Steering Committee are concerned about the risk of leaving the Traveller men to their own devices after this project as that may set them back in their learning and that the trust may be damaged. The Traveller men are often very confident in their everyday life. However, it has been necessary to build up their confidence in relation to education and other mainstream services. While this has been highly successful, confidence levels outside the project may still need to be increased in order for them to take a more proactive role in their lives. Therefore, to withdraw the support they have been given would be very much a barrier. It is recommended that short and long term goals are set in relation to continued work to break down the still existing barriers.

- The Traveller men expressed that it was important to them that they were learning together as they had negative experiences associated with learning prior to this project, e.g. feeling “stupid” compared to peers during school. This suggests that future projects need to consider the structure and setup of groups to ensure that all participants feel comfortable in the setting.
- Difficulties in accessing certain service facilities such as sports and fitness clubs have been noted. Racism in the wider community is assumed to be a factor. It is therefore recommended that the agencies engage in further efforts to eliminate discrimination on all levels in the county.
- It is recommended that a specific Traveller men’s action plan be developed for the next three years with input from all agencies and sub groups of the Traveller Interagency Group, the Traveller men and Tipperary Rural Traveller Project with a view to continuing the good work completed to date.

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Appendix: Photos from the Project

Literacy/Computer



Literacy/Numeracy and Computer literacy formed a large part of the project. The men took part in these classes on a weekly basis where they worked on improving their skills. Some of the projects they were involved in included the process of setting up a handball club, a sport which the men love and the organizing of a Sulky Drive. They also worked on form filling, letter writing and the driver theory test.

Stone Carving



A number of the men from the Killenaule Men's group completed a stone carving course with Philip Quinn at Stonemad Workshops in Holycross. The men completed a number of different stone pieces which they brought home with them.

Stone Table



A group of men from Cashel were involved in the building of a stone table as part of the EU Charter weekend in Cashel in 2011. The base of the Table contained a Time capsule which contained objects from the Charter delegates. The Table was covered by Handprints from the delegates of the different countries that came to Cashel over the weekend. The handprints were then carved out in stone by the Men. Over 10 Traveller men were involved in the building of the Table which was done in conjunction with Philip Quinn of Stonemad.ie. Over the course of the weekend different delegates and the public were involved in designing and constructing the Table along with the artist and the men.

Welding/Woodwork Project



Welding/woodwork workshops also formed a large part of the Project. Each of the groups took part in a number of welding/woodwork workshops. A group of men from Killenaule made garden benches as part of their level 3 welding course. The men also took part in the making of small trailers (trolley boxes) as well as restoring larger horse boxes. A number of men were also involved in the making of sulkies.

Woodwork Projects



Woodwork was something the men engaged very well with. They made wooden pieces such as coffee tables which they burnt their own images onto. Other groups made chicken hatches and Dog boxes.