



## **Traveller Visibility Group CLG**

### **Annual Report 2020**

#### **Contents**

1. Chair Person's Statement
2. Director of Advocacy Statement
3. Declaration of Compliance with Charities Governance Code
4. Board of Directors and Staff
5. Financial Overview
6. Committee and Interagency Participation
7. Administration
8. Community Employment Schemes
9. Childcare
10. Health Programme
11. Drugs and Alcohol Support Project
12. Education
13. Mission Statement
14. Acknowledgements

## **1. Chair Person's Statement**

This has been an exceptionally challenging year in which TVG staff and members of the Traveller Community have been placed under severe pressure. The Covid 19 crisis has created enormous demands which TVG staff and supporters/volunteers have responded to with great professionalism, dedication and energy. The Covid crisis has highlighted the importance of the work of TVG and the existing strengths within the Traveller Community, while at the same time clearly exposing the gross inadequacy of accommodation/services and the continuation of institutional anti-Traveller racism.

This has been my first full year as Chair of the Board of Directors (BOD) and while the year has been dominated by responses to Covid, there have been a number of important developments in the operation of TVG and the implementation of TVG's strategic plan (2020-2025). This has also been the first full year of the employment of Breda O'Donoghue as Director of Advocacy and Eileen O'Shea as Director of Operations. Under their leadership TVG has developed clearer systems of management and financial control. Their commitment to making TVG an effective and dynamic organisation has been outstanding, especially in a time when many extra demands have been created by the Covid crisis.

The BOD has undergone changes with new members appointed - Jason Sheehan (Travellers of North Cork) and Chris McDonagh (Traveller Mediation Service). Aideen Creedon has also been appointed to the Board and taken up the role of Treasurer. Daithí Mac Bhiocaire, the longest-standing member of the Board, has stood down this year. His knowledge and commitment to Travellers' rights will be missed. There has been relatively little staff turnover during the year. However, the resignation of Caroline Vasseur, who was the Health Coordinator and had worked with TVG for 14 years, is a significant loss.

TVG is a Traveller-led organisation and during 2021 we will continue to strengthen the representation of Travellers on the BOD. TVG has continued to run, in collaboration with University College Cork, the Community Leadership Programme with over twenty women students who are members of the Traveller community. This programme has been a great success in supporting existing leadership within the local Traveller Community and encouraging women to take on new advocacy roles.

While the initiatives from last year (e.g. the expansion of the TVG Goras Community Childcare Centre and the implementation of the plan for working with Traveller men) have continued, along with all the other work described in this report, TVG have started to develop a stronger advocacy role. Along with the Cork Traveller Women's Network an application was made to the Ombudsman for Children's over concerns regarding children living in the Spring Lane Halting Site. Furthermore, members of TVG have had a strong representation in the establishment of the Traveller Interagency Group as well as continuing to strongly advocate for Traveller's rights in a wide range of other committees and organisations.

The Support Traveller and Roma (STAR) Projects as part of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS, 2017-2021) hosted by TVG has shown how the needs of Traveller children, and their parents, are going unmet. While the STAR Project has shown examples of good practice locally, overall the education system is clearly failing to meet the needs of Traveller children. We have a further generation of Traveller children, particularly in secondary schools, who are being marginalised and/or excluded from education. TVG will continue to advocate for the educational needs of Traveller children and their parents and plans to include Traveller young people's representatives on the BOD.

As we start to adapt to Covid 19 and live in the 'new normal' world, TVG will continue to grow in strength and continue to challenge 'settled' perceptions of the world. As a 'settled person' it is a privilege to work with Traveller and 'settled' colleagues in TVG and with the wider Traveller Community in Cork. None of the work undertaken by TVG could have been achieved without the continuing support and guidance of members of the local Traveller Community. During 2020, TVG has continued to develop by employing a group of highly talented workers who work with great dedication alongside members of the Traveller Community.

I would also like to thank all the organisations, funders and supporters who make the work of TVG possible. These include: Health Service Executive, Cork City Council, the Traveller Health Unit, Cork Education Training Board, Cork Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force, Pavee Point, Pobal, Solas, University College Cork, Munster Technological University, Cork City Partnership, Parents of Children who attend the TVG Goras Community Childcare Centre, Cork Equal and Sustainable Communities Alliance, local TDs and Councillors, and our fellow Traveller Organisations, especially the Cork Traveller Women's Network. We look forward to the continuing support of our partners and the wider community to continue the essential work of TVG.

**Alastair Christie**

**Chair, TVG Board of Directors**



## **2. Director of Advocacy**

As Director of Advocacy during 2020, I can confidently say it was one of the most challenging and difficult years I have experienced working with TVG. When we first learned of the Covid 19 pandemic there was widespread panic and fear in the Traveller community. As a Traveller Project in Cork City our team were very concerned with the outcomes that faced Travellers living in Cork. As we know well, there are serious overcrowding issues in both authorised and non-authorised halting sites which we feared would make it virtually impossible for the residents to protect themselves against the spread of the virus. The facilities such as running water, electricity and adequate washing facilities are simply unavailable to many Travellers in the city and due to this we feared that Covid 19 would have a massive impact on the health of the community. In the early months we responded by sharing as much information on best practice as possible. We linked in with our colleagues in the THU as well as the Community Work Department of HSE to develop strategies to support Travellers in this time.

Our main challenge here was that the very best practice advised from international guidelines would be very difficult, near impossible, to achieve for certain families living in Cork's most overcrowded areas. We relayed our concerns to the HSE Social Inclusion who were very helpful and understanding. This led to developing an emergency response plan that all Traveller organisations in Cork and Kerry agreed to. With the help and direction of HSE Social Inclusion, we created a working document for standard operating procedures in the event of an outbreak of Covid 19. Whilst this document was helpful and indeed worked in terms of assisting one off individuals and families, there was always the fear that if a serious, large scale outbreak occurred in an overcrowded Traveller accommodation setting that we would not be able to contain the spread of the virus. As is well reported, many Travellers live with underlying health conditions which could make them more vulnerable to Covid 19. As referenced in the All Ireland Traveller Health Study 2010, Travellers have much poorer health outcomes than the Settled Community. I feared that Covid 19 would seriously impact Travellers health due to this as well as the Traveller accommodation crisis. Our team at TVG and through sister organisations relayed our concern regularly to the local Authority asking for support and better accommodation facilities as well as temporary accommodation for Travellers who are most at risk during the pandemic. Unfortunately the response was very poor and ultimately, Travellers in Cork have been left to fend for themselves in terms of accommodation and social distancing. Luckily, the HSE were able to provide emergency accommodation for Travellers with Covid 19 which was a big help. We will continue to fight for the rights of Travellers and improved accommodation for the community and it will be focus for 2021.

I was also concerned for the welfare of our team here in TVG, We had to ensure that whatever work our team were doing was safe and all risks were managed as carefully as possible. 50% of staff in TVG are from the Traveller community and would also have underlying health conditions so there were added complications to the way we could work. Our response in TVG was to work remotely as much as possible and I must commend all our staff for their quick up-skilling to work with software such as Zoom and to change their working style entirely to support the Traveller community over the

phone and online. While managing our Covid 19 response with HSE and our THU colleagues, the team at TVG were also trying to maintain the regular steady workload of the project. I am delighted to say that we were able to deliver a successful and well received Traveller Pride Week in 2020, and it was heart-warming to see the Traveller Pride flag raised in June over City Hall, it was a welcome break from the heaviness of Covid 19. I was pleased to see how Social media was able to connect the Traveller community to each other. Travellers live in the extended family and while Level 5 restrictions were enforced many Traveller families were isolated from each other. This I know was a shared experience for all of Ireland, however many Travellers living in private rented accommodation often have to hide their identity for fear of eviction from landlords and therefore wouldn't have the connection to neighbours during this time. Our work promoting social media connection such as Beor's Boutique online, Zoom training and Facebook engagement really helped to connect the community at times when they felt isolated. The Drugs and Alcohol Project and NTRIS STAR project were able to continue their important work throughout Covid 19, however each worker faced new challenges with the pandemic, not least of all the physical distance restrictions that were in place in schools and recovery units. Our community development and primary health care team largely worked on spreading awareness of Covid 19 info and supporting families through the testing and self isolation stages however they were also able to engage in their regular work which was great to see.

I mentioned above that 2020 was one of the most challenging years in my time at TVG, however it was great to see how my team reacted and that TVG as an organisation could be so quick to adapt to an emergency situation. I was proud of the work that completed in the year and of the tireless efforts and positive attitude of the TVG team. It was an unprecedented year in so many respects and I feel that the team really came together to support the community and each other. I would like to thank our Board of Directors for their continued support and advice during this challenging year. My thanks also to our Director of Operations Eileen O'Shea for all the work throughout the year assisting with moving to remote working and maintaining the building and crèche operations at the same time. Our Administration Team need particular mention as they battled with many new payroll systems and funding administration throughout Covid 19 pandemic. It was challenging for them to operate remotely both technically and from running office from busy homes, their work, patience and flexibility didn't go unnoticed! Again, the HSE Social Inclusion Team and our sister organisation in the THU were fantastic and we all worked together to support the community as best we could. While it was disappointing and challenging to see there was a lot that was out of control in terms of supporting the Traveller community, one positive that has come from Covid 19 is a reinforced energy to focus on improving Traveller accommodation in Cork City. It is clear that huge discrimination and disadvantage is experienced within the community and TVG will put extra attention on to improving this situation for the community.

**Breda o Donoghue**  
**Director of Advocacy**

### **3. Declaration of Compliance with the Charities Governance Code.**

**Declaration (B) Part Compliant:** TVG is currently part-compliant with the Charities Governance Code. We are in the process of reviewing our internal policies and will have all 15 policies reviewed and signed off by our Board of Directors (BOD) by June 2022. Please note that while TVG is in the process of reviewing internal policies the organisation is still working in line with current legislation and existing internal policies to ensure best practice for our employees, service users and stakeholders alike. We are currently developing a Board of Directors' induction pack, along with the code of conduct and Board of Directors Handbook and will have this completed by March 2022. In the interim all new Board members will receive a formal letter of appointment and induction training along with the internal working policies of TVG and confirm any conflicts of interest at each BOD meeting.

### **4. Board of Directors and Staff**

List of TVG Board of Directors 2020:

Chair and Secretary: Alastair Christie (Appointed 30 November 2020)  
Treasurer: Aileen Creedon (Appointed 30 November 2020)  
Siobhan O'Donoghue (Appointed 30 November 2020)  
Chris McDonagh (Appointed 30 November 2020)  
Jason Sheehan (Appointed 30 November 2020)  
Sheila Colette Kelleher (Appointed 30 November 2020)  
Cora Williams (Appointed 30 November 2020)  
Company Secretary Alastair Christie (Appointed 30 November 2020)  
Anne Burke (Resigned 30 November 2020)  
Breda O'Donoghue (Resigned 30 November 2020)  
Daithi Mac an Bhiochair (Resigned 30 November 2020)

#### **List of TVG staff 2019:**

Breda O'Donoghue	Director of Advocacy (15 hours)
Eileen O'Shea	Director of Operations (35 hours)
Mary Coughlan	Project Administrator (28 hours)
Sarah McCarthy	Assistant Administrator (19 hours)
Caroline Vasseur	TVG Traveller Health Coordinator (35 Hours)
John O Sullivan	Men's Health Development Worker
Thomas Erbsloh	Development Worker (21 hours)
Vacant	Women's Health Development Worker (14 hours)
Biddy McDonagh	Traveller Community Health Worker (17.5 hours)
Jean Donoghue	Traveller Community Health Worker (15 hours)
Nora Cash	Traveller Community Health Worker (15 hours)
Elizabeth McGrath	Traveller Community Health Worker (19.5 hours)
Eileen Burke	Domestic and Sexual Gender Based Violence Worker 15 hrs)
Ann Jordan	Community Drugs and Alcohol Worker (21 hours)
Eoin O'Callaghan	Community Drugs and Alcohol Worker (Resigned June 2020)
Anne Burke	Education Coordinator (15 hrs)
Gemma Lewsley	Childcare Manager
Susan Mannion	Childcare Team Leader
Jemma Caughlan	Childcare Worker

Laura Walsh  
Tanya O'Sullivan  
Shauna Kiely  
Jessica Varian

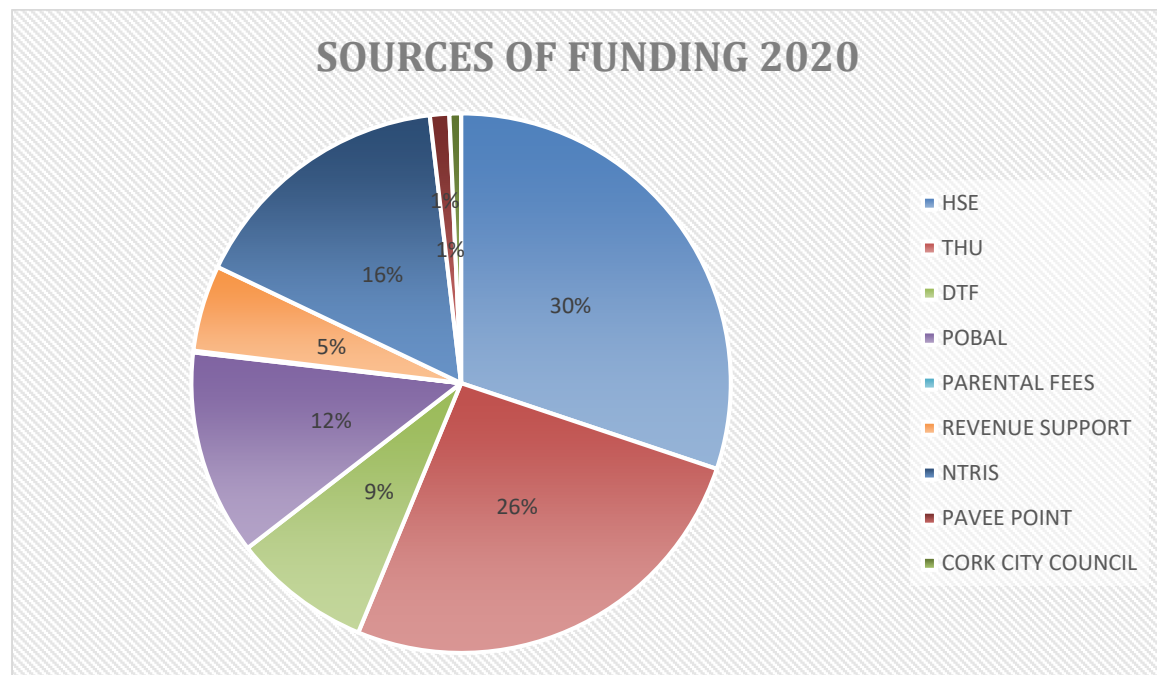
Childcare Worker  
Childcare Worker  
Childcare Worker  
Childcare Worker

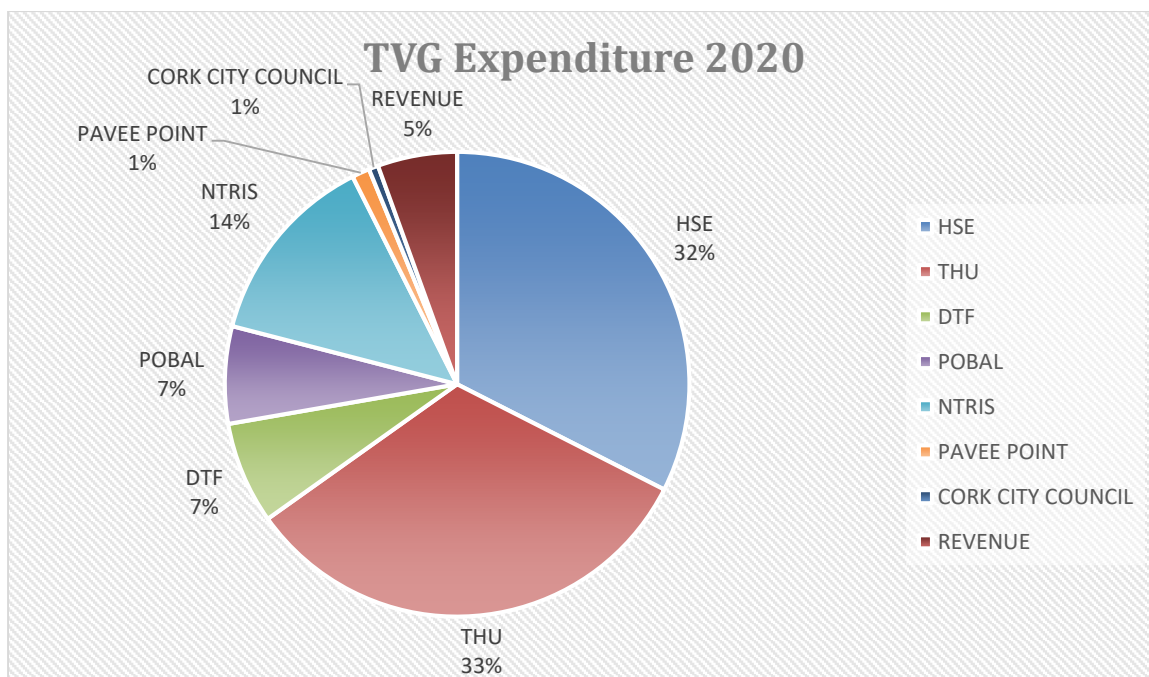
**Community Employment Scheme 2020:**

Helen O'Connor  
Josie Heaphy  
Oliver McCarthy/Ray Manning  
Ellen Quilligan  
Joanne O'Donoghue  
Eve Broderick

Receptionist  
Housekeeper  
Caretaker  
Community Development Worker  
Childcare Assistant (Admin)  
Childcare Assistant

**5. Financial Overview**





## **6. Committee and Interagency Participation**

Committee involvement has long been a very important part of the work of the TVG. This is one of the ways we work to progress the development of the Traveller community. In 2020, many of these committee meetings had to be moved online due to Covid 19 restrictions. Some of these meetings were less effective as a result however for the most part it was positive that we continued to work at committee level in order to build equality, increase awareness of matters affecting Travellers in our society and develop initiatives to ensure more positive outcomes for them. Members of the Traveller community were also supported to represent themselves and their community across a number of committees locally, regionally and nationally. The following lists all of the committees TVG participated in:

### **Local**

- Cork City Traveller Horse Initiative Steering Group
- Cork City Traveller Youth Workers Forum
- Cork City Interagency Traveller Education Subgroup
- Cork City Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- Spring Lane residents Committee
- Cork County Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- St Anthony's Park, Knocknaheeny, Community Centre Steering Group
- Healthy Minds, Traveller Suicide and Mental Health Project Steering Group
- Cork City Cancer Action Network
- Cork City Community Health Network
- Cork Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force Network
- North Side Drugs Initiative Committee
- Alcohol Pilot Strategy in Churchfield/ Knocknaheeny/Gurannabraher
- Cork Equal and Sustainable Communities Alliance (CESCA)
- TVG & Cork City Local Councillors Network Meetings
- Cork City Childcare Committee
- Cork City Aged 0-3 Network

- Cork City Early Years Alliance
- CYPSC

#### **Regional**

- Cork and Kerry Traveller Health Unit, HSE South
- Traveller Cultural Awareness Training Steering Group
- Cork and Kerry Traveller Primary Health Care Network
- Cork and Kerry Traveller Accommodation Group
- All Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS) 2010 Working Group
- Southern Traveller Health Network
- Regional Traveller Mental Health Sub Group.

#### **National**

- National Traveller Primary Health Care Network (Pavee Point, Dublin)
- National Traveller Men's Development Network (Pavee Point, Dublin)
- Minceirs Whiden Traveller Only Space Network
- Cena (Culturally Appropriate Homes Ltd) Steering Group
- National Drugs Network (Pavee Point)
- Irish Traveller Movement Central Group
- Irish Traveller Movement Coordinators Group
- Irish Traveller Movement Employment Sub Group
- Traveller Prison Initiative Group
- National Traveller Accommodation Working Group
- National Traveller Roma and Integration Strategy
- National Traveller Mental Health Network
- Traveller Domestic and Sexual Gender-Based Violence pilot project advisory group

## **7. Administration**

In 2020, Covid 19 required the administration team to work remotely for the most part which proved very challenging. As the crèche was closed for a major part of the year TVG had to avail of the Wage Subsidy Scheme for its crèche employees. As this scheme was introduced at very short notice it created a lot of administration particularly as the scheme evolved and changed a number of times during the year.

Administration by its nature is repetitive, for example, the paying of salaries, bills, Collector General etc, and this was ongoing for the year. Periodic Returns to the Pobal, HSE and other funders were completed. However, it was challenging for the team to maintain the usual duties remotely while also tackling the additional administrative tasks required from the Wage Subsidy Scheme along with ensuring the correct Covid 19 equipment and protocol was in place across TVG.

Sarah McCarthy continues to work 19 hours a week as Assistant Administrator while our Administrator Mary Prendergast work a 28 hours a week to manage the administration of the busy project.

## **8. Community Employment (CE) Schemes**

We continued to provide 10 CE placements to people in the Traveller community in 2020. CE workers are an excellent addition to the team as they are strategically placed within each section of the organisation so they can support the day to day running of the overall project and also take up

training opportunities in their personal interest areas. These have included Administration Assistants, Receptionist, Care Taker, Community Development Worker and House Keeping.

In March 2020 following government guidelines TVG office and crèche/preschool had to close resulting in our CE team having to stay at home. TVG worked with the Community Employment Coordinator to ensure the team were kept up to date with progress and to ensure payment and holidays were managed. When the Creche re-opened our CE Caretaker would come in twice a week for waste disposal and was on call for odd jobs across the service, cleaning public spaces etc.

CE placements can have duration of 3 years per participant which can be very beneficial to the participant as well as the organisation. This can give adequate time to building of skill sets and preparation for the workplace.

In 2020 the following CE participants included:

Shannon O'Connor	Reception (morning move to CE Development Worker in late 2019)
Helen O Connor	Reception (afternoon moved to morning Receptionist to cover Ellen)
Oliver McCarthy/Ray Manning	Caretaker/Maintenance
Josie Heaphy	Housekeeping
Ellen Quilligan	Community Development
VACANT	Community development
Jemma O'Reilly (+ part time TVG employee)	ChildCare
Joanne O'Donoghue	Childcare(Admin)
Eve Broderick	Childcare
VACANT	Drugs and Alcohol Project

### **CE Childcare Places**

Criteria for CE places in Childcare changed in 2015. In order to take up a CE place in Childcare a person must

- 1) Be over 18 years
- 2) Attend classes and gain Fetac level 5 or 6 in childcare study
- 3) The person, when finished their CE scheme will have a recognised qualification and 3 years experience in an Early Years setting and will meet the minimum requirements for any job in Childcare

The person will automatically get their CE place for 3 years with full support with college work from the TVG Creche Manager.

**Ray Manning – Caretaker**



*"I like my job as Caretaker at TVG. I like socialising with my colleagues, and the opportunities to learn new skills here is great. I started back in July 2020 and although Covid 19 closures were a bit tricky I was able to get back in to the building as soon as possible to help with keeping the building safe and in good working order."*

**Joanne O'Donoghue – TVG Crèche Administrator**

*"I work as administrator at the TVG crèche and preschool. I have been working here since September 2020. I like the job and my team are great! I like the administration part of my job, particularly the accounts and keeping the office in good order."*

## **9. Childcare Staff**

Going into January Susan Twomey ran the preschool and had Aim support worker which was Tanya O Sullivan who was hired in November the previous year. The Crèche employees were Gemma Lewsley, Jemma Coughlan and Laura Walsh.

Susan and Gemma are continuing their Level 7 at this time. Both Jemma and Laura had commenced happy talk and Hanen training which was cut short due to the closure with the current Pandemic. The service closed its doors on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March following Government announcement.

During this time some online training was provided on First 5 for Childcare practitioners. Gemma and Susan moved to online classes.

Service reopened on the 29<sup>th</sup> June for the crèche 9:25-1:00 which had 6 children and closed for summer break on the 31<sup>st</sup> July.

Laura Walsh and Tanya O' Sullivan did not return to TVG. Interviews took place in August for a childcare assistant and Aim support worker. We hired Shauna Kiely as Childcare Assistant in the Crèche and Jessica Varian as Aim support in the preschool.

Gemma interviewed 2 more CE Scheme participants and Eve Broderick was hired to work in the preschool in the afternoon and Joanne O'Donoghue was hired as the Crèche Administrator.

There is now a total of 7 staff working in TVG Goras Community Childcare.

Gemma Lewsley has started her second year in Childcare Level 7 and Jemma Coughlan and Jessica Varian are continuing their Level 6. Susan Twomey completed her Level 7 in Childcare.

Gemma Lewsley has received a place on the LINC course which is starting in January for 6 months.

## **Funding**

Funding was provided by Pobal in July. A total of €8000 was received as a grant for reopening after Covid. Funds covered signs, cleaning products and childcare materials for the rooms as they were not allowed to share resources.

An Environmental enhancement fund was received from Young Knocknaheeney of €500 which was put towards art & craft materials.

Susan Twomey's qualification will see an increase in capitation towards Preschool children. TVG receive €69 per child but will now get €80.50 per ECCE child.

When Gemma completes the LINC course this will also be an added capitation @ €2 per ECCE child.

### Crèche/Preschool



The children attending the crèche and preschool have been doing well. Even though only 6 returned in July there was a big interest for places in September. We have a total of 18

preschool children and 20 Crèche children. 19 of these children are from the Traveler community.

Beag have kindly gifted us some materials to use with the children as they have not been allowed entre the building with restrictions.



## **10. Health Programme**

### **Traveller Community Health Work Team and Pavee Point/TVG Traveller women's awareness worker**

*The TVG Traveller Community Health Workers (TCHWs) are Nora Cash, Biddy McDonagh, Jean O'Donoghue and Liz McGrath. Each work part-time and focus their work on engaging the community around primary health care. Each worker has been assigned geographical areas within which they access Travellers through outreach and through visiting and supporting women and youth groups as well as supporting the setting up of new groups and programs. A large part of the Traveller Community health workers' role involves keeping Travellers informed about and linked in with health services in Cork, cancer screening programs, as well as actively delivering health promotion information.*

*In addition to this team, Eileen Burke is the Women's Awareness Worker whose role is to support Traveller women access domestic and sexual violence support services and information. Eileen is one of 4 workers across Ireland who works in this role; Eileen is jointly supported and coordinated by Pavee Point and TVG, and is integral member of the TVG community health team.*

*Caroline Vasseur, the TVG health coordinator, supports the team and coordinates the delivery of the Traveller community health program for TVG.*



### **Valentine's Day: the Launch of 'Taken'd!', TVG's Sexual Health awareness animation**

On 14th February 2020, the TVG and the Sexual Health Centre in Cork launched their Traveller specific animation resource 'Taken'd!' in the Kino. The animation film is the product of two years of discussions and workshops between the TCHW team, TVG men's development worker, TVG's Drugs and Alcohol worker and Susan Walsh from the Sexual Health centre. Animation artist Hazel Hurley joined the discussions in the later months to capture the key issues and themes that would enable us to produce a culturally appropriate animated video on sexual health, disease prevention and intimate relationships.

The animation was made available on our social media (YouTube, Facebook) and our intention is to use the resource in group work to facilitate discussions on sexual health and relationships, while also integrating the work of Eileen Burke, Women's awareness worker, to the workshops.



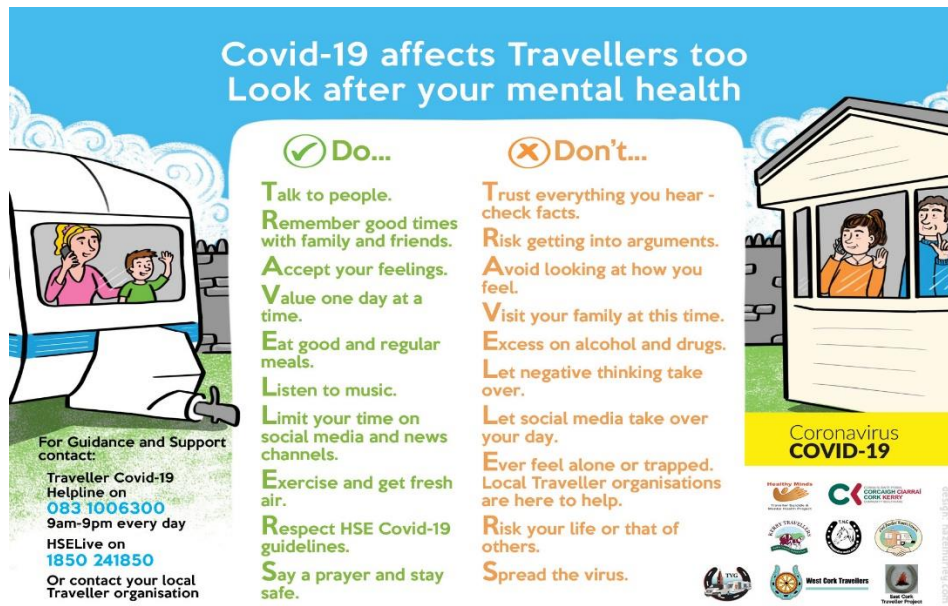
*Launch of Taken'd! at the Kino: Eileen Burke, Breda O'Donoghue, Liz McGrath, Jean O'Donoghue, Susan Walsh (Sexual Health centre) and Anne O'Driscoll (West Cork Travellers centre)*

### **Covid 19 public health information and support work**

From late February onwards, making sure that Travellers across the city had access to Covid-19 disease prevention and management information and support has formed the most significant part of our team's work.

Early on in the pandemic, our team members were assigned geographical areas and families with whom to link in on a regular basis to give information and offer support. Throughout the year, the whole TVG team has made referrals to the HSE, public health, and the local authority for Travellers in need of Covid-19 tests, sanitary supplies, and self-isolation facilities. We have also worked with the community to try and prevent outbreaks where we know Travellers are living in overcrowded conditions, by attempting to survey and plan for needs in the event of an outbreak and the TVG has liaised with the HSE and Local authorities weekly in that respect.

The TCHWs were tasked with preparing and distributing Covid-19 care and information packs across the whole community in partnership with Cork Traveller Women's Network, and assisting some of the families and persons in quarantine with shopping and accessing various goods and services. The TVG has used Facebook and Twitter intensively throughout 2020 to ensure that Travellers had access to information and support. We have collaborated with other Traveller organisations regionally and nationally to produce fast, culturally appropriate public health information, such as the Traveller Mental Health support poster as well as a number of videos with key public health messages for the community.



### Family and accommodation/homelessness support work

Unfortunately this year again, the TVG has observed an important increase in the needs of Travellers for support with securing accommodation, and in particular for Travellers in homelessness. Our staff has worked intensively with Travellers in long-term emergency accommodation, Travellers facing evictions from private landlords, Travellers being released from prison and treatment centres during Covid-19 lockdowns, families facing deferrals from the social housing list, Travellers families separated (or at risk of) due to child welfare interventions and with many Travellers living in health-detrimental substandard conditions on sites.

It is hard to imagine what a difficult year it must have been for those individuals and families who have lost a home or have had children placed in care during the pandemic; besides advocating and liaising weekly with local authorities, Threshold, homeless services, and Tusla throughout the year, TVG staff have also provided emotional, psychological and practical support face to face and over the phone, including visits to emergency accommodation and 3 way support meetings when we could.

On a positive side, the TVG has developed working relationships and lines of communication with a number of organisations involved with Travellers during the pandemic, including Good Shepherds, Mayfield NYP, Barnardos, Cork Penny Dinners, and Accommodation Placement Services.

### Traveller youth and Traveller youth workers forum

- The Traveller Youth Workers Forum group has held 3 meetings in 2020, in person in the TVG and on Zoom. This year has been sadly quiet on the youth work front due to restrictions. However, the TVG has secured funding from Healthy Ireland to run a mental health and well-being program with young Travellers in the city in 2021 and we have begun planning the program which will be based on a partnership with Foroige the Glen and the FAYRE youth project and involve 3 groups of young Travellers of mixed gender, aged 13 to 18 yrs.

- One of the groups, the TVG young girls group who previously worked with Downton Puppets in 2018-19, have taken part in TVG's project work during the year by featuring in the 'Little Bags of Hope' video for Beoirs Boutique, and just now as we are writing this report, the group is meeting Eileen Burke and TCHWs on Zoom for a gender-based violence awareness session as part of the international 16 days campaign.
- CAMHS Intellectual Disability/Cork/Kerry Traveller organisations working group
- In 2019, the HSE regional Traveller Mental Health coordinator formed a working group composed of staff from Child and Adolescent Mental Health services and Traveller community health workers.

The aim of the group is to bring to light the needs for CAMHS services within the Traveller community and to facilitate access and follow on interventions for Traveller families. The TVG TCHWs have continued to attend these meetings throughout 2020 on Zoom and have taken part in a focus group with CAMHS to contribute to local research on needs. The group is currently planning the creation of an easy to navigate road map to CAMHS services for the community in early 2021.

- Traveller immunity study and follow on collaborations with UCC team
- Also this year we received the great news that the findings of the Traveller immunity study 2018 (a collaborative field research between UCC and TVG based on the participation of over 100 Traveller women and men in Travellers' micro-biome analysis) were published in the medical science journal 'Nature Medicine'. Our team enjoyed continued discussions about the significance of those findings in support of Travellers' ethnicity, cultural heritage and lifestyle with Professor Fergus Shanahan (UCC) on Zoom. TVG and the research team have now successfully secured a further grant to work in partnership on:
  1. The creation with Travellers of ways of conveying the findings and their significance to the wider Traveller community using an animated video with the voices of Traveller people and
  2. continuing the engagement with Travellers to explore unanswered questions about how their ethnicity has influenced their micro-biome and how it can be retained for health benefit.

### **Traveller Women's Groups and Beoirs Boutique**

Across the city, the women's groups established with the support of the TVG have had few opportunities to get together in 2020, and many of the activities they had planned in early 2020 simply could not take place, with the exception of a few small groups walks in late summer. Beoirs Boutique, which has really (and virtually!) got off the ground during the pandemic, has provided a way for Traveller women to actively celebrate one another at a distance, get support and information around self-care and mental well-being, and get in touch with one another beyond the boundaries of Cork city. With the Beoirs Boutique initiative, TCHWs have been involved in planning inputs and well-being topics for the Facebook page with Ann Jordan and it has been one of the most celebrated successes of the year, with over 100 Traveller women members following the page, and an interview coverage in the Autumn edition of the national Travellers' Voice magazine.



***Beoirs Boutique members and nominees***

### **World Suicide Awareness Day and Traveller Mental Health Day**

The Mahon women's group, supported by Biddy, did manage to seize a window for meeting up between two lockdowns in early September and chose to work on creative posters in support of the National Traveller Together Preventing Suicide (TTPS) campaign on Suicide Awareness Day on 10<sup>th</sup> September.



### ***Mahon Traveller women's group TTPS 2020 campaign***

TCHWs also promoted Suicide Awareness Day by uniting with other Traveller organisations in Cork and Kerry to run the TTPS campaign regionally. A beautiful display of photographs of young and older Travellers' hands holding a candle was compiled for our social media and the images fed into the national TTPS campaign (of which TVG was a member since 2019).



***Jean, Nora and Liz launching the TTPS 2020 campaign in TVG***



***Mahon Traveller women's group TTPS 2020 campaign***

Throughout 2020, the TVG has played an active role in implementing various actions of the National Traveller Mental Health Network and the Regional Traveller Mental Health Network (Cork & Kerry), supporting and delivering both national and local actions to raise awareness of Traveller mental health needs and issues.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> October, we marked the very first National Traveller mental health day by planting two hazel trees in Cork city, located in Loughmahon park and the old Spring Lane park. We also invited Traveller children in the community to send us their Traveller Tree of Life art work and all were published on Facebook and rewarded with a prize for their participation. We hope that next year on October 8<sup>th</sup> and each year after, we will be able to gather safely around our Trees of Life with the community.

Biddy McDonagh and Nora Cash gave an input at the 'Feel Good Friday' webinar for HSE mental health services on 9<sup>th</sup> October for World Mental Health day.

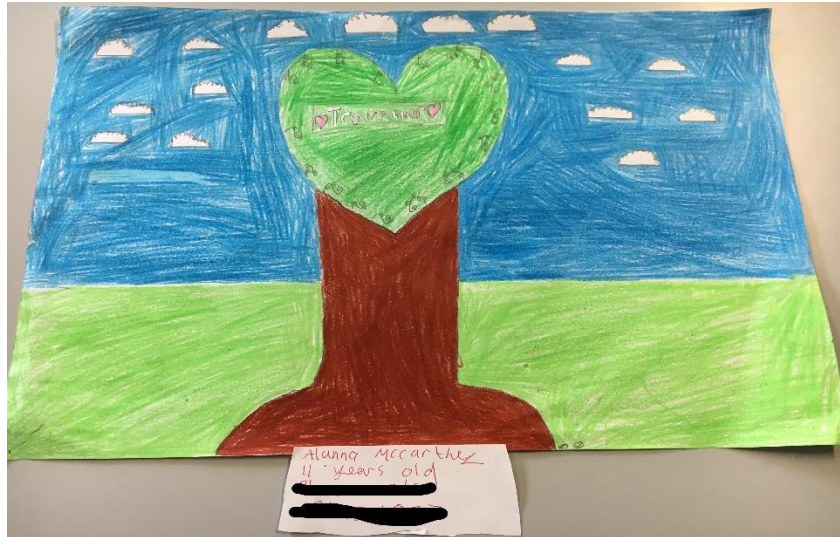


***Winnie McDonagh, John O'Sullivan, and Biddy McDonagh planting the Traveller mental health day Hazel tree in Loughmahon park***



***Rachel Coffey and Jim O'Connell planting the Traveller mental health day hazel tree on Spring Lane***

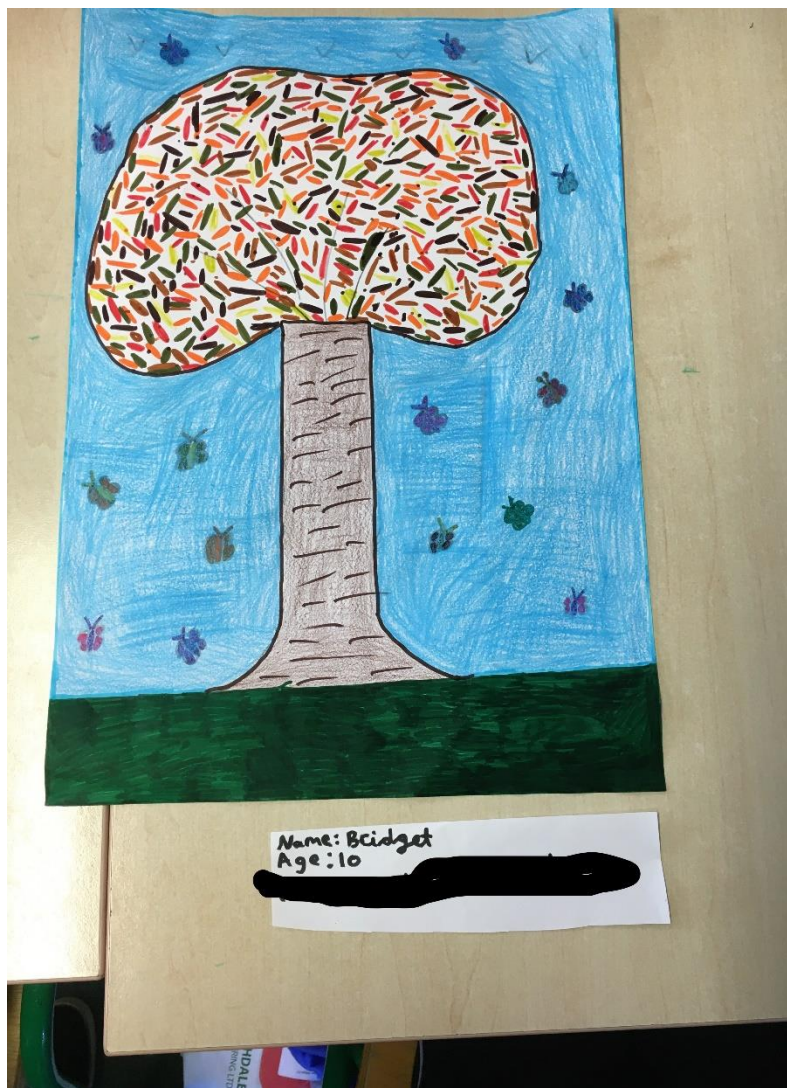




**Melanie Collins showing her Traveller Tree of Life**



***Alanna, Ann and Bridget from St Brendan's girls school the Glen, receiving their prize after participating in TVG's national Traveller mental health day Tree of Life drawing event***



### **Team training and up skilling**

- Jean and Eileen attended the 2-days Manuela training programme in Dublin in February; the Manuela training programme looks at safety (sexual and social) for young people and in particular for young women.
- In Spring 2020, our team took part in the 6 weeks online Stress Control course. We have also attended numerous webinars and training days online on Covid-19 guidelines and control, PPE use, as well as youth sexual health, alcohol misuse and consent, and mental health and suicide prevention.
- In September, Eileen and Caroline completed ethnic data monitoring training with Pavee Point.
- Jean completed the 2-days first aid mental health training in October; in November, our full team also took part in housing rights training with Threshold.
- Three of the TCHWs have continued on to year 2 of the Leadership training course with UCC and the STHN for 2 mornings each week.

### **Traveller Women's Awareness work/Domestic and Sexual Violence Prevention and Support**

- This year has been particularly challenging for the project. Through successive lockdowns and restrictions, there has been an increase in the need for support and emergency accommodation for women of all communities across Ireland experiencing violence in their home.

Eileen Burke has continued to meet on Zoom with her team of Traveller women's awareness workers, coordinated by Pavee Point, on a weekly basis. Eileen has also been meeting regularly with two local networks in Cork, Survivors of domestic violence, and the Cork network of violence against women services.

Eileen has channelled her time and her energy in sharing and posting valuable information for women and families on TVG's social media and Whatsapp each day, and has supported a greater number of women this year in accessing services with refuges, courts, etc.

- Eileen has also taken on an active role on Beoirs Boutique, putting a face to her project on a live video. She has produced the Little Bags of Hope video with Jean and with the TVG young girls group to reach out to other women via social media.
- Although this year the government level 5 restrictions made it much more difficult to run the activities we had planned for the 16 days campaign against gender-based violence, Eileen and the TCHWs organised 3km walks to mark the campaign on International Human Rights day on 10<sup>th</sup> December. They also met with TVG's young girls group for two discussions based on the viewing of 'Takend'!' and the Rings of Hope animation films.



***16 days campaign 3Km walk on Nash's boreen***



***16 days campaign 3km walk in Mahon***



***16 days campaign 3km walk in Mahon***

**Our aims and hopes for 2021:**

- In the coming year, we hope that we will be able to meet with groups of Traveller women and young people across the city to run activities and programs 'off line' and get a sense of normality in doing what we do best, community development work.
- We are also keen to deliver cardiovascular and diabetes health screenings in various areas where Travellers in Cork are living, and we have been contacting the Irish Heart Foundation and Diabetes Ireland in that respect to secure dates for the mobile unit in 2021.
- We are looking forward to supporting the delivery of the TVG Traveller men's strategy, from a primary health care perspective, and supporting men and boys in improving their health and well-being.
- As always, our team will continue to work with Travellers in the community and campaign on all fronts and with TVG's partners and allies, around Travellers' access to accommodation, mental health, violence against women, children's access to education and health services, Traveller culture awareness and cultural competency within services, and challenging racism and discrimination against Travellers.

**Community Health Development Workers**

**Traveller Accommodation**

- Traveller accommodation continues to be one of the key issues for Travellers in Cork City, and is one of the key determinants for outcomes in other areas, notably health and education.
- 2020 was another year with little to no progress in the area of accommodation, with the ongoing national scandal of the Traveller accommodation underspend continuing, as does the non-implementation of the recommendations from the Report of the Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation, now outstanding for the last 18 months. The review of Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) by the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission (IHREC) was initiated in around the same time, but we have not yet received an update or progress report from IHREC, and it is unclear if the outcomes will be published before the TAPs being audited have run their course.
- The **Cork City Traveller Accommodation Programme (TAP) 2019–2023** was adopted in the last weeks of 2019. An analysis by the Irish Traveller Movement of the 31 TAPs across the country shows Cork City Council to be the only one among the 31 to be failing on four key legal, statutory requirements. It has no targets, nor does it outline the needs to be met. There has been no progress on implementing the aims of the current TAP to date.
- TVG is represented on the **Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC)** by John O’Sullivan during 2020, and during the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, the LTACC met more frequently. These meetings were either on the phone, or on video; it was not the full committee, as the Traveller site representatives were, not included, though the TVG & CTWN reps were. TVG & CTWN worked closely on the issues, and also liaised closely with the Irish Traveller Movement and the National Traveller Women’s Network on the issues, feeding the issues, the actions taken, or not taken, in to the Department and the NTACC.
- TVG drafted some proposed Terms of Reference for the LTACC from a Traveller Sector perspective. It also engaged on the absence of Housing Welfare Assessments for Travellers (while HWAs are available for other tenants and housing applicants of Cork City Council). The Department were also contacted about the lack of availability of HWA for Travellers in Cork.
- In response to the evolving Covid 19 situation, the Traveller organisations pushed for the full implementation of a Department of Housing circular, including the provision of additional mobiles to address chronic overcrowding on sites. As number of additional mobile homes were eventually delivered after some delay, and installed throughout 2020. Unlike previously, these mobiles were connected to water and electricity (or are waiting to be connected) in view of the Covid 19 situation and the departmental circular. The challenge for the post Covid 19 period will be to maintain this precedence of connecting mobiles and caravans for services. CTWN & TVG also compiled a list of families in overcrowded living conditions, leading to the delivery of about 20 portalooos across the city.
- The TVG actively participates in the **Accommodation Working Group (AWG) of the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM)**. The AWG met more frequently, almost monthly during the COVID 19 crisis, and Zoom video-conferencing facilitated this more frequent engagement.
- The THU Cork/Kerry THU **Regional Traveller Accommodation Working Group (RTAWG)** also met throughout 2020, mostly on Zoom. A Zoom information workshop on housing rights was organised with threshold towards the end of the year. Considerable progress was made on finalising a report on Traveller homelessness in the Cork/Kerry region. With the RTAWG worker having left her post in late 2019, and the COVID 19 situation delaying the

recruitment of a new worker, TVG reverted to the temporary role of convenor and secretariat to the RTAWG again.

### **Spring Lane Accommodation Campaign**

- The collective complaint, jointly submitted by TVG & CTWN to the Office of the Children's Ombudsman (OCO) in March 2018 has of yet not been brought to a conclusion. While the process had moved from examination to an investigation in 2019, and TVG understands that this investigation has been concluded in 2020. TVG liaised with OCO throughout 2020, and is eagerly awaiting publication of final recommendations, which we hope will act as a catalyst to improving the lives of children and families on Spring Lane.
- A hybrid Spring Lane Estate Management/LTACC meeting was held in February to discuss the plans for Ellis Yard. The unfolding Covid 19 situation meant there were no further meetings in 2020, nor was there any progress to report on the Ellis Yard development. City Council's Traveller Accommodation Unit sent a letter to Spring Lane residents during the summer, seeking expressions of interest vis-a-vis Ellis Yard.
- While Cork City Council has stated for years that the only route to standard housing, was through bidding on available properties on its electronic Choice Based Letting system, City Council were able to source 12 old properties, which were brought back from void housing stock. These were offered individually, as selected by officials, to Spring Lane families looking for standard housing. As none of the properties offered were in the area of choice, the uptake was low.
- Storm Ellen damaged a number of mobile homes in August, and Spring Lane residents are still awaiting action to address the issue.
- During 2020 an issue emerged with the outsourced caretaking service in Spring Lane. TVG prepared an internal Traveller Sector document on this issue, followed by a Zoom meeting with the ITM & CTWN (November). Both TVG & CTWN engaged extensively with City Council on the issue, leading to an alternative interim arrangement, while awaiting an investigation.
- Apart from outlining the accommodation support needs and lack of facilities of families on Spring Lane at the beginning of the COVID 19 crisis, TVG staff worked closely with the CTWN towards the latter end of 2020, in terms of a risk assessment on the site, and preparation for a potential future infection outbreak.
- The Spring Lane Campaign Facebook Page continues intermittently as a forum for information sharing and campaigning.

### **Individual & other Accommodation Supports/Advocacy**

- Due to Covid 19, there were very few opportunities to organise collectively on Traveller accommodation issues. As a result the workload of supporting individual families increased exponentially, with many families in either a current a homeless situation, or in precarious accommodation facing imminent homelessness, contacting the TVG for support.
- Support is being provided to a number of individuals, mostly on accommodation matters, or related issues. They may relate the housing list, housing applications, maintenance, electricity, rent receipts, proof-of-address. Supports include exploring the issue with the individual concerned, usually followed by an email to the Traveller Accommodation Unit to raise this issue (and to create an electronic paper-trail).

- There appears to be a common thread in many of the supported cases: difficulties with being a successful bidder on CBL, and a policy of deferrals (sometimes `rolling deferrals`) for sometimes minor convictions. This has led to some liaison with Housing allocations on the matter, along with, information gathering & distribution on CCC Policy on Housing List Deferrals. TVG has also contacted the Department, seeking an update on its NTRIS commitment to research Traveller difficulties with accessing the housing list. A meeting has been organised with Housing Allocations for early 2021 to discuss CBL, and associated difficulties.
- Since 2018 TVG had supported one individual family on their housing issue. Despite 22 qualifying years on the housing list, and several valid bids on CBL, the family had not been housed. TVG supported the family in a complaint under the Equal Status Act to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). Following mediation and investigation in 2019, the case came to a successful conclusion in July 2020, when the WRC found in favour of the complainant, awarding him compensation, and ordering Cork City Council to undertake an equality review of its CBL system. Instead of complying with the WRC ruling, and using the opportunity for an equality review, Cork City Council will appeal the matter to the Circuit Court.
- By the end of 2020 the TVG had supported another family with an accommodation equality case to the WRC, and is in the process of submitting another one. Both relate to the operation of the CBL system too.
- TVG has been liaising with the Legal Unit of the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission regarding the longstanding issue of an `unauthorised` halting site in the Fair Hill area for some time. Following repeated attempts to engage with City Council on the inadequate accommodation situation, the matter was brought to the High Court during 2020. After years of little progress addressing the accommodation needs of the site's residents, Cork City Council are now trying to directly engage with the family at the highest level. TVG provided IHREC with detailed information as to the inadequacies of the Traveller Accommodation Programme (as it relates to this site)
- During 2020, there was extensive written engagement with City Council on its Caravan Loan Scheme (CLS), and its condition for an applicant to be in need of two letters-of-refusals from credit institutions, before an application for a CLS can be made while City Council has refused to directly engage with the TVG on this issue, this condition has now been removed from the existing CLS, as well as the new, enhanced pilot CLS. (Incidentally the TVG successfully supported one CLS applicant with a successful equality complaint to the WRC over her treatment by a credit union in seeking such a letter-of-refusal).
- Towards the latter end of 2020, TVG sought to support a small Traveller family grouping to develop their own, Traveller-specific accommodation (in the absence of a public provision through the local authority). Contact was made with Cena, the Traveller-specific Approved Housing Body, as well as the Planning lecturers in UCC.

### **Solidarity Building**

- As a Community Development Organisation, TVG works in solidarity with other groups facing marginalisation (and their organisations).

- TVG participated strongly at a local rally, supporting a national demonstration in favour of a properly resourced Childcare sector and those working within it.
- As with many other activities, joint solidarity fell by the wayside during 2020 due to Covid-19. The annual Cork Says No To Racism Rally in March was initially deferred to a later date, and then subsequently cancelled for 2020. Some initial preparations by TVG staff to bring a musical element to the demonstrations may be picked up again in 2021. TVG had also drafted a press statement for the event.
- A positive by-product of Covid-19 restrictions was the widespread use of Zoom and similar video-conferencing facilities, also provided some new opportunities for engagement in national networks (cutting down on travel and improving time requirements).
- While the TVG has been a member of the Irish Network Against Racism/INAR for years, in late 2020 TVG started to participate in the monthly INAR Membership meetings via Zoom.

### **Conferences & Webinars Attended by Community Development Workers**

- NUI Maynooth Housing Conference (March)
- IHREC/INAR Roundtable Webinar on Convention Elimination Racial Discrimination (November)
- Raise The Roof Webinar (November)
- Feantsa European Housing Rights Webinar (September)
- CESCA Equality Webinar (December)
- Launch of FLAC Traveller Solicitor Service (July)

### **Policy Submissions**

- Submission to Cork City Council on the preparation of the new Cork City Development Plan 2022 – 2028 (August)
- Submission to the Review of the Role of the Traveller Social Worker, commissioned by the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (July), and subsequent phone interview on the issue between the researcher and John Sullivan.
- Submission to the Department of Justice on the Review of the Review of the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions & Certain Disclosures) Act 2016 (November), and subsequent distribution among allies to draw attention to difficulties faced by Traveller housing applicants.
- Submission to Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on their upcoming Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023 (November)
- TVG had started formulating a submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Travellers on Traveller accommodation and related issues in Cork in early 2020, and had hoped to address the committee in person. However with the general election being called, all Dail committees were disbanded. With the committee being re-established in late 2020, TVG hopes to pick up on this piece of work in 2021.

### **Other**

- Ongoing liaison with Cork Traveller Women's Network, the Springboard worker on St. Anthony's Park, the Healthy Minds Project, the THU/ HSE, various Good Shepherd staff, the FLAC Traveller solicitor, National Traveller MABS, as well as Tusla.

- TVG staff met with Planning students in UCC to give a presentation on Traveller accommodation issues, followed by a question & answer session with the students.
- TVG met with a local researcher, who was exploring the relationship between Travellers and their horses in early 2020 and put the researcher in contact with a number of local Traveller horse owners, and liaised with her throughout the year.
- There was a meeting with men from St. Anthony's Park in February (following two tragic deaths in late 2019), organised by the HSE Regional Traveller Mental Health co-Ordinator. This was followed by a number of Zoom meetings throughout 2020.
- The Community Development team assisted the HSE around arranging Covid 19 group testing and sharing coronavirus awareness information.
- In June TVG liaised with social researcher, Brian Harvey, on Traveller Homelessness and a report he was writing on behalf of Pavee Point.
- TVG hosted a regional meeting with the Exchange House Suicide Prevention Project in February
- Community Development workers attended meetings with Traveller Mediation Service.
- TVG worked on a brief summary of Children's Rights Alliance 2020 'Report Card', as it relates to Travellers.
- Irish Times journalist, Kitty Holland, was put in indirect contact with a local group housing scheme's residents for her coverage of Covid-19 responses.

### **Activities**

- The Covid-19 restrictions prohibited the running of group activities. A planned Run-a-Muck Event for Spring 2020 among Traveller men, was postponed as a result.
- Online activities for Traveller Pride and other events were held.

### **Traveller Men's Health Worker Projects:**

#### **Go Kart Project Meelagh**

- TVG and Meelagh Community Centre facilitated a 5 week "Bike Go Kart Project" with Traveller boys from Mahon. Ulick O'Brien tutored the group in all aspects of the structure making and assembly of all the components and paint work. This was very enjoyable and each boy that took part was able to get his own kart when finished which he worked on with Ulick's tutoring for the 5 weeks undertaken.

#### **Southside Group Health Activities 2020**

- Indoor Soccer Traveller men from Togher, Hazelwood Grove, Blackash and Douglas participated in weekly indoor soccer from Jan to March and then started to meet weekly outside in June when local restrictions lifted in the Douglas Astro pitches for matches. Older men from the group met over the summer months for weekly walking group session and undertook Tennis sessions which they really enjoyed.

#### **Training Opportunities:**

- TVG through the Cork City Partnership organised Manual Handling Training after a request from a group of Traveller men looking to get work on building sites. Unfortunately this had to be cancelled due to Covid 19 restrictions. A planned visit to the Rossa Avenue training

Centre in Bishoptown is planned when Covid restrictions allow for a group visit for Traveller men wishing to take up training opportunities and apprenticeships.

#### **Traveller Horse ownership**

- Traveller Horse Initiative working group continued to meet pre-Covid 19 in 2020. This working group has met on a regular basis since 2013 and this year we had a new member from the Traveller community join the group as a representative. We have delivered equine education programs to the Traveller community both with young and adult Travellers and continue to seek the support of Cork City Council to help us provide Traveller horse owners with a grazing/ Horse Project. During 2020 TVG made a detailed submission to Cork City Council in relation to their City development plan to include a Traveller Grazing/horse Project.

#### **Traveller Men's Development strategy**

- During 2020 TVG set up a working group from services across the city to look at an action plan from TVG's 5 year strategic plan for working with Traveller men. This working group is made up of services from Traveller mental health, Youthwork, Cork City Council, Intreo, Employability, Cork Alliance and CETB. In late December 2020, a meeting of the full Traveller Interagency took place for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in 5 years and I feel this will be of benefit to TVG to help us deliver on our objectives set out in our action plan.

#### **TVG Paid Internship funding proposal**

- The Traveller Men's Health Community development Worker John O'Sullivan has advocated strongly about the need for a structured pathway for Traveller men to train and progress to employment within a Traveller community development setting. During 2020 John has worked to develop two funding proposals and sent off for approval for a paid internship position with TVG's community development team. John strongly believes that such a targeted initiative for Traveller men should be looked at from a national prospective through NTRIS and I have contacted the national groups to raise this.

### **11. Drugs and Alcohol Support Project**

#### **Outreach to the Community and Traveller involvement in the Project**

- 2020 was a difficult year for the D and A project in relation to capacity. We were very sorry to see our colleague, Eoin O Callaghan, finish with us in June 2020. Ann and Eoin, had been working 52 hours between them, but when Eoin left the project hours were reduced to 21 hours. We picked up again in November to 27hrs, so that the project could support Covid wrap around help. We'd also been advertising a CE place on the project in 2020, to no avail, but as the year draws to a close we are delighted to be advertising, a CLDATF funded Traveller Peer Worker post. This post will be for 14 hrs per week. The project is very hopeful that a Traveller Peer worker will be in post in early Spring. We look forward to updating on this in 2021.

- The D&A project, strives to maintain close working links with Traveller colleagues in the TVG, and in other projects. 2020 was no different. We worked closely on the COVID poster, with all 5 of the Cork and Kerry projects. Ann supported the establishment of the Traveller Regional Mental Health Network meeting, the project initiated the Traveller SMART recovery meeting idea, with Traveller projects nationally, and Ann initiated the Beoirs Boutique online Traveller Women's group.

#### **1-1 work with people in addiction**

- During the year, despite the reduced hours in the project, we worked with 12 individuals on their substance addiction.
- People rang looking for help themselves, and services, like Cork Alliance, Tusla, Tabor Lodge referred people to us.
- We were meeting people where they were comfortable, early in the year, but as COVID related restrictions happened in March, Ann, started doing 99% of the 1-1 work on the phone. People got support via getting information, getting help to make referrals to other addiction services and on getting support for themselves, by way of meditation and listening support for themselves.
- TVG D&A project, supports the SMART recovery meetings. We moved the meetings to the evening time, in January. We then moved online in March. Ann has been co-facilitating 2 meetings a month during 2020. This project initiated an idea to start a **Traveller specific SMART** meeting, through the Traveller Drugs Project network. Pavée Point TDN have taken this idea on and are leading it now.

#### **Family Support to people experiencing the stress surrounding addiction in family**

- The project supported 15 families around the stress and strain of supporting a loved one in addiction.
- Some families rang the Drugs Workers looking for help. The team got to know others, through the COVID support phone calls to the Community, and in other cases, TVG colleagues passed Ann on families who needed support.
- At the beginning of the year, the project was offering face to face meetings with people, or phone calls. Ann was offering Beoirs Boutique sessions, and acupuncture too. However the service, changed in March, and Ann moved Beoirs Boutique online, to Facebook, and we continued support work over the phone, offering people regular phone calls.
- As part of more long term family support perspective, we completed the training part of the Family Support Programme with 15 trainees. This was done, with funding from the HSE, and in a co-working relationship with Mella Magee of the Community Outreach and Drug Awareness Project in the Cork City Partnership. We have developed a training package, that included 5 Step training by the National Family Support Network, TCAT training by local trainers, and Trauma Informed practice training by Dr Sharon Lambert. The trainees came from 3 CLDATF projects, 2 RDTF projects, Good Shepherd, Youth Health Service, Carrigaline family Resource Centre, Ballincollig Family Resource Centre and Fermoy Family Resource Centre. We liaised with Dr Sharon Lambert, UCC Psychology department for a piece of

Research, based on attitudinal change amongst the trainees. This will conclude in Spring 2021.

### **Men's Development Strategy**

- John O Sullivan, the TVG Men's Health Development worker, is leading out on this strategy. The D&A project is working with John on the Internal group, to support its implementation.
- This project is particularly involved in the 'Substance Misuse and Addiction' Action. This involves counselling and support, advocating with services, supporting affected families, building awareness and addressing challenges with dual diagnosis. The D+A project, along with TVG Co-Directors, Breda O'Donoghue and Eileen O'Shea, started a discussion with Coiscéim low cost counselling service in September, about **Traveller specific therapeutic services**. We will continue to work on this in 2021. Also, this project are building on TCAT done with **Tabor Group**, a residential treatment service, where Tabor are linking with us when they have Travellers in their service. This will continue in 2021. The family support training programme, is also linked to the Men's Development Strategy work.

### **Beoirs Boutique**

- Beoirs Boutique started in mid-2020, as a way to support women to get recovery support for themselves or for their family members. Marie Roache, a volunteer with TVG, and myself, linked with the TVG TCHWs, offered beauty therapies, with meditation and relaxation therapies, in TVG. Women's groups were booking us in with, with bookings until May, when COVID made sure we changed our direction.
- By May, we moved BB online, to a group off the TVG Facebook page. As of December we have 111 women 'friends' of BB, with women, from Cork, and further afield, Limerick, Navan, Dublin, Galway and even London! Marie finished as a volunteer with BB in July, but the TVG Traveller Community Health Worker team, the Healthy Minds Mental Health Outreach Worker, and the TVG UCC Social Work Student, have all worked on the Facebook group.
- We secured funding for the group from the THU, at the end of 2020. We have held fortnightly 'Nominations' draw, to encourage women, to celebrate and support each other. We regularly post positive quotes, meditations, music by Traveller women, and other pieces of work by Traveller Women in particular.

### **Networking – local to regional to national**

- This project was involved in setting up the Regional Mental Health Network meetings. We ensured that D&A issues were included in the discussion on Mental Health.
- Ann has maintained her presence at the Pavee Point Traveller Drugs worker network meetings.

### **Supporting students, Volunteers and research**

- In 2020, the project supported 2 students from Maynooth Youth and Community Work Course, and from UCC Social Work degree programme. We supported a volunteer in the

project and I participated in research with 2 students, on projects entitled, 'Culturally inclusive Talking therapy for Travellers' and 'Impact of Drug Related Death on Professionals'.

### **Ongoing Training**

- Ann is doing psychotherapy training with Flatstone.

## **12. Education**

Like all projects and organisations we have found this year to be an extremely challenging one and levels of stress and fatigue are really high. I don't think anybody in their wildest dreams ever thought we would find ourselves in the position that we did this year. We have had to adapt our work so much because, while our access to community diminished, the issues in the community intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I think this year has highlighted how vulnerable but also how resilient our community is, we were already struggling with so many issues before the pandemic and then we found ourselves having to almost do the impossible in order to protect our community and ensure we weren't lost in the chaos of crisis of responses.

The NTRIS (National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy) Education Pilot got going in January after recruitment of Gina Miyagawa and Rachel Coffey, who are brilliant. They hit the ground running, had a great understanding of the issues and a great relationship with the families. They knew what needed to be done and we had great plans for 2020. Little did we know what was ahead. We were fortunate in the summer that our education workers were able to get out into the community and visit Traveller and Roma parents and children in the 14 schools in the pilot. The workers designed and distributed information fliers to the parents and the schools introducing them to the pilot. Gina and Rachel also ran a number of summer camps for Traveller and Roma children building a good relationship with them.

We have set up a local steering committee to oversee the work of the education pilot. The first action undertaken by the steering committee was to participate in anti-racist training. To date there has been three sessions. Jim O'Connell, the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL), started with us in September. Jim, together with HSCL from the 14 schools and the Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) attached to the pilot schools completed three session of anti-racist training. We intend to roll out this training to all staff in the pilot schools thus ensuring everyone involved in the pilot is clear on what racism is and how we can develop models of good practice that deal with anti-Traveller and anti-Roma racism.

Most of the pilot schools responded positively to our plans and welcome the extra support it provides to Traveller and Roma children in their schools. To date because of COVID-19 restrictions we have had only limited access to the schools but have maintained phone contact and developed a news letter for the schools, which has been a great way to keep them updated on the work of the pilot. Hopefully we will have more contact in the New Year.

The pilot was meant to have 4 workers , a Roma education worker (Gina), a Traveller education worker (Rachel), a HSCL worker (Jim) and an EWO. The Dept of Education has not yet managed to recruit an EWO so instead they will employ third education worker. We expect this role to filled in January 2021.

In addition to managing the NTRIS project on behalf of TVG, I also worked during the year on other aspects of developing Traveller education at local regional and national level. I sat on a number of Traveller specific committees including the Traveller Interagency Education Committee. I also participated in the SOAR Project Traveller in Education Work Stream and the PATH Regional Advisory Committee. These initiatives both provide support to Travellers in third level education. I also sat on the NTRIS local Steering Committee, national NTRIS Oversight Committee and the Irish Traveller Movement Education working group.

In my work with the Southern Traveller Health Network (STHN), my colleague Ann Marie Rogan and I developed and delivered together with UCC the Traveller Women Leadership Course. This involved collaborating with UCC's Adult and Continuing Education Dept to design and develop a course that met the needs of Traveller women who wanted to develop skills in Leadership to provide them with training but also a qualification to help them to secure job opportunities. The course was very successful. The 19 women who completed the first year decided to do further education and we have now developed a second year programme. When they finish they can secure a Diploma in Leadership in the Community.

Reflecting on the year, I am now encouraged by the focus of so many groups and agencies now working on the issue of Traveller education. We have a lot of work to do because Traveller education is in a state of crisis, similar to the crisis facing Traveller accommodation. The very poor levels of achievement and completion of Traveller children here in secondary schools reflect that high levels of systemic racism that currently exist.

Looking ahead to 2021, there is an urgent need for serious effort to create opportunities to openly discuss the experience of Travellers in Cork and to ensure systems are put in place to remove the systemic racism. This can enable Travellers to have a positive secondary school education and to flourish as a result. I'm glad we finally have an opportunity to do this.

**Anne Burke, TVG Education Coordinator**

### **13. Mission Statement**

TVG is an independent, Cork-based, Traveller-led community development organisation. TVG will pursue social justice and equality with Travellers so that we can live free from racism and discrimination.

Values and Principles underpinning the TVG strategy and its work:

- TVG is an open and welcoming space for all Travellers and promotes Traveller visibility across Cork.
- TVG continually promotes Traveller participation and Traveller leadership.
- TVG works from a human rights and anti-racist perspective and will be Traveller-led.
- TVG promotes Traveller ethnicity and Traveller identities.
- TVG is committed to collective action with the Traveller community and works in solidarity with wider society to create a better Ireland.

## **14. Acknowledgements**

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