

Annual Report **2023**



Traveller Visibility Group



1. Chair Person's Statement

“

In my role, it's important to be out there engaging with the community. This helps build trust and with that you can help the community with support around all sorts of things, **talking about issues** in education, accommodation, drug and alcohol, mental health and fitness. It's about building **relationships in the community**

”

Patrick McDonagh

Traveller Men's Health Internship Worker

It has been another busy year for TVG, with 2023 being the first year free from Covid 19 restrictions. While Covid 19 has not 'disappeared', TVG has had some time to recover and start to assess the impact of the pandemic on Travellers living in Cork. TVG's initial assessment indicates that the pandemic has had a profound impact on the mental health of Travellers. While the Traveller Community responded positively and with great resilience to the different Covid 19 crises, TVG has experienced increase demands during 2023 to provide mental health and support services.

While the Covid pandemic has subsided, the conditions under which Travellers live has not changed. As the most oppressed and disadvantaged group in Irish society, institutional racism results in Travellers continuing to suffer disproportionately from a lack of accommodation, inadequate education and health services, as well as ongoing high levels of poverty and unemployment. Travellers living in Ireland continue to be denied their basic human rights; Travellers continue to be poorer, die younger and have worse health outcomes than any other group in Ireland. 2023 was a year for more reports from universities in Ireland that identify the wide range of discrimination faced by Travellers. For example, research from the University of Limerick found Travellers faced discrimination in the judicial system and in their contact with the Gardaí. Research from UCC identified how Traveller children are disadvantaged by the educational system, particularly when making the transition from primary to secondary education. Research from Trinity College Dublin found that asthma, bronchitis, and tuberculosis is 2-3 times more prevalent in Travellers



compared to the general Irish population. Each year research is produced that highlights different ways Travellers are discriminated, however, little is ever done by national and local governments to address these growing inequalities.

In this context Travellers in Cork show great determination in maintaining their culture and identities as Travellers. The 2022 Central Statistics Office Census identified an 11% increase since 2016 in the number of Travellers in County Cork. There are now estimated to be over 2,300 Travellers living in County Cork. The Traveller community is thriving and growing even in the face of overt racism and discrimination. The Traveller community remains younger than the settled community with 36% of the Traveller community under the age of 15 years. This has prompted TVG to urgently seek funding to employ a specialised Traveller youth worker who can work alongside existing youth services in Cork.

Staff and volunteers at TVG have worked tirelessly alongside the Traveller community, to address some of the worst impacts of discrimination. At TVG we are extremely lucky to employ staff, many from the Traveller community, who have the right mixture of knowledge, skills and abilities to work on the issues faced by Travellers. It has been my privilege as a member of the Settled community to be the Chair of TVG's Board of Directors for another year. TVG is a 'Traveller-led' organisation and this is reflected in the membership of the Board, as well as staff and volunteers. In 2023 we have appointed two new members to the Board, one from the Traveller community and one from the settled community. Two major pieces of work that the Board has undertaken this year is the de-

velopment of new strategic plan and a review of the pay and conditions of staff employed by TVG. The latter has been part of ongoing negotiations with our major funder, the Health Service Executive. As well as these specific activities the Board has held regular Board, strategy, finance and human resource meetings, as well as participating in numerous TVG events.

I would like to thank the Board of Directors, TVG's highly talented staff and our resourceful volunteers for their commitment and energy in pushing forward the work of TVG.

I would also like to thank, on behalf of the Board of Directors, 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, Irish Traveller Movement, Pobal, Solas, Munster Technological University, University College Cork, Cork City Partnership, the Community Foundation, 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 Statement



2023 was very much a learning for us here in TVG. In that it was the first year that we were fully clear of Covid 19 restrictions and we were able to learn more about the lasting impact of the epidemic in the community. Many Travellers were sharing their concerns with us that there had been an increase in drug and alcohol use within the community during lockdowns and that in 2023 we were still dealing with issues related to this. Our own drug and alcohol project was linking in with the wider community and a big focus last year was increasing the number of people availing of recovery treatment. I would like to thank staff in the Tabor Group particularly for working with me and our team to explore ways to improve access and participation of Traveller clients to the service. We also found ourselves working a lot with mental health services and creating awareness around mental health supports for Travellers who have been impacted by Covid 19 on top of the general stressors that Travellers face including high unemployment figures, poverty, homelessness, racism and discrimination. I have not named poverty as a key stressor in our community in previous annual reports and it feels strange to do so because Travellers are very resourceful at the of best times and often find seasonal employment to make ends meet. But when Covid came along many Travellers could not avail of the pandemic payments and supports and could not engage in traditional Traveller enterprise such as door to door marketplace work. On top of this, in 2023 the rising costs of living and continued housing crisis has led to Travellers being disproportionately impacted by economic downturn. As a result our Community Development Workers lobbied to ensure that Local Authority tenants on halting sites and group housing schemes also availed of the energy support payments during the cost of living crisis.

TVG has always promoted Traveller pathways to employment, training and education but in 2023 it became even more of a priority and as we go into 2024 and beyond we will be looking to work with public bodies and state agencies to create apprenticeships, career pathways and try to find real meaningful ways to improve Traveller outcomes in education and employment.

Another key project in 2023 was developing the Cork Kerry Traveller Health Action plan as a direct response to the welcome publication of the National Traveller Health Action Plan. We wanted to ensure that we developed an ambitious yet realistic plan, and needed to highlight the fact that Traveller organisations cannot be responsible for the outcome of Traveller health. We do not have the power to bring about the important changes necessary to improve Travellers' life expectancy and the quality of life a Traveller can hope to enjoy. This is a responsibility of the Irish government and as Traveller organisations we will continue to lobby for an improvement in the social determinants of health across all related state departments in accommodation, education and employment. With this perspective I am pleased to say that we have developed a plan that promotes the importance of implementation, our staff will work tirelessly to implement the areas that we have control over and we will continue to lobby for our partners and other key stakeholders to implement the actions that they are accountable for.

As ever, I am so grateful for the team around me. Myself and the Co-Director for Operations have a fantastic team behind us who deliver consistent and creative work. All staff in TVG have advocated for increase in wages, which we have supported and lobbied to our funders for and we are pleased to see that HSE Section 39 funding will allow for a much needed salary

increase, this is the first increase in wages in TVG in over 15 years and is long overdue. I know that Traveller organisations and other community development projects and NGOs are in the same boat in relation to wages and funding as we hope that this is beginning of a more concentrated support in staff development in the coming years. I would like to thank our Traveller Allies, our friends and partners along with our funders for their continued support in year and I look forward to working with you all in 2024. Lastly but certainly not least, I would like to thank all Travellers living in Cork, we will continue to advocate for your rights in the coming years, and please always feel welcome to call into us here in TVG.

Breda O'Donoghue

Director of Advocacy.



3. Executive Summary

15 National

8 Regional

25 Local



Inter-agency Work

TVG participates in **48** local, regional and national committees:

- **25 Local** Committees and Working Groups
- **8 Regional** Committees and Working Groups
- **15 National** Committees and Working Groups

Public Events

TVG produced 18 public events including 5 events for Traveller Pride celebrations along with further events on accommodation, Traveller ethnicity, domestic violence, drug and alcohol service, Traveller culture, mental health.



Submissions and Policy Work



TVG staff also participated in 35 external events across 2023 to ensure a Traveller voice and a strong representation of Cork Traveller issues and lived experience were shared at local, regional and national events.

- Department Of Justice Legal Aid Scheme: TVG contributed to the public consultation on the Review of Civil Legal Aid.
- TVG's Presentation on Traveller Accommodation to the Oireachtas Committee on Key Issues in affecting the Traveller Community
- TVG collaborated on creating a position paper on Traveller homelessness with the Regional Traveller Accommodation Working Group.
- TVG submitted two motions on Traveller Accommodation to the PPN, both were adopted as PPN policy, and brought forward to the Housing SPC
- TVG produced an animated video promoting awareness on domestic violence
- The TVG Health Team delivered a submission on the framework Convention on the Status of Minorities in collaboration with ITM
- TVG contributed to Pavee Point's submission to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).



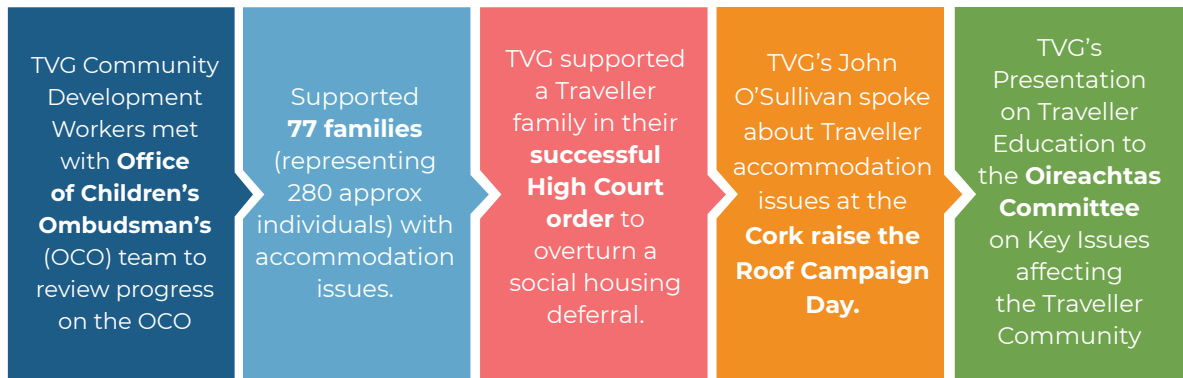
TVG Advocacy Work

In 2023 TVG staff worked directly with Government departments and political party leaders to advocate for Traveller rights, to combat anti-Traveller racism and seek equality and equity in health, accommodation and education outcomes for Travellers. In 2023 TVG formally met with the following national and local Government leaders, state bodies and national organisations:

- TVG attended a Women's Caucus event regarding women in politics.
- TVG attended the National Traveller Women's Forum Political Training and Women in Elections Workshop
- TVG attended the ITM Annual General Meeting and TVG's Director for Advocacy facilitated a panel discussion on issues impacting Travellers
- TVG Director for Advocacy co-Chairs the ITM Central Group and is involved in planning meetings throughout the year.
- Oireachtas Joint Committee for Issues Impacting Travellers.
- Chair of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, and first ever Traveller to be appointed to the Seanad.
- The Office of the Children's Ombudsman
- The Chief Executive of Cork City Council
- Cork City Traveller Accommodation Unit (TAU)
- Cork Traveller Inter-Agency Group (Cork City)
- Specialist Social Inclusion in HSE



Accommodation Workers Highlights



Education and Employment Team Highlights



Health Team Highlights





Training and Employment Development Work

TVG participated in a “Train the Trainer” programme for 19 Traveller women, the course was developed and delivered by STHN and Cork ETB. TVG directly supported 9 women in this group and all 19 women graduated with full attendance from the start of the course to the finish, a record first for any ETB course. In 2023, TVG has worked with both Traveller men and Cork ETB to create training and employment pathway initiatives. 11 Traveller men undertook a 12-week Metal Arc Welding Course with the Cork ETB. We have worked closely with our Traveller Men's Training and Employment sub group to identify objectives and goals for 2023 and beyond. We worked to establish links with DEASP, Employability, CETB and Cork City Partnership to deliver training and education programs for Traveller men. We have linked with the ITM national apprenticeship program to connect men to the program and provide information workshops.

TVG continued to host our Community Development Traveller Men's Internship worker Patrick McDonagh. This role is supervised and mentored by our Traveller Men's Development worker here in TVG and involves facilitation of men's groups and provides a vital link through advocacy work to Traveller men in Cork. Patrick McDonagh has completed his UCC Youth and Community Diploma and is awaiting results due in early 2024. We have worked well throughout 2023 to established new working relationships with services and worked to create pathways for Traveller men. 2023, was the start of TVG's journey with Traveller men and formal training and employment initiatives, the participation and commitment shown by Traveller men on these programs is very encouraging and will hopefully lead to more men participating and gaining employment in future - John O'Sullivan, TVG Traveller Men's Health Development Worker.

Throughout 2023 TVG supported 8 young Traveller women aged from 16 to 20 to complete a taster course in make-up application and skills.

We received great feedback from both the students and tutor after this course and this has driven further development into new professional and certified training courses for this group. This short course was ran in the Cork College of FET in Knocknaheeny. In collaboration with Cork ETB, we explored further certified courses for this new group and we hope to create more structured and certified courses in 2024.

Further to this training & development work we also supported 5 Traveller girls (16+) who received a certificate for participation for a 6-week nail course, which was presented by Ellen Quilligan a Traveller woman and qualified nail technician along with staff from Bruac Education and Development and the Good Shepherd, Cork. Again we hope to build on this in 2024 and create new opportunities in training and development for Traveller women in Cork. It is great to hear of opportunities and pathways for our younger community to develop their skills and access training and employment for better outcomes – Elizabeth McGrath TVG Community Development Worker.

“

TVG is excited about the upcoming TRES Traveller and Roma Education Strategy. TVG is deeply committed to improving the educational journeys and outcomes for the Traveller community.

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Dr Linda Greene,

TVG Education Strategy Coordinator

Ally Awards

TVG teamed up with sister organisation Cork Traveller Women's Network (CTWN) to create a new awards programme that celebrates allies of the Traveller community over 2022 and 2023. The two Cork City-based Traveller organisations selected 28 recipients of the award spanning the first 2 years of the new programme. This award recognises the continued efforts of an organisation or group to fight for Traveller rights, to challenge anti-Traveller racism and discrimination and to increase engagement of Travellers into their service by ensuring accessible and inclusive systems are in place to accommodate a diverse user-base. The recipients of the Traveller Ally Awards were celebrated at an event in the Triskel Arts Centre in October 2023 which saw all 28 Allies take the stage to be celebrated and thanked for their continued work in fighting for Travelling rights. Each award winner received a beautifully designed vinyl sticker created by Traveller artist Francesca Hutchinson along with a Cork Traveller Pride logo image which will be displayed proudly in their office. The full list of winners in 2022 and 2023 are below and we look forward to celebrating new allies and developing this award in 2024:

2022 winners

1. Cork Community Art Link
2. Cork Gay Project
3. Cork Public Museum
4. Cork says no to Racism
5. Crawford Art Gallery
6. Dr Mary Favier, Parklands Surgery
7. Frameworks Films
8. LINC
9. Munster Technological University
10. People's Republic of Cork
11. Sexual Health Centre Cork
12. The Glucksman
13. Traveller Equality & Justice Project
14. Triskel Arts Centre
15. University College Cork

2023 Winners

1. Cork City Council Community Arts Officer, Siobhan Clancy
2. Cork City Council Heritage Officer, Niamh Twomey
3. Cork city Local Drugs task force
4. JOINT AWARD Cork Folklore Project/ UCC Folklore Department
5. Cork ETB Training Centre
6. JOINT AWARD: HSE South west Traveller Health Unit
Coordinator Deirdre O Reilly /North & South lee Community
work departments
7. Maggie O'Neill, UCC
8. Tabor group
9. Cork Life Centre
10. Dr Fergus Shanahan & APC Microbiome research team, UCC
11. Cork Sexual Violence Centre Mary Crilly

Academic Research Participation

TVG values the ongoing research and academic work delivered by universities and professional bodies both nationally and internationally. We regularly collaborate with research studies that focus on issues impacting Travellers. In 2023 TVG was participating or collaborating in the following research studies:

- Traveller Microbiome Study with APC and UCC
- University Limerick (UL) and Dr Mary Favier's research on Travellers and GPs regarding the Travellers Health Reference Guide
- Dawn Higgins' (Maynooth University) research on dementia
- Dr Patricia Fox and Reuel Jalal (UCD) research on Travellers' attitudes to cancer
- Tawreack Gamble-Eddington's (Oxford University) research on Migratory Communities in Ireland and the UK





A selection of
photographs from
various events
throughout 2023...



Traveller Education Development Work

TVG has prioritised Traveller education in recent strategic plans and through involvement with the Southern Traveller Health Network (STHN) NTRIS STAR Education Pilot along with participation in groups such as the Cork Traveller Education Education Working Group (CTEWG), a local Traveller education working group founded by STHN, and participating in Traveller Education Subgroup of the Traveller Inter-agency Group (TIG) we have continued to focus on improving outcomes for Travellers in Education

The TVG STAR Education Workers have been working directly with students across 14 schools in Cork City throughout the year and we have been collaborating with Traveller parents, teachers and principals within the STAR remit. TVG also sits on the NTRIS Oversight Committee where all 4 STAR pilot projects meet with key stakeholders to discuss progress as a group. Some of the key priorities of TVG's education team in 2023 and beyond are:

- To write and implement the education strategy on the social determinants of education.
- Maintain stakeholder relationships and continue to work with our allies in education.
- Lobby NTRIS and Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) policies for implementation plans, mid term evaluations, to ensure Traveller voice and visibility on the curriculum and to ensure Travellers are acutely positioned in important representative spaces where key decisions are made.

Across 2023 the TVG education work has focused on empowering Traveller and Roma

students through STAR and mentoring programs to transition smoothly to second level education. A key focus for development is ensuring strong Traveller representation at policy level for all areas of education development. We continue to work with the yellow Flag programme and supporting the delivery of Traveller Cultural Awareness Training (TCAT) to schools and education services.

TVG Goras Community Childcare and Early Years Centre continued to be a busy hub for young Travellers and children from many other communities and backgrounds. In 2023 we were able to upgrade our outdoor flooring in the play area making a brighter and safer play space for the children. We also received funding from Let's Grow Together to buy materials for our outdoor area. We bought some balance bikes, climbing frames for the creche children and other materials. We are continuing to work with Let's Grow Together, an excellent resource for enhancing our service to our young participants. Our Creche Manager attended infant mental health training and uses the resources to share with staff. One Childcare Assistant attended Hanen training which will continue until March 2024. This training and learning is then integrated into our service for all to benefit from this knowledge. As ever our seasonal holiday celebrations created lots of fun learning opportunities as well as a space for children to play and celebrate cultural holidays. We were delighted to see our creche and pre-school families attend the Family Fun Day in Fitzgerald's Park as part of Traveller Pride Week in the summer. In December we visited Santa at the Foyer and the children really enjoyed the outing and we also had Santa visit the TVG service and had a party afterwards which was a huge hit!

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It's a pleasure to work with the children in the STAR schools and to work with the teachers and principals who support the STAR Education Pilot Project

”

Maryanne O'Donoghue

Traveller Education Worker



4. Board of Directors and Staff

List of TVG Board of Directors 2023:

Alastair Christie	Chair and Company Secretary
Deirdre Kelleher <small>joined May 2023</small>	Treasurer
Siobhan O'Donoghue <small>(resigned November 2023)</small>	
Chris McDonagh <small>(resigned September 2023)</small>	
Jason Sheehan	
Cora Williams	
Leanne McDonnagh	
Margarita O'Driscoll	

List of TVG staff 2023:

Breda O'Donoghue	Director of Advocacy
Eileen O'Shea	Director of Operations
Mary Coughlan	Project Administrator
Sarah McCarthy	Assistant Administrator
Joanne O'Donoghue	Assistant Administrator
Tehmina Kazi	TVG Traveller Health Coordinator
John O Sullivan	Men's Health Development Worker
Thomas Erbsloh	Community Development Worker
Elizabeth McGrath	Women's Health Development Worker
Biddy McDonagh	Traveller Community Health Worker
Jean Donoghue	Traveller Community Health Worker
Nora Cash	Traveller Community Health Worker
Eileen Burke	Traveller Community Health Worker
Maria Stokes	Domestic & Sexual Gender Based Violence
Noreen O'Reilly	Domestic & Sexual Gender Based Violence
Emily Barrett	Community Drugs and Alcohol Worker
Amanda O'Donnell	Traveller Peer Drugs and Alcohol Worker
Patrick McDonnagh	Traveller Men's Strategy Intern
Dr Linda Greene	Education Strategy Coordinator
Maryanne O'Donoghue	Traveller Education Worker
Rachel Coffey	Traveller Education Worker
Rachel Hurley Roche	Roma Education Worker
Gemma Lewsley	Childcare Manager
Susan Mannion	Childcare Team Leader
Jemma Coughlan	Childcare Worker
Shauna Kiely	Childcare Worker
Rebecca Castro	Childcare Worker
Kayleigh Curtin	Childcare Worker
Donna Cambridge	Childcare Worker

Community Employment Scheme (CE)

We continued to provide 10 CE placements to people in the Traveller community in 2023. 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 2023 we further developed this offering to explore the opportunity to offer more Community Development positions for CE staff where they could gain valuable work experience and specific community development training as part of their time at TVG. This

has proven very successful and in 2023 we saw a CE Community Development Worker successfully apply to become a staff member in the TVG education project. This is the kind of training and opportunity that we want to develop to increase opportunities in career development both in TVG and in other organisations and services to tackle inequalities that Traveller face in education, training and employment.

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 2023 the following CE Workers included:

Helen O'Connor
Katieann Stokes
Ray Manning
Marianne O'Donoghue
Bernadette O'Donoghue
Aimee Daly
Joanne O'Donoghue
Eve Broderick
VACANT
VACANT

Reception
Reception
Caretaker/Maintenance
Community Development
Community Development
Community Development
Childcare (Admin)
Childcare
Drugs and Alcohol Project
Front House/House Keeping

“

As a Traveller women's Development worker and a Traveller myself, I have an opportunity to work within my community, my work includes, having an understanding of the issues impacting on Travellers health and wellbeing. I share experiences and ideas to develop collective strategies and skills. I work towards better outcomes for Travellers in society, my aim is to promote equality and diversity within the community, I also work with my community to improve quality of life and I represent them on a local and national level.

Elizabeth McGrath,
Community Development Worker

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5. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all our funders throughout 2023 including:

Social Inclusion and Cork Community Work Department (HSE)

Traveller Health Unit (HSE)

Cork Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force (HSE)

Pobal

Cork Education Training Board

SICAP

IHREC

Cork City Council

Community Foundation of Ireland

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth

All colleagues in the Cork and Kerry Traveller Health Unit

A further thank you to the **UCC Social Work Students** who took up work placement with our team in TVG over the year, thanks for your interest, passion and commitment to delivering anti-racist and culturally aware services in your future careers.

TVG would like to thank our sister Traveller organisations across Cork and Kerry, and a special thank you to members of **TCAT** and **STHN** who have been excellent partners in our work in 2023 and over the years.

TVG would like to acknowledge the work of our national Traveller organisations and all their members: **Irish Traveller Movement**, **National Traveller Women's Forum** and **Minceirs Whidden** and a thank you to the team in **Pavee Point** for continued collaboration on the Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence Project



Thank you

A special thank you to **Traveller allies, our friends** and **supporters** who join us in solidarity in the pursuit of social justice for Travellers in Ireland.






Traveller Visibility Group

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