



Friends Families and Travellers

REPORT BCCG FUNDED ENGAGEMENT  
DECEMBER 2013 - MARCH 2014

# Gypsy and Traveller thoughts around wellbeing

A summary of the report compiled for Brighton and Hove CCG  
by **Michelle Gavin, Friends Families and Travellers**



**INTRODUCTION**

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) is a lead organisation seeking to address the problems facing the Gypsy and Traveller communities, providing advice and information along with a wide range of other services. FFT work nationally and for this project work solely with Travellers within Brighton and Hove city, whether residing in or 'resorting' to Brighton.

**METHODOLOGY**

From December 2013 – March 2014, 35 members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities were interviewed on the subject of mental health and well-being, and the routes and barriers to its improvement.

The interviewing was carried out through a combination of:

- Bespoke questionnaire.
- Telephone interviews/drop-in to office.
- 1:1 interviews.
- Assertive outreach site visits (knocking on trailer doors, inc. on unauthorised sites).
- Focus group – Department of Health chat hosted by FFT.
- Informal Women’s Group run by FFT.



Friends Families and Travellers

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER THOUGHTS  
AROUND WELLBEING

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

**From December 2013 – March 2014 there was a fall in respondents as many Travellers over-winter elsewhere.**

### Gender, age and ethnicity

**35** people were interviewed, of whom **19 (54%)** were women and **16 (46%)** men.

.....

The survey was restricted to adult respondents.

.....

About half of respondents were aged 23-39, the largest cohort.

.....

**23%** were aged 18-22, and **29%** aged 40 - 60+.

.....

**49%** of respondents were from the New Traveller community, the largest cohort.

.....

Of the remainder, almost a third (**31%**) were Irish Travellers.

.....

**14%** were from the Gypsy community and **5%** from the Welsh Traveller community.

.....

### Living situation

The majority (**71%**) lived on unauthorised sites.

.....

**23%** lived in bricks-and-mortar accommodation, with just **2** respondents living on privately owned sites.

.....

**83%** of respondents were Brighton residents. Less than a fifth (**6** people) were 'resorting' to Brighton during the winter.

.....





## WHAT THE RESEARCH UNCOVERED

A sizeable proportion of respondents had experienced problems related to stress and/or anxiety. 10 had been linked with Brighton Mental Health Services/ wellbeing service, 12 had been prescribed medication for stress, anxiety or other mental health issue, and 11 had had a mental health crisis at some point.

Respondents had clear ideas about what worked for them in terms of dealing with feeling anxious or down:

Two thirds of respondents talked to friends and family about their problems.

---

More than half (54%) said counselling worked for them.

---

40% said travelling helped them.

---

The same amount (40%) said outdoor activities including work/animals/cars helped.

---

Stress/anxiety/depression was most common. 43% complained of these. Physical health was an issue for a fifth of respondents (7). A minority mentioned dementia, bi-polar disorder and PTSD as problematic.

---

Perhaps the clearest correlation was in what respondents blamed for their poor wellbeing: the lack of a secure place to stay, and the lack of funds to enable them to do activities which would help their wellbeing. More than half (18 people) said living on a secure site with family would help, and a third (12 people) said they had insufficient funds to do activities.

---

Other big issues were debt (60% of respondents), bereavement (37%) and safety (for 29%). 60% said they suffered as a result of constant evictions, yet transition to bricks and mortar accommodation could equally prove stressful. Further, access to healthcare services will generally be restricted if one is not registered with a GP, which remains a problem within the community. **“Travelling makes it impossible to access care in different counties,”** said a 50-year-old woman.

---



## CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH

These findings must be seen against a backdrop of poor health and economic security among Travellers compared to the wider population. **38%** of Gypsies and Travellers have a long term illness, compared to **26%** of age - and sex-matched comparators in the wider population (see Parry et al., 2004). Suicide and para-suicide levels are high. Life expectancy for Irish Traveller men is 20 years below the national average, and children report high levels of race-related bullying. Additionally, Irish Travellers have unemployment at over twice the city average for Brighton specifically.

---

## CASE STUDIES

These included

A New Traveller male aged 50+, who suffered a double blow of depression and physical injury following a bereavement. He was also not receiving the correct benefits. With support from FFT he lives in secure housing and cites this as a major benefit to his increased well-being.

---

A 50+ year - old transgender New Traveller woman who had never accessed mental health services after experiencing a 'barrage of racism' at a first meeting with a psychiatrist. She stills feels unable to trust mental health professionals, though she knows this may be self-destructive. She cited work travelling as key means of dealing with stress, but that constant evictions make things worse.

---

A Gypsy woman in her mid - 40s, waited 9 months for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy sessions. She completed all 12 sessions with FFT support.

---

A 43 year - old Irish Traveller woman who was linked to the mental health service and had a community psychiatric nurse (CPN). With support from FFT she was able to explain her feelings in a 1.5 hour session. As a result her care plan and medication were tweaked and the client reported she had "found her voice" again.

---



## **EXPERIENCES OF COUNSELLING**

These were mixed. While one woman had a CPN whom she regularly chatted to on Facebook, another did not like counselling, seeing it as all listening and no action. Others were concerned that mental health 'is a label that sticks with you', or that admitting to depression might lead to their children being taken away.

.....

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING COUNSELLING SERVICES**

A 'buddying system' or peer-support group with a pro-active, 'bubbly' co-ordinator.

.....

Using social media/emails/texting to stay in contact.

.....

Being on an equal footing with other people and professionals.

.....

Personalised support; non-judgmental services; literacy issues being taken into account.

.....

Personal Health Budgets could be used to fee mentor (travel, coffee etc).

.....

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING COUNSELLING SERVICES**

- 1.** Cultural awareness training to the well-being service around use of language, cultural pertinence and cultural practices.  
.....
- 2.** Training given to the local authority around housing issues and understanding the complexities related to entering bricks-and-mortar housing.  
.....
- 3.** For commissioned services to be more mindful about partnership work with FFT in delivering an improved mental health and well-being service to the community.  
.....
- 4.** For the CCG to look at more creative ways of engaging with the community - the use of the Health Bus in Brighton has been a very successful way of engaging the community and of introducing specialist health care services, and could work as an improved access point for those living on unauthorised sites.  
.....
- 5.** GPs considering providing prescriptions for gym membership, which is recommended as a preventative of various conditions under NICE public health guidance.  
.....
- 6.** To improve ethnic monitoring of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller patients among service providers.  
.....
- 7.** A peer support programme specific to Gypsies and Travellers.  
.....
- 8.** The positive introduction of Personal Health Budgets for the community to improve clients' well-being with work related issues/self esteem/training, rather than simply using traditional medication.  
.....





**FFT Community Base 113 Queens Road Brighton East Sussex BN1 3XG**  
Telephone **01273 234 777** Fax **01273 234 778**  
**[fft@gypsy-traveller.org](mailto:fft@gypsy-traveller.org) [www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org)**