

## **Minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Advisory Committee on Traveller and Roma Education**

**Monday the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2013, 10.00 – 1.00 am**

### **Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre**

**Attendance:** Aodhán O' Ríordáin TD , Jean Rafter (NEWB), Martin Collins (Pavee Point), Ronnie Fay (Pavee Point), Mary Corrigan (Barnardos, TESO project), Kathleen McDonnell (Traveller Community Worker) and Johnny Mc Donagh (Traveller Community Worker).

**Apologies:** Paul Downes (Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Pats), Sheila Nunan (INTO), Gabi Muntenau (Roma Community Worker), Mairin Kenny (Independent Academic)

#### **Items discussed:**

Introductions

Background to the Education Programme in Pavee Point

Terms of Reference

Introduction to Rom UP!

#### **Background**

The advisory committee was established to provide a forum for key education stakeholders to discuss and advise on:

- the impact of policy changes and budget cuts on Traveller and Roma educational outcomes;
- examples of good practice and successful education programmes in Ireland and Europe;
- current challenges of meeting the educational needs of Traveller and Roma children;
- possible future initiatives and opportunities at both a local and national level and ;

#### **Terms of Reference**

All present were prepared to accept the TOR as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding.

#### **Role of the Chair**

It was agreed that for the first year of the committee (first 4 meetings) that Ronnie Fay (Co Director, Pavee Point) would assume the role of the chair. The role of the chair would then be reopened to the Committee.

**Items discussed: The following is a brief outline of the key issues that were discussed.**

#### **Education Passport**

The possible introduction of the Education passport was discussed. It has been suggested that the passport would include data around attainment, attendance and possibly behaviour.

The passport was flagged as a way in which an ethnic identifier could be introduced across the education system.

It is hoped the passport system would also work to catch children who may not be successfully transferring from primary to post primary education.

#### **Follow Up Actions:**

PP to monitor any possible developments on the education passport and if appropriate, develop a submission on:

- the inclusion of an ethnic identifier in the education passport,
- ensure that along with the introduction of a passport an obligation/requirement is placed on primary principals to ensure their students transfer to post primary school
- ensure that preschool education is also included in the passport

#### **Impact of cuts on Traveller children**

The impact of the cuts to Traveller education supports was highlighted particularly the void left by the Visiting Teachers for Travellers (VTT). All participants felt that the withdrawal of the service had left a significant 'gap' as much of the knowledge and information that had been gathered through the service was lost.

It was mentioned that schools can still be a very uncomfortable places for many parents, with some schools still trying to discourage students from different backgrounds or with special educational needs from enrolling.

Traveller parents often feel anxious approaching schools and in some cases schools are not aware of factors which act as a barrier to their engagement. The majority of schools do not have an adult literacy policy and given that many Traveller parents have literacy difficulties not having notes and other communications in an accessible language can be particularly problematic.

#### **Lack of Traveller/Roma role models in the education system**

The lack of Traveller/Roma role models in the education system was highlighted as an issue. The Marino Institute of Education is running a programme where they were offering children from disadvantaged communities extra support with their Irish so that they could possibly become primary school teachers. It was agreed that having more Travellers/Roma in the education system would be particularly beneficial for young Travellers.

#### **Possible Actions**

Explore opportunities to include Traveller/Roma role models in the education system

## Rom UP!

A short PowerPoint presentation was given outlining the background to the Rom Up! Project, the rationale behind it and the processes involved in the selection of the *Successful Educational Experiences*.

There was a brief overview of each of the selected experiences from the different European partners including the core elements of each programme and the outcomes.

The following discussion looked at the elements of the experiences which could be successfully introduced in an Irish context and would best meet the needs of Traveller and Roma parents and children.

In many cases it was elements of projects rather than the complete experience which were identified as particularly important. For example the opportunity to have parents more involved in the school was identified as a key element that emerged in many of the experiences and was identified as being needed in the Irish system.

Given the lack of a framework around Roma in education in Ireland the 'wholesale' transferability of any of the experiences was considered unlikely. It was however felt that there was an absence of examples of good practice and that it would be beneficial for all or some of the experiences to be disseminated more widely through the groups' contacts.

A number of the experiences were identified as particularly relevant to the Irish experience.

The Bulgaria experience was noted as being particularly interesting as it included interactive and intercultural in teaching methods. It also included Roma culture within the curriculum which was considered a current deficit in the Irish education system.

Including the family in the education system was considered particularly important as it is an area that can present a difficulty for education stakeholders given Travellers historical experience with the education system and current barriers with Roma parents. The 'Decisive Family/Community Participation' model from Spain given its success in using education and training among family members to help transfer positive attitude to learning among children was considered particularly interesting by the group. There was a particular interest in the flexible approach taken by programme in engaging parents.

The Greek model was also regarded as particularly applicable to the Irish context given its focus on women as agents of change. Initiatives in other areas with Travellers which have focused on women have been particularly effective.

### Possible Actions

- Panel will consider and explore the *Successful Educational Experiences* in more depth, particularly the examples highlighted in this meeting.
- Consider where they could be integrated into the Irish system
- Where the experiences should be disseminated/presented to

