

Young traveller goes online to fight prejudice

By Shirley Hastings

A YOUNG gypsy traveller in Inverness has gone online in an attempt to put an end to years of discrimination and stigma.

Lizanne McGroary (14) is part of a group of five young people from across the Highlands and other parts of Scotland who have launched the country's first website dedicated to young gypsy travellers.

"Come Look At Us" is an attempt to put an end to the misconceptions and stereotypical views that surround the culture of travelling people.

The site — the result of seven months work — gives people an insight into the life of young travelling people as well as providing a platform for them to meet and share their views.

Lizanne, who was responsible for the photographs and games on the site, has been living at the Longman travellers' site for nearly three years with her mother Elizabeth, father John and 15-year-old brother Joseph.

She claims much of her time spent living in towns and cities has been overshadowed by watching her friends become the victims of abuse. She hopes the site will encourage people to find out more about the travellers and put an end to the stigma associated with their culture.

"From my experience no-one has really been interested in finding out about our culture and people often assume that if they meet one traveller they've met them all," she stated. "All the work that has gone into producing

the site will be worth it if it helps people understand us more."

Lizanne claimed that, while attitudes towards the travelling culture are slowly beginning to change, there is still a huge gap in understanding. Many of her friends were convinced the web site would not stop people unfairly judging her.

"I know people who have suffered verbal abuse for years and they thought the site would be a waste of time but I was determined to prove them wrong," she added. "It was a big challenge for me because before the project I was very wary of people but working with this group has made me much more trusting."

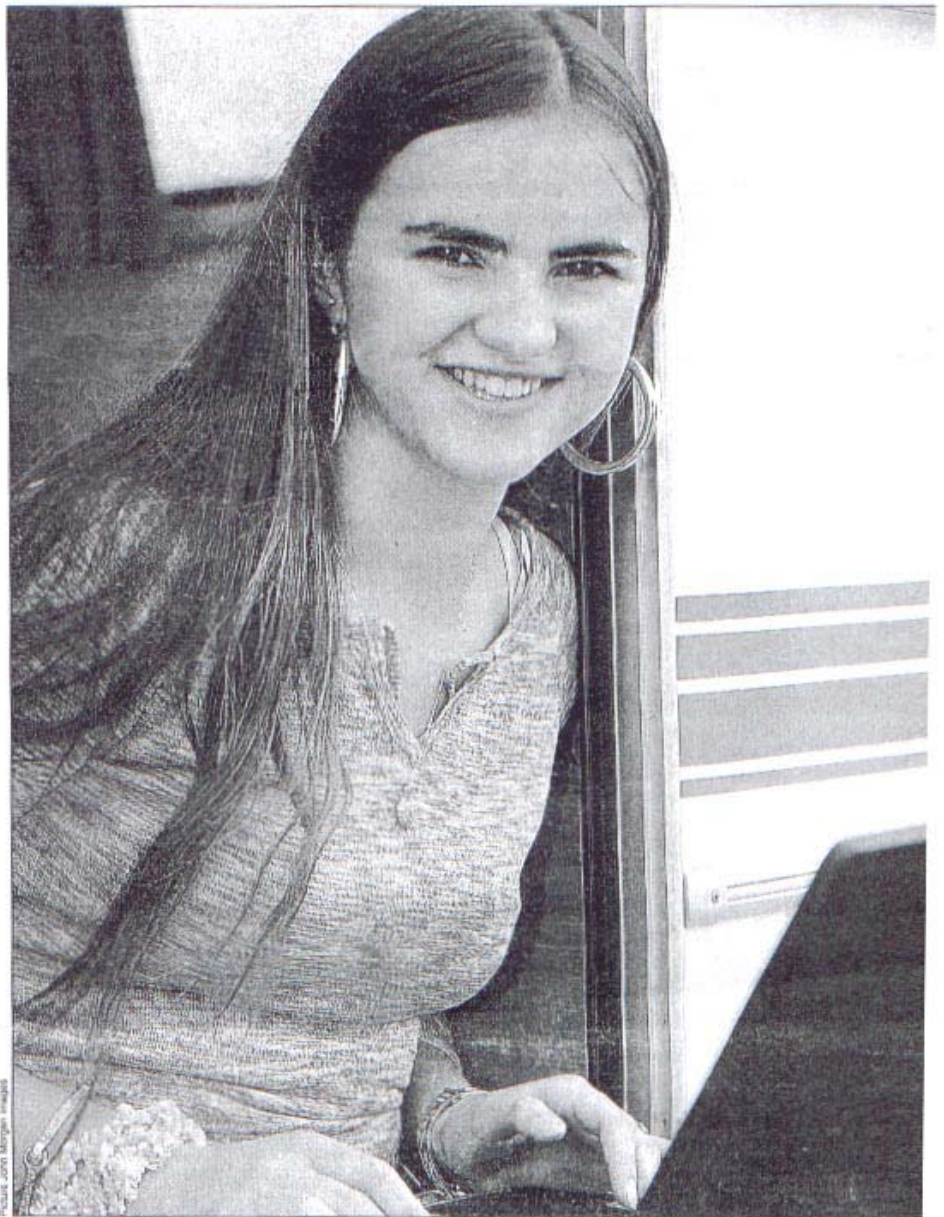
The initiative was instigated by Save the Children and made possible through funding from the Chase Millennium Award project for socially excluded children.

Inverness based Chase mentor Karen Powell explained that the aim of the initiative is to dispel the stigma attached to travelling people and put an end to the negative views surrounding their culture.

"It has been hard work getting everyone together, with some of the young people involved travelling from as far away as Wick and Skye to attend the meetings in Inverness, but the group have been dedicated to the project and worked extremely hard over the past five months."

The group's efforts can be seen at www.comelookatus.org.

Lizanne McGroary does some work on the Come Look At Us website.



Picture: John Morgan Images