

Young voices

Grace Claire O'Neill on her day at the Coalition conference in Birmingham

Our Youth Conference started with an ice-breaker exercise – where we all got to know each other, and our different backgrounds. I found out there were people from all different backgrounds there: Scottish Gypsy Travellers, English Gypsies, Irish Travellers and young people from the settled community.

We watched a fantastic presentation by three Scottish Gypsy Travellers. The presentation highlighted just what you can achieve when young Gypsies and Travellers do their own projects. The group's DVD about boxing was excellent. This was followed by Richard O'Neill, Violet Tucker and Margaret Stokes who gave short talks about their childhoods – good and bad. This was really interesting.

After this, we got straight into writing a group letter to the government about issues and problems facing Gypsy and Traveller youth. This was the fun part! We got to express our fears and concerns in whatever creative way we wanted – as a drama piece, a painting, a 'mindmap' or whatever we wanted.



Photo: Jade Jones

Then the main points from our 'creations' were put into the letter- so we had full control over it. Later we did a brilliant exercise about evictions. We had a group discussion first, and then we put our thoughts, comments and hopes for the future on the 'wishing line'. Later still we watched two DVDs, one by a group of Irish Traveller girls about fashion, in which they made their own clothes and had a fashion show.

The second DVD was made by Leeds GATE solely by Gypsy and Traveller youth – it showed what GATE is all about, and the Gypsy lifestyle.

Then we said our goodbyes and headed downstairs for a group photograph for none other than the Travellers' Times!



Computer award: Margaret Stokes from Haringey Traveller Education Service presents Traveller Martin Power with a new laptop for all his hard work.