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# Sussex Traveller Women's Health Project

*Friends, Families and Travellers*

## **Final Project Report 2003 - 2006**

*Funded by the Department of Health*

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# Sussex Traveller Women's Health Project

*Friends, Families and Travellers*

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# Sussex Traveller Women's Health Project Final Report

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## Foreword by Project Manager

The last 30 years have seen many changes in the ways that we all live and work: None more so than for the Gypsy/Traveller community, originally a nomadic culture travelling within Britain for over 500 years. Increasingly, Gypsies and Travellers have experienced an erosion of their traditional way of life, though many maintain a strong cultural identity despite this. It is this unbreakable spirit, which inspires those of us who work alongside Gypsies and Travellers.

My family has been connected with the Travelling community for over 40 years, with an Aunt receiving an MBE for her work with the community in Kent. Personally, I first started working at FFT after completing an MA in Health Promotion (Europe), where I focused on the Health of Gypsies and Travellers. During a research trip for my dissertation, I visited Pavee Point in Dublin who have been doing some very innovative work with Irish Travellers. I was inspired to see if their project could be replicated in the UK.

It has not always been an easy ride and we have had to constantly change and adapt the way that we have worked for the duration of this project. The key to our success being flexibility! However, the experience has been a valuable lesson in the viability of project replication, which as we have found out cannot always be duplicated readily. Many of the variables were quite different; geographically, demographically and socially. Not least, in that the Irish Travellers were paid to participate in the project, due to our benefits system and nature of our funding we were only able to pay expenses. I would like to therefore thank all of the women who have participated in this project.

Special Thanks are due to:

Patricia Knight	Ada	Elaine	Sarah
Liz Cook	Rosemary	Louise	Maggie
Paul Myles	Jenny	Minnie Senior	Melanie
Margaret Greenfields	Donna	Minnie Junior	Debbie
Kate	Lisa	Phoebe Senior	Susan and many
Rose	Sally	Phoebe Junior	more

Zoe Matthews,  
Health Project Manager

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# Sussex Traveller Women's Health Project Final Report

*Friends, Families and Travellers*

## Introduction

Up until fairly recently there has been little research into the health of Britain's Travelling community, though it was widely known to be poorer than that of the general population. Since the start of the project the 'Health Status Report on Gypsies and Travellers in England' has been completed by Patricia Van Cleemput at the University of Sheffield (2004). The following quotes are from this report:

*Health problems amongst Gypsy Travellers are between two and five times more common than the settled community*

*Gypsy Travellers are more likely to be anxious, have breathing problems (including asthma and bronchitis) and chest pain. They are also more likely to suffer from miscarriages, still births, the death of young babies and older children.*

*Gypsy Traveller women are twice as likely to be anxious than Gypsy Traveller men.*

This project was initially set up by FFT to address some of the health related issues experienced by the Gypsy/Traveller community in Sussex. It was set up as a volunteer project, following a successful application to Volunteering England, with funding from the Department of Health. The aim was to support Gypsy/Traveller women to become health advocates for their own families and communities. It was based upon a similar model used at Pavee Point in Dublin with shared aims and objectives.

## **Aims and Objectives of Sussex Traveller Women's Health Project**

Establish a model of Traveller participation in the promotion of health:

- To involve Travellers in all aspects of the project
- To increase Traveller awareness and knowledge of health issues
- To access and disseminate information to Travellers
- To support Travellers in gaining access to health care
- To develop culturally appropriate educational materials

Develop the skills of Traveller Women in providing community based services:

- To provide training in health skills and information, whilst building on existing awareness of health matters
- To facilitate group discussions with the wider community on health issues.
- To participate in the formulation of health policy on Travellers

Assist with dialogue between Travellers and Health Service Providers:

- To prepare a health profile of women involved and their families.
- To analyse and disseminate findings
- To educate health service professionals in their work with Travellers
- To challenge racism and discrimination
- Inform other health professionals about the project

Reduce inequalities in existing services & highlight gaps:

- Review current services and promote change where needed
- Empower and enable through information and access to health services
- Review policies at consultation to identify discrimination

## Project Structure

### Friends, Families and Travellers Board of Directors:

- Neil Ansell
- Liz Watkins
- Tony Thompson
- Marc Willers
- Justine Compton
- Bobbie Kellie
- Rob Torkington
- Franqui Wolf

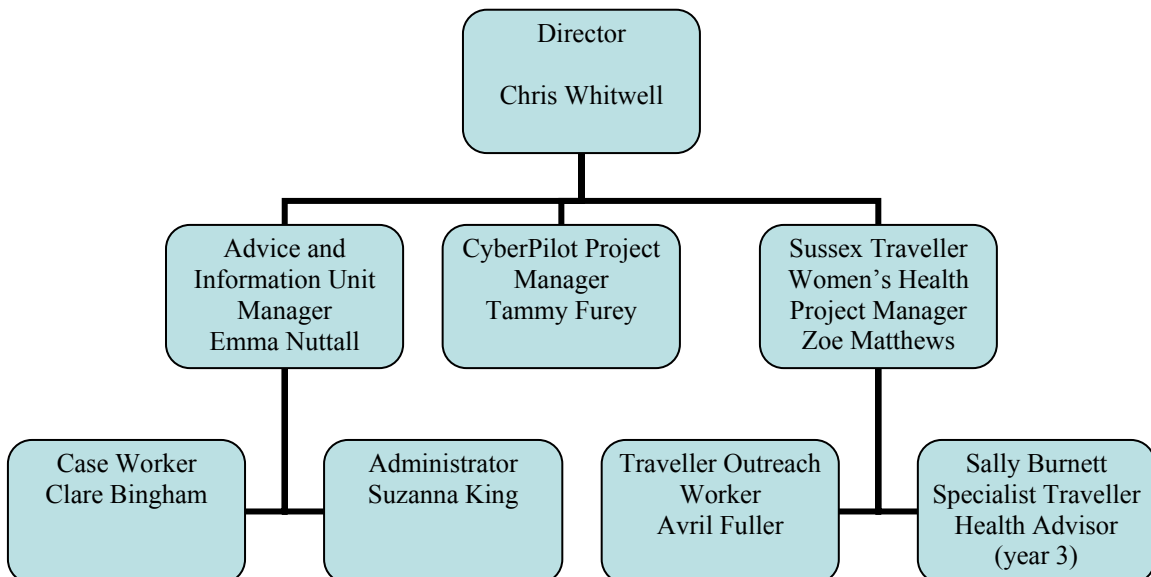
### Project Management:

The project was managed by a steering group; consisting of the following members at different stages of the project:

- A Trustee from FFT- Neil Ansell
- National Co-ordinator FFT – (post not always occupied)
- Widening skills and Participation Manager, South Downs Adult Education – David Brindley (year 1)
- G.P with a specialist interest in hard to reach groups – Dr Christopher Sargeant
- Health Project Manager – Zoe Matthews
- Traveller participant, who became Outreach Worker for the project – Avril Fuller
- Specialist Traveller Health Advisor – Sally Burnett (year 3)
- Midwife – Jan Mattis (year 3)

The steering group was responsible for the overall management and direction of the project. Initially the steering group met every six weeks, reducing contact for the last phase of the project.

### Friends, Families and Travellers' Staff Structure:



## **Friends, Families and Travellers**

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) was established during the passage through Parliament of the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill and has emerged as a lead organisation seeking to address the problems facing the Gypsy and Traveller community. Starting as an informal support group working primarily with new Travellers, FFT soon began working with Gypsies and Irish Travellers and within a few years had grown into a formal organisation providing advice and information along with a wide range of other services to Gypsies and Travellers nationwide.

Very early on in its history FFT developed a working relationship with the Public Law Project and provided crucial groundbreaking work for two landmark legal challenges, which resulted in local authorities being required to make basic welfare enquiries before carrying out evictions. FFT's ongoing work in this field gained recognition when the organisation was short-listed for the Human Rights Award in 1999. Taking this work forward FFT is one of three host agencies of the Gypsy & Traveller Law Reform Coalition.

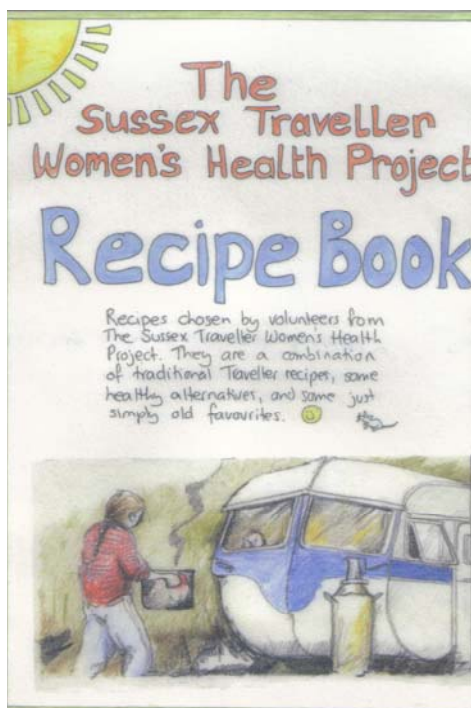
FFT is a membership organisation run by a Board of Trustees, which is currently made up of eight Trustees, five of whom are Travellers and two who are lawyers specialising in Traveller issues. FFT is a non-profit company limited by guarantee (No. 3597515) and a charity (No. 111 2326).

## Events and Training Provided

The first six months of the project were spent visiting the authorised Gypsy sites within Sussex, getting to know the residents and identifying community leaders and advocates. This was greatly enhanced by the fact that the Outreach Worker was already known to most of the Gypsy/Travellers through her work with the Traveller Education Service. At this stage in the project we were working closely with South Downs Adult Education who were going to supply the teaching for the project. We hosted a party and information session for all interested parties where volunteers were able to sign up for the project.

We arranged transport and childcare for all course participants who agreed to attend college for the sessions. The Outreach Worker contacted all participants the night before we were due to start the training, despite this nobody came to the first two sessions.

It was at this point that we realised it was unrealistic to expect the volunteers to come to us. It may have been different if we could have paid them adequately, but many of our volunteers were extremely busy women with many different demands upon them. In the end we took the project to our volunteers. We paid them childcare expenses, travelling expenses and a nominal amount for lunch, where this was not provided.



We worked predominantly with two groups of Travellers, a housed group of Travellers in West Sussex and Gypsies on an authorised local authority site in East Sussex, though sessions were not exclusive to these groups. Sometimes it was necessary to run sessions in parallel due to tensions between some of the participants, enabling everyone to attend with ease.

The first few sessions with a new group were spent getting to know each other in a relaxed and informal way. We often used craft sessions at the beginning of each new course where we would use traditional Gypsy crafts such as flower making as a way of starting our work together.

We also did a lot of cooking together and would share the food afterwards, this culminated in a collection of Traveller recipes, which we put together in a book. We used an artist to illustrate each recipe in a step-by-step format making it accessible to those with low levels of literacy. Our book has been very successful and we have had orders from all over the country and further afield; Ireland, Europe, Canada and Mexico.

It was during these informal sessions that we were able to discuss health issues with the volunteers. We then supported the group to identify their own health themes and the needs from within the group.

We put training sessions in place to address the themes in health that the group had identified. We also spent a lot of time supporting individuals and bridging the gaps within statutory provision.

We provided training in the following areas after consultation with volunteer participants. Many of the sessions were repeated (See Appendix One for statistics on the project volunteers):





- Holistic Therapies and Massage
- Healthy Eating
- Healthy Living
- Baby Massage
- First Aid for Babies and Children
- Looking Good and Feeling Good – Hairdressing and Beauty
- Cooking

- Quitting Smoking
- Gym Introduction
- Pregnancy & menopause
- Reflexology
- Health Entitlement
- Drugs Awareness
- First Aid for Adults
- Hand Massage
- Dietician Advice
- Basic Skills
- Presentation Skills
- Herbal Remedies and Homeopathy



Artist Nancy Evans ran a series of workshops with The Sussex Traveller Women's Health Project to create an informative and decorative Textile Banner. This project was funded through the Say Aah Challenge Fund, and inspired by the Say Aah Event.

The workshops were used as a forum for discussion around health related issues, and an opportunity to explore dyeing and printing processes. Participants created their own individual textile panel around the theme of health. The panels were then sewn together to create an informative and decorative banner.

The aims of the Banner project:



- To generate / stimulate discussions amongst the women about Traveller health issues. Encouraging them to identify and confront their health concerns and raising avenues for possible solutions.
- To build group dynamics by engaging the Women in a creative activity.
- To produce a culturally recognisable banner symbolic of participation and growth.
- To teach new skills and creative tools to the women increasing their self-confidence and esteem.
- To produce a visual aid for when the group are presenting themselves. Helping the Travellers to communicate their health issues to the wider community, improving awareness of Traveller issues and decreasing misconceptions and discrimination.

The banner and panels can be viewed in Appendices Three - Five.



## Project Related Actions:

### Liaison with other Traveller Projects

An important feature of our work has been the contacts that we have built up over the duration of the project; this has facilitated networking and information sharing. We have encouraged Traveller participation at all levels.

### International

- The Traveller Outreach Worker and two other Traveller volunteers visited Pavee Point in Dublin to meet with Irish Travellers and find out about their experiences as Community Health Advocates.



### National

- A delegation of Gypsy/Traveller women participated in the UK Public Health Action Conference in 2004. This also served as an opportunity to meet up again with fellow Irish Travellers from Pavee Point who were also at the Conference.
- Participation in Sheffield University research.
- House of Lords 'Year of the Volunteer' – Presentation on Health project.
- Interviews for Maternity Alliance 'Research into Maternity Services and Travellers'
- St Pauls Cathedral 'Racial Justice Day'
- Traveller Coalition

## **Local**

- Participation in Housing Needs Assessment
- Participation in Sussex Traveller Action Group
- Brighton and Hove Equalities Forum
- ‘Travellers and Heritage’ Wealds and Downlands Open air Museum
- 1<sup>st</sup> Gypsy Bonfire Society Event
- Say Aah – Arts and Health
- Oakmeads School Cultural Awareness Week (See Appendix Two)
- Young Traveller Adult Support Group
- East Sussex County Council Equalities Audit
- ‘Change Up’ Interviews
- Women’s Voluntary Federation
- Meeting Researcher from the Drug Action Team

## **Media**

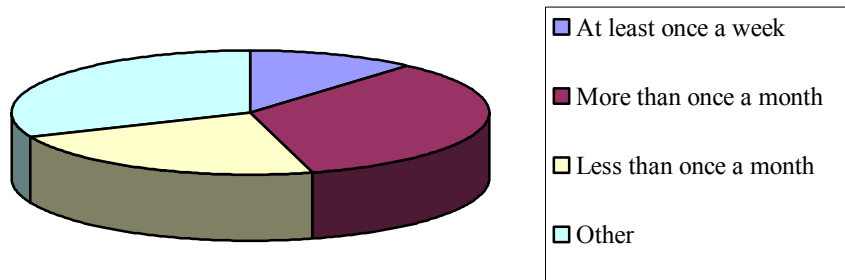
- Television coverage of the project’s Christmas Party
- Assisted with the production of ‘Ladged no Longer’ by Jake Bowers, a DVD made by Travellers for Travellers, with Home Office funding, on the issue of drugs awareness.
- Radio Interview on Southern Counties covering the launch of our ‘Traveller Recipe Book’
- Radio Southern Counties and television coverage of the launch of the project’s Health Packs.

# Appendix One – Volunteer Participation.

Based on a survey of Volunteers Oct 05- March 06

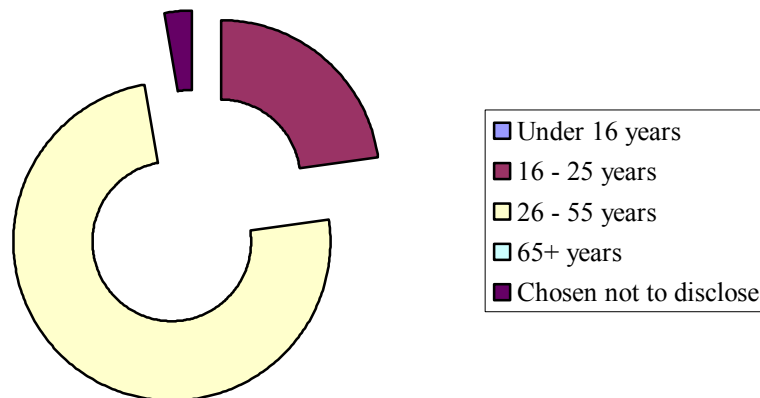
- Number of Volunteers recruited throughout project: 82
- Volunteers actively involved in the project during the last six-months: 35

**Frequency of Involvement**



- Total number of hours volunteered in the last six-month period: Approximately 175
- Volunteers that have left the project in the last six months: 2

**Age of Volunteers**



Benefits identified of being a project volunteer:

- We assist many of our volunteers to identify the barriers that they and their community face in accessing health and social care
- A number of our volunteers have gone on to become activists within the community, with two having given radio interviews.
- Many have been able to access educational opportunities previously felt to be unavailable to them.
- We have provided a number of weekly training sessions around themes identified by the volunteers themselves.
- We provide regular weekly sessions in a new support group for Gypsies and Travellers
- We have run numerous one to one sessions in social skills training for some of our volunteers going into schools to talk about their experience of being a Traveller.
- We provide a comprehensive training programmes, as outlined in 'Events and training provided'.

# Appendix Two – Oakmeeds Community College

6 MB THE MIDDY June 23, 2005 [www.midsussextoday.co.uk](http://www.midsussextoday.co.uk)

## NEWS from Burgess Hill and district

05june007



### Insight into Romany culture

**OAKMEEDS** Community College pupils were fortunate to be treated to a wonderful display of Romany Culture as part of their Activities week. Frank, Olby and Gary Brazil proudly demonstrated their Vardo wagon as part of the South East Romany Museum, featuring family heirlooms over 100 years old as well as traditional artefacts dating back to the Artlake tragedy at Hadlow in Kent in 1853. Frank said of the project: "We are a traditional living museum and enjoy living in the old ways as much as possible." Further details and visits can be arranged on 01622 831681. Running simultaneously was a stimulating and varied display of a variety of aspects of Romany Culture, organised by the West Sussex Traveller Education Support, Friends, Family and Travellers with Phoebe Boyd and the Community House project. Pupils at the college were entertained by a wealth of information on Romany customs such as holistic therapies, traditional recipes, Traveller history and Traveller law. Pupils commented that they had enjoyed the displays and the college looks forward to future collaboration with the Traveller community.

# Appendix Three – Textile Banner Panels



Image 1: Fruit by Rosie Brazil

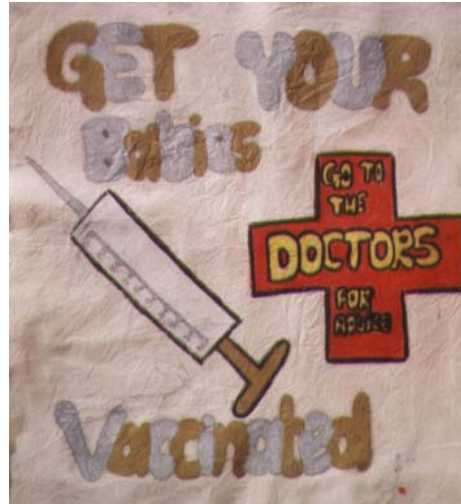


Image 2: Vaccinate by Maggie



Image 3: Romany Vargo by Kate Brazil



Image 4: Veg Bowl by Sonia



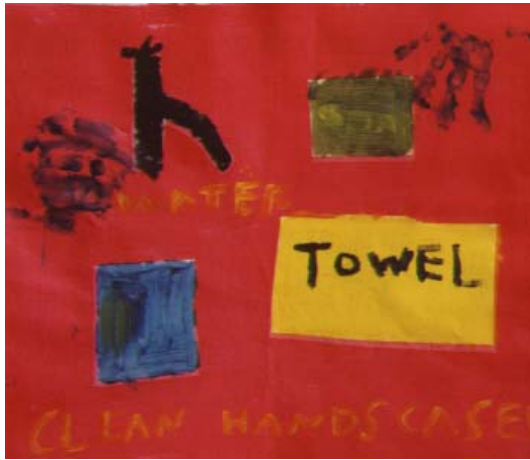


Image 5: Wash Hands by Pheobe Boyd



Image 7: Apple Picking by Pheobe Boyd

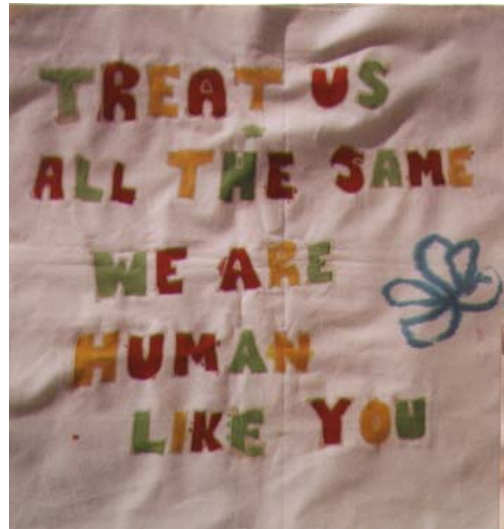


Image 8: Treat us the same by Pheobe Boyd



Image 9: My World by Pheobe Smith

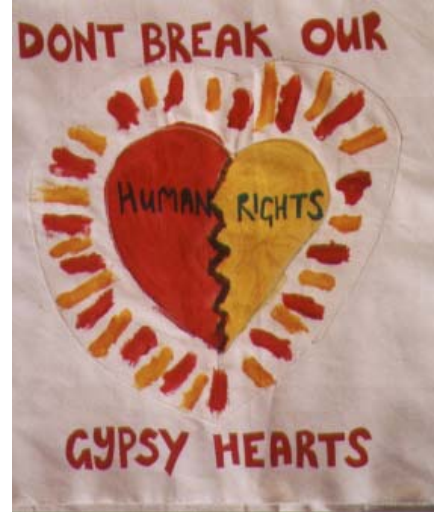


Image 10: Gypsy Hearts by Ada & Kate Brazil



Image 11: Clown by Rosie Brazil



Image 12: Wolf by Shanon aged 12

# Appendix Four – Textile Banner – Work in Progress



# Appendix Five – Textile Banner – Completed Banner

