

## **Supporting Gypsies & Travellers living with Domestic Violence 8 May 2009 London**

### **Summary Findings of the Conference**

#### **The event**

This was the first event ever of its kind. Demand far outstripped the places available and many applicants did not get places. 160 people attended on the day, including women from the travelling communities and a wide variety of agencies.

The day was energising, busy and slightly overcrowded with lots of learning and networking achieved. Humour was also a welcome feature.

#### **Summary of key learning points:**

- Need to ask and understand the special needs of the different Gypsy & Traveller communities.
- Experience of racism and bullying is normal for Gypsies and Travellers
- Acceptance of DV as normal for many
- Marriage is for life – women who leave are “spoiled goods”
- The women are not weak – they are strong ‘pushing out 7 or 8 children isn’t easy’ so need to respect their strength as well as understanding their vulnerable situation.
- Low literacy is an issue for many in the Gypsy and Traveller communities.
- Leaving DV means leaving the whole culture
- Service providers need to have cultural awareness training
- Specialist and/or tailored provision DV is needed.
- Trust in the organisation is key - employing community members helps.
- Need to recognise the diversity *within* the communities.
- Work with men and families is needed to stop the violence
- How to engage – need to develop a whole new practice in terms of making contact with people unwilling to come forward.
- Need to raise awareness of DV within the Gypsy and Traveller communities, including impacts on children.
- Need to build capacity within Traveller communities to challenge DV

#### **Speakers (speakers notes are in the full report)**

**Deborah McIlveen, National Policy Manager for Women’s Aid** opened the conference, setting the policy and organisational context for Domestic Violence and Gypsies and Travellers.

**Bridie Jones, Irish Traveller Movement in Kent** told her own story, telling her mother’s and her own experience of domestic Violence and her experience as a survivor helping others and setting up 3 support groups in Kent.

**Shirley Barrett & Janie Codona from One Voice** in East Anglia talked about their work reaching women through offering support on other matters, like benefits and then being able to give DV support and information & links to other agencies.

**Bernie O’Roarke, Outreach Worker, Solace Women’s Aid** talked about the work of this the only specialist Refuge for Travellers in this country and her experience as an outreach worker supporting women and now their daughters.

**Kathleen Morrison, Leeds Gypsy & Traveller Exchange** spoke about the work of a domestic violence project she set up at Leeds GATE, developing a conversation about DV and training and supporting women, leading to the report One Punch Kills.

### **Workshops (outcomes in full report)**

- How do Gypsies and Travellers access services?
- What would help Survivors?
- The role of Advocacy Services
- Developing Good Domestic Violence Practice in Community Development Projects
- Overcoming the Barriers to Accessing Domestic Violence Services
- The impacts on Children and Young People
- Understanding DV in the Gypsy & Traveller Community

### **Feedback**

Delegates reported gaining:

- better knowledge and understanding of Gypsy and Traveller issues, needs and culture, including DV and the barriers to accessing services
- contacts and support
- ideas and tips on how to help and good practice
- How much knowledge and good practice is already around
- The challenges and difficulties of changing behaviour

Delegates also said there was lots more to learn, with many asking specifically for:

- a follow on conference and regional events
- more specific learning on how to engage and support
- more about culture

also:

- more on men as perpetrators or victims
- supporting children
- how to raise awareness of DV in the Gypsy and Traveller communities
- how to get funding
- more generally on Gypsy & Traveller health

Several people asked about setting up an independent forum, sharing information or having a resource directory.

### **Conclusions**

This conference has been a great start, but it is clear lots more work is wanted and needs to be done. A steering group of delegates (email [fft@gypsy-traveller](mailto:fft@gypsy-traveller) to join) will develop an action plan likely to include:

- A follow up event or events
- A resource directory
- Developing information & materials for the Gypsies & Travellers
- Supporting the learning needs of DV service providers
- Improving the cultural awareness for DV service providers
- Finding resources

Further information is available on the Friends, Families and Travellers website: [gypsy-traveller.org/](http://gypsy-traveller.org/) /health/domestic-violence and the Women's Aid website: [womensaid.org.uk](http://womensaid.org.uk) and newsletter.