

HMP Ford

Model of Good Practice

Gypsy, Traveller,

Romany



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Introduction

The Ford model of Good Practice has been put together by the Gypsy, Traveller, and Roma group to give other prisons ideas to help them be supported.

This ethnic group are traditionally labelled as difficult to reach. They often have poor literacy skills, which hinder them from accessing the prison regime. The Education Department try hard to engage men to attend classes, to improve their skills but, the men often decline. They often like to keep themselves to their own ethnic group and some have mental health issues which lead to self harm.

Gypsy, Travellers, Romany Offender Representative

The Representative at HMP Ford is currently employed in full-time education and is accountable to The Skills for Life Team Leader. He has a job description (appendix 2) which lays out his responsibilities.

One of their main responsibilities is to meet and greet new offenders into the prison and this has been particularly useful as it allows the GTR (Gypsy, Traveller, and Romany) offenders to have a feeling of belonging. GTR groups tend to be reliant upon each other outside of the prison system. This is mainly due to prejudice from other groups with bullying and harassment of Gypsies and Travellers commonplace. When GTRs are sent to prison, they lose this important support structure. Having a Representative who can explain the prison regime, to them, is beneficial to both the offender and officers alike, as GTRs are then more likely to follow prison procedures.

Illiteracy levels are much higher in these communities and whilst many Gypsy and Traveller children have had some form of primary school education, many do not progress through the education system. Many have had no form of schooling at any level, so having someone to help read prison notices and fill in application forms with them is imperative. Having a rep. who is also willing to become a Shannon Trust Reading Plan (old Toe by Toe) Mentor helps encourage GTR offenders to engage in improving their reading. At HMP Ford, evidence has shown that more GTR offenders are willing to engage in attending English and Maths classes

once they have become confident in their environment and realise there are other offenders who have the same backgrounds and difficulties as themselves.

The Ministry of Justice report 'No Room to Roam' states that problems faced by Gypsy and Traveller offenders are often overlooked in prison, despite GTRs forming a distinct ethnic group recognised by race equality legislation. In order to address the needs of Gypsy and Traveller offenders, it is vital that the Prison Service identifies them, ensures that they have access to services and that they do not receive unfavourable treatment compared to other racial groups. Once in the prison system, it is extremely common for Gypsy and Traveller offenders not to disclose their ethnicity for fear of inviting trouble. Having a rep. helps break down these misconceptions and all GTR offenders are encouraged to register themselves as ethnicity code O3.

The offender rep also attends the equalities meeting to discuss any issues that the men may have.

Staff Representative

Having a GTR Staff Representative is very important and the GTR offenders all agreed it would have been beneficial in the other prisons that they had been to. At HMP Ford the Staff Rep. is a member of The Education Department. This is particularly helpful as GTRs have someone they can approach if they need help and advice. Also, once trust is built up, GTR offenders are more likely to attend Education courses to improve themselves and gain qualifications.

As a Staff Rep. you liaise between the offenders and the Prison Equalities Officer and attend the Equalities Meeting. At HMP Ford the meetings are held bi-monthly and the Staff Rep. together with the Offenders' Rep, produce a report for the prison giving appropriate data such as who is attending education and what level the men are at with their education. This has become important information that the prison needs to keep and at HMP Ford it was found that the information was more accurate, due to more offenders feeling safe to identify themselves as GTR.

The Staff Rep. meets with the group every 4-6 weeks to discuss any issues and minutes are taken and given to the Equalities Officer. However

the men can ask to see the Staff Rep. whenever a problem arises that the Offender Rep. can not sort out at the first instance.

(For ideas for group activities please see appendix 3)

Culture awareness

One of the jobs of the Offender Rep. is to raise cultural awareness of GTRs within the prison. As a group, GTRs have prepared displays in specific areas around the prison, to share their culture. A display about cooking was displayed in the dining hall and a timeline to show how GTRs have been persecuted in the past was also displayed in The Education Department. This helped raise staff and offender awareness of diversity and cultural issues affecting Gypsy and Traveller offenders.

Lack of awareness is a key contributory factor to negative stereotyping. Initiatives such as National Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month are ideal opportunities for establishments to get involved and demonstrate that, as organisations, they recognise these marginalised ethnic groups and respect their culture as important and distinct.

Working with the kitchen has been really useful and having cultural food, such as Bacon Pudding, on the menu has been beneficial to all offenders, becoming a popular item. The Sussex Traveller Woman's Health Project has produced a wonderful Recipe Book with easy recipes, which can be cooked in the kitchen and included on the menu.

Although traditionally, Irish Travellers follow the Roman Catholic religion, many Travellers and Gypsies now follow The Light and Life faith. The Light and Life Gypsy Church originally started in France, when a gypsy woman was refused entry into a church, wanting to say thanks to God, as her sick child got better from an illness. Preachers from the church are happy to hold services in the prison Chapel. The Chaplain can make arrangements for the church to visit.

Gypsy Pin

Families are particularly important to the GTR groups. They often marry at an early age and have many children so that maintaining family ties is important. All offenders struggle with the separation from their families and loved ones and the Prison Service attaches great importance to

maintaining family ties as a way of helping to reduce re-offending. Maintaining close family ties is particularly difficult for those from Gypsy and Traveller communities. A offender may be serving their sentence in a prison many miles from their family and community. The nomadic existence of Traveller people presents a unique set of difficulties, for instance, keeping in touch by phone, as calls to mobiles are expensive.

At HMP Ford, the Gypsy Pin was introduced to help make calls to mobile phones more accessible. Once a week, GTR offenders are given a form, from the rep. which allows them to transfer additional funds from their private funds onto their pin number.

Support Charities such as Friends Families and Travellers (FFT), Irish Chaplaincy in Britain Traveller Equality Project and Shannon Trust Reading Plan. (STRP) visiting the prison.

The visits by these charities into the prison to support GTR offenders and staff are invaluable; as they have a whole wealth of knowledge and experience that they are willing to share. HMP Ford has a good relationship with these charities and recently the prison arranged for two GTR offenders to go on Community Service placements with FFT to work on a range of projects such as cultural awareness. Contact details are available as appendix 1.

Irish Chaplaincy in Britain Traveller Equality Project

The ICB Traveller Equality Project (TEP) works to improve the situation of Gypsies and Travellers in the justice system.

"We work in collaboration with the National Offender Management Service, Probation Service and Crown Prosecution Service to advocate on behalf of Gypsies and Travellers. We conduct research into the specific needs of Gypsies and Travellers in prison or under probation supervision, and lobby for the implementation of best practice. We provide information and advice and produce free resources for practitioners working with Travellers. We also deliver diversity training and provide a consultation service to statutory agencies."

Shannon Trust

"Learning to read is easy with the Shannon Trust Reading Plan.

How does it work?

- *you learn on a 1 to 1 basis with an offender mentor*
- *in short 20 minute sessions, 5 times a week*
- *it's confidential*
- *and you go at your own speed"*

Friends Families and Travellers

"Friends, Families and Travellers is a national charity that provides signposting and support services to Gypsies and Travellers across England. We seek to end racism and discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers, whatever their ethnicity, culture or background. We are based in Brighton and have an outreach worker supporting the well-being of offenders and their families throughout Sussex. In addition to this our team carries out national case work supporting offenders and their families throughout the country. We work in partnership with HMP Ford and other organisations to promote good practice when working with Gypsies and Travellers within the criminal justice system."

Education

At HMP Ford English and Maths are taught as Outreach, Pod provisions to encourage reading, writing and Maths. Many GTR offenders have had limited schooling and find it difficult to sit in a classroom all morning or afternoon but, they are quite happy to attend a class for an hour, in an informal situation, with a small group of learners who have the same difficulties.

There are also embedded learning classes for those who want to complete trade courses, such as Carpentry or Painting and Decorating. The learners have support with their English and Maths as required by each course. They are also supported to complete their portfolios with as much of the evidence collated by the use of photographs as possible.

The increasing number of Eastern European Roma in the prison system presents its own set of issues. Their knowledge of English is either limited, or more often than not, non-existent. In their home countries

many Roma are denied access to education. Many are threatened with deportation and are worried about being separated from their families, which increases their barriers to learning. Using trained Peer Support Mentors have been useful to give 1-1 support within the learning Pod. Further advice can found by contacting the Roma Support Group

It is hoped that you have found this document of interest and if you wish to further your knowledge in this subject, please do not hesitate to make use of the contact details (Appendix 1)

Reference and Further reading:

No Room to Roam, 2010, Ministry of Justice

The Acceptable Face of Racism, 2010, Ministry of Justice

www.countrysidematters.org.uk

Voices Unheard, A study of Irish Traveller in Prison, 2011, Mac Gabhann

Contact Details

Friends, Families and Travellers

Community Base
113 Queens Road
Brighton
BN1 3XG
01273 234 777

Irish Chaplaincy in Britain

50-52 Camden Square
London
NW1 9XB
0207 482 5525

The Shannon Trust

www.shannontrust.org.uk

Travellers Advice Team

07768316755

The Gypsy Council

01708868986

Roma Support Group

0207 511 5721

HMP Ford

aleta.blackall@hmps.gsi.gov.uk

Gypsy / Traveller Rep

Job Description

This is a pro-active job role were you will represent the Gypsy/Traveller community here in Ford.

Duties

- Meeting with Staff Representative on a daily basis to discuss problems/needs of offenders in the Gypsy/Traveller community.
- Keeping the list of Gypsy/Travellers up to date.
- Talking on behalf of the Gypsy/Traveller community at the prison inclusion meeting once a month.
- Participating in the induction of new Gypsy/Travellers on arrival at the prison and assisting them settle in.
- Assist with preparation for family days.
- Be a (toe by toe mentor) Shannon Trust Reading Plan Mentor.
- To develop cultural awareness around the prison.

Skills

- Patience.
- Good communicator and listener
- Willing to work hard on behalf of others.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Risk assessed.
- Reliable.
- Non-judgemental

Traveller Equality Project f 50- 52 Camden Square, London, NW1 9XB f Tel: 02074825525 f travellers@irishchaplaincy.org.uk f

Traveller Groups in Prison

Summary

There are significant numbers of English Gypsies and Irish Travellers in prisons in England and Wales.

A National Offender Management service' (NOMs) Race Review in 2008 noted *'particular concerns relating to Gypsy, Traveller, Roma offenders',* including *'difficulties accessing services, including offender behaviour programmes, as the literacy level required was too high... and lack of cultural awareness and understanding of staff.'*

Since then, NOMs has made concerted efforts to engage with the Traveller prison population. In 2011 the code 'W3 - Gypsy or Irish Traveller' was added to the P-Nomis monitoring system for the first time. Many prisons now hold **Traveller groups**, appoint Traveller reps and hold Traveller history month events in an effort to promote inclusion.

Traveller groups are an excellent forum for prisons to resolve issues, improve communication and reduce conflict with Traveller offenders.

Points to consider when setting up a Traveller group

Traveller Groups are effective when the meetings have a direction and focus rather than just being social gatherings. Traveller offenders should be **involved** in deciding on an agenda of issues they think need to be addressed. Once groups are up and running, it may be useful to have a 'theme' for each meeting; perhaps inviting staff from different departments to come along so that the Traveller offenders get a sense that they are being listened to by the prison.

Traveller groups provide an excellent forum for specialist staff to gain an **understanding** of the needs of Traveller offenders and overcome barriers to engagement. This is especially relevant for education staff, given the extremely high rates of illiteracy in the Traveller community. Groups provide a 'safe space' for staff to talk to Traveller offenders and 'sell' the benefits of engaging with education.

Traveller Groups in Prison

It is very easy for prison focus groups to become solely an opportunity for complaining, which can become de-motivating. To avoid this, meetings should be **structured and solution focused**, with a set number of issues discussed at each meeting. These issues should be followed up by staff,

making enquiries with appropriate colleagues in the prison. Giving feedback on matters raised at the next meeting will help offenders see that groups are constructive and worthwhile.

Traveller groups should be kept **varied and interesting**. This could involve showing films or documentaries relevant to Traveller culture (available free of charge from the Traveller Equality Project), or inviting outside speakers to address the group.

Meetings should be **inclusive** of different Traveller groups - Romany Gypsies, Welsh Kale, Scottish and Irish Travellers - and avoid being slanted towards one culture. Free resources are available from the Traveller Equality Project, celebrating different Traveller cultures.

Having something to work towards can help keep up the momentum. Many prisons now hold **Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month** events in June. Events might include traditional singing, storytelling and performances, or even traditional food. Celebrating Traveller culture in prison helps break down barriers and misconceptions and can be educational for non-Traveller offenders.

Traveller Groups are effective when they are held on a **regular basis** as this shows that the prison values the role of these forums.