
Gypsies, Travellers & the Media

GYPSY SITE: 'NOW IT IS WAR'

Gypsies made life such hell
...STORY PAGE 4

EASTER HOLIDAY INVASION
GYPSY HELL FOR TESSA

MEET YOUR

NEIGHBOURS
...THANKS TO JOHN PRESCOT

GAY ASYLUM-SEEKING GYPSIES ROAM OUR STREETS


FAMILIES MUST SELL LAND FOR GYPSY CAMPSITES

Protest over travellers' site
...City Council and police officers


You can do something!

People tend to believe what they read in the newspapers. Media articles can encourage negative stereotypes and perceptions. This can lead to hostility and discrimination towards groups

and individuals. There are very often negative articles about Gypsies and Travellers in the press which are rarely challenged.



"Some Romany kids at secondary school experienced a backlash from media when after the first two went through school with no problems, an unconnected Romany family set up camp on their own land near the school and applied for planning permission. There was a lot of negative reporting and the third child, a girl, was made to feel so bad she ended up dropping out of school all together".



*"There was a local news item on the TV one evening about a big protest against a proposed Gypsy site. It showed lots of people carrying placards saying
'NO to Gypsies.'*

That same evening some gun shots were fired just outside our truck.

It was dark and I was alone at the time.

I was terrified!

*Our site was unconnected to this news item
- it seems like we were scapegoats."*

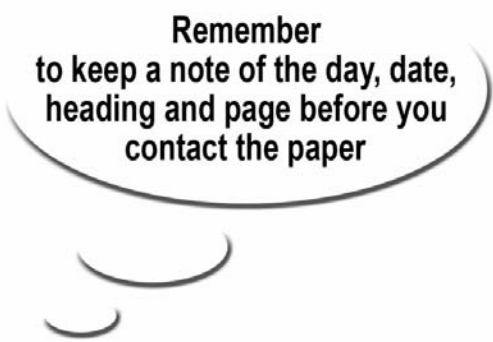
There are various things you can do...

Newspaper articles should be fair, balanced and factually correct. Often Gypsies and Travellers feel that this is not the case. There are various ways you can challenge an unfair article:

- 1. Write a letter to be published on the letters page.**
- 2. Write a letter of complaint to the editor of the newspaper.**
- 3. Ring up the newspaper.**
- 4. Comment on line.**
- 5. Contact the Press Complaints Commission.**

Write a letter of complaint to the Editor of the newspaper.

Consider whether the story is factually inaccurate. If it is, you may ask the paper for a correction. Make it clear that this is a complaint, not for publication and that you want a response.



Remember to keep a note of the day, date, heading and page before you contact the paper

✓ Advantages:

This is a formal way to put your concerns to the person who is responsible for the content of the newspaper.

This reminds the papers of their journalistic responsibility.

Media often get stories from other media sources. If an incorrect story is challenged and corrected it could prevent it being repeated as if it were fact.

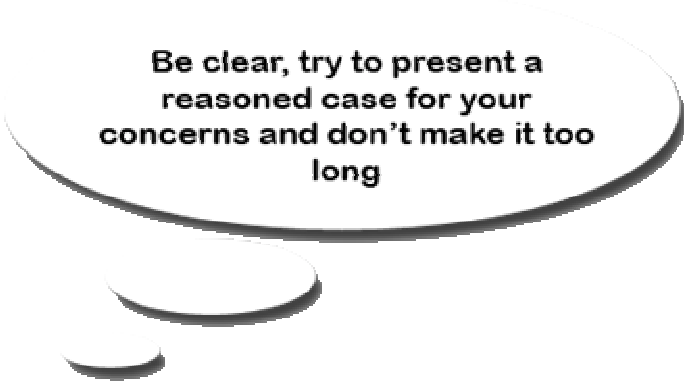
✗ Disadvantages:

You might not get the response you want.

It might take a while to get a response.

If there is an apology it may be very brief and not in an obvious part of the paper. It may not be seen by the same people who read the original incorrect story.

Write a letter to be published on the letters page.



Be clear, try to present a reasoned case for your concerns and don't make it too long

✓ Advantages:

There is a chance your letter will get published and widely read.

You can put your views across clearly.

When you write letters it may give confidence to others to do the same.

✗ Disadvantages:

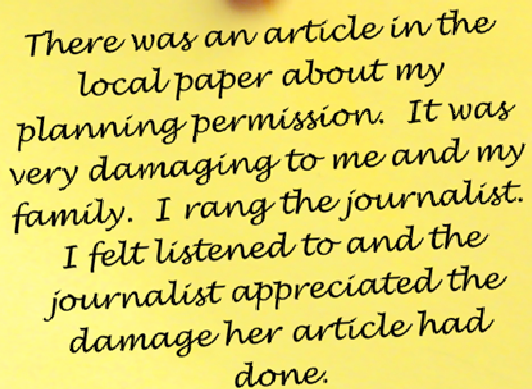
Your letter may not be published.

Your letter may be edited which could distort the true meaning.

Your letter may prompt responses from other letter writers who may not agree with you.

Ring up the newspaper

Don't ring in the heat of the moment. A calm, measured response will be more effective. Your phone call may be recorded!



There was an article in the local paper about my planning permission. It was very damaging to me and my family. I rang the journalist. I felt listened to and the journalist appreciated the damage her article had done.

(Romany woman)



Advantages:

You may get to speak to the reporter who wrote the article, have the opportunity to put your point across and have a discussion.

You can put a human side to the story and get the reporter to see the consequences for you and your family of what was written.

A calm and measured approach could prove very effective and help change attitudes.



Disadvantages:

You might get drawn into a heated discussion.

One phone call may not be enough. You may need to persist and speak to someone else. They may call you back.

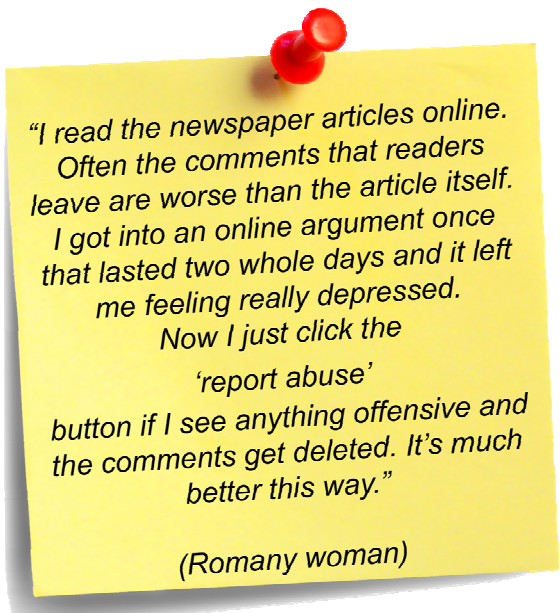
You may feel intimidated if the conversation doesn't go the way you planned.

What you say "on record" can be used in future stories. Avoid "off the record" comments.

Before you ring up be very clear about what you want to say.

Comment online

Most articles in newspapers have an online version with a space at the bottom for readers' comments. Articles about Gypsies and Travellers often generate huge amounts of online comments, mostly negative.



"I read the newspaper articles online. Often the comments that readers leave are worse than the article itself. I got into an online argument once that lasted two whole days and it left me feeling really depressed.

Now I just click the 'report abuse' button if I see anything offensive and the comments get deleted. It's much better this way."

(Romany woman)



Advantages:

This is the quickest way to put your point across.

When there are abusive, offensive or racist comments you can report them by clicking on the "report abuse" button. They will be removed but this can take up to 24 hours.

Users who constantly get their abusive comments reported can get their accounts deleted.



Disadvantages:

A quick response is sometimes not the best approach as it can appear too emotive. It's easy to give a knee jerk reaction so think about what you want to say before you submit it.

Online comments are not always checked by newspapers so some very racist and extreme views can be expressed. By challenging these you may get drawn into a heated online argument.

Your argument is limited to the other people who are commenting online.



Remember
if you comment online you are
opening a dialogue so expect
people to respond.

Report to the Press Complaints Commission

Report to the Press Complaints Commission (PCC). This should be a last resort after first pursuing it with the newspaper. Newspaper Editors have a Code of Practice which they should follow. If articles are discriminatory, or inaccurate, or invade your privacy your complaint should be considered. You can ring 0207 7831 0022, write to 20-23 Holborn, London, EC1N 2JD or go online www.pcc.org.uk to make a report to the PCC.



Advantages:

This is a formal way to register your concern and take action.

The result could be:
The publication of a correction or an apology; a follow-up piece or letter from the complainant; a private letter of apology from the editor; an undertaking as to future conduct by the newspaper.



Disadvantages:

The PCC won't always uphold your complaint.

It could take time and you may not get the result you want.

Newspapers use the words “Gypsies & Travellers” without necessarily making it clear which group they are referring to. Sometimes this can cause confusion for their readers and it also can cause conflict between different Traveller groups who feel misrepresented. When responding to newspaper articles it is important to be measured and fair towards other Traveller Groups because all groups can experience unfair media attention.

If negative media articles continue to go unchallenged the situation will never improve for Gypsies and Travellers. You have every right to put your views forward.



This leaflet was put together by a group of Gypsies and Travellers in Devon, working with Plymouth & Devon Racial Equality Council (14 York Rd, Exeter, EX4 6BA 01392 422566) and Community Council of Devon.