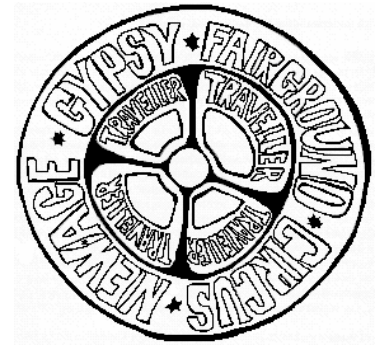


Devon Consortium Traveller Education Service

Serving Devon, Plymouth and Torbay



Newsletter 14 >> for the attention of Social Inclusion Co-ordinators << Autumn 2004

The View From Here...

Increasingly concerned by a series of anti-Gypsy and Traveller articles appearing in the media over recent months, a student within the Devon Consortium wrote to the Daily Mail. The edited version of her letter which was printed on Thursday July 8th is reproduced here.

“As a Gypsy, I’m increasingly concerned about the effect recent anti-Gypsy publicity is having on our society. Why are so many people opposed to Gypsies moving on to a site and settling down? Look at it from the Gypsies’ point of view: we’re told of a Gypsy spokesman who is unable to write his name. A lack of education like this is something many Gypsies regret. They wish to settle down so their children can have the education they never did.

There are very few official council campsites for Gypsies to live on, so many either buy their own property and try to get planning permission to live on it, or use common or farmland. Trespassing isn’t the best thing to do, but society leaves Gypsies with little choice.

Gypsies are referred to as ‘gangs’ – a word associated with thugs, violence and intimidation. When Gypsies buy a property or move on to a site, they usually do so with members of their family: Gypsies are very family oriented. They don’t go around in ‘gangs’ but in extended families. People complain that Gypsy sites are an eyesore for local villages and lower the value of their houses, but there have been Gypsies in England since the 1500s and we’re British citizens

. Don’t we have the same rights as others to settle and live? Why should our homes be banned because we’re in the way of a view or the caravans we choose to live in don’t conform to what looks nice from Mr and Mrs Smith’s window? When we’re given permission to live somewhere, we try to make our homes as nice as possible. Most Gypsy women take great pride in their homes and keep them clean and shiny. We’re very private people and have as little wish to look into your homes as you do into ours. Not all Gypsies are illiterate thugs and thieves. I’ve been settled for six years and am currently studying for my A-levels. Given the chance, many of us can be valued members of society – but to achieve this, we need to be able to settle, something others are making increasingly difficult to achieve. Please allow me and other Gypsies the right to live in peace without feeling ostracised in our country. Anything else encourages a fascist attitude, something my great-grandfather and many other Gypsy men fought shoulder to shoulder with non-Gypsies to prevent.”

Any schools interested in copies of the articles which prompted this reply, together with the unedited version of the letter sent - for use in Citizenship studies - please contact DCTES.

Respect Festival 2004

The Devon Consortium Traveller Education Service once again took part in the Respect Festival held in Plymouth’s Guildhall on Sunday 31st of October.

This is a very popular event which promotes racial equality, cultural awareness and respect for ethnic diversity.

There were stalls, workshops, children’s activities and live music on stage. A wide variety of ethnic food was available throughout the event for people to sample.

The D.C.T.E.S. had a presentation stand and ran competitions for children during the day. It was a wonderful opportunity for networking and introducing Traveller culture and tradition to new people. The event this year attracted a record number of 5000 people which made this a very rewarding and successful event.

Mobility and Educational Provision

At any time of year there are highly mobile Travellers moving through the Consortium area. It is during the summer that the greatest movement of Travelling people happens in the South West. The Fairground and Circus runs are at their height and the numbers of mobile Romany and Irish Travellers greatly increases the numbers of Travelling children entitled to educational provision. This summer saw an increase in larger groups of Travellers, with sometimes over 30 trailers arriving at a stopping place. The Travellers themselves will expect to be stopping for only a week or so, as they know that they will be evicted. Many of these trailers will belong to families with school age children. Increasingly the families would like their children to be in school as they put a great emphasis on the value of education.

For the highly mobile Traveller who probably has little knowledge of the area, finding a school place can be a daunting experience. The DCTES once aware of encampments will as a priority make a visit. Often we can be the first official visitors on the site and will liaise with other agencies, particularly health. Finding school places can be difficult, especially if there are large numbers of pupils. But in Devon we are blessed with an increasing number of schools who readily understand the issues and will respond with alacrity to make short term provision for pupils.

However, access to school provision can mean simply getting to school. If a family has one vehicle and that is used for the family business then alternative transport means must be found by the DCTES. In some cases it can be a transport problem that denies pupil's access to those vital school sessions that schools readily offer. Where there is no available taxi service at short notice highly mobile pupils may not be able to access educational provision. Meaning these vulnerable pupils miss out.

THANK YOU

The big thank you is for the many schools that welcomed new Traveller children last term.

The TES would particularly like to thank the schools that embraced the opportunity to take the Circus children from various venues around the consortium, the families do appreciate the effort that goes into including their children for such short stays.

A huge "thank you" also goes to the Exeter and Plymouth schools who provided places for the large number Irish Travellers that were in and out of the area constantly from March until September. The schools that offered places to as

many as 12 children at a time (often at very short notice) deserve to feel proud of themselves for making the curriculum accessible to pupils who have little experience of education and a welcoming place to be.

What happens when a school is full?

With schools in many areas experiencing a lack of places in certain year groups or key stages, Travellers may find that a school, that was able to take their children the last time they stopped, is unable to receive them for their current stay. In this situation the administrator helpfully contacts "Admissions" who finds the next nearest available school, the places are found, transport - if the children are eligible, is arranged and that is the end of the story.

However with some Traveller families this is a situation they would find difficult. Traveller culture is one of keeping children safe and often families have developed and built up a trust with the school that is now full. The families know the staff and are at ease with going into see the administrator when concerns need to be addressed. This in itself can be very daunting position to be in for adults who may have had a negative experience as a child or may have low levels of literacy.

Travellers often favour schools that to other people resemble a prison, with the security gates and high fences. They see it as a secure place to leave their children during the school day, a place safe from people who might want to hurt children. In many cases other Traveller children might be attending that school, important not just for the children but mothers who often share the transporting between them – especially in circumstances of a new and probably demanding recent addition to the family! If attending the new school necessitates a journey by taxi, sometimes parents refuse the place as they do not know the driver who is unknown to them. There have been situations where only the older child had a place in the nearest preferred school whilst the younger KS1 child would have to have attended the next nearest school. The parents unwilling to let the two girls travel together unchaperoned were certainly not going to allow the younger sibling to travel on her own. Happily a compromise was reached when a fuel allowance was offered to the mother if she was willing to transport the girls herself as the distance they had to travel made them eligible for this. This she did and the girls settled in well to their new school.

Moving Swiftly On

Imagine what it feels like for a Primary age child moving into an area and going to their new school at this stage of the academic year.

Now think about doing this every week in a different town, going to a different school and having English as a second language.

This is what children travelling with the circus may do throughout the Travelling Season.

Three English and three Bulgarian children from Arnett and Paulo's Circus have recently spent a week each at Tiverton, Honiton and Topsham. Many thanks go to the schools that made them so welcome and included them in all the activities that were taking place whilst the children were there.

With prior knowledge of the events and close liaison between the schools and the DCTES, the children went on a visit to Knightshayes House, participated in a sponsored sporting event, took part in a class photo shoot and took Optional Year 4 S.A.Ts papers. All that was just in their first school! In their following schools they had an Arts Week and a Sports Day to look forward to.

The children are very adept at pursuing this pattern of education in the Travelling Season and confidently settle into the new school. The Optional S.A.Ts papers have been sent off to the child's winter base school to help inform the child's teacher of her progress made whilst she was travelling.

One of the secondary age children took his K.S.3 S.A.Ts at a school near to where he was pitched during the week of tests in May. His papers will have been sent off to his winter base school to help inform them of his progress.

The increasing length of the travelling season experienced by both Circuses and Showmen has meant that in some cases the young people have only 2 months in their winter school before going out travelling for the new season. Often family holidays can only be taken in these 2 months, further shortening the time spent in school. For secondary age pupils travelling with both the circus and the fair, this presents a difficult task for the schools which have to make assessments, fill gaps in the student's knowledge and provide distance learning materials for the coming season.

A Year 9 pupil with the circus was not in school when the G.C.S.E options were made. D.C.T.E.S in collaboration with his family, Lincolnshire T.E.S. and his base school, are supporting him in making his choices so that he could settle more quickly into his courses on his return in late November. It was a difficult call, but not impossible.

Barnstaple Fair 2004

Barnstaple Fair, one of the English traditional charter fairs - goes back centuries. For the DCTES it is important as it is probably the biggest fair in the Devon calendar, it has the most children and it takes place just after the start of the autumn term.

Because of its size and significance it has always been well supported by the DCTES. Two mobile classrooms and the full compliment of staff give teaching support; liaise with parents and schools and other TESs.

Barnstaple has its own unique atmosphere.

Showmen's families from north and east converge on Barnstaple. The conviviality of such meetings does not always bode well for finding pupils and students with education as a priority, or distance learning packs, often last seen at the end of the summer term somewhere under the wagon or at Granny's...in Chipping Sodbury.

We are well used to Barnstaple. Each year we look for ways of making it a significant event in the pupils' minds.

What does not change, as it has been so successful, is the Pre-School facility originated by Pat Keenan of the DCTES (now enjoying a well deserved retirement) and Barbara Young from the Pre-School Learning Alliance who has also moved on to pastures new. The Sure - Start teams from Ilfracombe and Bideford stepped in and made the three 2 hour sessions a great success.

For pupils working with distance learning this year, the DCTES had one day of support teaching using the mobile classroom facility. The second full day's teaching was based on input from education support agencies that the mobility of a Showmen's family lifestyle often preclud the pupils from accessing.

For the Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils there was a visit from the Life Education mobile classroom set up with information and activities to promote an understanding of health and the human body.

Barnstaple Health Service readily sent school nurses and a health worker with some highly motivating activities and the opportunity for Showmen parents to discuss their children's health.

For the Key stage 3 and 4 pupils there were formal and drop - in sessions with Y-Smart, for drugs and alcohol awareness, Connexions and Child Employment, many also enjoyed the Health activities.

This was quite a day! For the pupils, a valuable experience and access to a part of the curriculum that could never be included so successfully in distance learning packs. For the professionals there was the realisation of the vulnerability of mobile children and the obvious challenges of teaching outside the formal parameters of the school environment.

Farewell to Pat Keenan

It is with a great sense of loss that the DCTES team says farewell to Pat Keenan who retired this autumn. Though Pat worked in Plymouth she was well known and highly respected for her truly dedicated work throughout Devon. Her commitment to Traveller Education also took her far beyond the borders of Devon. She welcomed the opportunities of working with colleagues throughout the U.K and Europe. Both Traveller families and schools were highly appreciative of her dedication to Traveller Education. Many benefited and were truly grateful to her for her work which was usually above and beyond her job description. She had an enthusiasm for all aspects of her work and was valued as an inspirational colleague and team member.

We wish her a happy and fulfilled retirement.

In the interim....

The DCTES warmly welcomes Noel Gallagher on to the team and Noel will be covering Plymouth and also working in Torbay. Noel who is a very experienced teacher working with vulnerable children will be with us until April, when it is anticipated that a permanent appointment will be made.

Noel's contact details can be seen below.

Service Level Agreements

Last year all schools found the recently introduced Service Level Agreements to be useful. Discussions with DCTES staff, enabled a closer understanding of Traveller lifestyles and culture through the contents of the document and subsequent training for staff.

The input has worked positively to enable schools to continue developing an inclusive curriculum. Key Stage 2 schools have used TESS resources in their planning and implementation across many areas of the curriculum to include Traveller perspectives. One Community College has used our input and resources to develop an induction for Year 7 pupils celebrating diversity.

It is a year since the introduction of the revised Service Level Agreements. There is the opportunity in the annual review to share examples of good practice for the celebration of diversity, or to plan staff training if your school has new staff or the DCTES input had to be postponed last year. And of course there are some schools who welcomed Traveller pupils for the first time last year and do want to know more.

We are always available...

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Exeter and surrounding area: Liz Gallagher 07974 973746

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Plymouth and Torbay: Noel Gallagher 07970 146413

Pre-School

Following the initiatives and development of Pre-School education, the DCTES has worked on a definitive document intended to inform Pre-Schools and those engaged in the work of facilitating pre-school education of Traveller perspectives and inclusive practice. This will be available for distribution in the New Year.

For Pre-Schools we have Pre-School loan boxes offering a selection of books and puzzles reflecting Traveller culture

- now available to Pre-School providers across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay
- appropriate for use in your Pre-school setting, whether or not you have Traveller children attending.

Resource base

3a Watts Road, St Judes,
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Contact
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