



Friends Families and Travellers

REPORT OF CONFERENCE HELD ON
21 JANUARY 2014

Improving outcomes for offenders from Gypsy and Traveller communities

Hosted by Friends, Families and Travellers and the
Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG)



Friends Families and Travellers





IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR OFFENDERS
FROM GYPSY AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES

1. Introduction

FFT and BTEG hosted a one day conference on 21 January at the Voluntary Action Islington conference rooms in Kings Cross London.

The event was attended by 41 individuals from predominantly voluntary sector groups working with Gypsy and Traveller (GT) offenders.

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The aim of the conference was to give a focus on the needs of Gypsy and Traveller offenders within the context of the Government's changes to the offender management system. The Government's Transforming Rehabilitation competition programme will see large private and voluntary sector organisations deliver rehabilitation services to medium and low risk offenders, while a National Probation service has responsibility for those offenders deemed as high risk.

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This short report from the conference provides an overview of the presentations from the day, audience feedback and issues to be addressed. FFT and BTEG hope to take forward some follow up actions on the subject later in the year.

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2. Summary of presentations

Emily Thomas MOJ Transforming Rehabilitation Team

The first presentation on the day was from Emily Thomas from the Ministry of Justice. A member of the Transforming Rehabilitation team Emily was formerly a Governor of Cookham Wood Young Offenders Institute Emily's presentation covered:

- An overview on the process for the Transforming Rehabilitation competition.
- The service changes that will require the new providers to deliver rehabilitation services to all offenders not just those with sentences of 12 months or more as is the case under the current arrangements
- How the new arrangements would work in relation to the new National Probation Service which would have responsibility for high risk offenders
- The time table which would see the new providers starting their contracts in April 2015
- The implementation of the Equality Act duties. Questions were raised during the TR consultation around payment by results leading to providers opting for 'one size fits all' solutions. There were also concerns raised about women offenders.

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The presentation didn't pick up any specific issues related to the Gypsy and Traveller community. Emily did however stress the need for bidding organisations to understand the offender population and the needs of different communities. However there was little in terms of clear policy from NOMS in relation to GT offenders. The main message for GT organisations interested in providing services was to influence the potential tier one providers.

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Joseph Cottrell-Boyce and Conn McGabhann Traveller Equality Project

Joseph and Conn spoke about their work and research in supporting GT offender groups. Some of the key points from the presentation were as follows:

- High levels of illiteracy amongst GT offenders in prisons
- NOMS has a duty to educate prisoners and that requires greater levels of flexibility from prisons in working with GT offenders
- Great stigma attached to illiteracy and many GT offenders will not engage with mainstream interventions.
- Stereotype that GT offenders are not interested in engaging in education
- Some best practice is developed in some prisons. The Shannon Trust's Toby programme - is a peer led approach to learning literacy and works well with GT offenders.
- Many main stream programmes and approaches are not reaching GT offenders
- Research carried out in Thames Valley probation area via OASYS assessments for GT offenders found 59% of GT offenders had reading problems and only 12% of GT offenders had any formal qualifications.

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The need for prisons to facilitate GT led groups that can help to develop peer led literacy interventions was crucial and needed to be given wider support across the system. Ethnic monitoring was crucial and would only improve if the need for it is communicated to GT offenders through GT offender groups that could explain the need and benefits of declaring GT heritage through ethnic monitoring. There is a high level of scepticism and fear as many GT offenders have hidden their ethnic identity through fear of being bullied or harassed. There is a need for a clear strategy from NOMS in improving ethnic monitoring and addressing literacy levels amongst GT Offenders.

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Emma Nuttall FFT

Working in HMP Ford and HMP Lewes, and national casework with Gypsy and Traveller prisoners and their families.

- Much of the work focused on mental health support
- Supporting families of offenders and helping them to navigate the system better and support their loved ones
- Working with offenders to arrange transfers to be nearer home to support family contact.
- FFT were hosting two offenders on a Community Service placement within the organisation
- Working with GT offenders on small peer led support groups, in partnership, at Ford, with the Skills for Life Coordinator.
- A lot of courses not applicable or attractive to GT offenders. Mainstream approaches around literacy and numeracy not effective
- Providing cultural awareness training (together with Gypsy/Traveller community service placementees, i.e Joe and Jimmy) for prison staff at Ford and Lewes.
- Advising prisons on Good Practice, such as having a G/T rep, G/T peer support group, and G/T dishes on the prison menu.

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FFT have worked effectively in the prisons and showed staff the benefits of engagement with GT offenders that can help to break down isolation and increase engagement with education and training/work opportunities within the prison. Greater engagement in the prison regime is positive for GT offenders and for the prison staff.

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Zoe James University of Plymouth - Policing Gypsies and Travellers

Zoe focussed on the area of policing Gypsy and Traveller communities. Her presentation gave an overview of GT communities being over policed as potential offenders and under policed as victims. Some of the key points from her presentation were as follows:

- GT communities seen as problematic and labelled on mass as potential lawbreakers by Police
- Stereotypes reinforced by blanket negative media coverage of GT communities
- The issue of settlement is key
- GT communities victims of hate crime and the policing response to this is weak
- Vicious cycle of over policing of the whole community as potential offenders and under policed as victims

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The relationship between the Police and the community is crucial and is often the first point of contact with the CJS. Improving this relationship and building trust is key to steering young people from the GT community away from the penal system. There is also a huge challenge in relation to hate crime and GT community's position as victims and high levels of under reporting linked to lack of trust and confidence in the police from GT communities.

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Yvonne McNamara Traveller Movement - Putting policy into practice

The presentation from Yvonne McNamara focused on what institutions and community organisations need to do to foster better service delivery for GT offenders and their families. She acknowledged that progress had been made with NOMS but that needed to progress further.

- Lack of monitoring in prison still a major difficulty. More needs to be done to support GT offenders to positively declare their ethnic background
- Probation Trusts also not monitoring numbers of GT offenders effectively
- GT offenders still found it difficult to access mainstream services in the prisons and not enough effort to develop targeted programmes despite excellent examples being presented at the conference today
- Increasing numbers of GT women in the women's estate and more work needed to happen to get a correct hold on numbers and the reasons behind this (offence type etc)
- GT service providers need to establish more partnerships with mainstream providers. This may emerge from Transforming Rehabilitation reforms. But GT offender service organisations need support from NOMS

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Yvonne's presentation highlighted the need for greater efforts to be made around monitoring need and working with GT organisations from NOMS.
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Aleta Blackwell & Joe & Jimmy from HMP Ford

- Good GT practice at HMP Ford

Aleta spoke about her efforts in supporting consultative forum for GT offenders at Ford. There had been a misconception amongst staff that GT prisoners would not get involved in a forum. However with support from a small group of GT offenders the group now meets with over 35 regular attendees. Joe and Jimmy gave their perspectives as GT inmates at HMP Ford.

- Not all GT prisoners have literacy problems but many do
- Joe supports new inmates to Ford and encourages them to register their ethnicity and can direct support for issues such as literacy and health
- Jimmy outlined how difficult education was before Ford. But at Ford the support has been greater and easier to access. He volunteers for the Samaritans' listening service
- Jimmy had recently completed his HGV 2 driving license
- Both Jimmy and Joe were beginning a placement at FFT
- Resettlement issues for both focused jobs and employment but also police surveillance, giving them an opportunity to go straight.

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The presentation gave a great insight into the experience of two GT offenders and how a supportive prison structure could help to improve outcomes for GT offenders.

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3. Chair's summing up

The Chair for the conference Chris Whitwell brought the day to a close.

"We will have to wait and see if the changes taking place within the prison and probation services are going to be changes for the better but any change brings opportunities and we need to make sure that we take full advantage of those opportunities in order to secure the best possible outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers.

What caught my mind about Conn and Joe's presentation was the importance of empowering individual Gypsies and Travellers and how it is possible to bring about real and positive change working at the individual level.

From Emma's presentation I heard the message that there is a need to work holistically with whole families – not just the offender in custody but with the family as a whole so that some of the multiple problems and issues that they may be facing can be sorted out. All these things are inter-related with the issue of the propensity to re-offend.

Zoe's presentation reminded me of the need to see Gypsies and Travellers as an integral and valued part of our society, so that when we talk about policing it is not about 'us' policing 'them' but rather that they are represented in all walks of life – police, democracy, councils, NHS etc.

Yvonne gave a very comprehensive overview of the issues and barriers facing Gypsies and Travellers in the criminal justice system but what struck me particularly was the importance, not simply of ethnic monitoring for the sake of it, but of creating a safe environment where people feel able and proud to reveal their identity and heritage.

Finally it was inspiring to hear from Aleta, Joe and Jimmy about the excellent work that is being done at HMP Ford and these good practices should be disseminated and rolled out to other prisons elsewhere."

Next steps

BTEG and FFT will produce a short report from the conference which will be forwarded to NOMS and MOJ. Funding permitting we'd like to hold some kind of follow up in the next financial year.
