

Inspiring Traveller WOMEN

IRISH TRAVELLER MOVEMENT

National Traveller Women's Forum



Foreword

The idea for this booklet stemmed from a discussion about celebrating the role that Traveller Women play in their communities and wider society and how to celebrate their contribution they make on a daily basis as part of International Women's Day 2013. It was decided that the best advocates for the work that Traveller women do was the women themselves and that all we needed to do was create a platform for their stories to be heard and inspire others.

The Irish Traveller Movement, and specifically Geraldine Mc Donnell, who was on placement from the Parish of the Travelling People as part of the Degree in Community and Youth work in NUI Maynooth, made contact with Traveller women from across the country and asked them to put together a short story about their life in order that we could post them on the ITM Facebook page on International Women's Day (8th March 2013).

The response we received from our Facebook fans was so positive and provoked such fantastic discussion and we were repeatedly asked to put the stories together as some sort of resource for community groups, schools, public libraries and women's organisations. ITM approached the National Traveller Women's Forum to work in partnership to expand the booklet and jointly launch it as part of Traveller Pride Week 2013. We are proud to work together in order to create this resource that presents the stories of Traveller Women and Traveller Women's groups on the issues they face, what matters in their lives, what roles they play and who has inspired them to do what they do to bring about positive change in Ireland for Travellers.

We hope that everyone who reads this will be as inspired by the words on these pages as we have.

We would like to thank the Department of Justice and Equality who made funding available as part of Traveller Pride Week 2013 to print this booklet.

We would also like to recognise the hard work, energy, passion and expertise of Geraldine Mc Donnell in making this project a reality. From the initial idea, to getting women involved, happy to share their life stories, to promoting it on Facebook and getting this booklet together, Geraldine's commitment to this project turned it from an idea to celebrate Traveller Women as part of International Women's Day 2013 into the booklet you are holding in your hands today. Thank you Geraldine for all your efforts in making this project work.

Finally we would like to thank the women themselves for putting the time into having their stories heard. Traveller Women from across the country gave their time and shared their personal lives in an honest, inspiring way. Without their involvement and openeness we naturally would not have the booklet to share with all of you.

We hope that the readers of this booklet will be inspired by these fantastic women, and bring some of the energy and passion in these pages into their hearts.

Brigid Quilligan, Director,
Irish Traveller Movement

Maria Joyce, Director, National Traveller Women's Forum

May 16th 2013

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Cathleen McDonagh Clark

I work in adult education because I believe that formal education is fundamental to individuals and the Traveller community as a whole. For the individual it opens doors of opportunity in work, and life that would otherwise stayed closed. The Traveller community as a whole needs formal education if we are to fully take our rightful place in society. We as a people need to have the same skills as settled people, if we are to have our input understood and heard in the forming society and our futures.

Education is a key that opens doors and provides people with skills. It facilitates people to express their voice in matters that is of importance to them. Education & qualifications will provide people with skills that could lead to employment in skilled jobs, leadership roles etc.

There have been lots of influence in my life but if I have to choose two it would be my mum and Martin Luther King My parents were a great influence to me. My mother was a woman of great love, wisdom and understanding. She would always tell us never to judge a book by its cover and to be open to both sides of a story. She was a good and kind woman who worked hard all her life. She had a great work ethic which she passed on to us. She thought good of people and she brought us up to respect ourselves and others especially the sick, elderly and children. My



values and beliefs were formed by my family, my faith and my experiences in life. I follow a code in life which believes in hurting no one and believing in the good in all people and in myself. I know we can make a difference in this world.

I have always been interested in equality, civil rights and justice. From an early age Travellers have to question why they experience racism, prejudice and discrimination. It leads a person to question and seek understanding and answers. On my own journey of discovery I came across the life of Martin Luther King and his work and writings. He was an American clergyman, activist, and leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement and I could relate to his experiences and his dream.

I too have a dream like his where all people would be able to live in a society

where they are valued and respected. The following are some of his quotes which express something to me. "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

This I too believe that it is when people stay silent injustice abounds. And sadly in relation to the Traveller community the silence is deafening.

It is his dream that is filled with hope for a better future for everyone equally. To live in a society where it would not matter if you were Traveller or Settled, where the colour or your skin or ethnicity would not be an issue. That was the dream of Martin Luther King and my dream.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character…. "Martin Luther King, Jr.

The future can be better for the young. They should not have to suffer the indifferences that we do. We have to work to make it different for them. They deserve a future and a country where they can live in peace and respect. We cannot do it alone. If we are to take our rightful place in this county we need others to work with us and the Government to take us seriously and see us as people with value.

I believe things can change and will. That is why I believe in the power of education. It provides people with skills that enable them to have a choice. This situation of Travellers experience of rejection and pain can and will be changed. It is a burden we as people have carried too long. This is not the sum of our existence and if we want to change this situation we need education and the opportunity and access it can provide. It is not the only solution but we are at a great disadvantage without it.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Nelson Mandela

Bridget Connors

My Name is Bridget Connors I live in Tallaght Dublin. I came from a family of sixteen, Five brothers and ten sisters. I had eight children and I lost two children through a genetic disease which devastated my life for years, and only that I went back to education I would not have been able for my life. I got my inspiration from Jesus, Mary, and the saints. My children are growing up now and I have fifteen grandchildren. My father died when he was only fifty two and left us all broking hearted he was my world. My mother is seventy five God bless her and doing very well.

My inspirations come from faith, also books and education as I have learned so many things reading books and learning how to spell. Education was the only way I could defeat depression and praying to the saints and our Lord. I learned how to pray the right way and read the Holy Bible and that I could read it properly was very important to me if not where would I be today. I think I would be in asylum or something like that. What else had I in life to keep me going only prayer? I became a very proud woman to be able to read and write I have taught my children the importance of their faith and education. My Mother god bless her never had any education and she has missed out on so much in her life, she can say prayers but can't read new ones and when she is alone it would be



a great gift if she could read as she would not be so lonesome. I would read stories to my grandchildren and they love it I can't keep up with them and their questions as I am still teaching myself I get so much inspiration from my grandchildren.

I also got inspiration from my father and my grandfather and grandmother they taught me so much in my life always to be proud of who I am I where I came from and to be a good and honest person and that's how I try to live my life, not to do any harm on any person and to be honest and always tell the truth no matter what. It is hard for me to express and put in writing how faith and my family has inspired me in my life I am one happy and proud women to have faith and to be born into a family like I have.

Margaret Quilligan

Margaret Quilligan, mother of 11, grandmother of 13, great grandmother to 1 from Killarney. Margaret didn't receive a formal education herself, but was raised in a home where women's rights were instilled by her parents, Mikey and Molly O'Brien. Margaret is passionate about education and when her children started primary school, she removed them from the Traveller Specific Special classes that were the norm in the 80's. She was criticised heavily by fellow Travellers and teachers at the time for doing so, but she never waivered in her belief that Traveller children were just as capable as other children if the conditions were equal in school. She worked hard as a market trader to finance her children through primary, secondary and third level education.

She taught all her children to walk tall and to be proud of their culture and ethnicity. She holds dear the traditional Traveller values and continuing that on, she has encouraged all her daughters to be self sufficient, independent women and believes no woman should be oppressed. Margaret is very religious and loves going on pilgrimages to Lourdes, Medjugorje and Knock. Her favourite place is Millstreet Well and her favourite person is her husband John, followed by her oldest sister Nora. Margaret's inspiration is her



niece Mary Mongan, who despite great heartbreak and illness always manages to smile and give love and kindness to others. Margaret's favourite song is Loretta Lynns "Coat of many colours" because it reminds her of how good Traveller women are to their children. Margaret hopes that the Irish Government will stop denying Traveller Ethnicity and support Travellers to preserve our culture. Margaret is an inspiration to all young women because she is not afraid to be a trailblazer. She is strong, independent and a loving mother, grandmother, wife, aunt, sister and friend.

Margaret Anne O'Brien

My name is Margaret Anne O'Brien. I am involved in fundraising. This year I will participate in the Flora Women's Mini Marathon for the 10th year in a row. I am not really sure how I got started, I just knew I wanted to do something to help people who were in need. Somebody I know suggested I might raise some money for the Vincentian Lay Missionary (VLM) projects in Ethiopia. In my first year I raised almost €4,000, I couldn't believe how generous and willing people were to contribute to good causes.

The money raised was used to build three houses for some very poor women in Mekele. I heard later that the women who got the homes were able to get jobs, send their children to school and live independent lives. Before that they were living on the streets and survived by begging. I was shocked that so little could make such a big difference to some people. From that moment I felt something inside me say, you have to keep going, you have to keep helping to make a difference. Since that time I have raised almost €50,000 for different projects and causes.

While a good deal of my fundraising is focused on Ethiopia, I never forget that there are people in need here in my own country or among the Traveller community. I have a special place in my heart for the homeless, for people living on the streets. I often think about them when the weather is freezing and wonder



how they cope. I have raised money for Focus Ireland, especially a project that reaches out to young homeless Traveller boys and girls. Every year I raise funds for St. James Cancer Research Foundation, the people in the hospital were very kind and caring to my Father during his last years. I can never forget that and raising funds is a small way of expressing my thanks. I also raised funds for Crumlin Children's Hospital, they cared for a niece of mine who was very seriously ill. Thank God she made a full recovery.

Other groups I have benefited from the fundraising include: Tir Na Nog preschool for Travellers in Basin Lane, Barnardos preschool for Travellers Ballyfermot, The Traveller Counselling Service, Bothar, St. Francis Hospice Blanchardstown, Anne Sullivan Deaf Blind, The Elderly Deaf Club Drumcondra. I raised enough money to send an elderly person from the parish of Ballyfermot to Lourdes. Recently our local school in Bluebell was struggling to

pay its bills and give the children the education they deserve, so I got involved in helping to organize a raffle to raise funds to pay for essential school materials. All my nieces go to this school and it's a very good school.

As I said most of my fundraising goes to Ethiopia. Among the projects that I have supported is a kindergarten (Pre-School) in a town called Ambo. Before the school was built the children, (who mostly come from the Leprosy Village), were taught under a big tree in the compound. They could only come to school three days a week and never during the rainy season. Through the generosity of people who responded to my fundraising we were able to put a proper floor and a ceiling in the hall and connect the hall to the electric supply system. We also built a small kitchen and storeroom so the children could get a meal every day. Now the children from the village receive education five days a week all year round.

Last year I raised enough funds to build 20 basic homes for a tribe of people who are known as the 'Outcast' people. They lived in small reed huts which are often destroyed during the rainy season. The new homes offer better protection and a little more security. They are far from ideal, but hopefully the local government will give the tribe permission to build more permanent homes on the land they occupy. The new structures we built mean the children and the old people are better protected from the weather and that the children can go to school.

I also sponsored two young women from the tribe Ms. Takela Mishie and Ms Helen Eirku to go to Wolita and train as Kindergarten teachers. This is the first time anyone from the tribe has gone to such a college, they will return with knowledge and skills which they will use for the benefit of the children. They will be role models for the children many of whom are the first in their family to ever receive any formal education.

I was blessed to be able to travel to Ethiopia with VLM back in 2010. This visit opened my eyes to the real needs that exist among people in Developing Countries. I felt a great desire to commit myself even more to the work of fundraising in order to better respond to the needs of the people I met. All of the money I raise goes supporting projects for education, income generating or housing. When I travelled to Ambo, I saw the school I helped to build, I could see the happiness on the faces of the children and it was obvious that they loved coming to school. I also met some women in a Leprosy village in a place called Jimma, we supported them in their income generating project, making bags and baskets which means they don't have to go begging. We also gave some funds to a group of young girls to support them to stay in Education. They used the money to set up a small café to sell tea and coffee to people coming to the local mill to grind their grain. This meant they

don't have to go to the local town anymore to sell bits and pieces where they were often at risk of being assaulted or abused.

Each year I discuss funding for projects in Ethiopia with Fr. Stephen. He has a close association with the people over there and so we are sure that all the money raised goes directly to the people it is intended to benefit.

This year I am committed to raising funds to help support a Deaf school in Ambo which Fr. Stephen has helped to establish. It is the first time the Deaf children have been able to receive an education through sign language. You can see a video of the opening of the school on You Tube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zqq5LnFLqg

I am looking forward to my 10th anniversary of the Mini Marathon. In my fundraising I have met a great many people and have only received encouragement and support for what I am doing. There is still a great deal of generosity among people in Ireland and they are happy to give to causes and projects which are helping to make a real difference in peoples lives. As I said, I don't really know how I got involved in fundraising, I just know that when I started, I had a great sense of satisfaction from knowing that the little bit of effort I was making was making a very big difference in the lives of so many other people.

People ask me, how do you do it, how do you raise so much. I can't explain, its all about how you approach people. I go in and out of pubs, hotels, shops, local businesses, I tell people what I am doing, I tell them all about the projects I am involved with. Most people are very interested and they are generally willing to give something. I have built up a good relationship with a lot of people in the pubs, they tell me when is a good time to come, when there will be a big crowd in and they encourage me to go about collecting. That's how I train for the marathon, by going out walking, visiting places raising funds. I do church collections as well and I always get the project announced in the mass and put up posters and information about the work so people can see where the money is going and who they are helping. Please God, I will have the strength and the energy to keep going. I hope to go back to Ethiopia, maybe to do the Great Ethiopian Run, a 10km run in Addis Ababa. That's my goal now.

If you would like to support my fundraising work you can make a donation to the Deaf school through My Charity.ie. please follow the link below.

http://www.mycharity.ie/event/stephen_monaghans_ethiopian_deaf_project/

Or why not join me in this year's mini marathon. Email address: margaretanneobrien@gmail.com
Links: www.vlm.ie

Marie Cash

Traveller woman Marie Cash from Ballyfermot was so committed to telling the story of the people and communities she met during a trip to Ethiopia that she decided to keep a journal to share the experiences with people at home.

Marie's story of her experiences received wide acclaim from both President Michael D. Higgins and Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn who launched the publication in the Royal Irish Academy.

The Minister for Education commended Marie Cash's courage in writing the story and said it was an excellent publication. Marie Cash's book received fulsome praise on all aspects from the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn. The Minister praised the author Marie Cash for her courage in taking the action of recording her experiences in Ethiopia, writing the story and seeing it through to publication.

Marie is targeting Irish schools with her publication believing that her story has the potential to impact on the perceptions of Travellers prevailing in our school system. It presents the reader with a positive image of modern and progressive Travellers engaging in



actions to make the world a better place. Marie's story can also be used as a resource in schools for children to engage in critical thinking and dialogue on local and global justice issues.

Marie was also invited to Áras an Uachtaráin to present her book to the President, Michael D. Higgins. The president said what he liked about the book was how it put together the stories of Travellers and people in Ethiopia. He said he liked the idea of respect for people's stories and that stories put side by side is how we live.

Mary Connors

Mary Connors is a Human Rights activist from Wexford. Born in England, she returned to Ireland when she was nine. She is a mother of five children and a grandmother of thirteen. She received only 18months of formal education when she was a child, but it was enough for her to learn how to read and write. Mary returned to education at the age of 46 when she started a three year diploma course in NUIM in Youth and Community Development work.

Mary worked in Waterford Traveller Development Project for six years and is a representative on many local and national structures. She is a board member of the Irish Traveller Movement, The National Traveller Women's Forum and of Minceir Whidden. Mary devotes the majority of her time to Traveller rights, particularly in the areas of accommodation, education, women's rights and conflict. She won the overall Traveller Pride Community Award in 2012 – this is an award voted for by her peers and an indication of how much respect and admiration that other Travellers have for Mary.



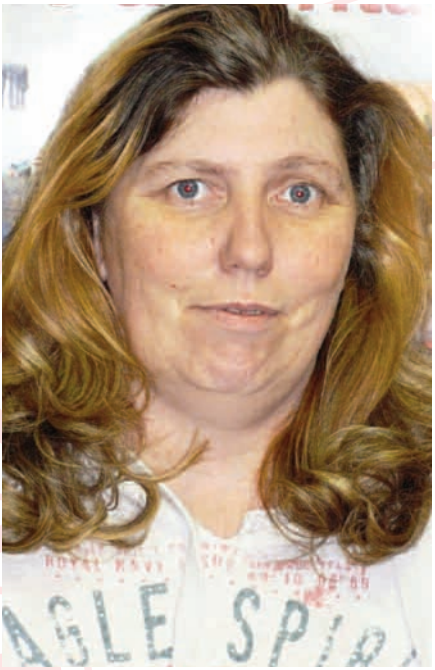
Mary likes Travelling and spending time with her family and her favourite musician is Elvis. Asked why she devotes her life to human rights work, Marys says "It is because Travellers are not treated equally; why would we be when we are not even recognised as an ethnic group"

Brigid Carmody

My name is Brigid Carmody and I am Co-ordinator of the Cork Traveller Women's Network. We are community development organisation working to give Traveller women a voice in creating a better and fairer society. I am in the job about a year, before this

I was a volunteer for the project for 10 years because I enjoyed doing it because I wanted to make a difference. The network is run by Traveller women – it is a place where Traveller women from Cork can come and talk about the issues affecting them, to get training, to build their confidence and make changes. One of the biggest thinks I hope we can make an impact on is better living conditions for Travellers.

I am very proud of the Traveller culture exhibit we have created in Cork Public Museum – which involved us making a traditional barrel top wagon. This gave us an opportunity to showcase who we are and the skills Travellers have and to showcase them in a public place for everyone to see I am proud of my history, my culture and my family and who I am. I want my children to be proud of who they are and to make a better life for Travellers in Cork. Being



a Traveller and doing this work is part of who I am I have 7 children including a set of triplets now aged 6. My children, especially the triplets have all grown up, hearing us talking about building a wagon, about local Traveller group and hearing strong Traveller women working and trying to make making a difference. I want my children to be able go to school and be proud to say I am a Traveller.

Katie O Donoghue



My Name is Katie O Donoghue from Cork. I am a Traveller woman and I am involved in Cork Traveller Women's Network. When I was younger I was always looking to improve things for myself, my family and community but I could never see a way until I got involved in a group. Through groups, I have been involved in building women's confidence, looking at ways to tackle discrimination, and improve our education and accommodation. I was a researcher as well for the Traveller Health Study and that was a very important piece of research for Travellers. I have seen many changes over the years – Travellers are getting more involved in education and now so many young women are coming out and becoming involved in Travellers rights. 25 years ago you wouldn't have seen this. Now women have more confidence.

What keeps me going is to think that I can make changes, even a small difference, that will improve things for my daughters and grandchildren. I also have always had great faith. I have 8 children and some of them are involved in Travellers rights as well. I hope for all Traveller children that they will remember where came from and be proud. I hope we can make things better for Travellers, to get our rights and still keep our identity.

Mags O Sullivan



My name is Mags O'Sullivan. I work as a community development worker for the Cork Traveller Women's Network I have been in this job for 2 years and I was a volunteer for the project for the previous 2 yrs. What I love about this work is supporting other Traveller women to up skill, gain confidence and to find their own strength within the community.

I am also a Traveller cultural awareness trainer – I work with a team of Traveller women and we go out to groups and agencies giving training and information on Traveller culture. I think this training is very important as it is part of breaking down barriers between communities and also challenging discrimination.

I have 2 children – 2 girls who I am very proud of but I have also learned that life is about more that getting married and having a family. I want Traveller women to have confidence and a voice. Seeing other women find their voice and entering the workforce inspired me – especially my aunt Mary who was strong Traveller woman – who encouraged me, put me on the spot in every conversation and encouraged me to ask questions and speak out. I am proud of who I am and to be a Traveller woman.

Margaret Collins

My name is Margaret Collins; I work as the administrator for National Traveller MABS for the past nine years. I like my job as it gives me time to keep upgrading my skills and also I get to meet people from all walks of life. I work part time, this suits me as I have two children at home. Both my children go to primary school so my work fits around that. Sometimes it's not always easy to juggle both work and home life together but I like having the responsibility of both. As a Traveller I think it's important to get in to the mainstream workforce and discover the different options available to each individual. What inspired me to finish out school was my family as some of my sisters and brothers had already gone onto third level education they pushed me and encouraged me to get my education so that someday I would get a proper job. I admire young Traveller people who go on to third level education from secondary school and push themselves further up the ladder no matter what stands in their way such as their beliefs or culture. I think anything is impossible if you really put your mind to it no matter where you come from.



Margaret Mc Carthy

My name is Margaret McCarthy from Cork – I have been involved in the Cork Traveller Women's Network as a volunteer since 1996. I love being involved and mixing with the other women, speaking out for ourselves and going to meetings, to get information and try and improve things for our selves, our children and our grandchildren I lost 2 children to suicide, my son and my daughter – it took me a long time to come to terms with it, to talk about and it get back to myself after that. Going to meetings and to the network supported me and helped me very much after this. Travellers find it hard to talk about suicide or depression – especially men, but I want to help to change this. Because talking definitely helps. I want to help others to talk about it and to look for help. I am also a leader in our local Traveller women's group from Spring



Lane. We are going to launch a children's book about our culture – in the old days, in the time of barrel top wagons. We want to share it with settled and Traveller children so they can learn about our culture. We hope schools might use it. I enjoy doing this work because I am proud of who I am. Years ago I never thought I would be able to do this type of work but I have learned to speak out and I am not afraid to speak out.

Tessa Collins

My name is Tessa Collins I am from the Traveller community I live in Dublin I am married with 3 children and 1 grandchild. I work in Pavee Point on the violence against women programme.

Women who inspire me are from my own community who talk about domestic violence and don't see domestic violence as a taboo or a hidden issue, but as an issue that should be talked about and challenged and not seen as woman's fault.



Women are strong and are even stronger when they stand together.

Happy international women's day.

Nancy Power



My name is Nancy Power I'm the joint Co-ordinator of National Traveller MABS. I worked previously as a Money Advisor up until I took on the role of co-ordinator in 2006. I graduated in NUI Maynooth where I qualified with a Diploma in Youth and Community Studies. I also have a professional Certificate in management from NCI and have recently completed a certificate in counselling. I juggle my work and home life where I have five children.

I sit on the board of Exchange House National Traveller Services, an organisation which offers support to Travellers in the area of family support, education, youth work and addiction. As a Traveller, I am acutely aware of the issues facing my community in the area of financial exclusion and have campaigned for the past 13 years to bring about change in this area.

The people who inspire me are Traveller women who have gone again against the grain who worked outside the home with great difficulties with either little or no support and continued to upgrade their skills and have achieved great success in the area of their possession.

Noreen Ward



My Name is Noreen ward I live in Dublin, over 20 years ago I worked for Sr. Patricia in St Josephs training centre in Finglas. During my training Sr.Patricia asked me to go back to college and study business administration. The following year I went to London and applied for a college course. After two years of studying I did my work experience in London women's centre, and was asked to stay on workings for them.

When I left the London women's centre, I started to work for a doctor in London, Which lasted for five years.

When I moved home to Ireland I started working in an office doing accounts and secretarial work for about three years.

I got an opportunity to work for the HSE. I trained with a nutritionist to deliver healthy food made easy. I have been teaching this course over seven years to schools, community groups and other groups. This has been the biggest achievement yet.

I have encouraged younger Traveller girls I've taken as a group, To go on to higher education and achieve their goals, that maybe in the future they can teach courses like I have done.

Selina O'Leary



My name is Selina O'Leary. I'm 21 years old; I live in Tullow Co. Carlow. I am proud to say I am a member of the Travelling community. I come from a family of 12- 9 sisters and 2 brothers. Music has always been a big part of my life. My grandfather and all my uncles were very good accordion players and all my aunts could sing. I started to sing at a very young age. I was brought up listening to people like Aretha Franklin, Dean Martin and Dolly Parton. I wasn't interested in Modern music as such.

The very first time I ever sang in front of a large crowd was at my sister's wedding and that was the beginning of it all which led me to Carnegie Hall, New York and Paris. I have been involved with the Margaret Wouters at the Music Project in St. Catherines Community Services Centre in Carlow for the last few years, and had all the help and support I need to get me where I am today. I am inspired by lots of people, family, friends, musicians, and singers but the person who inspires me the most in life is my mother. She has always encouraged me to push forward with my music. She has always believed in me and my talent. She never gave up on me and she has always been a great support for me and without her I would not be where I am today.

I am very proud of what I have achieved. I have brought out a CD entitled "Thousands are Sailing" which has been very successful, I was on the Miriam O Callaghan show promoting that album. I have achieved a lot more than a lot of other Travelling girls. I have had the privilege of travelling to America to perform in one of the biggest music venues in the world, Carnegie Hall with my aunt Elizabeth. I also had the opportunity to sing with the Gypsy Kings, Eugene Gogol, and Stephan Eicher with Goren Bregovic in Paris in January of this year. I sing the lead song in Goren's album "Champagne for Gipsies" and a second song "On a Leash". The album is on sale in the UK and Ireland now and I will be on tour with him over the next year. I know this is just the beginning for me, and I have great support from all over the world. I hope to inspire other Traveller girls to follow their dreams. One of my favourite quotes is "Never let the fear of striking out keep you from playing the game".

Missy Collins

Missy Collins is a founder member of the first Primary Health Care for Travellers project at Pavee Point in 1994 which established a model of Traveller participation in providing community based health services to Travellers.

In the fifteen years, Missy has been an active participant of this project and health worker. She has campaigned relentlessly for the Right to Health Services that address the needs of Travellers and highlighted the inequalities that exist in Traveller health.

Missy has played a key role at local and national levels in securing approval and funding for the skills development and employment of Traveller Health Workers and building up of both a Regional and National Health Network which today includes more than 40 projects throughout Ireland. It was this Network that made the Our Geels All Ireland Traveller Health Study possible.

For almost 20 years she has never faltered in her determination to ensure Travellers are represented by attending meetings and conferences, lobbying local politicians and government ministers to include consultation and recommendations from Travellers within policy making and actions that affect the Traveller Community.

Throughout the Our Geels AITHS Missy has been involved at every level as an advocate of the need for a Traveller Health study at the



Department of Health, to working with the research team at UCD, then being out there on the sites as a peer researcher during the census and facilitator of focus groups. Now she is looking forward to knowing what the findings are and taking this information back out into the Community.

All this while still representing Pavee Point on the National Traveller Health Advisory Committee, visiting local PHC projects around the country, popping into the Oireachtas Committee when she can and doing her weekly groundwork as a Community Health Worker. This mother of eight has been an inspiration to so many for the work, spirit and drive she has maintained and continues to deliver for the improvement of Traveller Health.

St Margaret's Traveller Women's Local Training Initiative



St Margaret's Traveller Women's Local Training Initiative – An Inspirational Group!!

A group of 15 Traveller women came together last September to improve their education, learn new skills and meet new people. Just 7 months later the group have grown stronger and stronger, strangers have become friends and the group have completed many FETAC modules and some aim to achieve a Major Award in Employability Skills, the equivalent to the Junior Cert over the next year or two. Additionally, there are 3 women that are completing their full Leaving Certificate this coming June and are hoping to go to third level college this coming September. Even with all this work going on, each woman supports the next and if help is needed they have no hesitation in giving it to each other. The group work hard each day to get through their work and to progress their goals in life, even though all members in the group have children and family responsibilities. They are an inspiration to their families and their community and we at St. Margaret's are very proud of our inspirational group!!

Ann-Marie McDonnell

Age 23

Lives in Finglas in Dublin, Ann-Marie is a young Traveller woman, she works fulltime in Blanchardstown Traveller Development group as an assistant co-ordinator, she is fulltime mom to Kelly who is almost 2yrs old. Annmarie is a part time student pursuing a degree in Community and Youth in NUI Maynooth.

'As a young Traveller woman I felt it necessary to further my own education by pursuing a 3rd level qualification which I hope on completion will provide bright career opportunities for my future'

'My hopes for Travellers in the future is that our ethnic identity will be recognized by the state in order for Travellers unique culture and identity to be respected and valued.

Travellers do not receive equal opportunities within Ireland and constantly have to tackle discrimination and exclusion.'



'I am inspired by Travellers who have completed 3rd level education and those who are spokes persons for the Traveller Community but also held on to their Traveller culture and Traditions which may include marrying young and having a family, I feel that it is important for young Traveller women to know that you don't have to chose between an education a career and their Traveller culture, it is possible to achieve them all with some hard work and determination'.

Leanne McDonnell



Age 18

Lives in Finglas Dublin, Leanne got married last December.

Leanne is a Traveller girl whom has completed level 3 and level 5 in hairdressing and is now a trainee hairdresser. Leanne also did a course in Gel nails so she would like to pursue a career in hair and beauty.

'As a Traveller girl my goal for the future is to continue with hairdressing by going to the next level and to become a fully qualified hairdresser'

'My hopes for the future are for Travellers to be recognised as an ethnic group and our culture to be respected. Also that we don't have to hide who we are when applying for a job etc as we face a lot of discrimination and exclusion in society'

'I am inspired by Traveller women who continue with their education and work, as well as getting married and having a family. They inspire me because they still hold onto their culture and traditions while doing this. I see this as the way forward for Traveller women in the future they are powerful role models to the next generation'

Kathleen McDonnell

My name is Kathleen McDonnell.

I live in Dublin. I'm a mother of 6 and I have 3 grandchildren with another on the way. I work as an education support worker in Pavee Point Travellers and Roma Centre. Pavee Point is an NGO which works for human rights for Irish Travellers and Roma at a local, national and international level.



I enjoy my work very much as I get to meet a lot of people both settled and Travellers. What inspires me to do my work is my family, because education is part of their life and everybody is entitled to it

I feel that I am a good role model to my daughters and granddaughter and I would encourage them to take up opportunities because there is more to life than staying at home cooking and cleaning. There are new opportunities out there, so good on you girls get out and explore them.

Mary Joyce



Mary Joyce is a full time Mother and Grandmother

Mary works partime as a Traveller Community healthworker in Meath Primary Health Care Project following a 2 year training programme; This is a programme that delivers health information to the Traveller community and looks at bridging the gap between Health Services and the Travelling community.

Mary has also completed studies for Special Needs Assistant, Youth and Community Development and a foundation course in Counselling.

Mary delivers Traveller Cultural Awareness training as part of a team and on individual basis within the health services and for other organizations.

Mary puts her family as her number one priority and is always available to support her family. Mary's role as mother and grandmother is very important to her and makes her the person she is.

Mary loves to cook and makes cakes for all occasions, she has made a few wedding cakes for family and friends she also likes to read and travel.

As to what or who inspires Mary "Mary says her faith and her Traveller culture inspires her.

Pauline Mc Donnell



My name is Pauline McDonnell. I live in Dublin and I have three children one is married and she is also a trainee hairdresser. I work part time in the Parish of the Travelling people and I am also a member of the pastoral council. I really enjoy my job as I get to meet Travellers that I wouldn't have met before.

I also am part of a team which works on a Parish newsletter. I did a level 7 in community development which I enjoyed very much; I also did a level 7 in Office Admin which came in very handy for the job I'm in now. I am inspired by Traveller women because as well as getting married and having a family, young and old are out there working and enjoying it while still holding onto their culture and traditions. I am also inspired by our strong faith.

My hopes for the young Travellers are for them to hold onto their culture and for them to continue onto third level education. It would be great if there were more job opportunities and equal rights for Travellers and also for Travellers to be recognised as an ethnic minority.

Nuala Reilly



My name is Nuala Reilly I live in Clondalkin,

I have 5 children and 9 Grandchildren. My grandchildren keep me going and I love having them around.

I work in Clondalkin Travellers and I am on a Primary Health Care programme.

I love my work as I get to meet a lot of people both settled and Travellers.

As well as Travellers health I also do cultural awareness sessions with schools, I like talking about my culture because I am very proud of it.

I volunteer with the Divine Mercy and am involved very much in my local parish, I was very afraid of flying but when an opportunity arose to go to Fatima I put my fears aside and it was a great experience for me to go to Fatima. My faith is one of the most important things to me and as well as my family it keeps me going through good and bad times. I get great inspiration from other woman, and I love going into work and mixing the woman.

Nelly Joyce



My name is Nelly Joyce. I am sixty eight years old. I was born and reared on the roadside around Co. Westmeath, one of a large family of thirteen. I got married young and had a family of eight children, now thank God I have 32 grandchild and 20 great grand children and I am hoping for and looking forward to many more please God. At present I find myself with my family reared, and at a bit of a loose end.

I was lucky enough a few years ago through the Navan Travellers training centre to come into contact with the Summerhill active retirement group run by Mary McNally, myself and five or six other Traveller women would meet up with the settled women on a regular basis, and we would have a good time reminiscing about the times and the people now passed on. We found although our communities had lived quite differently the hard times weren't restricted to the Traveller community alone, as women we found we have a lot in common.

Similar fears and concerns and the issues that arise each day for ourselves and our families are not so far apart as they may seem to be. We find there are no boundaries to worry for our family and the future it affects us all the same way regardless. The group is going very well and we meet every week. We go out to other groups in the area. We have been on holidays to Cork, and Wexford, to concerts of Susan McCann and Sonny Knowles and we take part in coffee mornings to raise funds. I also take part in school cultural days by bringing in items from the old days. I t always goes down well with the children. We exchange stories and sing songs. We recorded a CD of old songs and stories to raise money. It was through the Summerhill group that my name was put forward for the 2009 Granny of the year award.

Having gone through successfully the different stages I came in third place in the overall final. I t was a lovely time for myself and all the family and I was delighted to be able to share this time with my grandchildren, who were very excited and supportive. We made many happy memories for the children which is what it is all about. The inspiration for my life was the memory of my own mother who died a young woman. My children have no memory of both grandmothers. Both myself and my children felt their loss many times. This loss encouraged me to make the most of my own life and to be the best I could be in the role of mother and grandmother, if nothing else I think I have achieved this and I look forward to many years ahead please God.

Nancy Collins

My name is Nancy Collins I live in Dublin and I have seven grown up daughters. I have nineteen grandchildren. I'm a member of a Traveller pastoral council and as a result of being on the PPC I got an opportunity to g to Rome in 2011 to be part of an audience with the Pope. It was very uninspected when I was asked to personally greet the Pope, it was a once in a lifetime opportunity and one I will never forget.

2012 was a very traumatic time for me because my daughter Caitriona was diagnosed with the early stages of breast cancer and had to have her breast removed. Caitriona was very vigilant and went to the doctor at the first signs and is doing very well now thank God. I hope this encourages other young women who may be concerned or worried about breast cancer to seek help sooner rather than later. My faith got me through this very traumatic time and I thank God every day that Caitriona was caught in time.

My own mother Kathleen died of breast cancer at the age of 59. Sadly she left it too late to seek help. She was a very inspiring woman she had great faith in God and our Blessed Lady. She was very family orientated and worried about everyone, family is the most important thing to me also.



I would like to encourage all mothers out there to look after your health because you will be missed when you're gone because even after 17yrs I still miss my mother Kathleen every day.

Winnie Mc Donnell



My name is Winnie McDonnell I live in Dublin. I have 6 children and 7 grandchildren. I'm on a woman's training programme in Exchange house Travellers centre. I would love to work full time in a Traveller organisation.

I'm a big supporter of the Dublin football team and have met a lot of the players and got lots of photos taken with them.

I get my inspiration from my mother Sheila, she is 74 years old she became a young widow at the age of 32 when my father Jamsy died. She had 6 children and was having her 7 th. She reared us all on her own and was both a mother and a father to us. She has great faith and family is the most important thing to her which it is to me also.

She has a great talent for making paper flowers. She made paper flowers for the 50th International congress which was held in Dublin in 2012. The paper flowers were a big highlight of the congress and also featured in the media.

Anne Hand

My Mother Anne Hand was a lovely woman, everyone loved her, and she had a heart of gold. My Mommy loved to sit down with a cup of tea and tell beautiful stories of long ago, of her life back then, and how she missed it so much... that them years were the days that she didn't and wouldn't forget, believe me she would let us know and it was beautiful to hear the stories from this woman that we thought the World of. My Mother was there and cared for us all. She always had a smile on her face for all, her beautiful smile we will not forget, and her laugh. She'd always ask you 'do you want a cuppa tae'. She would light up to see her own coming in and wouldn't want them to go.



But as we all know, my mommy was also broken hearted for in her lifetime she couldn't continue Travelling and she never go over the loss of my brother Matsie who was murdered 13 years ago. We were there for each other, we had our secrets and will always treasure the times we shared together. Sometimes we laughed and sometimes we cried but no matter what she will always be in my heart. Brooky my nephew adored her and many more of us miss her with all our hearts. There's so much more I could say but I cannot say it all here so I'll end with what everyone knows... We will Love you always Mommy and whoever I meet in my path I will tell the stories you told us, stories that were told by Anne Hand.

Geraldine Mc Donnell

My Name is Geraldine McDonnell, I live in Dublin. I have 3 Children, and one grandchild called Kelly who is almost 2yrs old.

I work in the Parish of the Travelling People.

I am also a part time student perusing a Degree in Community and Youth in NUI Maynooth, going back to education was a big step for me as I left school very young and didn't have second level education let alone 3rd level, I suppose I was a bit worried that it might not be for me, or that I wouldn't be able to keep up with the work that would be involved in 3rd level education. But here I am almost finished my 2nd year and I'm enjoying it very much, not to say that's it not tough at times, getting assignments in on time is not my strong point so needless to say they was a few hectic moments. My daughter Annmarie is also in college with me, I find having another Traveller in the group is a great support, the rest of the group are all mature students so it's a good atmosphere.

My hopes and dreams for the future would be that our Traveller culture will be recognized and respected, and that us Travellers won't have to feel like we have to hide our identity to be treated equal. It's a great inspiration to see strong Traveller woman who represent our community, and who are in leadership roles in our community and are doing a great job.



When I was younger I travelled around a lot, and can just about remember living in tents on the side of the road, when I bring my mother Maggie to visit family members she will talk about places and roads where her family used to travel, she says they were the good old days, even though they didn't have very much there was a great sense of community back then, everyone looked out for one another and you shared what you had with others on the road

Id like to share a story that has inspired me, a couple of weeks ago I was bringing my father Tom to an appointment, when we passed by a furniture building he said to me do you know that used to be an old picture hall years ago, he started to tell me a story which happened over 45 years ago when he was young. The story was about his father old Paddy McDonnell, Paddy was sent to mount joy prison for 3 months, and as his family were

travelling around at the time it was difficult for them to visit him, so my father went into the local post office to send him up some cigarettes, the owner of the post office said he would deliver them as he was going to Dublin that day, the man went into Mountjoy, paid 10 pounds of his own money to get Paddy out of prison, paid for him to go in to the pictures and then picked him up and brought him back home , where they spent hours driving around trying to locate Paddy's family as they had moved from the camp when he was with them last, when they found the camp my grandfather thanked the man, and that was the last he seen or heard from him.

I thought how many more stories like this one are out there that haven't been told, the relationship between most Travellers and settled people years ago was one of respect.

There are loads of stories from the older generation of Travellers that are great to listen to, and it would be great to get them documented for the younger generation to learn from.

Maureen Ward

I am Maureen Ward, I am a human rights activist and I am the youth work coordinator with Tullamore Youth Project, employed by Midlands Regional Youth service. I am also the chairperson of the Irish Traveller Movement and chair of Offaly Traveller Movement. My role model is my mother and "live and let live" my motto.



Margaret Stokes

I am Margaret (Star) Stokes, I am 25 and from Waterford City. I am a member of the Traveller Community and I work with Waterford Traveller Community Development Project as Outreach and Development Worker (WTCDP).

I started out with WTCDP as a member of management, I had a great interest in how the project offered opportunities to Travellers for training and community education, so when the job opportunity came and it involved supporting the participants and organising activities, I was delighted to get it. Being a young Traveller woman who married at 16, and having a son with a physical disability, I find I can relate to a large range of people within my community, and my own experiences have really influenced the way I work with people.

I am also in Waterford Institute of Technology, studying for a Level 6 certificate in Community Development and Education and hope to go on to do a Degree after that.

I have a great passion for anti-discrimination, anti-racism and equality work with my community, and believe that Travellers should be recognised as an Ethnic Minority in Ireland. I have found from my own experience that Travellers working for their own rights is the most effective way forward, as it is part of our own empowerment.



I am married to Kris, and have five children, Paddy, 7, Tom, 5, Christopher, 4, James, 2, and Tony 8 months, so I am busy all the time, but I have a very supportive husband too.

Sally Flynn



I a 23 year Traveller women living in Ballyfermot (I was born and reared in Ballyfermot) I went to school in there and this was a very good experience for me. I have lived on a Halting site all my life; I think it's a lovely place to live in and we are a close community, I completed all my schooling which was a very positive experience for me, after I finished my leaving cert in 2008 I went on to do a PLC course in youth and community work, I really enjoyed my time in college in 2010 and when I completed the course I then went on to work for St Dominic's secondary school in Ballyfermot for one year.

In 2006 I started to volunteer for Ballyfermot youth service undertaking leadership courses, and working at the youth drop- ins, I have been on a number off exchanges both home and aboard, travelling to a range of countries including Brazil, Italy, Carbine, France, Belgium, Ireland all of which were valuable learning for me and a very positive experience.

I see myself as being very involved in my community as a whole; in 2009 my twin sister and I were the first two Travellers in the country to receive the Traveller Pride Award for Education. I am also very involved on the board of management for Ballyfermot Travellers Project and working as a youth work assistant doing group work which involves supporting the young women empowerment group, leadership group Drop-ins, Saturday night soccer. I have a keen interest in youth and community work my goal in life is to become a professional youth worker so I can put my educational experience into practice.

People who inspired me were the principle of St Dominic's secondary school - and the strong school complete team she had with her. Also the manager of the Ballyfermot Youth service who gave me great opportunities and guidance, one of my most memorable experience of this time was the opportunity to travel to Brazil with the above school and youth service.

Now today as a young Traveller women, I hope to inspire young Travellers and give back what people gave to me. If you what to do something strongly enough, you can and it is important that young Travellers have high expectations for themselves. As Barrack Obama Stated when he came to Ireland Is Féidir Linn (yes we can).

Breaking down stereotyping and perceptions of Travellers is very important to me and programmes and films that re-enforce these prejudges making life more difficult for young Traveller growing up in today's society really angers me. Some Young Traveller women have to overcome challenges that breaks the norms, I am glad and proud that I broke the cycle in relation to education, this was not an easy task and it did come with challenges.

Bridget Kelly



I am Bridget Kelly a Traveller woman from Co Galway, I got married in 1996 and I have five children. I work with the Galway Traveller Movement (GTM) as an Enterprise worker with their Empowering Traveller Women Entrepreneurs Programme (ETWE). One of the key pieces of work carried out by the ETWE over the past year or so has been the development of an Equality Mainstreaming Toolkit which sets out the key issues for Traveller women and enterprise.

The main reasons I got involved in community development is because I know the direct experience of racism, discrimination and barriers that Travellers and Traveller women experience. I felt I had no choice but get involved In the Traveller rights movement and its struggle for equality. Also I feel it is very important that there are strong Traveller women out there as role models. I have always been involved in business since I was a child. I would have been selling from knee high, selling Balloons, Christmas trees, Market Trading and door to door trading etc..Myself and my husband set up our own business in 2004 (Fantastic Fireplaces) a fireplace shop in Co Galway. Since joining ETWE it has helped me Develop my Talent and knowledge around business and enterprise.

Family Support Skills Programme Participants

(This course is a FETAC accredited programme undertaken by Traveller Women over the course of 2012-2013. Key modules of the Family Support Skills Programme are adult and child development, understanding the legal system in relation to family support, understanding the health service system and the support structures and facilities for families and the range of community and voluntary supports which can be accessed)

We are a group of 8 Traveller women who have just completed the above FETAC level 5 course. Different things motivated us to get involved in the course for some of us we knew it was going to be a challenge but we liked the idea of that challenge. For some of us we were very interested in the legal aspect of the course and understanding how better to protect women. Training and education does make you more informed and this course has been a real eye opener, it is about not telling women what to do it is about giving them choices. Getting information out knowing what are the supports needed and awareness of Violence Against Women issues.

Who inspires us? Traveller women who overcome the challenges that they have to put with around poor accommodation; Traveller women who are working at being a mother, being a wife and holding down a job; Traveller women who are out there in the Traveller Movement pushing the rights based agenda for Travellers and for



other women; Women who see education as their future and the future for their children.

This type of course is about empowering women and it is great to get to the end of a course and have the sense of achievement that it gives to us both personally and what it can bring to us in our work.

Margaret (Mooie) Doyle, Kitty Connors, Annemarie Connors, Ally Connors, Sally Flynn, Marianne Maughan, Bridget Zeqo, Mary O Brien

