
THINK TRAVELLER

BELFAST

Background

The traveller community is the most disadvantaged community in Northern Ireland. For example, only 5% of Travellers live to be 50 years old. Less than 10% of adult Travellers have ever been in gainful employment. Most adult travellers have a very low level of education and their children rarely complete their education. They are the only indigenous ethnic group protected by legislation (Race Relations (NI) Order 1997). Although this law affords them protection in the delivery of goods and services, they continue to suffer discrimination in the provision of goods and services. More specifically, the problem concerns:



- statutory agencies off-loading their responsibilities to the voluntary or support sector;
- the absence of an overseeing body reporting directly to the Northern Ireland assembly.

Although Belfast City Council has long been involved in anti-racism training, two main problems specific to the traveller community are:

- the difficulty in conveying the positive characteristics of the traveller community;
- the challenge, specifically for government departments and service providers, to provide the same level of support for the traveller community as the city's permanent residents.

What is the overall goal and specific objectives of the project?

To overcome these problems, the council, in partnership with An Munia Tober (Traveller Support Organisation) produced the Think Traveller DVD in December 2008 to raise awareness of the traveller community. The travelling community had the opportunity to participate in the making of the DVD. The concept of this DVD is to promote awareness in the settled community about the travelling community, the benefits of anti-racism training and also encourages best practice in delivering services to the travelling community.

Belfast City Council and An Munia Tober developed a joint training programme (delivered by young members of the travelling community) which is designed to raise awareness and encourage service providers to fulfil their moral and legislative responsibilities. Both of these initiatives complement the promotional element of the DVD.

Who is responsible for the project's implementation?

An Munia Tober will provide the Traveller trainers and Belfast City Council will support via their Traveller Unit (Professional Officer). Support for the project was provided by the Director of Client Services and the Head of Community and Leisure Services.

How does the project work?

The concept of the initiative is to raise awareness of the travelling community, especially to key service providers who will hopefully review their current service delivery process to the travelling community and address any short-comings. The travelling community are also more aware of their statutory rights and should be encouraged to follow the official complaints procedures as and when required.

What are the results of the project (so far)?

There has been a significant increase in requests for the Traveller awareness/anti racism training provided by young Travellers. The feedback to the Council's Traveller Liaison Officer has been very positive and there have been many requests for copies of the Think Traveller DVD. Belfast City Council has, in the spirit of the DVD, decided to expand the influence of their Traveller Liaison Group and have instigated a review by an outside body to explore the possibility of an inter-agency partnership approach.

Was the project evaluated and were there any follow-up activities?

The evaluation forms from the launch were very positive. Nonetheless, this project is at an early stage and the type of future evaluation will have to be considered at management level.

What lessons did you learn?

There is willingness by most agencies to address issues which are preventing the normal service delivery to the traveller community however there is a need to follow up on the Think Traveller initiative.

How is the project funded and what resources (financial and human) are dedicated to its delivery?

Belfast City Council, to date, did not seek external funding for this project. The Think Traveller DVD project was produced locally within the Belfast City Council community services budget. Current feedback indicates that future funding from external sources will be essential to further progress the training programmes necessary to achieve our goals.

Who is the contact officer for the strategy/project?

Frank O Hagan - Traveller Liaison Officer - Belfast City Council - ohaganf@belfastcity.gov.uk.

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If you have an example of a good practice that you would like to include in the database, please send an email to caroline.greene@eurocities.eu.