



## OFFALY TRAVELLER MOVEMENT

### Traveller Culture Traveller Programme

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Offaly Traveller Movement believes in human rights principles of equality, cultural diversity, partnership and freedom from discrimination and persecution. We offer Cultural Awareness Training to organisations who come across Travellers in their daily work. Our approach to work is based on:

**Community Development:** embraces empowerment and participation; equality and anti-discrimination; social justice and human rights, all of which are key ingredients to achieving positive outcomes for Travellers.

**Cultural Identity:** Travellers are a distinct ethnic group with shared heritage, customs and traditions.

**Traveller Empowerment:** providing opportunities for Travellers to develop their skills and knowledge supports their self-determination. Building the community's and service providers' capacity to understand and meet the needs of Travellers improves outcomes for Travellers.

**Anti-discrimination:** challenging discriminatory attitudes and practices of individuals, institutions and society is necessary to bring about positive change for Travellers.

**Anti-violence:** signposting external supports and services for Travellers to resolve conflicts peaceably and constructively – whilst maintaining service neutrality in disputes.



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### Traveller Cultural Awareness Training offered by Offaly Traveller Movement

#### Cultural Awareness Training from OTM Staff

This training will introduce the Traveller community and look at what life is like for Travellers in Ireland today. It will explain the negative impact of legislation over recent years on Travellers lives and will pay particular attention to important areas such as: Traveller accommodation, health, mental health, education, employment and youth. It will discuss the recent state recognition of Irish Travellers as an ethnic minority group and how we hope this will impact on Travellers lives in the future. The training is informative and interactive and there is plenty of room for discussions and questions. This training is delivered by a number of key OTM staff members from our health team; our Health Manager, our Mental Health Social Worker, Community Health workers (these are highly skilled and experienced peer workers; Traveller women who have undergone extensive training and deliver health promotion to their own community, this is deemed best practice in the delivery of health promotion to an ethnic minority group). The team have vast experience delivering this training.

This is a very comprehensive training and covers all aspect of Traveller culture. It is our experience that people like to get a good general overview and understanding of Traveller life. We can cover some or all of the topics outlined below and we often tailor the training to the specific needs of the organisation.

#### The work of OTM

This part of the presentation discusses the valuable work that OTM carries out. We are a vibrant community development organisation employing 19 workers from both the Traveller and wider community, and we offer Travellers who are living in County Offaly programmes in health promotion and mental health, accommodation, youth work, education and enterprise.





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### Traveller Culture & Ethnicity

Traveller ethnicity was granted on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2017. It is a significant milestone for ensuring that the cultural identity of Travellers will be fully incorporated into public policy. This training discusses Irish Travellers as an indigenous ethnic minority with a long shared history, language, culture, customs and traditions. They are widely regarded as one of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in Irish society and their exclusion from society is often compounded by discrimination.

### Population structure

The population pyramid for Travellers in Ireland is like that of a third-world. Almost 60 per cent of Travellers are under 25, compared with 33.4 per cent of the general population. With very few Travellers living into old age.



### Accommodation

Accommodation is a key factor for Travellers and it impacts on their physical and mental health. There is a huge volume of accommodation issues experienced by Travellers across the county. The homelessness crisis has disproportionately impacted on Traveller families. This part of the presentation discusses the need for Traveller specific accommodation and the failure of Co. Councils to deliver on successive TAP programmes.

### Education

A large amount of adult Travellers are unable to read. Poor illiteracy continues to have health implications for Travellers. We look at patterns of education in the Traveller population. 70% of Traveller children leave school aged 16 whereas less than 30% of settled children leave at that age. Only 2% of Travellers progress to third level.

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### Unemployment

We discuss the high degree of unemployment in the Travelling Community and present some of the recent trends in Traveller employment. The majority (80.2 per cent) of Travellers in the labour force are unemployed. Almost one in eight are unable to work due to a disability, which is almost three times the rate in the general population. Travellers sometimes pass themselves off as settled people to secure employment and report experiencing discrimination from potential employers. Youth unemployment is particularly high which often leads to feelings of resignation and hopelessness.

### Discrimination

We discuss the impact of discrimination on Traveller families throughout the presentation. The Traveller community experience high levels of multiple disadvantage relative to the general population in areas of housing, health, employment and education.



### Health

In Ireland there is a stark difference between the health of Travellers and the health of the settled population. The All Ireland Health Study (2010) shows that at all ages and for all causes of death, Travellers experience a higher mortality rate than the general population. We discuss health



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differences in detail and ask course participants to engage with us in a Traveller Health Quiz. We present the work of the Peer Community Health Workers and the Public Health Nurse and the significance of this work on Traveller health.

### **Mental Health**

One in four people are affected by poor mental health at some point in their lives. Suicide and Mental Health issues are a growing crisis within the Traveller Community. We discuss the various issues that impact on Traveller mental health and why Travellers experience significantly worse mental health than the settled population. The Traveller suicide rate is 6.6 times higher than in the general population. Suicide alone represents 11% of all Traveller deaths.



### **Horse Project**

Our Horse Project began in 2011 as a pilot project to engage with Traveller men in Offaly through horses. It is currently funded through the Midlands THU and it was then set up as a mental health project. We discuss how Keeping horses is a central part of Irish Traveller culture. This practice has become the focus of legislation and regulation in recent years which has adversely impacted on the Traveller community. A recent review of Offaly Horse Project found that this work has contributed positively to enhancing the lives of the Traveller men and supporting preservation and pride in Traveller culture.