

CONNECTING WITH ROMANI & TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRACTICE

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- Co-Founder GRT SWA

- Alison Shell

- November 2025



AIMS OF TODAY

- Romani and Traveller SW Association
- History and context
- Impact of perceptions
- Considerations for adult social workers and practitioners

Cautions..

- Not instructional – I will not provide guidance on how to be as a social worker, our intention is to prompt questions, reflections, issues to think about...
- We speak from personal experience (family and friends), we do not speak for all communities.
- Difference and diversity.



GYPSY, ROMA, AND TRAVELLER HISTORY MONTH IN JUNE 2025 FOCUSED ON THE THEME "HEROES," CELEBRATING INSPIRATIONAL FIGURES FROM THESE COMMUNITIES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETY

Through celebration, education and raising awareness, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month helps to tackle prejudice, change the story, and amplify the voices of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in wider society.

For more information and Resources..

[Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month - Friends, Families and Travellers](#)



DOREEN'S HEROES . . .



ROMANI & TRAVELLER SOCIAL WORK ASSOCIATION



ROMANI & TRAVELLER SOCIAL WORK ASSOCIATION



- The Romani and Traveller Social Work Association was set up in June 2020 by three Romani social workers who initially needed a safe and peer led space to share experiences of being one of the very few social workers who are from Romani Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Roma or Showman families.
- AIMS: Reform SW with Romani & Traveller communities
 - Training and best practice guidance with communities
 - Promote equal representation of people within social work agency structures
 - Develop research to inform improved SW practice
 - More Romani & Traveller people to become SW/ SC professionals

<https://romanitravellersocialwork.org/>



RESEARCH- SOCIAL WORKERS

- In 2018, Dr Dan Allen interviewed 155 social workers with an aim to shed some light on the scale and nature of child protection practice with Romani and Traveller communities in England.
- During the interview, Dan asked each person to imagine that they had received a child protection referral about domestic abuse and that they had been asked to visit a child and family to verify the risk of harm.
- As the social workers were shown the following images, they were asked to describe their thoughts and feelings, and to consider how these thoughts and feelings might impact on their practice.
- As you look at the following images, what do you think that they said?
- Whilst you are viewing the images, what is going through your mind as an AMHP?



**YOU ARE UNDERTAKING A SAFEGUARDING RELATED HOME VISIT TO THIS ADDRESS. A CONCERN HAS BEEN RAISED BY A COMMUNITY NURSE THAT FAMILY ARE NEGLECTING TO CARE FOR AN OLDER LADY WHO LIVES THERE...
WHILST YOU ARE VIEWING THE IMAGE, WHAT IS GOING THROUGH YOUR MIND AS YOU PREPARE FOR THE HOME VISIT?**



**YOU ARE UNDERTAKING THE SAME VISIT AT THIS ADDRESS.
WHILST YOU ARE VIEWING THE IMAGE, WHAT IS GOING THROUGH YOUR MIND AS YOU PREPARE
FOR THIS VISIT?**



REFLECTION...

What do you know about Romani and Traveller people?

If you knew nothing at all about the communities what might your first impressions be, based on social media/internet search?



MEDIA



It's time we stopped pandering to Travellers

Indulging those who claim to be nomads by giving them designated sites and ethnic minority status has gone too far

Prospective MPs show support as Christmas fair raises funds for fight against traveller site

By [Leigh Sanders](#) | [Wolverhampton](#) | Published: Dec 10, 2019 | Last Updated: Dec 10, 2019

Residents raised nearly £600 towards their fight against a proposed travellers transit site with a Christmas fair in Wolverhampton.

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MEDIA CONTINUED...

Pontins used blacklist of common Irish surnames to keep Traveller families out of holiday parks

EXCLUSIVE

The list was uploaded to the Pontins intranet under the heading “Undesirable Guests”, instructing call handlers that people using these names were “unwelcome”



Camper-van conversion: 'We sold all our possessions to go live in a van'

By Francesca Gillett
BBC News

© 22 October 2020

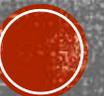


NEWS

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Pontins says sorry to Travellers over discrimination



Karen Hoggan

Business reporter, BBC News

2 September 2024

Pontins has apologised directly to Irish Travellers saying its previous refusal to allow guests to stay because it suspected they were from the community was "clearly wrong".

The apology is the first stage in the holiday park company's one-year action plan launched to tackle discrimination against Irish Travellers.

The plan was developed with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), after the watchdog found Pontins had engaged in unlawful acts discriminating against Irish Travellers.

Earlier this year the EHRC published an investigation into Pontins having unearthed "company systems and practices" designed to bar Irish Travellers from its holiday parks between 2013 and 2018.

On Monday, EHRC chairwoman Baroness Kishwer Falkner said: "Race and ethnicity should never be a barrier to going on holiday.

"Pontins has today apologised to the Irish Traveller community it discriminated against and has begun work to introduce strict safeguards and guarantee a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination."





BREAKING

...ouldn't be alive' • Megastar nearly 'dies' in shock overdose •

People

Rushden Lakes radio policy sparks discrimination debate as list of things to watch out for includes 'Tango' travellers

By William Carter



Charlotte said...

"They said they were going to use it to target people who are orange, that's exactly how it was described to me by the boy who introduced me, he said the reason it was called 'Tango' was because 'you'll see them, they're all orange, you'll know exactly who they are.'"

January 2024





ROADS FROM THE PAST TRAVELLERS' TIMES

<https://youtu.be/nH2YtzsSEIo>







- 1530- To banish 'outlandish people calling themselves Egyptians'
- 1554- Gypsies could avoid persecution if they left behind their nomadic lifestyles
- Once welcomed to Britain by Henry VII, being enjoyed for their skills in entertainment (music, dancing, acting, singing) and trades (skilled labour, blacksmiths, carpentry), 'Egyptians' were soon forced to assimilate.
- Labelled as 'enemies to the commonwealth and welfare of the land' (Mayall, 1997).
- Targetted by a range of restrictions that endeavoured to limit their freedoms and determine their experience of equality to this very day (Allen, 2021)

HISTORY, POLICY, POWER (KID, 2020)

- 600 years of oppression in the UK – Egyptian Act
- Marginalisation of the GRT community in Europe reached its climax with the Holocaust, or the Porajmos, or the Devouring (Hancock, 1987, 2007). Mass genocide of Europe's Roma and Sinti population.
- More recently GRT communities have been subjected to policies based on racist notions that they are in need of “saving” or corrective treatment (Powell, 2008), resulting in a mixture of adaptation, evasion, conformity and conflict (Crawley, 2004; Mayall, 2004).
- The stereotype of nomadism imagines the entire community as “involved in criminal activities, irreverent towards religion, harbouring sinister magical powers and primitive, as evidenced in promiscuity, dancing and baby-snatching” (Woodcock, 2010, p.471)



PART 4- POLICE, CRIME, SENTENCING AND COURTS ACT 2022

- Trespass changed from civil to criminal offence
- The criminalisation of trespass:
 - A £2500 fine
 - Time in prison
 - The vehicle (someone's home and belongings) being confiscated

Abbie Kirkby, Public Affairs and Policy Manager at Friends, Families and Travellers said:

“Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill must be scrapped. We have seen huge opposition to these proposals, not only from the police but from across society in recognition of the implications for human rights and civil liberties.”

The Government have failed Gypsy and Traveller communities – there is no point in bringing in more laws which tell Travellers where they can't go when you aren't telling them where they can go.”





Civil Society leaders call on Government to repeal new anti-Travelling laws



30 April 2025

[Civil Society leaders call on Government to repeal new anti-Travelling laws | Travellers Times](#)

Today (30th April, 2025), [Friends, Families and Travellers \(FFT\)](#) and a coalition of 22 civil society leaders, including [Amnesty UK](#), [Liberty](#), [Quakers in Britain](#), [Homeless Link](#), [Right to Roam](#) and wider Gypsy and Traveller civil society, have written to the Policing Minister Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP to call for the repeal of Part 4 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSC Act).

The open letter, which can be read below, states that measures brought in by Part 4, including fines and imprisonment, worsen existing inequalities faced by Gypsy and Traveller communities, arguing that Part 4 of the PCSC Act pushes individuals and entire families into the criminal justice system and further increases risks of homelessness and poverty.

"Safe stopping places for Gypsy and Traveller families are practically non-existent, and waiting lists for sites are extremely bloated, with no end in sight. Part 4 of the PCSC Act criminalises people for having no safe place to stop, and adds insult to injury for the thousands of Gypsies and Travellers who want to live in peace and free from harassment," said Sarah Mann, Chief Executive Officer at Friends, Families and Travellers.

"We're grateful to our co-signatories across civil society, and this letter is an invitation to the Government to work collaboratively on real solutions that respect people's rights, address accommodation needs, and foster greater understanding."





- Average life expectancy of populations in the UK has been estimated variously as 10-12 years below that of 'other' White British citizens (Parry et al., 2004)
- The health status of an average 60 year old person is similar to the average 80 year old White British person (Watkinson et. al., 2021)
- Travellers and Romani people are among the most disadvantaged people in the country and have poor outcomes in key areas such as health and education (UK Government/Women and Equalities Committee, 2019)

RACISM, HATE CRIME & SUICIDE

Research from Traveller Movement (2017) and **Report Hate GRT** (2019/2020); offer underpinning evidence of extraordinarily high levels of experiences of racism/discrimination experienced by communities

2020 Publication of report (Greenfields and Rogers, 2020) **linkage between experiences of hate crime and suicide amongst the GRT communities**

Alongside high level of depression/anxiety/self-harm, **suicide rates are x 6 that of non -GRT population** (Traveller Movement, 2020)



**GYPSY, ROMA AND
TRAVELLER CHILDREN
IN CHILD WELFARE
SERVICES IN
ENGLAND DAN ALLEN,
AND VICTORIA
HAMNETT
BRITISH JOURNAL OF
SOCIAL WORK (2022)**

- Overrepresentation of children known to child welfare services from GRT families/communities.
- Gypsy/ Roma children 1.5 times more likely than 'all other' ethnic groups to be connected to children services, and Travellers of Irish Heritage 2.74 times more likely.
- Gypsy/ Roma children 2.0 times more likely than 'all other' ethnic groups to be considered at Initial Child Protection Conferences, and Travellers of Irish Heritage 3.11 times more likely.
- Gypsy/ Roma children 2.11 times more likely to live in state care, and Travellers of Irish Heritage 2.55 more likely.
- *Reflecting on the data, we highlight the need for Early Help services to engage 'Travellers of Irish Heritage' and prevent families from falling into crisis. We also call for an increased focus on developing effective child protection practices with 'Gypsy/Roma' children, as part of wider anti-racist strategies.*



INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA (HULMES, 2021)

- Trauma is traditionally understood as having a **deeply disturbing personal experience**. However, professionals are now starting to recognise that **trauma can also be experienced indirectly**, and that it is **not necessarily the traumatic event itself that causes trauma, but the memory of it**.
- Therefore, when we have '**collective memory**' of a traumatic event, trauma can potentially impact whole communities through remembrance – this is called '**cultural trauma**'
- The study of cultural trauma includes **structural violence** and trauma experienced by communities, often due to strategies of **forced assimilation**. For example, First Nations peoples having their children removed, being forced into reserves and their traditions of nomadism banned, are proven to have direct links with increased rates of depression within their communities (Bombay and colleagues, 2011, 379-380).
- It's known that cultural trauma impacts mental health. For example, the children of Holocaust survivors are described in some studies as having a 'persistent shadow of the Holocaust', and are proven to experience high symptoms of trauma despite never having experienced the events of the Holocaust directly (Fonagy, 1999, 97)
- Therefore, there is no reason why the cultural trauma experienced by Gypsy/Traveller parents is not also internalised by the Gypsy/Traveller children, leading to mistrust of social work and potentially increased health inequalities
- Romani/ Traveller history is littered with persecution and oppression. They have experienced marginalisation of their nomadic culture, been forced into 'bricks and mortar and have had their children forcibly sent abroad and removed into state care -outside of culture and ethnic identity



Inequalities in Mental Health Care for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities

Identifying Best Practice

September 2023

**Inequalities-in-
mental-health-care-
for-Gypsy-Roma-
and-Traveller-
communities.pdf**

**Or go to Resources-
Resources –
Romani & Traveller
Social Work
Association**



FFT welcomes inclusion of Romany Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in NHS data capturing

23 May, 2025

“Today, NHS England has taken a significant positive step by recommending that health bodies across the UK include Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people in patient data, aligning records with the 2021 census, in cases where “the design of a new product cannot wait until the joint...standards are published”.

This landmark decision is the result of 15 years of tireless campaigning by Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT), alongside many dedicated activists and partners.

The shift in data records marks a crucial victory for upholding the rights of Romany Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, ensuring that healthcare institutions can better understand, support, and tailor their services to meet the needs of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller patients.

For too long, people from a Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller background have largely gone unrecorded in official health statistics, despite experiencing some of the worst health outcomes in the UK.

Research consistently shows that individuals from these communities have significantly lower life expectancy, higher maternal mortality rates, increased prevalence of long-term illnesses, and are approximately six times more likely to die by suicide than the general population.

We call on NHS England to roll out a full implementation of bringing health records in line with the UK census, as soon as possible.

FFT welcomes inclusion of Romany Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in NHS data capturing - Friends, Families and Travellers

NOTE- Not disclosing ethnicity...’no good will come, put her down as Irish’



The Reflection, Objective, Movement and Action (ROMA) Model©.

Drawing on extensive lived and learned experience, they argue that social workers can **dehumanise** Romani and Traveller people by associating their lives and cultural mores with risk, violence, crime and deviance. Although social work seeks to promote social justice through social change, social cohesion, and the empowerment of people, the group believe that these ambitions are not being achieved with Romani and Traveller people.

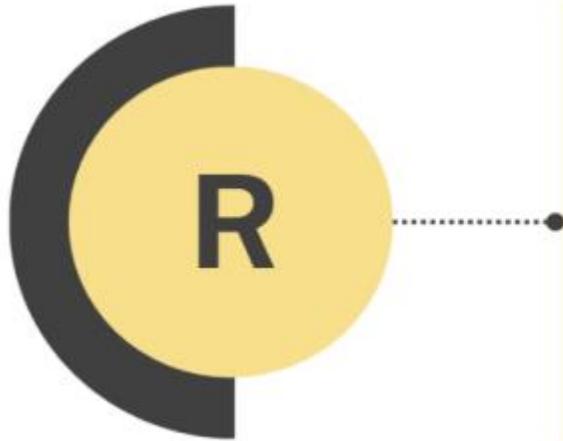
In an attempt to address **antigypsyism**, the word used to describe normalised racism as the dehumanisation of Romani and Traveller people, the group developed the ROMA model© to provide a framework for professional supervision that can help build relationships, foster learning environments and identify and address oppression within the existing socio-political order of practice.

THE REFLECTION, OBJECTIVE, MOVEMENT AND ACTION (ROMA) MODEL©: A FRAMEWORK FOR RESTORATIVE SUPERVISION

Developed by the Romani and Traveller Social Work Association with support of Liverpool Hope University, Swansea University, The University of Sheffield and the University of Worcester.

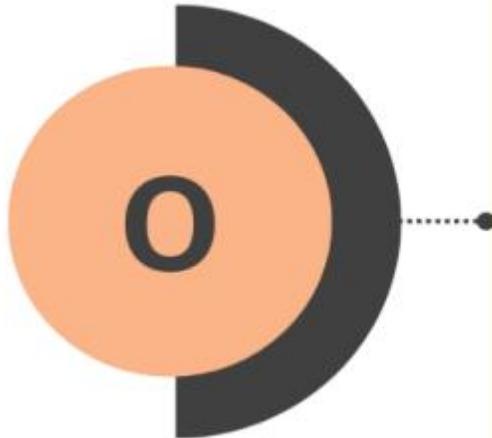
Adapted from Allen, D., Bolton, J., Dove, J., Hulmes, A., Kidd, C., Moloney-Neachtain, M., Rees, I., Rogers, M., Smith, A., & Unwin, P. (In Press) A scoping review of social work with Romani and Traveller communities: introducing the ROMA model. *European Journal of Social Work*





STAGE 1: REFLECTION ARE WE....

- Clear about why social work is involved?
- Clear about what has happened?
- Finding it hard to engage and support the individual, family or community?
- Being open and honest about the negative and perhaps hostile views that exist about the individual, family or community?
- Recognising the individual, family or community as victims of racism?
- Being sensitive to how the individual, family or community might describe and respond to our involvement in their lives?
- Supporting the individual, family or community needs?



STAGE 2: OBJECTIVE HOW CAN WE BETTER UNDERSTAND...

- The experience of the individual, family and community?
- How the family feel about our involvement?
- The way that various legal and policy frameworks impact the lives of the individual, family or community?
- The way that racism and oppression might impact our ability to engage the individual, family or community?
- The way that our views and values about the individual, family or community impact accessibility and service delivery?
- The lived experiences of the individual, family or community, such as their traditions, family bonds and relationship with non-Romani and Traveller people?

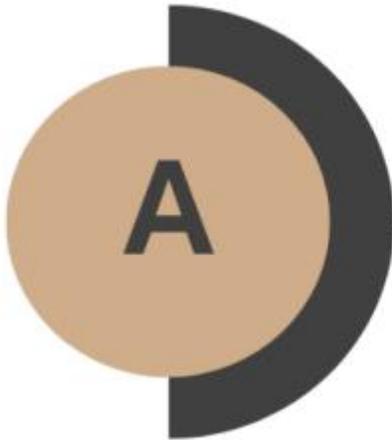




STAGE 3: MOVEMENT

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO DIFFERENTLY TO...

- Positively explore commonality and difference?
- Identify and challenge racism in our own recording and reporting systems?
- Promote a better understanding of the needs and experiences of the individual, family or community?
- Provide effective and proportionate services?
- Develop an approach to practice using national and international models of best practice?
- Improve the quality of life for the individual, family or community?
- Advance community-based partnerships?



STAGE 4: ACTION

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN FOR US TO...

- Promote anti-racist practice?
- Engage and support the individual, family or community?
- Work effectively to make the situation better?
- Promote the safety and well-being of the individual, family or community?
- Ensure that negative and perhaps hostile views do not influence the assessment?
- Protect the individual, family or community from racism?
- Understand how the individual, family, or community describes and experiences our involvement in their lives?
- Challenge structural inequalities?



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TRAINING AND
RESEARCH EVENT HELD ON THE 25TH OF APRIL
2024 WITH BEST INTEREST ASSESSORS

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL AND CHESHIRE AND
WARRINGTON TRAVELLER TEAM
LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY
DAN ALLEN, DOREEN DOVE, ALLISON HULMES AND
NICEL MUBAIWA

- **Barriers and Opportunities:** Systemic racism, lack of guidance, language barriers, and limited access to services. Opportunities lie in cultural sensitivity, community engagement, appreciative enquiries, cultural humility and sharing good practices.
- **Training Needs:** Training for Best Interests Assessors and allied professional groups should cover cultural awareness, language skills, trauma-informed practices, restorative supervision, reflexivity and ways to empower Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities.
- **Accessible Information:** Information must be made more accessible, helping to promote transparency and cultural sensitivity.
- **Professional Practice:** Promoting social justice by empowering communities through evidence-informed and culturally sensitive assessments . Participation of the community and centralise the ability of individuals and families who have been impacted by Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards to transform the system and the policies that affect their lives.



OLD WOMEN CAN'T LIVE IN CARAVANS": CONDUCTING BEST INTERESTS ASSESSMENTS WITH ROMANI AND TRAVELLER ADULTS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Submitted to The British Journal of Social Work, awaiting publication...

Conclusion

This study has underscored the critical role that BIAs play in navigating cultural identity, systemic discrimination, and antigypsyism within health and social care assessments involving Romani and Traveller adults subject to DoLS. While BIAs demonstrated a clear commitment to equitable practice, our analysis illustrates how antigypsyism and aversive racism continue to influence perceptions of risk, autonomy, and care. Addressing these challenges will require improvements in ethnicity monitoring, alongside targeted training in anti-racism, trauma informed practice, and restorative supervision.

By providing BIAs with training that enables them to transfer core professional skills to diverse contexts, where Romani and Traveller identities are understood, respected, and no longer marginalised, we argue that BIAs can become vital agents of social justice, better positioned to safeguard the liberty and human rights of Romani and Traveller adults





<https://youtu.be/3rSJ9eD1NFw?si=vGOVMnui4FMnWdKq>





ALISON AND DOREEN'S PRACTICE TIPS

Remember humanity: Work compassionately, empathetically, creatively, and in an anti-racist manner. Recognise personal limitations in addressing historical oppression but evoke your power to be anti-oppressive in moments of connection with individuals and family.

Be honest: Maintain openness, transparency, and candour. Clearly explain your role, answer questions, and avoid making promises you cannot keep.

Listen and include: Involve individuals, families, and communities in all discussions, respecting confidentiality as appropriate. Building trust and authentic listening may require additional time.

Advocate: Support individuals, families, and communities, upholding their rights while respecting privacy and confidentiality.

Promote strengths: Value family and community systems, and work in partnership to identify and recognise strengths.

Challenge yourself and others: Use reflective and reflexive practice. Address concerning behaviour or attitudes and raise issues about unsafe organisational practices.

Be creative: Explore new ideas and approaches without self-imposed limitations.

Debrief and supervision: Seek regular opportunities for debriefing and supervision, acknowledging and processing personal impact.



FREEDOM

‘And if she had her way, she’d have lived in caravans all her life, but she never had that choice...’

