Social Work with Gypsies and Travellers

Dan Allen
The Study

- Explore the experiences of Gypsy and Traveller children in care
- Contacted every local authority
- Use of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma charity groups
- A flexible methodology which recognised the need for great sensitivity and ethical awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Origin</td>
<td>59,360</td>
<td>60,890</td>
<td>64,410</td>
<td>65,520</td>
<td>67,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>45,580</td>
<td>46,200</td>
<td>48,990</td>
<td>50,340</td>
<td>52,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>43,810</td>
<td>44,510</td>
<td>47,170</td>
<td>48,480</td>
<td>49,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Irish</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other White background</td>
<td>1,360</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>1,390</td>
<td>1,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveller of Irish Heritage</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gypsy/Roma</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken from the Department for Education. (2012). Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2012.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym name</th>
<th>Length of time in care</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Accommodation before care</th>
<th>Placement Type</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Geographical location of placement</th>
<th>Approximate dates of care experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Trailer Roadside</td>
<td>Residential Home</td>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1970’s – 1980’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Trailer Campsite</td>
<td>Residential Home</td>
<td>English Gypsy</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>1980’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Trailer Roadside</td>
<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>1990’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>Adopted as a baby by non-Showmen</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Trailer Campsite</td>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>Showman</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1980’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>Trailer Campsite</td>
<td>Residential Home</td>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>1990’s - 2000’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>3 years, then adopted by Traveller carers</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Trailer Roadside</td>
<td>Foster care</td>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>England in foster care then adopted in Ireland</td>
<td>1990’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Trailer Campsite</td>
<td>Foster Care and Residential Home</td>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>1980’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Trailer Campsite</td>
<td>Foster Care with Traveller carers</td>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1990’s - 2000’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>Trailer Campsite</td>
<td>Foster Care with Traveller carers</td>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1990’s - 2000’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>13 Years</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>Trailer Campsite</td>
<td>Foster Care with Traveller carers</td>
<td>Irish Traveller</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1990’s - 2000’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Helen

Interviewer: Does your husband know about your time in care?

No.

Interviewer: Can you tell me why?

Because he would leave me.

Interviewer: Why would he leave you?

Because he’d see me as dirty. I have to hide all of that. It’s a secret. I can’t talk about it because I would be humiliated.

Interviewer: Is it easy to keep it a secret?

Ah Jesus! (Shouting) Is it easy to live a lie? Is it easy to hide it all? Is it easy to be someone I am not? (Talking) What do you think Dan?
Laura

The problem with yous social workers is that yous don’t give a fuck about the Travellers. Yous just sit there in your la de daa clothes looking down on us. Your problem is that yous don’t care about what we have done to get through, you know, to get by and live amongst yous all with no proper facilities. No one cares that we don’t have things like a hard standing for the trailers and all the mud and shite or that we can’t let our children play outside for fear of them being run down. (Shouting) Your man [Traveller Education Service Worker] always goes on about ‘children need this’ and ‘children need that’ but in my eyes he knows fuck all about what we need. Cont...
Laura

No one does nothing for the Travellers and then one day the social come along and say that us Travellers can’t mind our own children and that we are all crazy in the head. Now I don’t know what world yous comes from sweetheart but to us Travellers all this is make no fucking sense at all. Will yous tell me I’m wrong? (7)

Interviewer: What do you think a social worker should be?

Laura: On the Travellers side next question.
Peter

One night the other boys in the [childrens] home got into my bedroom and pulled me out of bed. They had been drinking and poured beer on me and pissed on me. They squirted my toiletries at me and called me filthy pikey. They barricaded the door and set about beating me saying that I would fight back if I was a proper Gypsy.
Mary

I remember as soon as they [my parents] were gone I was pushed into a bath and scrubbed because they told me I was dirty because I was from a Traveller family...I had beautifully thick, long black hair. If you stood me in a line with the other girls you could tell that I was a Traveller because of my hair. The care workers cut it all off because they said it was dirty.
Sarah

The kids at my new school picked on me because of my accent...I told my foster family but they didn’t care...So I thought well, I won’t speak with an accent anymore.

Interviewer: Was that a difficult decision to make?
(Sobbing) Yes because I loved my mum and dad....but it didn’t work. The kids carried on picking on me anyway, saying I was just trying to be like them.

Interviewer: How did it make you feel about being a Traveller?
Dirty.
Mary

- I’m an adult that is not able to have any intimate relationships or any physical... and that I find very difficult to understand and to live with and to manage. I had to live in a psychiatric hospital at times. I have had an eating disorder - I could not eat in front of other people – I cut my breasts.
Journey through ‘Care’

**Stage 1a**
Do I see myself as a Traveller/Gypsy?

- Yes
  - **Stage 2a**
  Is it important for me to be a Traveller/Gypsy?
    - Yes
      - **Stage 3a**
      Do I enjoy being a Traveller/Gypsy?
        - Yes
          - **Stage 4a**
          Do I want to remain a Traveller/Gypsy?
            - Yes
              - **Stage 5a**
              Am I free to communicate my Traveller/Gypsy self-concept on a daily basis?
                - Yes
                  - **Stage 6**
                  Secure Traveller/Gypsy self-concept
                - No
                  - **Stage 5b**
                  Social and Emotional Protest, Despair, and Detachment
            - No
              - **Stage 4b**
              Social Reintegration Strategies
        - No
          - **Stage 3b**
          Social Avoidance Strategies
    - No
      - **Stage 2b**
      Social Separation Strategies

- No
  - **Stage 1b**
  Insecure Traveller/Gypsy self-concept

**Stage 6b**
Ambivalent Traveller/Gypsy self-concept
An unfinished symphony

- Experiences described occurred sometime between the 1970s and 2000s
- Unlikely to occur today?
- Rule of optimism in the context of modern services
- Policies and organisational practices can fail all children living in care, including Travellers and Gypsies
- Concepts of Power versus Powerlessness remain
- Roma children and families remain hugely under researched
- Good practice guide: social work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families
Looking forward

• Individual workers should practise within an anti-discriminatory framework, and in accordance with the requirements of their regulatory body - trust

• All Local authorities should develop a specific local policy setting out how they will meet the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and families in their area, including issues of accommodation - inclusion

• Appropriate and relevant training should be made available to those working to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children - respect

• Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and their representatives should be much more involved in all aspects of policy making - representation
Looking forward

• Further research should be commissioned to look into the social care needs of Roma children and families, and the care experience of this group of children - **understanding**

• Research should be commissioned to consider the feasibility of setting up specialist services to recruit, assess and approve foster carers and adopters from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities - **empowerment**

• The recommendations set out in respect of policy should be set out as requirements in appropriate legislation or statutory guidance - **permanence**