

DONCASTER CVS

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER INCLUSION PROJECT ("GIVE US A VOICE")

The Gypsy and Traveller Inclusion Project ("Give Us A Voice") is aimed at empowering the Gypsy and Traveller community and strengthening its ability to have its voices heard at strategic level. The team is made up of Katy George (Gypsy and Traveller Inclusion Officer) and Zoe Forrest (Assistant Community Development Worker). Zoe is from the Traveller community herself, and provides a crucial link with this group who are often very hard to reach. Karen Wardman, DCVS, Outreach Worker says "Zoe also lends the project and its partners an invaluable insight into the culture and social norms of the Traveller lifestyle, promoting sensitive and appropriate approaches from agencies and their representatives".

The project facilitates the multi-agency Strategy Group which comprises all major service providers and voluntary sector organisations working with Gypsies and Travellers. The project uses this group as an arena to help develop and improve service provision and access for Gypsies and Travellers. This involves working with individual agencies and sub-groups to support increased awareness of and adaptability to the needs of this marginalised community.

The project workers are liaising very closely with the Advice Centre Co-ordinator and supporting the establishment of this new community resource. A long list of agencies have already been met with and possibilities for future enhancement of services been discussed and two new voluntary sector agencies have already been brought into the Strategy Group structure.

The project is also laying the foundations for setting up a Gypsy and Traveller Forum, with the emphasis on community ownership; functioning to feed views into the Strategy Group and other channels such as the Community Empowerment Network and the Black and Minority Ethnic Key Strategic Partnership. Workers are also taking part in organising cultural events such as the Romany Festival 2008 and the Doncaster Mela, and taking part in regional groups and ventures such as the Yorkshire and Humber Accommodation Needs Assessment and the Northern Network of Travelling People. Contacts within the community are being made through close contact with the Traveller Education Team and Community First's Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officers.

The project hopes to act as a bridge between the Gypsy and Traveller community and agencies working with and for them. This will facilitate better communication and improved community cohesion, enabling individuals to have more input in the decisions affecting them, and giving them confidence to challenge negative and discriminatory responses to them as a group.