

## **Accomplishments/ Services provided**

Over the last two years since the service opened its doors a lot of development and progress has taken place, in the first year we launched the pilot project we did not know how it would be received or how the community would respond to it and the big question was would the community use the service? This question has been very firmly answered by the community. In the first year of the service we had a lot of inquiries about the service and people making appointments but not showing up, we had in the region of 150 appointments made the actual number of clients seen in the first year was about one quarter of this. this year and particularly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the year we are on average seeing between 8 and 10 clients per week this is a huge increase in the number of clients accessing the service. This increase is due to a number of factors one of the key ones being the placing of counsellors in local areas in partnership with local Traveller organisations.

### **Client profile**

Since the service was launched we have both men and women nearly on a fifty-fifty basis both in terms of inquires, making appointments and coming for counselling, this has been one of the big surprises for us as counselling service as the assumption was that men would not use the service. The majority of clients are from the greater Dublin area with some clients from outside Dublin, the majority of clients are referred by social workers, community workers, Traveller projects and other counselling services.

### **Presenting issues**

Clients have presented with a number of different issues, some of the main ones being,

Drug and alcohol abuse

Suicidal thoughts and feelings

Identity issues

Depression

Domestic violence

Relationship problems

### **Engagement with local Traveller groups**

We have engaged with many local organisations, in the start up phase the service met with every local Traveller primary healthcare group in the greater Dublin area and in Bray and Wicklow, the service continues to meet with the Primary healthcare teams in local organisations both in Dublin and outside of Dublin, the service has carried out sessions in Cork, Galway, Tipperary, and also with the midlands. We have also engaged with the national Traveller organisations in supporting them to address issues of mental health among the Traveller community.

### **Engagement with the local community**

The service has had a number of sessions in local areas with the Traveller community Blanchardstown, Finglas and Tallaght the service has found that these sessions have been very good and intend to continue to host discussion and information sessions with local travellers particularly out on to sites and group housing schemes,

### **Engaging with other minority groups**

The Traveller counselling service has been instrumental in engaging with other ethnic and cultural minority groups in beginning to bring a focus on culturally accessible mental health services for all. There has been a number of meetings with many groups from different minorities who have come together and are beginning to focus on creating a framework for the development of culturally accessible mental health and what it would look like this is a very positive development for minority groups but also for the development of inclusive mental health services in Ireland

### **Operations/Staff,**

At present we have five psychotherapists plus a manager who is also qualified psychotherapist we have also hired an Administrator who works on part-time bases. One counsellor is seeing clients in Bray one morning a week. One counsellor is seeing clients in the city centre, we have a counsellor in Port-Laois and we have two

counsellors working in the centre in cabra. There are four women and three men on the staff. We also have a supervisor provides supervision to the team on regular basis. The counsellors provide one to one, couple and family therapy. Over the last year there have been nine supervision meetings, these meetings last from between one and half to two hours and look at the clinical work and what were the key cultural issues which arose in the counselling sessions, all counsellors and manger attend these supervision meetings. Supervision is a crucial part of developing a culturally sensitive counselling service, it during these supervision sessions that we as a team are able to explore our assumption perceptions and interventions and look at these from different cultural perspectives.

## **Finance,**

Our funding at present comes from a number of different sources,

Social Entrepreneurs Ireland who have generously given us an award of €80.000 euro, we get this award over two years, the project will receive the final part of this ward this year.

The Traveller health Unit of the HSE has been very generous and given the project €17.500 last year and the year before we hope that this funding will continue this year.

The Family support Agency has given us a grant of €5.000 euro over the last few years

Also we have forwarded an application to the Department of rural and community affairs for funding

Reimbursement from local project, Bray has been the only project to have secured funding so this reimbursement has started on a monthly basis. Port-Laos has said that Funding is there for the project in September

The present state of our finances are (please see attached financial statement)

## **Strategic Plan**

### **The vision**

That all services should be appropriate to all needs

### **The problem**

That the emotional and health needs of Travellers were not being met by existing services, which was due to a number of factors including

Racism and discrimination

Lack of engagement with the established infrastructure

Isolation of the Traveller community

Mental health not being a priority for the health services

Lack of culturally appropriate services, one size does not fit all

Lack of trust between Travellers and the settled community

### **The symptoms**

Isolation

Increase in substance abuse (prescribed and illicit)

Lack of mutual understanding of issues and problems

Clash of values

Lack of trust both externally and also internally in the community

High levels of suicide

Very low self esteem among Travellers

Disproportionate number of Travellers in psychiatric units

No infrastructure to address the issues

High levels of stress, Anxiety and depression among the Traveller community

High levels of domestic violence and family breakdown

Identity crisis among Travellers, a lot of Traveller ashamed of being known as Travellers, internalised shame. Also identity issues with regard to sexuality

### **The external barriers to addressing these issues**

Deep rooted societal prejudice and racism

The continuing cycles of exclusion and discrimination

The way services are structured, in that they do not cater for Traveller cultural

A lack of understanding by existing service providers to the issues faced by Travellers

Lack of education of Traveller issues among service providers

### **Internal barriers**

The physical health differences and the issues that face Travellers, such as accommodation issues and health issues

Stigma within the Traveller community towards issues regarding mental health

Cultural taboos

Lack of funding and resources

## **Levers to remove barriers**

The levers that might remove some of these barriers

Accessibility for the community to services

Research into appropriate services

Awareness rising

Sustainability

These levers would identify some of the actions that we need to take as an organisation in order to develop the kind of service that we envisage. John suggested we do a number of follow on exercises which would help the board to do this, these were a Stake holder map, and set of actions also that the board needed to look at governance.

## **The Way Forward**

To build partnerships with Traveller organisations who are working with the Traveller community in local areas.

To build partnerships with local service providers

To Place counsellors in local areas where Travellers are able to access the Traveller counselling service, counsellors would not be based in the Traveller organisations but in a local counselling organisation.

Local Traveller organisations would look for resources to reimburse the Traveller counselling service for the counselling hours.

Local traveller organisation would promote the Traveller counselling service among the Traveller community and other service providers in an area

The counselling services in local areas would be reviewed on a six monthly basis to look at how they can be improved

Initially counselling would be based in a local area one morning a week for four hours this would allow the counsellor to meet with three clients per week

As has been stated earlier already we have placed counsellors in some local areas as a pilot and the response has been very positive also the take of the service has increased dramatically.

We feel that this strategy addresses a number of barriers which was identified in our strategic planning session, namely

- **Accessibility**  
Access to and by the community to the Traveller counselling service, Having counsellors in local areas make the services more accessible it also creates more of a direct link between the counselling service and the Traveller community
- **Sustainability**  
Sustainability, in establishing counselling services in local areas where the local groups can apply for small grants to pay for the counselling for local people, is much more likely to be sustainable in to the future  
The Traveller community become more of a stake holder in the Traveller counselling service and shape from a local perspective how the service will develop into the future

The plan over the next two years would be to have at least one counsellor in each of the local areas in Dublin and surrounding areas where there is a large Traveller population and where a local Traveller group is operating. As part of this counsellors who are working towards accreditation will be recruited to work a long side more experienced counsellors.

There will continue to be a central base where clients will be seen and supervision and management issues dealt with. Also in the provision of other services such as

Group therapy

Training

Phone counselling

Where the strategy is at, at present, we have one counsellor in Bray on a weekly basis, a counsellor has worked in port-Laos for a number of weeks on a trial basis and now we have agreed that this will be started in September for a number of months on a pilot basis. We have a counsellor working in the city centre and are in the process of setting up a meeting with exchange house with a view to establishing such a service and it looks quite positive. We have been offered the use of counselling facilities both in Blanchardstown and Tallaght and have set up meetings with the management of both of the local Traveller groups in these areas, again local groups seem quite positive towards being part of this strategy.

Over all there has been significant progress and change in how the project has developed the number of clients using the service and how we will move in to the future, the feedback from local groups, the Traveller community and other service providers is very positive and encouraging. We are looking forward to holding our AGM in September where we will be host discussion groups to explore this strategy in more dept.