



Traveller Counselling Service

Annual Report

2019



The Impact of Inter-family Conflict on Traveller Mental Health
Conference, Dublin Castle, April 2019

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Introduction

2019 was a very busy year that saw the launch of the National Traveller Mental Health Network, the establishment of the Garda/Traveller Advisory Forum and the holding of a national conference exploring the impact of inter-family conflict on Traveller mental health. Correspondingly, we have made a number of submissions and inputs to the All Party Oireachtas on the future of mental health in Ireland.

We have given numerous presentations to Traveller groups, service providers and organisations such as IACP, Connecting for life Donegal and the Galway Traveller Movement, to name but a few.

Our work during 2019 also saw the Traveller Counselling Service becoming increasingly involved in the establishment of Mental Health Steering Groups, within local Traveller organisations. The work of these Steering Groups includes supporting them to carry out local mental health surveys with Travellers in their area which created a strong base from which these steering groups can identify the mental health needs of the community and look at how these might be addressed. In 2019, surveys have been carried out in Clondalkin, Tallaght, and Bray and with the support of the Traveller Counselling Service working in conjunction with the Steering Groups, counselling has been established in counties Meath and Offaly.

We developed and provided a course addressing mental health needs with the Traveller men in Arbour Hill Prison and continued with the provision of group support to the men. The Traveller Counselling Service also provided counselling and support to Traveller women in Dochas Women's Prison. 2019 also saw the establishment of a coordinating group whose role is to develop and oversee a course on community mental health which will be delivered to members of the Traveller community and is scheduled to commence in 2021.

Governance was a key priority during the 2019 that saw the establishment of a Governance Sub Group, a Finance Sub-Group and a Board Sub-Group, all of whom meet regularly throughout the year and report directly back to the Board of Management.

The increased demand for the counselling service in local areas is indicative of the need for the service and correspondingly highlights the emergence of new presenting issues in the counselling sessions, (see figures attached) which is a direct reflection of the new and emerging issues that our clients are facing in their lives. The Traveller Counselling Service had its busiest year to date in 2019 and anticipates an equally busy year in 2020.

Thomas McCann

Director

Chairperson's Statement

I hope you are all well and staying safe in these most difficult times that are now upon us. The world and the way we do business has changed a lot in 2020, though on reflection, the hard work and the increased demand in service during 2019, prepared us in some respects for the unexpected in 2020.

2019 was a very busy and demanding year for the Traveller Counselling Service. Throughout the year one thing has remained constant, the staff and counsellors continued to provide vital support to Traveller families and individuals.

As Chair, I would like to acknowledge the significant work of our team (Thomas, Beatrice, Suzie, Cairenn, Ruth, Margaret, Louise, Jacky, Jimmy and Aileen) and their dedication to the important work that they do. I am amazed at the sheer level of commitment that is shown by the staff in delivering the counselling services on a daily basis.

Some of the highlights of the year include:

- The launch of National Traveller Mental Health Network
- The conference on inter-family conflict and the launch of the conference report
- The development of the Garda/Traveller Advisory Forum

I would like to thank the board for their support and guidance throughout the year.

I am confident that TCS will continue to address the many challenges and issues that are affecting the Traveller community for the remainder of the year and for 2020.

Chris Mc Donagh

Chairperson

Management and Staff

Board

Chairperson: Chris McDonagh

Directors: Oein DeBhairduin, Cairenn Bryson, Kevin Byrne, Fr Paul O'Driscoll, Margaret O'Leary, Kerry Cuskelly

The Board of the Traveller Counselling Service has been very active in supporting the staff and team and have met regularly throughout 2019. Board members have participated on key working groups such as Governance, Finance and Board Review Sub-Groups. Aside from this, individual members of the Board have given of their time and expertise in an individual capacity to support the staff to develop and deliver programmes to the Traveller community.

Staff team

Manager - Thomas McCann

Community Development Worker - Suzie McCarthy

Office Manager - Beatrice Hughes

IT Support - Simon Stewart, Richard Boyle.

Although we have a very small staff and the workload can be very large, the team have worked very effectively to address the key priority areas of work identified. We continue to hold staff planning and review meetings on a regular basis and provide support in areas where we feel the staff need it, including the provision of external support when the need arises.

Counselling Team

External Supervisor - Jimmy Judge

Counsellors - Cairenn Bryson, Jacky Grainger, Louise McDonagh, Margaret Doyle

Clanwilliam Team - Aileen Tierney and Ruth Eustace.

We have held regular team supervision sessions and provided individual supervision, advice and support when needed.

Counselling and Client Work

The Traveller Counselling Service was set up in 2009 with a view to providing a counselling service to members of the Traveller community in Ireland as set out in our governing document,

“The main object for which the company is established is to provide culturally appropriate counselling services to the Traveller community”.

It was found that the counselling services that were providing adequately to the majority population, often failed to recognise or accommodate the cultural differences when it came to Travellers, which at times further alienated Travellers and increased their sense of exclusion and discrimination.

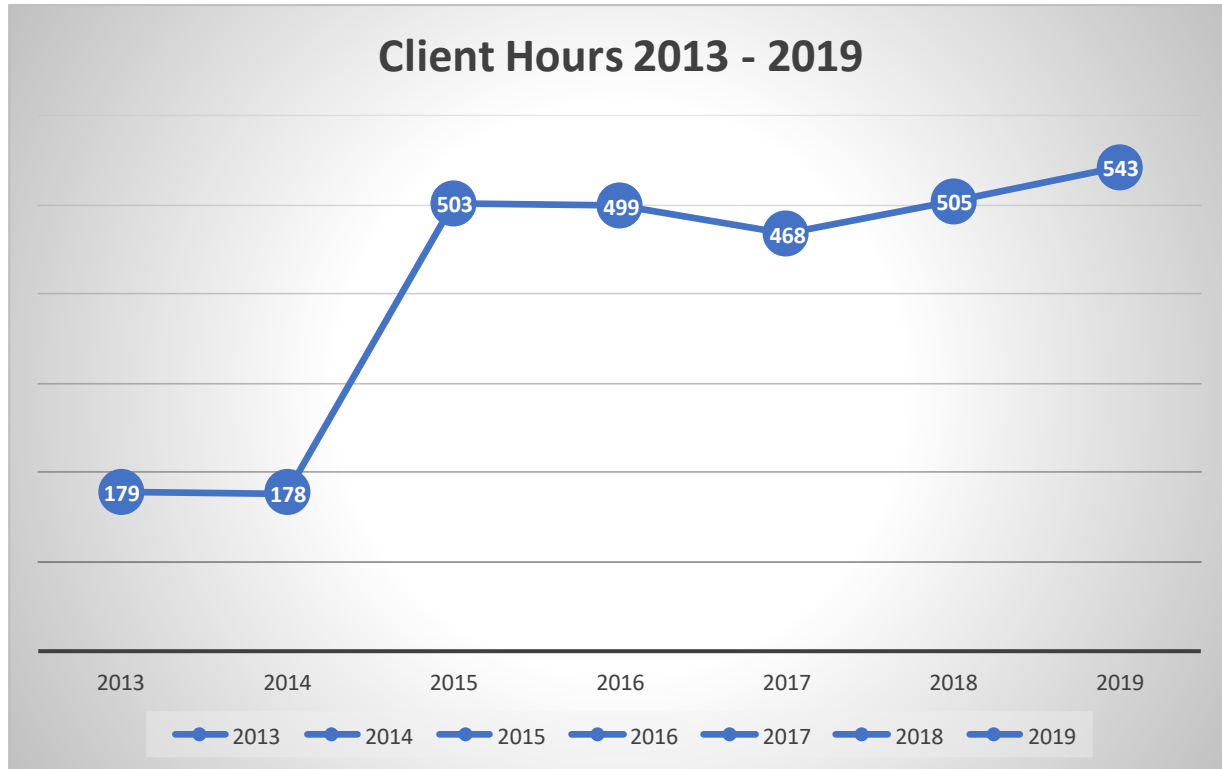
Since 2009, the Traveller Counselling Service has developed to meet the changing needs and demands of the community. Providing a counselling service to members of the Traveller community requires cultural competency and sensitivity and we are very lucky with our team of highly skilled and dedicated counsellors who provide this service in a variety of locations across greater Dublin and Wicklow.

As our service is available to clients aged over 18 years and over, we have developed a partnership with the Clanwilliam Institute, who see Traveller families on our behalf. We have also helped to develop Traveller specific counselling services in Meath and Offally, that run independently but link in with us, as do the staff from the Clanwilliam, for team supervision and support.

Below, we have provided a synopsis of the counselling work carried out in 2019, but a full statistical report of the counselling and the presenting and emerging issues is provided in our Client Statistical Report for 2019.

Client/Counselling Hours 2013 –2019

Since our inception in 2008, to end Dec 2019, we have provided a total of 2875 counselling hours to members of the Traveller community.



2019

We have provided a total of 543 counselling hours during 2019 which is a high figure when taking into account one therapist has been on extended parental leave and another therapist has been on sabbatical till 2020.

Gender

The gender profile for 2019 is in keeping with gender profiles in previous periods and showing a continued trend with an increase in men attending the service with 43% male and 57% female attendance during 2019.

Age Profile

The figures indicate that individuals aged between 25 – 30 represent our largest client group in terms of age ranges with fewer older Travellers attending for counselling. This statistic is consistent with other periods.

Mental Health & Related Issues 2019

The majority of clients attending our service are facing very real struggles with their mental health. Some worrying statistics here are the continuing trend that indicates that over half of clients are presenting with anxiety, stress and depression. A further concern is the continuing trend in the number of clients presenting with suicide ideation and using psychotropic medication which is 1/3rd of all clients. A further concerning statistic is the number of clients presenting with PTSD which represents over 1/5th of clients attending the service. Another worrying trend is the increasing figure for clients presenting as homeless which has increased from 14% in 2017, 17% in 2018 to 19% in 2019. We have separated some of the more prevalent factors to be looked at individually (see attached client statistic report for detailed breakdown).

Geographic Spread

The counselling that took place during 2019 was provided in 1 Wicklow and 5 Dublin locations. The limited availability of our service is reflected in the statistics. Clients being seen in Dochas prison are listed as hailing from Dublin, unless they refer to themselves as homeless.

Other Areas of Work

Governance

We have been very active in developing our codes of Governance and policies for the organization and have most policies now in place. Beatrice, with the support of the Governance Sub-Group has done great work in this area and we are making good progress and hope to sign off on these in 2020.

Finances

Our finances are in a strong position as can be seen from the attached excerpt from our Audited Accounts:-

Income and Expenditure

The financial results of the Traveller Counselling Service for the year ended 31 December 2019 are set out in the Statement of Financial Activities on page 11 of the financial statements. The Charity generated a surplus of €47k during the year.

The Charity received the majority of its income in 2019 from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law reform with the remainder coming from other grants and income generated from counselling services throughout the year. Other grants were received from the Traveller Health Unit, St Stephens Green Trust and Tulsa. The restricted income received by the Charity amounted to €176k. This income was made up of grants and donations. The unrestricted income received by the Charity amounted to €32k. This income was made up of unrestricted grant income and income generated from counselling services. The majority of restricted income is spent on wages and salaries. Unrestricted income is spent on charitable activities and governance costs such as rent, computer costs, subscriptions, printing and stationery & audit fees.

Income increased from 190k in 2018 to €208k in 2019. This increase mainly relates to funding from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law reform €167k vs €159k and new funding received this year from St Stephens Green Trust of €4,000 as shown in note 4 of the financial statements.

The resources expended during the year are classified under the headings of charitable activities and governance costs. Resources expended amounted to €161k in 2019. The main expenditure relates to wages & salaries and costs associated with providing counselling services.

Expenditure incurred has increased from €141k in 2018 to €161k in 2019. This increase is mainly down to staff costs €125k vs €107k as shown in note 8 of the financial statements.

A full copy of the audited accounts are available on request.

Funding Received During 2019

Funding Body	Type of Funding	Specifics	Amount
Department of Justice	Core Funding	Management and Admin Salaries	44,600
SSGT	Project	Prisons Partnership Project	6,000
Tusla	Counselling	Counselling Hours	3,100
HSE Social Inclusion Unit	Counselling	Counselling Hours	11,400
HSE	Project	Cultural Competency Training Programme	5,000
Department of Justice	Core Funding	Community Development Worker Salary	50,000

Addiction Support Discussion Group

The Traveller Counselling Service invited a number of organisations and individuals who work in the area of addiction with Travellers to a discussion on what supports are needed for Travellers on the ground struggling with issues of addiction. As a result, a number of specific supports were identified and an ongoing discussion group was established, however this group, due to a number of factors, has not met for number of months but it is hoped that it will resume meeting again in due course.

Engagement with Local and National Groups

We have been very active in engaging in relation to mental health issues with local and national Traveller organisations including, Exchange House, Minceir Whiden, the ITM, the National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point. We have done numerous presentations at national conferences on the issues of Travellers and mental health, including Galway, Cork, Tuam, Wexford and Donegal . The Traveller Counselling Service also supported the establishment of a number of Traveller Mental Health Steering Groups, many of whom carried out local mental health surveys with Travellers in their areas and two established counselling in the counties of Meath and Offally

Training

The Traveller Counselling Service have provided numerous training sessions to a variety of service providers at local and national level and to both Traveller and mainstream service providers. This training covered areas such as the different aspects of Traveller mental health, the development of cultural competency and the provision of training to local Traveller groups to support them to put structures in place that will ensure that they are giving the best possible support to clients who present who are self-harming or suicidal.

Course on Community Mental Health with Travellers

A steering group was established to develop and oversee the development of a course on community mental health with Travellers which is planned to be rolled out in January 2021

Advocacy

Meeting with The Minister For Mental Health

The Traveller Counselling Service met with Minister Jim Daly, then Minister with responsibility for mental health, as part of the NTMHN delegation.

National Policy Work

We continue to input in to the NTRIS strategy which plays a key role in the development of policy regarding the Traveller community in Ireland and the ways that services are provided to Travellers. We have been very active as part of the NTRIS steering committee to ensure that issues that impact on Traveller mental health are on the agenda. We were also part of the working groups of NTRIS such as the working group to bring feuding to an end in the Traveller community and made submissions and engaged in the national steering group meetings.

Oireachtas Committee on issues impacting on the Traveller community

The Traveller Counselling Service made a submission and provided an oral presentation to the committee on the issue of mental health and Travellers. We correspondingly supported a number of local and national Traveller organisations to make submissions and oral presentations on the issue of mental health. These presentations can be seen on Oireachtas TV. The committee is to publish a final report when it finishes its deliberations (submission available on request).

Garda Traveller Advisory Forum

The Traveller Counselling Service has been very involved alongside the Traveller Mediation Service in supporting the establishment of the Garda/Traveller Advisory Forum which appointed Bridget Quilligan as its chair and Kevin Daly as its vice chair. This advisory group has held a number of meetings on the issue of policing and the Traveller community.

Conference on the Impact of Inter-family Violence on Traveller Mental Health

The Traveller Counselling Service, in partnership with the Traveller Mediation Service and Exchange House Ireland held a very successful national conference that explored the impact of conflict on Traveller mental health. As a follow on from the conference a report was launched on Wednesday 4th December in Exchange House.

The report highlights a number of recommendations on how services could enhance their support of Traveller families who are caught up in conflict. The work to realise these recommendations, will continue to be in collaboration with other Traveller organisations throughout 2020.

Launch of National Traveller Mental Health Network

The launch of the National Traveller Mental Health Network, of which the Traveller Counselling Service is a founding member, took place in Galway in February 2019. It was a very successful launch and was very well attended. The NTMHN developed a strategic plan which runs for 2019-2021 (available on request).



Participants at the Launch of National Traveller Mental Health Network, Galway, 2019

Priorities for 2020

- Develop the capacity of the team to develop and expand the Traveller Counselling Service with a particular focus outside Dublin
- Support local groups to put structures in place that will help identify and address the mental health needs of the local Traveller community in their area including the development of mental health surveys
- Support the development of Partnership structures between mental health services and Traveller organisations
- Develop the work with the Travellers in Prison Initiative
- The development of a three-year Strategic plan
- Support the continued development of the NTMHN to advocate on behalf of Travellers with regard to mental health
- Develop and expand policy work through making submissions on key issues in relation to Traveller Mental Health
- Develop a manual on cultural competency that can be used by both Travellers and mainstream service providers
- Develop a training module for workers engaging with Travellers who are self-harming and/or suicidal
- Develop a training course on community mental health for Travellers
- Develop counselling supports for Travellers who are involved in inter-family violence
- Reach full compliance with the Governance Code

Conclusion

2019 has been a very busy and at times a challenging year, however, with the support and commitment of the team and the board of directors and funders, the Traveller Counselling Service has managed to address these challenges and are now in a position to go forward on a much stronger footing.

This report has just touched on just some of the key areas that the Traveller Counselling Service has been involved with throughout the year, however, it does not represent the huge range of activities and work that all of the team and board members have been involved with throughout 2019.

On behalf of the Traveller Counselling Service, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff, the counselling team and the Board of Directors for all their hard work and commitment throughout 2019 and for making it a very successful year.

A special thanks also to our supporters and funders, the local Traveller organisations with whom we work, the Parish of the Travelling People, St Stephens Green Trust, Tusla, the THU, the HSE and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. We look forward to your continued support in 2020.