



The lives of Gypsies and Travellers

in West Yorkshire

West Yorkshire
Health and Care Partnership





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Who are Leeds GATE?

Leeds Gypsy & Traveller Exchange, known more commonly as Leeds GATE, is a vibrant and brave grassroots organisation led by Gypsy and Traveller people in partnership with others in and across West Yorkshire.

Our aim is to improve the quality of life for Gypsies and Travellers through improving access to homes, health, education, employment, and inclusion in society.

Originally founded by community members in 2003, Leeds GATE tackles these issues across West Yorkshire. We also advocate for the community at a national level through partnerships, capacity building and systemic work.

Ultimately, our vision is a world in which all Gypsies and Travellers have the opportunity to thrive and make choices as equal, valued and respected members of society.

How to use this resource...



This educational tool aims to give you an insight into the lives of Gypsies and Travellers across West Yorkshire. It highlights some of the health inequalities faced by our communities and invites you to think about the part you could play to make things better.

This resource comes in three parts to support your learning.

READ

this educational document **(Part A)**

WATCH

the video using the code below **(Part B)**

WORKSHOP

follow the workshop plan **(Part C)**

We would advise you to read this document first (Part A), then watch the video below using the QR code (Part B), then complete the workshop which can be found in the corresponding document (Part C).

To use a QR code simply scan it using the camera of your phone or tablet camera.



Who are Gypsies and Travellers?



'Gypsies and Travellers' are words used to describe a range of people from several ethnic minorities and some people who identify as cultural or trade groups. The terms hide a lot of history. In the past, these groups have been put together by professionals because they were all nomadic – which means they travel as a way of life.

At Leeds GATE we work with Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers. Other than this brief introduction this resource won't cover Roma, New Traveller, Show people or Bargee communities.



Romany Gypsies

Romany Gypsies, are a group or groups of people who left India over a thousand years ago and dispersed across the globe. Along the way they were defined (usually by others) as being 'Egyptian' and this has become shortened to Gypsy. Gypsy people began appearing in UK records in the 16th century, and have settled here ever since.



Romany is the word that Gypsy people in England and Wales apply to themselves, hence the term 'Romany Gypsy'. Romany Gypsies are recognised as an ethnic minority group in UK law (Race Relations Act 2000 and Equalities Act 2010).



Irish Travellers

Irish Travellers (or Pavee as they refer to themselves) have been a distinct ethnic group within Irish society for over 500 years. They are traditionally a nomadic culture and have a distinct identity, heritage, language and culture to settled communities in Ireland.

Irish Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority group in UK law (Race Relations Act 2000 and Equalities Act 2010).



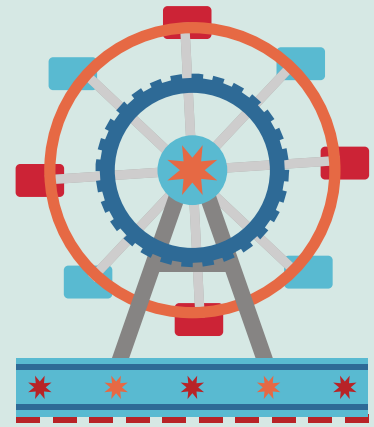
Roma

The word 'Roma' is used as a catch-all term for European 'Gypsies'. There are several distinct groups of people, including Roma, Manouche and Sinti in Central and Eastern Europe, and the Jeniche people of Switzerland and Germany. During the past 50 years increasing numbers of Roma people, particularly from Eastern Europe, have migrated to the UK.



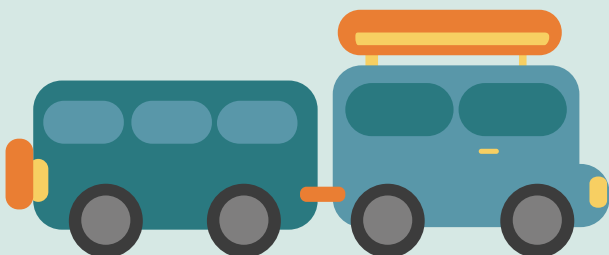
Showmen

Families with a tradition of living and working in travelling fairs are usually described as Showmen. This group are regarded as a trade group.



Bargees / Boaters

Bargees is a term used to describe people and families who live on the canals and waterways across the UK.



New Travellers

New Travellers is a term is used to describe people who live a travelling lifestyle but who are not ethnically defined as Gypsies, Scottish Gypsy Travellers or Irish Travellers. Some New Traveller families have lived a travelling lifestyle for several generations and no longer regard themselves as part of the 'settled' population.

Find out more...



Learning about the history of the communities we work with help us build our base knowledge and understanding. Scan the above code to watch 'Roads from the past' an excellent animated short film.



REFLECTION TIME: *WHO WE ARE*

Take five minutes to reflect & answer the following questions, you may find it useful to write down your answers...

- When you think about Gypsies and Travellers what thoughts and pictures come to mind? **Are they positive or negative?**
- Before reading this, who did you think Gypsies and Travellers were?
- What are the sources of news and information do you have about Gypsies and Traveller life?

Gypsies and Travellers across West Yorkshire

Gypsies and Travellers have a long and rich history across West Yorkshire.

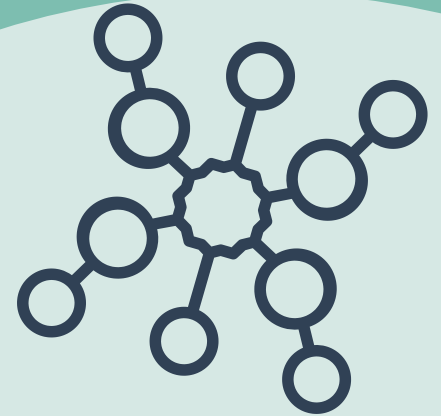
The first written reference to Gypsies and Travellers in Leeds can be found in the Parish register of 1572, with the baptism in Leeds Parish Church of Elizabeth Smawlyeye.

We can see the legacy of Gypsy Traveller encampments dating back to the 17th Century in street names across the area – Gypsy Lane in Middleton or Gypsy Hill in Woodlesford. Lee Gap Horse Fair is a traditional Gypsy Traveller Fair still held in Tingley, it was granted a royal charter in 1136.

Today, it is estimated that there are 7,000 Gypsies and Travellers living across West Yorkshire in houses, on the local authority provided sites, private sites and roadside encampments. Our communities are bonded by shared ethnicities, culture, language, trades and history.



Community Strengths & Assets



Before we take a dive into what the research has to say about the health outcomes of Gypsy and Traveller people we want to take this opportunity to highlight the strengths, of which there are many, that Leeds GATE members have uncovered during our near 20 years of work.

Family Orientated

Firstly our communities identify they are very family orientated and often live in small family units wherein people who are sick and disabled are nearly always cared for. Most people have a strong family support network. However, it is important not to assume this is the case; often family members care for people but do not identify themselves as carers.

Resourceful

Secondly, Gypsy and Traveller people are often incredibly adaptable and resourceful people who are often highly attuned to their surroundings. They are able to communicate their needs effectively despite challenges and barriers such as low literacy and racism.

Experts in Health Inclusion

Gypsies and Traveller people have a wealth of knowledge about what good health inclusion looks like gleaned from generations of systemic exclusion and racism. We encourage any professional reading this guide to engage with and hire Gypsy and Traveller service users and those with lived experience of racism and health exclusion, seek their knowledge and experience in your efforts to make services better and more accessible for everyone.



Accommodation

Not all Gypsies live roadside. The 2011 census told us that **61 % of Gypsies and Travellers surveyed lived in a house or bungalow**. Some families have lived in housing for generations, but maintain their cultural identity, and travel seasonally. Other families feel that the move into housing is due to a shortage of available sites and stopping places. Not being able to access healthcare or education is also widely given as a reason for moving into housing.

Across our region, we have **5** local authority provided Gypsy and Traveller Sites with a total of **134** pitches (or family homes) available. Some sites are badly in need of refurbishment, leading to health problems associated with poor quality accommodation, such as breathing difficulties and joint pain.

Current accommodation needs assessments produced by local authorities for our region say we need to build over **200 homes** on sites to accommodate those who need a home.

A 2021 research study* found 1696 Gypsy and Traveller families are currently on a waiting list for a home nationwide, but there were only 59 available plots across the country.

MYTH BUSTER!

Gypsies and Travellers DO pay tax and pay rent and utilities for their pitches. Often rent is more expensive than the equivalent social housing!

*<https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/planning/new-research-shows-huge-unmet-need-for-pitches-on-traveller-sites-in-england/>

The view of accommodation for Gypsies & Travellers across West Yorkshire...

5

dedicated
Sites

134

Pitches/
family
homes

80

Families
living
roadside

200

homes still
needed



Negotiated Stopping

Life on the roadsides can be tough, without access to rubbish collection, sanitation, running water, mains gas or electricity. Frequent evictions can have an impact on people's ability to access basic services such as GP's and schools. Evictions and racism towards encampments also impact people's mental health and expose people to trauma.

At any one time, we have at least **80 families** living on the roadside across West Yorkshire – these are often referred to as 'unauthorised encampments'. These are families who are actively travelling, living a nomadic life. Due to a lack of available land for them to stay on, they are often stopping on land they do not own (hence the term unauthorised). Most encampments are evicted quickly by local authorities or private landowners. Many of these families are on long waiting lists for a place on a local authority site. Evictions are costly to the Local Authority.

In Leeds, the local authority has pioneered a scheme called **Negotiated Stopping** where they negotiate with families on encampments to enable a short stop providing certain conditions are met on both sides. Scan the code below to find out more...

MYTH BUSTER!

Travelling as a way of life or stopping in a temporary encampment are often wrongly reported as "illegal". However, there is a disproportionate lack of sites and safe stopping places for Gypsies and Travellers.





“You kind of grow up with a fear that you could go to bed and in the morning you might be dragged off by the council or they’d come with a digger in the night and dug a trench around you so you couldn’t get off.”

- Testimony from a Leeds GATE Member living roadside.



REFLECTION TIME: *WHERE WE LIVE*

This is another opportunity to take 5 minutes to reflect on the information you've just learnt about accommodation provision for Gypsies and Travellers.

Ask yourself the following questions?

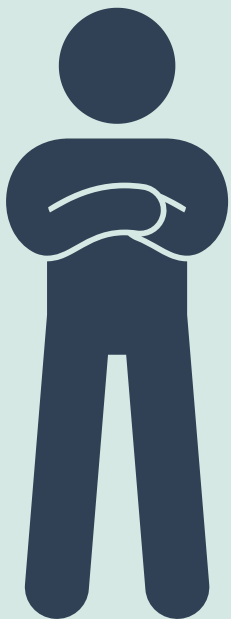
- **Before reading this guide - where and how did you think Gypsies and Travellers lived in the UK?**
- **Do you understand the difference between site, yard, and stopping places? If not, consider re-reading the accommodation section of this resource.**
- **How do you think the living conditions some Gypsies and Travellers live in could present barriers to accessing health services?**



Health

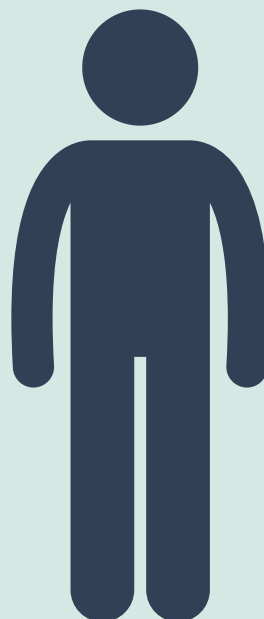
The age profile of Gypsy and Traveller people is in stark contrast to the age profile of the general population. The Leeds Baseline Census of Gypsies and Travellers in 2005 found that half the population was under 25 and only 2.66% were over 60. The average life expectancy was 50 years of age. Gypsies and Travellers are reported to have the poorest health outcomes of any ethnic minority.*

Life Expectancy



50

The latest data we have shows the average life expectancy of a Gypsy or Traveller person is **50 Years old.**



79

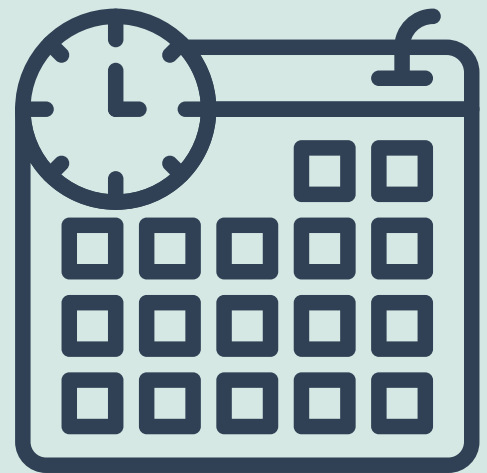
Comparatively the average life expectancy of a Gorja person (Gypsy term meaning a non-Gypsy or Traveller) at this time is **79 Years old.**

The Leeds baseline census reflected the national picture; that Gypsies and Travellers were more likely to have a long-term condition, more likely to be affected by suicide, more likely to have experienced the death of a child, less likely to be engaged in NHS screening programmes and more likely to have symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Low Rates of Literacy

Due to poor educational opportunities, the rates of literacy are low across the Gypsy and Traveller community with many people not being able to read or write at all.

Low literacy affects the health literacy of Gypsies and Travellers and it can be impossible for individuals to engage with services that are opt-in, rely on letters, written invitations and more recently, digital access to services. It is not uncommon to find patients that have been referred to secondary care services multiple times but never get there as they cannot navigate the systems.



REFLECTION TIME: *WHAT WE NEED*

Once again, here is a chance to take five minutes out to reflect & answer the following questions...

- Think of the last time you accessed a frontline health service, where and when did you rely on literacy to navigate the service?
- What are the consequences to a group of people not being able to access frontline healthcare services?
- Why do you think these health inequalities persist?
- As a health care professional - what does this make you feel?

Gypsy and Traveller communities have some of the worst outcomes of any ethnic group in the UK across a huge range of areas, including education, health, employment, criminal justice and hate crime.'

- 2019 review by the Parliamentary Women and Equalities Select Committee

MYTH BUSTER!

Being a Gypsy or a Traveller are not lifestyle choices or labels chosen because people move around. They are protected ethnic groups under UK law.



Education

Many older Gypsies and Travellers didn't get the opportunity to go to school due to travelling and because of racism within schools. Older Gypsies and Travellers might not be able to read and write but rely heavily on word of mouth and relationships to navigate services. Most people under 40 will have had some experience in school, with many people completing primary school but not secondary school.

There is a growing movement for change that is challenging our education systems and increasing numbers of Gypsy and Traveller people who attend university.

Qualifications

Nationally, **Gypsies and Travellers are much less likely to have post-16 qualifications than the general population at 40% compared to 78%.*** Gypsies and Irish Travellers have the highest rates of exclusions from schools than any other ethnicity.**

Racism

Unfortunately, for Gypsies and Travellers racism is still a common experience in education and many young people become elective home educated as a result.

Employment

Many people in the community are self-employed and do trades they learn from their family and community such as gardening, tree work and tarmacking.



REFLECTION TIME: *OUR EXPERIENCES*

This time we invite you to take some time to reflect on the information you've just read about Education and Employment and the exclusion Gypsies and Travellers face.

Ask yourself the following questions?

- **How do you think negative experiences in school during childhood effect the health of an individual, how do you think this effects a whole community over generations?**
- **How do you think negative experiences in school could affect people's engagement with health services?**
- **Think of and write down ways your service could be made more inclusive of different education and literacy levels.**

Social Exclusion



Racism and discrimination are cited by Gypsies and Travellers in West Yorkshire as one of the top 2 factors affecting their health and mental health. Leeds GATE's members describe how this impacts their access to education, goods and services, the way they move through public space (being unduly followed by security guards or stopped by the police are common experiences) and their healthcare.

It is common for Gypsies and Travellers to experience refusal of registration at a GP practice because they cannot prove their address, despite there being clear guidance to say they should be registered. Through our work we know of recent examples where services have refused to visit our members at home because they live in a caravan, citing a perceived risk because they are Gypsies and Travellers.

44% of British adults openly express negative attitudes against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.* There are strong links between these experiences of hate crime and the over-representation of mental health and suicide within the community.

Leeds GATE produced a report in 2020 called 'Don't Be Beat' outlining recommendations for professionals looking to understand and improve the mental health outcomes of Gypsies and Travellers.



It starts with you...



Providing safe, holistic and equitable care starts with you. As part of continued professional development, you are encouraged to think about how experiences different to your own can improve your everyday practice. Compare any preconceptions you have about Gypsies and Travellers and what you've read in this resource. [Here are some tips for including Gypsies and Travellers in your work.](#)

DON'T *STEREOTYPE*

Practice active listening, ask open questions and give information and time consistently to build trust. Think of the whole person.

Many Gypsies and Travellers live in extended family units and manage large amounts of unpaid care responsibilities. Flexibility and opportunism could lead to building great relationships across whole families. Be prepared to think of how you can offer additional support, for example around reading and writing, to get the person what they need.

UNDERSTAND *STRENGTHS* & NEEDS

THINK *SYSTEMS!*

Think about the many systems you operate within in your work. Use your voice in the rooms Gypsy and Traveller people will most likely not have access to.

**BE AN AGENT OF CHANGE
AGAINST HEALTH INEQUALITIES!**

Areas of change

Here are some suggested areas to focus on and questions to ask when taking steps to improve Health access for marginalised groups.

Training

- How can explore & address biases within your services?
- How do you engage people with lived experience?
- Think about your skill gaps – how can other organisation approaches help you?

Processes

- Do you include enough time for practitioners to build trust?
- What could you do better to ensure a person can better engage?

Data

- Who is missing from and who is attending your service? Why?
- Are Gypsy and Traveller ethnicities recorded?
- What other holistic information could you begin to record?

Continue the conversation!

This resource is just the beginning. To continue learning more about Gypsy and Traveller communities, find good sources of information, especially those that champion voices from the community. When consuming media that seeks to “represent” the community, consider the impact of the portrayals offered continue to feed the cycle of misrepresentation and racism.

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