Barrow Cadbury Trust

FRIENDS, FAMILIES & TRAVELLERS

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# Trapped in the Turnstile:

## Understanding the Impacts of the Criminal Justice System on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Young Adults and their Families

**Friends, Families & Travellers**

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*"I think if everyone tried to be a Traveller in our shoes for one day they would see how it is for us…*

*…You try and book a table, or go to a pub or a shop and as soon as they hear your accent you're not welcome, 'we are full, we are closed'…all that....This has a massive effect on us, every day, and all the years of discrimination my parents went through, and it makes you feel so hated and so upset and then you're like angry and you think what is the point of trying?"*

**—Irish Traveller, aged 24, currently in the criminal justice system**

## Acknowledgements

This report was compiled by Sam Worrall, Criminal Justice Policy Officer at Friends, Families and Travellers.

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*"Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are among the most marginalised in the UK, and are vastly over-represented in the incarcerated population.*

*We warmly welcome this report, with its wealth of contributions by young Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. We trust that this important report marks the start of increased understanding of their views, experiences and cultures, improvements in criminal justice responses and a decrease in numbers imprisoned.*

**—Debbie Pippard, Director of Programmes, Barrow Cadbury Trust**

# Contents

## Key Findings

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities face additional barriers throughout the criminal justice system (CJS); inequalities in mental health and diagnosed conditions, lack of appropriate educational opportunities and no knowledge of systems, among other factors. This report is designed to offer insight into the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities relating to all stages of the criminal justice system, to help improve knowledge and understanding of how to approach policy and practice for people from these communities. The report draws on primary data collection from surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. The insight and voices of members of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities provide the key evidence for policy makers, service providers and commissioners working across the criminal justice system, to ensure that the guidance authentically reflects experiences and needs.

We found:

- Alternatives to custody were not considered for the majority of cases related to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller individuals.
- Lack of support throughout the custodial journey for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and their families.
- Lack of accessible and culturally appropriate support provided for mental health needs.
- Prison and probation/parole staff did not have the cultural competency required to work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller individuals.
- Lack of resources and staff capacity for delivering equalities requirements for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners.
- Prisoners did not have easy access to culturally appropriate education and/or practical courses and workshops to support them in prison.
- Lack of consistency across the prison estate for regular Gypsy, Roma and Traveller forums or meet ups.
- Lack of awareness and information about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and significant calendar events around prisons.
- Lack of consistency across the prison estate, in managing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoner needs. The Ministry of Justice must prioritise its Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Strategy to ensure a level playing field across prisons.

## Recommendations

- **Offer effective alternatives to remand for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller offenders.** Instead of holding an individual on remand, the prison system should offer programmes to support diversion, improve mental health, and offer meaningful community service.

- **Provide effective signposting for individuals at every stage of the criminal justice pathway.** From the point of being accused of a crime, through custodial sentence and including post-custody (after prison). Ensure individuals are put in contact with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller-friendly legal support and other organisations who offer support throughout the CJS. Ensure police stations and courts are signposting to trusted organisations.

- **Offer programmes of support to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners to support future diversion**, and improve mental health.

- **Ensure individuals receive mental health support at all stages**. Develop a consistent model across the criminal justice system, especially in the prison estate, such as pastoral support, and/or a programme of community mentor listeners. Remove barriers that prevent individuals from accessing this support by, for example, allowing pastoral care to be available to those on basic mental health support.

- **Co-produce accessible resources** such as videos for young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and their families.

- **Develop cultural competency training for staff** including probation/parole staff across CJS. Explore co-produced options such as Q&A sessions with community members and display boards raising awareness.

- **Provide specific resources** for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to be available in forums and libraries.

- **Ensure funding** is targeted to increase Equalities teams and ensure those in post are committed to equality across all communities.

- **Provide culturally appropriate education and additional practical courses for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners.** Offer educational workshops and programmes such as those run by the Shannon Trust, ensuring extra support is in place to encourage young people to enrol.

- **Hold regular Gypsy, Roma and Traveller forums in prison.** Celebrate key community events, create safe spaces, and encourage prisoner interaction and other activities. Raise awareness of the communities to non-community prisoners and prison staff. Co-produce the events programme with community prisoners.

- **Include regular evaluation and monitoring of all of the above** as part of the delivery of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller strategy for the criminal justice system.

## Recommendations for the Ministry of Justice draft Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Strategy

Following conversations with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners and families, the following must be addressed in the upcoming Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Strategy:

- **Encouraging Romany Gypsy, Roma or Irish Traveller people to disclose ethnic status, on entering prison**. Our engagement sessions revealed that young people from these communities are much more willing than older community members, and indeed not scared, to disclose ethnic status on the Prison National Offender Management Information System (p-NOMIS). This positive change should be encouraged by consistent good practice and creating trusted relationships between Equalities Officers and prisoners.

- **Access to education and meaningful occupation in prison.** Young people revealed that they would be willing to take part and embark upon education and other practical courses to support them with resettlement. However, the education needs to be appropriate, focusing on practical skills and learning, rather than simply maths and English. Some of the barriers that prevent young people from physically attending education or workshops include prolonged lockdown, and staff unwillingness to unlock or move people across sites to locations where educational sessions are taking place. Prisoners need to be given the flexibility to attend sessions in addition to other prison activities, rather than having to choose between 'showers or education', or education or forums, or education or paid work. Prisoners need to be supported and encouraged to make informed choices.

- **Healthcare inequalities**. Many young people spoke of diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health conditions, and several prisoners stated that medication for conditions such as ADHD had not been given to them. They spoke of the need to 'do something bad' before mental health staff would act, and the only support they had to rely on was from fellow community members, often older people, who helped them with depression and anger management. Prisoners, including young people, should be offered mental health support, in a culturally appropriate manner.

# Introduction

The following report and recommendations were evidenced from engagement with young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, aged 18-25 years, and their families. This was a two-year project for the Transition to Adulthood Alliance, part of the Barrow Cadbury Trust.[1]

People from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities face systemic marginalisation and discrimination, across the whole of society and from statutory services. Within the criminal justice system (CJS), children from these communities are overrepresented. In England and Wales, just 0.1% of the population identify as 'Romany Gypsy' or 'Irish Traveller', yet Gypsy and Irish Traveller children make up 12% of Secure Training Centres (STCs) and 7% of Young Offender Institutions (YOIs). For example, 17% of the specialist YOI Keppel Unit in Yorkshire are from these communities.[2]

Data collected on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the CJS is inconsistent, creating challenges for the provision and commission of services.[3] Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) is aware of official records often including a significant undercount; Gypsies and Travellers are often less likely to ask for support in any stage of the CJS, and community voices are seldom listened to. Data specifically recording Gypsy, Roma and Traveller experiences of the CJS has only been collected recently in the Lammy Review,[4] and the data collected for this report was predominantly quantitative (based on numerical records).

The purpose of this project was to add qualitative evidence to this numerical data by speaking to young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities about their experiences of the CJS. Specifically, we wanted to hear about each stage of the CJS, as outlined in T2A's Framework. A significant part of this engagement was conducted inside prisons across England and Wales.

At the time of writing, the Ministry of Justice is working on His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) Gypsy Roma and Traveller Strategy. Therefore, this

[1] For more information on T2A, please see: Transition to Adulthood

[2] The Traveller Movement (2017) Sentencing GTR Children

[3] Women and Equalities Committee (2019) Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

[4] Lammy Review (2017) An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System

project is timely, with the potential to influence the strategy, by providing evidence of areas for concern and making recommendations for improvement.

## The Project Methodology

FFT first carried out a literature review linking evidence from existing reports, policy and other projects with the T2A Pathway. To conduct this project, a steering group was formed, made up of two Irish Traveller people, four Romany Gypsy people and two New Travellers. The steering group met throughout the project to ensure the right questions were asked in the initial survey and questionnaire, based upon key issues identified from the literature review.

Three community organisations, TravellerSpace (Devon and Cornwall), York Travellers Trust (Yorkshire) and Travelling Ahead (Wales) acted as project partners, supporting engagement with community members across England and Wales.

Two videos were filmed by community members and shared across our networks and social media, to help publicise the project in an accessible format for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

The survey was published as an online tool. Individual interviews were carried out using paper copies by Service Delivery staff from FFT and our project partners. The results of the survey were analysed, from which a series of deep dive questions were formulated. These were shared with the steering group and project partners for comment. The purpose of these questions was for use in focus group sessions, and the aim was to encourage deeper discussions around each T2A Pathway stage.

# Introduction to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities

The term Gypsy, Roma and Traveller encompasses various distinct communities.

These include Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, New Travellers, Boaters, Showmen and Roma. The term Romany Gypsy may also encompass English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsy Travellers, Welsh Gypsies, and Romani people more widely.[5]

These communities are sometimes referred to as 'GRT', and the use of this abbreviation presents similar issues as the use of 'BAME', as it arguably fails to reflect the true diversity of the communities referenced.

For the purposes of this report, we have avoided its use. However, you may find the term used in other policy documents. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have traditionally lived nomadic lives in the UK, although members of these communities have increasingly moved into bricks and mortar housing. The 2021 census for England and Wales recorded 78% of Gypsies and Travellers as living in houses, flats, maisonettes or apartments.[6]

The table below offers some basic background information on these communities.

[5] GOV UK (2022) Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller ethnicity summary. Section 2.

[6] 2021 Census

| | Ethnicity | Arrival in England | Language | Accommodation type |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Romany Gypsies** | Historically originating in northern India, Romany Gypsies have been in the UK for many centuries. | Pre-16th century. | Romany Gypsies speak English and many also speak a Romani dialect to varying levels of fluency. | Around 75% of live in housing, and 25% live on sites, in caravans or chalets, or roadside. |
| **Roma** | Historically originated in Northern India and settled in Europe (including Romania, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland) before migrating to the UK more recently. Culturally, Roma individuals may belong to any of ~40 different groups/tribes. | Small numbers since 1945, with a number of Roma seeking asylum in the 1990s, and early 2000s, then a growth in population following EU expansion after 2004. | Most Roma people speak one of the many Romani dialects as a first language and a European origin country's as a second language. Fluency in second language, as well as in English varies greatly. | The vast majority of Roma people live in housing, although there are disproportionate levels of homelessness and overcrowding. |
| **Irish Travellers** | Irish Travellers originated in Ireland as a distinct and separate ethnic group from the general Irish population recorded since the 12th century. | Recorded from the 18th century. | Irish Travellers speak English, and some speak Gaelic/Irish. Many Irish Travellers also speak Gaelic derived Gammon or Cant. | Around 75% of live in housing, and 25% live on sites, in caravans or chalets, or roadside. |
| **Travelling Showmen** | Anyone who travels to hold shows, circuses and fairs can be a Showman. Many families have led this way of life for generations and many have Romany heritage. | According to the National Fairground Archive, the first recorded charter was granted to King's Lynn in 1204. | Showmen primarily speak English. | Most Showmen live on yards in the winter months and travel during the summer months. |
| **New Travellers** | 'New Traveller' can describe people from any background who choose to lead a nomadic way of life, and their descendants. | Rooted in the free festivals of the 1960s, but people of all backgrounds have practiced nomadism throughout history. | New Travellers primarily speak English. | New Travellers lead a nomadic way of life – in vans, mobile homes, caravans and a small proportion are horse drawn. |
| **Liveaboard Boaters** | Anyone who lives on a boat, from all walks of life and backgrounds. | People have lived and worked on boats since canals were built in England in the 18th century. | Liveaboard Boaters primarily speak English. | Boaters live on narrowboats, barges or river cruisers, whether on a home mooring, a winter mooring or continuously cruising on a canal, or in a marina. |

In the 2021 UK census, 172,465 people from Romany Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller communities in England and Wales disclosed their ethnicity.[7] However, census engagement is negatively impacted by a significant trust gap between these communities, state institutions and public services. It is therefore likely that the official census record is an underestimation of the population size as are the figures for these populations in the criminal justice system.

Historically, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have faced persecution across the UK and Europe, with every modern EU state having anti-Gypsy laws at some point. In the 16th century a law was passed in England that allowed the state to imprison, execute or banish anyone that was perceived to be a Gypsy.[8] Historians estimate that during the Second World War, between 200,000 and 500,000 Roma and Sinti people were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators in an act known as the Roma Genocide.[9] A number of discriminatory acts have also affected Irish Traveller and New Traveller communities, such as the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994[10] which facilitated evictions of, and gave police additional powers against, unauthorised encampments.

This history is felt keenly by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and contributes to the lack of trust in state structures and bodies. Today, the UK Government accepts that 'Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are among the most disadvantaged people in the country and have poor outcomes in key areas such as health and education'.[11]

Therefore, these realities were considered when engaging with prisoners, who may have experienced years of mistrust with regard to the authorities and the CJS in general.

[7] Office for National Statistics (2021) Ethnic Group (detailed)

[8] National Archives, 'Act concerning 'Egyptians', 1530'

[9] Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, The Roma Genocide

[10] Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

[11] UK Government (2017) (GRT0059)

# Findings

## Prison Focus Groups

FFT visited 19 prisons, holding prisoner focus groups, and speaking to prison staff. Often, some people were initially reluctant to engage or talk about their experiences within a focus group. Some prisoners felt that talking about the challenges they had or providing suggestions for change, would not make any difference to the system or for future prisoners. However, once FFT shared previous experiences of engagement and the impact it had made in the past, confidence rose and prisoners began to share their experiences. Participants demonstrated peer-to-peer support for one another by being part of the group and this helped encourage group members to join in discussions.

Common to all groups was the observation that no one had previously engaged with these participants to ask their views or find out about their experiences of the CJS—participants added that nobody had shown any interest in trying to address the way they had been treated. Notably, each session concluded with thanks from participants, “for listening”. Many participants offered to help with future projects. Participants also offered to become representatives for their communities within the prison system, and several people volunteered to help coordinate and encourage other prisoners to take part in forums and other events. Almost all participants wanted to find out the results from this project and any impact it has for their communities in the CJS.

Feedback from staff at the 19 prisons was also very positive. Prison staff felt they had learnt more about Gypsy and Traveller communities and gained better understanding during sessions than ever before. An additional positive outcome of a focus group in Devon was the valuable links made between an advocacy and support worker from project partner TravellerSpace, and prisoners in the area. This liaison has continued post-project, offering support to community member prisoners and their families.

Every young person (aged 18 – 25 years) engaged in prison settings was either from the Romany Gypsy, or Irish Traveller communities (with the exception of one young woman being from the Roma community). In total, there were 25 young Gypsy or Irish Traveller men across adult and Youth Offending Institutes (YOI).

Focus group questions were grouped under themes and the findings below have been presented accordingly.

## Experiences growing up

This section explores formative experiences during childhood that may have contributed to young people becoming involved with crime and the criminal justice system. In the initial survey distributed, respondents raised several issues, including growing up in care and having not received an education, and how they felt this was linked to contact with the criminal justice system. Respondents included negative and often traumatic experiences with the police and the law, and how these shaped opinions of the law from a very young age. The evidence below demonstrates how interactions with police and services from a young age can influence the choices people make.

Young people spoke of how they were always warned by their parents to 'stay away' from the police, keep quiet and keep their heads down. Messaging in wider society suggests the police service is there to protect from harm and keep society safe. However, young people from Romany and Traveller communities described a diametrically oppositional experience:

*"We were told not to speak to [the police] and if we did it would lead to trouble. But they used to follow us every time we left site so we were scared of them, and we would always run away, to stay safe."*

*"As a kid, I just thought [non-Gypsies] and police were just there to take us away. Into care if we were kids, or to put the adults in prison."*

*"As a child you were taught that the police were the bad people, we were brought up to tell lies to protect ourselves and our families and that the police wanted to take our trailers off us, our homes."*

Participants were asked if as young people, they experienced other family members serving a prison sentence. Every participant across all focus groups had experience of growing up with at least one family member in prison. Young people talked about it being 'normal' or 'standard' with multiple relatives from immediate or extended family being in and out of prison almost continuously:

*"My mum, dad, uncle, grandad…all been in when I was a kid...at one point my older brother had to step up to be the parent cos they were all in at once."*

*"My dad, brothers, cousins, yeah all at some point, we used to visit them."*

In terms of how this affected growing up, recalling imprisonment was commonplace. It was normalised and not seen as anything other than an inconvenience. Sometimes prison was even romanticised, and although as children they may not have been aware of this, the effect was damaging none the less:

*"I think I blocked it out a lot. My dad was in and out, he wasn't really around at all, but it felt normal I guess as other people in my family were in prison and out all the time."*

*"I had an older brother inside and I remember thinking how interesting it sounded...like quite exciting... I think I wanted to be cool like him, silly really cos now I been inside I know what it's like and it's not cool."*

Participants talked about personal experiences of contact with the police and how this developed increasingly negative attitudes towards the law as a result. Every participant had personal stories of harassment, site raids, evictions, and witnessing family members being assaulted or arrested. These experiences compounded what they had been told by adults while growing up and impacted negatively on mental health, creating traumatic memories that have never found resolution or closure.

Consider the example of the Dale Farm eviction in Essex, 2011, and how children witnessing and being involved in such an event can have lasting negative impact on their mental health.[12]

[12] https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/oct/20/dale-farm-families-in-squalor

"*We always got pulled over as soon as we left the site and [the police] always hang around outside waiting…or they will often drive onto sites, drive around and then leave, just feels intimidating.*"

*"What you see happening and what happens to you makes you fear them or makes you angry or both, so you react that way."*

*"We moved around a lot, so we had contact with police a lot...the hate felt overwhelming. The police turn up with extra precautions that are just silly, and it was scary when you are a kid. They would turn up in the night to move us on, we were living roadside cos all the sites were shut down…my mum didn't sleep much a lot of the time and nor did we cos we were just waiting for them to come."*

*"I saw police restrain and hit family members when I was little."*

Participants spoke of the first time they were arrested or encountered the police, with the majority saying they were around 12 or 13 years of age. It is suggested that the reason for most of these contact points was the participant's identification as a Gypsy or Traveller, rather than because of the participant having broken the law:

*"I was arrested first when I was 12, for fighting and my 17-year-old brother was too, and he got a prison sentence for that. We were fighting against someone calling us names. We were fighting together and they were against us."*

*"I grew up living on site and sometimes roadside, and we got pulled over and moved on or hassled all the time, but then when I got married she was a Gorger [non-Gypsy] girl so I moved into a house with her in a different town and that was when I really realised the difference because after that I never got pulled or stopped or hassled or even seen the police for ages, so that was an eye opener to me."*

*"My first offence was for violence because I was being called the P word...I was being racially abused and stood up for myself, but none of this got considered at court."*

*"Well the thing is, I am a right hot head, I know it, I know it's what gets me into trouble all the time…people find out I'm a Traveller and then they push me into getting angry and you know this time the guy was calling me and my family names,*

*like P**ey and other things and I just have to react cos I was brought up to fight and to protect my family, like we all were so I lashed out."*

## The Care System and Education

Official figures from 2017/18 report that Gypsy and Roma children were 2.11 times more likely to live in care than children from other ethnic groups. In the same year, child Travellers of Irish heritage were 2.55 times more likely to live in care than children from all other ethnic groups.[13]

In focus group discussions on growing up in state care, the majority of young people had not had any experience of this, but for those that did, these experiences created feelings of anger and hate towards the system. Notably, experiences of the care system were common amongst the older participants. This could reflect recent changes in social service practice.

*"There was an order being made against me by the social services, and I was playing outside one day then suddenly the police came and surrounded me to be taken away from my mum...they kept saying we are doing this to protect you and for your stability, but that was crap, it just made me even more angry and hate the system even more."*

*"I wasn't but my brother and sister were taken into care. I never knew why, and I never wanted to talk about it and the effect it had on me 'til I came to prison. Then I was in talking therapy and it helped to talk about it."*

*"Yeah, when I was 12 or 13, my mum had to do a course to get me back."*

Being taken into care also meant that these young people were at risk of being exposed to experiences they had not encountered before, which set them on the pathway to being criminalised. These young people also felt the negative impact of being taken away from their extended family. Having previously lived with family on site and in trailers, moving to bricks and mortar accommodation, and sharing this with strangers was a difficult transition.

[13] https://www.cypnow.co.uk/content/research/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-children-in-child-welfare-services-in-england

Previous suspicious and discriminatory interactions with people from outside the communities further added to this trauma:

*"I think I got worse after I'd been in care, I was hanging around with a load of others I would not usually have contact with and they got me into drugs and fighting and robbing."*

The majority of young people spoken with had attended some mainstream schooling until around 12 years old, and had a basic level of literacy. It is traditional for young men from Gypsy and Traveller communities to leave school and start working in family businesses. The young people who took part in this project had bigger aspirations, to earn a good living, and wanting better for themselves and their families. However, the negative impact education experiences had on the ability to progress became clear:

*"It was painful. I didn't know what discrimination was when I was young though. There used to be a…Travellers Education lady; she would visit about three times a week, but that all stopped...I think people think that Travellers don't want or need to be able to read and write."*

*"It was just hassle at school; our lifestyle is not in books, so I'm not interested in what school teaches you."*

*"I got expelled cos I was always angry and fighting but that is because I was always being provoked cos I am a Traveller, and the other kids provoke you into fighting."*

*"I got bullied, the other kids were nasty, the teachers were okay, but they didn't stop all the bullying, and I left when I was 12 to go and work with my dad."*

Speaking on how these experiences informed interactions with the law, most of the young people felt their previous experiences were a factor in their journey towards the criminal justice pathway:

*"It feels like society doesn't let us dream big, it seems our lives are controlled, and we can't achieve like others can."*

*"Actually, I think we are all traumatised you know, by the things we saw and what happened to us growing up and the way we get treated every day in society and in the papers. I think we are all traumatised, but we can't get any help."*

*"You try and fit in just to have some normality in life but it's too hard and there are too many barriers in the way. You just have to learn to live with the discrimination."*

One young man highlighted the interaction of systems that further compound traumatic experiences:

*"So, we got our own code and our own way of dealing with things and we don't see why we should respect any Gorger law cos what do we get from them...no respect, no acceptance, not left to live our culture, just being squashed down all the time. It's like our whole way of life is criminalised, taking away our sites, our stopping places, banned from travelling through counties, new laws so we can't deal scrap or door to door trade, all the things we been doing and working on for years and generations, my dad and my whole family, so how are we expected to make a way in life if it's all taken away from us? It just makes us feel like f*** it what's the point?"*

Another young person reflected on travelling, nomadism and exclusion:

*"I feel like our culture is being wiped out and its more difficult to earn a living. You can go legit, lots of us do but it's harder and for us it's easier to not go legit and do things that earn you better money."*

*"In society we are looked at as the most hated people. We can't book venues and there are still signs in windows around here [banning Travellers]."*

*"There is bad in every community and if you are a scumbag then you're a scumbag but we all get looked at like that. We are always blamed for everything in the area going wrong "it was the Gypsies" like we are scapegoats."*

## Sentencing and Custody

This section explores how these young people experienced prosecution, sentencing and custody. It demonstrates how their experiences compare with those of young people from non-Travelling communities. When asked, participants often felt they had not had a fair trial and believed things had been prejudiced against them in court, due to their ethnicity.

*"It was my first offence, but I was told by the magistrate in court 'You're from a well-known Gypsy family who have made careers out of crime'."*

*"The magistrate said to me "Mr...As a minor from the Travelling community..." at the start."*

*"A big point was made by the prosecution that I was a Gypsy. If the judge I had when I was 15 had been a bit more understanding I really think it would have been different for me."*

The young people were asked what support had been offered, for themselves or their families, and if they had received legal advice. They were also asked if they had received support from or signposting to organisations who could explain what was happening, help them navigate proceedings, or approach court.

None of the participants or their families had received any support. People spoke of how they had not understood what the processes were, or what was going on. In general, the only advice they received or experience they could use, was from other family members who had been through the system themselves. Participants did not consider reaching out to external organisations because they did not know how or where to find these relevant organisations.

*"I think the Police use big words to catch people out. I didn't understand what they were saying to me really."*

*"Never had any help and support, I had to find out what I could myself by asking my uncle."*

*"No support, not any of the time at any point. I was 14 and it was just a blur really, I had no idea what was going on."*

One common theme across all discussions, was the use of remand without consideration for the alternative use of bail. Every person had experience of this, either before or after custody. Two people had experienced being allowed to return to their home site as a one-off, with an electronic tag. However, in later discussions the same two people mentioned being kept on remand post custody at other times.

*"I wasn't given bail as I was told I was a flight risk. They told me I can't go back to my trailer because it could move...it's never moved for years that trailer!"*

*"Yes they put me on bail for 4 months because they said I would disappear, but I had a business, a really successful one so I wouldn't have gone and left that or my family but they put me on remand so I had to get my friend to sell the business, so now when I get out I will have to start from nothing all over again."*

*"I had really good reports from probation and all that, but they were ignored and I got remanded. Even my solicitor said don't bother asking for bail!"*

Similarly, enquiries were made as to whether participants had been offered alternatives to custody, or if they had any experience of restorative justice, community service, desistance support such as behaviour change, or mental health, alcohol or substance abuse support.

None of the participants had received any alternatives to custody except for the rare instance of community service. When this was offered, external factors such as lack of transport or being stopped by the police again made it impossible to attend. Many of the young people said it was easier to do the time and get it over with rather than fail to make appointments or be humiliated in public and "ordered around."

*"I would have liked to do community service instead of prison, but it wasn't offered to me."*

*"I had to report to the police station but I was often late cos the police would stop and search when I left site, like on purpose to make me late...I was doing community service at the time too but cos I was always late due to being stopped, it got extended."*

*"There was no public transport from our site so I had to rely on people giving me lifts and one day the car broke down so I couldn't get there. I had to go back to court but I was lucky, the magistrate understood so he didn't punish me more."*

Most of the people had experience of being held in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs); none of the participants had been held in Secure Training Centres (STCs). Common to all, was that being accommodated in a YOI was a negative experience and opportunities available in an adult estate were not available to YOI residents. Education opportunities were lacking and bullying and fighting seemed commonplace.

*"In YOI we didn't get any access to education at all. It was really boring, nothing to do. Just locked up all the time it felt."*

*"Yeah there were so many goings on in there and you felt you had to stick up for yourself all the time. Felt like you always had to prove yourself and there were lots of fights and arguments."*

*"It was very tough in YOI. Big difference in YOI to adult prisons...always fighting…Adult prisons are much better, more mature, more clued up on life. In Adult prison you learn practical skills and life skills, there's more education even though it's not easy to access for us."*

Less than half of the young people had experience of being transferred to the adult estate. For young Gypsy and Traveller men the experience of being in a YOI is a frustrating one. Most already have children of their own, and are mature, working and earning a living to support their families. Therefore, being accommodated with young people who are still immature and living with their parents is not suitable, as some of the comments above demonstrate. For those people who had been transferred to the adult estate, it was preferable:

*"I was a man before my time, before Gorger boys become men grown up, so I just felt like I surrounded by little kids and all they wanted to do was kick off and play PlayStation, but I wanted to work."*

*"Everyone wanted to fight me all the time, so I had to be on my guard all the time to stay off fighting, it was really exhausting. When I got here it was a massive relief, I could relax."*

*"Having been in an adult prison and now I am back in a YOI it's horrendous. I feel so unsafe here, things are going on here that just wouldn't if I was in Adult."*

Of those that had been transferred to adult prison, there was little explanation from staff or other professionals as to what was going on. For some young people it was something that had happened quite suddenly and sometimes it did not make any sense:

*"Well, I got pushed around by an officer who didn't like Travellers, he told me...he went too far one day and I lashed out and ended up being restrained then I was transferred the same day up to Adult but nobody warned me."*

*"I am almost 26 and I am still here but last time I was inside I was in Adult, so I don't get why I am back here in YOI!"*

Some participants shared disturbing accounts about gang culture in one of the YOIs. After the session where the experiences below were shared, the Equalities Officer took the young man to the Safeguarding Custody Officer, discussing what support they could give him. The participant's family contacted FFT following the visit to see what support could be offered to her son.

*"I got attacked a few days ago. Basically, there were four guys from one of the Black gangs, they waited for me in the corridor and one of them tripped me over then the others tried to beat me up and kick me...they got a couple of kicks in but I was lucky. I managed to stand up then my pad mate caught up and he sent them packing. if he hadn't been there I would have been in trouble...it's because the person whose family member I hurt has found some Black gang members' family on the outside and they have offered money for the guys inside to get me, to cut me up."*

*"I have to be on my guard all the time…it's a big worry. I don't feel safe here no way…They got people outside and they have offered someone inside £9,000 to slice me up…I'm terrified…cos they split me up from my brother and put me on the other wing and I am the only Traveller there and I am scared to go out of my cell."*

*"So, I am in there 24 hours a day, this last week, and on the hour when everyone is out, I am barricading my door with my bed. I have tried to talk to the officers and tell them I need help and I am scared for my life, but they don't do anything, they aren't taking it seriously so what do I do? Wait to be attacked? I am gonna go back later and set fire to my bed or cut myself so that the staff get me out of there before it's too late."*

*"I've been barricading myself in for days but they just ignore me! My mum keeps trying to call and get something done but they don't do anything...I feel like I am a target and I can't wait for whatever is gonna happen so I am gonna take matters into my own hands."*

## Discrimination and Treatment

This section explores experiences where participants' ethnicities were referenced in connection with how they were treated in custody. FFT is aware, as is HMPPS that there is an issue around ethnicity disclosure, and that many people from Gypsy and Traveller communities avoid ticking the relevant W3 box on the p-NOMIS form.

Participants were asked if they had disclosed that they were from Gypsy or Traveller communities and what influenced their decision to disclose or not. While younger participants were more likely to tick the W3 box, older community members present in the discussions were less likely to disclose their ethnicity. It is positive that younger community members were more open to doing so, or at least doing so retrospectively, once they saw things would be okay for them.

*"The new officers check online to see who everyone is and how to approach them, but you can see once they find out you're a Traveller they act differently to you."*

*"I didn't at first, jails are cliquey but when you get in you know your own people so then you find each other, and we look out for each other. When our Rep met me at the gate when I came in, I knew I was gonna be okay, so I changed it."*

*"Yes, always. I am proud to say I am a Gypsy!"*

There is plenty of research in the public domain to show that Gypsy and Traveller people are treated more negatively by services and staff throughout the criminal

justice system, when compared to other communities. When speaking to the young people during this project, they provided examples of negative treatment as a result of their Gypsy and Traveller status. Some thought that in many cases, staff were just ignorant of the derogatory language they were using against Gypsies or Travellers; it was felt that this was not always meant in a nasty way. However, staff were said to use name calling in a 'jokey' manner, but with the intention of provoking a reaction and to cause people to get into trouble.

Generally, people stated they did not try to make a complaint about these issues as they were ignored or trivialised.

*"They target us, but I don't think they understand how we speak sometimes so they take a bit of lip the wrong way and we get punished for it but it's just how we talk."*

*"We get called bad names but it's like done in a jokey way and you know I think lots of them don't realise it's bad and hurtful, so I don't think they really mean it. Some of them anyway, they just don't understand. They don't call other people from other communities the names because they know they can't do that anymore, but society is slow to accept that some of the names we get called are just as bad."*

*"No point putting in complaints against staff, plus Travellers have a very thick skin, so it's like water off a duck's back. We protect each other and they protect themselves."*

Prisoners also talked about how they were treated by other inmates. Sometimes Gypsy and Traveller people were provoked into reacting and had a tough image they needed to stand up to, as explored in an earlier section on gang culture in YOIs. However, it was more often the case in the adult estate that other prisoners left them alone as they knew the Gypsy and Traveller prisoners had the protection of their fellow community members and feared community retaliation.

*"Us lot just look after ourselves. We help each other with our jobs, cleaning mostly. You all look after each other and most of us know of each other's families anyway. We get discriminated against, but we ignore it, but even if there are just a few of us people seem to expect the worst from us."*

*"Mostly we get left alone in adult prisons, cos we have that reputation of being tough, but sometimes that goes against us and we are provoked into fighting, then we end up in more trouble of course and it wasn't our fault we had to stand up for ourselves."*

## Mental Health and Emotional Support

With national services for mental health and wellbeing overstretched, this section explores how accessible these services are to young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities in custodial settings. Gypsy and Traveller communities suffer an ongoing and unaddressed mental health crisis, with many young people, especially young men taking their own lives. The close-knit nature and extended family ties mean that many people already know of relatives who have lost their lives due to poor mental health. In addition, missing out on full time education can mean conditions such as ADHD, autism and dyslexia are often left undiagnosed. Subsequent behavioural issues can lead to people coming into confrontation with the law, without these conditions and needs being acknowledged or treated.

The young people were asked if they had disclosed any mental health concerns or if they had been asked if they had any on entering prison:

*"Yeh I was asked but then nothing ever happened, and it wasn't mentioned again. I didn't say anything after that."*

*"Didn't get asked…I was having bad dreams, hearing voices and seeing things sometimes. I was sick of coming back to prison yet again and I tried to hang myself…they just put me on basic with extra watch, no actual support."*

*"I don't tell the officers if I need support, cos they all chat and tell tales to each other so it all gets spread around."*

When asked whether support had been offered once conditions were disclosed:

*"I have been trying to get an assessment for Autism since I got to prison as they said it's what I have, but they said they don't do that here so I would need to move but that won't happen. I have been here five months. I've given up asking now."*

*"I tried to hang myself, because of the length of my sentence, I'd be in my mid-thirties when it's done and there had been a family bereavement and I felt very isolated and low, so I tried to hang myself in my cell but a member of staff found me and got me down...I was out of it, then suddenly I kinda woke up and came around...I was confused and upset cos I wasn't dead and someone was holding me down so I panicked and lashed out and I hit the officer and for that I was then punished and put on basics and locked up and they never offered me any counselling!"*

*"We get to go to chapel once a week, so we get to see each other then, from all the wings. There isn't really any help in here, I dunno if it's because it's a YOI and we are on 23 hours lock up, which in itself drives you nuts some days. I don't get any support from [Offender Management Unit] here."*

When asked what support was offered, and how effective it had been:

*"Here on the [Vulnerable Prisoner] wing there is trauma support and we… go to the day care sessions for anger management, trauma therapy, depression, bereavement and relationship therapies."*

*"They didn't let me go to my uncle's funeral, but they offered me bereavement therapy, but it was so rushed, it didn't help really so I asked for the chaplaincy guy and he was allowed to visit so that did help."*

*"I asked for help, one week later they sent someone, but I had already talked to the other lads, and they had really helped. You got to be really bad and do something like cut yourself up or trash your cell for them to take you seriously."*

During the conversations with young prisoners, the importance of community representatives and the support of fellow community members became apparent. Having older people to support and guide them, and to be able to confide in was a theme that came up in every session. People stressed the value of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller forums being held on a regular basis at prison. These were talked about as being vital to maintaining good mental health and contact with fellow community members.

However, while many of the prisons visited held forums, these were not regular, with most only offering one forum every few months. Three of the prisons had tried to

offer regular forums but according to the staff, these were not attended well enough to make them worthwhile. On further investigation, this appeared to be due to the information being disseminated by a non-community representative who had not established a strong bond with Gypsy and Traveller prisoners. There was a general lack of trust amongst some prisoners that forums would actually take place, as they had experienced several promises that did not materialise. Another factor was that the layout of the prison restricted where and how prisoners could be moved, making it difficult to arrange a meeting they could all attend.

As an example of this, one of the visits carried out was only attended by three prisoners, due to miscommunication. Prison staff had informed prisoners the visit had been cancelled due to the contact officer arriving late, rather than trying to find out what the delay was. More prisoners would have attended if they had been told the visit was delayed rather than cancelled. This caused distress and anger among the three people who did attend, as it seemed they were always being promised things that never materialised. This type of complaint was common in most of the prisons visited:

*"I talk to the other [Traveller] guys here. We are forgotten about. Black History Month is always celebrated but we get forgotten. We don't get any information, leaflets or posters go up. It would be great if we had a Rep. And one of us to cook some food. Any of us here would happily put ourselves forward to be a Rep. The kitchen does a Joey Gray once a month but none of us eat it cos it tastes s**t. Why don't they ask us to do it, we would and do it properly!"*

*"Last year there was supposed to be a family visit for [Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month], but it got cancelled."*

*"We automatically help each other as we feel more comfortable with one of our own, but we need more forums with all of us from the wings. Traveller wings work, like when we are all together...I know a lot of prisons want to split us all up, but it really helps our mental health if we are with at least some others from our communities."*

*"The other older guys are a huge support, cos they tell you the rules of the prison and how it all works and help calm you down and talk to officers they trust if you go a bit crazy."*

*“Having a Rep when we come in is really a big deal. Reps and forums are like safe spaces where we can all get together and talk, for support, and Reps can go between staff and us and that really helps. We would not go to a Gorger to ask for help as it’s embarrassing.”*

In some of the establishments visited, positive changes had been made. It was apparent from conversations that having Equalities Staff who were appropriately skilled and experienced was crucial to making things happen, and having the right representative in prison was also very important. Young people highlighted the importance of having access to non-contact gyms and training. They explained this was both culturally important to them, and also positive for mental and physical health.

*“I’ve just been made Rep, but we didn’t have one before that, before [the Equalities Officer] came. She has been really great at supporting us and helping our families too. She puts on forums and the GRTHM [Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, History Month] event was really great, and she helps us keep in touch with our families.”*

*“Gyms really help, non-contact sport stuff, that really helps me, it’s part of who we are too. We miss our culture, like sparring and boxing, that really helps with mental and physical health but it’s like they make sure we don’t get to do it here at all cos they know we love it.”*

*“The gym is the best thing in here. We get this thing called X180 CrossFit programme and it’s brilliant, really good programme. I spend as much time there as possible. It helps my head too you know...because I am concentrating on it and you can zone out and stop the noise in my head, then afterwards I feel good and physically tired and that is good too.”*

## Accessing education and other opportunities

Many people from Gypsy and Traveller communities are not given access to education inside prisons. A 2022 report into literacy levels across the prison estate found that almost 57% of adults in prison in the UK have a reading level below that of an average 11 year old.[14] Lack of basic skills such as reading and numeracy has been linked to the likelihood of an individual turning to crime and higher rates of reoffending. Therefore, having accessible and appropriate education opportunities in prison is an important step towards preventing reoffending. Many of the young people had only negative things to say about the education opportunities in the prison estate. However, some of the prisoners talked about positive experiences.

Programmes such as the Shannon Trust's reading programme are currently rolling out more widely across prisons. However, young Gypsy and Traveller people are often already working successfully in a family business or running their own. Therefore, what could be done in prisons to better support practical education needs? From the experiences of the prisoners, there didn't seem to be much consistency across prisons, regarding the education available. This appeared to be due to the categories of each prison and the design of the wings which may have made access to workshops challenging. As to what people wanted, prisoners spoke about practical courses in addition to maths and English.

*"They need to do more hands-on courses in adult, like useful ones...woodwork, mechanics, how to grow food, get water etc., life skills. I have done maths and English here and it was good, and they actually supported me. I would like to do a mental health course so I can help people."*

*"It would be good if we could do bricklaying, carpentry, but the woodwork classes are good if you can get in there. Getting a CSCS [Construction Skills Certification Scheme] card would be great so help with that and the exam would be great here."*

*"The education here is good, and they have helped me set up an interview for when I get out soon."*

[14] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-education-a-review-of-reading-education-in-prisons/prison-education-a-review-of-reading-education-in-prisons

*“There isn’t much here, on our wing there is nothing. The Shannon Trust come but as we are on lockdown so long and the staff just don’t want to let you out cos it’s too much work for them, they can’t be bothered so the Shannon Trust have to try and do lessons through the door if people want it, or they set a date and time for meeting then the staff won’t let you out so you miss it then you kind of give up bothering.”*

When asked what sort of interventions for mental health or education support would be useful, it was clear that people were keen to access these, despite the barriers. Some people had undertaken maths and English courses at Level 1 more than once, in order to access other educational or meaningful activities. Having staff persist and gain trust seemed to lead to positive engagement too. However, it was generally felt that repeating the same Level 1 courses was a waste of time.

*“Shannon Trust here are brilliant...at first I didn’t want to know but they kept coming to ask and then I decided to give it a go. Before I couldn’t read or write or do maths really and now I have done all the books and I have to say I have loved it and it’s really changed my headset too, it's been brilliant.”*

*“Mental health support. It takes time to get our trust, but they just need to keep trying so we know they mean it. Samaritans and Listeners courses would also be something I would like to learn, so I can help others.”*

*“I done all these courses on victim support and mental health and it’s started to change me and how I am; I am not like the angry violent person I was, and it’s made me look into myself and I finally realised stuff and now I want to help others in my community like me.”*

## Other resources and staff training

FFT receive a high number of requests from Equalities Officers asking us for resources, ideas for forums and other information. This suggests that resources are generally lacking in prisons across the UK, and therefore participants were asked what resources and materials people had, or would like access to in prison, to support with learning, or to keep in touch with their cultures.

Resources, displays and communal events organised for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners can act as informal training for staff. For example, the magazine Travellers' Times[15] is very popular with community members. An additional benefit is this can provide easily accessible articles about community lives to non-community staff.

Community members were asked if they felt staff training would encourage better understanding and engagement, and what that training could look like.

*"There is a real lack of understanding about our culture in the staff. Some officers are interested in a good way though."*

*"Staff need training yes but by us, or someone who knows us and our cultures...and also the staff who end up as Gypsy and Traveller reps or Equalities Officers need to want to do that, not just get told….if they are just told you can see they don't really care and never do anything so it has to be people who want to do it."*

*"Staff need to be educated about Traveller and Gypsy history and culture. We would be happy to do like a Q&A session so there is a place where staff can ask questions, they maybe were too scared to normally, as long as it was done with respect, we would do that, it would really help I think."*

[15] https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk/news/2022/03/we-need-ensure-gypsy-and-traveller-prisoners-have-equal-access-rehabilitation

## Family Access

Family is at the heart of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, providing support and strength. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people usually live with extended family members, sometimes with two or three generations living in shared accommodation.

Many of the young people felt the negative impact of being separated from family, on their mental health. Negative impact worsened when the prison they were convicted to was geographically far away, or where a prisoner had been barred from attending funerals and had to cope with bereavement in prison. The main method of communication with families appeared to be video pads (tablet-style devices used to hold video calls), often available in individual cells. While contact is easier using modern technology, there were some security issues and challenges with the use of this service.

Many people complained of inconsistencies with receiving the 'Traveller Pin'. Similar to the Foreign National scheme, prisoners receive money towards the cost of calling mobile numbers, which are a more typical way of contacting family who are on the move. Not every prison offered this scheme, with little explanation given.

*"The facetime video calls are really good but sometimes they cut off the call cos if someone like my son comes into the picture it doesn't recognise his face, so the call cuts off."*

*"We don't get the Traveller Pin here; they do at other places I done time in but not here. We don't have landlines, but we don't get the Pin. That is getting more expensive, so you have to choose between spending money on a vape or a call."*

*"It's meant to be important isn't it that we keep family links when we are in prison, but I can't afford the credit on the phone to call their mobiles."*

When asked if they had experienced any difficulties with family visits, or with being allowed out under supervision to attend funerals or relatives in hospital, most of the young people did not want to physically see their families as they did not want their children exposed to prison or to see them incarcerated. Distance was a barrier to many as their families were too far away to be able to afford the travel. Another barrier was concerning family members who did not have ID.

*“Not much as I am far away, and the fuel money and nine-hour travel time makes it hard for them to come.”*

*“Don’t here as they have to give fingerprints and they don’t want to, too scared, so they don’t come so the video and phone calls are really important.”*

*“I had a visit booked and my wife came to visit with my children, and she was told she could bring three children in but would have to leave the other two children in the car on their own so she had to cancel this visit even though she had travelled miles with all the kids!”*

*“My family haven’t got any ID and cos I have a different last name it made things complicated, so basically, I had to change my name by deed poll so I could get some ID to match up and prove it was my family. It took months and months.”*

*“I lost my brother in 2020 but wasn’t allowed to go to the funeral as it was at our site…I felt discriminated against and I was only offered to go and light a candle in the chapel, and I still haven’t been able to visit the grave, so this really makes my mental health suffer.”*

*“A few weeks ago, I was told my mum was in hospital, but the prison wouldn’t let me go and see her even though the hospital requested it. Then when she got out of the hospital, they arranged a visit to see her but I had to say well it's too late now she’s back home. I still haven’t seen her even though she is still quite ill, and I am really worried something might happen to her and I won’t have seen her.”*

The majority of people and their families said they had no support to help stay in touch with each other. However, at four of the prisons visited, the young people praised the Equalities Officer for the help they gave the young men and their families.

*“We got no support from anyone, so they didn’t know what to do at first…I had to work it out then tell them. So, it was a while before I got a visit.”*

*“I just found out from other family members how it all works, or the other guys who’ve been here longer.”*

*"Yes, our Equalities Officer here is great, she helps us stay in touch with families, it really means a lot."*

*"I am trying to find out if my Cat D is going through, like it's meant to be now, because my wife is having a baby in two weeks and I really want to be there because I wasn't there for the previous one. I was in prison then too, but this time I am so close to being out for when the baby comes but they are a week late moving me to my Cat D and I don't know what is going on, they won't tell me a thing so it's really stressing me out."*

## Resettlement and Desistance

Many young people were concerned about what was going to happen in the last few weeks of their respective prison sentences, and what support they would receive to help with resettlement.

Of the 25 people, 17 were already serving a repeat sentence and for these prisoners their concern was based on previous experiences where support had been lacking and Prison, Parole and Probation Officers even possibly contributing to reincarceration.

People were concerned about the approved premises they would be sent to live in. There was a perception that it was almost impossible to be released back to site, and to family, and this treatment seemed to be different from that received by non-Gypsy or Traveller prisoners.

*"I dunno what my future holds the minute I step out of here. I have not seen my parole officer hardly at all, only one meeting in months, feels like they don't give a s**t, there's no communication they just chuck you out the door."*

*"The officers wave and say, 'see you in a few weeks.' And laugh. It's like you're a Traveller so they expect you to end up back again and it's a joke to them."*

*"Once you do a prison sentence you're just back in again and again and you're stuck. You are brought up to be bringing in some money and feed the family and support wider family so you gotta be doing something, earn money somehow if the legit way is not possible anymore."*

A common theme during group sessions and individual interviews, was how the probation service lacks true understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures. This lack of understanding was particularly in relation to Travellers returning to traditional (site) accommodation and the negative effects on mental health, of forcing Travellers into bricks and mortar. Only one person gave a positive story about their Probation Officer, and little was said about receiving mental health support post custody for trauma around being in prison or resettling into society.

*"I am way over my sentence cos I won't go into a house. They should have let me out on tag but I said I am not going into a house so I am still here."*

*"I am really stressed cos they said they won't release me to site after the hostel but they don't know what to do so I am really stressed cos I know I will end up here again! I have offered to wear GPS [Global Positioning System] tags, anything they want really so I can get back home with my family but they said it's too high risk and they want the names of everyone on site...that's nuts! They don't get how site works and how many people there are and moving on and off all the time…they wouldn't ask for all the people's names in a street would they so why on a Gypsy site...it's discrimination."*

*"I am really concerned that they won't let me go back to my family on site when I get released but I can't get an answer from probation if they will let me."*

Prisoners serving repeat sentences were asked what they believed were the reasons for this and what could be done to help young people from reoffending. Many young people said they had enough of being in prison and had the desire to change their behaviour. However, there was a realisation that this may not be possible due to lack of opportunities and support, and the clash of cultures with non-Traveller society.

*"I was a mental wreck after I was released, but I just powered on, sadly it didn't last for long then I lost the plot and got arrested again."*

*"I'm a fighting man and I will always fight to defend my community and my family, no one else will so I got to do it, then I end up back inside again."*

*"I want to change now cos its exhausting, but I don't really know how or who can help."*

Prisoners were asked how much time had elapsed between prison sentences and many highlighted how short the time could be. Few were surprised that they had returned to prison. Often the reasons seemed to be for small transgressions or seemingly unavoidable situations, due to the lack of support they were given upon initial release. One person said it was as little as five weeks before they found themselves back in prison.

*"Well, it's a turnstile isn't it...once you are in it you just go round and round…they know your face, you can't get work, you do one little thing out of line…back through the turnstile."*

*"Last time I was out it was three months; it was lovely to have that three-month break with my family before I got back in again."*

*"I keep a bag packed under my bed, ready for when I get recalled, cos I know no matter how I try, it will happen."*

When asked what could be done to support on release and potentially avoid re-incarceration, most prisoners were despondent:

*"Let's be serious here, who is gonna help us? The world is hard to live in now, everyone needs help but we have to protect ourselves. Noone else is going to help us."*

*"If I could have talked to someone it would have helped, but if you say you're from the Travelling community people don't feel comfortable talking to you, only your own people."*

*"More meetings like forums, group talks and support. I needed housing but there was no support or help. I was trying my best but it wasn't good enough."*

*"We need more help to integrate back into society. More support networks if you don't have family, like more Gypsy and Traveller charities working in prisons and helping after. Mental health support too. You just have to bury the whole prison thing and suddenly get on with normal life for a bit."*

*"Prison is like the norm now, it would help if people understood us and didn't think just because we don't read or write that we are stupid and not worth the effort to help, we never get a chance to get helped you know? And actually, there are a lot more opportunities sometimes in prisons so in some ways it's better to be here than out there."*

## Positive change and support

Finally, when asked to suggest what could have helped their journey through the criminal justice system, young peoples' suggestions centred around the recognition and acknowledgement of their cultures in prisons, through organisation of regular forums and events for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller History Month.

*"To be listened to and treated same as anyone else. Not to be treated different so you don't have to lie from the start. To be treated more humanely. To have our voices heard."*

*"Flying a flag doesn't do much does it? They need to listen to us. Staff need training about our lifestyle and all the issues. We need more support in prison, more groups, more people who really care working in Equalities to help with family contact and forums, or from outside organisations who know about us."*

*"Staff need to persevere about asking us to come to groups or education or mental health stuff. We won't say yes just up front, we need to know we can trust you so they need to keep asking us and doing what they say they will so we know we can trust and that there will be support. If we get asked to do something it's ingrained in us to think why are people doing this why are they being nice to me, what is their real motive? So, we won't just open up immediately".*

## Other Community Members' Experiences

### New Traveller experiences

New Traveller attitudes to police and the law really altered after what became known as The Battle of the Beanfield.[16] There were two young men from the New Traveller community on the project steering group. One man was recently out of prison and on Home Detention Curfew (HDC), known as being 'on tag' and the other had recently been released from a prison sentence of a few years. The young man on tag had served time for taking part in a protest against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which brought in additional, draconian powers for police to tackle roadside camps, protests and demonstrations.

The prison visits had no young participants from New Traveller or Showman communities. However, some family members were interviewed and one of the stories that was recounted is captured as a case study and will be published separate to this report.

### Roma experiences

Engagement with the Roma communities can be difficult and present a few barriers. As many Roma people in England live with the threat of deportation and the memory of extremely harsh treatment in countries of origin, they can be understandably reluctant to engage with anyone but trusted support and advocacy organisations.

Language is also a barrier as many older people in particular do not speak English.

A group of Roma women took part in the project at a prison run by Sodexo. The visit was organised by Hibiscus Initiative, which works with minoritised migrant women. There is currently no identification box on prison entry forms for 'Roma' as an ethnicity. Therefore, people from Roma communities are being missed from demographics, creating additional barriers to providing targeted support. The experiences of one young Roma woman is also included in a separate publication of case studies.

[16] https://alanlodge.co.uk/OnTheRoad/battle-of-the-beanfield/

## Individual female interviews

Despite interviewing a number of young people from Romany Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities, there were few interviews with young women. More research needs to be conducted to target engagement with young Gypsy and Traveller women to achieve a fuller picture of their experiences. Below are quotes from the small number of women who took part. Broadly, the views and experiences matched those of the young male prisoners.

*"I got time for over-pricing a job. But who decides I'm over-pricing? A Trading Standards worker who sees Traveller and no address. I think I got a sentence I shouldn't have because Trading Standards don't like Travellers around here, six months in prison for a £500 job."*

—Irish Traveller woman, aged 25**.**

*"It was very hard; I had visits booked and then they moved me over a hundred miles from my children and family. Then it took ages to sort out what was happening to rebook it all."*

—Romany Gypsy woman, aged 24.

*"I felt very isolated from my family, really depressed sometimes. Especially my youngest. They should let you see your kids more if you're a mum."*

— Romany Gypsy woman, aged 25.

## Family member insights

This project includes testimonies from family members who had children or young relatives with experience of the criminal justice system.

An emerging theme, predominantly from mothers, was the feeling that their young people were ‘stuck’ in the system. Relatives expressed concerns that their young people were repeatedly put into provocative situations, and this led to punishment, again and again.

*“[My son] went to the town, this was about two weeks ago, there were loads of them walking, but the police jumped out and grabbed him and searched him because he looked suspicious. Only him. There were others there, but they searched him. He’s been randomly searched three times now; he's getting sick of it. He’s only 16.”*

*“The way [the police] treat our kids is different to the way they treat other people’s kids. They talk to our kids like a piece of s**t.”*

*“My son’s issues started when we moved into a house when he was 10. I thought I was doing the right thing by moving into a house, to avoid all the hassle the police gave us on the road, but it was the worst thing. He was climbing out of the window and running off. Having violent outbursts. Things got worse and I could not control his outbursts, so he went into foster care. He would come home a bit but it was mostly foster care, aged 14-18 that he was getting into trouble with the police around this time too while he was in care. He would get into fights, dealing cannabis and drunk, hanging out with other foster kids. He’s just out of prison yet again but over the years he’s been sectioned nine times but he keeps escaping and I can't get any help with him from social services now. He has now been diagnosed with autism and borderline personality disorder, but he is in denial about it all.”*

*“Every time I have called an ambulance to get him help in crisis cos he is self-harming severely, they say he needs to be sectioned. But the police have to come along too as he is labelled as dangerous...about 10 of them come and turn up and stand around laughing like it’s a joke and make it worse...they have been vile to me and him...he just kicks off then it all goes pear-shaped again. Back to prison for assault, then sectioned…round and round.”*

## Prison staff experiences

Through conversation with prison staff, issues around funding in the prisons and probation service clearly came to light as a frustration and a barrier to providing services for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners. Prison staff were clearly committed to the work they do, in particular the Equalities Officers who organised the focus group sessions. It appeared that most staff wanted to support Traveller prisoners as best as they could.

However, having very limited or no resources available, including staff capacity, or budget for supporting materials, staff were hindered in their ability to provide suitable services. Another challenge was the physical logistics of organising prison staff and prisoners to enable regular meetings or forums for the 12 protected characteristics. As a result, prison staff felt they struggled to achieve the bare minimum in terms of support and engagement with Gypsy and Traveller prisoners.

Around Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, FFT is often contacted by a number of prisons desperate for ideas and resources to use in events. However, there is often no budget available.

Staff members created their own PowerPoint training sessions as there was no available funding for external organisations, and even made cakes at home to bring to group meetings. Some staff ensured that kitchens and communal areas were available for cooking traditional Traveller dishes, and to make spaces available for community prisoners to gather in, so that external support organisations could come in and talk to community prisoners together.

It was often the case that only one person was responsible for prisoners and staff equalities, in any one prison. Therefore, to provide support for Traveller prisoners, Equalities staff needed to work beyond their official job role.

One Equalities Officer said:

*“I have all the groups for the protected characteristics to arrange and all the different awareness months to do, then I have all the staff to look after too...I do Equalities for prisoners and staff...there is just me here. I am chasing my tail all the time. We need more people, we need a team for Equalities, one person physically can’t do it all. I feel the prisoners from the protected characteristic groups feel let down a lot*

*because there is not time to do all the things they want. I can only do forums every few months because I just don't have the time to do them all every month or even every two months."*

Another Officer from a different prison:

*"There is a lot of organising and logistics to do to move prisoners across wings to get them all to group sessions and sometimes you have to rely on a Prison Officer being nice or in a good mood. One of my colleagues moved one of my Traveller guys off a wing and when I asked him why he said he wanted to split them up as there were two Travellers on that wing and he only wanted there to be one. I told him no way put the guy back and made it happen, but even that took up so much of my time."*

An Equalities Officer from a third prison summed up a typical experience, as noticed in every prison visited:

*"There is no money for resources and no money to put events on or pay for people to come in etc., so we have to scrabble around and beg, we are really desperate for resources. Usually I pay for the biscuits and juice myself at the meetings we run for prisoners."*

With regard to training for prison staff generally, Equalities Officers echoed the concerns of the prisoners:

*"Yes, we need more and more often, because there is a bit of a turnover of young staff who need to know more about Gypsy and Traveller culture."*

*"We need it badly here, because we have a lot of Nigerian staff members from the local community, and they have literally no idea about Gypsy and Traveller culture!"*

*"Staff training by people who know the communities or the communities themselves would be great because there isn't any of that right now but there is no money or time allocated for it. I feel the younger staff really would benefit from training as they don't have any experience in working with Gypsy and Traveller prisoners or any idea of the issues and barriers, not like the older staff members did, who worked with them for years and just gained that knowledge and the trust often too."*

Staff were clearly frustrated with the inflexibility of allowing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners to take on voluntary representative roles:

*"I am fighting here at the moment because they want to stop us having one of the guys to be the GRT Rep. It's a paid position here but one guy has offered to do it for free because it's that important they have someone, but the prison want to stop there being a GRT Rep and just have one Rep for all the Protected Characteristics!"*

One Officer who had worked in the prison service for a number of years and had established rapport with Traveller prisoners:

*"Personally, in the past I have worked in prisons where the Travellers and Gypsies were all on one wing, and you know we never ever had any trouble from that wing or those lads…I would much rather have it like that now, because I know they would take care of each other and keep the hot heads out of trouble and it made our lives a lot easier."*

# Conclusion and Next Steps

## What was found

**Exposure to lifelong and generational discrimination** together with enforced marginalisation were by far the strongest themes that emerged from the engagement sessions with young prisoners.

This stigmatisation impacts on self-belief and self-worth and seems to be the **starting point** for many young Gypsy and Traveller people towards the criminal justice system pathway. Many of the young people had experienced bullying at school, received negative attitudes towards them from police and general public, and had been exposed to negative articles and opinions published in mainstream media about their communities.

Another theme, was the **low expectations by society towards Gypsies and Travellers**. A common expression was "*everyone sees me as guilty anyway so I may as well be*". Young Gypsies and Travellers spoke about the lack of opportunities on offer, and the assumption that they did not want to access education or other educational activities. Also, that society did not expect them to have dreams, hopes or aspirations to better themselves or find successful career opportunities. As a result, opportunities to progress were less likely to be sought or offered.

Having **older people in the focus group** sessions provided an interesting comparison to the younger prisoners, in terms of their respective experiences. Younger people were more likely to have **defiant pride in their community roots**, leading to stronger reactions to racist incidents. However, being openly proud of their heritage, younger people were much more likely to declare 'Romany Gypsy' or 'Irish Traveller' ethnicity on entering prison, compared to older prisoners. The older peer group could still remember a time when their ethnicity was not included in the ethnic groups recorded on the prison P-NOMIS system, and where it was, this could result in discrimination.

Younger people were **more likely to have received a diagnosis for conditions** such as ADHD, Autism or depression before entering prison, than the older prisoners. Younger prisoners tended to have had a **better experience of school education** and as a result were likely to be more literate than older peers. However,

this did not seem to be appreciated by society or within the prison system, and **opportunities for education and advancement were often unavailable or inaccessible** to Gypsy, and Traveller people.

Younger prisoners were more likely than their older peers to make their children aware of the negative consequences of prison life. Younger prisoners can remember being told by grandparents to live life how they wanted and not compromise and thinking their imprisoned uncle or brother was 'admirable'. But the message to their own children is *"Don't do what I do, stay out of trouble".*

## What's recommended

Gypsy and Traveller people have their own beliefs, traditions and histories and the young people had a strong awareness of this heritage. It is therefore vital that **services encountering these communities (social workers, police, probation officers and prison officers etc.) have a good understanding of these traditions.** This enables more successful engagement and avoids misunderstanding. Most importantly, it better enables services to support community members to make better choices, helping resist peer pressure, and providing non-aggressive alternatives to responding to provocation. The ultimate aim being to avoid repeat offending.

**Culturally appropriate support should be both practical, and pastoral with support for mental as well as physical health.** Beginning with the first stage of sentencing, courts could offer an alternative to custody, for example, community service, restorative justice and/or referral to drug, alcohol and mental health services as an extension of their suspended sentence. At the same time the person could receive educational and pastoral support with access to meaningful pastimes, all with the aim of helping them to desist from reoffending.

**When admitted to prison, people should also be offered appropriate support, access to other prisoners from the same community and the ability to re-educate and learn new skills.** Being held in a prison wing with other community members can provide peer-to-peer support and is an essential part of positive wellbeing. Access to education provides a means of positive motivation and supports a future alternative to crime. Access to culturally important activities such as non-

contact gyms and training while in prison offers a positive alternative to releasing physical energy.

**Service provision can be aided by working with the community.** Prisoners should be engaged in discussing the type of services that are provided as they are the best people to understand what they need. Most of the young participants offered themselves as representatives for their community group and also felt that peer-to-peer support would be a more effective way of encouraging attendance by others, at Gypsy and Traveller forums and other community activities.

**Another aspect of prisoner engagement is involvement in staff training.** Young prisoners were willing to discuss their histories and cultures with prison staff if this was in a “safe respectful space”. Staff could ask questions and prisoners would have an opportunity to provide clarification on terminology used, such as ‘Gypsy’ or ‘Gorger’. This could be an effective way to provide informal training for staff as well as fostering better relations between prison staff and prisoners.

**Important throughout the criminal justice system, is providing an understanding of what is happening, what is likely to happen and what choices can be made.** Many young people were provided with little or no information before, or during their imprisonment. Equally, most people did not know what to expect when they left prison. Peer-to-peer information sharing can complement professionally provided information.

Incorporating the recommendations from this research could provide a criminal justice system that recognises and responds to the trauma and exclusion experienced by many Gypsies and Travellers:

- Offering alternatives to custody;
- Access to education and mental health support; and
- Helping people to navigate the system.

Co-producing services with prisoners could strengthen otherwise under-funded resources as well as providing wellbeing in an often-isolating environment:

- Co-producing prison support services by speaking to prisoners about what is needed;
- Appointing prisoners as community representatives; and

- Holding question and answer sessions with prisoners to provide informal training to staff.

Incorporating some of these recommendations in the upcoming Ministry of Justice Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Strategy would be a good start to reflecting the experiences of the young prisoners we spoke to.

Ultimately, all of these recommendations support future prevention of re-offending and an alternative to a return to prison for some of society's young people.

## Note for further research

There were some limitations to this project that should be addressed in any future funded work.

The only female prison able to be accessed for this project (with the necessary clearance for engagement with community members) was the Sodexo-run prison.

The voices of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are rarely heard in the prison estate; the voices of female Gypsies and Travellers, especially young women are listened to even less.

The women who participated in this project spoke with passion about the negative impact of being separated from families and children. This is an area that must be explored further.

# About Us

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) is a leading national charity that seeks to end racism and discrimination against Gypsies, Travellers and Roma communities and to protect the right to pursue a nomadic way of life.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 | Charts

The charts below show the experiences of the young people who took part in this project. The numbers along the bottom of the bar chart represent the actual number of people and the numbers at the end of each bar are percentages.

(Breakdown = 25 prisoners in prison settings and 6 individual interviews = 31 people)

**Chart One – Formative Experiences that may have influenced the journey towards the CJS**

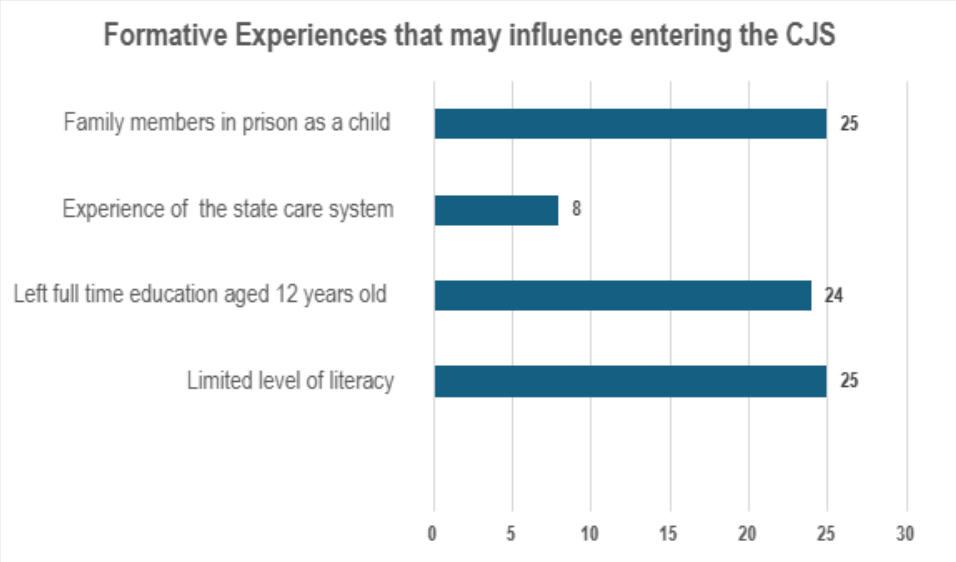
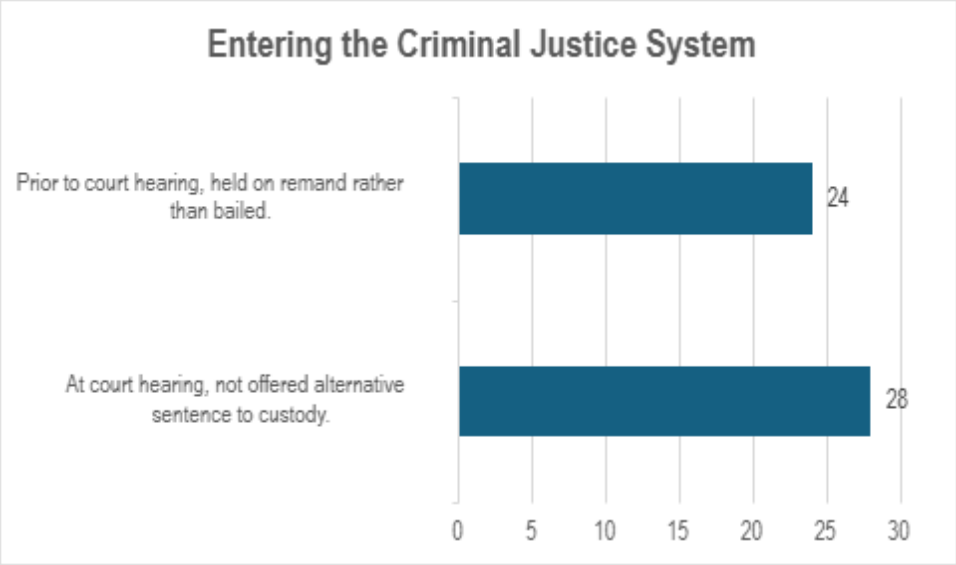



Chart One shows that of the 31 people interviewed in prison, the majority had experienced situations that may have influenced their journey towards the criminal justice system. 25 people (81%) grew up with family members who had recently experienced the CJS or were in prison during the person's childhood.

**Chart Two – Entering the CJS**

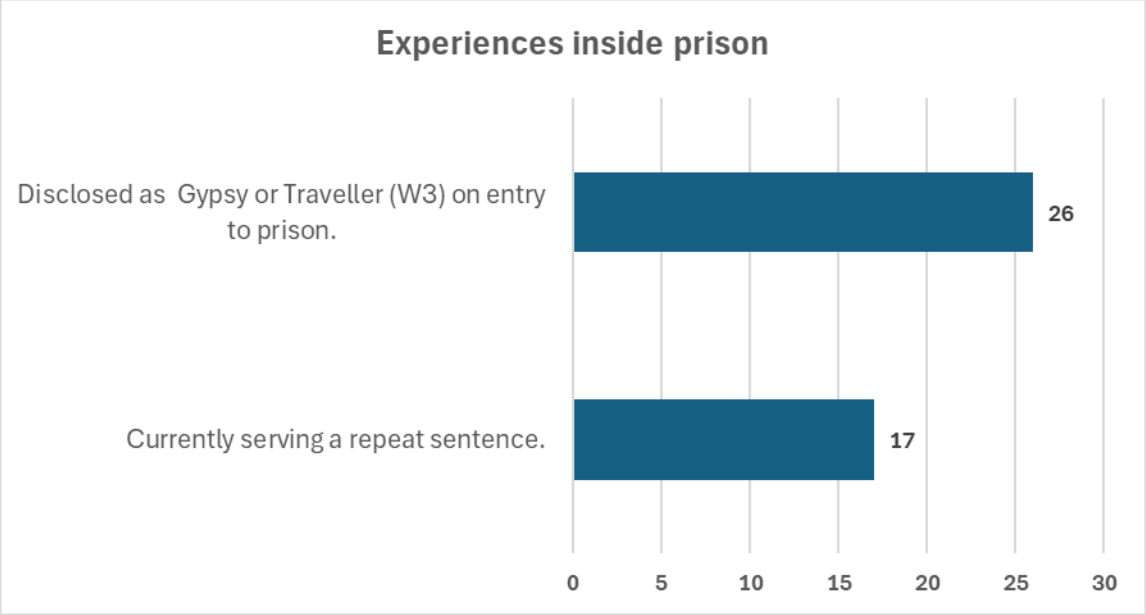



The above chart shows the experiences of the 31 people interviewed at the beginning of entering the CJS. Prior to their court hearing, 28 people (90%) were held on remand rather than offered the option of bail, and temporary return to their family. This negatively compares to an estimate of between 16% and 18% in the wider population.

**Chart Three – Custody Experience**

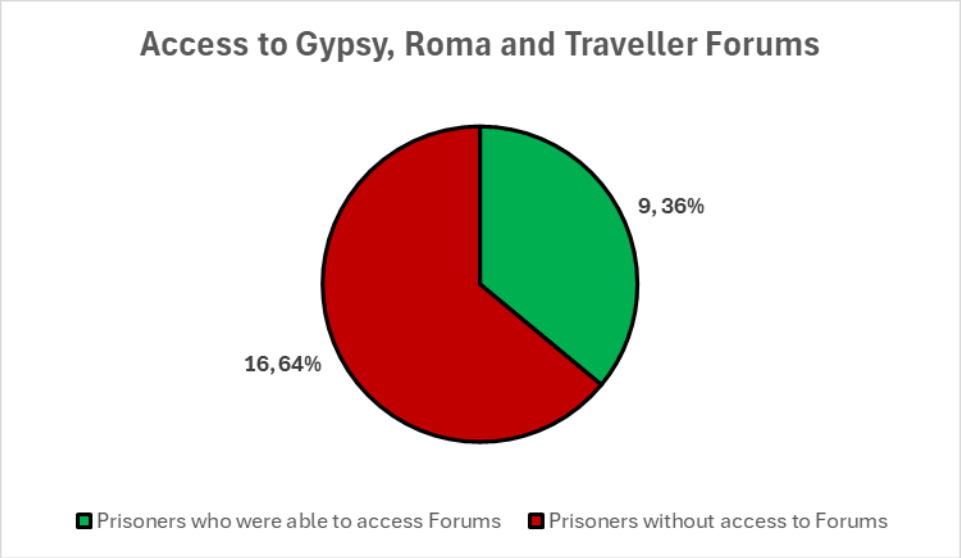

The above chart shows how many of the 31 people interviewed had experience of Youth Offending Institutes (YOI). About half (17, 55%) had served a sentence in a YOI. Nine people (29%) had been transferred from a YOI to an adult prison.

**Chart Four – Experiences inside prison**




The above chart shows some of the experiences of people interviewed, whether in prison currently or regarding a previous prison sentence. Of the 31 people, most (26, 84%) had disclosed themselves as Gypsy or Traveller on the prison entry form. 17 (55%) were currently serving a repeat sentence.

**Chart Five – Access to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Forums**




The above chart shows prisoner access to regular (usually bi-monthly) Gypsy, Roma and Traveller forums. Of 25 prisoners (people currently in prison), almost two-thirds (16, 64%) did not have access to regular forums. Only nine people (36%) did have access to forums.

## Appendix 2 | Examples of Good Practice

The following good practice examples took place in the named establishments around the country, at the time of this project and were mentioned by the young people who took part as being helpful. This list is intended to offer fresh ideas and approaches for other organisations. However, consideration should be given to local differences and needs to ensure projects are suitably and appropriately adapted.

### X-fit Programme HMP Lancaster Farms

180 Project — A Second Chance at Life with CrossFit and Community: **https://www.crossfit.com/essentials/180-project-united-kingdom**

### One Small Wing HMP Parkhurst

A trauma informed talking therapy that prisoners can be referred to for emotional support and behaviour change.

### Irish Chaplaincy

The Traveller Project offers support and advice and religious support for prisoners: **https://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk/irish-travellers**

### ICPO

Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas. Offers support and resources for Traveller prisoners: **https://www.icpo.ie/support-for-prisoners/**

### Irish Community Care in Northwest

Offering support through the CJS including support with running forums and co-production with Shannon Trust to build upon engagement with Irish Traveller prisoners in regional prisons: **https://www.irishcc.net/**

### Friends, Families & Travellers RSPH training at HMP Ford and Lewes

Tailored accessible training for community members looking at healthy life changes and certificated, recognised qualification. Delivered within prison settings: **https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/royal-society-of-public-health-training/**

### Leicester GATE at HMP Stocken

Support for prisoners and their families throughout the CJS journey:
https://twitter.com/Leicester_GATE

### PACT at HMP Ford

Supporting prisoners and their families with engagement, education and resettlement:
https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/prisons/hmp-ford/

### NHSE Diversion and Liaison Service

Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services identify people who have mental health, learning disability, substance misuse or other vulnerabilities when they first come into contact with the criminal justice system as suspects, defendants or offenders:
https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/health-just/liaison-and-diversion/about/#:~:text=Liaison%20and%20Diversion%20(L%26D)%20services,as%20suspects%2C%20defendants%20or%20offenders

## Appendix 3 Literature Review – key findings and comparative reflections on the report.

Prior to data collection, a literature review of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people's experiences of the criminal justice system was conducted. The review highlighted the following key findings/themes within the CJS, namely:

- Lack of proactive and positive engagement by the police.
- Reluctance (for whatever reason) from services and staff across the CJS to engage with young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people around support, alternatives to custody, education, mental health and other support.
- Lack of recognition that generational and anecdotal experiences of the CJS learnt by young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people can affect attitudes around engaging and trusting services and staff.
- Lack of cultural understanding from services and staff around Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- Experiences of young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in YOIs impeding opportunities for successful engagement around support, education and desistence.
- Lack of culturally appropriate education and training available in adult estate to support advancement, employment opportunities and resettlement.
- No specialist support available post custody.

Reflecting on the findings from the engagement sessions, it is interesting to note that similar themes came to light in the data collection. In addition, the data collection brought about new findings, (such as the importance of dedicated staff with good cultural awareness of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and the tenacity to keep engaging and working with the communities), that have been highlighted in the findings section in the main report above.

https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/resource/desktop-research-transition-2-adulthoods-pathway-for-change-and-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities/