1. Introduction
Bristol has a nationally recognised Gypsy and Traveller (G&T) team who are regularly consulted by central government. When the city was planning to set up a permanent Gypsy and Traveller site the team's highly successful consultation and community cohesion work set a strong foundation for the embedding of the Gypsy and Traveller community as an integral part of its local community and for the development of further sites in Bristol and the enlargement of the council's G&T team.

They are regularly consulted by central government and are quoted on the EHRC website, saying:
"[When] we didn’t have any authorised sites, ... every summer we were facing 20-30 large illegal encampments, each one with 40-50 vans. The situation was at boiling point: we were receiving over 1,000 complaints every year, and we had a number of serious standoffs between Travellers and local residents. We were spending anywhere between £200,000-£350,000 annually dealing with the situation. It was unsustainable, so we decided we had to spend to save. [Now] we built two sites, one transit site and one permanent. Almost instantly we saw the level of expenditure drop. We now receive rent on all those pitches, and residents pay their utility bills like everyone else. We are generating income as opposed to expenditure. We used to get banner headlines about Gypsies in the local press every other week – that has just fallen away. Rather than wasting public money on clearups and evictions, we can now focus on getting families access to healthcare and education."

This work was just the beginning - the team is now building on this work, ensuring that the council and its partners meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, tackling inequalities and promoting community cohesion. Part of this work is to empower G&T communities so that they can work in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations themselves to tackle and challenge the discrimination they face.

The G&T team's responsibilities include ensuring:
- representation of Gypsies and Travellers in policy/service development
- equality in support and advice offered
- ongoing development of adequate site provision within Bristol.
The City Council’s responsibilities towards Gypsies and Travellers include education, children and family welfare, vulnerable adult care, tackling harassment and site/homelessness provision.

The team is proactive; seeking and nurturing partnerships with statutory and voluntary agencies to develop innovative ways of engaging with and responding to the G&T community. They achieved a number of notable successes and key outcomes during the period 2008-10.

2. Training community trainers
In response to increasing demand from customer-facing organisations seeking cultural competence training the G&T team worked with VOSCUR to develop a two day training course; ‘Confident to Present’. The aim of the course was to empower Gypsies and Travellers to develop the confidence and skills to deliver their own training courses. This would then enable them to be able to deliver cultural competence training to service providers to ensure improved responses to G&T customers.

A challenge of the training was encouraging members of the G&T community, many of whom had low key skills and confidence in statutory agencies, to participate. BCC's G&T team worked to support Gypsies and Travellers to get involved.

Since receiving the training, members of the G&T community have given presentations on housing and education and the prejudice they can encounter to staff from VOSCUR who found it really insightful. The presenters now feel they have been given the tools to enable them to train effectively; they feel empowered and are keen to do more.

Feedback from 'Confident to Present' participants:
- “It really hit home - years of persecution. You get used to it; it's only when you go to training that you realise how bad it is"
- "I felt very welcomed, also felt part of the group".

One of the participants on the 'Confident to Present' training had never attended this kind of training. He was nervous about talking in front of an audience. Since completing the course he has a new awareness of the discrimination he experienced as a Romany Gypsy and how these differ from the experiences of other BME and G&T communities, eg. Show people.
After successfully completing the training he gained enough confidence to plan and deliver training sessions for a range of prison staff and to take part in delivering Hate Crime training with VOSCUR staff; leading a workshop on G&T awareness and presenting to 90 people at a plenary.

Undertaking this training gave this individual the confidence to apply to work with G&T communities as a Community Development worker. He secured the job and is now one of two people from the community working in BCC’s G&T team. His main role is to engage with G&T men - this has led to a better understanding of the community, particularly around health issues.

3. Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health Care Project (DREMHCP)

Through this project the G&T community development workers aim to eliminate race inequality from mental health care services in England (in partnership with the PCT). The project has two priorities:

- to empower BME communities with the insights/tools that will help them improve their mental health and wellbeing
- to empower communities to influence decision makers to ensure they deliver more appropriate and responsive services.

Recently the G&T community development workers started hosting 'Walkabouts' as an innovative way of bringing CEOs, Chairs of PCT Boards, health commissioners and managers and Gypsies and Travellers together. Traditionally the health service has not had strong relationships with the G&T community. This is an opportunity for health professionals to visit a G&T site and hear the issues the communities face. They give health professionals an awareness of the health challenges facing G&T people and provide insights into what services are needed and how existing services might develop.

60 local authority and health managers and clinicians have applied for places and seven Walkabouts have taken place in Bristol so far and the work is ongoing. The Chair of one of the local PCTs has already participated and, along with other senior managers, they now have a deeper understanding of what the health needs of Gypsies and Travellers are.

Feedback from participants:

- “The most insight filled day I have spent at the PCT”. (NHS Bristol Board Member)
- “Raised my enthusiasm and motivation for the work ... Reminded me why we're here”. (NHS Bristol Board Member).
- “The opportunity to ask questions, to be questioned and to go away from the day thinking about how your own service delivers race equality....”. (NHS Bristol Service Improvement Manager).
4. Domestic Violence and Abuse Project
As part of the DREMHCP, Bristol’s female G&T community development worker has been working with G&T women around Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA). DVA is compounded for G&T women because of poor knowledge of their rights, and because of poor relationships with DVA support services which often know very little about G&T culture. These two factors combined to make the services inaccessible, leaving vulnerable women to struggle with a range of personal traumas alone.

BCC’s G&T Team have started to work in partnership with the Bristol Domestic Abuse Forum to deliver a series of training courses for DVA service providers on the specific issues for G&T women suffering domestic violence and abuse.

This ongoing work has resulted in direct support to individuals enabling them to have greater choice, control and empowerment over their lives.

5. Improving Quality of Life of the Roma Community
A community of Romanian Roma arrived in Bristol after the accession of Romania into the EU in 2007. This community is impoverished and excluded, both in Romania and across Europe. The council estimates that there are around 60 families living in crowded private rented accommodation in Bristol.

There have been various concerns for this community. Young women have been involved in street begging and windscreen washing at busy road junctions. BCC was concerned that, in addition to this being dangerous, it was also generating negative media interest, which could cause tensions in the community and hostility towards Romanian Roma.

Mainstream service providers were finding it difficult to keep track of children and to communicate with and support families. Existing levels of support were inadequate and placed a huge burden on front line staff.

Few members of the Roma community spoke English and, with only three Romanian interpreters in Bristol, there was huge pressure on agencies. BCC’s G&T and Community Cohesion teams felt that a multi-agency drop-in service would assist agencies in reaching, advising and supporting the community.
6. The Roma drop-in service
This has been operating for five months and allows Roma families and agencies to tackle a number of issues quickly and in one place. It also allows the limited number of interpreters to be used more effectively. The drop-in tackles everything from help with paperwork, play and reading activities to health queries, etc. The drop-in is successful in establishing a contact point between agencies and the Roma community and has enabled trust to be built up. Services attending the sessions include health visitors, advice agencies, Barnados, Traveller Education team, Libraries, Play Workers, as well as BCC’s G&T and Community Cohesion teams.

The G&T Team have provided funding to employ a sessional worker to coordinate these and provide outreach services to visit families at home. The team is planning to fund some basic skills/citizenship/ESOL work to run during the drop-in sessions.

Through working at the drop-in, agencies have been able to build relationships that enable them to operate in other areas. For example, the G&T Team has assisted social workers with joint home visits when child protection concerns have arisen.

7. Roma seminar and webcast
In addition to direct work with the Roma community BCC’s Community Cohesion team hosted a seminar on the Romanian Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) Community which was attended by over 100 people. The seminar was so oversubscribed that it was webcast to ensure the widest possible dissemination. Its purpose was to ensure that staff from BCC, schools, health workers, the police etc are able to respond appropriately to the needs of the local Romanian GRT population and understand the structural and institutional barriers that people face because of their immigration status and because of public perception.

The seminar explained the history of the community, recent political changes in Romania and their experiences in Britain. For example, the seminar explained that the community does not have a written tradition; this affects their understanding of addresses and appointments, and that they have religious beliefs which affect the way they view some health services.

8. Partnerships
The Gypsy and Traveller and Community Cohesion teams work in partnership not just with VOSCUR and the NHS but also with surrounding councils, especially South Gloucestershire and North Somerset.
One of the community development workers participates in the community development workers' regional network, sharing her expertise with colleagues from across the South West. They have also worked proactively to raise awareness about the issues facing the GRT community, working with others to produce a number of resources including:

- a mythbusting booklet
- sections of the “Talking Cultures” DVD on BCC's website.

These resources have been used by other councils, for example Leicestershire which based its own publication on BCC booklet.

9. Conclusion
All of the innovative initiatives led by Bristol City Council's G&T team have enabled GRT communities to work with statutory and voluntary agencies to tackle together the inequality and discrimination that they face in accessing appropriate services and site provision. They have also ensured that GRT communities have been empowered to represent themselves in the future development of such services and particularly in the imminent development of new sites in Bristol.

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