



## Evaluation of the Gypsy, Romani and Traveller project

Delivered by Blyth Citizens Advice Bureau

Carried out by:



August 2014

Evaluation funded by:

Northern Rock Foundation



## About Blyth Citizens Advice Bureau

Blyth Citizens Advice Bureau is a thriving moderate size bureau which has offices in Blyth and Cramlington and an outreach in Seaton Delaval. They specialise in welfare benefits and debt, as well as a volunteer project from which there is a Money Active Project, a Telephone Project and a Complex Client Project. There are 31 volunteers who deliver the face to face work, as well as 13 Trustees who manage the Bureau. In 2013, they had over 4400 face-to-face new clients, and provided telephone support to an average of 300 clients. They are currently in the process of merging with other bureaus across Northumberland.

More information: [www.adviceatblyth.org.uk](http://www.adviceatblyth.org.uk)



## About the authors

Barefoot Research and Evaluation is a social and economic research organisation based in Newcastle upon Tyne, working across the North East and Cumbria. They have particular expertise in research and evaluation with hidden and excluded communities. Dr. Christopher Hartworth, who set up Barefoot, has 20 years' experience of research and evaluation, beginning in developing countries in poverty alleviation programmes and continuing in the North East of England in work with disadvantaged communities. Joanne Hartworth has a First Class Honours Degree in Sociology, is a qualified teacher and an accomplished project manager, having managed projects in East and West Newcastle.

More information: [www.barefootresearch.org.uk](http://www.barefootresearch.org.uk)



## Comments about the project

*She's been there for us, if she wasn't who else would travellers turn to?*

Romani Gypsy

*We give the travelling community in Northumberland a voice and they wouldn't have that voice if it wasn't for us*

Project Worker

*We would be lost without her*

Romani Gypsy

*If you take her away, we have nothing*

Scottish Traveller

*I would be homeless if it wasn't for her, maybe even worse*

Romani Gypsy

*You can't underestimate the negative effects of the very low levels of literacy within Traveller communities ... it excludes them from so much*

Project Worker

*She's helped me with my kids' schooling, helped me to flee domestic violence, helped my mother with her health and depression*

Scottish Traveller

*She helps them with their housing benefits and their problems, things that I would not be able to help with, in many ways she helped us get paid as a landlord ... She is a great asset to them*

Local Authority Traveller Liaison Officer

## **i Executive summary**

This is an evaluation of Blyth Citizens Advice Bureau's Gypsy, Romani and Traveller (GRT) Project that started in 2010 in Northumberland with funding from Northumberland County Council and Northern Rock Foundation.

GRTs represent a small yet constant population in Northumberland. They are known to be a highly marginalised group which experiences harassment, discrimination and disadvantage in a several key areas, such as health, education and access to services (Parry *et al*, 2007). The Government's own research suggested they were the most excluded group in the UK (DCLG, 2007).

The Blyth CAB project provides support to GRT throughout Northumberland, including on local authority sites in Bedlington and Lynemouth and private sites in Berwick upon Tweed. The project also works with GRT families who are on unauthorised sites and those living in bricks and mortar. They receive referrals from all these via word of mouth. The Project Worker will then visit them on site, in their homes or they come and see her at the CAB offices in Blyth. The project has also delivered a service in HMP Northumberland for GRT prisoners.

The project has worked with a total of 57 individuals between July 2011 and March 2014: 42 in the community and 20 individuals in prison. The greatest number of these have belonged to the English Romani ethnic group, followed by Irish and Scottish Travellers.

The areas of support provided by the project are diverse and include tackling discrimination, employment-related support and legal issues, housing, welfare advice, support for education-related issues, debt and health.

## Findings

Based on research, the evaluation makes a series of findings. These include the following:

**The Project Worker has developed strong relationships with GRT groups across Northumberland:** this takes a particular skill set from the worker and is an achievement in itself. GRT communities are well known to be highly suspicious and distrustful of community agencies and so gaining the trust of GRT communities and engaging them into services is a great achievement. GRT reported a close and trusting relationship between themselves and the Project Worker, which enabled them to access the services provided.

**Effective alternative engagement and referral systems:** the project has developed an effective alternative to formal referral systems used by the majority of community based professional agencies. They have developed a word of mouth appointment system and a direct approach method where individuals will access the Project Worker when needs arise. This system has worked well for the project where other approaches have failed, such as a more formal appointment based or surgery style system.

**Individuals and their families often have a number of needs:** individual GRT have received support in several areas from the project, i.e. it has not been one person one issue. The project has then often provided support to their families. This demonstrates a strong service need within GRT which may be the result of historic under provision for the group.

**Increasing equalities and reducing discrimination in Northumberland:** the service makes for a more inclusive Northumberland. The Council's investment, along with that of Northern Rock Foundation, is creating a more equitable array of services for the population of Northumberland. It was clear

from the research that GRT would not access services in the community if there was not a named and identifiable contact. Therefore, the presence of the Project Worker ensures that GRT are able to access services that they need. As with many equality areas, a service does not become truly equitable if concerted efforts are not made to reach out to those minorities. In other words, it is not sufficient simply to say, 'our services are equal', but work needs to be done to enable minorities to be able to access those services, as is the case here. The Project Worker has also been proactive in addressing incidents of discrimination, such as existed in Berwick, and from contact with officials. GRT communities suffer discrimination and hate crime as a regular part of their lives and the Project Worker has addressed these incidents where she has found them.

**Increasing equalities within CAB:** increasing the number of GRT clients was one of three key strategic objectives of the national CAB. Certainly, in Northumberland, this has been achieved. Previous to the start of the project it was rare that they would receive anybody from a GRT community. However, since 2010 and the start of the project, they regularly have around 30 attendances each year (approximately 10 individuals).

**Influencing policy and practice and presenting a model of best practice from the North East:** through representation on national policy and learning meetings, such as the CAB's National Task Force and the Diversity Strategy and Pathways Groups in HMP Northumberland, and as a result of the Project Worker's expertise and knowledge, Blyth CAB is able to contribute significantly to national policy and practice throughout the UK. The Blyth CAB model includes the method of engagement, the referral mechanisms and the supportive approach and exists both in the community work and its prison-based work. This has a direct impact on a national and local level of awareness, discrimination and prejudice experienced by GRT communities.

**Ensuring benefit entitlements and payments are in place:** the project helps GRT groups receive the benefits they are entitled to. This particularly includes the complexities of receiving housing benefits for rented caravans and sites. This ensures that payments are made to the council, arrears are not built up and that people receive the correct benefits.

**Reducing reoffending in GRT prison populations:** through the project work in prison, which adheres to NOMS and best practice guidance, the project contributes towards efforts to reduce reoffending amongst GRT groups in prison. This is achieved through removing structural barriers to desistance, such as helping prisoners with driving offences to obtain their licences, and through supporting prisoners to maintain family contact, which has been proven to be a major factor in reducing future offending.

## **Conclusion**

GRT are clearly one of the most oppressed groups in British society. They suffer daily discrimination and exclusion, they are the regular victims of hate crime, they experience poorer health and life outcomes including mortality rates and are excluded from public and private spaces. Access to resources and services is a particular issue for GRT communities. There is very little which is specifically tailored to their needs or targeted for their use. They have a great distrust of non-GRT people because of their experiences of discrimination and will only access services if they know sympathetic individuals will be there for them.

The Blyth CAB service is one of the very few targeted GRT services in both Northumberland and in the country; it is a model of best practice and an exemplar project. An important reason behind this is the quality of the relationship and trust which has developed between the Project Worker and the GRT communities with which she works. In the national training that the project work is involved with, participants often ask the Project Worker, '*how*

*do you engage with GRT?*

Whilst the success of the engagement in Northumberland is undoubtedly due to the character and expertise of the Project Worker, we suspect there is another explanation. The reason GRT communities access the service is because the Project Worker goes to see them on-site or in their homes and if they need to come into the CAB offices, they know her and trust her and can ask to see her in person. If other services wish to be GRT-friendly and equitable, they need to do the same. It is not simply sufficient to have an open door policy.

The results of the project and their approach appear to be significant, not least in enabling GRT to access services. We also see the project has: increased their access to resources and material benefits, which has knock on effect to health and well-being; made more direct impacts on particularly mental health, through better housing, managing debts and sorting out benefits; made impacts on local discrimination, which ultimately results in improved community cohesion. The project is a testimony to the intentions of the Citizens Advice Bureau, Northumberland County Council and Northern Rock Foundation to make local services truly accessible to an oppressed minority living in the British Isles.

## **Recommendations**

We have limited recommendations for this project, the main one being the need to find sustainable continuation funding. The momentum and reputation built up by the project amongst GRT communities is a valuable asset and if left to fall because of an absence of funding, would be disastrous.

The second recommendation relates to how the project monitors its outputs and impact. For this it is necessary and important that the project improves record keeping and project databases to improve the ability to access quickly

information on outputs and outcomes. This is a mainstay of all good funded projects and in the absence of external evaluation, this is the main way that the project will demonstrate impact.

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# 1.0 Introduction

This is an evaluation of Blyth Citizens Advice Bureau's Gypsy, Romani and Traveller (GRT) Project that started in 2010 in Northumberland with funding from Northumberland County Council and Northern Rock Foundation.

GRTs represent a small, yet constant population in Northumberland. They are known to be a highly marginalised group which experiences harassment, discrimination and disadvantage in a several key areas, such as health, education and access to services (Parry *et al*, 2007). The Government's own research suggested they were the most excluded group in the UK (DCLG, 2007). One study commented that the life of a Traveller is often short and framed by exclusion (Mac Gabhann, 2011). They are a hidden part of British culture, often living in the midst of local communities, but for many they remain unknown, disliked and feared. In opinion polls, they are the most disliked group in Britain (Ipsos Mori, 2001)<sup>1</sup>.

In the true spirit and meaning of equalities, there is a requirement for services to proactively ensure they are relevant and accessible to all communities, including GRT groups. Blyth CAB has done this and has also commissioned this independent evaluation of their service, as a demonstration of their commitment to excellence and continual improvement.

This evaluation was carried out in September 2014 by an independent sector specialist<sup>2</sup> and was based on a series of interviews with GRT, project staff and associated professionals, analysis of project qualitative and quantitative data and a review of the literature. The evaluation finds a project that has engaged extremely well with and gained the trust of Northumberland GRT

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<sup>1</sup> An Ipsos Mori (2001) poll found that almost two thirds of people in England (64 percent) could name at least one minority group towards whom they feel less positive - representing 25 million adults across the country. The most frequently cited groups were Gypsies and Travellers (35 percent).

<sup>2</sup> Barefoot Research and Evaluation, [www.barefootresearch.org.uk](http://www.barefootresearch.org.uk)

communities, delivering an independent, effective and valued service to a highly marginalised group.

## 1.1 Background and context

GRT have been part of British Society since the 1500s living a nomadic lifestyle (Johnson *et al*, 2005). Since they arrived in the UK, where they were referred to as Egyptians, the root word of Gypsy, they have been subject to discrimination and exclusion, initially being as severe as deportation and execution. The Egyptians Acts of 1530 and 1554 were designed to discourage the presence of '*outlandish people calling themselves Egyptians*<sup>3</sup>', and make it a crime to associate with them ('*to continue for one month in the company or fellowship of any vagabonds commonly called Egyptians*<sup>4</sup>') (Wood, 2013). A parish register in the North East holds records in 1592 of individuals who were hanged for being '*Egyptians.*' (*ibid*, 2013). Irish Travellers were a more recent introduction to mainland Britain, arriving in the mid 1800s (Kenrick and Bakewell, 1990), commonly providing rural labour.

There are several definitions of GRT communities, with the Northumberland County Council using an inclusive one that includes those recognised as a racial group under the Equalities Act 2010 and subsequent judicial decisions (these are Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers and Gypsies of either English, Scottish or Welsh origin) and those who self identify. It also includes groups who are not covered by the Equalities Act 2010, such as New Travellers who may be part of the community within Northumberland, if only for a short while or while they are passing through.

Assessing the numbers of GRT communities is clearly difficult because of the nature of nomadic lifestyles. The 2011 Census finds 58,000 people who identified themselves as Gypsy or Irish Traveller in the UK. However, the

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<sup>3</sup> Egyptians Act of 1530.

<sup>4</sup> Egyptians Act of 1554.

Commission for Racial Equality estimated the number of Gypsies and Travellers in Britain to be between 250,000 and 300,000 living in bricks and mortar and around 90,000 living a semi nomadic life (CRE, 2006). The 2011 Census finds just over 150 people identifying as GRT in Northumberland. Around 800 identify as White Irish which may incorporate Irish Travellers (Census, 2011). The 2009 housing needs assessment estimates a total of 553 individuals in caravans and bricks and mortar (HLDL, 2009).

The general population of Northumberland in 2011 was 316,028. The GRT population represents approximately 0.15 of the total Northumberland population. The following figure presents the main GRT locations according to the 2011 Census.

**Figure 1.0 GRT locations, 2011**



## **1.2 Background to the work in prison**

People from GRT communities are significantly overrepresented in the prison population (HMIP, 2014). They are a sub-group of the prison population that face a particular set of problems but rarely receive any targeted support or services. It has been identified by a major study on conditions of Travellers in prison (Mac Gabhann, 2011) that negative social factors which face GRT communities in everyday life present serious challenges to prisons and prison staff in relation to their custody, rehabilitation and resettlement.

### ***1.2.1 Numbers of GRT in prison***

According to HMIP (2014) research, the GRT prison population in England and Wales is approximately<sup>5</sup>:

- 4263 adult males (five percent of a prison population of 85,674): in some prisons, the proportion increases to 12 percent (HMP Elmley);
- 278 adult females (seven percent of a population of 3921): some prisons hold up to eight percent (HMP New Hall);
- 55 children (under 18 years old): percentages range up to 12 percent (in YOI Warren Hill). In Secure Training Centres (STC) which also hold children, here there is an even higher proportion of children from GRT communities, reaching 22 percent in STC Medway in Kent.

The prison system has only been collecting information on the numbers of GRT since 2011 when the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) introduced the W3 code of Gypsy or Irish Traveller to P Nomis, their recording system. This action was in response to the Ministry of Justice's 2008 Race Review (MoJ, 2008) which found no monitoring of populations and complaints by GRT offenders of unmet needs. Previous to this, numbers were unknown and hidden as GRT prisoners concealed their identity to avoid bullying and

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<sup>5</sup> All figures are calculated from Ministry of Justice, Population Bulletin, August 22, 2014.

discrimination by both fellow prisoners and staff. The Race Review 2008 expressed a hope that improved monitoring of GRT would improve access to the rehabilitation and resettlement services (Mac Gabhann and Cottrell Boyce, 2014).

### ***1.2.2 Issues affecting GRT prisoners***

A recent HMIP (2014) review which looked specifically at GRT populations in prison made a number of important findings:

- People from GRT communities have a greater likelihood of being given custodial sentences due to the lack of a recognised home address or an expectation that they might abscond;
- Young GRT men are vulnerable to involvement with criminal justice agencies, possibly due to a high number leaving school at a young age;
- GRT groups may have a limited understanding of criminal justice systems and processes;
- GRT prisoners are significantly more likely than others to feel unsafe, to experience bullying and victimisation from fellow prisoners and staff and to have been segregated and physically restrained;
- The high levels of illiteracy within the GRT community makes it difficult to access education, training and jobs in prison;
- GRT prisoners were more likely to require support on a range of issues but less likely to receive support than other prisoners; and
- GRT prisoners find it hard to cope, have mental health problems which can lead to acute distress and suicide (HMIP, 2014).

### ***1.2.3 Good practice***

Although provision is very limited, there are some examples of specific good practice in prisons and now a good practice guide, providing more generic

examples of what establishments can do to improve provision and engagement. The HMIP (2014: 11) examples include:

- At HMP YOI Feltham, a weekly support group for GRT young people was described as producing some very positive work.
- At HMP Birmingham, a monthly forum for GRT prisoners had been running for over a year, in addition to a regular newsletter and an event to promote diversity.
- At HMP Liverpool, links had been established with an external community group, Irish Community Care Merseyside, which had attended the prison's first Travellers' forum. There were also plans to broadcast a programme on Irish Travellers on the prison radio.
- At HMP Woodhill, GRT prisoners could apply for additional weekly telephone credit from their private cash if their only means of contact with family was by mobile telephone.
- At HMP Leyhill, families of GRT prisoners were able to collect visiting orders at the gate.
- At HMP Leeds, links had been established with community organisations to support GRT prisoners on release.

The good practice guide (Mac Gabhann and Cottrell Boyce, 2014), advocated the need for: **GRT groups**: these are proposed as an opportunity for prisons to resolve issues, improve communication and reduce conflict with GRT prisoners; and **GRT representatives**: these speak up on behalf of other GRT prisoners in diversity forums, and can help promote communication and understanding between the prison and prisoners.

### **1.3 Provision and policy in Northumberland**

There has been provision in Northumberland for GRT communities for a number of years, which reflects the length of time they have been recognised as a separate ethnic group in the county. For example, the local authority has

had a Traveller Education service for over 20 years, which has catered for the education needs of GRT children. They have also employed a dedicated Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officer who is the administrative link between the local authority and GRT communities, with a particular focus on caravan site management. There is a Gypsy Roma and Traveller Strategy Group which is a multi-agency partnership made up of public (including health, Police and housing) and voluntary sector organisations. This group has produced two GRT strategies: 2008 to 2012; and 2013 to 2016. The overall aim of the current strategy is to ensure:

*Gypsies and Travellers residing in, travelling through or staying temporarily in Northumberland will have an equal opportunity to participate in the community. Their right to a cultural identity will be understood and equal access to services will be facilitated (NCC, 2013: 6).*

There are seven objectives:

1. Provide strategic direction, coordination and delivery to inform all partner organisations' policies and practices in relation to Gypsies and Travellers.
2. Ensure Gypsies and Travellers are given the opportunity to influence the design, development and delivery of services to better meet the needs of their communities.
3. Enable the effective collection of data, intelligence and information so that we better understand the needs of Gypsies and Travellers accessing services, with particular focus on Health and Education Services.
4. Provide the permanent and transit Gypsy and Traveller community in Northumberland with information about the area in an appropriate format.
5. Raise awareness and understanding of Gypsy and Traveller culture and traditions.
6. Ensure accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers are better understood, included in and provided for in development plans.
7. Challenge unlawful discrimination and/or harassment; promote equality of

opportunity, and a mutual understanding and respect between the settled community and Gypsy and Traveller communities.

The local authority has also funded the CAB GRT Project Worker since December 2010, demonstrating a commitment to achieving the strategy aim and objectives and supporting their most vulnerable and marginalised ethnic group.

### **Box 1.0 The disadvantage and vulnerabilities of GRT communities**

Equality and Human Rights Commission (Cemlyn *et al*, 2009) research found extensive inequalities affecting GRT communities including:

- Life expectancy for GRT men and women is 10 years lower than the national average;
- GRT mothers are 20 times more likely than the rest of the population to have experienced the death of a child;
- Less than one quarter of GRT children obtained five GCSEs at A-C grades compared to a national average of over one half;
- Difficulties with economic inclusion and access to employment;
- Access to and experience of the healthcare system, social care, education and other public services, policing and the Criminal Justice System;
- Racism and discrimination;
- Victims of domestic abuse are less likely to receive culturally appropriate services and therefore find it harder to leave abusive relationships.

## 2.0 The project

The idea for the project came from both a strategic interest and a grassroots identification of the need for a county wide GRT support service. In the 2008 to 2013 strategic plan for Northumberland, created by the Northumberland Strategic Partnership, a need was identified for a GRT service to support local populations, particularly around homelessness<sup>6</sup> issues. For several years previous to this, the Blyth CAB manager had noted that GRT in Northumberland were a highly marginalised and under represented group in their constituency. Indeed, no people from GRT communities ever used the CAB. Further to this, the manager had visited a GRT support project in North Wales, also delivered by the CAB, which was considered best practice and subsequently had wanted to start a similar project in Northumberland.

As a consequence, in 2010 Northumberland County Council invested £20,000 to pay for a part time GRT Project Worker that was employed by the CAB. After six months, a local funder, the Northern Rock Foundation was interested in matching the funding to create a full time position. In December 2010, Northumberland first GRT Project Worker started work.

The objectives of the project were to:

- Break down the barriers which prevented people from GRT communities from using the CAB;
- To provide independent advice and support; and
- To challenge discrimination and prejudice.

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<sup>6</sup> Under the Housing Act 1996, a Gypsy or Traveller is homeless if s/he does not have a lawful place to put his or her caravan or living vehicle.

## **2.1 The early stages: developing relationships and earning trust**

The first issue for the new Project Worker was how to begin engaging with local GRT groups. The worker started by being introduced to GRT on the county's authorised sites by the local authority's planning officer, who had responsibility for GRT sites. Here it was explained that her role was an independent adviser and advocate for GRT groups across the county. After first introductions, the Project Worker started to visit the sites on a regular basis, beginning with the site wardens (the sites have a nominated individual from a GRT family who is the first point of contact for the authorities). During those visits, she would be told about others at the sites who were having problems with particular issues, such as benefits or letters, who she would visit and assist. Many of those initial visits would entail simply spending time with GRT families, talking and sharing things from her life about family and life in general, gaining trust and familiarity; in short developing a relationship and friendships with those first GRTs that she made contact with.

The Project Worker in these early stages was most involved with females from the GRT communities as it is women who are mostly involved with life on site and in their caravans. The men were mostly off site, working often as scrap metal traders. It is likely that these cultural arrangements, i.e. women on site and men off site, and the Project Worker as a mature woman, played a key role in the project's ability to engage with the GRT communities. The women were entertained by a new person from the outside world which provided a distraction from their routine, this person did not pose a threat to their husbands (i.e. was not a man), was credible, interesting and had a life experience of her own, including children, so she could relate to young and old and she was someone the women could talk to who was not from their own community, allowing them a freedom which they would not often be able to possess, if ever. It is for these reasons that the Project Worker was allowed access and was able to come into women's homes and sit and talk. The

importance of this ability cannot be overstated.

The project's prison-based work had arisen out of conversations between the Project Worker and the Inclusion and Diversity Manager at HMP Northumberland in early 2012. The latter had become aware of issues affecting GRT communities in the prison and wanted to start a GRT group. A few months later a GRT group was started which met on the last Friday of every month. The group ran from 9am until 12pm and was held in the faith room next to the Chapel. Section 3.3 presents the work in detail.

## **2.2 Referrals**

The Project Worker had envisaged holding weekly surgeries at the sites where clients would approach her with their issues. However, despite repeated efforts this attempt at formality did not prove successful. Instead, as her relationship became stronger with the local communities, her role and function was increasingly talked about within and between GRT communities, and requests would come via those first families she made contact with. Sometimes during the subsequent visits, she would be told about other individuals or others would approach her when she was on site. Other times people would come into the CAB office in Blyth and ask for her personally.

Thus, it would appear that the word of mouth appointment system and the approaches of individuals when needs arise, works over a more formal appointment based or surgery style system.

Once engaged with a client, a common occurrence is dealing with a broader range of issues in addition to that initially presented. For example, a client with literacy problems may come to the Project Worker asking for help reading or responding to official letters. Then it becomes apparent that the client has a health need which they require support with, following this there is a housing need, then a discrimination issue. This pattern is reflected in the project's

output statistics, with a high number of times support is provided, with a lower number of separate individuals recorded.

After support has been provided to one individual, it often becomes apparent that the client's mother, father, son or daughter requires support or an Aunt or Uncle. For example, the Project Worker started helping a single parent with their benefits which had been stopped, then she helped her father who was a victim of harassment and was in court for public order offences, then with her mother with an ESA (Employment Support Allowance) appeal, which was successful, then she helped arrange home schooling for the single parent's son who was being bullied. As the Project Worker says '*it just snowballs, once your in.*' In this way, the Project Worker becomes involved with supporting the family with a number of structural issues and works in a profound way with them.

This is a departure from how the CAB usually works, which is through an appointment system where a case file is opened, work is carried out and then the file is closed when the case has been resolved. In the case of the GRT project, they can be working with the same family for four years on different topics and the 'case' is never 'closed'.

Once trust and relationships had been established, the Project Worker's function and reputation spread throughout the GRT communities in Northumberland, including those on unplanned sites. As a result of her successes helping referrals resolve issues they needed support with, others came forward. As the Project Worker illuminated:

*"It quickly spread on the Bush Telegraph, what I did and what I could do."*

A key approach of the project has been to accompany people to places where they need to go, such as a housing or benefits offices. This form of support has also been an important part of the relationship building and trust which

has developed between the project and GRT communities.

It is worthy of note that when the Project Worker gives external presentations or training, the most common question is how she gains access to GRT communities, how she gets an '*in*'. A key learning point from the project is that if others want to replicate the initiative, great consideration and care needs to be taken to select the right candidate for the position, as if the right candidate is not selected then the project will achieve little. It is testimony to the CAB's interview panel that they had the fortune or foresight to select a perfect candidate to ensure the success of the project.

The project must ensure that it is up to date with all the relevant and new legislation and processes. For example, the new Scrap Metal Dealers Act in 2013, Housing Benefit applications and how they relate to caravans and trailers, and with established legislation such as the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

## **2.3 Location of work**

Support work has taken place throughout Northumberland including on local authority sites in Bedlington and Lynemouth and private sites in Berwick upon Tweed. The project also works with GRT families who are not on authorised sites. They receive referrals from these sites via word of mouth and then visits them on their own sites or they come and see her at her office.

## **2.4 National representation**

The Project Worker represents Northumberland CAB at national GRT events and policy groups. These included the CAB National Taskforce which chose GRT communities as one of their priority groups in their 2012-2015 strategy. This group developed a best practice guide for working with GRT communities, which contained significant input from the Blyth CAB worker and

now every bureau around the country has a 'Getting Started' pack. The Blyth worker is also involved in national training on working with GRT communities. At these occasions she is often presented as a model of best practice and a source of expertise, both for her knowledge and method of engagement.

## **2.5 Partnership working**

The project works closely with Northumberland County Council's existing GRT resources and staff, such as the Traveller Site Manager. They have been working recently towards bringing the authorised sites in line with social housing standards, for example, newcomers needing to complete an application form if they require pitch. This has brought new GRT in closer contact with the Council and raised new support needs. Thus, when a new arrival comes to the site, the Site Manager contacts the Project Worker who makes a visit and helps them with any needs or applications they have.

The Project Worker contributes to the local authority's multi-agency GRT strategy group and also sits on HMP Northumberland's Diversity Group, which is held once a month and deals with any issues of equality and diversity affecting prisoners. As an independent representative of the GRT population in prison, the Project Worker is a vital member of this group.

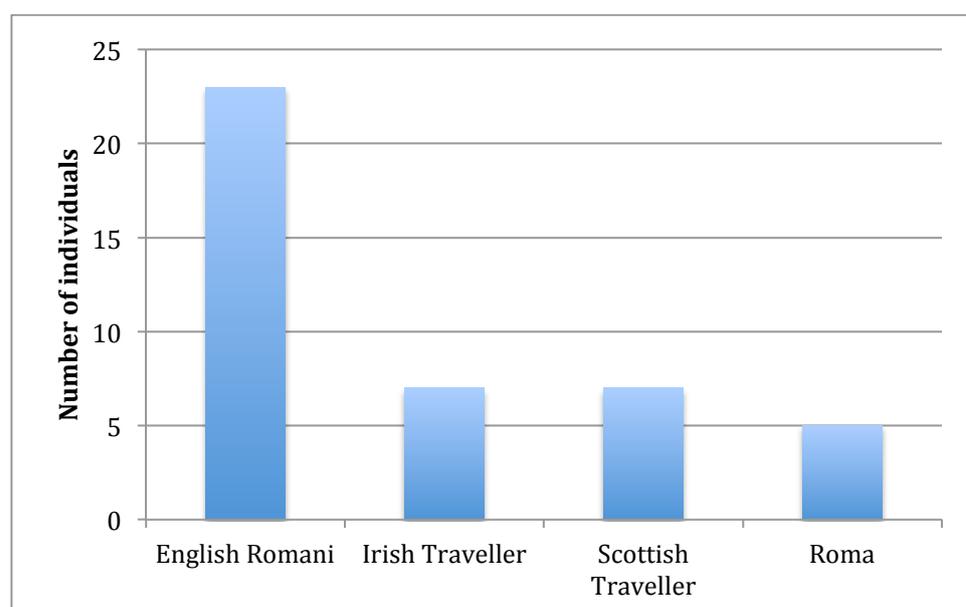
## 3.0 Outputs, areas of work and feedback from GRT

This section presents the areas of support which have been provided by the project, and the outputs associated with them. The subsequent sub section then presents the project's community and prison based work.

### 3.1 Outputs

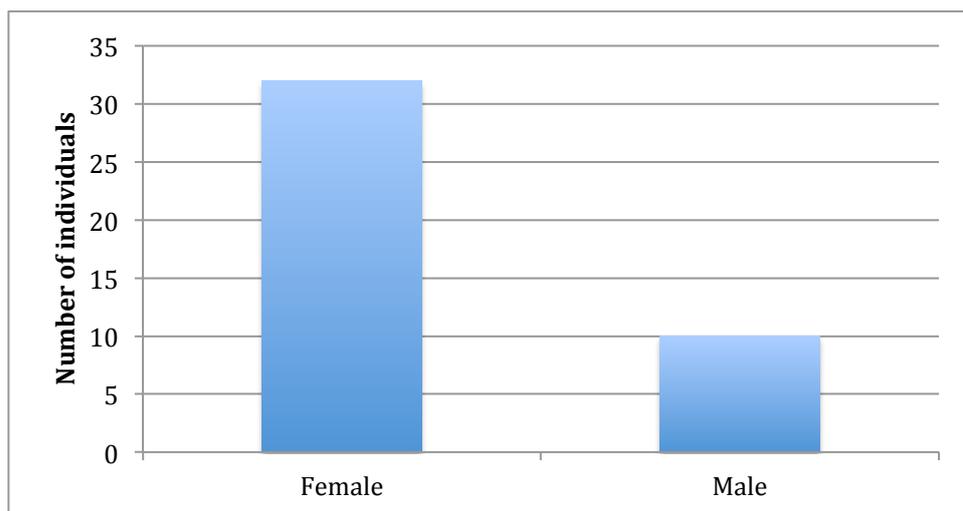
The project has worked with a total of 57 individuals between July 2011 and March 2014: 42 in the community and 20 individuals in prison. The greatest number of these have belonged to the English Romani ethnic group, followed by Irish and Scottish Travellers (see figure 3.0). As section 2.2 explained, each individual commonly received support in a number of areas, such as benefits, housing and legal support. Thus the number of individuals belies the level of support provided (see figure 3.0 for a presentation of the number of times support was provided).

**Figure 3.0 Ethnic group of GRT supported by the project, July 2011 to March 2014**



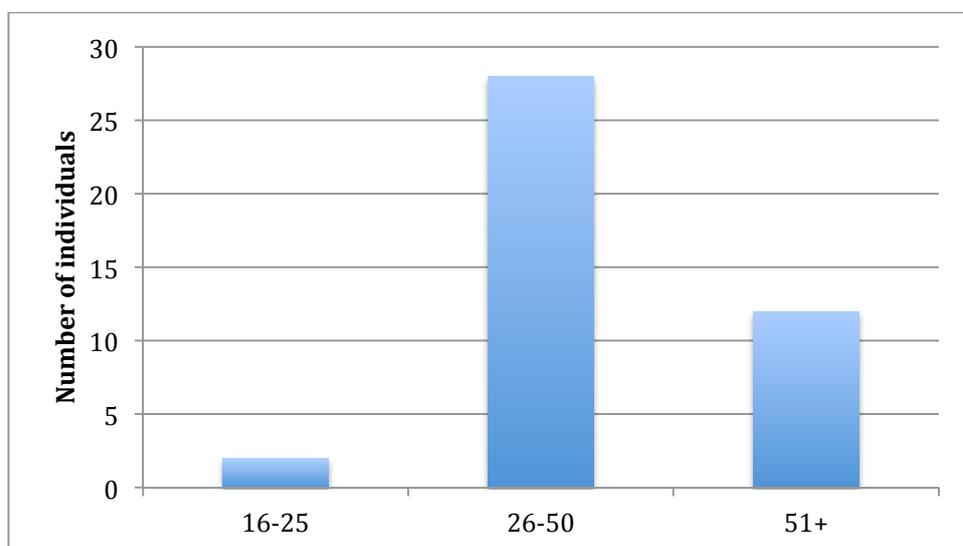
The project has worked with more women than men (figure 3.1), which is explained by the predominance of women on site in the day, when the Project Worker makes her visits.

**Figure 3.1 Gender of GRT supported by the project, July 2011 to March 2014**



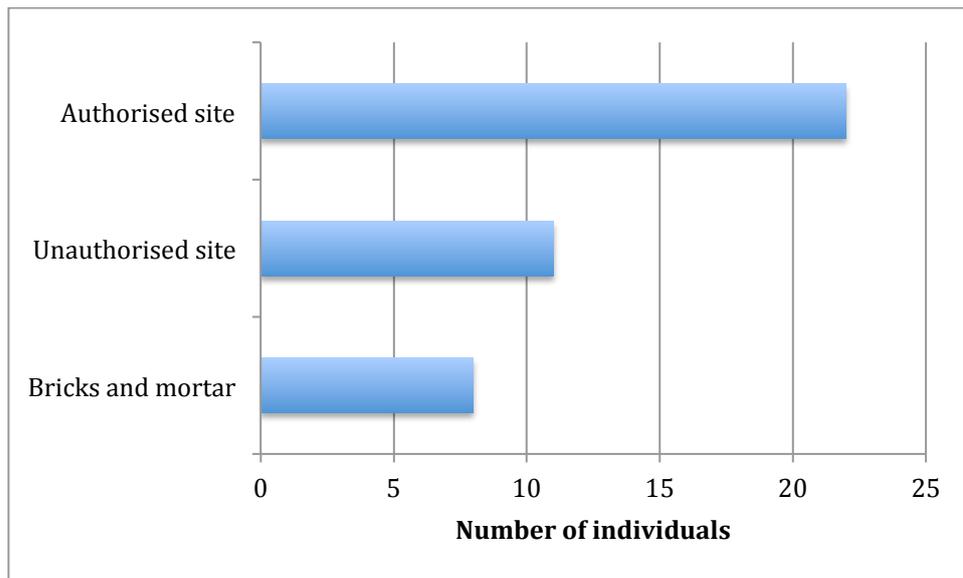
The most common age group of GRT requiring support was between 26 and 50 years old (figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2 Ages of GRT supported by the project, July 2011 to March 2014**



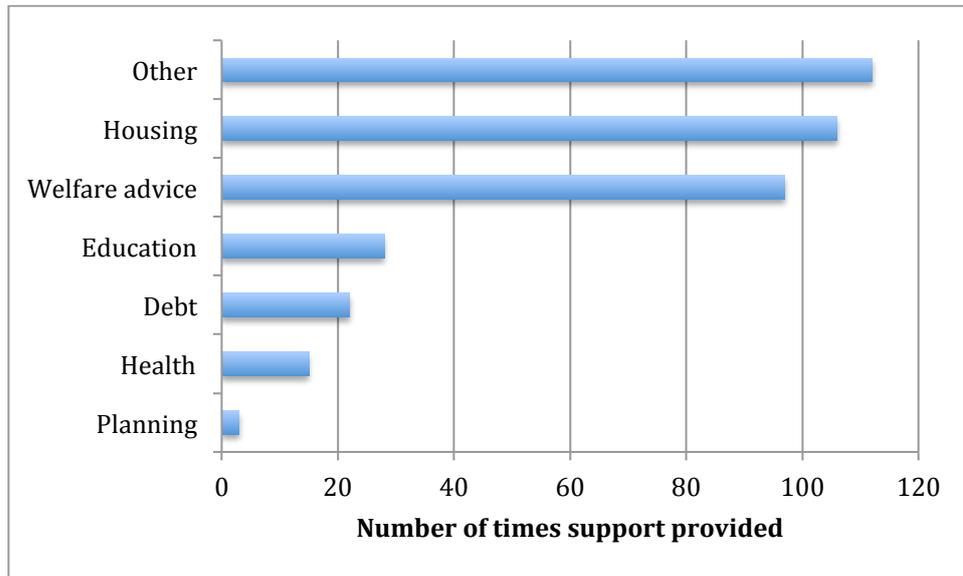
The majority of the GRT supported have been nomadic, living in caravans either on established sites in Northumberland, or on unauthorised sites. The project has also supported GRT living in bricks and mortar accommodation (figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3 Accommodation status of GRT supported by the project, July 2011 to March 2014**



The areas of support provided by the project are shown in the following figure (and discussed in the following section). After the 'other' category, which includes a diverse range of support areas including tackling discrimination, employment-related support and legal issues, the most common area of support provided has been housing, followed by welfare advice, then support for education-related issues, debt and health.

**Figure 3.0 Ethnic group of GRT supported by the project, July 2011 to March 2014**



### **3.2 Community based work**

The project has covered a range of issues as presented by the previous figure. Many of these relate to difficulties with literacy, such as problems filling in forms, reading letters and understanding medical instructions/literature. Poor literacy within GRT communities is well known, partly as the result of the variety of languages spoken, including Romani, Cant and Gaelic are non-written languages (NCC, 2013) and partly because school attendance is often sporadic and short lived.

Poor literacy causes many problems on a variety of different areas in the lives of the GRT community. For example, a single parent, living in bricks and mortar accommodation had her benefits stopped because she was not keeping a diary of her job seeking activities, despite her having told them she could not read or write. When the Project Worker accompanied the woman to an appointment in the light of this, the Job Centre Plus staff said that she could orally tell them, and her benefits were reinstated. Poor literacy acts as a barrier to GRT men wanting to sit driving licence exams, putting them at risk

of fines and custodial sentences. Often, GRT men have no option but to drive without a licence and therefore put themselves at risk, as their main means of livelihood is as scrap metal dealers, which requires them to drive.

The areas covered by the project have included:

**Support with literacy: benefits and applications:** completing applications for benefits (including Child Benefit and Tax Credits), housing, legal applications or indeed applications of any kind is often very difficult for GRT people. This is the result of a combination of factors, including poor literacy and related to this is the non-collection or storing of letters or other written information/documentation. For example, often when GRT families receive official letters, they will throw them in the bin. As a result of this, they have few records which are necessary as supporting information. As a result, all applications must start from scratch, gathering all of the necessary documents required, making it a very lengthy process.

On the level of literacy, the Project Worker illustrated by saying:

*“A Housing Benefit form takes me about an hour and a half to complete ... so you can imagine what it is like if you can’t read or write.”*

And

*“Anything that takes hours by people from the settled community, takes weeks for people from the travelling community.”*

An additional factor in applications of any kind related to cultural factors. For example, with a housing application, at the point when the application has been accepted and it is the time to bid for houses, the GRT family may have gone travelling, so they are unable to complete the application. When they return, it may be too late or the application may have timed out. GRT families

may also leave applications too late. For example, when trying to get a school place for children, there may be an expectation amongst some families that they can arrive very shortly before the school year and receive a place. Some families may often not appreciate the need to apply in advance.

The project provides much support on these issues, sometimes on site for other times in the CAB offices. Either as a result of word of mouth recommendation or due to previous contact with the project, GRT families will drop-in to the CAB office in Blyth and ask by name to see the GRT Project Worker. This may be in relation to a particular letter they have received or because of a specific issue they are experiencing.

**Health:** the project regularly supports clients with health-related matters, from registering GRT with GPs, to helping them with letters or appointments. Health is a consistently common issue with the project's clients, with a number of particularly older females being in poor physical and mental health. The Project Worker has supported GRT with their direct health needs, such as making enquiries to find appropriate health professionals and also with other issues which have strong health implications, such as helping with housing and benefits.

**Education:** the attendance of GRT children at schools and the issues which relate to this are a perennial problem for local authorities who have a statutory obligation to ensure every child receives an education. GRT children often miss major parts of their education as a result of their nomadic lifestyle, not wanting their, particularly female, children to mix with non-GRT people past a certain age and disengaging early from the compulsory school years attendance (e.g. leaving school at 13 or 14 years). Consequently, incidence of formal qualifications is low and literacy and numeracy problems are common. The Project Worker has supported a number of GRT families on education-related matters, such as: finding a school for their children; negotiating between schools and parents around non-attendance; and arranging for home

schooling.

**Tackling discrimination and harassment:** in agreement with existing literature on GRT communities, these are common occurrences in the GRT community, being described by the Project Worker, '*as an everyday thing*' and the project has worked to represent communities and individuals. Examples of general discrimination against GRT people includes:

- A 10 year old girl from a GRT community, accompanying a school friend trick or treating on Halloween. From a house that was knocked at, the occupiers were reported to have said '*come back when you haven't got that f\*\*\*\*\* Gypsy b\*\*\*\*\* with you.*'
- Comments from neighbours to travellers in bricks and mortar accommodation, including '*dirty, stinking Gypsies*' and regular shouts of "*Pikee*".
- Being refused entry to leisure complexes, pubs and other public venues because of their ethnic identity.
- Being refused venue and goods hire because of their ethnic identity.

In short, similar to other forms of social oppression, GRT are excluded access from a number of community spaces and resources. There is little wonder that GRT communities become insular and hidden in these contexts. Box 3.0 presents further examples of this.

The Project Worker has also supported people who were involved in court cases for harassment and other issues, speaking for them or presenting written evidence. In one case the Judge was reported by the Project Worker to have said, '*this is the first time we have had Citizens Advice in the court representing the Travelling Community and we have taken it into account [when passing sentence]*'.

**Employment-related support:** the Project Worker has spent considerable time helping GRT men apply for licences to fulfil the new legislation under the Scrap Metal Dealers Act, which meant they had to apply for a licence for each local authority they work under. This is a detailed and complex process with several forms to fill in and a Criminal Disclosure to apply for, which clearly presents problems for people with poor literacy skills. As scrap metal dealing is the dominant form of employment, without the support of the Project Worker, GRT communities would have suffered economically or would have been at risk of prosecution.

**Housing applications:** the Project Worker has assisted GRT families move into settled, brick and mortar accommodation. This is a long and difficult process and has resulted in GRT families being declared homeless and therefore provided with emergency hostel accommodation. This has been very difficult for those families (which have included those with young children) because of other tenants with ongoing substance misuse problems. GRT communities known to be very anti-drugs of any kind. However, the Project Worker has been successful with gaining secure accommodation for five families.

**Other issues:** the project supports GRT people in a range of other areas. This has included: assisting victims of domestic abuse within GRT communities move away from abusive situations into places of safety, including new accommodation and into refuges; supporting GRT with legal issues, such as accompanying clients to solicitors and to the courts; helping with employment-related issues, such as going with GRT to Job Centre interviews and advocating on their behalf about literacy difficulties.

### **Box 3.0 Tackling discrimination in Berwick**

GRT were facing discrimination in several areas in the town of Berwick; they were not allowed into local pubs and they were banned from the local leisure centre. The Project Worker approached both the local publicans and the Police to attempt to resolve the issue. She indicated that it was not legal to refuse people entry because of their race and she tried to explain some of the cultural differences of the GRT community. After many phone calls, attempted meetings, representations at Licensing Meetings and other lobbying, people from the GRT community can now drink in Berwick pubs. At the leisure centre they were not allowing people from the GRT in to use their showers, where others could. After the Project Worker talking to the manager of the centre, they are now allowed in to use their facilities.

There have been a number of other incidents of discrimination which have required a response from the Project Worker. For example, a GRT family were experiencing racist comments and behaviour towards them when they were using a public café from both employees and customers. The Project Worker raised these issues with management and the situation improved. A local paper ran a story of people from GRT communities burying their dead illegally by opening up existing graves. GRT people have very strong traditions concerning death and would never violate the graves of others. This caused great offence to the GRT community. Again the CAB represented the local GRT community and they received a formal apology.

### 3.3 Prison based work

The project's prison-based work consisted of a monthly group for GRT prisoners intended to deal with any issues relating to them as a community, such as bullying, discriminatory practices, cultural issues, or their individual needs, such as applications, letters and family contact. It soon became clear to the project, that the group experienced specific issues in the prison; they were not popular and suffered discrimination and prejudice on a daily basis.

There has been a total of 20 groups run in the prison, between May 2012 and February 2014, with a total of 130 attendances; approximately 15 individuals attended each group. The beginning of each group is often started with a DVD about different GRT-related subjects, or this would be left playing in the background. For example, they will show DVDs of the Appleby Horse Fair, the main annual event in the GRT cultural calendar. The groups were an opportunity for GRT to talk together and share their cultural identity. During the group time, the Project Worker would approach every individual and ask whether they had any problems or issues which needed resolving. If any GRT prisoner needed individual support outside of the monthly meetings, the Project Worker would visit them in the prison in between times, facilitated by the Diversity Manager in the prison.

The Project Worker activities in the prison have included:

**Strengthening and supporting family contact:** research has demonstrated positive impacts on reoffending where prisoners have been supported to maintain family contact. At HMP Northumberland, the Project Worker has been able to maintain contact between GRT prisoners and their families and has been a point of contact for the latter where there have been concerns over prisoner welfare. One GRT prisoner gave his family's telephone number to the Project Worker and asked her to contact them for him to reassure them of his well being. This created a regular and open communication channel

between the Project Worker and the GRT family.

**Maintenance of communication networks and cultural knowledge:** the Project Worker played an important role in exchanging information between GRT communities outside of prison and those GRT people inside. Thus, the Project Worker would tell GRT prisoners about marriages, funerals and births, all extremely important cultural events. Although termed 'gossip' this is a vitally important ingredient of the cultural identity of nomadic groups.

**Removing barriers to desistance:** this refers to addressing the factors which caused individuals to offend and end up in prison. Often in an individual's offending career there is a structural reason for the offending, for example, a substance addiction or an anger problem. When these are dealt with the offending reduces or stops. There were a number of GRT prisoners with driving-related offences (estimated to be approximately 40 percent of GRT prisoners), predominantly driving without a licence. When the Project Worker investigated this issue with GRT groups, it became apparent that people could not get licenses because they lacked personal identification. For example, the Project Worker reported:

*“One lad said to me he couldn't get a drivers licence because he didn't have any ID, he didn't have a birth certificate ... He didn't know where he was born.”*

In this case, the Project Worker managed to track down his family and sourced a birth certificate. The Project Worker continued:

*“When I gave it to him, he actually burst into tears ... He was 24 years old and he had never had a birth certificate before.”*

After this, there were a number (n=10) of GRT prisoners that approached the Project Worker to enquire about getting their birth certificates to enable them

to get their driving licences. The CAB sourced £1000 from a local community chest fund to pay for the driving licences. However, unfortunately this was at the time of the prison restructure when the project stopped going in, and the money had to be repaid. Helping GRT communities with their driving licences is not limited to their prison work as the Project Worker has helped other GRT people sit their theory tests as well as help them apply for their licences.

**Improving literacy levels:** we have already alluded to the poorer literacy levels amongst GRT communities. Inside prison they run education and literacy courses for those with low literacy levels. However, it is rare for a GRT individual to attend such classes. This is said to be attributed to pride, and not wanting to be seen to have a problem in front of non-GRT people. To address this issue, the Project Worker arranged for GRT only classes, which were subsequently well attended.

**Strategic representation:** the Project Worker attends both the prison's Diversity Strategy Group and the Pathways Group. The former deals with equalities issues within the prison and the latter with the resettlement and accommodation needs of exiting prisoners. The CAB is considered a valuable external agency for both groups and important for a more equal and balanced prison.

**Advocacy and representation:** the project received many approaches by GRT prisoners to help them in communications with the prison. GRT prisoners complained often of being ignored. For example, when applying for a transfer to a prison nearer their family, there was no response. The Project Worker can represent a prisoner and, in her words, "*make a bit of noise*", thus acting as an advocate. She explained her role as "*giving them a voice to ensure they are heard, not ignored and they weren't treated unfairly because of who they are.*"

**Improving conditions for GRT people in the prison:** before the advent of the project in the prison, GRT prisoners were housed in different areas across the prison. The Project Worker was able to negotiate with the prison to get all GRT prisoners housed on the same House Block. Although this was resisted at first by the prison because of fears of a gang identity, they agreed when it was communicated that a hierarchy of age and respect was important to the GRT community and the presence of older GRT prisoners would have a positive impact on others. The Project Worker said:

*“The older ones keep the younger ones in check.”*

**Strengthening cultural identity:** the project would run an annual celebration day of GRT culture. This corresponded with the Appleby Horse Fair and consisted of DVDs of the event, favourite GRT foods (they chose a recipe from the Gypsy Cookbook) and other culturally appropriate activities.

### **3.4 Feedback from GRT**

This section presents reactions to the project from GRT communities based on detailed and in-depth interviews with two GRT women representatives that were held at the Blyth CAB offices.

The issue of **trust** and the importance of **confidentiality** were both very important to GRT. They reported that they felt comfortable with the Project Worker, they liked her manner and afforded her considerable trust.

*You feel comfortable with her, you can trust her.*

This meant they invited her into their homes and told her things that they would not tell their friends, neighbours or family. For example:

*The thing is, you can't tell your friends because things will get round to everybody, everybody knows everybody, so if you tell something to somebody, everybody will end up knowing, so you can't say something. But you can tell anything to [name of Project Worker] and you know she won't say and she will help you what you need help with.*

This trust in her and in the confidential nature of the support provided, was critical to the success of the project's work. An example of this is the support provided to GRT with literacy problems. The Project Worker helped people with forms and applications which meant they did not have to ask other people to fill them in for them, which they did not like. For example, one GRT commented:

*I hate asking other travellers to fill them in [forms] for me, knowing your business, it's embarrassing.*

The trust and confidence that was engendered by the Project Worker, was contrasted to other officials they encountered.

*She's not like the others, who can be off with you, nasty even sometimes.*

Indeed, GRT reported that the Project Worker had led to improvements in how other officials communicated with them. For example:

*[Name of the official] used to talk to me really badly, it used to make me feel not nice at all, like he would lose patience with me because I didn't understand, but I didn't understand, he was using long words and things I didn't know ... [Name of Project Worker] talked to him about it and told him to stop, and he talks to me nice now.*

The issue of **discrimination and hate crime** was raised consistently by GRT and the project undoubtedly played a role in addressing this, as the previous example illustrates. In terms of incidents, GRT reported other nearby residents saying:

*I don't want my daughter playing with you dirty stinking Gypsies.*

*Shouting 'dirty Gypos' and 'thieving Pikees' at us.*

GRT reported a particular source of prejudice and stereotypes as being the television series, My Fat Gypsy Wedding. For example:

*That did really bad for us, everybody thinks we are like that, have loads of money, dress up like that ...*

There were reports that the support of the Project Worker had resulted in **psychological benefits** to GRT, such as **relieving stress and depression**. This was achieved predominantly through the project solving structural problems, such as issues with debt or housing applications or other official matters. For example:

*My mother wasn't sleeping because she was so stressed about losing her benefits, so when [Name of Project Worker] started to help and sorted it all out, she got better, put her mind at rest, now it's all sorted out and she sleeps fine.*

There were other aspects of the service, fundamental to the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau, which were highly valued. These included the Project Worker's **impartiality and independence** and **knowledge and ability to respond** to problems or unknown issues:

*She just tells you how it is, what the situation is, she won't flower it up or lead you on and she knows loads, and if she doesn't know she'll find out.*

It was pointed out that GRT in Northumberland have **very limited access to resources**. The help and support of the Project Worker was contrasted to this lack of access. For example:

*In Scotland, the sites have a room like this, and every week a health worker comes there, then someone from the education, then someone else, there's nothing like that here ... if it wasn't a June we have nothing.*

It was also identified that the Project Worker, through the relationships she has created and her outreach work, brings people into the Blyth CAB offices. GRT will seek out a Project Worker specifically as they know she will understand them and they trust her. They will not go to other offices because they have no-one similar to trust. For example, when asked if they ever visited other CAB officers, they answered no. Similarly, when asked if they would visit the Blyth office if the Project Worker was not here, and they also said no.

### **Box 3.1 Case study: helping with literacy problems and benefits**

This case study concerns two women in their 50s, both who have long-term, chronic health problems. They share a caravan and have been in receipt of Incapacity Benefit for a number of years. They are both illiterate, although they can recognise numbers and letters. When they receive an official looking letter, usually in relation to their benefits, or hospital appointments they bring them straight into the Bureau for the Project Worker to read, and explain the contents to them.

In 2014, everyone in receipt of Incapacity Benefit had to complete Limited Capability for Work questionnaire, a document which is over 20 pages long and needs to include details of all illnesses and disabilities, medication, medical evidence and how these affect everyday life. Clearly, completing such an application if you are illiterate will be impossible. Depending on the outcome of the questionnaire, the applicant could be transferred onto ESA for a year and then over to JSA (Job Seekers Allowance) and be required to attend a Work Related Activity Group. Alternatively, they can remain on ESA and have the option of joining a support group if they want help in obtaining employment.

Neither of these GRT women were in a position to be employed in the settled community and have both been extremely stressed by the possibility of their benefits being transferred to Job Seekers Allowance. Fortunately, having completed their questionnaires and provided the relevant medical information, these women not only successfully retained their ESA benefit, but were awarded nearly an extra £20 per week. This improved the quality of their lives and has given them peace of mind by removing the worry of losing their sickness benefit.

The women consider the Project Worker very important to them, as one of them said *"just to know there is someone there for us ... we will never forget what you have done for us."* The project ensures that the women's literacy and numeracy problems do not exclude them and place them at greater disadvantage.

#### **Box 4.0 Case study: GRT homelessness**

This case study concerns a family of Irish Travellers consisting of mum, dad and two children, a boy aged nine and a girl aged 12. They were living in a two berth caravan in serious disrepair, with a leaking roof, parked on an unauthorised site on an industrial estate in Cramlington. The referral came from a word of mouth recommendation from another family who had received support from the project.

The Project Worker went out to visit them and they asked for her help in getting re-housed as they were very poor, the father had health problems and they were both illiterate. They were keen for the children to continue with their education and wanted to settle in Northumberland as they had local connections. The Project Worker acted as their advocate and provided information about the area and local Catholic schools so that they could decide where to apply for housing. She attended every housing interview with them and helped them complete all the necessary paperwork. She also liaised with the housing officers and contacted the Registry Department in Edinburgh, where the children were born, to obtain copies of their birth certificates to provide necessary ID for Northumberland County Council for schools.

The Project Worker arranged to get them into homeless accommodation where they stayed for seven weeks until a suitable property became available. During this time the Project Worker kept in regular contact with them, liaising with the hostel manager, GPs and social housing providers. Eventually they were offered an appropriate house with a garden, which suited them perfectly and the Project Worker helped them with completing forms to apply for a Community Care Grant to help with the furnishing.

The Project Worker contacted energy suppliers and liaised with the Traveller Education Officer to get the youngest child into school. Traveller culture does not usually favour girls attending school, once they have reached 12 years of age so the Project Worker was able to support them in their application for Elective Home Schooling. She organised a broadband connection and the oldest child received a laptop which enables her to continue with her education.

The family says “*we’re eternally grateful for June’s support ... it’s made a massive difference to our lives.*” Their house is immaculate and they take great pleasure in it, but still retain the same pride in their Traveller roots and culture.

## 4. 0 Findings

Based on research, the evaluation makes a series of findings. These include the following:

**The Project Worker has developed strong relationships with GRT groups across Northumberland:** this takes a particular skill set from the worker and is an achievement in itself. GRT communities are well known to be highly suspicious and distrustful of community agencies and so gaining the trust of GRT communities and engaging them into services is a great achievement. GRT reported a close and trusting relationship between themselves and the Project Worker, which enabled them to access the services provided.

**Effective alternative engagement and referral systems:** the project has developed an effective alternative to formal referral systems used by the majority of community based professional agencies. They have developed a word of mouth appointment system and a direct approach method where individuals will access the Project Worker when needs arise. This system has worked well for the project where other approaches have failed, such as a more formal appointment based or surgery style system.

**Individuals and their families often have a number of needs:** individual GRT have received support in several areas from the project, i.e. it has not been one person one issue. The project has then often provided support to their families. This demonstrates a strong service need within GRT which may be the result of historic under provision for the group.

**Increasing equalities and reducing discrimination in Northumberland:** the service makes for a more inclusive Northumberland. The Council's investment, along with that of Northern Rock Foundation, is creating a more

equitable array of services for the population of Northumberland. It was clear from the research that GRT would not access services in the community if there was not a named and identifiable contact. Therefore, the presence of the Project Worker ensures that GRT are able to access services that they need. As with many equality areas, a service does not become truly equitable if concerted efforts are not made to reach out to those minorities. In other words, it is not sufficient simply to say, 'our services are equal', but work needs to be done to enable minorities to be able to access those services, as is the case here. The Project Worker has also been proactive in addressing incidents of discrimination, such as existed in Berwick, and from contact with officials. GRT communities suffer discrimination and hate crime as a regular part of their lives and the Project Worker has addressed these incidents where she has found them.

**Increasing equalities within CAB:** increasing the number of GRT clients was one of three key strategic objectives of the national CAB. Certainly, in Northumberland, this has been achieved. Previous to the start of the project it was rare that they would receive anybody from a GRT community. However, since 2010 and the start of the project, they regularly have around 30 attendances each year (approximately 10 individuals).

**Influencing policy and practice and presenting a model of best practice from the North East:** through representation on national policy and learning meetings, such as the CAB's National Task Force and the Diversity Strategy and Pathways Groups in HMP Northumberland, and as a result of the Project Worker's expertise and knowledge, Blyth CAB is able to contribute significantly to national policy and practice throughout the UK. The Blyth CAB model includes the method of engagement, the referral mechanisms and the supportive approach and exists both in the community work and its prison-based work. This has a direct impact on a national and local level of awareness, discrimination and prejudice experienced by GRT communities.

**Ensuring benefit entitlements and payments are in place:** the project helps GRT groups receive the benefits they are entitled to. This particularly includes the complexities of receiving housing benefits for rented caravans and sites. This ensures that payments are made to the council, arrears are not built up and that people receive the correct benefits.

**Reducing reoffending in GRT prison populations:** through the project work in prison, which adheres to NOMS and best practice guidance, the project contributes towards efforts to reduce reoffending amongst GRT groups in prison. This is achieved through removing structural barriers to desistance, such as helping prisoners with driving offences to obtain their licences, and through supporting prisoners to maintain family contact, which has been proven to be a major factor in reducing future offending.

**Interruptions in prison delivery:** in 2013/14, HMP Northumberland changed its status from a public sector to a private sector prison. There were significant changes to the prison and its administration including staff cuts. During this time, the Inclusion and Diversity Manager was made redundant and there was a gap of eight months in the delivery of the prison work, between January and September 2014. Unfortunately, as the Project Worker explains, *“I’m only as good as the person in prison”*, in other words, if there is no proactive prison staff member to act as an ambassador for the work, then the project cannot be delivered.

## 5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

GRT are clearly one of the most oppressed groups in British society. They suffer daily discrimination and exclusion, they are the regular victims of hate crime, they experience poorer health and life outcomes including mortality rates and are excluded from public and private spaces. Access to resources and services is a particular issue for GRT communities. There is very little which is specifically tailored to their needs or targeted for their use. They have a great distrust of non-GRT people because of their experiences of discrimination and will only access services if they know sympathetic individuals will be there for them.

The Blyth CAB service is one of the very few targeted GRT services in both Northumberland and in the country; it is a model of best practice and an exemplar project. An important reason behind this is the quality of the relationship and trust which has developed between the Project Worker and the GRT communities with which she works. In the national training that the project work is involved with, participants often ask the Project Worker, *'how do you engage with GRT?'*

Whilst the success of the engagement in Northumberland is undoubtedly due to the character and expertise of the Project Worker, we suspect there is another explanation. The reason GRT communities access the service is because the Project Worker goes to see them on-site or in their homes and if they need to come into the CAB offices, they know her and trust her and can ask to see her in person. If other services wish to be GRT-friendly and equitable, they need to do the same. It is not simply sufficient to have an open door policy.

The results of the project and their approach appear to be significant, not least in enabling GRT to access services. We also see the project has: increased their access to resources and material benefits, which has knock on effect to health and well-being; made more direct impacts on particularly mental health, through better housing, managing debts and sorting out benefits; made impacts on local discrimination, which ultimately results in improved community cohesion. The project is a testimony to the intentions of the Citizens Advice Bureau, Northumberland County Council and Northern Rock Foundation to make local services truly accessible to an oppressed minority living in the British Isles.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

We have limited recommendations for this project, the main one being the need to find sustainable continuation funding. The momentum and reputation built up by the project amongst GRT communities is a valuable asset and if left to fall because of an absence of funding, would be disastrous.

The second recommendation relates to how the project monitors its outputs and impact. For this it is necessary and important that the project improves record keeping and project databases to improve the ability to access quickly information on outputs and outcomes. This is a mainstay of all good funded projects and in the absence of external evaluation, this is the main way that the project will demonstrate impact.

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