

Widening Access to Higher Education for GRT communities – LinC Higher and Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative

Inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) students

In 2010 the Department for Education highlighted that GRT pupils were the lowest achieving ethnic groups within schools in England and the most likely to be identified as having special educational needs. They were four times more likely than any other group to be excluded from school. (DfES, 2005; DCSF, 2009a) Unfortunately this situation has continued to be the case over the last 8 years. In 2017/18, the average score for 'Attainment 8' (which measures pupils' performance in 8 GCSE-level qualifications) was 46.5 out of 90. Pupils from the White Gypsy/Roma (18.2) and Irish Traveller (21.9) ethnic groups had the lowest average scores. (Gov.uk-education-skills-attainment-key-stage4).

- Why does this situation persist? It is a complex of many different reasons some of which are listed below:
- Prejudice and discrimination shown by schools
- Low school attendance (80% - 85% Primary, 15% - 20% Secondary)
- Tradition of Travellers leaving school at end of primary stage – boys to work with dad, girls to help raise siblings and manage the home
- Lack of parental expectations beyond that described above
- Fear of loss of 'Traveller identity' – time to learn adult Traveller ways
- Fear of bullying in school, which, sadly, does occur regularly
- Fear of exposure to negative influences – promiscuity, drugs etc.
- Parental influences – low value placed on education
- Negative experiences of school by parents
- Low literacy levels in the home
- Often rurally isolated or if in urban areas in undesirable locations – near rubbish tips/motorways etc – away from schools and services
- Roma – language barriers

This list is by no means exhaustive and certainly does not apply to all Travellers. There are families that are very ambitious for their children's education and very involved and supportive in ensuring the best possible outcomes. However, it does illustrate some of the barriers and challenges which prevent young Travellers accessing HE and FE institutions. It is important to note that around age 15 or 16 an increasing number of young Travellers express a wish to enter college or to train for work and parents are often much more confident about them venturing out of their communities in order to pursue their ambitions. **It is critical to engage with young Travellers in the 'gap period' between age 11 to 16 years in order to be able to successfully facilitate their access into FE colleges en route to HE institutions or employment.**

Best Practices

- Work in the communities – i.e. on the sites (either in a Mobile Classroom or in Travellers' homes)
- Work with the whole family – adult training, parent/carer/toddler groups, health work i.e. 'family learning'
- Work in and around Traveller lifestyles – be sensitive to the community's priorities
- Work needs to be bite-sized but regular
- Mix of fun activities/trips/outings
- Celebrate success – rewards, events etc
- Involve adult Travellers in the education of their children
- Visit colleges/universities/work places to feed ambition
- Have clear targets – individual educational plans
- Be massively positive, but be realistic – small steps
- Offer a broad curriculum Prince's Trust, Arts Award, Functional Skills, First Aid, CV writing etc.
- Aim to achieve recognised, accredited qualifications
- Make sure all teachers etc are professional, positive, friendly and well supported
- Work with other organisations but make sure that it is managed and controlled. (LTI works with LincHigher, Lincolnshire Council for Voluntary Youth Service, Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincolnshire County Council, Healthwatch and NHS Lincolnshire, to name but a few.)

Access to Further Education/Higher Education

- It is important get young Travellers into Further Education – LTI gets 6 -8 students per annum into college
- LTI then supports them in Further Education; maintaining all family ties with a view to progression to Higher Education
- At present access to Higher Education is rare – but it has happened in the past – and there is no reason why it shouldn't happen more often in the future!

LincHigher/LTI Travellers Project

History

In the Autumn of 2017, a meeting was held between LTI Director, Paul Boucher, and LincHigher Project Manager, Naomi Prendergast. When Naomi heard of LTI's educational achievements with young Travellers in preceding years, she expressed a strong belief that, with additional resources and supportive partnership working, LTI and LincHigher could close the gap between GRT learners and their counterparts from the settled community.

Naomi's firm conviction mirrored Paul's, and a twelve-month pilot project was born. LTI had worked with the Prince's Trust before, and, although many young Traveller's had gained 2 or 3 certificates, these had almost always been at Level 1. The project had ambitious plans to improve on this.

Aims and objectives

From an original cohort of 16 young Travellers the aim was for at least 12 of them to achieve 5 Level 2 Prince's Trust Personal Development and Employability Skills Qualifications, equivalent to 5 GCSE's and thus in line with the National Target for all pupils. The project began on the 1st January 2018 and, in view of its success was extended by 7 months to the end of July 2019. The number of students rose to 30.

Results

By the end of the initial twelve-month period the aim of 12 young Travellers gaining 5 Level 2 certificates had been achieved. By the end of the 18-month period certificates achieved were: -

Number of students	Number of Level 2 certificates.
5	7
2	6
11	5
3	4
2	3
3	2
4	1
Total 30	130

To have gained 130 Level 2 certificates in 18 months from a cohort of 30 young Travellers (av. 4.3/student) is an amazing result, even more so when you consider that some moved away during that time and some were newly arrived.

During the same period LTI has prepared 10 students for the Trinity College, London, Bronze Arts Award, is now offering students Functional Skills Maths and English up to Level 2 and ensures all students have a First Aid Certificate and a Health & Safety at Work Certificate.

Also, during that period, LTI and LincHigher jointly arranged visits to Boston College, Lincoln College, Bishop Grosseteste University (Presentation Day, BBQ and University Tour), Lincoln Water Park and held a music recording day.

Benefits of the project

Apart from the obvious benefits for this cohort of students in terms of having qualifications in preparation for college or work the wider impact of the project is huge. Two Traveller parents have gained Level 3 Teaching Certificates, two Travellers are employed by LTI and upwards of 20 adult Travellers have gained numerous vocational qualifications with 6 of

them gaining employment. This is Equal Opportunities in action leading to greatly improved Community Cohesion.

Conclusions

- It is possible to narrow the gap in educational attainment between GRT students and the wider settled community.
- It is cost effective – the first 12 months of the LincHigher/LTI project cost under £20k
- The way forward to increasing access to HE is by gaining entry to FE organisations by Travellers and then supporting Travellers within those organisations to continue on their learning journey.
- What is needed is more people with a genuine belief in the abilities and hopes and desires of the Traveller communities and who are prepared to listen to them and work with them to bring about change.

For more information contact Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative.

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