



The Tharrie Times

Issue 23, Winter 2017

Welcome

Welcome to Issue 23 of **The Tharrie Times**, the bi-annual newsletter of National Traveller MABS. This year, 2017, has seen many changes for us with two colleagues leaving the service and two new members of staff joining us. We welcome our newly appointed staff members on board Michelle Kearns and Sian Crowley, as we know there are exciting times ahead. We are delighted to be back at full strength and to welcome them both. Michelle Kearns was recently appointed as National Development Worker. Michelle previously worked in a variety of community work positions, including most recently as a community worker for SDC Partnership based in Clondalkin. Michelle has been involved in anti-poverty work and is on the board of Tallaght Travellers, the All-Ireland Body promoting community work and community development and the European Anti-Poverty Network.

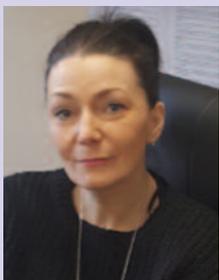
Sian Crowley has joined NTMABS as National Education Worker. Sian has a background in adult education, outreach and campaigning. She most recently worked in the financial justice organisation Debt and Development Coalition Ireland, where she worked on national financial justice campaigns, as well as delivering a series of community education workshops exploring the impacts of austerity on disadvantaged communities.

This year has also been a historic one for the Traveller Community with the decision by the Irish state to officially recognise Travellers as an ethnic group. The importance of this recognition of identity for Travellers cannot be understated, and we see our work in the area of financial inclusion as complimenting the work area of the National Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy.

We have continued to work on a variety of issues including our Key Worker Programme; we are working with other Traveller organisations to establish a National Caravan Loan Scheme, we continue to be part of the Travellers in prison initiative whilst we continue to raise awareness of financial exclusion faced by many Travellers.

We report on Meath MABS joining the list of services which has provided money management community education directly to their local Traveller primary health care team.

We hope you enjoy reading the above articles and, as always, welcome any feedback and comments! And don't forget to follow our Facebook page or follow us on Twitter at @ntmabs.



Michelle Kearns



Sian Crowley

Goodbye to Liz



National Traveller MABS would like to take the opportunity to say farewell to one of our most dedicated staff members, Liz Daly. Liz joined us back in 2002 as an administrator and over the 15 years of her working with National Traveller MABS she got the opportunity to develop and grow within the organisation. Moving from strength to strength, she

became the National Development and Support worker. She initiated and built a network of links through the national mapping exercise, where she set up meetings with local MABS services, local Traveller groups, along with other stakeholders, such as the local authorities. This work was hugely important in establishing the national nature of the job, and in providing solid information to MABS about the numbers of Travellers living in their catchment areas.

The caravan loan scheme was developed and initiated through Liz's hard work and dedication. Through this scheme affordable credit became available through a loan guarantee system, where Travellers could apply for loans through their local Credit Union. The repayments were made through the household budget system, via the Lough Credit Union. This scheme provided people with a chance to improve their quality of life. This scheme has unfortunately since ceased.

Liz was involved in the first prisoner savings scheme within Mountjoy prison which allowed prisoners to save on a regular basis. Over the years Liz has made a huge contribution to the work for National Traveller MABS as a staff member. We saw the setting up of a key worker project which allowed primary health care workers to be trained and to pass on the new skills and information within their own community. This achievement is detailed within the evaluation report on the Key worker project.

This is only an overview of the commitment Liz gave when she worked for National Traveller MABS.

National Traveller MABS in March 2017 after 15 years of service and commitment said farewell to Liz. Luckily for MABS she is still part of the service, working with Fingal MABS as a money advisor. The board and staff of National Traveller MABS would like to acknowledge all her great work. We are looking forward to our paths crossing again and working with her in the future.



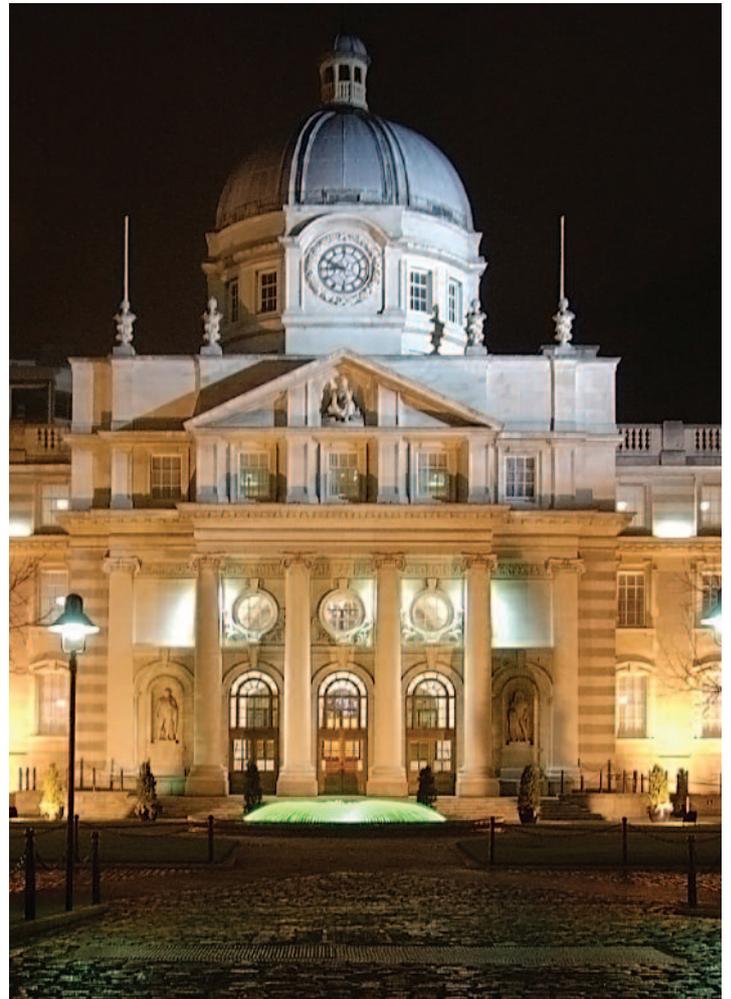
Budget 2018 responses from organisations concerned with social justice and eradication of poverty- some welcome measures but missed opportunities

There has been a mixed response from various community and social justice organisations to budget 2018. The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INO), Social Justice Ireland, The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice and The Peter Mc Verry Trust and One Family welcomed some budget measures, including, increases in basic social welfare payments, income tax and USC adjustments and additional monies for social housing, many also expressed disappointment at missed opportunities in this year's budget.

Positive Measures

There were a number of measures that were welcomed by most organisations including:

- Weekly increases of €5 per week with proportional increases for qualified adults and those on reduced rates, CE, TUS and the rural social scheme- increased rates will be paid from week beginning March 2018
- Those under 26 will get a €5 increase (which is more than the proportional rate of payment)
- The weekly rate for a qualified child will increase by €2 per week
- State pensions will increase by €5 per week
- Family Income Supplement threshold rates will increase by €10 for families with up to three children
- The Back to Work Family Dividend scheme which aims to support families to move from social welfare to employment, and which was due to end on 31 March 2018, will now be retained.
- The Fuel Allowance season will be extended by 1 week, from 26 to 27 weeks, into the first week of April 2018.
- A Christmas Bonus of 85% will be paid in December 2017 to people getting a long-term social welfare payment (minimum payment of €20)
- The earnings disregard for the One-Parent Family Payment and the Jobseeker's Transition payment will increase by €20 per week, from €110 to €130 per week (March 2018)



The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice responded...

'adjustment to in-work social welfare supports for households with children, in conjunction with the increase to the national minimum wage and adjustment to USC will result in modest increases in total household income, potentially improving the position of families in minimum wage and low paid employment'

Peter Mc Verry Trust responded to some positive measures in the area of housing and homelessness as follows:

'The additional €18 million funding for homeless services and an increase in the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) in 2018 are particularly welcome. The Housing Assistance Payment scheme is an important element towards alleviating the homeless crisis in 2018, as the results of an accelerated social housing building programme are yet to come on stream. We are delighted to see additional funding for TUSLA – the Child and Family Agency along with a commitment to fund reduced class sizes at primary level. These measures will result in improved outcomes for vulnerable young people, and will act as long-term homelessness prevention measures.'

Disappointments and Missed Opportunities

There were many organisations that expressed disappointments at budget measures or missed opportunities:

- While welfare rates have increased and are moving towards 2009 levels, it was seen as a disappointment that these will not come into effect until March 2018, while positive changes in tax rates will come into effect from January 1st 2018 (INOUE)
- Some organisations like One Family, have argued that a €5 weekly welfare increase in the basic payment and €2 per child increase is not sufficient to lift people parenting alone and in receipt of a welfare payment out of poverty
- Age segregation in welfare payment continues, with those aged under 26 continuing to receive substantially lower payments than those over 26. This measure disproportionately impacts young Travellers who on average get married and set up a home earlier than those under 26 in the general population and in general before the age of 26. The INOUE and the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice both expressed

disappointment that reduced payments for younger people was not reversed in the budget

- The issue of social housing is a concern for most organisations working with those in poverty and on low income, the Peter Mc Verry Trust said that it is 'disappointed that an empty homes tax wasn't announced in Budget 2018. We feel that this is out of line with the Government's vision and aim to significantly reduce the amount of homes and properties lying vacant around the country....and '(we are) happy to see an increase in social housing targets up to 2021. However, we would hope that additional funding in 2018 and 2019 would front load the delivery of new capital projects given the deepening housing and homeless crisis.'

For those organisations concerned with social justice there were some positive developments but a number of missed opportunities for improving peoples living and working conditions.





Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Education Achievement Awards 2017

The National Educational Achievement Awards are held to recognise and celebrate the on-going educational achievements within the Traveller Community across the island of Ireland.

This year the awards were presented to the recipients by our guest of honour Roseleen McDonagh, a woman of great achievements herself and an inspiration to all who know her.

This year Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service was honoured to present overall:

6 - 3rd levels

8 - Leaving certs

40 - Junior certs

On the night of the Awards 32 nominees received their awards.

The awards are held every year to celebrate educational achievement within the Traveller community. To mark the success of the recipients and to celebrate this with them and their families, friends, Teachers, etc. All of the recipients will have achieved their junior or leaving certificates, QQI Majors or third level qualifications

and their educational achievements are a wonderful success for them, their families and the Traveller community.

The Educational Achievement Awards acknowledges their achievement and all their hard work. The key to their success is what they have invested in their education. The long hours of study have paid off and we are very proud to say well done and congratulations. They are the future of the Traveller community and their spirit, talent and ability to achieve will safeguard their future and that of the community.

The other aspect of this award is to support the fact that education can be a powerful and positive advantage which will improve people's opportunities in life and that of the Traveller community in general.

The National Education Achievement Awards for 2017 was a fun filled celebration of the success and achievements of the recipients of the award, their families and all the people who support them.

Cathleen McDonagh Clark



Presentation of flowers to Roseleen McDonagh by Celine McDonnell at National Achievement Awards

Meath Travellers Primary Health Care workers complete Money Management Training with local MABS



Back row L-R: Primary Health Workers Nathanya McDonagh, Lisa McDonagh, Mary Joyce, Mary Joyce, Sharon Nevin, Eileen Gilsean, and Michael Laffey of Meath MABS.

Front Row L-R: Brigid Collins, Michelle Kearns of National Traveller MABS, Patricia Marley of Meath MABS, and Julie Power.

Missing from photo: Pauline Doyle

On October 18th, women from Meath Travellers Primary Health Care group were presented with certificates for successfully completing a Money Management Course with their local MABS service. The presentation ceremony was featured in the local paper, The Meath Chronicle.

A total of 8 women completed the course, which includes *A Way of Life* and *Overcoming Illegal Debt* training programmes. Combined, these two programmes cover money management, budgeting, saving, borrowing, and explore the risks involved in borrowing money from an illegal moneylender. Speaking about the MABS course, one participant said that she "was very happy with it because it highlighted the dangers of using illegal money lenders".

Community Education is an essential part of the services offered by MABS. It provides an opportunity for the Traveller community to establish a solid working relationship with their local MABS service. The programme also helped to build up the Primary

Health Care workers' knowledge of MABS and money management. They can use the skills and knowledge they develop during the course in their work with their local community.

Patricia Marley, from Meath MABS, who delivered the training said: "The community education was a great success. It is a brilliant way of developing our on-going relationship with the local Primary Health Care group. The programme is learner centred. It enables participants build on first-hand relevant life experiences so as to develop lifelong skills. It is envisaged that the participants will pass on their knowledge to the wider community helping to alleviate issues related to debt and over indebtedness."

National Traveller MABS were delighted to support Meath MABS with training and resources so that this community education took place. If you know of a Traveller group who might be interested in doing a money management community education course, please contact our education worker, Sian Crowley at sian_crowley@mabs.ie.

Traveller Community National Survey

On the 4th of October 2017 the Traveller Community National Study was launched in the Morrison Hotel in Dublin. The survey was commissioned by The National Traveller Data Steering Group and the Community Foundation for Ireland. It was the second study of its kind into the position of Travellers in Irish society, the first having been undertaken in the year 2000. It sheds light into a range of areas of life and people's experiences of being a Traveller as well as attitudes towards Travellers. The study looks at life today, how Travellers are portrayed in the media, health, mental health, Traveller culture, Travellers and the settled community, employment and training, financial services and supports and education. So, it gives us a real and up to date understanding of how Travellers feel about these issues.

Why do we need a study like this?

You might well be asking yourself why do we need a study like this and how exactly is it going to improve the life experiences of Travellers? There are a number of reasons why studies like this are important. Firstly the issues are looked at from the point of view of Travellers themselves which doesn't happen very often and it's important that the issues are named by the people experiencing them. Secondly, over time we can look at how things are changing, where there are improvements and where things are getting worse. This provides evidence for Traveller organisations and others concerned to make better decisions on how services are delivered and provided to Travellers. This was the first time a survey of Travellers included a section on Financial Services and Supports. It also provides evidence to challenge discrimination against Travellers.

What did the study find?

The study had many findings, below is just some of the ones you might be interested in;

- In 2017 just over 60% of the Traveller Community considered

themselves to be 'satisfied with life in Ireland these days'. In 2000 71% of Travellers were satisfied with life in general.

- Only 24% of Travellers assess their health as excellent and 36% assess it as poor or very poor.
- Mental health 'is a key aspect of life' that has been seen by Travellers to have gotten worse. Over 90% of Travellers agreed that mental health problems are common among the community.
- 82% of the community have been affected by suicide. 44% have been affected by suicide in their immediate family and have also experienced it in their wider family.
- 77% of Travellers have experienced discrimination in the last year.
- 40% report that their children have been bullied in school because they are Travellers.
- The vast majority of Travellers agree that the community is adapting their behaviour and how they present themselves to 'fit in more'.
- 48% of Travellers describe their ideal place to live as a standalone house or private house assisted by the local authority.
- Only 1 in 10 of the community still travel.
- 1 in 10 Travellers have used a Money Advice and Budgeting Service.

Some positive findings:

Education attainment is improving for Travellers:

- 39% of Travellers completed their inter/group cert/junior cert in 2017 vs 9% in 2000.
- Personal satisfaction about education is stronger among young Travellers.
- 16% of Travellers completed leaving cert compared to 2% in 2000.
- 73% of the general public believe Travellers should receive support to access and progress in education.

For more information on the survey you can log onto

<http://www.communityfoundation.ie/images/uploads/pdfs/National-Traveller-Survey-2017.pdf>



Launch of the 2017 Traveller Community National Survey photo by David Murphy of Traveller Voice Magazine

Funding is now available to Local Authorities for Emergency Replacement Mobile Caravans



The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government has funding which is available to local authorities for 50% of the cost of purchase of 'emergency replacement mobile caravans'. Fixing or repair of mobiles /caravans is not funded, but preparatory ground works, concrete slab and services solely to facilitate new caravan/mobiles is eligible. Local authorities on submitting proposals must ensure there is a genuine emergency, and that replacement is required as a result of an event such as storm damage, flood or fire that has rendered the caravan uninhabitable or dangerous to live in. Replacement required as a result of a caravan falling into disrepair over time is not eligible.

For more information contact your local Traveller accommodation unit or directly to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government@ Catherine.Marsh@housing.gov.ie or Alan.Ryan@housing.gov.ie

Turn2us Response Fund – for those experiencing financial hardship

Turn2us have set up a new Response Fund for people who have experienced a life-changing event in the last year that has left them in financial hardship. Their website states that: "grants will be provided for specific needs which are essential to the financial stability, wellbeing, and independence of the individual/family to help them to maintain normal daily living". The Turn2us Response Fund will accept applications for support from anyone in financial hardship who meets the eligibility criteria. A client of yours might be eligible for a grant from the Fund if they have recently experienced a significant life event, such as:

- Bereavement– including funeral costs
- Beginning to live with a disability
- Domestic abuse
- Ill health or injury
- Poor physical or mental wellbeing with a recent diagnosis of a health condition or disability
- Reduced income through redundancy
- Reduction in working hours
- Relationship breakdown
- Unsafe, insecure or inappropriate housing arrangements
- Other unexpected occurrences which impacts severely on an individual's quality of life.

Turn2us are working with partner organisations including MABS, the Simon Community and Coolmine Therapeutic Community to promote the fund across communities who need it, and to support applicants in making strong applications. They want to make the process as user-friendly as possible.

Members of the Traveller Community are particularly vulnerable to the costs of unexpected life events such as deaths and illnesses, and often fall prey to illegal money-lenders. This grant could support Travellers who are at financial risk in coping through a difficult period. For more information visit turn2us.ie or get in contact with National Traveller MABS: info@ntmabs.org



Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity: an important moment for the Irish State

This year the Irish State formally recognised Travellers as an ethnic minority in Ireland. Here we look at the implications of ethnic recognition for Travellers and for MABS, and give a background of the political environment for Travellers before this watershed moment.

Internationally, ethnic minorities including members of the Traveller community, First Nations People, Native Americans, Aboriginal Australians, Māori people, among others, perform poorly across a range of social indicators such as education, employment, housing and accommodation, financial inclusion, health, mental health, and mortality. The Traveller community in Ireland experiences what the ESRI describes as “extreme disadvantage in terms of... education, employment, housing and health.” The recognition of Traveller ethnicity by the State means that members of Traveller community are now protected by Article 21.1 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights – Non-discrimination – which states that: “Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.”

What does this mean for MABS?

Many Travellers experience financial exclusion, over-indebtedness, and have difficulties accessing financial services such as basic banking facilities, credit, savings, and insurance services. This makes Travellers a key demographic for MABS services, whose original target group is those experiencing long-term financial exclusion and who need debt prevention support. Recognition of Traveller ethnicity means that MABS is now responsible to provide services to Travellers which are culturally informed and appropriate. National Traveller MABS advocates for the financial inclusion of Travellers in Ireland, and seeks to

support the development of a collaborative working relationship between local MABS and local Travellers. National Traveller MABS are here to support local MABS organisations to engage in relevant debt-prevention and money-management strategies, such as delivering community education and Money Advice with local Travellers and Traveller groups.



¹ <https://www.esri.ie/pubs/RS56.pdf>

² http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Counting-Us-In-A4_WEB.pdf



Culture, ethnicity, and dispelling myths

Though there is no universally accepted definition of ethnicity, Pavee Point note that ethnicity is defined by some or all of the following features: a shared history, a common cultural tradition, a common geographical origin, common ancestors, a common language, a common religion, a distinct group within a larger community. Culture is just one aspect of ethnicity. Anthropologist, Cristina De Rossi, anthropologist, writes that “Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things.” No culture is homogenous; however there are certain characteristics which are specific to Traveller culture, which include nomadism – the practice of travelling as a way of life and a state of mind, a unique language, custom, traditions, and a shared ancestry.

Traveller ethnicity and culture has been discredited since the foundation of the Irish state. Myths about the origin of Travellers, including the false claims that Travellers were settled people who took to the road as a result of poverty or famine, have come to be believed by many people. These myths became a social narrative which has influenced policy-makers and the attitudes of the settled community over generations. The state’s view of Traveller culture was made official with the 1963 Report of the Commission

on Itinerancy, which sought to assimilate the Traveller community into the wider settled community. This report claimed that Travellers were a ‘problem’ that needed to be ‘absorbed’ into mainstream society. Established in 2002, the Anti-Trespass Act made it an offence to enter and occupy land, and made no provisions for any line of defence, which had an immediate impact on many Travellers’ way of life. These policies amounted to state-sanctioned myth-making, discrimination, and structural violence.

DNA research has confirmed that Travellers are a distinct genetic grouping descended from the general Irish population but which split around 12 generations ago, or around 360 years ago. This verifies that while the Traveller community are a distinct genetic group, they are indigenous to Ireland. On March 1st 2017, the Irish state formally recognised Travellers as an ethnic minority. This was an historic moment – brought around by decades of Traveller activism and resistance – because it was an acknowledgement by the state that Travellers experience racism and discrimination, and it was an indirect admission that the State’s assimilation policies were prejudiced and wrong. It is hoped that the recognition of Traveller ethnicity will improve the morale, self-esteem, self-value, and self-image of the Traveller community, which suffers from serious mental health issues as a consequence of social exclusion, and has a suicide rate that is six times higher than the national average.

³ <http://itmtrav.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ITM-Review-of-the-1963-Commission-on-Itinerancy.pdf>

⁴ (<http://epubs.rcsi.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1100&context=mcart>, Royal College of Surgeons & University of Edinburgh.)



Please save the date 1st March 2018 as there are celebrations planned for the first anniversary of the Irish state recognising Traveller Ethnicity, and it will take place in the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham.



Travellers in Prison Conference

On 20th October the Traveller in Prison Initiative held its first national conference. The Minister of State for Equality Immigration and Integration, David Stanton, T.D. gave the opening address. The conference brought together people working in prison services, educators, community organisations, Traveller organisations, health and other service providers, representatives from government departments and members of the Traveller community. The conference sought to raise awareness about the issues for Travellers in prison and to showcase the work of the Travellers in Prison Initiative.

The conference had a range of speakers giving inputs on the Travellers in Prison Initiative, the history of Travellers and their experiences, Ethnic Data Collection and Monitoring, the experiences of Traveller women in prison, a peer mediation programme running in some prisons, and personal testimonies of imprisonment.

The conference offered an opportunity for key stakeholders to understand the factors behind higher rates of incarceration of Travellers, how the experience of imprisonment is different for Travellers than for non-Travellers and the kinds of issues facing Travellers on leaving prison. The personal testimonies of Travellers were difficult to listen to, but highlighted what can happen when people get acknowledged and supported.

- Traveller men are 11 times more likely than other men to go to prison
- Traveller women are 22 times more at risk than other women of going to prison.
- Thomas highlighted how Travellers are always talked about as 'a problem' to be solved. Thomas, is a counsellor and he explained how this becomes what he termed 'internalised oppression', people start to believe that there is something wrong with them. This impacts on mental health, and is a factor in self harm and suicide.
- He highlighted the impacts of discrimination on Travellers
- Thomas explained how Travellers way of life has been deliberately taken away by the state and how avenues for employment and work have been cut off for Travellers

The Over Representation of Travellers in Prison

Thomas McCann of the Traveller Counselling service gave an overview of the reasons for over-representation of Travellers in Prison some of the points he made are below:

- As has been shown by numerous reports Travellers are one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups in Irish society today, if not the most. As a community, Travellers fare badly on every indicator used to measure disadvantage; unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, health status, infant mortality, life expectancy, illiteracy, formal education and training levels this has huge implications for why more Travellers go to prison

Traveller Women in Prison

A report by Rachel Doyle about the experiences of Traveller women in prison was officially launched at the meeting. The report gave in-depth and personal accounts of how women came to be in the prison system, their experiences in prison and the fact that Traveller women face stigma both in the Traveller community as well as in the general community. The report featured the personal stories of women and what was striking was the impact on women of not being with their children and the shame they felt about being in prison. The report also highlighted the difficulties women face on leaving prison. For more information on the Travellers in Prison Initiative go to http://www.ssgt.ie/travellers_in_prison_initiative.htm



Michael Mc Donagh and David Stanton T.D. Minister of State for Equality and Integration



Mags Casey and Catherine Joyce at TPI conference



Kathleen Lawrence of Pavee Point at the TPI Conference



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