



Article 12 in Scotland

Young Gypsy Travellers' Lives Project

Awareness-Raising/Conflict Resolution Workshops

St Andrews High School, May 2015

Background

Article 12 in Scotland is a non-governmental organisation that works, through the medium of peer education, to promote young people's rights as set out in international human rights charters. Through our *Young Gypsy Travellers' Lives [YGTL]* project, *Article 12 in Scotland* aims to significantly improve relations between the Gypsy/Traveller and settled communities, in particular, but not exclusively, between young people; thus building bridges, bonds and links between people and communities of different cultures and enabling young Gypsy/Travellers to contribute as equal citizens to decision making processes and live their lives free from prejudice.

The *YGTL* project – which is led by a group of young Scottish Gypsy/Travellers, and staffed by members from both the Gypsy/Traveller and the settled community - is committed to addressing the discrimination and prejudice faced by Gypsy/Travellers living in Scotland today.

Rationale

Fife was chosen as our area of work for the final year of the current *YGTL* project, given the large Gypsy/Traveller community living throughout the region: there are currently three local authority sites - *Heatherywood* in Kirkcaldy with 18 pitches; *Thornton Wood* in Kelty with 12 pitches and *Tarvit Mill* in Cupar with 20 pitches. In addition to these 'official sites', there are also a number of private sites, and the area is often host to roadside encampments whilst people are 'shifting' [moving from site to site].

In comparison with the previous areas in which the *YGTL* project has carried out work with the Gypsy/Traveller community, Fife already has a *relatively* good service provision for the community in terms of health, education and accommodation. That said, a significant number of the community we worked with still felt that these provisions are by no means on a par with the services provided for the settled community. Members of the community, including children and young people, reported shocking instances of discrimination - both at service level and from the settled community, particularly whilst living 'on the road'. There are no temporary halt sites in the area; often resulting in conflict with the settled community and services.

Our work in Aberdeen City and the Shire during 2011-12, Larkhall in 2012 and Edinburgh and East Lothian in 2013, demonstrated that one of the most effective ways of raising awareness and building bridges is to engage people from both communities in awareness-raising/conflict resolution non-formal learning experiences [a copy of these outcomes reports may be obtained from Beth Cadger, Director: Policy, Research and Editorial, *Article 12 in Scotland*].

With the above in mind, and following meetings with the Gypsy/Traveller community, local authority representatives and school staff, *St Andrews High School* in Kirkcaldy agreed to

host the *YGTL* project's awareness-raising/conflict resolution workshop. This report highlights the actions and outcomes of our interventions at this school.

Aims

The key aims of the *YGTL* awareness-raising/conflict resolution workshop are:

- an increased understanding of the culture and traditions of the Gypsy/Traveller community;
- improved relations between Gypsy/Travellers and the settled community particularly, but not exclusively, young people.

The workshop

NB: Workshops were delivered by *Article 12 in Scotland* staff and Peer Educators from the *YGTL* Project.

Section 1 – Awareness-Raising:

Negative myths, misunderstandings and stereotypes are very damaging and can, and indeed do, lead to heightened tensions, bullying and vicious attacks. *Article 12 in Scotland* believes it is essential to tackle these untruths early on, and change mind-sets before they become impossible to correct. A major cause of conflict is a fear of the 'unknown'. A lack of understanding of the culture or lifestyle of others can lead to all sorts of negative doubts, misunderstandings, frustrations and myths about a community or culture; often the media plays a big role in this. Understanding and respecting the rights and needs of each other's cultures is the first step to addressing the issues that have led to serious conflict in the past.

This first section of the workshop tackles these negative myths, misunderstandings and stereotypes and explains the real facts behind them. The areas covered here have been chosen by the young Gypsy/Travellers in the *YGTL* Management Group, and were chosen because of the impact certain beliefs concerning the Gypsy/Traveller community have had on their own and their families' lives.

Facilitators read out a series of statements and ask the group to agree or disagree, placing themselves at any point along an imaginary line [with agree and disagree located at polar ends]. Participants are then asked to discuss these statements amongst themselves, and also the reasons behind their positioning, with the facilitators and the rest of the group. The facts behind the myth are then explained, and participants are asked if they would like to reposition themselves – an opportunity which is usually taken up by the majority due to their new-found knowledge.

Section 2 – Conflict Resolution:

Roadside encampments are one of the major causes of conflict when Gypsy/Travellers enter an area. This exercise was designed to enable the young people from the settled community

to come up with positive ways of identifying and addressing such issues. This exercise is broken up in to the following sections:

- creating two lists of issues and concerns – for both the settled community and the Gypsy/Traveller community;
- ranking these issues and concerns in order of importance, and looking for any issues and concerns the two communities have in common;
- preparing an ‘action grid’; this grid comprises what will be done, why it should be done and who will be involved;
- participants are asked to share their grids with the rest of the group.

This exercise is particularly useful in getting the participants to think not only about any issues or concerns that they, their peers, friends and families may have, but also the fears that arise for Gypsy/Travellers when they set-up camp in a new area. Participants will find that both communities actually share many common concerns, which in turn helps to humanise this marginalised community.

The action grid encourages problem solving [which in itself is a useful life-skill to possess] and also promotes the practice of thinking about the ‘bigger picture’.

Section 3 – What a Voice video: <http://www.article12.org/gypsytravellers/>

[please scroll down the page to locate the video]

Section 4 – Question and Answer Session.

Before and After Cards:

Participants are asked to write three words/statements describing Gypsy/Travellers at the start of the session, and again at the end. This allows *Article 12 in Scotland* to accurately measure attitudinal change.

Outcomes

The *YGTL* core group and staff delivered their awareness raising/conflict resolution workshops at *St Andrews High School* throughout the month of May 2015 to approximately 156 young people in their 4th year of High School [the workshops were carried out later than our initial March deadline due to the challenges of making our workshops fit with busy school timetables]. In order to measure attitudinal change, we asked participants to write three words/statements about Gypsy/Travellers at the beginning of the workshops, then three words/statements again at the end. Of the 156 pupils, 127 filled in one of our ‘Before and After’ cards [although it is important to note that some cards were completed in pairs/threes and the cards were not issued to the workshop that was facilitated for the Pupil Council], giving us an 81% feedback rate.

Outcomes are as follows:

- **80%** of ‘Before and After’ cards **demonstrated a positive change in attitude** towards the Gypsy/Traveller community after participating in a *YGTL* workshop;
- **14%** of ‘Before and After’ cards **demonstrated that participants had retained their negative perception** of the Gypsy/Traveller community;
- 6% of ‘Before and After’ cards showed that participants had not changed their opinion of the Gypsy/Traveller community; however, these initial opinions were not overly negative;
- Examples of attitudinal change [these words/phrases have been taken directly from our ‘Before and After’ cards]:
- Before: dim, they steal dogs, nasty, minkers, thieves, fighting, ‘Gypsy Grab’, violent, cheeky, hobo, stupid, slags, tax-evaders, fake, show-offs, annoying, bare-knuckle boxing, police, drugs, disrespectful, dirty, law breakers, unhygienic, unfair, thick, fly-tipping, riots, strange, argumentative, outlaws, rude, smelly, unclean, junkies, not nice people, mingers, illegal, fake, drunk, loud, lazy, mental, angry, they don’t go to school, gypo, against the law, messy, different rules, tacky, self-centred, aggressive, immature, horrible people, they don’t fit in, normally have an accent, litter-bugs, homeless, eviction, they don’t pay to stay places in their caravans, rubbish. Many of these key-words and stereotypes are frequently perpetuated by the mainstream media, for more information on the reporting style of the media with regards to the Gypsy/Traveller community, please see *Article 12 in Scotland’s Media Audit* reports, available here: <http://www.article12.org/gypsytravellers/>
- After: misunderstood, caring, respectful, happy, judged, cheery, great personality, unique, interesting history, wrongly treated, good, awesome, honest, bright, unequal rights, workers, humans, the same as everyone else, ethnic minority, kind, heritage, ethnic group, traditional, just like us, free, normal people, unfairly treated, can live in caravans or houses, clean, independent, tax-paying, ‘barrie’, fair, language/Cant, hygienic, close to their families, polite, culture, traditions, healthy, equal.

We hope our work within *St Andrews High School* has gone some way to preventing and reducing negative attitudes toward the community; however we are acutely aware that there is still much to be done to tackle the discrimination faced by the community across the area - and indeed Scotland as a whole.

Conclusions

Article 12 in Scotland found delivering the workshops at *St Andrews High School* to be an enjoyable experience. Changing negative attitudes held by children and young people is essential if we are to challenge and change what many describe as the last ‘socially acceptable’ form of racism in Scotland. By challenging these mind-sets and facilitating a positive change in the attitudes of children and young people, we are also setting in place the foundations for peer education, thus multiplying the amount of children and young people reached. **An 80% positive change in attitude** is a very positive outcome for the *YGTL* project, especially given the high number of Gypsy/Travellers already resident in the local

area. These figures, combined with the 82.4% positive change in attitude recorded at *Kemnay Academy* in Aberdeenshire, the 66.8% positive change in attitude recorded at *Larkhall Academy* and the 69.4% combined change in attitude across schools in Edinburgh and East Lothian [*East Linton Primary, Wester Hailes Community High School, Castlebrae Community High School* and *Broughton High School*] clearly demonstrate that our awareness-raising/conflict resolution workshops are not only successful, but also essential in the fight to end the discrimination, abuse and racial harassment faced by Gypsy/Travellers on a daily basis.