



East Cork Travellers Project

STRATEGIC PLAN

January 2020 - January 2025

FORWARD

The Traveller Health Unit Cork//Kerry (THU) has been privileged to have had the opportunity to support the development of the East Cork Traveller Project. (ECTP). For many years we have attempted to link strategically with the Traveller Community in East Cork Recently we have worked in partnership with Cumann na Daoine CDP to facilitate the establishment of the East Cork Traveller Project.

The East Cork Traveller Project now has a steering group and a committed staff team that contracted Brian Dillon to facilitate this Strategic Planning Process. 2021-2025.

This plan has been informed principally by a series of joint planning sessions involving the participation of members of the ECTP steering group, staff and volunteers
The plan is also informed by a review of documentation and research relevant the challenges faced by the Traveller community in East Cork.

The strategy uses the Theory of Change model of planning this includes identifying the challenges faced by the community and the strengths and assets of both the project and the Traveller community. We have identified the key principles that will inform the work and six programme areas that respond to the challenges facing the Traveller Community in East Cork.

This Strategic Plan will lay the foundation for ECTPs continuing commitment to the Traveller community in East Cork.

I would like to thank all members of the Steering group, Cumann na Daione, Traveller volunteers, the THU and also pay special tribute to the staff who have worked through the Covid Pandemic both to support the community and complete this Strategy.

Deirdre O Reilly
Chair of East Cork Traveller Project
Coordinator of the Traveller Health Unit THU

Mission Statement

“To bring about improvements in circumstances and opportunities for Travellers in East Cork through informed self-determination”

The East Cork Traveller project is launching its Five-Year Strategic Plan.
The document outlines a commitment of the project to address the range of serious issues and challenges faced by Travellers in our community. In doing so, we are convinced of the importance of Travellers being at the centre of planning and implementation of programmes and actions.

The plan sets out the approach of ECTP to bringing about real change in living conditions, health and progression through a series of targeted programmes over the coming years.

Table of Contents

1. Background and Context

2. Challenges and Strengths

- a. Accommodation and Living Conditions
- b. Culture and Identity
- c. Mental and Physical Health
- d. Education, Training and Progression
- e. Employment
- f. Social and Family
- g. Building on our Strengths

3. Guiding Principles and Our Approach to Bringing About Change

4. Programmes and Actions

- a. Addressing Accommodation Needs
- b. Strengthening Cultural Identity
- c. Improving Mental and Physical Health
- d. Creating Opportunities for Learning and Progression
- e. Promoting Employment and Enterprise
- f. Social and Family Support

5. Management and Monitoring

6. Evaluation and Review

1. Background and Context

Cumann na Daoine (CnD) Community Development Project (CDP) was established in 1997 and is located in its own Community Resource Centre at Catherine Street, Youghal, Co. Cork. CnD is a Company limited by guarantee with Charitable Status run by a voluntary management committee and Board of Directors

In 2016, thanks to a grant from Cork County Council and another from the HSE, Cumann na Daoine was able to recruit a part-time Development Manager. A strategic plan was developed and adopted by the Board of Directors/ Management Committee entitled 'Cumann na Daoine Vision 2020' and in this Traveller Work for East Cork was identified. Three designated members of the committee along with the Development Manager approached the Traveller Health Unit (THU) to explore this idea further.

The THU decided to commission a piece of research with the Traveller Community in East Cork. This was carried out by Community Consultants and the findings led to the establishment of the East Cork Traveller steering committee. CnD secured funding through the THU to employ and set up Traveller work in East Cork and an initial Traveller Community Development Worker was employed in 2018. In 2019 the project underwent a few changes and now employs a Co-Ordinator along with a Community Development Worker.

This is a three-year funded programme. A new expanded interagency steering committee was set up to monitor and direct the work and which will oversee the implementation of this new strategy 2021 - 2025.

1.1 The East Cork Catchment Area and the Traveller Community

East Cork stretches from Glanmire to Little Island, Carrigtwohill, Dungourney, Midleton, Youghal, over to Ballycotton and Cobh and includes all rural areas in between these main urban centres. It is difficult to estimate the exact size of the Traveller population within this area, but a working assumption has been made that this equates to between 100 and 110 families as identified by the ECT team.

The All Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010) confirmed the very significant health challenges for Travellers in East Cork Travellers – similar in nature and extent to those of the general population of Travellers³.

A more focused look at Traveller needs in the East Cork Area (2004) identified a number of issues. For example:

- Difficulties in traveling to the city to access critical health services, with transport and cost being a barrier for many Traveller families.
- The fact that no official halting sites had been provided in East Cork. Even though the majority of families lived in standard housing at that stage, a number of extended Traveller families lived unofficially on the roadside for over 15 years without piped water, electricity and adequate sanitation. This is still the situation up to the present time.
- Low levels of confidence, self-esteem and literacy among many Travellers living in East Cork. In all locations many Travellers identified as Travellers, but some in all areas did not and this was particularly notable in Cobh and Youghal. In previous reports, there are several reasons given for not wanting to identify as Traveller, such as the negative repercussions of doing so, facing higher level of discrimination if their identity was articulated/known and in some cases Travellers have integrated into the settled community over the past twenty-thirty years, are well known locally and have not identified as Traveller for a long time.

Findings from the consultation process undertaken by Community Consultants in 2016 were consistent with results from these earlier studies. Engagement with both service providers and members of the Traveller community in East Cork established:

- Sub-standard accommodation and living conditions in the case of a number of families – in some cases resulting in homelessness and in all cases having knock-on negative effects (general health and barriers to children's education for example)
- High levels of disadvantage across a range of indicators (linked to poverty, educational attainment, interaction with the criminal justice system, low parental capacity etc) – resulting in the need for a range of family supports.
- Critically significant challenges in relation to both mental and physical health. All were shown to be linked directly to living conditions and social status; with serious concerns being expressed with regard to timely access to appropriate services.
- Added challenges for some families living in more remote rural areas – with the absence of transport and barriers to service access being identified as significant barriers to Traveller engagement and development. This was seen to be the case for both young and adult Travellers.
- Lack of sufficient knowledge and/or awareness amongst service-providers around Traveller culture. This was coupled often with low levels of understanding of human rights and equality legislation and practice (amongst both community workers and mainstream service providers).
- Low levels of engagement by young Travellers in mainstream youth services or programmes, while Traveller parents engaging in the consultation stressed the need for supports to help with keeping their children in school.
- The particular importance of Traveller women in taking on many of the responsibilities and facing any of the consequences associated with all these challenges. One particular issue highlighted as the absence of a space where women could simply meet and provide support for each other.
- Difficulties in establishing and maintaining meaningful engagement with Traveller men, with the recommendation that a more focused and structured approach is taken to encourage inclusion.
- The experience of discrimination faced on a daily basis, both on an ethnic and a gender basis.
- The potential for divisions and differences to emerge and persist amongst family groupings – making the task of building collective analysis and coordinated action more difficult.

1. Cumann na Daoine is a community based organisation. It is managed by a Voluntary Board of directors & management members – local people who give their time to manage and guide the work and staff of a Community Development Resource Centre.

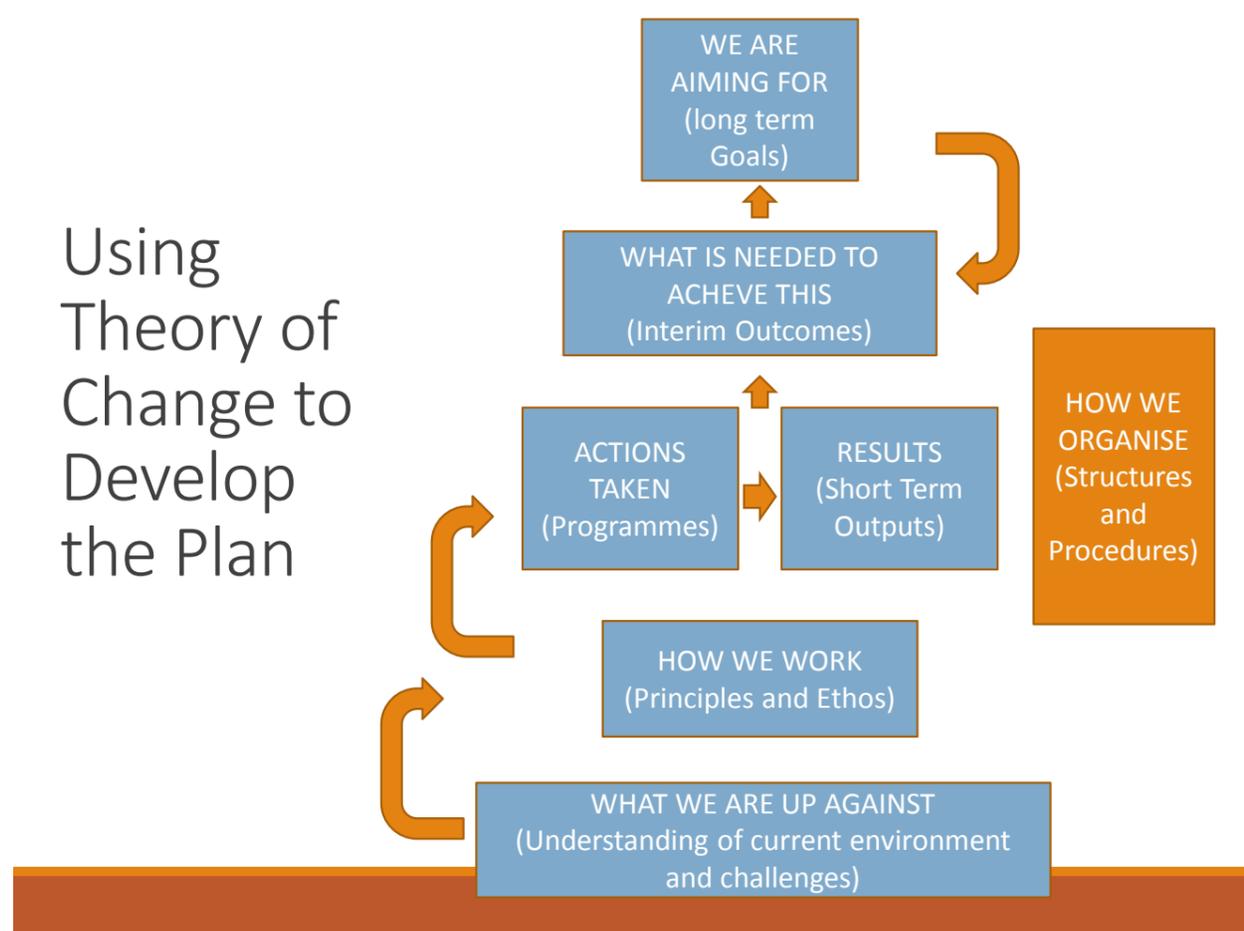
2. East Cork Travellers Research Report; Maria Power, Community Consultants; 2016

3. High levels of respiratory illnesses, heart concerns, poor mental health, high levels of suicide, substance and alcohol misuse. (All Ireland Traveller Health Study, 2010)

4. An Assessment of Travellers Needs in the East Cork Area. Clarity Consultants (2004)

1.2 The Strategic Planning Process

This plan has been informed principally by a series of joint planning sessions (five in all) involving the participation of members of ECTP Steering Committee, staff and volunteers. These were workshops, facilitated within the 'Theory of Change' model of planning (broad outline presented below)



There was a high level of participation by Travellers in the planning process, with follow-on engagement with members of the community on a broader level between workshops.

The plan was also informed by a review of documentation and research relating to development challenges for the Traveller community in East Cork

2. Challenges and Strengths

Those centrally involved in the ECTP (members of Steering Group, Sub-Groups, members of staff and volunteers) spent some time considering the main challenges faced by members of the Traveller community locally. Some engagement with members of the wider Traveller community took place as part of this. Consideration was also given to strengths and assets associated with the project, the community and the local service provision environment.

2.1 Understanding of the Challenges Facing Travellers in East Cork

A number of more recent developments within the broader policy environment could be seen as having the potential for improvement in circumstances and living conditions for Travellers – both nationally and locally in East Cork. For example:

- Official recognition by the Irish state of Traveller ethnicity (2017).
- Implementation of NTRIS (National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy) 2018- 2021.
- Completion of review of national Traveller accommodation policy and delivery (by Minister-appointed Expert Review Group) in 2019.

Despite what can be seen on the surface as a commitment at public policy level to address serious disadvantage, however, very little improvement in circumstances and opportunities is evident. In fact all indicators are that conditions and prospects for the Traveller community are continuing to deteriorate.

2.1.1 Outstanding Challenges

Accommodation for Travellers remains at the centre of these worsening conditions. There was a decline of more than 70% in funding to the provision of Traveller accommodation in the decade between 2008 and 2018 (from €40million per annum to €12million per annum). Furthermore, there is a continuing mismatch between funding allocated to Traveller accommodation and the amounts drawn down by local authorities to provide or improve homes. The Expert Review Group points to the fact that this mismatch was highest during those years where allocations were also highest.

“Analysis of trends in the proportion of funding allocated which was actually drawn down reveals that the mismatch between the two was particularly high in the years when funding was higher. During the three years when the funding allocated was lowest (2013,2014 and 2015) drawdown exceeded or almost matched funding allocated, while in the years when the funding allocated was highest the opposite pattern pertained.” Expert Review Group on Traveller Accommodation, 2019.

Significant decrease in national commitment, added to by local authorities lack of willingness and/or ability to draw down the limited funds that were available, has added to crisis in Traveller accommodation. The overall effects of this have been most recently highlighted in respect of:

- Record levels of homelessness amongst the Traveller community, the highest growth rate of any grouping in Irish society.
- Similarly unprecedented levels of overcrowding and numbers living on the side of roads or on unauthorised halting sites as identified by the recent report, No End in Site; An investigation into the living conditions of children living on a local authority site by the Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO).
- A continuous decline in the number of Traveller families able to access Traveller-appropriate accommodation, with increasing numbers forced to engage with a private-rented sector that has become almost inaccessible for most⁵.

Repeated and ongoing attempts to highlight this situation by Traveller representative organisations, together with pleas for urgent intervention, have not led to any improvement. Indeed attempts to do the same at the European level have met with a similar lack of response.

The European Committee of Social Rights – which works under the Committee of Ministers and is part of the Strasbourg -based Council of Europe – has on two occasions ruled that Traveller human rights are being violated. On the first occasion (May 2016) the committee found violations in four respects: that there is not enough Traveller accommodation; that many Traveller sites are in an inadequate condition; that Irish law provides inadequate safeguards for Travellers threatened with eviction; and that evictions are carried out without necessary safeguards.

Ireland was again found to be in breach of the European Social Charter in relation to treatment of the Traveller community in January 2019. This time the European Committee of Social Rights ruled that current laws do not give Travellers enough consultation rights in cases where landowners wish to evict families camping on their property. It also recommended that legislation should allow for the provision of alternative accommodation or legal representation for the affected families.

The continuing failure to address outstanding accommodation needs has in turn added to the levels of deprivation experienced in a range of other areas. Cutbacks imposed across a range of development programmes and services since 2008 have not been reversed⁶ and Travellers are continuing to experience the highest levels of unemployment, lowest levels of educational attainment, the fewest opportunities for progression, the poorest health and the highest incidence of suicide of any grouping in Irish society.

It is inevitable, therefore, that the last decade has seen serious deterioration in living conditions and an undoubted increase in levels of social and economic exclusion for Travellers. Statistics currently available to us substantiate this in a number of ways.

Homelessness:

- Travellers are 22 times more likely to experience discrimination within the private rental sector. Forced to hide their identity as Traveller
- In 2019 Travellers accounted for almost 12% of the homeless population nationally.
- The ITM conducted an audit in 2019 which showed that 30% of Traveller families require accommodation
- Women make up 56% of the Traveller homeless population, this is unheard of as the average statistic for female homelessness is between 20-30% in other European countries

Education:

The statistics in relation to poor outcomes for Traveller children in mainstream education are stark:

- 91% of Travellers leave school by the age of 16 or younger, compared to 25% of non-Traveller students (Watson et al, 2017, p.29).
- 28% of Traveller students leave school before the age of 13, compared to just 1% of non-Travellers.
- 25% of working age Travellers have no formal education;
- 53% have only primary education.
- Only 8% of working age Travellers have completed second level education or above, compared to 73% of non-Travellers.
- Only 1% of Travellers aged between 25-64 years have a college degree compared to 30% of non-Traveller students (ibid).

These figures show that Travellers have benefited less from the general improvement in education since the 1960's.

Travellers have failed to make progress in employment opportunities and other advantages associated with improved levels of education.

Employment:

According to CSO (2016), 80% of Travellers on a national basis are unemployed in contrast to 17% of the sedentary population. Overall, 972 Traveller women were employed and 2,938 as “*looking after the home*” (CSO, 2016). McGinnity et al., (2017) conducted empirical research to help identify those most affected by discrimination, “*Who experiences discrimination in Ireland?*”. The study revealed that the Traveller population are ten times more vulnerable to employment discrimination than the dominant white Irish population. When questioned, 40% of employers said they were unwilling to employ a Traveller and 75% of participants said they would not welcome a Traveller as a co-worker (ibid).

Imprisonment:

- While Travellers account for 0.6% of the population in Ireland they are overly represented within the Irish penal system. The Travellers in Prison Initiative (2017) estimate that Traveller women account for 22% of the female prison population.
- Traveller men make up 10% of the prison population.

⁵ “*Traveller Homes Matter*”. Research carried out by the Irish Traveller Movement, 2019

⁶Between 2008 and 2013, support for Traveller education programmes and initiatives was cut by 86.6%; support for equality initiatives cut by 76.3%; funding to national Traveller organisations cut by 63.6%; support to Traveller SPY youth initiatives cut by 29.8% and financial aid to initiatives to combat drug abuse amongst Travellers cut by 32.5%.

Discrimination:

MacGreil (1996) studied prejudice in Ireland and referred to the treatment of Travellers as *'Irelands Apartheid'*; noting that one in ten Irish people would deny citizenship to Travellers (p.314).

Further findings revealed that

- 55% of the general population would not like Travellers as members of their community
- 91% would not like a Traveller as family a member
- 85% would not have a Traveller as a friend.

A study of the private rental sector carried out by DKM Economic Consultants (2014) found that 82% of landlords would not rent to *"members of the Travelling community"* (p.47). Many Travellers living in private accommodation suffer from isolation as they cannot allow their families to visit *"in case the landlord discovers they are Travellers"* (DHPLG, 2019, p.20).

In addition to a continuing worsening in accommodation and living conditions, attention was drawn in the planning workshops and consultation in East Cork to:

- The persistence of discrimination as an everyday reality faced by most Travellers. Widespread stereotyping and prejudice, it was argued, has become even more prevalent through both mainstream and social media channels to the point that it often appears to be *'normalised'*. The negative consequences for Travellers are significant, with many being forced to conceal or deny their identity.
- Clearly linked to this also is the persistent and growing concern around mental health in the community. While no official effort has been made to monitor these rates since the All Ireland Traveller Health Study 12 years ago, many in the Traveller community share the conviction that suicide rates continue to increase. A particular cause for concern is the very clear rise in the of young Travellers taking their own lives.
- Barriers to progression: with uniquely high levels of unemployment persisting and a continuation of the trend in young Travellers leaving the formal school system at an early age.
- The range of social issues and challenges connected directly with the marginalized and oppressed position of Travellers in Irish society. The potential for inter and intra family conflict and disunity; for increased drug and alcohol dependency; domestic violence and involvement in criminality, is all evident. Acknowledgment also needs to be made for groupings within the Traveller community who may have particular needs or experience an even greater level of exclusion – for example Travellers with a disability, members of the LGBTQ community, ex-prisoners etc. The overall challenge is about building unity and a strong community 'voice' within a community that is currently fragmented and often voiceless.
- Particular attention was drawn to the potential for even further exclusion for some Traveller households in East Cork who are living in more remote and isolated rural areas. This is especially evident in respect of access to transport and mainstream services.

Efforts to address these issues in an effective way need to be made in a coordinated or integrated way – in the understanding that all are closely linked. Both living conditions and the persistence of societal discrimination, for example, undoubtedly feed directly into worsening physical and mental health within the Traveller community; while barriers to progression and educational attainment are critical factors in maintaining high levels of unemployment and poverty across the community.

2.1.2 Strengths and Assets ECT need to build on

While these are undoubtedly formidable challenges, ECT are setting out this plan in the knowledge that we have a strong platform on which to build. Some of these were identified and explored in the project's joint planning sessions. Most important of them were about:

1. The fact that the project is relatively new, and in its first years of existence. This has allowed us the opportunity to explore approaches and interventions taken by projects in other areas, to consider what could be seen as good practice in method and delivery, and to hopefully bring clarity to our goals and strategy *'from the outset'*.
2. Despite the project being in existence for a relatively short period of time, its origins within the broader Cumann na Daoine framework has meant that working alliances and cooperative arrangements with a range of local service providers and organisations have already been established ⁷.
3. Our location in the East Cork part of Munster, has also left us in a good position to forge links with, and learn from, other projects in the region, as well as a number of important regional networking initiatives ⁸.
4. A strong involvement of ECTP in national Traveller organisations, networks and programmes has also been built up⁹.
5. Most importantly, the project in East Cork has a strong involvement of members of the Traveller community to date (in management, staffing and voluntary commitments). This is seen as an essential platform upon which stronger and more effective engagement and influence can be built.

The ECTP plan for the coming five years is focused on building upon and expanding upon these existing strengths, in our efforts to address the very critical development challenges as outlined.

⁷These working alliances and cooperative arrangements locally include those with an Garda Síochána, Family Resource Centres, libraries, schools and crèches, Education and Training Board, HSE services, local businesses and clergy.

⁸Important in this respect has been solid links already forged with other Traveller projects in the region (notably in Tipperary, North Cork, Kerry and Cork City). ECTP has also been actively involved in the Traveller Health Unit at regional level, as well as in regional structures established around Traveller accommodation.

⁹Including with Minceir Whidden, the Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point, National Traveller MABS, Cena Approved Housing Body and the National Traveller Mental Health Network.

Guiding Principles: Our Approach to Bringing About Change

All research or analysis to date that has addressed the issue of developmental change for the Traveller community in East Cork has emphasised the need to build up capacity and leadership within the community itself.

An evaluation of the East Cork Travellers' Advocacy Programme report¹⁰ in 2007, for example, places central importance in building up capacity for self-determination, stressing the fact that:

- The building of capacity in any community, but particularly the Traveller community, is an extremely slow process and this needs to be recognised by funders, service providers and those who initiate and manage projects. Traveller capacity in East Cork is at many varying levels across the region and requires a long term commitment to reach its full potential.
- It will always be necessary to maintain development work at both the individual and collective level.

Evaluation of the East Cork 'Connect Youth Project'¹¹ in 2008 highlights the importance of networking (and collaborating) among agencies and service providers in helping to build capacity and reduce discriminatory attitudes towards young Travellers.

In March 2011, a feasibility report considering the establishment of a Traveller Resource space in East Cork¹² was undertaken by Joan Nolan (previously of Connect Youth Project in East Cork). The report concluded that greater capacity building measures and increasing Traveller participation was required prior to the acquisition of any independent resource space.

The 2016 research, carried out by Community Consultants¹³, further underlines the importance of central Traveller involvement, recommending that any planned initiative or programme needs to be *'developmental and Traveller led.'*

"All work must be underpinned by agreeing to adhere to community development principles and practices, a commitment to undertaking Traveller culture and awareness training and to working in partnership with Travellers." (Community Consultants, 2016)

A similar understanding around the need for strengthening of local Traveller capacity emerged from discussions in the ECTP planning workshops. A key consensus emerged in this context around the need for the involvement of Travellers to go beyond what might be seen as 'tokenistic'. There was a firm commitment to building strong leadership and meaningful involvement of Travellers in decisions and actions that impact on their own lives. For this to happen, there needs to be:

- Informed decision-making – building up a strong understanding amongst Travellers about both the causes and the consequences of development challenges they face - implying a commitment to learning across a range of issues (notably around accommodation, mental health, education, discrimination and community relations).
- Active Leadership build within the community (ensuring that the voices of all sections of the community are heard)
- An Evidence-based Approach: Empowerment of Travellers needs to encompass the capacity to influence, and not just the capacity to participate. Strong partnerships with mainstream service providers and statutory agencies need to be part of this – as does the need to show the positive outcomes of such partnerships and the very real benefits for all if self-determination is enabled.

¹⁰ East Cork Traveller's Advocacy Project – Evaluation by Gerry O'Sullivan, O'Sullivan Solutions (2007)

¹¹ Connect Youth Project East Cork – Evaluation by Community Consultants(2008)

¹² Report to the East Cork Traveller Forum (2011)

¹³ East Cork Travellers Research Report 2016, Community Consultants

3.1 The Five Key Principles Informing our Strategy

This plan marks our commitment as a project towards change and the improvement of living conditions and life opportunities for members of the Traveller community. ECT know that we can contribute to this change over the coming years if all our actions are informed by five key principles:

1. First, and most important, is the principle of Self-determination. A sustainable future for Travellers, and for Traveller identity, is possible if responses and solutions are driven by the Traveller community itself with external support where necessary. The failure of numerous efforts in the past to seriously address socio-economic disadvantage in the Traveller community has been due mainly to the fact that solutions and responses have been conceived outside the community – based on those in mainstream Irish society think Travellers need or want. ECT are committed, in all the activities and initiatives we undertake, to ensuring that Travellers are at the centre of decision-making about what needs to be prioritised and how challenges are addressed. Our efforts to increase the capacity for self-determination will have a number of elements:
 - a. ECT have begun discussions within the community about history; more specifically, the origins of the Traveller community. We have seen the importance of this in the value to Travellers of understanding their origins and their roots. This is especially important for young Travellers, developing the capacity to understand and communicate more about our roots and especially about why our culture and way of life developed¹⁴.
 - b. Aligned to knowledge about where we have come from, we also aim to build confidence and belief in where we are going to. Just as important, in building self-determination, is a Vision for the Future. Exclusion, isolation and a sense of alienation is increased, not decreased, within the Traveller community if the *'vision for the future'* is coming from other places and not from ourselves.
 - c. Continuing our efforts to build and support Traveller leadership. ECT see this as a targeted and culturally appropriate approach, taking into account existing patterns and potential for leadership within the community – norms and ways of life that have been in existence for centuries and that are based on principles of respect. ECT are not convinced that leadership can be imposed or developed from the outside, or can be achieved through academic advancement or formalised training. We are also committed to retain a particular focus on strengthening leadership amongst young Travellers.
 - d. Related to this is the challenge of building capacity for self-representation. Most of the many attempts to address disadvantage within the Traveller community (aimed, for example, at increasing educational or employment opportunities, improving health or living conditions) have resulted in little or no change. We are convinced that this failure is unavoidable, and indeed will continue, if 'solutions' to these problems continue to be developed from outside our community and delivered from outside our community. Real change in this will come about only when members of the Traveller community are meaningfully and positively engaged in understanding the challenges facing them, agreeing on the most effective ways of addressing these challenges, and fully engaged in implementation of programmes. The task of organising for self-representation can appear to be easily enough addressed within settled communities (residents and tenants associations have a long-standing tradition and are widely recognised as legitimate vehicles for self-representation). For the Traveller community, however, this notion of an 'organised voice' can be a very new one and, more importantly, the ways in which representative structures are created in the settled community may not all be appropriate in relation to the Traveller community. ECT are committed to working within our community to build this capacity from the ground up.

¹⁴ An example of how a discussion is facilitated amongst our children (within the Family Learning Programme) is shown in appendix 2

2. The second principle guiding our approach is about our commitment to developing Solutions. Our experience to date has also taught us that a commitment to opposing and highlighting injustice must and will remain an absolute necessity. But we are also convinced that real change is more likely to come about if this is accompanied with clear and workable proposals on how these injustices can be addressed. Again driven from within the community itself, we will remain committed to proposing solutions as well as highlighting problems.
3. The third principle is very much linked to the importance of developing solutions. There is an equally important need to Show the benefits of bringing about change or making improvements in all those areas where change is necessary. Many proposals for improving the circumstances of Travellers (as with most of those for other sections of the community) are refused on the grounds of cost. It has been our experience, however, that these cost doubts can be proved to be unfounded if a longer-term or broader view is taken. ECT will be endeavoring to show how relatively small amounts of investment in the correct educational approach, for example, can actually lead to savings in state expenditure in the longer term (due, for example, to the beneficial effects there are in terms of child welfare, health and wellbeing; as well as wider knock on benefits for family relations and family stability). We can make a similar case on the grounds of public expenditure savings, in respect of efforts to reduce the prospects of reoffending for Travellers in prison. We will continue to prioritise our commitment to demonstrating benefits across all our programmes of work. An important aspect of this commitment is the need to show that potential benefits are rarely restricted to the Traveller community, and that there can be both social and economic gains for Irish society generally. It is for this reason that the commitment to evaluation and review will be embedded in all actions we undertake and support.
4. Fourthly, the last decade has been marked by significant deterioration in living conditions and quality of life for large sections of Irish society. Much of can be seen as a legacy of austerity policies and has had negative effects across a range of areas with critical social and economic consequences for large sections of the Irish population. Some of the most devastating effects have been in relation to housing and health. Conditions for the Traveller community have reached crisis levels in both these respects, with levels of homelessness suicide rates remaining higher than any other groups in Irish society. We see it as extremely important to recognise, however, that very many of the same policies that create exclusion and disadvantage for the Traveller community also create exclusion and disadvantage for many settled people. More importantly, we attach considerable importance to increasing awareness around common concerns and to building alliances and working relationships with groups and initiatives in the settled community. The expectation is that 'cross-community' initiatives will develop a stronger and more informed awareness about the need for change. But it is also clear that there are considerable potential benefits in terms of tackling prejudice, challenging misconceptions and supporting broader community relations.

5. Finally, the potential for successful outcomes in tackling any of these issues is greatly increased if more attention is paid to the causes of the problems and challenges that arise. It is important to acknowledge that these problems have reached crisis levels in so many respects (especially in relation to accommodation, mental health, community and family breakdown). And that there is a continuing need to respond to the needs created by these crises on a day-to-day basis. It is also important, however, to recognise that dealing with the consequences alone is unlikely to bring about much-needed change. It is arguable also that a sole focus on dealing with consequences alone can increase costs in the longer term, if no attention is given to addressing the causes. This principle needs to become embedded across a range of the development challenges' faced by the project.

For example:

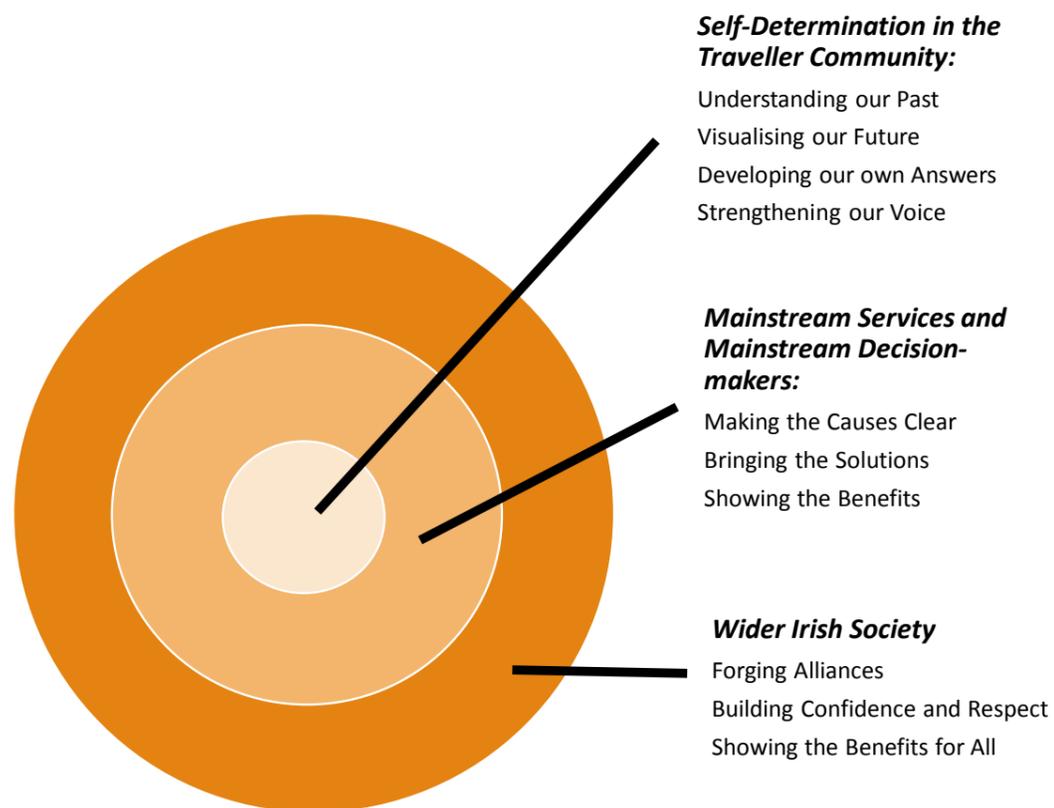
- a. Responding to the mental health crisis faced by Travellers certainly requires ongoing efforts to deal with the consequences – assisting those in need accessing mental health services, supporting those at risk, awareness programmes, helping bereaved families etc. These services and activities continue to be necessary and vital. But we have also been able to demonstrate very positive outcomes from our efforts to increase understanding within the community about why Travellers are more at risk. Most important will be efforts to highlight how isolation, exclusion and ongoing discrimination can lead to feelings of low self-worth, alienation, despair and hopelessness. And, conversely, how positive self-identity and a sense of belonging can contribute to positive mental health. It is also important to demonstrate how poor mental health is in itself a cause of poor physical health, and to use internationally collected evidence to show that investment in promoting good mental health saves money in dealing with poor physical health.
- b. Similarly, an impressive body of internationally conducted research has shown that social determinants (especially living conditions) can directly contribute to a range of negative outcomes. This is well-established in relation to poor health, but has also become clear with regard to a range of other problems prevalent within the Traveller community. A whole host of problems (including drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, conflict, anti-social and criminal behaviour) are more concentrated in situations where adequate accommodation and basic services are absent, where overcrowding creates pressurised situations, and where opportunities for progression or 'normal' social interaction are non-existent. Where Traveller families are living in these situations, it is not out of choice. And we believe that ongoing expenditure in dealing with the consequences or the 'fallout' from this is seriously higher than what would be required if the causes were addressed. Money can be saved in the longer term if appropriate and adequate accommodation is provided, and if Travellers are asked about their own needs and future hopes in this regard.

Our Strategic Plan is therefore built upon a commitment to:

1. Building and supporting self-determination within our community
2. Bringing forward solutions, and demonstrating how these solutions can benefit everyone
3. Making alliances and building understanding with relevant groups and initiatives in the settled community
4. Working continuously to build awareness and commitment around the causes of social problems and challenges we face in our community, while at the same time continuing with the work that is very necessary in dealing with the consequences on a day-to-day basis.

Our overall priorities and approach to the work are summarized below

East Cork Traveller Project Working for Lasting Change: From the Inside Out

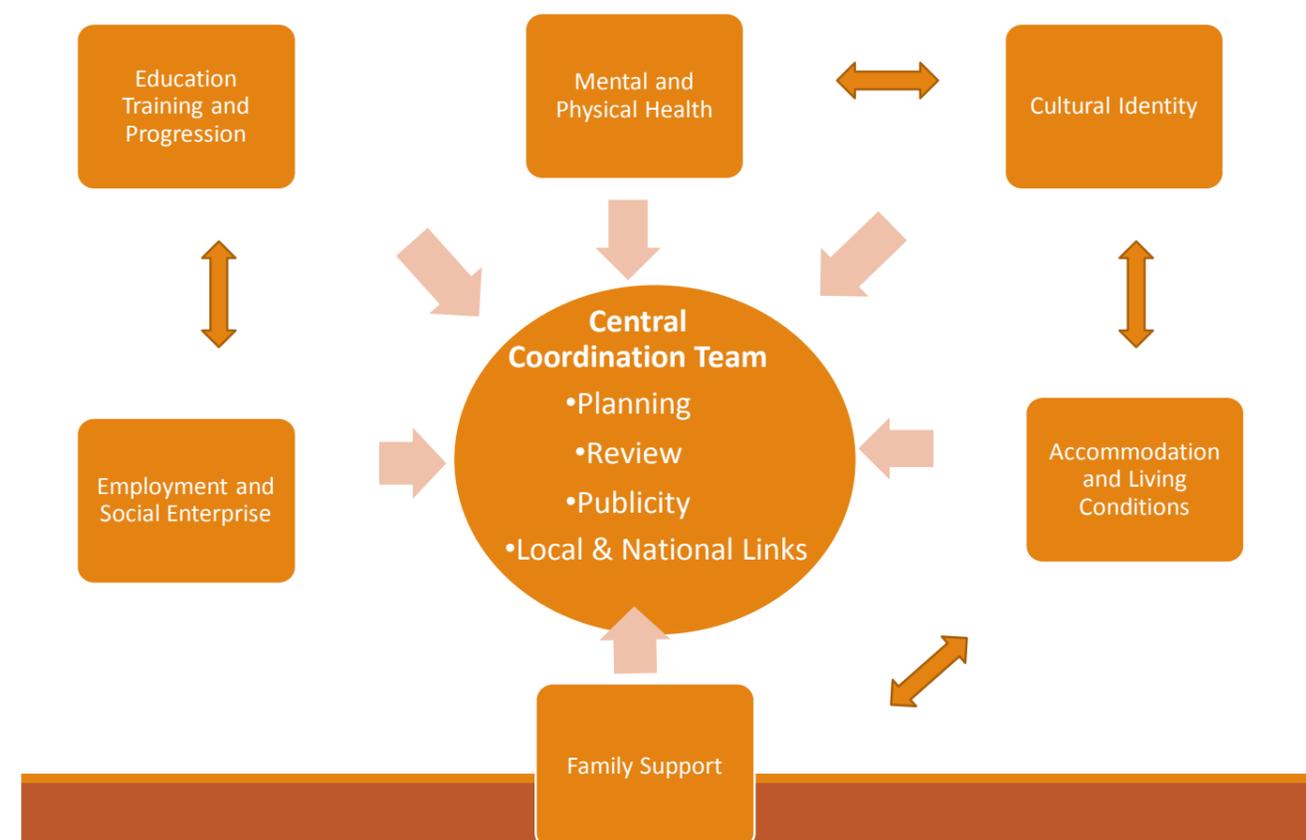


ECTP Programmes and Actions 2021-2025

ECT have arrived at key decisions around this strategic plan through a detailed internal review, as well as through consultation with people in the Traveller community we work with and for. Our plan for the coming five years is informed primarily by this process, but also by an acknowledgement of our achievements and strengths as a project to date.

Our strategy is designed to address the six key development challenges as outlined, while ensuring that the links between these challenges are recognized and taken into account (see below).

Six Programmes



The ECTP Steering Group will remain responsible for general coordination including month-to-month planning, review of progress, publicity and maintenance of links locally and nationally where necessary. We will allow for the establishment of working and sub-groups under each of the six programme headings. We will allow membership of these groups to change and grow over the five year period. This will primarily facilitate the active involvement of members of the Traveller community in specific activities. But it will also allow for specific areas of expertise to be recruited as and when they may be required.

All of our programmes and actions will be informed by the five key principles as outlined (around self-determination, building alliances, coming up with solutions, demonstrating benefits and understanding the causes). And all of our programmes and actions will be evaluated and judged by the extent to which we have furthered these principles in our work.

Details of each programme are contained in the following pages, setting out the involvement of specific groupings in our community, as well as actions designed in accordance with our five guiding principles.

Programme 1: Education, Learning and Progression

Traveller Community Target Groups					
	Children	Support Workers	Young People	Parents	
Guiding Principles	Building Self	Active involvement of children in designing their own curriculum and activities	Building peer skills Outreach and promotional skills	Establishing youth representative and youth leadership structures	Building capacity for Interaction with schools
		Out-of school peer support programme facilitated by Travellers	Formal recognition peer support training	Secondary school peer support programme	Traveller School Liaison Model
		Evaluation of outcomes for children, parents and support workers		Sharing results and lessons with other young Traveller initiatives regionally	
		Schools in reach activities (teacher alliances) Other Traveller Projects	ETB support in learning and training programme	Traveller led participation in regional and national youth initiatives	Traveller Family Support Workers
		'History and community origins' programme with children		Learning programme with young Travellers	

Key Hoped-for Outcomes of Education Learning and Progression Programme

ECT are aiming, over the five-year period of this strategic plan, to have achieved:

- Establishment of learning programmes for young Travellers and Traveller children (both facilitated by trained Traveller support workers)
- Evaluation of outcomes for these programmes and sharing of the lessons.
- Increased formal school inclusion
- A strong and informed voice for young Travellers
- Establishing links with other Traveller projects in the region to build a more inclusive approach to learning and to youth self-representation.

Overall, we see these activities as resulting in higher numbers of young Travellers staying in school; improved educational achievements for both Traveller children and young Travellers; more meaningful involvement of Traveller parents in the education of their children; a strengthened voice for young Travellers and an improvement in progression opportunities for Travellers in East Cork.

Key Working Partners in Education, Learning and Progression: Local schools, Education and Training Board, Solas, Expertise at Third Level; Youth Services and youth programmes.

Programme 2: Social Enterprise

Traveller Community Target Groups				
	Traveller Men	Traveller Women	Young Travellers	
Guiding Principles	Building Self-Determination	Setting up feasibility group on horse-linked activity?	Setting up feasibility group on socially-based activities?	Setting up feasibility group on apprenticeship-based activities?
	Designing Solutions	Feasibility study funding to be secured and business plan drawn up	Feasibility study funding to be secured and business plan drawn up	Feasibility study funding to be secured and business plan drawn up
	Demonstrating Benefits	Wide promotion of benefits in terms of local tourism, local employment and historic connections.	Economic analysis of effect of monies exiting the Traveller community and benefits of it being retained	Economic analysis of effect of monies exiting the Traveller community and benefits of it being retained
	Building Alliances	Visits to initiatives in similar fields Social Innovation Fund	Visits to initiatives in similar fields Market research across Ireland	Relevant trades unions Securing a market in the Traveller community
	Understanding the Causes	Linking movement of Travellers from the road to rise of tourism industry in Ireland (1960s): explanatory video production	Video production and social media presence on benefits of sustainability and retention of spending within the community	Video production and social media presence on benefits of sustainability and retention of spending within the community

Key Hoped-for Outcomes of Social Enterprise Programme

Over the five years of the plan, we will hope to have achieved:

- Feasibility studies completed around three potential social enterprise initiatives: demonstrating possible markets and possible benefits in terms of job creation and wider community outcomes.
- The formation by Travellers of groups around these ideas, with these groups managing the feasibility research and following through on results.
- Increased awareness within the community on the principles of social enterprise and the benefits that can accrue beyond individual job creation.
- The success of at least one of these initiatives on a sustainable basis.
- A positive contribution to building pride and self-identity, as well as to improvement of community relations generally.

Key Working Partners in Social Enterprise: Local Development Company, third-level institutes specialist expertise and support; good practice initiatives from elsewhere; trades unions; local employers; Travellers already in business; Department of Social Protection.

Programme 3: Accommodation and Living Conditions

Traveller Community Target Groups		
	Families in Accommodation Crisis	Families with Accommodation Needs
Guiding Principles	Building Self-Determination Creating the space for self-assessment of needs Building capacity for self-advocacy	Supporting continuation and expansion of Accommodation Action Group Supporting Traveller representation on LTACC and national accommodation initiatives
	Designing Solutions Traveller-appropriate emergency responses Developing 'first-start' solutions with newly formed families	Implementation of Cena 'Engagement model' to determine needs county-wide. Development of 15-year (costed) plan based on expressed need
	Demonstrating Benefits Case studies in good practice around emergency provision Mapping benefits for children	Assessment of longer-term economic benefits of responding to real needs. Public promotion of longer term strategy and vision
	Building Alliances Strategic alliance with homeless organisations and supports in the settled community Joining in efforts to highlight homelessness	Continued involvement with Cena to expand good practice and build representative structures with tenants and residents.
	Understanding the Causes A discussion with Travellers on longer-term accommodation 'vision' – informed by understanding of our own history Understanding and promoting the 'Home First' model	A discussion with Travellers on longer-term accommodation 'vision' – informed by understanding of our own history

Key Hoped-for Outcomes of Accommodation Programme

ECT are aiming, over the five-year period of this strategic plan, to have achieved:

- Most importantly, confidence in a vision for Traveller accommodation that is achievable and sustainable.
- A detailed home-by-home assessment of accommodation needs for all Travellers in East Cork
- A strengthened capacity of Traveller families to identify their own accommodation needs, to 'future-proof' these needs, and to represent themselves as tenants.
- A realisation (amongst policy makers, service providers and Irish society generally) that providing Traveller appropriate accommodation has many more benefits than costs.
- Arrival at a situation where we are able to see at least the beginning of the end of overcrowded and dysfunctional living spaces, and the acceptance that a new approach is both needed and beneficial to all.

ECT will be continuing to deal with day-to-day requests for help in accommodation (we anticipate that needs and demand will remain critical in the continuing accommodation crisis for Travellers). But we also know that there are no solutions to this if they are not based on an understanding of causes, and are driven by a longer term vision of a better future.

Key Working Partners in Accommodation: Local Authority Traveller accommodation services; Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee; Cena Approved Housing Body; other Traveller projects regionally; local and national media.

Programme 4: Mental Health

Traveller Community Target Groups				
	Traveller Men	Traveller Women	Traveller Families	Young Traveller
Guiding Principles	Building Self-Determination Supporting organised horse ownership Sports associations Media presence	Establishment of women's groups in local areas (rural and urban) Inviting inputs from other projects	Family cluster meetings on mental health Self-organisation around grieving and funerals	Elected county-wide youth forum Promotional video on mental health
	Designing Solutions Contribution of men to mental health events Horse Owners Forum	Mutual supports and peer support groups	Targeted supports for at-risk families Connections with counselling supports	Peer support Leadership
	Demonstrating Benefits Updating research on mental health crisis and suicide Positive engagement with prison and probation services	Engagement with mainstream and social media Mental Health Conference	Interagency involvement of ECTP family support workers	Young Traveller regional conference
	Building Alliances Connecting with Mens' Shed movement Links with supportive employers	National Traveller Women's Forum National Traveller Mental Health Network	Family Support Network National Traveller Mental Health Network	Replicating forum with other Munster projects National representation
	Understanding the Causes Encouraging and supporting more learning about history	Encouraging and supporting more learning about Traveller history	Suicide awareness sessions	Delivery of awareness programmes in schools

Major National Mental Health Event on Causes and Responses (2022)

Key Hoped-for Outcomes of Mental Health Programme

ECT are aiming, over the five-year period of this strategic plan, to have achieved:

- A strong and recognised voice for Traveller men, Traveller woman and young Travellers, impacting positively in relation to risk of suicide.
- Greater understanding around factors contributing to good and to poor mental health.
- The capacity for self-organisation increased in a range of fields (including recreation and sports, horse ownership, prison rehabilitation and funeral management) all of which will impact positively on mental health and help reduce the risk of suicide.
- More timely and more effective access to counselling and mental health support services for those in need of them, and especially for those at risk of suicide and self-harm.

All of these are achievable goals, and legitimate in their own right. However, there is little or no possibility of meaningful change or improvement with regard to the mental health challenges faced by Travellers without a serious shift in priorities at national level. All of our planned activities over the coming years will have the aim of raising consciousness around the crisis of suicide in our community.

Programme 4A: Physical Health

Traveller Community Target Groups			
	Traveller Men	Traveller Women	Traveller Families
Building Self-Determination	Establishing membership clubs in organised sports and gyms	Women's groups established in four centres of population Upgrading of learning and status for Primary Healthcare Workers	Updating of medical card entitlements
Designing Solutions	Building health checks into sporting and recreational activities	Cancer screening checks Breast check drive	Immunisation checks Blood pressure monitoring programme
Demonstrating Benefits	Collecting visual testimonies from men Social media outlets	Health focus in cultural awareness sessions	Nutritional awareness programme
Building Alliances	Organisation of charity run with relevant authorities and service providers	National Traveller Women's Forum RTHN/THU	GP information meetings
Understanding the Causes	Cardiovascular awareness sessions Organised historic walking trips	Researching and increasing understanding about social determinants of health	Researching and increasing understanding about how mental health impacts on physical health Bringing Traveller health to the LTACC

Key Hoped-for Outcomes of Physical Health Programme

ECT are aiming, over the five-year period of this strategic plan, to have achieved:

- Heightened and more widespread awareness around casual relationships between lifestyle and health, living conditions and health, good mental health and good physical health.
- Increased availability of Traveller friendly and Traveller managed spaces to facilitate activities that are health positive (women's groups, men's sports associations, social and mainstream media outlets).
- Higher rates of participation in national screening programmes
- Strengthened links, and more informed approaches from a cultural point of view, with GPs.
- A greater emphasis amongst mainstream service provision on the social determinants of health (demonstrated, for example, in a greater emphasis on accommodation determinants within the Traveller Health Unit and a greater emphasis on health outcomes within the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee.
- Stronger working alliances with other Traveller projects to agree on and implement effective and appropriate models of healthcare, health promotion and health monitoring.
- A strengthened emphasis on recording of health outcomes (and an enhanced understanding of the reasons for positive outcomes). We will engage in ongoing research, and dissemination of research results, with in mind.

Key Working Partners in Mental and Physical Health Programmes: Regional Traveller Health Unit; GPs; mental health services; counseling services (including Traveller mental health service); national Traveller Mental Health Network; HSE health promotion.

Programme 5: Family Support Programme

Traveller Community Target Groups		
	More Vulnerable Families	More Excluded Groups
Building Self-Determination	Training, learning and accreditation for Travellers to act as family support workers Supporting self-advocacy in family conferences	Establishment of LGBTQ support group Facilitating debate (media and social media) re more excluded groups – eg on grounds of disability or sexual orientation
Designing Solutions	Agreeing on multi-agency intervention strategies for particular families Traveller-led facilitation of responses	Designing and delivering Traveller appropriate responses to specific challenges. EG: •Domestic violence •Drug and Alcohol dependency •Conflict situations
Demonstrating Benefits	Understanding and promoting the 'home first' approach to addressing complex family issues Highlighting economic benefits of early intervention	Building awareness within Traveller community about the advantages of common identity and inclusion of all groups in the community
Building Alliances	Increasing and strengthening school-parental links and communication Delivery of cultural awareness programmes to targeted service providers	Establishing regional and national links with Traveller-led initiatives Establishing regional and national links with Settled-led initiatives
Understanding the Causes	Public awareness campaign to highlight the consequences of continued exclusion and marginalisation (including the economic costs)	Learning and educational initiatives to empower those with direct experience around root causes, and to become peer support workers

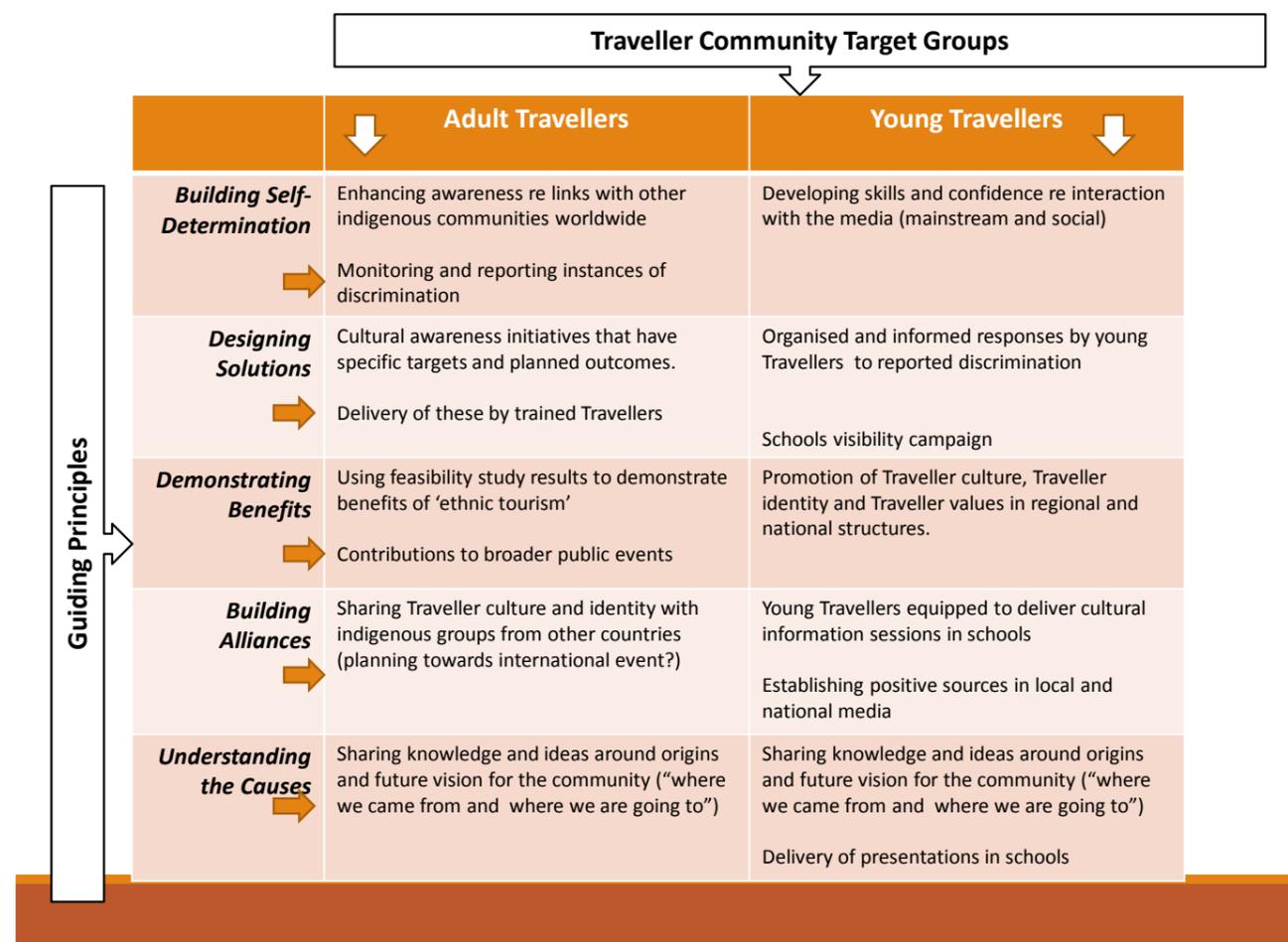
Key Hoped-for Outcomes of Family Support Programme

ECT are aiming, over the five-year period of this strategic plan, to have achieved:

- A more informed understanding amongst mainstream service providers around the causes and nature of challenges faced by Traveller families
- An enhanced awareness within the Traveller community about what causes these problems, the negative consequences involved, and the importance of unity and inclusiveness in tackling these issues.
- A more co-ordinated and multi-agency response to the range of issues that are very much interrelated for more vulnerable families and groups (especially those related to mental health, addiction, criminal behavior or use of violence)
- Central Traveller involvement in designing and facilitating these multi-agency responses (ensuring that the project has workers equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills)

Key Working Partners in Family Support: Social Work Services (Tusla, HSE and Local Authority-linked); School managers and teachers; drugs and alcohol counselors; prison and probation services; refuges)

Programme 6: Cultural Identity



Key Hoped-for Outcomes of Family Support Programme

ECT are aiming, over the five-year period of this strategic plan, to have achieved:

- A higher profile and stronger Traveller voice in East Cork public events and public awareness.
- Increased pride in identity (especially amongst young Travellers): a greater willingness to proclaim Traveller identity and a reduction in tendency to deny or hide culture.
- Decrease in levels of prejudice and 'hate speech' evident in local media.
- Greater understanding and appreciation of the benefits of 'mutual respect' being built between settled and Traveller communities.

Key Working Partners in Cultural Identity: Media (locally and nationally); residents associations in the settled community; community development programmes and Family Resource Centres; youth services; national Traveller organizations; other Traveller projects regionally).

Each programme and set of actions will therefore be guided by the same intervention approach, emphasizing:

- Very targeted approaches to involving specific groupings in the Traveller community; as well as
- An approach to programmes and actions that begins, in all cases, with building self-determination and collective action; builds upon this to bring about a positive influence on and with mainstream service providers; and results in solutions that are both appropriate and effective.

(see below)

	Youth	Men	Women	LGBT	Prisoners
Accommodation					
Education					
Employment and Enterprise					
Culture and Identity					
Mental and Physical Health					
Family Support					

5. Management, Monitoring and Evaluation

Management, Monitoring and Evaluation.

The ECT project currently falls within the governance structures of Cumann na Daoine (CDP) and all aspects of the project's reporting and compliance commitments are managed through this structure. The ECT Co-Ordinator reports monthly to the project steering committee and this current system will continue to facilitate the development of yearly operational plans drawn from the strategy, evaluations and reviews of the strategy, as it moves forward. ECT will carry out a needs assessment to determine the resources required to fully implement this plan.

It is envisaged that the ECT project, through the development of the programmes and actions presented in this strategy, will evolve over time into an autonomous project, with its own governance and systems of compliance.

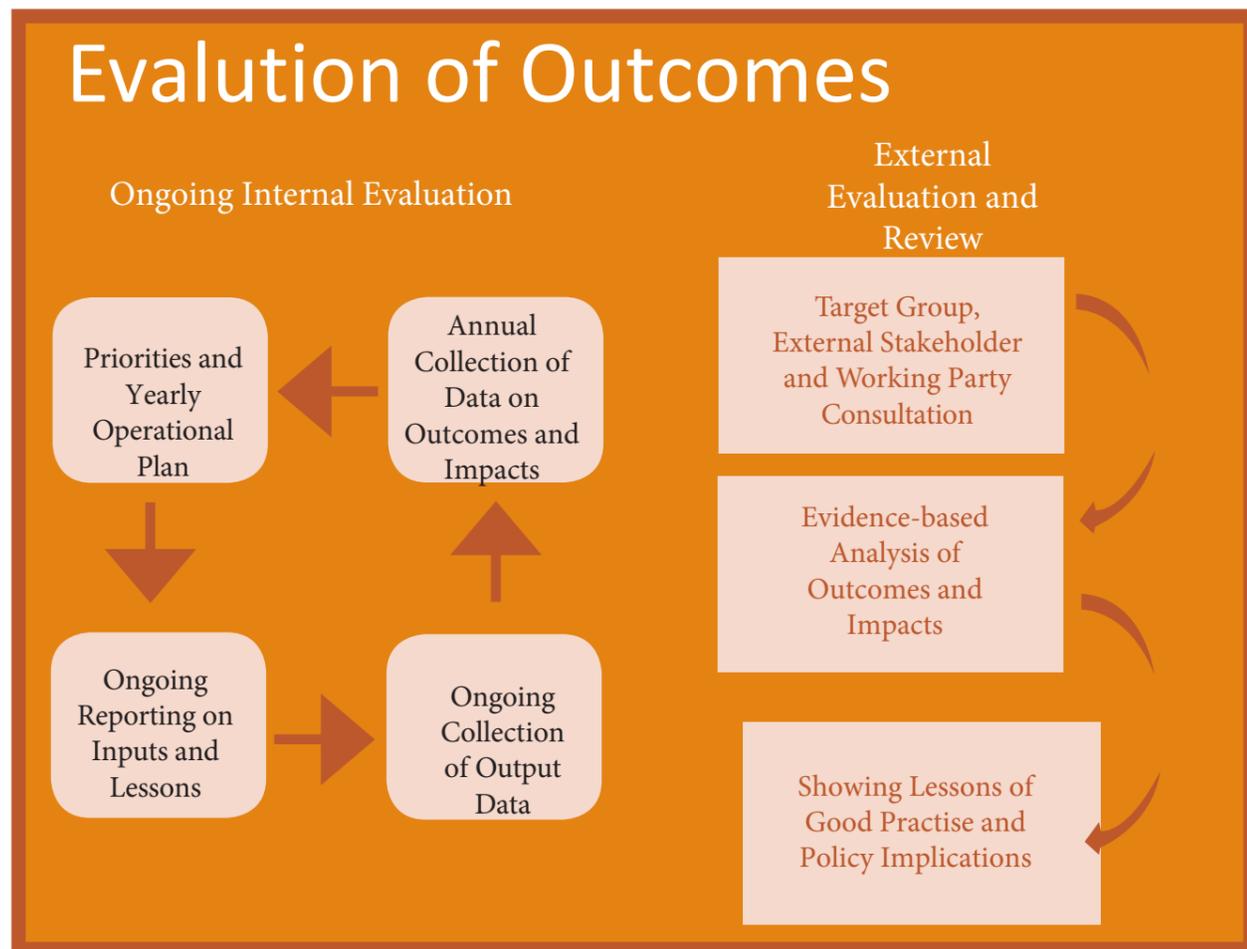
Coordination of programmes and actions will be the responsibility of a team or 'forum' (with one worker and/or volunteer from each of the six programme areas) facilitated by the project coordinator.

Each programme forum team will:

- Have an initial meeting to determine the starting point for actions.
- Set out specific objectives and an operational plan to achieve the particular action being taken on.
- Identify the participants and working partners needed to carry through on the particular action being taken on. This includes the specific personnel within mainstream service providers depending on the initiative being taken on (teachers or others delivering education, for example, it is about furthering a learning initiative; or it may be those delivering counseling services if it is an initiative around mental health). Participants should also be identified within the Traveller community – depending on who may have expertise, interest or motivation in the particular action being pursued.
- Work over a period of time to pursue the action in question.
- Involve all participants in reviewing progress and achievements associated with work on each action. The review will not be just about success or failure. It will also allow for lessons to be learned from the efforts made – with the learning from things not happening being just as important as learning from success.

Membership and participation in each forum will therefore not be set and unchanging over the period of the plan. It will change and grow depending on the actions being undertaken at any given time. People (Travellers, settled people and representatives of mainstream service providers) will participate in programme forums in order to help carry out a specified task and will be involved jointly in a review of efforts to achieve objectives associated with that task.

The overall aim for the five year plan is to work towards autonomy and develop a Traveller led project with a 60/40 Traveller leadership.



5.1 Evaluation and Review

We are committed to evaluation as an integral part of our development activities throughout the strategic planning period because we recognise the importance of:

1. The ever increasing need to demonstrate results in relation to resources invested. ECT are committed to demonstrating that the project not only succeeds in achieving the objectives and targets we have set ourselves, but that it also makes economic sense in terms of outcomes. This is especially important in the work we undertake in relation to health, education, accommodation and youth development. We will adopt an evidence-based approach to showing value for money in this respect.
2. Secondly, we are aware that impacts of the project go beyond the benefits to individuals participating in our programmes. There are also clear benefits for their partners, their children, and members of their community. Funding providers do not always request information or evidence in relation to these wider benefits (funding of educational courses, for example, often confine their requirements to numbers receiving qualifications; or measurement of success in training can be restricted to numbers accessing employment etc.). While these are important indicators in their own right, we are also committed to demonstrating related outcomes for participants in the longer term; as well as for their families and communities. We are also committed to using evidence to demonstrate the benefits of a more inclusive approach for mainstream service-providers and Irish society generally.
3. Thirdly, we are also strongly aware that successful outcomes are very much dependent upon the approach taken by ECTP project workers and volunteers. Our evaluation efforts will not only show what we have achieved; we will also focus on how these achievements have come about. We are committed to ongoing critical reflection on what works well and what may not – informed at all stages by participant and service-user feedback. As a result we will be able to demonstrate (and share) our 'model', and show how particular approaches and interventions can contribute to particular results.
4. Finally, we see lessons and insights emerging from the work as being of significant importance in shaping effective mainstream responses to social exclusion, education, health and other key challenges faced by the Traveller community. Our evaluation and review process provides a mechanism through which these lessons are captured, and then shared with our working partners within mainstream service provision and policy development.

We will facilitate the participation of staff, board members, volunteers and programme participants in a review process. An annual cycle will result in the production of a yearly report: summarising progress towards achievement of strategic objectives and highlighting issues for future planning.

The plan, and review approach, is based on the 'Theory of Change' model: with an emphasis on understanding changing and evolving circumstances; setting clear aims, and increasing the organisation's capacity to link and understand inputs and outputs on an ongoing basis.

An annual cycle will result in the production of a yearly report: summarising progress towards achievement of strategic objectives and highlighting issues for future planning. The evaluation system will also be used to assist staff with preparation of monthly progress reports to co-ordinator and Board. The basic elements of the model are presented below.

Acknowledgments

East Cork Traveller Project (ECT) has set a standard with the hard work that was built into this Strategic plan to cover a period between 2021-2025, making it clear the community have a voice and that ECT are now in a position to look at the future in order to build solidarity within the Traveller community of East Cork and beyond in order to make sure that the progression is Traveller led.

The past couple of years have been challenging and COVID-19 will always be part of our lives. There were huge obstacles faced within the project and overall Traveller community; we as a team within ECT needed to change its approach in engaging with the community.

The community across East Cork are now moving in the right direction and relationships are being made every day. The community have not had any real supports and over the last 10+ years as has been outlined by the community very early on within my time as Coordinator as ECT.

The determination to make sure Travellers have a voice has been a huge driving force over the years and with this, the first ever Strategic Plan coming from a solutions based approach along with clear objectives to ensure that ECT is led by Travellers for Travellers.

This could not have been done without the hard work of many. I would like to thank and to especially acknowledge the steering group for their hard work to date, to Cumm Na Daoine and the HSE Traveller Health Unit for their continued support, Nexus for compiling this report, St. Stephens Green Trust for funding this process and to all the community groups and workers that link with ECT to support the our work.

I want to acknowledge the huge efforts by my team at ECT and the overall community for their support and trust.

Finally, I want to say it's an honor to be a member of the Traveller community who is fortunate enough to be Coordinator of such a progressive team.

Thank you all,

TJ Hogan

Coordinator of East Cork Traveller project (ECT)



