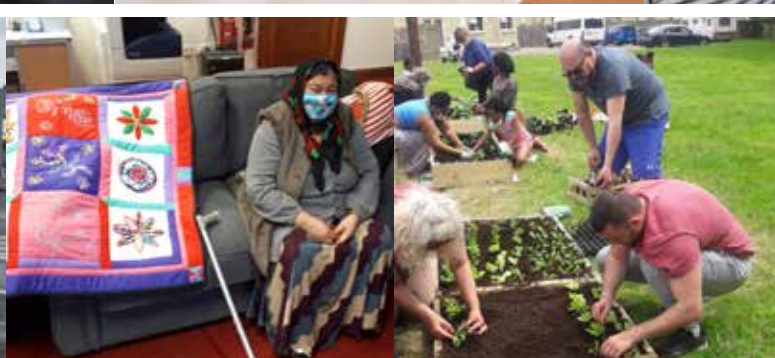




# DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT ANNUAL REPORT 2020

“WHAT COVID-19 DID IS LAY BARE THE SIGNIFICANT INEQUALITIES THAT ARE STILL EXPERIENCED BY THE TRAVELLER AND ROMA COMMUNITIES IN COUNTY DONEGAL.”





## ACRONYMS

<b>BIC</b>	Building Intercultural Communities	<b>DRRP</b>	Donegal Refugee Resettlement Project
<b>CAMS</b>	Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality	<b>HAP</b>	Housing Assistance Payment
<b>CE</b>	Community Employment	<b>HGV</b>	Heavy Goods Vehicle
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019	<b>IHREC</b>	Irish Human Rights Equality Commission
<b>CPD</b>	Continued Professional Development	<b>INAR</b>	Irish Network Against Racism
<b>DEASP</b>	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection	<b>MAED</b>	Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage
<b>DLDC</b>	Donegal Local Development CLG	<b>PHC</b>	Primary Health Care
<b>DTP</b>	Donegal Travellers Project	<b>PPE</b>	Personal Protective Equipment
		<b>PUP</b>	Pandemic Unemployment Payment



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*“2020 showed us different ways of continuing our important work in achieving better health outcomes for Travellers in Donegal. We moved our work online and carried out socially distanced visits, so our work kept going even in the middle of the pandemic, just in a different way”*

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- Margaret Boyle Community Healthcare Worker



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## 2020 BY NUMBERS



**100+** families received sanitation packs which were prepared by DTP staff and distributed throughout the county.

**1500+** People participated in the BIC project throughout its duration.

**7** Travellers graduated from Maynooth University with a qualification in Community Work in a Changing Ireland.

**18** Laptops were purchased through a grant from Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage to support Travellers studying online.

**100+** Travellers participated in the Donegal Travellers Project Community Consultation Survey.

**200+** People (including agencies & third level institutions) participated in the Donegal Travellers Intercultural Training Initiative exploring cultural competency and diversity awareness training.

**350+** Travellers, Roma and Asylum Seeker families were contacted at least once weekly by DTP staff during the COVID pandemic.

**450+** People have completed the joint DTP and BIC Project Diversity Aware Training.

**100** Summer Activity packs with an emphasis on outdoor games were developed by the DTP Primary Health Care Team and distributed to young Travellers and Roma in Donegal and Leitrim to promote cardiovascular health and positive mental health.



### TRAVELLER AND ROMA COMMUNITIES

#### THE TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

Travellers are a minority ethnic group, indigenous to the island of Ireland. Travellers maintain a shared history, language, traditions and culture. Nomadism is an integral part of Traveller culture. In Donegal, the Traveller population fluctuates between two hundred and fifty and three hundred and fifty Traveller families. The most recent profile of the population completed by DTP in August 2020 identified 380 Traveller families living in Donegal and north Leitrim. According to the Fundamental Rights Agency Travellers in Ireland survey, Traveller life expectancy is 10 years below the general population, with a bigger gap for Traveller men than women, unemployment levels are highest and 10 per cent of Travellers including children reported going to bed hungry at least once in the previous month. 90 per cent of Travellers report insufficient and inadequate accommodation while there are also high levels of racism and early school leaving.

#### THE ROMA COMMUNITY

The European Commission and the Council of Europe tend to use 'Roma' as an umbrella term to refer to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom) and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned including those who identify themselves as Gypsies. It is estimated that there are up to

5,000 Roma currently living in Ireland, with most coming from Romania and Slovakia. Roma in Ireland are generally EU citizens. Many Roma are now Irish citizens and there are now many second and third generation Roma who have been born in Ireland. Traveller and Roma share a history of nomadism, similar lifestyles and have a shared experience of social exclusion and racism.

In 2018, the first National Roma Needs Assessment revealed significant poverty and health inequalities among the Roma community with approximately 20 per cent of the community in Ireland living below a basic standard of living and experiencing severe material deprivation. Half those surveyed did not have a medical card and just over 50 per cent reported someone in the household going to bed hungry.

#### ROMA IN DONEGAL

Donegal Travellers Project received support from the Department of Justice to fund a Roma Community Development project for three years. The project has successfully secured funding into 2021. The project has successfully worked with and for the Roma Community in Donegal and has engaged directly with over forty families over the past three years.

#### PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE FOR TRAVELLERS RETIRES

Donegal Travellers Project said a sad farewell to Public Health Nurse for Travellers, Ita Ward who retired in 2020 after 15 years in the position.

Ita worked closely with the Primary Health Care (PHC) team, visiting Travellers throughout Donegal in her commitment to achieve better health outcomes for the Traveller community and deliver social justice and equality for Travellers in the county.

Ita's legacy working with the DTP will never be forgotten. The organisation wishes her well in her retirement and warmly welcomes her successor, Nicola Gillespie, who brings 24 years nursing and midwifery experience to the position.



Community Health Nurse Ita Ward is presented with flowers on the occasion of her retirement.

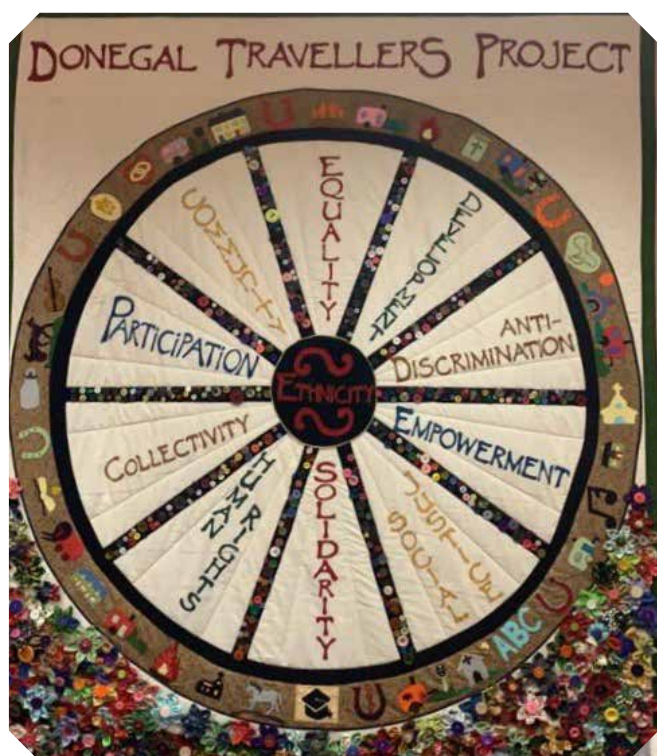
## TRAVELLER AND ROMA COMMUNITIES

### DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT

The Donegal Travellers Project is a locally based community development organisation of Travellers and members of the wider community working for justice, equality and human rights for the Traveller and Roma communities in Donegal. DTP offers programmes, support and services for the entire Traveller community. The organisation works across the total county and has offices in the Letterkenny and Ballyshannon areas. While 50 percent of the Traveller population live in the Letterkenny and surrounding areas, DTP reaches out to families across all of Donegal.

### WORK

For almost twenty five years, the project has supported Travellers, and more recently the Roma Community, to articulate their identity, to organize collectively and to work towards the realisation of their rights. Today, Donegal Travellers Project has a staff team of 23 working in a range of areas including community development, health, early years and adult education, accommodation, youth work, information and advocacy, interculturalism and anti-racism. The project is made up of; Travellers, members of the majority population and members of other minority groups committed to working together for the realisation of a more equal society. The project's commitment to anti-racism is evident from the ongoing work and innovative approach of the Donegal Travellers Intercultural Training Initiative and the newly established Diversity Aware online programme.



Traveller men, Ned Boyle and Raymond Gibbons used their time creatively during lockdown to make a barrel-top wagon garden ornament, entirely from recycled wood.



DTP Manager, Siobhan McLaughlin behind Reception Desk at Letterkenny office.

“

*DTP staff and management can be very proud of the work they did in supporting the community throughout the pandemic*

- Siobhan McLaughlin  
Project Manager

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## BOARD OF MANAGEMENT MEMBERSHIP



### LEADING THE WAY

All of the work of the Donegal Travellers Project during 2020 was led out by the DTP Board of Management, which met remotely twice monthly during the lockdown to ensure the needs and interests of the Traveller and Roma communities continued to be met during the COVID-19 crisis.



Chaired by Martin Mongan throughout this time, the voluntary Board, a partnership of Travellers and members of the settled community, provided invaluable support to the organisation as it navigated difficult challenges and empowered the staff to continue to deliver and adjust and develop innovative approaches to work during COVID.

DTP Board of Management and project managers also worked with funders to protect the delivery of services, ensuring they were kept aware that the work continued to focus on health, housing, education inequality and social justice, except through the lens of COVID.

### VOICE AT THE TOP TABLE



DTP Board of Management member and Donegal resident, Eileen Flynn made history in 2020 when she became the first Traveller woman member of the Seanad.

The trailblazing Independent senator went on to be elected Chair of the Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community.

“ 2020 was a new way of working for us as a Primary Healthcare Team - we wouldn't have worked as well or achieved so much without having such strong links, trust and relationships already built before the pandemic hit with the Traveller Community in Donegal.

-Kate Boyle,  
Community Healthcare Worker

## DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: CHAIRPERSON'S STATEMENT

**“COVID-19 has demonstrated that this is a flexible organisation that adapts and responds to challenges and that strives to put the needs of the Traveller and Roma communities at the core of everything we do.” - Angela O’Leary, Chairperson**



Throughout 2020, DTP staff and Board of Management worked tirelessly to inform, support, and protect the Traveller and Roma communities in Donegal.

C O V I D - 1 9 exacerbated inequalities that already existed within the Traveller and Roma communities and highlighted their frequent exclusion from services and the work of agencies across the county.

But DTP was present and active on the ground, working to ensure the needs and interests of the Traveller, Roma and Asylum Seeker communities were always included.

This pandemic tested the strength and flexibility of the organisation’s structures and challenged the Project to adapt and become more creative in the ways in which supports were delivered.

From the outset, DTP believed it had a professional and ethical responsibility to ensure it remained available throughout the crisis to the best of its capacity to address the challenges created by the pandemic. At the height of the crisis the organisation was providing a seven-day week supports service and was on emergency call outside of working hours.

The team endeavoured to ensure that the basic physical needs of the Traveller and Roma communities were being met and worked to create the conditions of connection and social support at a time of physical distancing and isolation.

DTP fought to ensure that the voices of the Traveller, Roma and BME communities were present and heard at the planning and implementation stages of the response to the COVID crisis.

The Project worked with Donegal County Council and the HSE to ensure accommodation and sanitation services were provided where they were most needed.

In collaboration with Public Health, DTP worked extensively to disseminate information and to control and minimise the spread of the virus.

DTP continued to conduct its core work from a Community Development and Human Rights framework to advocate for the inclusion of ethnic minorities and to raise awareness of the challenges and struggles of Travellers, Roma and BME communities, many of whom experience poverty and health inequality.

2020 saw the conclusion of the BIC Project, a unique collaboration between the Donegal Travellers Project, Roma and Donegal’s Intercultural communities and the launch of an online Diversity Aware training programme by DTP to promote diversity in the community and workplace.

DTP also worked with the Irish Network Against Racism to encourage general election candidates to reject racism, discrimination and hate speech.

To ensure the voices of the community remained at the core of its work, DTP conducted a community survey remotely, the findings of which guided its 2021 programme.

By the end of 2020, COVID-19 outbreaks were minimised and the entire DTP staff and Board had proven its professionalism, competency and commitment in dealing with a unique global health challenge.

“

*It was so important to protect the community from COVID-19. 2020 was a hard year for us all.*

**-Annie Mongan,  
Community Healthcare Worker**

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## DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: HEALTH & WELLBEING



PHC Team Coordinator Ann Friel attending a meeting at St Gabriel's

*“ Our role throughout this pandemic was to ensure the Traveller community were protected and the risk of COVID-19 was minimised while also continuing to ensure our work was delivered on to achieve better health outcomes for Travellers across Donegal’.*

*- Ann Friel, DTP Primary Health Care Team Coordinator*

*”*

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, Donegal Travellers Project has been working intensively to protect the health and wellbeing of the Traveller and Roma communities in Donegal.

Before the pandemic reached Irish shores, the Primary Health Care (PHC) Team had undergone a two day special training session with Public Health Nurse, Ita Ward and large quantities of hand sanitisers and Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) were secured.

PHC team meetings were relocated outdoors to the grounds of St Gabriel's where they continued weekly throughout the lockdown to ensure a collective approach to the work.

Team members were upskilled by the Public Health Nurse on information pertaining to such health issues as cardiovascular health, blood pressure and diabetes, which they then took out to the community. The team upskilled technically and ensured they kept updated on the ever-changing situation nationally.

Social media platforms such as Facebook became a tool to communicate multilingual information, health promotion and advice to the Traveller, Roma and BME communities in a culturally appropriate manner.

Information posters about COVID-19 were designed and delivered to sites all over Donegal and a special edition of the organisation's newsletter was published to convey information on the pandemic.

## PATRICK MCGINLEY'S LASTING LEGACY

The sudden tragic death in April 2021 of Patrick McGinley, DTP Community Health Worker for Older People, left the Donegal Travellers Project and the community devastated.

The moment the pandemic arrived, Patrick was active on the ground providing invaluable support and assistance to the older Traveller community with whom he had built up a strong relationship over the previous decade.



Patrick seen here preparing to deliver emergency care packages

One of the few Traveller organisations to have a dedicated Older People worker, Patrick assumed the role for DTP in 2009, building connections, making representations and instantly becoming a vital link in supporting Travellers with health related challenges, liaising with doctors and hospitals and facilitating transport to medical appointments.

He worked closely with the PHC Team and Donegal County Council to ensure essential repairs were carried out and that homes were fitted with smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. His work for the annual Bealtaine Older Persons' Festival brought older Travellers and settled people together in large numbers.

During the COVID crisis, Patrick made regular support phone calls each week to the county's older Traveller population, conducting safe home visits and delivering essential hygiene and food care packs to Travellers who were isolating.

This crucial outreach work carried out by Patrick McGinley during the pandemic is a fitting lasting legacy.



### STAYING IN CONTACT

By mid-March when the country went into lockdown, staff at DTP had completed an up-to-date population profile for Travellers, Roma and Asylum Seekers, co-ordinated by manager, Siobhan McLaughlin, for the purpose of health promotion phone calls.

Over the course of the year, the PHC team conducted up to 350 weekly phone-calls to members of the Traveller, Roma and Asylum Seeker communities. Much of the early communication was in providing reassurance to the community, many with underlying health issues, who were feeling isolated and fearful.

The PHC team worked closely with the Accommodation team to ensure all Travellers and Roma had the appropriate accommodation and sanitation facilities to deal with a major health incident.

Members demonstrated their flexibility, changing their hours to ensure there was always cover.



### SUPPORT

The team continuously endeavoured to find safe ways to support and assist Traveller and Roma communities, attending to their medical needs and delivering food and their own specially made up Care Packages to older Travellers. They also worked with Lifestart to access essential clothing for families with young children and new-born infants.

They supported families around what to do in the event of an outbreak. If someone needed to be tested they coordinated transport and liaised with the HSE to fast-track the process. They worked closely with the HSE on contact tracing and supporting families who had to isolate. Where families had to isolate, the PHC team delivered care packages to their doors. They provided daily and weekly updates to the HSE while also engaging with them to ensure that the risk of spread among the Traveller and Roma communities, particularly on halting sites was being minimised.

They responded to crises as they arose and were constantly planning to ensure Travellers, Roma and Asylum Seeker communities always had the latest message and the correct provisions to ensure their safety.

As the year progressed, much of the work of the PHC team continued to be around health equality and social justice through the lens of COVID-19.

The team supported applications for vital state services and entitlements. They also found new ways of connecting to pursue representation and policy work.

Despite lockdown a core group of staff continued to work on the ground to tackle complex non-Covid related issues, including child protection, accommodation crises, addiction and families that were struggling, providing referrals to appropriate services.

While the 2020 goals and actions of the PHC Team had to be revised, the operational plan was completed and targets were met despite the enormous challenges posed by the pandemic.

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*We had a good relationship with the community, so Travellers were glad to hear from us, and looked forward to the COVID-19 response phone calls weekly.*

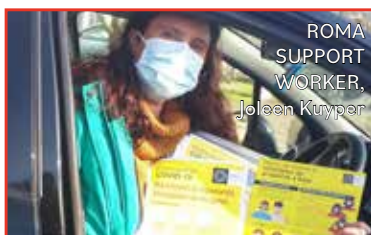
- Chrissie McGinley Community Healthcare Worker

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# DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: ROMA COMMUNITY

*“We had to focus on advocacy and supports because people’s needs were fairly urgent.”*

- Joleen Kuyper, DTP Roma Community Development and Advocacy Worker



Communicating the health message on how to keep safe during the Covid crisis was an immediate priority for DTP Roma Worker, Joleen Kuyper.

Social media became essential with DTP promoting culturally appropriate health specific materials through the Roma Facebook page. The services of an interpreter were employed to reinforce health messages via video for Facebook and YouTube.

The team created a population profile and up to date contact details for the estimated 200-250 Roma living in Donegal. This enabled communication not just to convey vital health information but to establish new links, maintain relationships and provide support for isolation among members of the community.

An urgent early need arose to assist members of the community whose livelihoods had been disrupted by the pandemic in applying for PPS numbers so they could avail of Pandemic Unemployment Payment or other emergency social welfare assistance.

Support was also provided with GP registration and medical card applications. Those with medical conditions, making them more susceptible to COVID-19, needed support to ensure they could continue to access medication.

Outreach work included making referrals to food banks and food and fuel support charities, delivering clothing, hygiene packs, activity and homework packs for children and providing digital and homework assistance to schoolchildren. A number of new babies were born in the Roma community during the outbreak and the team worked with DLDC and Lifestart to secure vital provisions for Roma families.

When an outbreak of Covid occurred in the north of the county at the height of lockdown, the Roma Worker and DTP Manager were on the ground distributing

translated letters through letter boxes, advising the community, arranging testing and accessing essential food and clothing.

Members of the Roma community were also supported in their applications for housing, back to school supports and pensions.

The team further supported job applications, and applications for Irish citizenship and passports. Advocacy work included providing assistance in

housing applications. There was also a successful appeal against a housing support application which had been turned down under housing circular 41/2012.

## MAKING ART DURING COVID



As testament to their spirit, a group of Roma women completed a magnificent embroidered artwork which they had begun in a sewing circle prior to lockdown.

The Roma Women’s Sewing Group started the project with Roma Worker, Joleen Kuyper in January 2020. After lockdown the group continued to work on it in their own homes, delivering the finished sections to facilitator, Deborah Stockdale, a textile artist, to assemble into a finished piece of art.





## DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: SOUTH DONEGAL

*“There needs to be appropriate Traveller specific accommodation and housing for Travellers in Donegal and an alternative strategy for Travellers who are homeless in the county as right now it’s not working for Travellers who are homeless.”*

- Rose McDonagh, DTP Development Worker, South Donegal



Rose McDonagh and Maeve McIvor preparing to deliver essential items

South Donegal Primary Health Care team provided on the ground assistance and support to the Traveller community dispersed across a wide geographical area in South Donegal throughout the pandemic.

The COVID-19 outbreak exacerbated further inequalities in the Traveller community including creating additional pressures for families living in overcrowded conditions. From the outset, the PHC team was on the ground working in the community, providing crucial outreach support including Education supports for young Traveller children and

young people while also connecting and working with different organisations, including Donegal County Council, HSE and Tusla as well as GPs and pharmacies, as various emergencies arose.

Responding to an immediate urgent need for clothing, food and provisions for babies, the PHC Team and wider DTP organisation networked with Lifestart, charity shops and food banks, also sourcing books and educational toys for children which were then distributed. The team also worked with the community in the creation of a community garden and grotto at the Ballintra halting site.

Initially connecting with the community through regular phone calls, home visits returned as soon it was deemed safe. Members of the community were supported with essential applications and with accessing other supports such as essential accommodation supports.

Much of the work was in keeping the community up to date with the latest health messages, ensuring medical cards were up to date and providing reassurance and assistance to people in attending non-Covid related medical appointments. The PHC team worked closely with Public Health and the HSE Social Inclusion to ensure Travellers were supported to isolate, register for COVID-19 testing and also to ensure appropriate isolation packs were distributed if positive for COVID-19.

Isolated members of the community were targeted for the ‘walk to wellness’ programme.

The South Donegal PHC team liaised with schools and supported children accessing and returning homework while schools were closed, and provided reassurance to families when schools reopened. Families were also provided with support around technology to facilitate remote learning.

Proud Traveller, Pat McGinley on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in July. Pat was born in a barrel-top wagon close to Doon Well in 1940. He first went to Scotland tatty-hoking at the age of 11.

“

*“2020 has highlighted the importance of staying connected with older Travellers - cocooning was tough for some and the isolation and loneliness increased because of this but we as a team stayed connected and ensured older Travellers were supported throughout the pandemic.”*

-Michael Mongan, Community Healthcare Worker



Pat McGinley celebrating his 80th birthday

”

## REACHING OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

Promoting positive Traveller mental health remained a priority in very challenging circumstances throughout 2020.

The Primary Health Care Team had to think of new, creative, safe ways to reach out to the community and break the isolation compounded by the pandemic and lockdowns.

Walk and Talk initiatives, a programme which pairs individual participants with a DTP staff member for weekly hour-long walks, continued throughout the pandemic in a safe, socially distanced manner.

The PHC team initiated a Walk To Wellness programme, adhering to health guidelines to promote positive mental and cardiovascular health and isolated members of the community were targeted.

Mindful of the impact of lockdown and isolation on young people's mental health, the DTP/Involve youth worker engaged with young people virtually and the organisation published advice developed by Pavee

Point Traveller and Roma Centre in Trav Times on 'Ways to mind our nucks during COVID-19'.

The PHC Team maintained telephone contact with Traveller men and women with mental health and isolation challenges and resumed face to face contact as soon as it was safe to do so.

The PHC Team also represented the needs and interests of the Traveller community in Donegal at the National Traveller Mental Health Network, focusing on the particular challenges and impact of COVID-19. In July the Network called for the development of a national strategy to address the high rate of suicide among the Traveller community.

To promote positive physical and mental health and wellbeing, the DTP team worked with communities to create community gardens at the Cullion Road site in Letterkenny, Ballintra site, St Gabriel's Preschool and at the Emergency Accommodation centre for Asylum Seekers in Portsalon.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GARDEN PROJECTS

Throughout the pandemic the Donegal Travellers Project supported the development of a number of ground-breaking community garden projects, created by the Traveller and Asylum Seeker communities at various locations across the county, to promote the health and wellness of residents.

At the Ballintra halting site, members of the Traveller community, supported by DTP staff, came together to develop a grotto and community garden and transform the living environment.

The new addition was warmly welcomed by residents.

Flower and vegetable gardens were also developed at the Cullion Road halting site in Letterkenny and at St Gabriel's preschool and are being maintained by residents and children.

The DTP team also supported the development of a community garden at the Direct Provision Centre in Portsalon to promote cardiovascular health and positive mental health among the residents.

This project was met with such enthusiasm from residents that the support worker feared there was a risk of the plants being over-watered.

All of these projects improve community wellbeing, promote outdoor physical activity and collective participation and have been embraced by the Traveller and Asylum Seeker communities.





## DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: ACCOMMODATION

*“COVID-19 further highlighted and exacerbated the housing and accommodation challenges experienced by Travellers. The risk of COVID-19 increased for Travellers living on the side of the road or in overcrowded spaces and our work over 2020 was to minimise that risk and work with agencies to ensure culturally appropriate alternative accommodation was provided.”*

-Hugh Friel, Accommodation Worker, DTP

Throughout the pandemic, the DTP advocated tirelessly with the relevant agencies to ensure the health, housing and accommodation needs of Travellers and Roma were being met in the county.

As the pandemic hit the Accommodation Team conducted an emergency assessment of those most at risk and developed a Strategic Plan for immediate action.

Campaigning through emails, phone-calls, meetings and lobbying, the team advocated on behalf of Travellers for the introduction of a number of critical COVID-19 risk prevention measures. They raised as a human rights issue the appalling living conditions of Travellers on the side of the road and on unofficial halting sites with limited facilities.

The accommodation and PHC teams worked with Public Health, the HSE and Donegal County Council to ensure families received appropriate sanitation services and campaigned successfully for additional portable toilets to be installed on several sites to limit the number of people sharing and for a hot water generator to be provided to a family living on the roadside with no facilities.

Weekly reports from official and unofficial halting sites and housing schemes were submitted to the HSE to ensure the risk of exposure to COVID-19 was being minimised.

The team also sought the urgent provision of accommodation for anyone homeless or in need of accommodation with better facilities.

They worked with families on halting sites, delivering health promotion materials and sanitation packs.

The Project supported families who were experiencing difficulties in self-isolating or cocooning while awaiting COVID-19 tests or results.

The team’s lobbying resulted in a commitment from the Local Authority to provide self-isolation caravans to families when the need arose, but in the end this facility was not required.

On foot of a directive from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in March a small number of families received additional mobile accommodation units and portable toilets to lessen the risk of infection.

The working relationship with the Traveller Accommodation Officer on Donegal County Council ensured the Council and the DTP were able to work collaboratively to achieve good outcomes in many cases. 2020 also saw the completion of refurbishment works at the Big Isle halting site and upgrading works at Ballintra halting site.

The DTP supported families in accessing Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) and individuals and families with accommodation concerns. The team participated in meetings and made referrals to Donegal County Council concerning individual cases as well as advocating for the provision of social housing.

There was also a satisfactory outcome to a case taken by the DTP to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) against Donegal County Council for its 14-year failure to provide culturally appropriate accommodation for a member of the Traveller community.

### A NEW MODEL FOR TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION IN DONEGAL



Aerial view of the Big Isle Halting Site

Image by Clive Wasson

Refurbishment works at the Big Isle halting site in Manorcunningham were finally completed in 2020, almost 15 years after the first negotiations began. The result is a state-of-the-art site with separate, neatly walled-off bays, portalooes and chalet with laundry and kitchen facilities.

The refurbishment of the site has transformed living conditions for the resident families from some of the worst to the best and most culturally appropriate Traveller accommodation in the county.

DTP has been advocating for the Big Isle families with Donegal County Council for the entire duration of the project.

## LEARNING IN NATURE



Prior to the pandemic, St Gabriel's Preschool in Letterkenny had already begun the transition to an outdoor culturally appropriate preschool, complete with learning and play areas and even a vegetable garden in its spacious grounds to deliver the full curriculum outside.

With the school closed for much of the 2020, the organisation used the outdoor space for staff meetings while work continued to complete the outdoor space in time for school reopening.

The new outdoor environment where children learn while immersed in nature and take home the vegetables they have grown, has been a huge hit with staff, students and families.

Children from nine different ethnic minority communities attend St Gabriel's which also supports children with additional needs, and all of the staff with the exception of one are, from the Traveller community.



Despite its closure during the pandemic, the creativity and commitment of the teaching team ensured that learning continued.

Staff devised weekly educational themes and developed matching activities for the children to do at home. These were posted on the school's Facebook Page and parents were contacted weekly.

Meanwhile staff came together weekly for Continued Professional Development (CPD) which focused on delivering childcare and early years education in an outdoor setting.

The DTP gratefully acknowledges Bishop Alan McGuckian and the Diocese of Raphoe for enabling the expansion at St Gabriel's to take place.

## HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Donegal Travellers Project selected the theme of Celebrating Traveller Pride and Identity as part of the 'Home is where the Art Is' art challenge run by the Regional Culture Arts Centre during Covid lockdown.

A number of entries were submitted under this theme including this detailed model of a barrel top wagon.





## DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: EDUCATION & YOUTH

*“All our normal chances to have a chat were gone, so we had to come up with new ways of keeping in contact with young people in order to inform and support them.”*

-Martin Mongan, DTP/Involve Youth Worker.

The DTP Youth Project, a collaboration between Involve and DTP, typically provides afterschool support, weekly drop-ins, sports and fitness and summer camps and leadership training for youth.

But with schools closed due to COVID-19, the emphasis switched to education and to ensuring that all Traveller and Roma children were affirmatively supported to work remotely and to return to school when lockdown was lifted.

Mindful of the potential of the pandemic to exacerbate educational disadvantage already experienced by young people in the Traveller and Roma communities, the immediate priority was to create a data base of all relevant schools and established remote contact with head teachers.

The team worked strategically to ensure students attended school on-line and participated in homework. They maintained regular contact with schools and checked in with parents to ensure children were being supported in remote learning.

Having identified a number of young Travellers at Leaving Cert and Junior Cert level who were in need of additional supports, a learning support programme with tutors was set up in a safe space.

The team also created a library, collecting books from a range of charity shops and sorting and distributing them according to age.

Information videos were uploaded onto social media and activity packs were created and distributed to support young people with remote learning and homework.

Information leaflets were developed and distributed to allay family fears and provide factual information on when it was safe and unsafe to send a child to school.

After reopening, the team offered a Home/School liaison service to support students and their families and provide a link between students and schools.

The Youth Team also reinvented ways of maintaining contact with young people and supporting them during the COVID-19 crisis. Frequent check in phone-calls offered them the opportunity to talk about their anxieties and concerns and online games were used as a means of engagement.



The DTP PHC team distributed 100 culturally appropriate activity packs to children aged 6-13 years aimed at promoting cardiovascular health and well-being through outdoor play during the summer holidays.

Also during the summer, a mental health leadership training camping trip took place and by the end of the year there was a cautious

return to weekly meet-ups of micro-groups to enable them to socialise with their friends.

Those with concerns relating to mental health could access specialist services such as CAMS (Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality) and Jigsaw (supporting young people's mental health) remotely or for referral. The DTP's presence resulted in an increased number of children accessing additional services in the latter part of the year. DTP also provided support for families where children were on the edge of care, in care or returning home and provided community link support services between Tusla and families where children were vulnerable or had additional or complex needs.

DTP staff also worked with National Traveller organisations to highlight the needs of Travellers from a rural perspective including education challenges and barriers and called for an education strategy for Traveller children and young people.

*“One of our roles was to ensure Traveller children and young people stayed engaged with remote learning - this meant also supporting parents and guardians and highlighting the importance of sticking with the online education platforms even though at times it was extremely hard particularly for some families without the appropriate technology”.*

-Philomena McGinlay, Community Healthcare Worker

## DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT

### TRAINING MOVES ONLINE

Over the past five years the Donegal Travellers Intercultural Training Initiative has delivered bespoke training, focusing on diversity and cultural competency and how practitioners can become more inclusive.



Pre-Covid Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding Training

Despite the unfolding health crisis, the DTP team continued to participate in upskilling and hosting training courses, most of which moved online during 2020.

These included courses in Personal Development, Public Health, Drugs and Alcohol Awareness and Vulnerable Adult Training with the HSE.

DTP also provided support for people accessing online training and to create the conditions to increase their employability.

In the early months of the year the team delivered cultural competency training courses to the Western Trust in Northern Ireland, the Mental Health Services in Sligo and the Education Training Board in Donegal and had begun work with the Alcohol Forum on developing ethnic identifier training.

The Primary Health Care team also delivered a six-week personal and professional development course for Traveller Women in the north of the county. Traveller women participated in a SafeTALK suicide prevention course and the team hosted a programme on positive mental health for men.

After the onset of Covid, services were brought online and the team took time to perfect this new model. For the remainder of 2020 tailored online training was delivered to GPs in Sligo and to students at Institutes

of Technology in Sligo and Donegal. The team also worked with Tusla delivering workshops with foster carers and social workers where the focus was on intercultural diversity and Traveller culture competency training.

During Social Inclusion Week, DTP hosted a webinar, at the invitation of Donegal Council, called COVID- 19 Equality and Inclusion, which looked at the impact of the pandemic in the Traveller and Roma communities and the particular the challenges it posed for these communities as well as Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

To tackle digital poverty among the Traveller and Roma communities and support members accessing online courses, the DTP secured funding through Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage(MAED) to purchase 18 laptops. The organisation now has a suite of laptops and portable printers for use by any member of the community wanting to access online training courses.

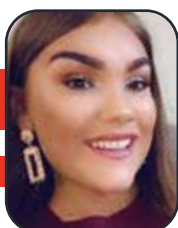
### TRAVELLERS GRADUATE IN COMMUNITY WORK

Seven Donegal Travellers were among 21 people from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in Donegal who graduated with a certificate in community work from NUI Maynooth in 2020.

The intense Level 7 Community Work in a Changing Ireland course, resourced by the BIC Project and requiring a minimum of 100 hours tuition moved online

after the COVID outbreak but despite the challenges this posed all graduated with high marks.

Thanks to their participation, the four staff members of the DTP team who completed the course now work to the principles of community development which was evident in their work throughout 2020.



Amanda Boyle



Caroline Boyle



Chantelle McDonagh



Eddie Friel



Marie Mongan



Michael Mongan



Philomena McGinlay



## DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT

*“There was a need straight away for essential items so my work shifted to sourcing and delivering essential items on the ground as well as assisting clients in accessing Pandemic Unemployment Payments”*

-Maeve McIvor, DLDC Jobs Coach with DTP

Donegal Travellers Project remains the single largest employer of Travellers in the county and the organisation continued to maintain those positions throughout 2020. DTP also employs two Community Employment workers in St Gabriel’s and two at the DTP office.

Throughout 2020, DTP continued to provide support for Travellers accessing online training and to create the conditions to increase pathways to employment opportunities.

Much of the focus for the DLDC Traveller Job Coach in collaboration with the PHC Team was to ensure Travellers had access essential supports throughout the pandemic.

This included assisting employed clients in accessing Pandemic Unemployment Payments (PUP), making representations to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) Case Officer where this payment was not forthcoming and assisting individuals in arranging for social welfare payments to be made online.

When COVID hit, the more pressing needs of food poverty, lack of essential baby items, children’s clothing and footwear, books and toys became a priority.

The team networked with FoodCloud, foodbanks, volunteer centres and charity shops to source essential provisions for Travellers, Roma and Asylum Seekers and deliver them throughout the county.

They worked with the Lifestart Foundation which provides support for parents, young children and new-born babies and proved an invaluable support to DTP throughout the pandemic.

The Job Coach sourced laptops and assisted six clients in participating in the DLDC online Fit2Work skills programme.

Two Travellers took an online Community Development course through An Cosán, with one since moving on to a degree course in Addiction Studies at Carlow IT.

Despite the COVID crisis, 14 individuals succeeded in finding employment, five as delivery drivers, a production operator, a childcare assistant and the remainder in cleaning and shop sales.

Job-seeking Travellers, such as those whose training for HGV licences was interrupted by the pandemic, volunteered as drivers, collecting provisions from foodbanks, charity shops, and delivering to those in need. Other individuals engaged with Donegal Volunteer Centre provided valuable support during lockdown.



Pamela Boyle

### EDUCATION ONLINE

Pamela Boyle availed of An Cosán, which offers adult education to women from disadvantaged areas, to pursue an on-line degree in Applied Addiction Studies and Community Development during lockdown. The young mum who works as a Support Worker for people with drug addictions is excited to be pursuing a career in something she loves.

## DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: ASYLUM SEEKERS COMMUNITY

*“I noticed poor mental health was starting to kick in at the beginning of the pandemic. For asylum seekers it was double lockdown. They were locked in the system and locked in the pandemic.”*

-Nolunga Sholongu, DTP Community Health support worker with Asylum Seekers

The dedicated Community Health worker to Asylum Seekers in the Direct Provision emergency accommodation centre in Portsalon worked to ensure the health needs and interests of the community were supported throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

Prior to the pandemic, the worker, in collaboration with the DTP team provided invaluable face to face connection with the outside world for the 27-member community from six different countries, supporting their access to and engagement with essential health services and education and language programmes.

With the arrival of lockdown, all medical appointments, classes, courses and weekly visits to the facility were cancelled but the support worker continued to engage with residents remotely, providing frequent telephone calls, responding to medical needs, providing support with applications and form filling and working with the DTP team to source essential clothing and children and baby supplies.

Online diversity training for adults and remote music and dancing classes for children were also organised.

Addressing health needs, residents with non-covid medical needs were accompanied to GP or hospital appointments, a blood pressure monitor was accessed for one resident and essential support was provided to a woman with urgent medical needs. DTP also engaged a registered midwife volunteer to be available for the

expectant mothers, and three babies were born to women at the centre during 2020.



Nolunga Sholongu at the Community Garden in Portsalon

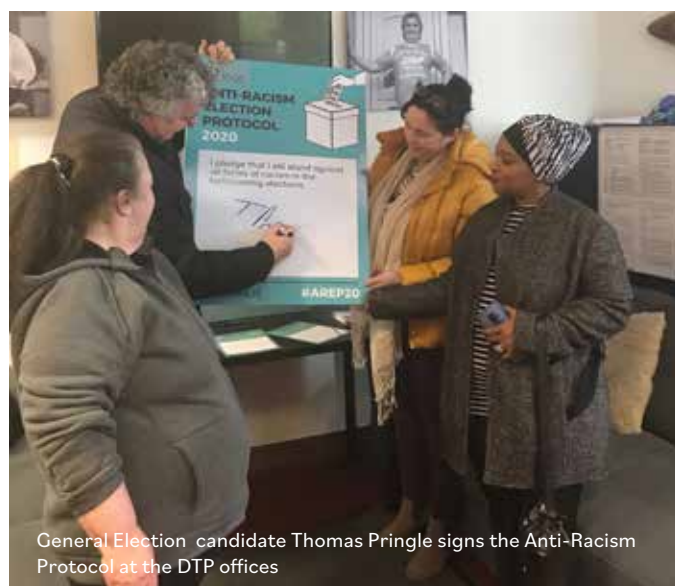
To support the mental health and wellbeing of residents, one to one ‘walk and talk’ sessions with residents resumed on the nearby beach when it was deemed to be safe.

The worker also supported families that had to isolate due to COVID-19 and worked on the ground on a community garden project which promoted cardiovascular health and positive mental health among the residents.

## SIGNING UP TO ANTI-RACISM

As part of its ongoing work with the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR), the DTP and the Donegal Intercultural Platform invited general election candidates to sign an Anti- Racism Election Protocol in 2020.

The protocol, drawn up by INAR, was made available to download or sign in person at the DTP offices in Letterkenny prior to the February General Election. The organisation was delighted with the engagement by election candidates who came into its offices to sign the Protocol. By signing, they sent out a strong message to their constituents that they rejected all forms of racism and hate speech.



General Election candidate Thomas Pringle signs the Anti-Racism Protocol at the DTP offices



## DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: ADVOCACY AND REPRESENTATION

*“When COVID hit, our job was to make sure the voices of Travellers were heard in those decision-making spaces.”*

-Kate Hagan, DTP Community Development and Health Worker

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, DTP worked to ensure that the voices of the Traveller, Roma and BME communities were present and heard and that appropriate responses were being planned and implemented.



A DTP representative secured a place on the COVID-19 Community Response Forum led by Donegal County Council, ensuring that the needs and interests of Traveller, Roma and BME communities were represented and recognised during the pandemic.

The Project’s work of conveying the lived reality for members of the Traveller, Roma and BME communities and ensuring the inclusion of ethnic minorities during this public health crisis was all conducted within the framework of Community Development and Human Rights.

Working in solidarity with other organisations, DTP represented the needs of the Traveller and Roma communities on the Covid Forum, the National Traveller Health Network, The National Traveller Partnership and a number of forums set up for Travellers specifically to deal specifically with Covid.

During the pandemic the DTP’s Primary Health Care team provided support for the Building Intercultural Communities(BIC) and Roma community representatives and worked with Safetynet Primary Care and with Public Health, participating in teleconferences when there was an outbreak and keeping records of Covid cases and changing demographics.

DTP education representatives participated in the National Traveller Women’s Forum on educational challenges. Health representatives worked closely with the Mental Health Services in Donegal and participated in the National Traveller Mental Health Network.

Donegal Travellers Project worked in solidarity with the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR) on an anti-racism protocol and core staff monitored media and social media to tackle anti-Traveller and Roma sentiment which surfaced on several occasions during the pandemic.

Throughout 2020, the Project participated remotely in workshops with European Anti- Poverty Network Ireland. Members sat on the Donegal Intercultural Platform steering committee, the National Traveller Advisory Forum, the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and the National Traveller Health Unit. A submission was written to the Anti-Racism Committee which DTP is hopeful will become part of a future National Action Plan Against Racism.

DTP also sits on a range of boards including the Garda Advisory Board, the National Traveller Health Advisory Forum, Mincéir Whiden and the Donegal Children and Young People’s Services Committee (CYPSC).

## BEACON OF HOPE

Jaxon Friel, promoting Traveller Pride, became a hit on social media after his Dad, David posted this picture on Twitter to celebrate Traveller Pride week in July.

In the words of his proud Dad, the picture signifies the hope of creating a new generation of Travellers who accept their identity and who will advocate for conditions where Travellers are no longer marginalised within Irish society. David, who holds a Bsc and MA in Social Care and Social Justice is currently working on a PhD on the impact of COVID-19 on Travellers.



Jaxon Friel promoting Traveller Pride became a hit on Social Media.

# DONEGAL TRAVELLERS PROJECT: INTERCULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY

## CURTAIN CLOSES ON BIC PROJECT

THE Building Intercultural Communities (BIC) Project, co-founded and driven by the DTP, came to a close at a hugely successful ‘Black, Traveller, Roma, Lives Matter’ event, at Letterkenny Community Centre sportsground in July 2020.



The event, organised jointly by DTP and the BIC Project garnered national media publicity with over 120 people, wearing masks and appropriately distanced from each other, spelling out a strong message of solidarity across the playing field.

Supported by Peace IV, the BIC Project was the result of a unique collaboration between the DTP and the Donegal Intercultural Platform.



It was the first time in Donegal that Travellers, Roma, Black and Minority Ethnic communities came together to name racism, build relationships across communities and to act in solidarity collectively.

Throughout its 18-month lifespan, the DTP’s Primary Health Care team worked closely with the BIC team on a number of successful initiatives and campaigns, aimed at promoting respect, equality and diversity among Donegal’s growing Black and Minority



Ethnic communities, Travellers, Roma and the majority population and on promoting Donegal as an intercultural community.

The BIC project showed significant participation and engagement at all levels across a range of initiatives with over 1,500 people participating in the wide range of events, seminars, courses and classes delivered by the project.

Also on the day, the DTP online Diversity Aware course was launched.

Writing in the BIC project final report, former chairperson UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Anastasia Crickley, who had officially launched the project, praised the solidarity between Donegal Travellers and more recent communities.

“It was clear then that they all had shared and parallel experiences of discrimination but clear now that at least some of these can be addressed locally and that collective work towards a positive intercultural future is positive and worthwhile,” she said.



Aerial shot from the BIC closing event.

## ONLINE DIVERSITY AWARENESS TRAINING COURSE

Over 450 people have so far completed the joint Donegal Travellers Project and BIC DiversityAware online training programme, which was launched mid-2020.

The course was created by members of the Traveller, Roma and BME communities in Donegal and evolved from a growing need to stand up against racism and discrimination and to promote diversity in the workplace and community.

The programme, which takes approximately 45 minutes to complete, contains a series of information videos, featuring up to 30 people from Donegal’s Traveller, Roma and Black, Minority, Ethnic communities, each illustrating how building a diverse and inclusive workplace makes good business sense for an employer and enriches communities.

Free to do, and available on the DTP website, [www.Donegaltravellersproject.ie](http://www.Donegaltravellersproject.ie) it is funded through the EU’s PEACE IV Programme. On completion, participants receive a DiversityAware course certificate. [www.donegaltravellersproject.ie](http://www.donegaltravellersproject.ie)



### CHALLENGES

**Supporting the Traveller, Roma and Asylum Seeker communities in keeping safe was the biggest challenge for DTP during the COVID-19 health crisis but the pandemic also exacerbated existing challenges for Travellers, Roma and Asylum Seekers in Donegal.**

**SANITATION:** At the start of the pandemic, the DTP advocated, lobbied and made urgent representation to Donegal County Council and the HSE about the lack of basic sanitation facilities for members of the Traveller community who were living on the side of the road and in unofficial halting sites in the county. The provision of culturally appropriate high standard Traveller accommodation based on the needs of the community remains a priority.

**HOMELESSNESS:** One of the biggest challenges for DTP arose around the lack of services available in the region for Travellers who were homeless and suffering from addiction problems, which the pandemic exposed. There is an urgent need for culturally appropriate accommodation for homeless Travellers and for a homeless worker on the ground in County Donegal. Securing alternative appropriate accommodation for families who are homeless is also an ongoing concern and challenge for DTP.

**RACISM:** Anti-Traveller and Roma racism, discrimination and inequalities continue to exist in Donegal as was evidenced by being unable to obtain emergency accommodation for Travellers who were homeless, using the Donegal County Council voucher system. DTP staff also had to monitor media and social media to tackle anti-Traveller and Roma sentiment which surfaced on several occasions during the pandemic.

**ISOLATION:** The pandemic exposed the number of Travellers and Roma living in isolation on sites and in housing schemes and the importance of the weekly phone-call or socially distanced visit from the DTP team.

**MENTAL HEALTH:** The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated Mental Health challenges faced by the community. DTP highlighted the importance of ensuring culturally appropriate mental health services to meet the health needs and interests of Travellers, Roma and Asylum Seekers. This work is ongoing.

**LANGUAGE AND LITERACY:** Among the casualties of lockdown were language and literacy classes and face to face interpretation services, the loss of which placed members of the Traveller, Roma and Asylum Seeker communities at a severe disadvantage. DTP worked to make language and literacy supports and interpreters available.

**DIGITAL POVERTY:** The pandemic exposed the problem of digital poverty among the Traveller, Roma and Asylum Seeker communities. Lack of equipment and skills made it difficult to access health information, education and adult learning and training, all of which moved on line during the year. The DTP worked to provide additional learning supports for children and to secure laptops and IT training for students and adults.

**DIRECT PROVISION ACCOMMODATION:** COVID-19 exposed the inappropriate living conditions of families in Emergency Temporary Accommodation. Where families had to isolate, they were confined to a single room for 14 days with no outdoor access. DTP campaigned for

more appropriate spaces for communities living in overcrowded conditions who were forced to isolate.

**TEAM WORK:** In carrying out its work, DTP had to find creative ways to keep its own team together and maintain morale during a time of remote working and social distancing. The grounds of St Gabriel's were used for regular outdoor team meetings and occasional social events to ensure the team was supporting each other in achieving its common goals.



Hand crafted bench at St Gabriels



### VOICE TO THE COMMUNITY

Over 100 members of the Traveller community participated in a telephone survey conducted by the DTP team at the end of 2020 to identify the key priorities, needs and interests of the community across Donegal.

After much of the year being occupied with responding to a public health crisis, the organisation felt it was important in planning for 2021 to return to its Community Development ethos with its focus on participation and engagement.

DTP compiled a list of questions with the support of Community Work Ireland and developed a Survey Monkey. The learning that had been accrued from conducting 300 weekly phone calls during the

COVID-19 crisis, was adapted to train a team to conduct the telephone research with Traveller families across the county.

One third of the Traveller population in the county was targeted, in terms of gender, age, geographical location and type of accommodation. The survey took up to five weeks to complete with the end result that voices of the community became a central part of its 2021 Operational Plan.

DTP also participated in a survey from the National Social Inclusion office of the HSE aimed at collecting experiences during COVID-19 in the community. For this, 50 participants were targeted and Donegal was the biggest contributor.

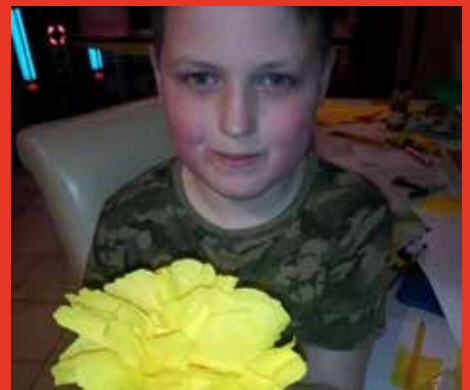


## STAFF IN 2020

- **SIOBHAN McLAUGHLIN - Project Manager**
- **ANN FRIEL - Assistant Project Manager/Primary Health Care Coordinator**
- **DERVALA BRODERICK - Primary Health Care Administrator**
- **CATHERINE CONAGHAN - National Traveller Partnership Administrator**
- **MARY COTTRELL - National Traveller Partnership Administrator**
- **HUGH FRIEL - Traveller Accommodation and Men's Development Health Worker**
- **ROSE McDONAGH - South Donegal Community Development Worker**
- **KATE HAGAN - Community Development and Health Worker**
- **KATIE BOYLE - Community Healthcare Worker**
- **PATRICK McGINLEY - Community Healthcare Worker**
- **ANNIE MONGAN - Community Healthcare Worker**
- **MARGARET BOYLE - Community Healthcare Worker**
- **CHRISSIE McGINLEY - Community Healthcare Worker**
- **PHILOMENA McGINLEY - Community Healthcare Worker**
- **MICHAEL MONGAN - Community Healthcare Worker**
- **JOLEEN KUYPER - Roma Community Development and Advocacy Worker**
- **EDDIE FRIEL - CE Worker**
- **KYLE QUILL - CE Worker**
- **KELLY STEWART - St. Gabriel's Pre-school Leader**
- **SANDRA McDAID - Pre-school worker**
- **MARGARET McCONIGLEY - Pre-school worker**
- **CHANTELLE McDONAGH - Pre-school worker**
- **MARGARET KELLY - Pre -school worker**
- **CAOIMHE SWEENEY - BIC Development Worker/ Education Development Worker**
- **NOLUNGA SHOLOGU - Asylum Seeker Support Worker**
- **BERNIE TAMSITT - Mental Health and Development Worker**
- **BILLY BANDA - BIC Community Links Worker**
- **FRANCINE BLACHÉ-BREEN - BIC Training and Development Officer**

The project also works in collaboration with a number of organisations including Involve Youth Service and Donegal Local Development Company -

- **MARTIN MONGAN - INVOLVE YOUTH COORDINATOR**
- **MAEVE MCIVOR - TRAVELLER JOB COACH**



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