

good practice guide

cultural awareness training

We Save the Children  Will you?



department for
children, schools and families

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Purpose and aims of this guide

This guide has been produced to detail and reflect the learning and experience acquired by Save the Children during the delivery of its early years cultural awareness training programme. It is a practical tool, to be used by local authorities and other early years services across the country to support the successful delivery of their own training programmes.

Background

Save the Children developed its early years Gypsy, Roma and Traveller project in order to support practitioners working across England to ensure that:

- the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are being met more fully
- there is a more inclusive education for all children attending the settings, not just those of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller origin.

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The project was a three year project funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Why deliver cultural awareness training?

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage are recognised ethnic groups under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. This act gives public bodies, including early years settings, which are directly run or maintained by the local education authority, a statutory duty to promote race equality. In practice, this means that settings must represent Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, just as they would any other minority ethnic group.

There are many barriers facing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children wishing to attend school or early years, including a lack of awareness and understanding about their culture. Difficulty in accessing services is particularly acute at the early years stage and historically there has been a very low take up of these services amongst Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Often Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents, as with any parent of a small child, are worried about leaving their “baby” with someone else for the first time. Their initial reluctance is compounded by a concern that their child will be singled out or treated differently in early years settings because of their ethnic identity.

“They should have someone who understands the way Traveller children are, someone that they can talk to, that won’t be prejudiced about Traveller children.”

Traveller parent

Parents can also be fearful that in sending their children into the *Gauje*¹ environment, they will lose their sense of identity as a Traveller.

“We need inclusive settings with staff who are well informed about Traveller cultures and can therefore work confidently with Traveller children and families, engaging them and ensuring they feel part of a setting.”

TES worker

Greater cultural awareness and consideration, by everyone involved in the strategic planning and practical delivery of all early years services, provides a better experience for existing users and encourages others to attend early years provision. Training therefore has a key role to play in achieving genuine equality of opportunity for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families.

¹ someone who is not Romani

Targeting the training for maximum impact

In the third year of the project, Save the Children worked in partnership with two local authorities to deliver the training. They worked alongside the Traveller Education Services in these areas, as well as having a co-trainer from the local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, to build links with early years settings. This method of working meant the project could reach more settings in one authority, thus allowing a detailed picture to be built up of the benefits of all settings receiving training.

The two local authorities chosen – Doncaster and the London Borough of Newham – were quite different from each other in a number of ways.

The Doncaster LA area is partly rural and, because of its position relative to national transport systems, has the largest population of Travellers in the UK. They are spread throughout the area and are therefore accessing a number of early years settings. Doncaster has a dedicated early years team, with whom Save the Children were able to work. Training was delivered to 11 centres with a total of 120 people attending.

“The training has changed my awareness completely. We didn’t really know anything about these communities. It was really informative and very clear. It will definitely have an impact when we’re working with these communities – it will help to increase confidence.”

Children’s centre deputy manager, Doncaster

“It’s helped increase our empathy and understanding. I would definitely recommend it to other settings. Our whole staff went on it. I think it’s something that should be rolled out across the board to all settings in our LEA.”

Infant school headteacher,
Newham

In Newham, there is one Travellers’ site, which has been the subject of a high profile move, due to the building of the Olympic village. Children from the families living on this site are largely accessing the same setting. Whilst there is also a Roma population in Newham, the take up of Children’s Centre services by these families currently remains low. Although Newham has no dedicated early years team, the Borough’s Traveller Education Service were keen to encourage Children’s Centres to sign up to the training. Six sessions were delivered to a total of 58 people.

In both areas, the training has been very well received, with an overwhelming number of participants (93%) saying they found the course to be very or quite informative.

Delivering effective training

The following information, based on the learning acquired by Save the Children, is intended as a checklist of good practice to support the set up and delivery of successful cultural awareness training programmes.

Who to involve

- Key decision makers in the local area (service heads, etc) can be very valuable when seeking to roll out training. They are in a position to encourage or mandate take up.
- Early years managers can ensure practice change is embedded.
- Those delivering frontline early years services from a range of agencies.
- Whenever possible, training should also be made available to those in other departments who are offering services which Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families are accessing – for example, housing, social services and the local health authority.
- Getting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultural awareness training added to the LA's core early years training programme is a good way of increasing access to staff from a range of services.

Why it is important to involve community members in the training

- Delivering the training in conjunction with a member of the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community has a positive impact on both those attending the course and the community member.
- Having a community member present, to answer questions and give a description of their culture and experiences, is a much more effective way to challenge people's perceptions and stereotypes than the simple presentation of facts by someone from outside the community.

“There was a local Traveller at our training session, helping to deliver the training, and the staff really liked it – they asked her lots of questions. I was impressed at the involvement of the Traveller in the training.”

EMTAS teacher, Newham

- It helps to promote capacity building within the community.
- It provides a unique opportunity for the community to influence and inform early years services for their benefit.
- By working in partnership with an established project, as was the case with Save the Children, community trainers have the opportunity to get involved as much as they need to build up their skills and confidence before delivering a session on their own.

“Professionally, it’s helped me improve relationships not only with the trainer, but with other members of the community and it’s also had a knock-on effect with schools. We’re doing some teacher-training sessions and it’s made me realise how important it is to have a community member as part of those sessions – to get an authentic voice.”

TES co-ordinator, Newham

Working with community members

There are a number of issues to consider when looking recruiting community co-trainers:

- What preparation work will be required beforehand, so that everyone is clear and happy about what is being asked of them?
- What, if any, support is required with literacy?
- What are people willing to disclose about their culture?
- Make sure people are prepared to deal with any negative comments that might be received during the training.
- Offer co-trainers the chance to debrief after the sessions, to handle any issues that arise – e.g. a lack of impact made.
- Payment is a key issue. Where no money is available within the Local Authority to fund community co-trainers, try working in partnership with a local voluntary group. They may be able to access funding which is not available to the statutory sector.
- Establishing a partnership agreement between the LA and the voluntary organisation can help this co-training arrangement to work as smoothly as possible.
- Payment may affect people’s entitlement to benefits.
- If it is not possible or you decide not to pay community co-trainers, you could offer non-financial rewards instead – for example, the provision of training opportunities, such as a Train the Trainer course.

Structure of the training

- The ideal length of a training session is half a day.
- Sessions should be no less than one and a half hours.
- Participant numbers should be kept to a maximum of 20.
- Where possible, always seek to co-deliver the training with a community member and always make sure you consult them about the planning and design of the session.
- Always include time for evaluation and feedback; it is really important to learn what people require and how they have responded to the content and style of the session.

“Personally, it’s good for me, as a Romany Gypsy myself, to spread the word... It’s fulfilling as a job, to teach people what Romany Gypsies are like really... The impact of having a community member as a trainer can be to breakdown the stereotypes people have of Gypsies – that we can’t read, we’re scruffy. I think people can be surprised to meet an educated Gypsy woman.”

Co-trainer

Content

- It is important to offer a mixture of specialist knowledge and cultural awareness.
- Provide time to share current practice and experiences, and an opportunity to discuss development of future practice.
- Participants are more likely to enjoy the training and get the most out of it if you use a range of activities and cover a variety of topics.

In the next section are some suggestions to cover the key areas.

Key themes and suggested activities

Prejudice and stereotypes

Tackling training participants' prejudices on issues such as education, taxes and crime is a useful way of exploding myths and challenging stereotypes participants may have.

- Give people post-it notes and ask them to write down everything, positive and negative, they've ever heard about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. Stick these up on a board and use them to facilitate a discussion about what people may have heard about these communities and what are the real facts.

Who are "Travellers"?

There are many different communities that are encompassed by the umbrella term "Traveller" and it is important for participants to gain some understanding of this.

- Using a large, clear diagram can be a helpful way of explaining which groups are covered by the term and how they relate to each other.

History

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in Britain have a long and varied history. It is useful for participants to have some understanding of this to help broaden their awareness of culture and customs.

- Try using a timeline exercise, marking key events, to explore the history of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the UK and their origins.

"The training helped us to identify ways in which we could approach Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. It was really good. I hadn't realised there were so many groups within groups – some people not wanting to be called a Gypsy etc. We came away with lots of talking points. It's spurred us on to make sure that we do more work with these communities in the future."

Deputy Centre Manager, Doncaster

“It has changed our understanding and perceptions of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities – we have a much better understanding now. Just after the training, there was so much stuff in the national press. It made the whole staff team debate things. It’s helped to increase our confidence. I think it will help staff to challenge discrimination.”

Centre manager, Newham

The duty to include

There are a number of legal duties incumbent on settings, practitioners and services to represent Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture, which participants need to be aware of.

- A quiz is a quick way of getting across quite a lot of information. You could have a variety of questions, so that it also provides an opportunity to give a cultural overview, as well as a legal one.

Promoting good practice

Translating learning into practice is very important if the training is to make a difference once participants are back in the workplace.

- Use case studies to highlight a variety of issues – the barriers that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers face when accessing services and what the experiences of families are likely to be. This allows participants the chance to consider the different approaches they, as professionals, could take to address these issues.
- Case studies can be a useful prompt for discussing how Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture fits into the Early Years Foundation Stage. Participants should recognise the importance of embedding the culture into their work and not viewing it as an add-on.
- Discuss with participants practical tips for changing practice. This might include suggestions for lesson plans or linking work to Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month.
- Make participants aware of the resources that can be borrowed from their local Traveller Education Service and signpost them to some of the other resources available (websites, posters, books, etc). Explain where and how to buy them. Offer tips on how to make culturally relevant resources.

“(It is important to ensure that there are culturally relevant materials available all the time, so that if there are no Travellers on the roll, other children can still access the materials and will be ready to welcome new arrivals.”

TES worker, Newham

Top tips for training

Planning

- Make sure you know your audience before you run a session and find out their needs and expectations.
- Work with the setting / organisation where you are delivering the training to create a relevant agenda for the training.
- Don't try to fit too much in to one session.

Preparation

- Be familiar with the materials and ensure that they are organised and ready to use.
- Ensure that all necessary equipment is available, booked and set up for use. Be sure you know how it works.
- PowerPoint can be a useful learning aid but make sure you don't overuse it.
- Where you do use PowerPoint, don't include too much information on each slide. Keep it short and to the point.

Inter-personal skills

- Listen actively at all times – to the group conversation, as well as to themes and concerns of individuals.
- Ask questions to clarify before offering answers.
- Encourage participants to ask questions throughout the session.
- Remember – and show you remember – what people did or said in previous activities.

Resolving conflict

- Setting ground rules should only take a couple of minutes, but it will help to ensure that everyone is clear about how the group will work together to get the most out of the session.
- Start the process off by suggesting one or two things you think are important, such as listening to each other or confidentiality.
- As ground rules are agreed, write them up and display them somewhere in the room. They can then be referred to should any conflict arise.

Handouts

- Producing handouts to accompany the session supports learning once people have left the training and are back in their settings.
- Handouts are always helpful in the sessions, as they allow those people who learn best from reading information to have something to focus on.
- Handouts help participants to focus on the subject area at the start of the session and ease them into the content of the session.
- Key points and facts can be reiterated if participants read handouts at a later date.
- Handouts are a useful reference point for contact details and signposting for further information.
- Wherever possible, use imaginative layouts, colours or different fonts and text size in order to make the information easy to read and more engaging.

Evaluation

- Evaluation is an important part of providing good training, so make sure you leave enough time to do it.
- It helps to put the training in its broader context and provides feedback which is essential to the planning of future sessions.
- Evaluation helps to gauge the impact of those delivering the training and can be used to assess the types of activities and the content covered.

Where to go for more support

- National Association of Teachers of Travellers (NATT)
<http://www.natt.org.uk>
- Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month website
<http://www.grthm.co.uk>
- Passing Places – a resource on Gypsy-Traveller lifestyles and culture
<http://www.passingplaces.org.uk>
- The Children's Society – contains information on Roma cultural awareness training
<http://www.childrensociety.org.uk>
- Working Towards Inclusive Practice – training toolkit
<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/earlyyears>



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