

*Tallaght Travellers Community Development Project
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**Traveller Rights are
Human Right**

Patrick Nevin: Tallaght Travellers Community Development Project opening statement

To understand the barriers of education for Travellers we must look to the states engagement with them from the foundation of the state and particularly so from 1963 onwards.

From the beginning Travellers were denied ownership of their position, we see this is very obvious in the 1952 Irish Folklore Commission survey. In this document we see that it was the sedentary members of society who were given the opportunity to speak, to name them, to place them, and denied them, the ownership of their position in the broader sphere of Irish society. This document to this very day is used by academics both at home and abroad as a starting point in their academic discourse, on Travellers. Yet at no time were Travellers given the opportunity to respond to the ready-made representations of the commissions respondents. From this we see how Travellers were to become idealised and denigrated, made into an object of representation and investigation. But at no time do we hear the voice of the Traveller in this document.

From this point onwards we see a more deepening interest in the Traveller community and the state taking a more active role in the 'the problem of Travellers'. I use the statement the problem of Travellers openly as this was how the state viewed my community. This was to culminate in the Government Report of the commission on Itinerancy in 1963. In this report we see again that the voice of the Traveller is not represented, but more disturbingly is the opening statement in this document where the chair of the commission first addressed the members of the commission.

The statement makes it quite clear that the solution to the Traveller problem was the complete absorption of my community. It follows:

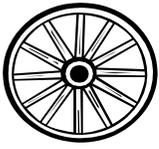
"the fact that there can be no final solution of the problems created by itinerants until they are absorbed into the general community"

With this in mind we must see this as the starting point when we are looking at the barriers that are faced by Travellers when they are accessing education. This open and transparent assault on my community's way of life and identity must be acknowledged as a major contributing factor to the exclusion of Travellers from the educational institutions.

For us to respond to the very serious issues that Travellers face in their everyday lives we must accept that the state needs to look at the issue of reparations, we have to acknowledge this



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injustice as we have acknowledged the injustice that was committed on the women who were institutionalised in such places as the Magdalen laundries. Fifty years of state sponsored denial of Traveller identity and culture has not only impacted on their educational attainment, but also has created an internalised oppression, barriers and lack of self-worth within my community.

Since march 2017 our ethnicity has been recognised, however, this on its own does not acknowledge or repair the damage that has been inflicted on the Traveller community by the state with its policies of absorption and assimilation. The state and its institutions needs to accept its direct role in this catastrophic damage to the Traveller community. We must have an open, transparent and honest discourse, like we have in recent years in regards, to other state and institutionalised wrongs.

Our submission has to some extent outlined a number of recommendations and ways that we can move forward in partnership to achieve more equal and improved outcomes, for my community in education. While addressing education we must remember that the states policies also have had a negative impact and created inequalities and poor outcomes for my community in other areas such health, employment, accommodation, culture and language.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

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