



Galway Traveller Movement

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Presentation to the Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community

Presenter Bridget Kelly, GTM Deputy Coordinator .

My name is Bridget Kelly and I am the deputy coordinator of the Galway Traveller Movement . Galway Traveller Movement made a submission to the committee and believe that addressing the mental health needs of the Traveller community, my community should be a matter of priority for the Irish State.

I am a Traveler woman and a mother of 5 children and I want a society where my children’s rights as members of a minority ethnic group are protected and celebrated.

Members of my community experience higher levels of suicide than the settled population and mental health is an issue that affects all Travellers in Ireland. Discrimination against Travellers, racism, unemployment, and social exclusion have a negative impact on the mental health of all Travellers - women, men, young people and children.

What are often called “mental health problems” are more commonly regarded as somehow located “in” the person, with an array of expert interventions geared towards producing changes in the individual. Yet, the kinds of mental pain, trauma and distress, and the sense of despair and hopelessness experienced by many members of my community, the LGBT+ community, and the asylum-seeking and refugee community, more often have their genesis in the social and political domain – in discrimination, exclusion, racism and the complex intersections of gender, ethnicity, class, disability, age, sexuality and so on.

GTM is of the belief that mental health services provided to my community should be informed by a 'Just Therapy' analysis and understanding of the negative impact of structural inequality . Structural inequality is at the root cause of many of the severe mental health issues affecting so many members of my community.

Just Therapy is a reflective approach to therapy developed by workers at the Family Centre, Wellington, New Zealand. A fundamental feature of Just Therapy is the attention paid to the broad cultural, gender, social, spiritual, economic and psychological contexts underlying the problems experienced by those with whom therapists work. It expresses the Family Centre philosophy and commitment to cultural, gender and socio-economic equity. This philosophy underlies the Family Centre's commitment to the eradication of racism, sexism and poverty. In all its therapy, field work activities and research, the Family Centre endeavours to expose the marginalisation of different sectors of the population and facilitate change to their advantage. This analysis and approach compliments a community work approach to improving my communities mental health and wellbeing.

As stated in a 'Vision for change'

“Community development models of mental health are particularly useful in the provision of mental health services to culturally diverse groups. Services need to reach out actively to communities to find alternative paths to channel support to individuals and families. ...”

Recommendations

The following are recommendations that are coming directly from the Traveller community Galway City and county developed as part of a healthy Ireland initiative, Galway and the GTM resilience project.

1. Mental health policy and services delivery in relation to Travellers should be **informed by an understanding of Traveller culture and the diversity which exists** within the Traveller community including that of gender, sexuality and age. It must also be informed by; an **anti-racism and gender equality perspective; a Just Therapy approach; the knowledge and experience of Travellers** themselves and by **international human rights standards.**

2. **Investment in mental health service provision** for Travellers is urgently required to ensure that Travellers in need of services have access to a cohesive, transparent, accountable, prompt service that listens to the people who use it, with shorter waiting times.
3. Appropriate **holistic mental health supports** should be provided at the levels of individual, family and community with greater flexibility about treatment i.e. it is not acceptable to be just handed a GP script for medication.
4. The **key role of Traveller organizations** in supporting positive mental health should be recognized, including their role in facilitating the voices of Travellers in social and political transformation. This involves the provision of support and resources for a **community development approach** to mental health based on meaningful collaborative relationships with community organizations and support groups.
5. **Mandatory Traveller cultural competency training** should be part of the training of all mental health professionals, developed and delivered in collaboration with Traveller organisations using already established models of best practice adapted to an Irish Traveller context.
6. Positive action measures should be introduced to **support Travellers to pursue third-level education** and training in becoming mental health professionals.
7. Particular attention should be given to an exploration of the potential of Equine therapy and the potential for **Traveller horse ownership** as a mechanism for Traveller mental health promotion.
8. Expanded **culturally appropriate counselling services with members of the Traveller community** as the therapists.
9. A **social model of mental health** should be developed e.g. through developing peer support in services and community participation.
10. The Accident and Emergency Department is inappropriate for all those experiencing mental health difficulties and a **dedicated space for admittance** should be established.
11. A clear **information and communications strategy** should be developed targeting the Traveller community explicitly with regard to who the mental health services are, services available and referral pathways.
12. Mental health **services must be planned by design and equality proofed** to ensure quality outcomes for Travellers according to human rights standards. This includes an ethnic identifier to support equality outcomes for the Traveller community, ongoing Review and Evaluation informed by a community

development approach; accountability for professionals in their practice of cultural competence.

13. The stigma of mental health is still prevalent in society generally and amongst members of the Traveller community. **Workshops and public conversations on mental health** are required which facilitate understanding through a social, cultural and political lens. In this regard personal stories told through this lens are powerful and need to reach more professionals and members of the public.

14. A **Working Group on Traveller mental health** should be established to oversee and plan for implementation of the recommendations and outcomes from the consultation process.

To finish.

Galway Traveller Movement was established in 1994. GTM is an independent Traveller community development organisation for Galway City and County made up of Travellers and non-Travellers. Our work has always been rooted in an understanding of and respect for the distinct culture and ethnic identity of the Traveller community. GTM's vision is 'Full equality for Travellers and the participation of Travellers in social, economic, political and cultural life; as well as the broader enhancement of social justice and human rights. Our work is motivated and guided by the following core values: Social Justice, Equality, Collectivity, Participation and Dignity.

Thank you for listening.