

Good Morning Everybody,

My name is Nora Mooney, I am a Traveller from Kilmallock in East County Limerick. I am married with two children, one in secondary school and one in preschool. I represent Travellers in East Limerick on the HSE Traveller Health unit. I am chairperson of Kilmallock Traveller Women's Group which was formed in April 2017.

We are a very lively vibrant group and we are ready to stand up and be counted. We are committed to working towards changing outcomes for Travellers.

We are a mixed age group made up of Grandmothers, Mothers and young single women. In the short period since we were established we also set up Kilmallock Traveller Men's Group.

We are a voluntary group with no staff, totally dependent on volunteers. We are supported by Ballyhoura Development and receive funding from the HSE Traveller Health Unit for group activities.

We appreciate the opportunity for being here today so that you can hear the situation that we find ourselves in, in East Limerick.

Recently an assessment looking at the Health Needs of Travellers in East Limerick was carried out by Ballyhoura Development, I was the Traveller Representative on the steering group for this project. This was the first ever meaningful engagement with the Traveller Community in East Limerick. The methodology used to conduct this research was peer led which meant that members of the Travelling Community were employed directly to carry out the survey. I am so proud of the work that the team of peer researchers completed.

The outcomes from this report are not just findings, they are our real life health issues which at the moment are not being addressed in a way that supports change for us.

Can you believe that in this day and age, in this country that out of 424 Traveller Individuals in East Limerick, that only 29 of these are over 50, worse still only 3 over the age of 65, one of these is my own father!

It frightens me to think that I might not see 50 and I am much less likely to see the age of 65! How long do you expect to live for?

I'm due to retire in 23 years' time, our recent assessment demonstrates that I am more than likely not going to be around for this. Looks like no need for the old age pension or the fair deal scheme for me.

I was wondering how I might get you to understand where we are coming from and how our health issues impacts on our lives and that of our children. Now that we have completed the assessment we realise the seriousness and the time limits that we have to achieve change.

The stereotype of Travellers has led to discrimination in all sectors including Education. My experience of Education was not positive at the start, when I was in primary school I was automatically segregated into a "remedial class" without reason or assessment, simply because I was a Traveller. I often spent hours in the playground singing instead of being in class learning which I was well capable of. Isn't it a wonder that we are such good singers or is that another stereotype? Only when I was old enough to realise that I was being treated differently and told my mother, did this situation change. It was only because of my mother's belief in my ability and her perseverance that I was eventually integrated back into regular class. Since then I have completed secondary and

third level education. I am forever grateful for my mother's intuition and thirty years on I find myself doing the same for my children, so what has improved?

I know from the personal experience of my immediate family, that low expectation of travellers to perform well in education continues along with segregation and discrimination. If we can't change this discrimination in primary school where can we change it?

Do you realise that 48% of my Community in East Limerick live in mobile homes or trailers, while I am lucky to have my own house and mortgage to go with it, some of my family have been on council housing waiting list for more than 16 years. That's 16 years of living in damp, mouldy, overcrowded conditions. Is it any wonder that our life expectancy is so low?

As high as 80% of Travellers are unemployed compared to 5% of the General population, we need meaningful employment opportunities for Travellers. I want to be able to ask my children what would they like to be when they grow up, and know that their isn't barriers stopping them materialising their dreams.

I can't leave here today without mentioning Mental Health, how these conditions and situations that we find ourselves in are impacting on our mental health. Every day I see how mental health issues affect the people that I love and care for. How many family and friends do you think I have lost? How long could you hold the weight of these factors on your shoulders?

None of these issues are stand alone, they are all interlinked and contribute to the multi layers of disadvantage continuously experienced by my community.

So what can we do about it? Where is the innovation, the new ways of thinking? For example, implementing Traveller led methodologies across all sectors including housing, education and health. What this means is models similar to the Traveller Primary Healthcare projects are applied across other sectors specifically Education and Housing. We know this way of working achieves greater results for example the assessment carried out in East Limerick identified 113% more travellers than the census in 2016.

For one of the best educated countries in the world why are we continually using one trick pony solutions when it comes to traveller welfare.

In East Limerick we are already on the brink of losing our oldest generation, we need support and resources to bring about change for our community. The first step for East Limerick is the establishment of Traveller Health Primary Care Team, while we have received commitment in principal from the HSE, time is running out! Don't I deserve to be around to see my Grandchildren growing up?

As a group we see ourselves as advocates for our community and we already hold the weight of our community on our shoulders. It's up to us to find the solutions, be the listener, make the connections, find the words to help. We can't do this without support.