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# An Evaluation of the Role of Senior Traveller Training Centres

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# **An Evaluation of the Role of Senior Traveller Training Centres**

A thesis submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in part fulfilment of the requirements for award of Masters (M.A.) in Child, Family and Community Studies.

by

**Maureen Foley**

September 2008

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the **Masters (M.A.) in Child, Family and Community Studies** is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

**Signature of candidate:**.....

**Date:** .....

## **ABSTRACT**

The study evaluates the role of the Senior Traveller Training Centres regarding further education. The centres provide basic compensatory education for Travellers aged 18 upwards. The aim of the centres is to provide Travellers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to successfully make the transition to work and adult life. It examines the rationale for the centres, the management structure, why people decide to go to the centres, and the curriculum.

The study also highlights the difficulties the Traveller community have faced in the past and are still facing today in terms of equality of outcomes in education. Travellers are seen as being different in terms of their culture, lifestyle, traditions and value systems. This has had a profound negative effect regarding their progress and development in education compared to the settled population. Entwined in Traveller culture and values is the gender issue which creates different roles for men and women within the community itself.

The research involved interviewing Directors and students from the centres and representatives from Pavee Point, the Irish Traveller Movement, the National Co-ordinator for the Training Centres and a secondary school teacher. I gained a valuable insight into how the centres are run on the ground and how the students see them. There were varying opinions from all the participants on the centres, both positive and negative.

The findings uncovered contrasting opinions on the centres. The students were very positive about their participation. They felt they were enhancing their education and as Traveller women were more confident, independent and had more self-belief. The Directors were very passionate about the centres. The work they did on the ground never came to light in any reports or statistics. They had to make the best of the resources they had.

However, representatives from Traveller organisations claimed that the centres were detrimental to Travellers progress in further education. The management structure was contested due to the fact that there are no Traveller Directors after 34 years. The centres were also criticised regarding the allowance that students are paid. This is seen as drawing people into the centres.

In conclusion, the centres are a valuable outlet for the Traveller community. They provide courses to facilitate the progress of Travellers onto further education and employment. The research highlights a need for the re-structuring of the centres based on the Community Education model, while still maintaining the ethos of the development and maintenance of Traveller culture, traditions, personal development and foundation education such as literacy and numeracy skills.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>C.E.A.R.T</b>	<b>Centre of Education and Resourcing Travellers</b>
<b>CERD</b>	<b>Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination</b>
<b>CSPE</b>	<b>Civil, Social and Political Education</b>
<b>DES</b>	<b>Department of Education and Science</b>
<b>ECDL</b>	<b>European Computer Driving Licence</b>
<b>FETAC</b>	<b>Further Education and Training Awards Council</b>
<b>ITM</b>	<b>Irish Traveller Movement</b>
<b>JC</b>	<b>Junior Certificate</b>
<b>LC</b>	<b>Leaving Certificate</b>
<b>LCA</b>	<b>Leaving Certificate Applied</b>
<b>NATC</b>	<b>National Association for Traveller Centres</b>
<b>PLC</b>	<b>Post Leaving Certificate</b>
<b>STTCs</b>	<b>Senior Traveller Training Centres</b>
<b>TES</b>	<b>Traveller Education Strategy</b>
<b>VEC</b>	<b>Vocational Education Committee</b>
<b>VTOS</b>	<b>Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme</b>

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**CHAPTER ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION**

In this study, I will examine the role of the Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs) in terms of Traveller students' progression onto further education and the negative or positive effects these centres may have on that progression.

The background to the establishment of STTCs has been explained by Gerrard Griffin (2008) as follows:

Senior Traveller Training Centres were established in 1974 to provide basic compensatory education for Travellers between the ages of 15 and 25, although the upper age limit has since been abolished. The aim of the centres is to provide Travellers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to successfully make the transition to work and adult life. (STTC, 2008).

The centres promote and celebrate Traveller culture and traditions. The courses offered in the training centres are arguably more attractive to young Travellers than mainstream second level education as they are more practical and there is less focus on subjects like English, Irish, and Maths etc, which they often find hard to learn due to their literacy rates being less advanced than those of the settled population. The STTCs emphasis on 'transition to work' is also a pull factor. The National Traveller Education Officer estimates in 2002/2003:

1608 Traveller children attended mainstream Post-Primary schools. The national retention rate to Junior Cert. is 94.3%. For Traveller pupils the rate was only 51%. Sixty two Traveller children attended 6th year Post-Primary. Visiting Teachers estimate that in 2002, 16 Travellers attended third level (Pavee Point, 2008).

'The transfer rate for Travellers to the post-primary level was 85 per cent in 2004. There were approximately 1,850 Traveller pupils in mainstream post-primary schools, out of a possible 4,000, that' (Traveller Education Strategy, 2006:16). It is apparent that the Junior Certificate is where the numbers start to drop off. Possibly, due to having gained a national educational certificate, students feel they do not want to pursue their education any further. In addition, the subjects may be more challenging and intense. Traveller children may not see the Leaving-Certificate as relevant in terms of future employment. Furthermore, it may not be the norm for Traveller children to complete the Leaving Certificate within their community as there has never been a historical link with education. This is possibly due to the marginalisation of Traveller children within mainstream education. Traveller parents are very wary of the education system due to the way they were treated in school and the way

Travellers are perceived within Irish society. Traveller only classes were the norm up to 2004. The way Travellers are perceived within Irish society.

The research aims to look at the role STTCs play in Traveller education. In particular it poses the question whether they are conducive to transitions to further education. The problem of the pull factor of students from mainstream education to STTCs for under 18's no longer exists as the minimum age for entry into the centres has changed to 18 plus. The next chapter will examine the literature that has evolved around the Traveller community and explains the complexities of issues that surround the community.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2.1 Introduction**

The Literature review examines the Traveller community's culture and traditions, in terms of who they are. Also under analysis are the various reports that have been published to deal with Travellers as a separate, unique entity in Irish society. The issue of ethnicity and the Traveller community will be examined in the context of their place in Irish society. Arguably, they can be seen as a distinct ethnic group within Irish society.

The education system and the legislation governing its application will be viewed in the context of cultural diversity. Furthermore, the relationship between education and the Traveller community will be examined. Arguably, there are problems and challenges born out of this relationship. Education is seen from both the primary and post-primary level from the point of view of the transfer and retention rates of Traveller students. Another focus is the attitudes and traditions within the Traveller community and wider society which may influence how Travellers see education and are seen by the settled community.

Finally, the literature review examines the STTCs origins, role and what they hope to achieve. The management structure of the STTCs will be explored, the curriculum that is offered and the outcomes and progression rates obtained. The discussion revolves around their usefulness and viability in terms of further education.

## **2.2 The Traveller community**

Irish Travellers are an indigenous minority; they have a long shared history, value system, language, customs and traditions that make them a group recognised by them and others as distinct. (Department of Education and Science, 2006:4).

The Traveller community have been a part of Irish society for centuries. 'The total number of persons in the Traveller Community nationally according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2006 statistics is 22,369' (NATC, 2008:7). So why is this group who are indigenous to Ireland, still seeking equality in housing, education, employment? Helleiner (2000:8) argues, that 'Anti-Travellerism is understood as a form of 'racism without racism', that does not invoke biological inferiority, but rather notions of undesirable cultural difference'. Fanning (2002:135) argues, that 'local

political responses to Travellers from 1963 were characterised by the radicalisation of Travellers as a threat and as deviant and violent underclass'. The Traveller community did not conform to certain societal norms in terms of their nomadic lifestyle. This highlights their rejection of the dominant culture which immediately categorises them as outsiders.

Travellers were seen as non-conformist and deviant in terms of the lifestyle they led; this arguably created a sense of fear, paranoia and suspicion amongst the settled population. Becker defines deviance as 'the consequence of the application of rules and sanctions by others to an "offender"'. The deviant is the person to whom the label "deviant" has been successfully applied' (Clinard & Meier, 1975:14). Any group or individual that does not submit to these norms is viewed as an outsider that needs to be reined in or controlled. According to Sheehan solving the issue of Travellers involves 'improving the lot of Itinerants and dealing with the problems created by them' (Sheehan, 2000:43). There have been numerous reports released regarding Government policy on Travellers.

The first report was the '1963 Report of the Commission on Itinerancy'. It proposed,

To enquire into the problem arising from the presence in the country of Itinerants in considerable numbers, to examine the economic, educational, health and social problems inherent in their way of life. To provide opportunities for a better way of life for Itinerants and to promote the absorption into the general community (Report of the Commission on Itinerancy, 1963:11).

Sheehan, (2000:43) claimed in her analysis of the 1963 report that 'All efforts directed at improving the lot of Itinerants and at dealing with the problems created by them, and all the schemes drawn up for these purposes, must always have as their aim the eventual absorption of the Itinerants into the general community'. Okely (1994:16) argues that 'the Commission on Itinerancy (1963) helped to create the impression that Irish Travellers were merely inadequate drop-outs and therefore ripe for assimilation'. 'Assimilation describes individuals who adapt to the dominant group whilst not maintaining their own cultural identity' (Lichtsinn & Veale in Fanning, 2007:99). The view of the time was that Travellers needed to be assimilated into the sedentary way of life if they were to be accepted. Their economic, accommodation and educational needs would be the same as those of the settled community.



The report failed to consult the target group to which they were referring. The Traveller community were not consulted in relation to the report nor were they asked to participate or give input as to what they thought were the best ways to tackle the issues. It is noted in the report that, 'the Commission on Itinerancy stated unequivocally that Travellers did not, in their view, constitute a single or homogenous community within Ireland' (Hayes, 2006:233).

The second report on Travellers was the 'Report of the Travelling Review Body (1983)'. One of the objectives of the report was 'to reduce progressively the present hostility to Travellers by large sections of the settled population' (Report of the Travelling Review Body, 1983:15). In addition, 'the Review Body considers that there is a need for a corporate body which would promote the general welfare of Travellers. Responsibility for the services to Travellers lies with at least six different Government Departments' (Report of the Travelling Review Body, 1983:107). The report concedes that,

The time has arrived for a full review of the services for Travellers with a re-appraisal of past programmes and developments to assess their appropriateness for the conditions of today and the foreseeable future' (Report of the Travelling Review Body, 1983:17).

The report signifies the intolerance on the Government's part in not acknowledging the traditions and culture of the Traveller community, one of which is their nomadic lifestyle. 'By 1983, they were recognised as an identifiable group within Irish society but their distinctiveness was regarded as an expression of individual choice within a narrow interpretation of the meaning of culture' (Fanning, 2002:154).

The next report on Travellers was the 'Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community' (1995). It was set up 'to advise and report on the needs of Travellers and on Government policy in relation to Travellers, with specific reference to the co-ordination in policy approaches by Government Departments and Local Authorities' (Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995:10). This report marked a change in direction in terms of policy on Travellers. For the first time, Travellers participated in the report process and had an input into the recommendations that were put forward through organisations such as Pavee Point and the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM). This led to a more inclusive document.

There was acknowledgement of the cultural rights of Travellers in the wording of many of the recommendations of the report.

‘The structures and initiatives that have been created deal with Travellers in mainstream services such as health and education’ (Sheehan, 2000:98). Within the education system, Traveller only classes have now ceased and Traveller children are now in mixed classes with their settled peers. ‘There are no special Traveller classes since the end of the school year 2003/2004 and there is only one Traveller-only primary school’ (Irish Traveller Movement, 2008).

The Report and Recommendations for Traveller Education Strategy 2006, was the most recent report to come out. The report states that,

The Department of Education and Science is fully committed to ensuring that Travellers receive a high quality, integrated education from early childhood to adult education that, will enable individuals to achieve their full potential and to participate fully as members of society, and contribute to Ireland’s social, cultural and economic development (The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy, 2006:90).

### **2.3 Ethnicity**

The ethnicity debate is crucial in terms of whether Travellers gain more rights in terms of access to services and recognition of their status and culture as a distinct minority group. Tovey (1989:8) argues that,

Dominant ethnicity contrasts sharply with subordinate ethnicity. The one enjoys both political and economic power, as well as cultural presumption, while the other, in extreme cases, may be so marginal as to be at the centre of nothing in the larger system but its own ethnic world (Crowley in Quin et al, 2005:232:233).

The Equal Status Act 2004 defines Travellers as ‘a community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland’ (National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, 2004:3). However, there is on-going debate as to whether the Traveller community constitute an ethnic group.

An ethnic group is a self-perceived inclusion of those who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact. Such traditions

typically include “folk” religious beliefs and practices, language, a sense of historical continuity, and common ancestry or place of origin (Romanucci-Ross, L & DeVos, G, 1995:18).

McCann, Ó’Síocháin, & Ruane (1994: xi-xii) maintain that ethnicity,

Has radical implications for the study of Irish Travellers because it approaches Traveller culture as distinct and valuable in its own right with its own historical path of development, rather than as a short term adaptation to poverty or marginality (The Equality Authority, 2006:53).

The term ‘Traveller’ is used here to designate membership of the identifiable group referred to and not just to make the distinction between a nomadic way of life and a settled one. The abandonment of the nomadic way of life does not automatically entail the renunciation of the Traveller ethnic integration with the settled community. Therefore, assimilatory policies will not take away their traditions and values as these are deep-rooted. This debate has reached a wider audience in terms of its controversy. ‘The Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 2005) concluded, that “the Committee expresses concern at the state party’s position with regard to the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group.” (Irish Traveller Movement, 2005:18). The recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group is important when looking at education in terms of inclusiveness and the curriculum.

## **2.4 Education**

The main legislation governing schools is the Education Act 1998. In the Education Act 1998, there are challenges to obtaining inclusiveness in education.

Inclusion in mainstream education involves not only issues of access and participation, but also of achieving outcomes in terms of education credentials and personal development (Schools and the Equal Status Act, 2003:16:17).

As stated in page one, the figures for the number of Traveller children attending second level is quite stark compared to the settled population. This highlights the urgent need to address the shortfall in attendance and retention rates in relation to Travellers in the education system. The shortfall is visible at every level throughout both primary and secondary school. While there is progress being made it is arguably slow and inconsistent. Attitudes towards the Traveller community in general need to be addressed. If they feel unwelcome, discriminated against and excluded both in

school and in the curriculum then they may not perceive that they have a real choice to remain in the education system.

The Report of the Department of Education Working Group on Post-Primary Education for Traveller Children identifies 'reasons why Traveller children do not attend school or why they fail to persevere in second-level education. They include:

- Insufficient level of attainment at Primary Level;
- Curriculum not perceived as relevant to vocational and cultural aspirations of Traveller community;
- Traveller children attending mainstream schools do not at present have their distinctive lifestyle and culture validated in their formal education;
- Low degree of parental involvement;
- Fear of some parents that education will lead to their children rejecting Traveller culture and way of life;
- Low expectations of the education system by Travellers themselves;' (Task force on the Travelling Community, 1995:184:185).

Some Traveller parents do not want their children staying within mainstream education due to the experiences they encountered as children. 'We would be wary of education. If we take on all their ways we will lose our traditions such as made matches, or the way we rear children to keep their place, to keep their distance from adults, to be old fashioned' (Kenny, 1997:119).

Many Traveller parents feel that they cannot take for granted things that settled parents generally do not even have to consider, for example that their child will be welcomed in some schools. This can lead to ambivalence and a negative attitude on the part of some Traveller parents regarding the value of formal education (Traveller Education Strategy, 2006:22).

Moreover, the lifestyle of Travellers plays a part in the ability of their children to participate in education on a continuous level.

Approximately nine per cent of Traveller families are living in unauthorised sites, and the reality of living without access to basic services and being under possible threat of eviction without notice has the potential of affecting a Traveller child's education in a very negative manner (Traveller Education Strategy, 2006:22).

Also, ‘the education system needs an agenda that educates all children equally but not one that teaches all children in the same manner’ (National Association of Traveller Centres, 2007:7). The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism argue that as a result, there is a ‘lack of expectations by Traveller parents and teachers of Travellers progressing at second level and a withdrawal of male students to help out in supporting the Traveller economy’ (The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, 2004:3).

There are initiatives at a local level that are often effective in changing perceptions and building understandings between parents and schools and raising expectations. There are parallel initiatives with schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

A schools programme in University College Cork has established links between the university and ten regional schools with significant numbers of young people from the Travelling community. Homework support groups, parenting courses, cultural awareness initiatives, and an induction programme for transfer from primary to secondary school are offered. (Higher Education Authority, 2004:22).

While the above initiative is a step in the right direction, there should be more work done by the schools themselves to encourage more inclusiveness. This should be visible in the curriculum in terms of Traveller culture. Early school leaving has a detrimental effect on a child’s future progress and development. ‘Education has a key role to play in the acquisition of social capital and of access to career opportunities and life chances.’ (Cullen, 2000 in the National Economic and Social Forum, 2004:8).

There is evidence to show that it is children from disadvantaged communities who constitute a majority of those who currently fail to benefit from the education system, and that under-achievement in school can have inter-generational effects on families and their communities. It is the children of early school leavers who are most at risk of leaving school early themselves. ‘Intervening in this cycle of deprivation demands that a systematic, integrated and effective strategy is put in place to address educational disadvantage’ (Department of Education and Science, 2005:16). There is no doubt that many of the barriers to under participation and the educational progress of children and young people are caused by issues outside the education system.

As previously mentioned, these barriers may be family related, lifestyle, culture, geographic or a combination.

## **2.5 Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs)**

Senior Traveller Training Centres were established in 1974 to provide basic compensatory education for Travellers between the ages of 15 and 25, although the upper age limit has since been abolished and in addition the centres no longer take under 18's. There is a network of thirty-three centres throughout the country. The first centre opened in Ennis, thirteen more within the following decade and the remaining centres were established in the last decade and a half. The aim of the centres is to provide Travellers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to successfully make the transition to work and adult life, and to participate fully in their communities.

These Centres provide a high quality education service that meets the educational, social and cultural needs of Travellers and members of 'the settled community'. They are fully funded by the Department of Education and Science (DES) and are managed locally by Vocational Education Committees (VEC). Traveller Training Centres' have enabled many Travellers to acquire a basic education. (National Association of Traveller Centres, 2008:6).

The centres give the students the opportunity to learn a trade or craft and thus may help them in the transition into work. It is evident that STTCs are not in line with courses that are necessary for entry into mainstream third level education. This is evident where six STTCs are offering the LCA nationally.

The Leaving Certificate Applied is a distinct, self-contained two-year programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. The programme puts an emphasis on forms of achievement and excellence, which the established Leaving Certificate has not recognized in the past. (DES, 2008).

The LCA offers subjects such as Graphics and Construction, Engineering, Irish, French, Information Technology with four weeks work experience.

Graduates of the LCA who progress to an approved further education award (e.g. PLC) can become eligible for admission to some third level courses in the Institutes of Technology and following that to some degree courses in the Institutes of Technology and in the Universities (Second Level Support Service, 2008).

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2001) maintained that,

For 2000 of LCA graduates, 91% are employed or attending further education in the year immediately following completion of the course ([Evaluation of the LCA programme in St. Joseph's Training Centre in Ennis](#), 2006:11).

There are objections to the STTCs and their usefulness. This criticism has come from the Traveller organisation Pavee Point. They want to see STTCs phased out over the next five years. Pavee Point feel that the STTCs are not in touch with the present education system and the courses they offer are not facilitating the transition from secondary to third level education. They argue that the funding should be re-directed into helping Travellers integrate into mainstream education. The STTCs are seen as segregating one community from the other, and hindering progress in terms of higher education. Pavee Point contends that resources should be ring-fenced and invested in supports for Travellers to be integrated into mainstream schooling and vocational training. (Pavee Point, 2006:2).

In looking at the issue of STTCs and access to higher education, it may be possible to look at how to re-invent the STTCs in the context of modern society and the present needs of the Traveller community. While they serve the community in terms of cultural richness and connectedness, they may need to review their curriculum and the service users and target group they wish to attract. They may not need to be phased out as they provide a vital service to older individuals in the Traveller community in terms of basic literacy and numeracy skills and community support.

In conclusion, there are many factors which are hindering Traveller children's progression through education which include exclusion, socio-economic factors, and cultural factors for example. The STTCs still have a role to play in the education and cultural needs of their community. There are far more deep-rooted problems at work here in terms of how Travellers are viewed by society as a whole. This has an impact on everything they do. In education they are seen as different and are treated differently. They participate far less in the education system compared to their settled peers. Their standard of education is not as advanced arguably due to the fact that they were in Traveller only classes up to 2004 and were not receiving the same standard of education.

Looking at Traveller parents, there is a lack of connectedness with the education system. This is partly due to the fact that they themselves have received inadequate education and faced discrimination in the past and therefore may feel let down by the education system. There is also a lack of communication between the parents and the schools. This is due to the lack of contact between both which can lead to misunderstandings. The situation has improved with almost 100% participation in Primary schools and up to 95% transfer rate to post-primary. This may be due to the fact that parents are legally obliged to keep their children in school until they have completed three years in post-primary or the equivalent of the Junior Certificate.

Some Traveller parents prefer if their children attend STTCs where they can mix with other Travellers. This is now not possible for Travellers under 18 as the centres now only cater for over 18's. This may improve the retention rates in mainstream schools and also put more responsibility on schools to have more inclusive policies. The next chapter will describe the research methodologies used in the study and the ethical guidelines followed.



**CHAPTER THREE**  
**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The research method used in this study is qualitative in nature and the research tool being the interview. 'Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data' (Bryman, 2001:264). The aim is to gain an understanding of the implications of the Senior Traveller Training Centres STTCs for participation in further education. The justification for using qualitative methods is based on the information I wish to gather. The research seeks to highlight the opinions of various actors who are involved with or affected by the STTCs.

Firstly, what exactly am I trying to find out? In qualitative research, behaviour, values and beliefs are the areas under research; therefore qualitative is more appropriate as the researcher is more involved with the participants and it is their opinions, values and beliefs that are crucial in understanding their actions. Qualitative research allows for more depth in relation to the topic being researched.

Secondly, what kind of focus on my topic do I want to achieve and how much detail do I want to go into? The research calls for an understanding of the issues involved from different perspectives and the dynamics of the actors involved, thus a qualitative approach is more appropriate. As the research requires different opinions from varied actors, it is necessary to have interview based discussion.

Thirdly, which methods will be most appropriate in terms of the time schedule? Furthermore, what resources are available in relation to access to groups and organisations and their co-operation? This also takes into account the length of time available to complete the project.

### **3.2 Interview**

The interview is more flexible and will acquire more information than a quantitative method like a survey for example. The interview type used is the semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview occurs when the,

Researcher has a list of questions of fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an 'interview guide', but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply. Questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule. Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by the interviewee (Bryman, 2001:314).

The interview garnered the opinions of the interviewees regarding the STTCs and their relevance within the Traveller community today. The information gathered from the interviewees helped to present an overall picture of the viability and future roles of the STTCs.

### **3.3 Participants**

The participants in the study numbered thirteen and ranged from Directors to students of STTCs. I interviewed representatives from two Traveller organisations. There was a varied geographical spread in terms of the centres with locations in Tullamore, Wicklow, Tallaght and Coolock. As the participants in the study were from both the Traveller community and settled community it allowed me to get different perspectives on the topic. The interviewees were three Directors from the training centres and six students, the National Co-ordinator for the STTCs, a representative from Pavee Point, a Secondary school teacher, and a representative from The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM). I sent a letter and email to each Director and to Pavee Point. I emailed the participant from the ITM. I arranged to interview the students when I visited the centres.

The three Directors from the Training Centres are located in Wicklow, Tallaght and Coolock. The students from the Training Centres are based in Tallaght and Tullamore. The participant from Pavee Point is located in an office in Dublin 1 and the participant from the ITM is located in Dublin 2. The National Co-ordinator for the STTCs is based in Ennis and the secondary school teacher is from Celbridge.

### **3.4 Limitations**

In undertaking the study, I encountered some limitations. The first limitation was the time constraints. As the study focused on STTCs, there was a limited time period in which I could interview staff and students due to courses finishing up for the summer. In addition, I could not get hold of any Department of Education and Science staff who is involved in Traveller education.

The second limitation centred on the fact that all the students I interviewed in the STTCs were female. I don't have a male perspective or a first hand account of their views on the STTCs.

This information would have been useful as arguably boys' and girl's roles within the Traveller community itself are very defined and traditional in their make-up. This may affect how they see education in general and their participation in the STTCs.

### **3.5 Ethics**

“Research ethics are about being clear about the nature of the agreement you have entered into with your research subjects” (Blaxter et al, 2006:158). Ethics in research involves confidentiality, if the interviewer has promised to keep certain information within the interview private, then he/she must stick to that promise. A second ethical consideration is anonymity. This is crucial if a person is revealing information or names of people who they are working for or who could be a potential threat to them. Their identity must be kept out of the research project. Thirdly, the research must be legal. If you are a witness to a crime or illegal activity it is your duty to come forth or risk being an accessory. Fourthly, it is unethical to mislead a research subject. A researcher may say the research is for one reason and use it against the research subject or for other purposes. Finally, a researcher must always get the consent of the research subject. In the case of children under eighteen, the consent must be obtained from parents or guardians. As I used interviews, ethics played a big part in the study. This was important in terms of who I interviewed and the questions I asked. When phrasing the questions, being conscious not to offend or upset the interviewee was important. The interviewee may have felt self conscious or uncomfortable with a certain topic so it was paramount that I did not pursue the issue. In addition, it was important not to mislead the interviewee by phrasing a question in a different way so as to get the same end result. A key area of ethics is confidentiality. If the researcher promised not to reveal their identity then they must stick to that promise. The interviewee may be revealing names of fellow colleagues or information that no one else is supposed to know about. In this case confidentiality is a must.

As mentioned previously, it was important to keep what the students said confidential and protect their anonymity. It's important they gave permission to record the interviews. I asked all the interviewees to sign a consent form before they participated. It stated that the interview is confidential and anonymous. It also stated that if they did not want to continue with the interview they could refrain from carrying on if they felt uncomfortable.

As a Dictaphone was used, it was important to explain why it was used and that all the information recorded was confidential. I later transcribed the interviews so as to gain a better understanding of the issues and to accurately represent the interviewees.

After conducting the interviews I gained a unique insight into what is involved in running a training centre and what the centres hoped to achieve. Furthermore, there was evidence of a lot of work on the ground that is not seen in terms of statistics and reports. I found the Directors and the students of the centres very accommodating and honest. The representatives from the Traveller organisations were also very open and passionate about the issues around education. They were highly surprised and interested to know why I choose this research topic. I think they felt that it was good that someone was showing an interest in the work that they do.

I analysed the interview data thematically. The themes that arose in the literature review were used to design the interview questions. I examined the interview transcripts and highlighted the common themes that kept reoccurring. That gave me a template for the discussion on my findings. The research highlighted opposing opinions on the STTCs and the work they do. The feedback from the interviewees were compared and contrasted relative to the themes highlighted. The next chapter identifies these themes and presents the findings under each relevant theme. it will present the findings from my qualitative interviews with the 13 participants.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**FINDINGS**

## **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I present the findings of my research and highlight the key themes that emerged after carrying out the study. The first theme involves an analysis of the role of the STTCs. The second theme relates to Traveller culture, lifestyle and traditions. Finally, the issue of gender arose in terms of the different roles that are assumed within the Traveller community.

## **4.2 Senior Traveller Training Centres**

### **4.2.1 Management Structure**

Firstly, I will give a brief description of the three centres whose directors were interviewed and outline the management structure.

#### **Centre of Education and Resourcing Travellers (C.E.A.R.T.)**

The C.E.A.R.T. centre is located in Wicklow. The staff include a secretary and 11 teaching staff and it caters for 22 students. The centre provides adult education and training for Travellers in partnership with County Wicklow VEC, and also crèche and pre-school facilities for children of women attending the centre.

#### **St. Basil's**

St. Basil's centre is located in Tallaght. There are 11 staff and 30 student places. It is a female only centre.

St. Basil's Training Centre has been in existence since 1981. Our Mission Statement is RESPECT, which stands for Relationships, Education, Support, Pride, Equality, Confidentiality, Trust (STTC, 2008).

The Director states that,

It developed into an all female centre. We're the first centre to pilot the FETAC scheme. I teach, I counsel, I manage the budgets I coordinate and I'm the key worker'. I don't even have a job description or contract. I'd rather be given a manual about what to do.

### **Cara Park**

The Cara Park centre is located in Coolock. The Director said 'It's been around for over 27 to 28 years. It aims to prepare students to progress to further education or employment and to educate students to the best of their ability'.

### **St. Colmcille's Training Centre**

St. Colmcille's Training Centre is located in Tullamore. The centre has 16 members of staff. It caters for 35 students. Its aim is to maintain a high standard of educational provision, facilitate learners to reach their goals and help learners to get meaningful work.

#### **4.2.2 The Role and Rationale for STTCs**

According to the representative from Pavee Point, there is concern around the present role and rationale of the STTCs compared with the original reason they were established. He argued that 'after 30 odd years, what are the outcomes? Where is the evidence of positive outcomes in terms of higher education?' The Directors from the C.E.A.R.T. and Coolock centres depended on word of mouth in terms of whether the students progressed to further education or employment. The Director from the Wicklow centre stated that 'there is no actual follow up; you're depending on word of mouth feedback'. The Coolock centre is located on the Traveller site so it is easier to find out what past students are doing now. Furthermore, past students may have family members in the centres so it is easy to find out what they are doing.

Regarding work experience, the St. Basil's centre has a working relationship with the local County Council and local businesses and work placements for students were organised in tandem with the courses they are studying in the centre. In addition, the centre has links with a third level college and are offering tailored courses, and the Director added that 'a third level group approached us and funded a ten week enterprise course for the women with an excellent lecturer who specialises in ethnic minority enterprises'. The C.E.A.R.T. Director said that it is very hard for Travellers to get employment in the area. Employers are unwilling to give them work.

It is apparent that the centres do not operate as one homogenous group. The ITM representative contends that 'some are very progressive and then there are



concerns about some of the centres in that they are not really about education and training and the development of Travellers'. In addition, 'the concerns that come from a lot of groups is the fact that some centres focus very much on crafts and the centres themselves being less about education and training and more like community centres'. He also noted that,

As opposed to challenging the situation in mainstream, the local STTCs have the accidental role of acting as a release valve. In some areas where you didn't have a STTC more kids stayed on and more progress has been made.

As mentioned previously, the age profile has been altered and the centres can no longer accept under 18's. The Tallaght and C.E.A.R.T. centres said they may still take in under 18's if they have nowhere else to go and if there is no other option. 'I think you can justify keeping them here if they have nothing else to do'. Some Traveller parents have said,

My child won't go into school. I don't want to send my daughter to Youthreach because there are drug problems, issues around sexuality and teenage pregnancy and we've seen Travellers who've gone there and ended up in bad situations.

#### **4.2.3 Why attend STTCs?**

The students from the St. Basil's centre were asked why they enrolled in the centre. Student A stated that,

I came here to get further education. To get something from it and to go onto other courses and to go into something you like, to gain work experience and to get a job. Not to be sitting around on the dole and wasting your life'.

In addition, she added that, 'if we do a certificate from here, it mightn't be the best level of certification but it's a start. If you go into a FAS centre, you can show them what you're capable of'. Student B from St. Basil's said that 'it is convenient for us and it wouldn't work if there were boys in here. We do subjects like Childcare, Hairdressing, Literacy, and European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). We are happy with the subjects because we find them interesting'. Finally, student C from St. Basil's commented that, 'the ECDL course is also relevant in terms of office work and you need to have it. In the long run I think work experience is good'. The student from the Tullamore centre enrolled in the centre because,

I decided to go the centre was because I seen it as an opportunity to up-grade my education and to learn new skills. I honestly believe if I never attended the STTCs when I did I would never accomplished the education and skills that I have now.

The Director of the Coolock centre said,

The women want to get out of the house, they want to socialise, being at home all day wears them down, and a number of them would say that they want to improve their reading and writing, some of them who might have been here in the past or who maybe have been on a VEC scheme and have come here would be conscious of FETAC as well. They would say that they want to finish off FETAC modules that they started somewhere else.

The Director of the Coolock centre pointed out that 'since Traveller children are staying in school up to Junior Certificate it means the younger population of Travellers do not need these centres, in terms of older population there is still a need'. The National Co-ordinator for the STTCs argued that 'the need for STTCs shouldn't last longer than 10-15 years. The need for segregated education will no longer exist as Travellers become more included in society'. Student A from St. Basil's remarked that 'it gives us the opportunity as Traveller women to learn and to get the education, where we're not getting it in school. In relation to older Travellers going to the centres, it's how they feel themselves'.

#### **4.2.4 Curriculum**

All the Directors stated that the literacy and numeracy needs of Travellers were a big concern. All the centres interviewed offered courses on literacy. The Director of the Coolock centre noted that,

The key subjects here would be literacy, numeracy and communication which are English FETAC. Many of the Travellers in the centre are experiencing education for the first time and many of them have very poor literacy rates.

He also noted that 'there would be a number of people in this centre who never went to primary school, or who went for three weeks and would have left after making their Confirmation'. One of the students in the Coolock centre 'learned to write a birthday card for the first time and that spurred her on to do more'. The Director of St. Basil's training centre said 'the married women who are here are experiencing education for the first time and they are just delighted with themselves'.

The Director of C.E.A.R.T claimed that,

A lot of our students would have very low reading ages so a lot of them are getting their first chance education because they will have missed primary education. That also affected the results that came out of the centre in terms of certification’.

The student from Tullamore was satisfied with the curriculum, ‘I completed full seven modules in FETAC. I completed the Junior Certificate, in English, Home Economics and Civil, Social, and Political Education (CSPE)’.

She went onto to add that,

The subjects were very relevant; they gave me the confidence to go on to upgrade m education again and complete a two-year course in VTOS. I completed: Junior Certificate Maths, Leaving Certificate English OL, and Leaving Certificate English Honours. In 2006, I completed a two-year course diploma course in Youth and Community with Cork University.

The Pavee Point Representative contends that,

When you look at the curriculum, there is nothing around political education, empowerment, and personal development. Serious questions have to be asked about the quality and the standard of education that’s been delivered by STTCs.

A member of the ITM argued that ‘is this acceptable that someone is doing a course for 15 years and still cannot read or write?’ He added that,

A major concern is the revolving door or merry-go round courses. People enrol and do a course for 2 years and they’re supposed to leave and then they do another course. Some people have been in centres for 20 years and at what point after 20 years of adult education are you not qualified for a job. You can show FETAC accreditation, many of those are exam based and many of those are doing assignments. Some people say that some people have FETAC 5 and they can’t read and write which should be impossible.

The National Co-ordinator for the STTCs pointed out that,

The certification outcomes which I am gathering at the moment validate the fact that Centres are providing certification outcomes to Travellers of a national standard. The FAS Special Employment Initiative for Travellers have identified STTCs as a useful educational institute for identifying ‘job ready’ Travellers and a number of Travellers have now set up their own businesses and found employment as a result of this initiative.

From the perspective of Pavee Point, STTCs are not helping Travellers progress onto further education. The curriculum is not geared towards a better standard of education. Pavee Point wishes to see Travellers stay in mainstream education and they view STTCs as a negative element in the educational prospects of Travellers. However, the Directors of the centres are of the opposite opinion. They view the centres as facilitating students on the path to employment and further education. The students in the research were very positive when asked about the centres. For them, the centres gave them an outlet in which to express themselves, upgrade their education and make them more employable. The research did emphasise that some students went to the centres because they felt comfortable and at ease and were bored at home. This arguably works against the goals of the centres regarding further education and employment opportunities.

#### **4.2.5 Leaving Certificate Applied**

None of the training centres researched offered the LCA. The secondary school teacher interviewed said that ‘the LCA is of only limited value to any student’. The Pavee Point representative was of the same opinion that the,

LCA is not worth the paper it’s written on and it has no real value even less when obtained from a traveller training centre. It has a little more weight when obtained from a mainstream school.

The Director of St. Basils centre said ‘We thought about doing it here but the drawback is that you have to have pretty high attendance for example over 80%. The Director of the C.E.A.R.T centre said ‘We don’t offer LCA. LCA doesn’t carry the weight that the Leaving Certificate does’. The Director of the Coolock centre claimed that ‘We’re not in a position to do LCA. Only a few would have the ability but the motivation isn’t there, they don’t want to do it’.

The general consensus of the Directors regarding the LCA was that they students may not have the ability to do the LCA. Secondly, the attendance rate was not at the required standard that the LCA calls for. Finally, the opinion was that the LCA was not adequate enough in terms of further education as third-level colleges do not recognise it for entry purposes.

#### **4.2.6 Allowance**

The new Training allowance rates effective from the 1st January 2008 include €197.80 for the training itself and for travel allowance of €32.60 (DES, 2008). The National Co-ordinator of the STTCs said the allowance available at the centres may encourage learners to remain in the centres'. The Director of the Coolock centre said, I have to say that after putting 1,500 people through the centre that nobody's ever said they want to come here because they want to get a couple of hundred euros a week. Whether that is another motive and they don't want to say that but I can only go on what people have actually told me and it was never said to me I need the money. The Director of C.E.A.R.T stated 'because they get an allowance here they look upon it as a job. To a certain extent it is because we are trying to get them to attend, be in a routine'.

On the other side, the representative from Pavee Point said,

I know Travellers who are doing well in school, who through their own choice or at the insistence of the parents, leave school to go the STTCs. They are attracted there because of the allowance they receive from FAS.

He added,

If there was no allowance given to the trainees, what sort of situation would we have then? I would claim that 80% of travellers would not go there if there was no allowance. For those who are unemployed it costs money to send a child to mainstream education but you actually get paid to go to a STTC.

The ITM representative said,

The primary reason I see is that a lot of Travellers view their role in STTCs as work. So its work that gives you an allowance. Why would someone who has a Leaving Certificate and has accessed third level education go to something that is providing basic Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)?

#### **4.3 Traveller Culture and Lifestyle**

The theme of Traveller culture and lifestyle came up in conversation quite a bit with the participants. It seemed to impact on the decisions that parents and children made in terms of education and why they went to STTCs. The Pavee Point Representative asserts that, 'There's also a tradition of your older sibling being in one. It's automatically done; this should be the same for mainstream education'. The ITM

representative stated that, 'there are issues within Travellers themselves. Travellers have dropped out really early. Families not living up to their responsibilities and ensuring kids stay on until at least Junior Certificate'. He added that,

In some cases from talking to Travellers, there's no space where Travellers can come together as Travellers. They're isolated within the community and there's no space where they can come together and STTCs provide that space. They have a bit of self worth because they're going to do something.

The ITM representative also stated that 'In some areas where Travellers have left school early, they pressurise other Travellers to leave early.' Added to the equation is the fact that 'within families the expectation for education was mainly for sacraments. They also came out knowing they were different and also getting inferior education'. Student A from St. Basil's remarked that,

I wouldn't be comfortable going to college. It wouldn't happen; it's a big issue among the travellers. If we came home we would get jeered and laughed at for having a rucksack just because we're going to school, people think we're soft going to school at our age. We shouldn't be at school we should be at home. They don't believe in going back into school and they don't believe in going back into college.

Assessing young Travellers views on mainstream education, there didn't seem to be an historic link with the education system. The ITM representative said that,

They can't wait to get out of there. There's a worrying level of absolute disengagement from the system. They think what's the point? There are a few Travellers who have gone on to do their Leaving Certificate and they have nothing from it.

There are also issues within the Traveller community itself that may take precedence over education. 'There are a lot of issues around feuding, drugs, mental health. At what point have Travellers had time to discuss what education means to them and what it can do for them?' The Pavee Point representative points out that there has been progress in terms how education is viewed amongst the Traveller community,

10 years ago, it wasn't the norm to transfer from primary to post-primary. You got your confirmation and Travellers didn't see a particular need for post-

primary. You're seeing a dramatic change of Travellers saying you need at least Junior Certificate to try and get on.

#### **4.4 Gender**

Another issue that was prominent was gender and education within the Traveller community. Student C from St. Basil's commented that 'It is difficult for the Traveller women and younger girls because it can be an issue with the older generation. Nowadays it's okay for a woman to work'. She added that,

A boy is more likely to get more work than a girl in manual work. They are more likely to hit the dole, their whole life is gone before they know it, married with children and that's it. I feel men aren't getting the education they deserve.

Another component of the gender issue for women is marriage,

It depends who you marry, they might want you at home all the time or they mightn't mind you working. I think that if a young woman sees three other women saying 'I want to do this job or this course and I'm going to come here' then that will encourage other women to do the same.

The student from Tullamore felt that,

Traveller students leave school after the Junior Certificate because they are seen as young women rather than teenagers. They also have to put up with the jokes and humiliation from other Traveller girls' and boys' for example "look at the big girl/ boy going to school with the small children.

She also argued that the STTCs were positive for Traveller women 'The STTCs are great resources for Traveller women because they experience triple discrimination, as women, as Travellers and as Traveller women'. The Director of St. Basil's made a point that,

There have been women who were in prison when they joined us and aren't anymore. We've had students who have been threatened with prison and I think by teaching mothers to read the whole family is going to benefit for generations to come.

She added that,

The Traveller community is quite a patriarchal society or culture. I think we should try and do something with the men; they are the ones who are in charge of the family. They are not going to be too thrilled if other members of the

family i.e. women progressing in the family. It makes them think 'where am I going? I think the whole family would benefit.

On the other hand, the Director from the Coolock centre said that in relation to employment 'We've had some successful employment; I'd have to say mostly with the males. Women tend not to; they'll either go onto a Community Employment scheme or stay at home and come back in 2 years time'. The Director of C.E.A.R.T. stated that,

There is also the black market economy which is still active amongst the men. The career path plan involves the dole i.e. marriage, dole. Absence of direction can lead to issues like alcoholism, domestic violence and suicide.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

## **5.1 Introduction**

The study involved an evaluation of the Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs). The aim of the research is to look at the role the centres play in Traveller education and in addition, the effects the centres have on the progression to further education be, that positive and/or negative. I interviewed three Directors from the STTCs and six students who are currently attending STTCs, a representative from Pavee Point, Irish Traveller Movement and the Co-ordinator for Traveller Training Centres and a secondary school teacher.

As previously mentioned the aim of the STTCs is to provide Travellers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to successfully make the transition to work and adult life. The courses offered in the centres include Childcare, Literacy and Numeracy, Computers, ECDL, Hairdressing, Personal Development, Junior Certificate, CSPE, Traveller history, Communication and Preparation for work. Many of these courses are accredited by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). This means that they are ‘creating opportunities for all learners in further education and training to have their achievements recognised and providing access to systematic progression pathways’ (FETAC, 2008). The courses run for two years depending on the level the student has reached.

The participants are mainly men and women from the Traveller community, who have left school with either minimal or no qualifications. One centre has recently enrolled a woman from the settled community. The centres used to take under 18’s but the age cohort has changed and the centres only take people over 18 with no upper age limit.

## **5.2 Management**

Each centre is managed by a Director. All the Directors of the centres in the research are from the settled community. All the Directors teach in the centres and one Director used to work as a Community Worker in Youthreach. Another Director said that he or she counselled students as well. The Director said that their role varies from day to day. They give guidance on careers and further education and arrange interviews for students. One Director said that they even drive students to interviews. It appears there is great commitment on the part of the individual Directors to improve the life chances of the students.

The Department of Education and Science (DES) is responsible for the administration of the centres. This has the effect of regulating and standardising all the centres. Every centre is subject to audits and is monitored by the Inspectorate from the DES. The teachers are required to have the relevant qualifications. One Director informed me that they had no contract or job description. They were the key worker, managed the budgets, taught and counselled. It seems that that particular Director is under-staffed and is fulfilling numerous roles that they may not be qualified for.

None of the centres kept an official record of their students' progress after they left the centres. They depended on word of mouth information in terms of what the students did when they left the centres. This is arguably because the Traveller community is a very tightly knit group based on family ties. This was facilitated by the fact that one of the centres is based within a Traveller housing estate. In another centre, even when students left the centre, they often dropped in to ask for advice and so on. As mentioned previously in the findings, several students return to the centres to pursue other courses. Furthermore, the students may not wish for records of their attendance, grades and so on to be kept on file.

As the DES has been in charge of the administration for the last thirteen years, it is surprising that there are no records or statistics on the outcomes or progression of students. This would benefit the centres in terms of feedback and analysis of what courses are yielding the best results and what measures need to be put in place to improve outcomes for the students. It is also crucial to analyse if these centres are fulfilling their role as education centres.

### **5.3 Role of STTCs**

The present emphasis of the centres is to,

Provide essential education in a more holistic-centred approach, help to break down barriers of discrimination and engender more co-operation and respect between the Travelling community and the 'settled' community. The increased adoption of educational programmes in the Centre, accredited by the (FETAC) has resulted in broad-based educational provision (STTCs, 2008).

The original emphasis of the centres was to provide Travellers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to successfully make the transition to work and adult life, and to participate fully in their communities. It is apparent that the educational needs of Travellers have changed since the first training centre was established 34 years ago.

The curriculum has expanded to offer Leaving Certificate Applied and Junior Certificate. There is also a lot more emphasis on courses like Childcare, Women's Health, Information Technology, Personal Development and Communication. Several of these courses are FETAC accredited which means that there are assessments and exams involved. Students work on a modular basis and can then progress onto further education. It is envisaged that students who complete these courses will increase their chances of gaining employment. The duration of the courses are two years over a 44 week period.

#### **5.4 Why attend STTC's**

In the research, the reasons why people attended STTCs were to further their education, get employment, to gain new skills and transfer that into the workplace. Several students said they felt safe in the centres. They also thought it was a better alternative than the dole. In some cases, people went to centres because they did not want to be sitting at home and in addition it got them out of the house. Therefore, the centres may be seen as an outlet for Travellers to congregate and socialise.

One factor that kept recurring in the research was the allowance that is paid to the students who attend STTCs. The students interviewed never mentioned the allowance as an incentive to attend the centres. One centre Director said that when he asks applicants why they want to attend, the allowance is never mentioned. However, he added that 'it doesn't mean that the allowance is not a reason to attend'. In looking at the schedule for students they are in the centres from nine o'clock to approximately five o'clock, Monday to Friday. This arguably means that they would be unable to hold down a full-time job. So in essence, the STTCs are seen as a job in the eyes of some students. The students who participate in courses in the STTCs receive an allowance depending on their attendance at the centre. One centre Director said 'if they do not attend a class, money is deducted from their allowance so they get penalised for non-attendance'.

Another factor involved in why people attend centres may be due to historical reasons. Generations of families attend centres. In a centre a person could be accompanied by his/her sister, brother mother or cousins. The security of being with their extended families and with other Travellers can be extremely comfortable as opposed to the discrimination they may face in mainstream schools. Parents who may have had bad experiences in school feel more comfortable knowing their children are

in a Traveller only environment? The STTCs were seen as a natural option for Travellers as well as it being historically inbuilt into their culture. One of the other choices open to Travellers leaving mainstream education after the Junior Certificate is Youthreach.

The programme is directed at unemployed young early school leavers aged 15-20. It offers participants the opportunity to identify and pursue viable options within adult life, and provides them with opportunities to acquire certification. It operates on a full-time, year-round basis (Youthreach, 2008).

As previously mentioned, one Director said some parents expressed reservations about sending their children to Youthreach as it was not in line with their values and beliefs. There were issues around sexuality and drugs.

The centres now cater for people aged 18 and over. This will have an impact on whom they attract to the centres. Prior to that, the centres catered for under 18's. The centres were criticised for acting as a magnet for drawing Traveller children out of mainstream. This is very important as a lot of Traveller were completing their Junior Certificate and then leaving mainstream education. The research highlighted that there are different age groups going to the centres. Added to this, are the varying academic abilities of the different age groups. This can hinder the progress of both students who may for example have a Junior Certificate and those students who have a basic primary education and or those who are experiencing education for the first time. As the centres have limited space in relation to number of classrooms, they have to put students of different capabilities in together. Therefore the age category may be too broad to fully facilitate everyone in the centres. Some students felt uncomfortable being in a class with older Traveller women. They like to stick with their own age group. However, in one centre they were mixed according to ability. It was felt that it was a more competitive environment for them and they were in with students who were on the same level as them academically. Therefore, more careful monitoring of potential students at the application stage is needed perhaps.

Another crucial factor is where you have students coming into the centres who have a Leaving Certificate. Arguably, if the centres cannot offer more than a course then the Director should not be accepting candidates of that standard. They should be referred elsewhere for example a Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course. The Directors advise the students where to go regarding further education and

employment options outside of the centres; they try to arrange job interviews with local employers. In reality, the onus is on the students as to what option they chose. The centres have little control or influence over the students once they leave the centre. However, it was evident that several students returned to the centres to start new courses. Perhaps the course they did previously did not suit them or they see the centres as a safe place where they are with like-minded people.

A worrying aspect arose in the research that, some people having spent 20 years in centres, are not qualified for a job. So the question needs to be asked, why did this happen? Arguably, any individual who has spent 20 years in an educational setting should be job-ready. The Directors of the centres have a responsibility to the students to prepare them for employment and further education. It is detrimental to their progress and creates a culture of dependence if they are not so equipped. This is of no benefit to the student in the long run. Also, the courses offered may not benefit students the way they are meant to. The European Computer Driving Course requires good literacy and numeracy skills in order to gain a certificate in it. As previously mentioned the literacy skills of a lot of students who enter the centres are quite poor and this can have an adverse effect on overall standards or outcomes. The hairdressing course is a very popular course but again in order to succeed in this profession it requires a lot of on the job experience. As noted before, students found that many employers would not give them a job because of who they were. One option the students have to become self-employed which brings its own problems and challenges in terms of book-keeping, tax returns and so on.

Finally, it was noted by one of the interviewees that several students known to him, came out of the centres not knowing how to read and write. This is disconcerting as poor literacy and numeracy skills were highlighted by all Directors as a key problem amongst their students upon entering the centres. The students are also undertaking exams and assessments in FETAC accredited exams. The centres in the study take in approximately 30 students each, so it may not be that difficult to keep a regular check on their progress. Responsibility may arguably lie with the teaching staff and the Director. The teachers have contact with the students in class and also are responsible for correcting their assignments. They should be aware of how each student is doing. One might argue that a teacher can only do so much and that students are responsible for completing assignments themselves. Another viewpoint may be that the issue that some people may be at a different level in terms of ability.

It is challenging for a teacher to teach students who are not all at the same stage as each other.

### **5.5 Curriculum**

All the Directors of the centres emphasised the poor literacy levels students have when they first come into the centres. Thus, all the centres offer literacy and numeracy courses. One Director noted that some students came in having completed the Junior Certificate but could barely do maths assignments. Therefore, one might query these students' readiness for employment and further education. Is it too much too soon for some of the students? There seems to be an imbalance between abilities and the courses offered. If the literacy levels of students are poor, surely improving that area is more important than sending them out into the work force after two years. They may have a false sense of their capabilities and this may lead to disappointment down the line. In addition, the centres offer a limited number of courses relating to employment and further education.

### **5.6 Traveller Culture and Lifestyle**

From the research, it was evident that the Traveller community do not have an historical link with education. It appears that in the past, Traveller children attended up to primary school partly so they could avail of the sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation. The Traveller community are quite religious, and it is important for their children to receive the holy sacraments. However as previously mentioned, parents are legally obliged to keep their children in school until they complete the Junior Certificate. This has an impact on how parents view education. It is a positive step as it may mean more engagement between parents and schools. It may start of a new norm amongst Travellers in terms of progressing further in education.

A contrasting issue seems to be that once a Traveller girl leaves school after completing her Junior Certificate she is seen as a young woman rather than a teenager. Therefore, she may have to stay at home and help her mother look after her siblings. The other choice may be to get married and have a family. However from speaking to the female students, it seems that several of them want to get an education and career before they think about marriage. They also stated that they will probably get married later, around their mid twenties.

Education is viewed differently amongst people within the Traveller community. If a young person is seen coming home from school with a rucksack on their back, there is a probability that they will be jeered by their peers. Furthermore, one of the students said that 'her parents wouldn't allow her to come home with a rucksack' It is viewed as 'being soft' and Travellers are too old to be going to school. Therefore, third-level is not an option for a lot of people.

In addition, many Traveller parents do not realise that there have been changes in the education system. The problem of access into mainstream education is not as much of an issue as it was ten years ago. Another factor was the fact that up until 2004/2005 there existed, special Traveller classes. This had the effect of segregating Traveller children from their settled peers.

### **5.7 Gender**

The research revealed that the centres were very important to women. It gave them more independence, confidence and freedom to pursue their goals. This was evident in the all female centre, where the women felt they could learn without feeling uncomfortable. They said they would feel intimidated if there were men in the centre. The centres were also beneficial to women who had never been to school and had reared families all their adult lives. It gave them an opportunity for first chance education. This was also crucial in terms of improving their literacy and numeracy skills.

The centres provide an outlet for married women who have reared families and have not had the chance to experience education. They wish to improve their literacy skills so they can help their children. This is positive as it penetrates the whole family. The centres are a new outlet for Traveller women, one which they have never had before. The Traveller community is quite patriarchal and women are viewed as home-makers and wives. They are expected to look after the children while the husband goes out to work or as the research found some men sign on the dole. Speaking to the students it seems that the mind-set is changing amongst Traveller women. They want to better themselves and feel that they don't need to get married as young. The centres have instilled a sense of confidence, togetherness and self-reliance amongst them. They feel they can achieve anything if they put their mind to it.

Also, it was evident that even if they did get married they were more likely to try and reach a compromise with their husbands in terms of careers. Traveller women



are realising that there are more options for them than staying at home and bringing up a family. However, it depends on the man that they marry; if he is open to a woman having a career then there will be no problem. The women pointed out that traditionally when you get married it is for life and it is frowned upon to separate. Therefore, it is important for them to meet a man who is open-minded.

As mentioned above, the centres are seen as a safe place for Travellers to congregate. However, there are different tiers of what is acceptable within Traveller culture in terms of gender. Firstly, some Traveller parents do not want their children mixing with their peers in mainstream education after the Junior Certificate. Secondly, within a Traveller only educational setting, some parents do not want boys and girls mixing in the same classrooms. Having said that the female students did add that they still take on board everything their parents say. They added that the boys have more freedom than the girls.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **6.1 Conclusion**

The research has drawn attention to a number of issues that affect the educational outcomes of the Traveller community. These issues go back decades and while they are still present, progress is being made albeit slowly. This progress has a lot to do with the persistent campaigning of the various organisations representing Travellers. The issue of access to mainstream schools by Travellers is not seen as a major problem presently. However, it is still an issue for Travellers who move from place to place. There are issues around school enrolment due to Travellers families arriving late into the school year. Furthermore, discrimination still exists in terms of access but it is arguably more subtle. The present challenges that the Traveller community face are equality of outcomes, results and retention in mainstream education. They are behind in terms of academic abilities and standards of achievement.

There are also issues within the Traveller community itself regarding their relationship with the education. As previously mentioned, Traveller parents are very wary of the education system. They themselves have not had a positive experience as children growing up. Not only were they in separate classes, they always had that sense of being different and being treated differently. They have brought this sense of suspicion with them with regard to how they view education for their children. Traditionally, they kept their children in school up to primary level in order for them to receive the sacraments. This situation has changed now as parents are legally obliged to keep their children in school up to three years in secondary school or the equivalent of the Junior Certificate. This means that the fall-off rate for Traveller children in mainstream education is now at Junior Certificate level. The challenge therefore is to try and retain them up to Leaving Certificate. Thus schools have to be more inclusive and intercultural in their enrolment policies, school policies and curriculum.

The aim of the research was to evaluate the Senior Traveller Training Centres and their role in further education for the Traveller community. These centres are seen as an alternative to mainstream education for Travellers. The objective of the centres is to help Travellers gain employment and/or to progress onto further education. They provide a positive space for Travellers who may feel marginalised in society. The Directors were very enthusiastic and dedicated and at the same time realistic as to what they could achieve. They were aware of the problems that are inherent in the Traveller community. The female students I talked to were satisfied with the centres

and the courses they were doing. They felt more confident and independent and that they could achieve anything they put their mind to. They were more aware of their employment rights. As Traveller women they were not tied down to the idea of getting married at a young age. They felt they could pursue a career before settling down.

Contrary to that some people see the centres in a negative light. They question the quality of education. The centres operate as a pull factor for Travellers away from mainstream education. This had been a big problem in the past for under 18's but that has changed as the centres only take people over 18 now. The age group arguably seems too varied from 18 upwards. An alternative for the 18 to 20 year olds might be Youthreach. The curriculum in the centres has received negative feedback in terms of its usefulness for further education and the knowledge society we live in today. The research seems to suggest that the centres need to be re-structured. The target group needs to be defined. One option is based on Community Education, whereby Traveller culture and values are still respected. Education will be maintained in terms of foundation levels based on literacy and numeracy skills, personal development and citizenship. Entwined in this will be advocacy and access to information on issues like education, accommodation, housing, social welfare and childcare for example. It will take a lot of co-operation on the part of the Traveller community, Government and society as a whole.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

- It is unusual that after 34 years, there are no Directors from the Traveller community. If the centres are to be representative of the Traveller community then having a Traveller as a Director should be a priority. This has the added effect of providing a role model for the students. If Travellers are appointed as Directors, it will benefit the centres and the students as they are arguably more in tune and aware of the issues facing the Traveller community.
- As mentioned in the findings, one Director had no job description or contract. This arguably shows a lack of commitment and professionalism on the part of the Department of Education and Science. This is paramount in any

organisation if it is to be run effectively and efficiently. The role of all the staff must be clearly defined.

- The centres also need more resources such as key workers, who are equipped to deal with issues that arguably the Director and teaching staff may not be qualified to deal with.
- There should be more joined up thinking regarding matching courses with students' abilities. As a number of students have literacy and numeracy difficulties upon entering the centres, it is paramount that they are taught in an environment that is conducive to them progressing at their own pace. Therefore, students of varying abilities should not be in the same classrooms.
- In order to achieve the previous recommendation, the assessment of students at the initial interview stage may need to be more rigorous.
- The age cohort of the students in the centres now range from 18 upwards. This can be detrimental in terms of catering for the differing age groups present in the centres. The research found that students' ages range from 18 up to 60 for example. There is no comparison between an 18 year old student who has a Junior Certificate level education and a woman who has never experienced education due to family commitments. Thus, the centres need to clarify their role and the demographic group they are catering to. They cannot satisfy the needs of all their students with the resources they have.
- As previously mentioned, more Traveller students are staying in education until their Junior Certificate, Youthreach may be more appropriate for people aged between 15 and 20. This is a viable option along with mainstream education especially as the STTCs no longer take under 18's. This may also be more beneficial to their development in terms of integrated education.
- The role of the centres is to meet the educational, social and cultural needs of Travellers. However, another way of looking at the centres is from an integrated, community based education model. The Department of Education and Science (2000, 110) define Community Education as, 'an extension of the service provided by second and third-level education institutions into the wider community. It is education in the community but not of the community' (Aontas, 2008). Therefore, community education would facilitate the older generation of Travellers that missed out on education or who left after primary

school. It is not so much about further education but more so about needs-based education, empowerment, culture, community development, citizen rights and social inclusion.

- The centres offer various FETAC courses in childcare, hairdressing, computers for example. Another option for potential students may be to access these courses through other agencies such as Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS). VTOS provides opportunities for unemployed people to return to adult education.
- Following on from the two previous recommendations, the STTCs may still be viable if they are re-structured. The re-structuring would follow the lines of a community centre. It would operate as a focal point for the Traveller and settled community to access services relating to accommodation, childcare employment, social welfare and further education for example. In addition, the centres could provide courses in literacy and numeracy skills, Traveller culture and computers for beginners. These courses would be seen as the first step into education for those who are experiencing first chance education. This arguably will target a whole new group who may not have had the opportunity to access the centres before or who fell through the cracks.

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# APPENDICES 1

Sender X

Date

Ph:

Pavee Point

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you in relation to a thesis I am doing in DIT Mountjoy Square. I am basing my thesis on Senior Traveller Training Centres and their future.

I am aware that you are of the opinion that the Traveller centres should be phased out and the funding re-invested elsewhere. In addition, you see the centres as diverting young people away from possible third-level courses or further education.

I was wondering if it is possible to interview you or a colleague some time in the future regarding the above issues. I am trying to get different perspectives so as to gain an overall picture.

I will be delighted to meet you at your convenience and, should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

---

Y

## **APPENDICES 2**

### **Letter of Consent**

To whom it may concern,

I am presently studying for a Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies in the DIT Mountjoy Square. As part of my course work, I have to complete a dissertation, mine of which is centred on the evaluation of the Senior Traveller Training Centres. I wish to ask for your consent to participate in an interview on the above research question. The information will be kept between me and my supervisor.

### **LETTER OF CONSENT**

I \_\_\_\_\_ give my informed consent to participate in the proposed research project. I have read the information sheet related to the project and have been informed of my role. I have been provided with the contact details of the necessary persons should I have any queries and understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.

Should I wish to participate there is no obligation to continue to do so, and I may withdraw at any time without any consequences. All information gathered will be treated with the strictest confidentiality.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **APPENDICES 3**

### **STTCS and Traveller Organisations Interview Questions**

1. The Traveller community are a distinct ethnic minority group of Irish people who differ from the general population in terms of culture, lifestyle and treatment by society. What impact does this difference have on the community as a whole?
2. One of the issues when looking at education within the Traveller community is the difficulties in obtaining access to mainstream education. How would you assess the present situation?
3. A second issue is the aim to retain traveller pupils in the senior cycle on a par with their settled peers. How do you see this being achieved?
4. If this is to be achieved, what role do the parents and the wider traveller community play?
5. Do you think there is a clash of cultures between the Traveller and settled community in terms of educational norms?
6. Do you think the curriculum in the mainstream schools needs to be changed to cater for the Traveller children's unique culture and traditions?
7. How can mainstream schools help in the process of retention of Traveller students up to and beyond the Junior Certificate?

8. The Senior Traveller Training Centre's have been in operation for over the last 30 years, therefore it seems that there is still a need for the service they offer within the Traveller community itself. How do you assess their role in further education?
9. Pavee Point claim that the 'STTC's should be phased out; resources should be ring-fenced and invested in supports for Travellers to be integrated into mainstream schooling and vocational training'. Could you elaborate on this statement?
10. The curriculum in the centres concentrates on general education which includes the Leaving Cert Applied, vocational training, work experience and personal development of which the main aim is to improve the chances of participants in the employment market? How would you assess the curriculum in terms of credibility and usefulness?
11. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some students who, even having completed their Leaving Cert, pursue courses in the training centres as opposed to going onto further education. What factors might lead a person to decide to go down that route?
12. The Department of Education and Science have taken over the responsibility for the administration and development of policy in regards to the training centres. How do you view this development?
13. Can you see any way in which the STTC's can still operate and facilitate the community in a positive way without being phased out altogether?



## **APPENDICES 4**

### **Student Interview Questions**

1. As a member of the traveller community, what problems have you experienced within Irish society in general?
2. What were your experiences in Primary school?
3. What were your experiences in Secondary school?
4. Did you feel that the subjects being taught in the school were relevant to you?
5. Did you find it difficult to enrol in the schools in your area?
6. If so, what were the other choices you had instead of school?
7. Why did you decide to go to the Cara Park Training Centre?
8. What subjects are you doing?
9. Do you feel that these subjects are useful to you?
10. If you were to change anything in the centre, what would it be?
11. Do you feel that the centre will give you a better chance of finding a job or to go onto further education?
12. Do you think there is a need for the centres within the traveller community?
13. What do you hope to do in the near future?

