

The Wagon Project

An initiative
by Southside
Travellers
Action Group



“ This is
just the
beginning.”



Acronyms

CYPSC	Children and Young People's Services Committee
CfL	Connecting for Life
DLR	Dún Laoghaire Rathdown
ETB	Education and Training Board
FET	Further Education Training
HRB	Health Research Board
HSE	Health Service Executive
IADT	Institute of Art, Design and Technology
IMA	Irish Museums Association
ITM	Irish Traveller Movement
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
NTRIS	National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy
NTHAP	National Traveller Health Action Plan
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
ROSP	Resource Officer for Suicide Prevention
STAG	Southside Traveller Action Group
TASK	Training Awareness and Skills Knowledge
WHO	World Health Organisation



Stakeholders

No.	Organisation	Person/People
1	STAG Director and all the staff and coordinators in STAG	Geraldine Dunne
2	Traveller Men's Shed	John O' Brien Patrick Slevin
3	TASK Trainees	Natasha Kavanagh Jerry Doran Jessica Doran Jerry Murphy Jessica Doyle Karl Smith Larry Connors Anthony O'Brien Sadie Murphy Margaret Doran Kevin Cash Wall Amber Quinn Bridget Cox
4	Hazel House	Gerry Farrell
5	HSE Traveller Mental Health Coordinator CHO 6	Peter O' Reilly
6	Resource Officer for Suicide Prevention (2022) / Area Lead for Mental Health Engagement (2023)	Andrea Koenigstorfer
7	Dun Laoghaire Rathdown CYPSC Coordinator	Helena O' Brien
8	IADT Access Officer	Sinead Mc Entee
9	Age-Friendly Programme Manager & Social Inclusion Officer	Siobhán Nic Gaoithín

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Introduction

“It’s a Live Museum”

Paper flowers, camphor balls and buttons are the coded mementoes of a tradition now enshrined in the permanent installation of a newly built Traveller wagon at Cork’s Public Museum (Irish Times, 2005). STAG “Men’s Shed” took on the dream and vision of building a traditional barrel top old-style Wagon through a Men’s Shed initiative. Something that STAG and its members were longing to achieve.

The Wagon Project was initiated and led by two Traveller men who passed on the tradition of Wagon building to the younger generation. The aim of the project was to promote positive mental health among Traveller men and young Travellers, through culturally appropriate means.

The hope was to attract Traveller men to come together with a common interest and to create a Men’s Shed group. There, they could engage in showcasing and sharing their skillsets, as well as gain all the health benefits of establishing a Men’s Shed. Traditionally, Wagon trades and skill set making across time and down through Traveller generations has declined. This initiative was an opportunity to awaken the spirit and enthusiasm of Travellers in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown (DLR). Availing of the supported initiatives would help them reinvest and take pride in their heritage, culture and create something they could be proud of and lead for the coming months.

There were two men out of six at the start of the conversations that agreed to take on the initiative and commit to becoming “shedders”. They had the specific knowledge, shared different skillsets, and most importantly had the stamina and good will factor to stay committed to the Men’s Shed initiatives and reach the overall goal of building the Wagon.

There were several highlights and challenges along the way, some visible and some not so visible. The pictures of this journey will visibly showcase the initiative from start to finish and document the craftsmanship and the level of work it took to achieve and build the Wagon. Participants from the Men’s Shed said that they are creating a living museum for people to experience the essence of Traveller heritage.

The Wagon Project has demonstrated that initiatives like these provide supports and pathways for improved mental health among communities.

The project needed to be financed and funded, however, the Traveller men dedicated all their time voluntarily to the project until its final completion. The initiative’s success is down to the commitment and dedication of all who believed in it and all who donated their time, energy, wisdom, and dedication to the vision of this initiative.

When the men from the Men’s Shed were describing their experience of coproducing the Wagon Project, the joy in working together, and the pleasure and pride in everything that has been achieved including a celebration of Traveller culture, they said:

“It’s a Live Museum.”

Every element of the social connection, the heritage, the pride, and joinery skills have created results, in addition to the core culturally specific mental health initiative it originated as.

This report presents the evidence for supporting the Wagon Project as a Culturally Specific Mental Health Initiative. Three noteworthy features have emerged from this initiative:

1. The Wagon Project expands on an educational and heritage dimension.
2. It responds to the significant mental health needs of the Traveller community (old and young) highlighted in multiple data sources and
3. It is aligned with several policy frameworks and branded health messages such as Act Belong Commit (Department of Health, 2020).

With these solid foundations, the questions posed by participants raises the bigger question of sustainability: Where do we go from here?

“We want to continue to learn and grow.”

“We’re excited to be here.”

“I like been kept busy like this.”

(TASK Trainee)

This report concludes with a series of recommendations informed from the stakeholder learning, participant feedback and collective enthusiasm for this initiative.

**“Did you see the shelves in the Wagon?
...I made them”**

(TASK Trainee)

The Wagon Project moves beyond a community development approach to community engagement and empowerment. It is widely recognised that Travellers are among the most disadvantaged and marginalised people in Irish society. This negatively impacts on their health and wellbeing. The aim of this project was to address some of these issues. This was achieved through the growing of an idea from a conversation, consultations, relationship building and coproduction process. The strength of this initiative arises from cross-sectoral learning: The belief and support of the stakeholders for the project further empowered the participants, while the passion and knowledge of the participants improved the understanding the stakeholders have of the challenges Travellers face in our society. It also provided agencies with a direct platform to engage, on a one-to-one basis, with the Traveller community, to gain invaluable knowledge of Traveller issues, and to gain an understanding of their culture.

STAG Wagon Project Conceptual Framework of a Culturally Specific Mental Health Initiative

As defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO), mental health is a state of wellbeing in which the individual recognises their own abilities and can cope with normal stresses in daily life (WHO, 2022). The conceptual framework around this initiative describes eight interrelated factors that represent major themes in a Culturally Specific Mental Health Initiative from the general (physical, emotional, cognitive, and social) to the specific (interagency, culturally specific, environment, stewardship).

The Eight Factors of The Culturally Specific Mental Health Initiative: The Wagon Project

1. Physical Health

The STAG Wagon Project based at Hazel House, Tribadden, Co. Dublin is engaging individuals in both (a) the physical labour of joinery and (b) walking. The location is designed for embracing nature, spiritual walks and tending to animals. Examining the physical health benefits more deeply, individuals practise both large and fine motor skills, individuals are physically moving and physically active for the four hours they are on site.

Data from the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study suggest that Traveller men have a life expectancy

of only 63 years (versus 78 years in the general population). For Traveller women, that figure is 71 years (versus 82 years in the general population). This means Irish Travellers die about 11-15 years earlier than the general population. (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, 2010)

Traveller Primary Health Care Projects have key performance indicators, some of which are cardiovascular health, diabetes, and mental health. As a physical health priority, the Wagon Project incorporates physical activity which contributes to the national Traveller health priorities of improving cardiovascular health and reducing diabetes.



2. Emotional Health

Emotional health refers to having an awareness of your feelings and emotions as well as having the ability to manage and express these feelings in an age-appropriate fashion. When our mental health begins to decline, so does our ability to properly process and control our emotions. This can be particularly true during times of mental duress such as stress, trauma, or depression. If these problems continue for a prolonged period without treatment, it can negatively affect both your mental and physical health and well-being. Uniquely, the Wagon Project hosted in Hazel House is a programme born out of the premise of unconditional acceptance of each participant for who they are as people.

Travellers experience racism in many of their interactions across their life cycle. The Wagon Project hosted by Hazel House, in its unique environment is a mental health sanctuary for all, was unanimously reported as both a safe place and a place to celebrate individuals and communities. Travellers' emotional health needs are significant, they are exposed to prolonged discrimination. (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017)

Racial trauma, or race-based stress which Traveller's experience, is defined as "...the events of danger related to real or perceived experience of racial discrimination." These include threats or actual events that can elicit shame as well as witnessing harm to others. As with all forms of oppression, such experiences often arise within an intersectional context, where different group memberships – including gender, sexual orientation, and social class – can intersect in ways that amplify the adverse impact of discrimination. Racial trauma is characterized as involving ongoing exposure over time to experiences of stress or injury both direct and vicarious and is typically interpersonal in nature (Comas-Díaz, Hall and Neville, 2019).

Irish research has demonstrated that racism affects multiple domains of development – ranging from educational outcomes to mental health (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth [DECDIY], 2022). The Sharing the Vision Campaign, Act Belong Commit is an integral part of the emotional health component (Department of Health, 2020). The Hazel House Act Belong Commit framework is mapped out in the figure below:

Figure 1: Hazel House Act Belong Commit Framework



Act Belong Commit is proven to:

1. Increase people's awareness that there is something they can and should do to protect and boost their mental health.
2. Change attitudes towards mental health and illness.
3. Encourage people to engage in activities to promote their mental health.

3. Cognitive Health

Cognition refers to our ability to think, recognize, obtain, comprehend, and answer information that is presented to us. Examples of cognition include concentration, the ability to remember things, analyzation, problem-solving, categorizing, and reordering. We need to be able to do all these things to be successful in our daily lives in work, social, and academic environments. Cognitive health is related to overall mental health. (Montare Behavioral Health, 2022)

Woodworking involves skills like measurement, tool use, analytical reasoning, verbal skills, and cognitive spatial ability. Participants spoke about the satisfaction they felt when a task was completed, the personal sense of achievement and the recognition from peers and trainers.

“Did you see the roofing? We did all of those ourselves; they gave us the timber and we refurbished it here.”

“I did all the shelving.”

“We can make one ourselves now, yeah well ... with Gerry”

(TASK Trainees)

4. Social Health

In a digital era, social health might be the biggest thing that people are struggling with right now. For a Traveller, isolated by wider society and challenged navigating an ever-changing society unaccepting of their identity and culture, social health is often compromised. Members of the Traveller community can feel isolated within their community for many reasons ranging from grief, relationship status to sexuality. Mental health is very much connected to our ability to have regular to semi-regular social interactions.

A Haslam et al. study from 2016 found that being well integrated into social networks is a protective factor against depression, and cognitive decline. Similar studies have found that belongingness and social identification protects against or alleviates depressive symptoms and enhances cognitive health.

More than 40 United Nations Agencies state in a joint statement that Indigenous peoples still face exclusion and vulnerability despite recent progress. Ten years after the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, progress has been made in terms of the formal recognition of Indigenous peoples in several countries, including Travellers in Ireland in 2017, but they overwhelmingly continue to face discrimination, marginalization, and major challenges in enjoying their basic rights (United Nations [UN], 2017).

A 2022 Burnett et al. study on “Spirituality, Community Belonging, and Mental Health Outcomes of Indigenous Peoples during the COVID-19 Pandemic” informs us that community belonging was associated with positive mental health outcomes. This establishes that Indigenous-led cultural programs that foster community belonging may promote the mental health of Indigenous Peoples. The researchers found a strong association between cultural connectedness (as measured by the Cultural Connectedness Scale) and indicators of mental health, suggesting that cultural connectedness is an important contributor to Indigenous youths' overall mental health and well-being.

5. Culturally Specific

Indigenous populations and communities around the world confront historical, cultural, socioeconomic, and forced geographic limitations that have profound impacts on mental wellness. The impacts of colonialism and, for some Indigenous populations, forced residential schooling and the resulting loss of culture and family ties, have contributed to higher risks of mental illness in these groups. In addition, there are barriers to healing and mental wellness, including inconsistent cultural competence of mainstream mental health professionals, coupled with the limited numbers of indigenous mental health professionals (Sones et al., 2010).

This is also the case for Irish Travellers. In a context of persistent disadvantage and segregation, Irish Travellers were officially recognised as an ethnic minority in March 2017 (European Commission, 2017). This recognition of the distinct heritage, culture and identity of Travellers and their special place in Irish society is hugely important to Traveller pride, to Traveller self-esteem and to overcoming the legacy of marginalisation and discrimination that the community has experienced (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017).

Culturally specific is described as a separate component for the framework and learning purposes but is a part of every component of a culturally specific mental health initiative. This submersion throughout all components contributes to the success.



6. Environment

The environment we live and work in forms part of the wider context of our lives. The mental health sanctuary of Hazel House, its location physically at the foothills of the Dublin mountains, a cafe with a carpentry workshop, is just a few kilometres from suburbia. There are chickens pecking around, and ducks squawking in the background - Hazel House is an immersion of nature therapy. The location and design of the Hazel House environment is to create a soothing experience to connect with oneself and the natural environment. This location provides cultural acceptance and recognition of the Traveller community. By virtue of facilitating the Wagon project, Hazel House values the Traveller culture. But Hazel House is more than accepting and appreciative. When you approach Hazel House, the Wagon is visible, not hidden away, not a one day a week project but an integral part of the work undertaken by Hazel House. It is a clear validation for all the Travellers who are involved in this initiative and a clear statement to the public, that Hazel House values and respects individuals, families, cultures, and communities including Travellers.

Hazel House does not have broadband coverage. Trainees said they look forward to the digital break. When they are at Hazel House, they are there for themselves and to focus on their work. Participants said that the absence of broadband stopped them from needlessly checking their phones or hearing notifications to distract them.

“It’s peaceful here, focused when we’re here, busy.”

“There’s no distractions and I love it.”

(TASK Trainees)



It is emphasised in an article named “Spaces & Places: Understanding Sense of Belonging and Cultural Engagement Among Indigenous Youth” in the International Journal of Qualitative Methods (Liebenberg et al., 2019) that Indigenous youth continue to live with a socioeconomic and political legacy of marginalisation and they are confronted by environments harmful to their psychosocial development. As such, meaningful connection to community together with cultural continuity are important contributors to resilience. The cocreation of the Wagon Project with Traveller mentorship from the Men’s Shed and leadership from STAG certainly creates the continuity and contributors for meaningful connection and resilience.

7. Interagency

“Their eyes were haunted, their hands were shaking, and now their eyes are like children’s eyes under a Christmas tree. Their physical and mental demeanour has changed.”

(Stakeholder)

The terms “multi-agency”, “interagency”, “interdisciplinary” or “joint working” are all used interchangeably to refer to any collaboration between agencies, stakeholders or between professionals from different agencies; for this report, we are using the term interagency.

The stakeholders involved in the Wagon Project began with the Traveller Mental Health Co-ordinator and then Resource Officer for Suicide Prevention, who reached out to the Community Liaison Officer in STAG. This collaboration was with a view to exploring with Traveller men how best to support them with their mental health and the contagion of suicide in their community. From Traveller led conversations and a community development approach, the men identified a series of areas that they would be keen to learn from horticulture to Wagon making. Coincidentally, around the same time, an introduction was made between the HSE Traveller Mental Health Coordinator and Gerry Farrell, GROW Chairperson and Businessman/Joiner/Owner of Hazel House. This partnership of five stakeholders sowed the seeds of the Wagon Project. A new partnership was made, with an invitation to include DLR CYPSC. The DLR CYPSC Coordinator was approached with a view to seek CYPSC Healthy Ireland Funding for the initiative and provide a link to children and young people up to the age of 24 years. The STAG Training Awareness Skills and Knowledge (TASK) Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 4 Programme Coordinator and Trainees were from this point included in the Wagon Project.

Interagency working achieves changes in the way agencies and the personnel within them work with each other. This includes an improved understanding of each other’s role, a greater willingness to share information, better insights into how a wider range of services can be mobilised to support children, and greater job satisfaction. Positive outcomes for agencies include a reduction in duplication, achievement of economies of scale, and a better connection to local communities. All these advantages to interagency working were echoed by each of the stakeholders, including the most recent stakeholder IADT Access Officer.

The most powerful feature of this interagency working group is the shared commitment to what works best for the participants. Each stakeholder can step out of their personal and professional egos, can hold their role and agency agenda while prioritising the care of each of the participants and the participant collective. Their commitment is to the wellbeing and experience of each of the participants and not just to the success of building a barrel top wagon within a timeframe. This commitment to the participants is where the bounty of successes has grown from.

With Traveller men and the TASK trainees being recognised as a significant stakeholder, this practise aligns with the HSE Coproduction in Practice Guidance Document 2018-2020 for recovery in Mental Health, which specify coproduction as a combination of the following:

Creation of an Exploratory Space	This is where all stakeholders come together to create new knowledge.
Collaborative Process	All stakeholders share their various perspectives with a view to reaching desirable outcomes.
Power Sharing	A sharing of power between all stakeholders based on recognising different areas of expertise, and resulting in shared ownership of decisions.
Enhancement of Knowledge	Recognising, understanding, and using the various sources of knowledge.
Relationship of Equals	Relationships that are based on mutual respect.
Non-linear	A journey with ups and downs from which we learn.
A Continuum of Practice	Supporting recovery and service improvement at all stages of service provision.

(Department of Health, 2017)

Involving members of the Traveller community, a recognised priority group across all policies as an equal stakeholder, is best practise. The undisputable evidence of why this is best practise is the results. The HSE Health Services Change Guide (2018) presents the key steps in developing capacity for coproduction. The STAG Wagon Project exemplifies these four steps.

1. Empower people to take personal and shared responsibility for change and work towards a meaningful partnership approach – sharing information, knowledge and reaching mutual agreement on goals and outcomes.
2. Afford people dignity, respect and compassion and empower citizens to be partners in the creation of health and wellbeing, becoming co-producers working in partnership with health and social care staff.
3. Enable people to participate by embedding and formalising participation and engagement methods and processes.
4. Clarify expectations, roles, responsibilities, and levels of accountability so that co-production can be realised.

8. Stewardship

In "What you do is important but How you do it is More Important" (Isaacs et al. 2011) the lessons learnt included providing for a long-time frame, which is necessary to develop relationships and trust with individuals and their communities, adopting a flexible approach and engaging cultural advisers who represent different sections of the community. Stakeholder partners embrace these core concepts. The foundations of safety, trust and openness is the primary purpose, upon which engagement flourishes. Stakeholder partners are respectful of each other's role and leadership. STAG provide the exclusive leadership and platform for Traveller engagement, as such the Director, Geraldine Dunne is the cultural lead.

Hazel House Director, Gerry Farrell, creates an environment and provides an approach that is flexible to meet the needs and interests of all his students from the TASK group and the Men's Shed. This flexibility allows for creativity and has led to the innovative evolution of the Wagon Project and the many other related initiatives proposed from the Wagon Project. Time is a key factor identified in the research and in this initiative; the research states a long timeframe is necessary. Participant feedback would concur, but they go further to explain why. The time and use of time was critical. Although their programme was twenty-four sessions across two twelve-week blocks, there was no time pressure on the trainees to produce, they learnt at their individual pace, they produced at their individual pace, the time was used to build trust, safety, and communication. From this, impressive results were achieved. However, the physical results of producing the Wagon, the mini wagons and horses were not the primary objective in the twenty-four-week timeline. Success was defined by the Traveller men and young people: Successful outcomes were pride, positive mental health, relationship building, and trust in services.



Figure 2: **The Eight Factors of The Culturally Specific Mental Health Initiative**



The Education Dimension

Community education models follow inclusion principles. Culturally specific community education requires a foundational engagement to create an environment of safety, trust and unconditional acceptance of the student's ethnicity, sexuality, individuality, cognitive capacity, learning styles, interests, intrinsic motivation, and self-worth. Thus, community education requires education to be at the pace of the student. While some students might progress into mainstream educational institutions, students from an ethnic minority such as the Traveller community, with such a negative history of Irish educational institutions, require trust and understanding in their teacher and the teacher to build their capacity to trust themselves and combat the negative self-dialogue created from their personal experience.

The Culturally Specific Mental Health framework of the Wagon Project created safe, trusting, fertile foundations from which educational interests were grown. The Wagon Project, although a mental health initiative, adopted a community education model. It is relevant to acknowledge that TASK trainees were all between the ages of 18 years and 24 years and were of mixed gender and a diverse background including LGBTQIA+.

Key education-related actions proposed in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS), 2017-2021 relevant to the Wagon Project include:

- Traveller and Roma should be supported in key areas including education, employment, and economic development.
- SOLAS and Education Training Boards (ETB) should consider the needs of disadvantaged groups including Travellers and Roma in the planning of Further Education Training (FET) provision.
- Strengthening of cooperation between formal education and non-formal learning sectors to address the high rate of early school-leaving in the Traveller and Roma communities.

(Department of Justice and Equality, 2017)

Findings from Mc Inerney and King (2013) in their study to examine the relationships among achievement goals, self-concept, learning strategies and self-regulation for post-secondary Indigenous Australian and Native American students revealed that self-concept was found to positively predict deep learning and self-regulated learning, and these effects were mediated by achievement goals. Students who pursued proficiency and social goals had core positive educational outcomes. Self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem were overriding messages from the participant feedback session; it was evident that this educational opportunity bolstered a sense of self, and a sense of belief in oneself that they felt was not present before. Measuring this qualitative component would be key moving forward.

To harness the educational opportunity afforded from the Wagon Project, a 2022 study by Destin et al. provides us with the findings that the most common supports for pre-college age youth were culturally sensitive schooling, personal/intrinsic qualities along with family and social support.

For college age students, the most common supports were university personnel, community-based supports, and student intrinsic factors. The involvement of IADT creates an opportunity to expand the educational opportunities for young people involved. The IADT Access Officer currently provides financial support to assist in the completion of the initiative and engaged its film studies students to document the initiative visually, with three-fold outcomes: a) exposing trainees to film studies as an opportunity in further education, b) cultural awareness for the film students and c) documenting through film the Wagon Project.

The Heritage Dimension

The Irish Museums Association's (IMA) Decolonising the Catalogues November 2021 conference was aimed specifically to examine how museums have traditionally excluded marginalised ethnic groups including Irish Travellers from the process of documenting and describing material created from within their culture. There is an absence of Traveller history and culture in Irish Museums. With the Wagon Project, Traveller culture and heritage was accepted, validated, and celebrated. The cultural heritage of the Traveller community has also been embraced by the DLR Age Alliance, the Age Friendly Council. Members of the Traveller community are representatives on the Age Friendly Council and shared the joy and pride they are feeling about the Wagon Project.

Other members of the Age Council were excited and curious to learn about their experience with them and rekindle everyone's memories of Irish Travellers, and the barrel top Wagons, by featuring the Wagon at the Age Well Expo on the 11th June, 2023. The Wagon Project and STAG Men's Shed also feature in the Age Friendly Magazine 2023.

Additionally, DLR County Council, in partnership with the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin, is conducting an extensive oral history project, named The People's History of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. This will create a space where Irish Travellers can be interviewed to capture their own and their families' experiences of living in the DLR region, to capture the Traveller experience of change over the years.



Relevance

This section provides context and highlights the stark health status and education figures, which firmly establish the need for initiatives such as the Wagon Project. The section on current Irish policy provides rationale and emphasises the importance of culturally specific mental health initiatives with the Traveller community.

Life Expectancy

Statistics from the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study 2010 suggest that Traveller women have a life expectancy of 71 years (vs 82 in the general population) and for Traveller men that figure for life expectancy is only 63 years (vs 78 in the general population).

The life expectancy for both Traveller men and women is less than in the general population.

- 11.5 years less for Traveller women
- 15 years less for Traveller men

This means Irish Travellers die about 11-15 years earlier than the general population.

Traveller infant mortality is estimated at 14.1 per 1,000 live births. This compares to 3.9 per 1,000 live births among the general population.

The gap in healthy life expectancy is even more striking. Irish Travellers will experience 16-17 more years of poorer health than the general population, and they are more likely to be categorised as disabled. Travellers experience the same health problems as the general population however the rates of certain conditions are different.



Mental Health

Mental health is also worse among Travellers, with:

59% of Traveller men believing their mental health was not good for one or more days in the last 30 days – compared with 21.8% of male medical cardholders in the general population.

63% of Traveller women said their mental health was not good for one or more days in the last 30 days compared to 19.9% of female medical card holders.

Suicide is a real issue, with a suicide rate for Travellers that is 5-7 times higher than in the general population.

Suicide for Traveller men is 7 times higher and most common in young Traveller men aged 15-25. Suicide for Traveller women is 5 times higher than the general population.

(UCD, 2010)

Kavalidou et al. (2023) published research describing the incidence of hospital-presenting self-harm and suicidal ideation among the Travelling population in Ireland. This study highlighted:

- a. Traveller patients accounted for 4.3% of presentations made to hospital for emergency care, while Travellers represent 1.6% of the local area population.
- b. 14.8% of self-harm and suicidal ideation hospital episodes were from the Traveller community.
- c. The suicide-related ideation age specific rates were highest in the 40–49 age group of Traveller females (1054.9 per 100,000) and in the 20–29 age band of male Travellers (1955 per 100,000). The latter age-group have the highest ideation rates across all male ethnic patient groups.
- d. The peak self-harm age specific rates for both female and male Travellers were for those between 20 and 29 years old (2469.5 per 100,000 and 2249.6 per 100,000 respectively).

Education

13% of Travellers completed secondary education in comparison with 92% of the general population in the same age band (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2016).

7 out of 10 Traveller children (67.3%) live in families where the mother has either no formal education or primary education only.

According to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014) State of the Nation's Children 2014 report, less than 1% of Travellers go on to third level education (CSO, 2016).

Current Irish Policy and commitment to Travellers

Policy	Relevance
Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014-2020)	<p>Only 13% of Traveller children complete secondary school education (while 92% of general population complete secondary school education). 1.2% of 0-24-year-olds are Travellers and 42% of Travellers are under 15 years of age.</p> <p>Action 1.4 Tackle inequalities in health outcomes for identified vulnerable groups, including Travellers, Roma, refugee and asylum-seeking children, migrants, young people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQI+), those experiencing poverty, and children and young people who are the responsibility of the State, whether in care or detention.</p> <p>Action 5.6 Reduce discrimination and intolerance of all types experienced by marginalised groups (i.e., Travellers).</p> <p>https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/775847-better-outcomes-brighter-futures/</p>
National Traveller Health Action Plan (2022-2027)	<p>Action 25 Ensure the local Connecting for Life (CfL) Implementation Plans include Traveller-specific actions as relevant to the local area and promote Traveller representation on groups as appropriate.</p> <p>Action 26 Support and resource peer-led initiatives focused on Traveller men's health to improve mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Action 27 Support and further develop culturally safe services to respond to the mental health needs of Travellers in consultation with Travellers and organisations.</p> <p>Action 28 Work with the HSE to develop programmes to address mental health issues for young Travellers.</p> <p>Action 29 Ensure implementation of the outstanding mental health actions in NTRIS to maximise the delivery of diverse culturally competent mental health supports throughout the services.</p> <p>Action 30 Prioritise the implementation of actions relating to Travellers in Sharing the Vision and CfL.</p> <p>https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/travellers-and-roma/irish-travellers/national-traveller-health-action-plan.html</p>
Connecting for Life 2015-2020	<p>In CfL 2015-2020 there was an identified list of priority groups for suicide prevention activities, Travellers are one of these priority groups for which targeted initiatives and services are to be developed and delivered.</p> <p>Action 2.3.3 Deliver a range of mental health promoting programmes in community, health and education settings aimed at improving the mental health of the whole population and priority groups.</p> <p>Action 3.1.6 Continue the development of mental health promotion programmes with and for priority groups, including the youth sector.</p> <p>https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/</p>
Final Report of the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community 2021	<p>Action 4 Prioritise funding to examine the distinct needs of young members of the Traveller community who are vulnerable to suicide and develop an initiative to train peer support outreach workers within the community.</p>

<p>National Traveller and Roma Implementation Strategy (2015-2021)</p>	<p>There are ten strategic themes designed to promote Traveller and Roma inclusion (marking a shift in emphasis from previous strategies from integration to inclusion). These are: employment and Traveller economy, children and youth, health, gender equality, anti-discrimination, accommodation, Traveller and Roma communities, and public services. Each of the ten strategic themes has objectives and actions.</p> <p>Action 42 The Department of Health, in conjunction with the HSE, will develop programmes to address mental health issues among children and youths in the Traveller and Roma communities.</p> <p>Action 51 The HSE will support the youth sector to develop targeted culturally appropriate programmes for Travellers and Roma which support mental wellbeing and resilience in youth work settings.</p> <p>Action 88 The Health Service Executive will develop targeted interventions and educational materials to support good mental health, suicide prevention and promote self-esteem and self-acceptance for young Travellers.</p> <p>https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/43310/d7d54fbff0f4418982856e7dddaf78c1.pdf#page=null</p>
<p>DLR Age Friendly Strategy 2022-2026</p>	<p>Expand the work underway in supporting marginalised older people and older people’s groups in DLR: Collaborative community supports and initiatives as well as arts, culture, health & well-being projects delivered to support older travellers, people with disabilities, migrants, LGBTIQ+, religious minorities and marginalised older people.</p> <p>Support provided with projects in digital inclusion, community integration and inclusion and with events such as Traveller Pride Festival, Festival of Inclusion, Africa Day, India Day, PRIDE, Bealtaine etc.</p> <p>https://www.dlrcoco.ie/sites/default/files/dlr_age_friendly_strategy_eng_online.pdf</p>
<p>DLR Heritage Strategy 2021-2025</p>	<p>Cultural Heritage includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time. This can include tangible (physical) heritage such as buildings, archaeology, documents, and structures as well as intangible heritage, such as music, language, craft, and sport.</p> <p>https://www.dlrcoco.ie/sites/default/files/atoms/files/dun_laoghaire-rathdown_county_heritage_plan_2021-2025_final_screen.pdf</p>
<p>National Access Plan (2022-2028)</p>	<p>This National Access Plan (NAP) is a Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education. It identifies three main groups who are underrepresented in higher education: one of those groups are members of the Irish Traveller and Roma communities. The NAP will shape the work of access offices, particularly relevant to the IADT Access officer in her role supporting STAG TASK Trainees and the Wagon Project.</p> <p>https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/national-access-plan-2022-2028/</p>
<p>National Action Plan Against Racism (2023)</p>	<p>The Irish Network Against Racism (INAR) launched the Report of its 2022 findings from the iReport.ie racist incident reporting system. The total number of incidents reaching 600 (rising from 404 in 2021), the system also recorded 223 criminal incidents, including racist assaults, a record 190 reports of illegal discrimination and 136 reports of hate speech.</p> <p>Action 2.3 Develop and adopt a training, enterprise and employment strategy to increase the employment of groups experiencing racism.</p> <p>Action 2.4 Introduce measures to address ethnic differentials in education and achieve equality of enrollment, retention, attendance, progression and outcomes for groups experiencing racism. This to include actions to address the recognised differentials for the education of minorities caused by Covid-19 and its outcomes.</p> <p>Action 2.9 Put in place measures to address ethnic differentials in health and mental health outcomes, acknowledging the social determinants of health. This to include culturally appropriate targeted measures in mainstream services and reinforcement of autonomous peer led targeted initiatives.</p> <p>Action 2.11 Take measures to ensure the inclusion of minority ethnic young people in mainstream youth work and other state funded youth initiatives, reinforce support for targeted minority ethnic group youth initiatives, and resource initiatives aimed at empowering young people to understand and challenge racism.</p> <p>https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/250147/ff9dea67-ef0a-413e-9905-7246b5432737.pdf#page=null</p>

Sustainability

The STAG Wagon Project evolved out of a response to supporting Traveller men pursue identified interests. Wagon making skills was one of the interest areas that stakeholders were exploring to create resources and opportunities as a short-term finite initiative to explore value. This initiative started with Local Community and Development Committee (LCDC) and Healthy Ireland Funding supported by Exchange House. Unfortunately, Covid-19 pandemic era interrupted the project. The STAG Men's Shed continued to try to run remotely during Covid. However, the planned activities before the pandemic included to use amenities such as the pool, gym and STAG premises. They continued to try to meet on zoom throughout Covid and when permitted, social distancing in outdoor areas. Eventually the members lost interest and the shedders did not participate or attend the weekly sessions arranged for them.

The engagement plan for both Young and Older Traveller Men in culturally appropriate activities in a supportive environment, while providing support and advice on mental health issues, suicide prevention and wider services available, only came after the Covid-19 pandemic. STAG reached out to an already affected community after the pandemic to see if their members would reengage in a Men's Shed initiative. None of the previous members returned or engaged in the Men's shed. After several outreach interventions and internal supports from STAG, Traveller members and staff (wives of Traveller men) encouraged them to reengage and take part in the Men's Shed. On the information night there were about nine men in total. While they all agreed that the Wagon Project would be great to build, only two Traveller men stayed committed throughout the duration of the project.

Budget resourcing was one of the challenges experienced. For example, at the end October 2022, the budget was over extended. The reason for this overcommitted budget, was because the group were going up four days rather than one day as initially planned and budgeted for. This is partially due to the enthusiasm of the group participants, but also due to the realisation that to complete the project within a reasonable time frame more working hours than initially assumed were needed. The material fees, the use of the yard costs and the refreshment costs amounted to twice the allocated budget before the first twelve weeks were completed.

A steering committee was formed to explore solutions and continue the initiative. STAG agreed to do packed lunches. Further investment from ROSP, HSE Health and Wellbeing, and DLR CYPSC Budget was allocated towards the end of 2022. However, the completion of the initiative would not have been afforded, were it not for the belief, vision and support provided by Hazel House owner Gerry Farrell.

Without core multi annual funding commitments this is not a sustainable initiative. Staggered funding is problematic. It has a negative impact on the initiative and the experience of trainees and community leaders (Traveller men). It creates a stop start flow to the programme and an uncertainty in their plans and developments.

The willingness from stakeholders, the willingness from participants and the wider Traveller community is there. Any adherence to evidence-based practise as outlined above in terms of coproduction delivery, culturally specific mental health programmes, educational progression, all indicate that funding is the primary block for any further developments or sustainability for this initiative.

Conclusion

The Traveller men from the Men's Shed, said "This is just the beginning." From conversations to consultations, they cocreated a culturally specific initiative driven by their passion. This inspired multiple stakeholders to support the Wagon Project, revived and taught wagon making skills to a younger generation of Travellers, showcased Traveller culture and heritage in the Age Friendly Magazine, the Age Well Expo and upcoming Traveller celebration and launch of the Wagon Project in July 2023. The primary purpose of the Wagon project was to support Traveller men and Traveller youths' mental health, recognising Traveller men and the Traveller community as a priority group, recognising the isolation and barriers to Travellers' experiences.

This has been a co-production between STAG, Hazel House Café and Woodwork School in Tibbradden, HSE Mental Health Service Co-ordinator for Travellers, Resource Officer for Suicide Prevention (ROSP) / Area Lead for Mental Health Engagement, HSE Health and Wellbeing, DLR CYPSC, Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) and Age-Friendly Programme Manager & Social Inclusion Officer, dlr County Council.

The organic development and the coproduction process as a cornerstone of the Wagon Project conceptualised a Culturally Specific Mental Health Framework. This had eight components; four are general mental health factors such as social, physical, emotional and cognitive and four are specific; these include environment, interagency, stewardship and culturally specific. Although culturally specific is a factor, this factor significantly influences and underpins every interlocking component. Although a culturally specific mental health initiative, there were two sizeable additional outcomes: These were educational and heritage. The concluding section of this paper outlines nine recommendations to continue and expand the Wagon Project, in the hope that:

“ This is just the beginning. ”

Recommendations

Traveller health inequalities reflect the social and economic disadvantages faced by this population group, referred to as the social determinants of health. Being a minority ethnic group can also be predictor of poor health. Therefore, to reduce Traveller ill health, a comprehensive public health response is needed that provides tailored and affirmative measures to prevent disease, promote health and prolong life for this population group, and are delivered in partnership with Travellers (Department of Health, 2022). The STAG Wagon Project meets all the criteria of principles, practise, process and people proposed in the National Traveller Health Action Plan.

Recommendation 1

Mental health issues pose an increasing challenge to Traveller health and wellbeing, as highlighted in the Report of the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community. The Department's policies for mental health, Sharing the Vision, and CfL (the strategy for reducing self-harm and suicide) all recognise that Travellers are a priority group who have specific vulnerabilities and that these should be addressed through the delivery of diverse and culturally competent mental health services. Based on the above-named policy commitments for young person's mental health, a collaboration with the ETB for a community education programme with certified QQI woodwork on site progression opportunities for Travellers and the wider community should be explored.

Recommendation 2

Trainee and Stakeholder feedback has presented favourable indicators for apprenticeships. Apprenticeship programme(s) at Hazel House will require support from certifying bodies. The ETB has been invited to a meeting to further explore the possibilities. The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) for supported apprenticeship for the trainee has been contacted. The outstanding partner in apprenticeship programme is the employer. Hazel House can provide the mentorship and apprenticeship skill-based learning but will require apprenticeship salary contribution.

Recommendation 3

The Wagon Project has significant capital, infrastructure, and storage costs on an ongoing basis. Expanding collaborative working relationships with DLR County Council with a view to sourcing capital and infrastructure support is recommended.

Recommendation 4

As a culturally specific mental health initiative, an outcomes measurement of, for example, self-efficacy or self-esteem as presented in the Health Research Board (HRB) Recovery Outcomes Framework or similar, would be a useful measurement framework to further explore the qualitative outcomes. This too would be a useful measurement reference for self-determination as a precursor to engaging in educational goals.

Recommendation 5

It is an ideal time to explore furthering the educational outputs and outcomes of the programme. Aligned with the culturally specific mental health pillars, it is recommended that the educational opportunities are premised on the principle of unconditional acceptance allowing trainees to take one, two or more seasons/years to complete their educational goals. A long-term outlook avoids reactive approaches that respond to immediate stress and crisis and invest in initiative-taking health-promoting approaches that build young people's resilience and address the social and cultural determinants of health and wellbeing, supporting a long-term vision. This would require longer-term commissioning cycles and continue to enhance co-ordination and communication between services. There is a need to reduce systematic barriers, and promote practical pathways, to help to link organisations to work collaboratively and effectively around the young people's support needs. For example, (a) exploring and securing funding and commitment from relevant agencies including the ETB apprenticeship programme to resource Gerry Farrell Joinery to employ apprentice(s); (b) partner with TU Dublin, Tallaght Campus to adapt a mentorship programme;

(c) introduce stronger monitoring and evaluations. The systematic monitoring and evaluation of the processes, impacts, and outcomes of projects is important. These need to be respectful of young people's voices and aligned with Traveller methodologies. This could culminate in building a longitudinal study around the Wagon Project.

Recommendation 6

Support the next steps of the Wagon Project and Traveller Men's Shed with their ideas, for example tin-smithing, musical instrument making, more Wagon refurbishment, Wagon making from scratch; are all ideas from the Traveller men and young trainees. These ideas should be tabled, explored, strategized, to support their social, educational, emotional, cultural and physical wellbeing.

Recommendation 7

Include the Wagon Project and Traveller Men's Shed in the new DLR Age Friendly Strategy, in its efforts to support minority groups.

Recommendation 8

Include the Wagon Project and Traveller Men's Shed in the new DLR Heritage Strategy and the UCD Folklore oral history project.

Recommendation 9

Explore the Wagon Project 'live museum' concept as a social enterprise and access resources from Southside Partnership mentoring and social enterprise programme.





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