

Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange (GATE)



In March 2007 Leeds GATE was awarded a grant of £4950 by Nationwide Foundation to run a domestic violence project for one year. The projects' intention was:

“..to provide opportunities for safe discussion of domestic violence issues among a group [of Gypsy and Irish Traveller] parents; to raise self esteem; to provide opportunities for young people to discuss domestic violence and raise confidence to keep safe; to improve by discussion [access to] services provided to Gypsies and Irish Travellers; to write a report suggesting good practice.”

We hoped the project would be of benefit in some way to at least 75 people. In the end the project has directly involved closer to 200 people (so far).

Kathleen Morrison – Youth Inclusion; Domestic Violence project lead.

“I decided to do the project based on what I see in my own community (Gypsies and Irish Travellers). Through my job as part time Youth Inclusion worker at Leeds GATE I learned about Every Child Matters and realised that the children in my community were not getting the benefit of the five outcomes – Make a positive contribution; enjoy and achieve; achieve economic well being; being healthy and staying safe.

I went a training course about domestic violence*, that is when it all happened! I was shocked by what I learned and I understood that there is a lot of things that are actually part of domestic violence but we didn't think about it. I knew it was a very tricky subject and it was hidden under the carpet but I knew I had to do this; if not for me then for all the women and children in my community. Lots of our women don't know what domestic violence is, they think it is all based on a good hiding and believe if you don't get hit then you are not suffering.

I started to understand about how much violence has got to do with power. The worst thing of domestic violence is one person having power over another one and using it in a bad way. I didn't think we could do anything big to solve it but change has got to start somewhere. I decided that the only place to start was with talking and that is what this project has been. The reason I decided to call the project 'one punch kills' is because some people are not taking it on board that one punch can kill even if you are not intending to kill that person. But it can happen. Your hands are weapons and everybody knows you should not use a weapon so why should you use your hands. In my experience lots of people use their hands and I have seen a boy go to prison for manslaughter because he punched once during an argument with a stranger. This just makes you realize how much damage one punch can cause.

Also in my community we use the word kill in other ways apart from just to say that someone is dead. I feel that just one punch kills lots of things like respect, trust, self esteem. It kills the spark of life even if it doesn't kill your body. Children who are around violence lose all these things as well even if they are not getting hit themselves.”

*(Leeds Inter-Agency Project delivers a range of training courses which aim to increase awareness of the issues for women and their children experiencing violence from men they know and promote good practice within agencies. Kathleen attended a two day course 'Women Experiencing Violence from Men They Know')

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The Project

Claire Graham – Advocacy/Development
On 9th March 2007 GATE ran a health discussion forum attended by 18 community members, all women. There was a small discussion surrounding domestic violence (DV) but the main point that came out from the community was that it was something kept very private and that women who suffer it are often looked down upon by other community members as someone who cannot stick up for themselves. Women often feel ashamed to discuss and it is kept very confidential. We told all of the women of various ways GATE can help and distributed numbers for them to contact. We didn't feel like we could elaborate much further with the discussion as it was clear that some women felt very uncomfortable.

As the funding became available Kathleen Morrison began work as a sessional worker (in addition to her part time youth inclusion work) to begin 'sounding out' women in her community as to their receptivity to speaking about domestic violence. This work was carried out completely informally, in the course of spending time with community families that she is acquainted with. Kathleen began to open up discussion as the opportunity arose.

Over four weeks she focussed initially on five women in particular. Quite quickly Kathleen found that women seemed to begin seeking her out in order to raise discussion about violence themselves. Using this opportunity Kathleen highlighted the opportunity to attend training that would increase understanding of child protection and domestic violence issues.

To attend any training can be a very big step for Gypsy and Traveller women who are often unfamiliar with training environments, may have attended very little formal schooling and have poor literacy. It demonstrates a high degree of interest that women were prepared to risk

putting themselves in such an unfamiliar and uncomfortable environment in order to access the content of the courses.

IMPACT: increased understanding of domestic violence and willingness to challenge accepted behaviour. 5 women attend LIAP domestic violence awareness course

IMPACT: one training provider has experience of providing CP learning to young women and adaptations required to maximise learning. 3 young women attend LCC Child protection awareness training.

"The impact on the women was very good. They learned that the power was a big thing. The things they took for granted was domestic violence. After the training I saw on one occasion one of the young women remove her sisters kids when a row was going on because of what she seen, and was talking about, on the domestic violence training; that even if the kids don't see it they can hear it. The man is much higher than the women in my community, if the man says no, then it's no and that itself has a very big impact on the kids."

IMPACT: we begin to see evidence of women taking power in their relationships and sharing their understanding with other women.

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Our Advocacy Development Worker and Strategic Health Advocate worked intensively with 3 separate cases in the last 8 months with women who are looking to get restraining orders and divorces. This included close partnership work with the police, local family solicitors and women's aid. We also did one piece of work with a family who had never before had contact with GATE, our youth inclusion worker pointed the family towards us and within 24 hours they were safely in a hostel in South Yorkshire.

IMPACT: women fleeing violence begin to access other GATE staff for help.
6 women who flee violence with help from GATE
2 women who stay away

About half way through the project these were the issues we identified as arising when we reviewed the project plan:

- A little bursary fund would be very helpful for women to access when fleeing violence, a little money can really help for people to get away from violence for a longer term. Recent interagency work has pointed towards the Common Assessment Framework and
- Focus on giving specific practical activities for young people known to be living in violent circumstances; this would be a major piece of work.
- Men identify that causes of violence include drugs.

- Men are publically acknowledging that what other men do ie scandalizing, is wrong.
- Hearing through the grapevine what Kathleen does is giving people confidence to talk about subjects that they want to talk about. More often now the subject is raised with Kathleen around rather than her actively raising, however feedback about the making a cd using women's voices discussing DV is not confident.
- Parents becoming aware of child protection implications – need for much better understanding of social care practice.

“The reason I decided not to do a cd is because people did not want to be recorded and did not want to be recognized in my community ever on recorder or dicTA phone they never felt confident enough to do a cd. I felt that it was really important to respect what the women felt like and not push them in to it and back them in to a corner. One of the women suggested we put some numbers on the back of some pictures so that's what we did instead. We also give out LIAP (Leeds Interagency Partnership) lipsyls that had help line numbers on them.”

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On 20th June 2008 two workers from GATE, one of whom is an Irish Traveller and has good links and relations with the community took 3 women who are known to suffer from domestic violence to a restaurant for a meal. The venue was requested by the women themselves and they felt comfortable in that environment. All of the women knew each other and, again, felt comfortable in each other's company. One of the women had requested that GATE photocopy a picture an artist had drawn for her of Jesus surrounded by Travellers and various Travelling images in the background. We colour photocopied the drawing, enlarged the scale and made 10 laminated copies. We discreetly put numbers that the women experiencing violence and seeking support could contact on the back of the picture but removed the organisation's names. The numbers included the National Domestic Violence number, Women's Aid and HALT. All the women took a copy of the picture and commented that the way the numbers were put on the back was sensible. More copies of the picture have since been given to women by staff.

IMPACT: Women have ownership over a safe way of accessing refuge help.

Discussion around DV ensued, the main suggestion brought forward was the need to raise awareness of, and within, the various organisations that could help and the fact that the women all had something in common. The women were very open and willing to discuss the subject in detail and also requested a training course about domestic violence in order to share knowledge with other women about what constitutes domestic violence and where to get help from. This was a striking change from our earlier efforts to raise the subject and represents

a significant outcome of our project. The key feature was the development of trust and it seems evident that this trust arose because the project was lead by a community member herself. Her knowledge of the particular sensitivities and context within Gypsy and Irish Traveller families and use of familiar language and concepts are critical to the achievement of shifts of understanding and viewpoint and to the sustainability of change. However the willingness of women to talk in front of other GATE staff by this point indicates a growing trust in the whole organisation to, in the very least, do no harm. Managing this organisation/community/individual relationship in the context of safeguarding responsibilities and legislation can be a challenge. We have had to consider deeply our responsibility to intervene in particular circumstances balanced against how critical it is to maintain a relationship of trust if we are going to influence change which could lead to significant increase overall safety and reduced levels of violence within the whole community. In truth any organisation working in this area will find itself on the horns of this dilemma. Our legal responsibilities are clearcut but action taken in specific circumstances may impact on trust in the whole organisation. In light of this we have had to look deeply at our internal safeguarding policy and practice and to develop very good communication and understanding with Local Authority Safeguarding staff. The development of this relationship is ongoing and presents challenges. All staff at GATE now complete an e-learning course on understanding and recognising safe guarding issues.

IMPACT: development of GATE internal processes around safeguarding, confidentiality policy updated, improved networking with safeguarding board, GATE staff update safeguarding training.

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“I have seen change among my community towards social workers. They know that they are not there to take your children off you and they are there to help you if you have problems that are too much to sort out on your own.”

IMPACT: increased understanding of impact on children of witnessing dv and awareness of safeguarding professionals

A huge outcome for us was a worker witnessing one of the women, two weeks after a full conversation with GATE staff, bringing up the subject of domestic violence in front of her husband. Her husband asking the worker questions such as what is meant by ‘domestic violence?’ what do settled people call DV compared to what Travellers themselves regard as DV? This has given the woman more confidence to address issues with her husband and informally from the community we have heard that she is more empowered and suffers less violence.

“In my community, if you sleep with someone out of marriage then you will get scandalized [be the subject of scandal]. One girl slept out of marriage with a man much older than her. All the boys was talking about her and later on that night I was with the same group of people and it came up again. So I said to them you are just talking about her but if you think about it she is 15 and he was much older, so I said “that’s noncing” (that is what we call paedophile behavior) The next day one of the men said when the subject came up again he just spoke the truth. He said we can all hide it under the carpet but she is 15 and he was much older than her. It was then I seen the change in my community, they just will not stand

for it. The way it is in our community, if a young girl goes wrong then it is not the same, we are still not allowed to sleep with someone out of marriage or get married again. Even if your partner dies you have to stay a widow, we are only allowed one man and that’s it. The men can marry many times and marry out of our community but the women can’t. I think this is something we have started to think about when you see it means young women are being marked and talked about.”

IMPACT: changing view of women expressed by men

IMPACT: evidence of men thinking about their own role and responsibilities for fair power sharing in families.

Conclusions

Helen Jones - Director

I have been really inspired by the domestic violence project initiated by Kathleen Morrison. Kathleen brought the idea for the project to me and we worked to find a funder who might support us. Although my literacy is better than Kathleen’s I wanted her to fill in the form in her own words because we needed to be very clear in all our minds that this was Kathleen’s project. Although the whole team at GATE has made a contribution to the success of the project none of the rest of us could have done it without her. Not only because she is herself a community member but also because she is a highly intelligent and sensitive person.

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Does that mean that this project cannot be repeated elsewhere? No I don't believe so but it needs to be recognised that a great deal of [community initiated] community development work has gone into the building up of Leeds GATE as an organisation before we felt able to run a project such as this. Community development and capacity building are expressions commonly used by professionals; you don't hear those words so often within communities themselves. When we use those words at GATE we mean learning how to respect and stand in solidarity with the community we are a representative part of. Without this history and commitment I don't believe the project would have been so successful.

The greatest learning for all of us from the project is about power. Who has it and why? How is power and powerlessness expressed and what are the consequences of that?

Kathleen Morrison

"I think the project ran very well. At first the subject was a very tricky one but I had the confidence to do the project among my community. I didn't know which way my community was going to react to it. But I felt that it had to be done. The funded project at GATE has finished but the work and the calls for help do not stop. We struggle to get the services needed by families living with violence now. I hope we can work with agencies to improve this. I think that we should try to get agencies to work together to get a small caravan site with pitches built just for Gypsy or Traveller women. What I mean is for families fleeing domestic violence. We could build a site just for two families in emergencies; one big shed with toilets; bathroom; a front room and kitchen. Let them rent it. It would be the same as renting a house. They would pay for electric. It's just the same.

I think there is some people down Bristol way who are trying to get this done, I really hope it can happen. It is too big of a shock to try to stay in a refuge if you are not even used to being in a house and having to live so close with people who are strange to you and you are strange to them.

You could even build a small park for the kids who are affected too by domestic violence. How much would it really cost to build a small site with a little play park? What is the cost on a child's life? PRICELESS. Every child matters.

I knew from the start of the project that this is just a beginning, a chance to begin making changes. There is a very big need to run projects which build on what we have begun; getting our community talking about how we can make a big change so that people don't have to keep running from violence and families can get stronger instead of weaker.

Gypsies and Travellers should work with the agencies that are up and running; get involved in projects that are running and run projects for themselves; go on courses. Learning is the key to changing things."

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Good Practice learning points

- ❖ Community projects are more likely to be successful from outset when started and carried out by a community member who has appropriate skills, sensitivities and understanding.
- ❖ To be successful, community staff carrying out projects like this need to be very well supported and in good communication with their organisations. A worker who is well supported can be adaptable to change as it happens and sensitive to the need to adapt the project as it develops. An organisation which has good trust and respect for its staff, backed up by excellent communication can enable staff to work in this proactive and sensitive way.
- ❖ Project staff need to demonstrate the ability to 'first do no harm' and to stand in solidarity with community members. This requires emotional intelligence and engagement.
- ❖ Project staff need to recognise that working in this way will cause change and be prepared to support community members and each other to deal appropriately with the impact of change.
- ❖ Project staff working in this field need to have good working knowledge of safeguarding policies and procedures both internally and externally.
- ❖ Training providers can maximise learning for Gypsy and Irish Travellers if they have an understanding of previous experience and context of learning.
- ❖ Projects need to have credible and achievable targets. Small impacts need to be particularly valued and viewed as critical to achieving sustainable widespread change. Projects need to be adaptable to change in order to be sensitive to community needs and growing understanding of those needs.
- ❖ Projects need to have an understanding of domestic violence in a wider context of family, community and societal power imbalance.
- ❖ All agencies whose responsibilities may bring them into contact with families experiencing domestic violence need to have good communication and understanding of each other roles and responsibilities.
- ❖ Agencies identifying and seeking to address domestic violence within communities should respect the work and values of communities' own representative organisations where such organisations can be found.
- ❖ Statutory agencies need to be supportive of projects ability to effect long term change and benefit and the unique position of trust that is critical to achieving this outcome.

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