**Evaluation of Traveller Mediation and Conflict Training Programme**

**By Brian Harvey**

In 2014 the Midland Traveller Conflict Mediation Initiative ran a two day workshop for Travellers in Westmeath /Offaly on the theme of managing and resolving conflicts. A key conclusion from the workshop was that the best people to resolve conflicts within the Traveller community are Travellers themselves and that an accredited Traveller mediation training programme needed to be developed.

Following this workshop, MTCMI met with the representative from the Edward Kennedy Institute (Maynooth University) to discuss the possibility of working together to pilot an accredited mediation and conflict training programme.

​MTCMI progressed with the development of the initiative with the Kennedy institute. Subsequently, Kildare/Wicklow ETB and Laois/Offaly ETB were also contacted and, following discussions, they agreed to also become stakeholders of the pilot programme.

​An Inter-Agency Steering Group with representatives from a number of regional and national Traveller organisations was then formed to guide the process and delivery of the programme.

​Following the successful completion, MTCMI asked for a process and outcomes evaluation of its pilot programme. The aim of the evaluation was to access the development, process and implementation of the pilot; its value to recipients and to the wider community; and to make recommendations for the roll-out of programmes or initiatives required to build on the work and to ensure sustainability into the future.

​The evaluation of the programme was authored and presented by Brian Harvey on 27 September at the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin which was attended by representatives from Traveller community organisations, co-ordinators and graduates of the scheme.

​Peter Cassells, Director of the Edward Kennedy Institute, Maynooth University began his introduction by explaining the origins of the programme, its current position and the future prospects of the programme.

Minister David Stanton followed, thanking everyone who was involved in establishing the programme and congratulated all the graduates of the programme. He also announced that he had secured funding of €750,000 over the next 3 years which will assist with the continuation and future development of the programme.

​There were speeches from Delma Sweeney and Thomas McCann regarding the design and delivery of the programme followed by speeches from both Aileen O’Brien and Chris McDonagh of the MTCMI who initiated the programme.

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Brian Harvey then presented the evaluation, discussing its objectives and focusing on aspects such as governance, resources and the course itself.

​Of the programme he said it provides ‘a good basis for replicating and extending…to other Education and Training Boards.’

​‘There was strong agreement [among participants] that this course was most important for the Traveller community in Ireland and held out the promise of dealing with long-standing problems of inter-familial conflict in a structured was...The potential of the course should not be underestimated.”

​Caroline Nevin, from Mullingar and a graduate of the programme delivered a passionate speech, explaining that she had always believed there ‘must be a better way than violence’ when she heard of some in her community resorting to it to settle disputes.

​“For some the only way they knew was violence and talking wasn’t an option. Both parties would be too stubborn to back down and no-one would even consider mediation. But I have seen it being done and it works. It’s about building trust with the parties, that they have confidence in the mediator. A trusted third party can bring people together.”

​She said while such interventions have been informal, she hoped that formally trained Traveller mediators would have the confidence of the community to “help Travellers who might have been feuding and violent to solve future conflicts” peacefully.