

Roma Community Cohesion Project

Evaluation 2012



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In January 2007 European Economic Area nationals became able to move and reside freely in any EU member state. Around this time, increasing numbers of Roma (from countries like Romania) began to settle in a concentrated area of private rented accommodation in South Gorton.

By 2010, Longsight Children's Centre were working with small numbers of the Roma families and identified that many families were living in poverty with issues including overcrowding, lack of basic furniture, lack of access to health services or training and employment advice, and a lack of school places for children.

As the Roma became more visible, hostility towards them from the host community in South Gorton began to grow, and Roma people were blamed for anti-social

behaviour in the area. A number of public meetings were held and attended by a vocal section of the community and local ward councillors, where anger was directed at the Roma community. At the same time the Roma community were negatively portrayed in a number of articles in national and local press.

In response, in 2010/11, The Big Issue in the North Trust provided £50,000 funding for the Roma Community Cohesion project in the Longsight Children's Centre.

The Big Issue in the North had already had experience of working Roma people. Opportunities for Roma to earn an income in the UK are limited to seasonal agricultural work and self employment and, as a result, many Roma earn an income through selling The Big Issue in the North. Since 2007, the number of Roma vendors selling

The Big Issue in the North grew until, in 2011, 40% of vendors were of Roma origin.

The Roma Community Cohesion project worked in partnership with local organisations, schools, Manchester University, Manchester City Council, the Police and health services to:

- Create role models in the Roma community to widen opportunities
- Improve access to services by Roma people
- Build greater understanding between the Roma community and other residents in the Longsight and Gorton areas of Manchester
- Support the Roma community to access opportunities for employment and training.

Creating Role models within the Roma community to widen opportunities

The Big Issue in the North seconded a Romanian speaking worker with experience of working with the Roma community to co-ordinate the Roma Community Cohesion project. The project worker was based within the Children's Centre Outreach Team and managed by the Centre Manager in order to ensure that the project had the greatest impact.

Six Trainee Outreach Workers were recruited from the Roma community to the project. They undertook an extensive five month Skills Development Programme covering all aspects of living and working in the UK, such as how schools work, health services, housing rights, and other local community information. It covered basic policies and procedures such as Confidentiality, Child Protection and Professional Boundaries. The Trainee

Outreach Workers also undertook a range of other training including: self employment, ESOL and IT. In partnership with Manchester University the team also learnt about Romani culture.

The Trainee Outreach Workers were then engaged on a self employed basis to provide advice and support to Roma people coming into the Longsight Children's Centre or to deliver a range of outreach services into the Roma community. A key success factor for the project was engaging Roma people who were able to spread the word in their own community and advocate on their behalf.

The Roma Community Cohesion project worked with 250 people from the Roma community.

Ramona was recruited and helped build bridges between Roma people and local community, and provided support in the Children's Centre.

"I have been able to help lots of people from my community find out about services", she said, "sometimes people stop me in the street to ask for help. Most Roma people don't think they can work and get on outside their own community, but I have shown that you can. I never went to school, but now I am working as a Teaching Assistant at the local school."



Improving access to services by Roma people

The project advocated on behalf of 150 Roma people, helping them to access services in the Children's Centre and the local area.

The Trainee Outreach Workers translated information and helped people understand and complete official documents. They also worked alongside statutory services such as Health Visitors and Benefits Advisers. This work enabled them to:

- Register for NI numbers
- Register Births
- Access play groups
- Secure school places
- Get housing advice and understand their rights
- Access benefits advice
- Access training and employment advice.

The team provided targeted advice sessions for the Roma community to engage them in services. For instance it ran a series of Dental Health events with fun activities for all the family, targeted at Roma people, but open to all the community. Roma families in need of targeted support were referred by the Trainee Outreach Workers to the Family Outreach Team and supported by using the Common Assessment Framework to develop support plans.

Satrrina doesn't speak very much English and so when she was visited at home by a Health Visitor she was too afraid to let her in. She didn't know who she was or what she wanted. The next day she came to the Children's Centre to speak to one of the Trainee Outreach Workers and showed her the letter the Health Visitor had left. The Trainee Outreach Worker was able to explain what a Health Visitor did and rang to make another appointment and an interpreter to accompany her. At her appointment Satrrina agreed to have her children immunised and received advice about healthy English foods.

“The service has made us happier as a family and hopeful for the future”



Building greater understanding between the Roma community and other residents in the Longsight and Gorton areas of Manchester

The Roma Community Cohesion project worked in partnership with a range of local agencies to deliver a co-ordinated programme of events to build understanding between the communities. These included:

- Five community events attended by over 180 people from the Roma and host community
- Roma cooking demonstration at Gorton Mount Primary School with parents from local community sharing recipes and food
- A summer play scheme encouraging children from different cultural backgrounds to mix
- Food, Film and Games Evening to bring local residents together with the Roma young people from areas where there was heightened community tension
- Roma residents encouraged to join the Friends of Crowcroft Park Association to address the ongoing accusations of problems with the Roma community dominating the park space.

Decembra was engaged as a self employed playworker on the summer playscheme and built good relationships with the local community. She helped the Roma community understand why they needed to keep the local park clean and got the Roma people to raise money and help plant new trees. For the first time, Roma people held a stall at the park summer festival, offering traditional foods.



Supporting the Roma community to access opportunities for employment and training

Six people completed the Skills Development Programme which equipped them with skills they would need to move into employment and work experience with a range of organisations. All the people on the programme have gone on to secure self employed work as interpreters in organisations including The Black Health Agency and a number of local schools.

The project engaged seven Roma residents onto Manchester City Council's Waste Recycling Education Programme, who were subsequently paid to raise awareness of recycling among the Roma community.

In addition the project ran a number of courses to equip people with skills they needed to move into self employment:

- 11 people gained Food Safety and Hygiene certificates
- 50 people attended Self Employment briefings
- 60 Roma people supported to apply for their 'Blue Card' – widening their employment opportunities
- 6 Roma residents were helped to apply for Scrap Metal Carrier/Dealer/Broker licenses from The Environmental Agency and Manchester City Council
- 6 Roma parents were supported into further education training.

Daniel came to England with his parents when he was 11. He spoke some English but couldn't write. "I could hardly write my name and I'm embarrassed to say I didn't even know my A, B, Cs," he said. Daniel came to Longsight Children's Centre as a teenager and took part in the Skills Development Programme. He helped out on the youth project and took part in the ESOL course as part of this and his English vastly improved. "Getting the opportunity to learn was really important to me. The ESOL course really helped me with my writing which is what I wanted. I now work in a school as a language supporter, helping Roma children with their English and I'm part of the Manchester Youth Council, supporting young people like me."



“I have learned many things, I have learned about culture and to read and write”

Partnership working

The Roma Community Cohesion project worked closely with a variety of partners to maximise its impact. Staff participated in key networks and forums such as the AGATE meetings (targeted at addressing issues within the Roma community) and the Roma Operational Group designed to encourage partnership working to improve service delivery. The Big Life group co-chaired the operational group meetings.

These were our partners on the project:

- Roots Project
- Manchester University
- Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Blue Orchid
- Gorton Mount Primary School
- Manchester Refugee and Asylum Seeker Network
- Cheetham Hill Advice Centre
- Manchester City Council Youth Service
- NHS
- Police
- South Manchester Regeneration Team

“The first public meeting I went to was really scary. Some poor Roma woman was shouted at and abused by a small group of local residents, whilst the vast majority were silent. There was obviously problems but this was no way to solve them,” said Emma Perry from The Big Life group. “By the end of the project it was very different. We got some local people to be mentors for Roma people. All the agencies: police, council and health staff worked together to ensure the Roma people understood what was expected of them, were able to access services, and to dispel myths as soon as they started.”



