

Community groups helping ease the Covid-19 crisis for Roma and Traveller people

Balbriggan Travellers Women's Group operates from St Macullins Park, Matt Lane, Balbriggan in North County Dublin. Since 2017, Traveller women have come together as a support group to progress and advance common issues affecting their community. Empower initially supported this group of women to receive personal development supports, voter registration workshops and training supports. Four of the women also attended a QQI Level 6 Intercultural Community Course with Technical University Dublin that was organised by Empower and part-funded by SICAP.

Margaret McDonagh, Development Worker with the Balbriggan Travellers Women's Group has since gone on to attend a Bachelor of Social Science (Community and Youth Work) at NUI Maynooth. Throughout the Corona virus outbreak, she has been a key contact for reaching out to the Traveller community. With the support of a SICAP Community Development Officer, they have jointly organised and helped provide COVID 19 resource packs to 51 Traveller families living on sites in Balbriggan, Skerries and Swords. Travellers were unable to source cleansing products in local shops and due to the closing living quarters on sites, there was a genuine fear of catching the virus, so Empower organised for the purchase of these materials from wholesalers and the delivery of these packs in collaboration with the Development Worker of the Traveller project. Easter eggs, colouring books, pencils and crayons were also contained within the delivery packs to provide supports to children living on the various sites across Fingal.

Due to Traveller families living in cramped conditions, and the importance of extended family, they are more at risk of contracting COVID 19. While infection rates in general are at 4%, Pavee Point estimates that infection rates are at around 12% among Travellers. This is not surprising given the high level of chronic disease already existing in the Traveller community, overcrowded living conditions and lack of access to basic facilities. [28/5/2020 Pavee Point] Five COVID-19 outbreaks involving the Traveller community have been notified, involving 43 cases, all of which were laboratory confirmed by the Coronavirus alert response team, HSE-Health Protection Surveillance Centre. An All-Ireland Traveller Health Study entitled *Our Geels* from 2010 highlighted that;

- Traveller women live on average 11.5 years less than women in the general population;
- Traveller men live on average 15 years less; and
- the number of deaths among Traveller infants is estimated at 14.1 for every 1,000 live births compared to 3.9 for every 1,000 live births among the general population



A National Traveller Helpline to deal with Corona virus (Covid-19) queries for Travellers, has been organised by the Traveller organisations in the Midlands with the support of the HSE Midlands Traveller Health at 083-1006300.

For further details, please contact Margaret McDonagh at maggiemcd85@gmail.com

P.S. A qualitative video was produced as part of our SICAP qualitative reporting requirements in 2019 to capture the dynamics behind the QQI Level 6 Intercultural Community Course. Please see link: <https://empower.ie/publications/2019-sicap-qualitative-video-case-study-faces-of-fingal/>