

Education Project Overview:

Traveller children feel 'unwanted' in education system, says Irish Times (2021). Which highlights why it was imperative for our council to implement a project that showed the GRT community we directly wanted to support them through educational hardships.

This Project focused on supporting pupils from the GRT communities in year 6 across Essex to raise transfer rates to year 7, by the provision of a dedicated secondary development worker who will work with parents and schools and support with school applications.

The transition support segment of the project was implanted help improve transfer rates to year 7 by the provision of a dedicated secondary development worker who worked with parents and schools to support with applications.

83 secondary schools were contacted, and we worked with a total of 35 families from a variety of schools within the secondary cohort. This area of the project had a massive impact on the community as transfer rates increased. Students are staying in school, and this was measured through constant check ins with families and schools.

The transition support was a massive success in the project as we supported families along the way. Parents had stated "They have never received such a helpful hand". We supported with school applications, transport and school meals but decreased the families worries and negative ideals associated with secondary school. This made the experience so much easier for parents and helped the pupils with any anxieties and discomforts.

We supported a child with support transition into secondary where there were mixed feelings amongst parents regarding attendance but whilst supporting, we have built a healthy relationship between mum and the school as we have

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a staff member that his mum feels comfortable with confiding in, and they support with transition.

In addition to this 3 young people were supported into college by supporting with applications and attending introductory day, we are keeping in touch with the families to monitor progress. Even though college students were not target for transition support, they were the older siblings of the year 5/6 families we supported.

Originally the NEET Programme was implemented in the project to provide a six-week- programme in areas, Basildon, and Braintree. That was planned to provide career and education advice, alongside accredited courses that are in high demand within the GRT community such as Hair and Beauty.

The Drop-in sessions were in conjunction with the Youth service to support GRT young people into education, training, or employment. Within helping with training, the sessions were planned to help young people sign up for the NEET Programme. 20 sessions were commissioned between Wickford and Braintree youth centres from October 2021 to October 2022. However due to the lack of engagement in drop-in sessions we were unable to sign up enough young people to carry out the remove the NEET Programme. So, we removed the programme and merge our services with the health days. They massively improved community engagement and our transition report rate. At the beginning of the project, due to the low engagement we only worked with a total of 3 families but once we moved to engaging on site, we worked with 15 families which is a massive improvement.

In total, during support transition we worked with a total of 50 families. 35/50 were from the secondary schools we contacted who had pupils transitioning to secondary school and needed support, this also includes the 3 young people that were supported into college. 15/50 were from face-to-face engagement

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when we attended the health days and families had young children that needed help with transition.

The drop ins were unsuccessful due to one; the community had no knowledge of the sessions so were unable to attend. In addition to this weather conditions and COVID restrictions. Families were worried about risking the health of their loved ones, which stopped them from leaving the house. To help with engagement we distributed flyers and put adverts out to let the community and schools know what we were offering.

10 Health Days were conducted where we had external agencies such as health visitors, the local delivery physical pilot project and West Essex CCG to follow us to our sites to support the community with health and education.

Community members were able to learn about fire safety, receive support with school applications, receive GP registration cards, children were given books and they were able to get their blood pressure checked. This was a massive turnover, and they were massively grateful for it. We were able to connect to the families and support them with not only secondary support but health and wellbeing too. We offered support regarding attendance issues and school-based meetings regarding the child's behaviour and engagement.

Also, we informed them on courses and educational programmes. Being able to build those connections with the families makes it easier for them to reach out for help and that has really improved the engagement of the project. What we learned from moving the drop-in sessions to health days was that the community feel more comfortable with us coming to them as if they feel safe and in their own comfort.

In addition to this we learned that promotion is very effective as this was a very key aspect of the project that went well and helped with results. For instance, the flyers for transition and cultural awareness session were put on

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the Essex Newsletter and drastically improved the number of schools we had signed up for the session.

We were commissioned to deliver Gypsy Roma Traveller awareness sessions for up to 30 staff members within 20 secondary schools in Essex. Provided by the Friends and Family of Travellers, it discussed the cultural issues and barriers faced when accessing education and how the community may feel when in education. To form the sessions curriculum, we asked parents from the GRT community what they thought schools needed to improve on and be aware of. This helped shape what the sessions would be based on and demonstrated to the community that we are here to support and hear their concerns.

In the beginning booking up the slots for the sessions were hard as some schools did not respond but once we put the flyer on the Essex Newsletter. The slots immediately started filling up and we were pleasantly surprised at the number of different service providers and primary schools wanting to engage in the sessions which was an amazing turnout. We had a 14/20 schools sign up for the sessions with 3 different service providers. So overall we filled 17/20 of the cultural awareness sessions. The 14 schools that completed sessions were:

1. Beauchamps
2. Bromfords
3. Basildon Lower Academy
4. The Ursuline
5. Ongar Academy
6. Helena Romanes School
7. Hylands
8. Sandon
9. Chelmer Valley High

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10. The Plume
11. Alec Hunter
12. Burnt Mills
13. Passmores
14. Phillip Morant

A school commented “This session was amazing; I feel so much more aware of the educational biases the GRT experience in school now”. This just demonstrates how positively impactful the project was and conversations are being put in place with FFT to continue these sessions for schools and services in following years.

One thing that could have improved the outcome of this project is if we had a set number of schools, we worked with instead of reaching out to schools on the data system. Therefore, we could have an easier way of tracking progress. It would be more consistent than sporadic. This way we could open our support to other schools through promotional elements rather than trying to build completely new relationships that may not work.

Employing a Secondary Development Worker worked out well as it encouraged delivery, new ideas and helped carry out the project. However, this could be more successful completed in a team. The more hands-on deck, the more ideas can be shared, and resources can be used.

Another issue was Parents and Pupils from the GRT community don't want to go to secondary school due to cultural reasons such as sex education, mixed boys and girls, boys going to work, bullying and lack of understanding of culture. In addition to this, travelling can make it hard to keep in contact with families and with transition support. However, there are many families that appreciate and need the help which is why it is important to keep reaching out.

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In addition to the above, another challenge was keeping the parents engaged, sometimes due to lack of accessibility to cars and internet it's been hard to meet with the parents to do the applications and they do not have the facilities to apply online, so that has been a challenge. Which explains why we started going onto site to meet the families and offer support where they felt most comfortable and that helped our turn around.

Overall, the project was a success, sections had to be adjusted or removed but the turnover was still a success. An important take away would be giving our schools the opportunity to learn more about the communities' biases for them to improve the experience of GRT children in the educational system.