

Outreach Report

Covid 19 - Impacts on the GRT Communities: -

Employment

High levels of people in the GRT communities impacted by covid with regard to earnings.

Many people from the GRT communities are working on a self-employed basis and were not protected in the same way as employees in many cases.

Also many working men in the GRT communities rely on going door to door to get work and this has not been possible during the lockdown periods this has meant an increase in the need to claim universal credit, which also has barriers as this is all on line.

Families have told me that they have had to claim benefits to make up shortfall in income, also have had to move to other areas try to seek work.

Women who are employed are often in low paid work, which cannot be done from home, these have also been impacted.

Accessing benefits and services

The Pandemic has triggered a speeding up of the transition to on line access to many services, face to face support has largely stopped for services where this has been deemed possible to do on line or over the phone, some services have no longer kept any option of direct contact, telephone contact has also often been ceased with regard to getting or discussing services.

This has made accessing services more difficult for people from the GRT communities as they may have low literacy levels, limited access to the internet and also in some cases struggle to understand over the phone processes, this is so for example for GP services, housing services, domestic violence support etc.

Education

During lockdown, many children were being educated at home via laptops/devices through zoom or work being set online. Many children from the GRT communities will have had difficulty accessing the online learning, either because of lack of devices, lack of internet access or lack of parental guidance as some parents will find reading through work set impossible. This means that many Traveller pupils will be returning to school further behind than their peers and it is likely the gap in attainment will be even wider.

The move to online application and interviews for colleges is also greatly increasing barriers to GRT Young People accessing college places. Often the young people of parent may not have an email address, once on the website for a course, navigating the application process is very difficult. Without support to access many YP wanting

to get onto courses will be unsuccessful and lose their places if they do not respond on-line to further requests for information etc.

The relative success for some organisations of moving to mostly if not all, online service, will probably mean that this is not reversed, leaving many people from the GRT communities at greater disadvantage when trying to access services.

Outreach during lockdown period

- We have continued to support via phone where possible with: -
- School applications
- Nursery places
- Tracing missing pupils
- Access to FSM vouchers
- Referrals to foodbanks
- GP registrations
- Referrals to housing support services
- Referral to domestic violence services
- Applications to colleges
- Supporting families re accessing education during the lockdown, liaising with schools to support with distance learning, provision of IT equipment etc.
- Support with benefit claims
- We have also met with service users outside if necessary, with appropriate PPE and social distancing, but this has been minimal.

On a strategic level the Outreach Team has: -

- met and worked with Mid Essex and North Essex Health workers to contribute to their equality impact assessment regarding delivery of the covid vaccine.
- Liaised with West Essex Health to enable some site residents to book in for their Covid vaccines.
- Met with members of the digital media and sports department to support with their development of campaign to counteract misinformation regarding the vaccine within the GRT communities.
- Worked with West Essex Health to access sites and facilitate resident's access to the covid vaccine.
- Supported people working on the Census with regard to access to sites.
- Been working on an Education proposal to the MHCLG, including work on raising the number of GRT pupils transferring from Year 6 into secondary school, delivery of cultural awareness training to secondary schools and also working with the Youth Service to deliver sessions for Young People not in education, training or employment to support them into college places, apprenticeships or employment. We hope to be able to update regarding this if the proposal is accepted.
- The Outreach Team has also started to work on the development of e-learning packages which could be delivered to other agencies/professionals,

developing and collating material that will be used to also provide targeted e-learning to the needs of different agencies/organisations.

- We are working with the social media team to develop a Facebook page which will hopefully extend our reach and be a valuable source of information for Essex GRT residents.

As Covid restrictions lift, we are starting to be able to return to attend schools and colleges to support students when necessary, with regard to any issues re attendance and behaviour.

Although we have tried to maintain contact and support during the Covid restrictions, what cannot take place is visits to sites and knocking on doors, which is what enables the Outreach Team to pick up on new families in the area and make them aware of our service. Also, many families we do know, will discuss issues when visited in person, which they may not think to contact about by phone, or may find discussing some issues over the phone difficult.