



East of England | Strategic
Local Government Association | Migration
Partnership

Parallel Lives Roma Project

Evaluation

June 2020

Parallel Lives Roma Project

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Item: Evaluation
Subject: Parallel Lives Roma Project
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Purpose

To share and highlight the key learning that has taken place during the Parallel Lives Roma Project. If you have any questions, or would like to provide feedback, please use the website address above to find relevant contact details.

Recommendations

1. Parallel Lives project team to share the evaluation report with Roma Support Group to inform and support the Cross-Government Working Group on Roma Communities
2. Parallel Lives project team to share the report with Local Government Association advisors in the East of England in order for them to advocate for ongoing Roma cultural awareness and safeguarding learning opportunities for Local Authority staff across the East of England
3. Local Authority Human Resource and Organisational Development leads in Fenland, Ipswich, Luton, Peterborough and Southend to signpost Social Work, Housing, Education and other significant teams to the Parallel Lives Project web pages as a learning support resource:
<https://smp.eelga.gov.uk/migrant-workers/parallel-lives-roma-project/>
4. Parallel Lives project team to share the report with locally based Roma charities and Inter-Agency Support Groups across the East of England in order for them to consider ways of supporting the ongoing cultural awareness requirements of frontline staff

Introduction

The Parallel Lives Roma Project was funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's (MHCLG) 'Controlling Migration Fund', initially for two years from October 2017-Sept 2019, with an extension to the end of June 2020.

It was based within the East of England Local Government Association's (EELGA) Strategic Migration Partnership Team, and was run by two part-time project workers, equivalent to one full-time post.

A central objective of the project was to raise awareness of Roma communities and their needs across the East of England amongst frontline workers and their managers.

The project workers began by carrying out a scoping study, talking to a wide variety of local organisations across the region about their knowledge and experiences of Roma communities and identified a large number of key themes which have informed the project as a whole. These were written up into one paper which is available on the Strategic Migration Partnership website: <https://smp.eelga.gov.uk/migrant-workers/parallel->

Workshops

The project contracted with a national Roma expert organisation, Roma Support Group, based in London, who delivered a total of **32** half-day workshops for the project in the region's key Roma areas of Ipswich, Luton, Peterborough, Southend and other neighbouring areas such as Huntingdon and Wisbech in Cambridgeshire.

Almost **700** people took part in these workshops – the first **11** of which concentrated on generic 'Roma Cultural Awareness' and the remaining **21** on 'Safeguarding Roma People and Communities'.

In addition, the project workers organised and ran three regional conferences – March 2018, March 2019 and March 2020. The first was a collaborative event to enable a wide range of interested partners to come together to help shape the project. The second, "Roma: Integrate to Educate" (RITE) was held at Queen Katharine Academy in Peterborough which has a significant cohort of Roma pupils, and the final event was the project's farewell conference, bringing Roma projects together from across the UK and mainland Europe. A total of around **180** people took part in these three events.

A separate event was organised between Suffolk County Council, Ipswich Borough Council and the Parallel Lives Project in Ipswich. The event invited Roma community members and over 100 professionals engaging with the Roma community. The aims of the event were to enhance understanding of Roma culture, history and traditions and to explore the challenges and examples of best practice in Ipswich when working with Roma individuals and families.

Open Dialogue Workshops

The project workers also ran a series of "Open Dialogue Workshops" across the region, bringing Roma adults and school pupils together with local service providers such as Housing, Social Services, Health, Education, and Charities to discuss Roma peoples' experiences of life and integration in their local areas, and looking for solutions for participants to take back into their workplaces.

Legacy

The Strategic Migration Partnership will locate various project resources on its website as part of the project's legacy, including a film made especially for the project with insights into Roma life in the region in 2019/20 called "Here for good" available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOnVIE9VIZ0&feature=youtu.be> and numerous other resources for professionals across disciplines.

All of the above strands of the project have generated a wealth of learning and insight into Roma communities and their needs.

Aim

The aim of this evaluation report is to highlight the outcomes of the project's half-day workshops.

Objective

The evaluation report's single objective is to provide an overview report on a set of telephone interviews with project workshop participants.

Timescale

Due to unforeseen circumstances the project's external evaluator was unable to complete the project evaluation. The evaluation has been completed by the project team in the final months of the project.

Methodology

The external evaluator had been tasked with carrying out follow-up telephone interviews with a 10% sample of workshop participants, aiming to reach 70 people. The agreed approach had been for the evaluator to allow four months to elapse between each workshop and contacting participants, in order to assess longer-lasting impact. Due to the change in circumstances the project team conducted the interviews and 38 people across the East of England provided feedback regarding their workshop experiences, which was a 5% sample of workshop participants.

The project team devised a set of six open-ended questions, and identified potential respondents, approaching a cross-section of people who had given permission to be contacted again after the workshop(s). The aim was to achieve a representative sample across the multi-agency mix of the workshops' participants, the different geographical areas in which the workshops had taken place and the timespan of the project.

The first workshop took place in August 2018 and the final workshop in March 2020. Therefore, the team had concerns that participants who attended the workshops over 18 months ago would struggle to remember the workshop and its outcome. These fears were unfounded as the majority of participants had retained relatively accurate information. They were also able to provide examples of the ways that they had applied their learning and made suggestions as to further learning and development needs.

The six interview questions were:

1. What do you remember about the content of the workshop you attended, and the methods used?
2. How relevant was it to your work?
3. Could it have been improved/enhanced in any way?
4. Were you able to act on anything you learnt?

5. Do you know whether there has been an increase or decrease in the numbers of Roma people using your service, or living in the area over the last few months?
 6. Do you know what additional support needs might you and/or other team members have?
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Results: West of the region

24 interviews were completed by the project worker who led the project in the west of the region. The key areas were Luton, Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. The interview transcripts are at Annex A.

1.1 Workshop contents and methods

In terms of workshop content, in general, irrespective of whether they had attended a workshop on Roma Cultural Awareness or Safeguarding, respondents remembered that they had included a focus on Roma culture and customs; the origins of Roma people; the oppression and persecution they had suffered over many centuries, and more recently the Roma holocaust during the Second World War. Words like ‘stigma’ and ‘discrimination’ were very much in their minds. The workshops were described as “eye-opening and informative.” They had had real impact.

“I believed I was doing the right things – thirty odd years and you’ve been able to take away my prejudices”. “It was extraordinary. Its myth-busted everything I thought I knew”.

Roma people experiencing barriers to education were commonly remembered, as well as customs around marriage, and there being no words in Romanes for ‘boyfriend’ or ‘girlfriend’, such that young people who were simply ‘dating’ were said to be ‘married’. This aspect of the workshops’ discussions had clearly meant a great deal to many of the social work and safeguarding professionals interviewed.

The ‘Gypsy Roma Traveller’ label was also brought up as an area of important learning: “I didn’t realise the breakdown of GRT.” And language and language barriers had also stuck with people, including the dearth of expressions for emotions/feelings in Romanes.

As far as workshop methods were concerned, there was a great deal of consensus that the mixed, interactive approach had worked well for most people. Specific elements that people remembered were videos/films; quiz; case studies; the PowerPoint slides; having literature to take back to work; groupwork and having time to ask questions and get feedback was also seen as valuable. “The other participants weren’t people I would normally meet with – there was a good mix of people there. We all look at things from our own perspective.”

The skills, expertise and informal approach of the workshop facilitators had been particularly important to respondents too, including the lived experience of one facilitator, who was Roma himself. They were referred to as “engaging and passionate” and “powerful.”

Workshop Relevance

19 respondents (79%) had most definitely found the workshop they had attended relevant, and many gave extremely positive feedback. “Absolutely relevant – safeguarding, checking on vulnerable children and families. They don’t know where their children are. They don’t speak English well or understand the British system. It was educating us as to the nature of the culture.”

1.2 Improving/enhancing the workshops

12 respondents (50%) felt unable to suggest ways to improve the workshops – they were happy with what they got and didn’t think anything needed changing. The other half made a variety of suggestions. These were the most consistent:

- Having some Roma people attend future workshops to talk about their day-to-day experiences of integration: “The voice of the Roma community is your strongest tool to be honest – we don’t know what’s shaped their experience.”
- Extending to full day, rather half-day workshops: “Maybe it was a bit rushed to make sure it finished on time, so there wasn’t much scope for people to bring their own experience. There were people there who were working directly with these communities. Maybe allow an extra half hour.”

Note the interesting contrast here with views above about having felt that there had been time to ask questions and get feedback. In general, respondents seemed to feel that the groupwork/table discussions had been more beneficial than plenary discussion time, which had perhaps not brought out inter-agency perspectives as much as it could have done. And despite the use of case studies as a consistent part of the workshops, one respondent had wanted still more time spent on: “How to actively deal with them on a case.” Those respondents with more day-to-day experience of working with Roma communities talked about wanting something more in-depth, and perhaps more challenging: “These are the problems – how can we work on solving this?”

A small number of people had attended both types of workshop run by the project – i.e. ‘Roma Cultural Awareness’ (August 2018-March 2019) and ‘Safeguarding Roma People & Communities’ (May 2019-March 2020). For some of them, the distinction between the two workshops had been blurred: “It was great and really interesting, however the final workshop was exactly the same. Because it was a final workshop it should have been summarized a little bit more with different movies and different subjects.”

One respondent expressed quite strong concerns about the facilitator(s) suggesting that underage marriage amongst Roma communities was no longer the norm, contrasted with her experience as a Social Services safeguarding lead, where she had observed the opposite.

Other minor improvements included perhaps sending out pre-workshop reading to participants to compensate for the workshops being just half-day and making sure that the groups were kept to a manageable size in order to allow more people to participate in plenary discussions.

1.3 Acting on the learning

Respondents had been able to act on the learning from the workshops in a wide variety of ways. These were amongst the most consistent themes:

- Understanding the need to actively encourage Roma people to use services – building trust
- Understanding that Roma people might be reluctant to engage with authority: “Try not to go in a suit, or be too authoritative”
- Being clearer with Roma people after attending the workshop – for example, about their rights as tenants dealing with exploitative landlords
- Simplifying methods of communication – for example, using emoticons
- Generally feeling more confident in dealing with, and being able to respond more effectively and sensitively to vulnerable Roma people: “We had concerns about a Roma woman begging, that she might have been subject to child sexual abuse....if we’d come across her before the workshop we wouldn’t have understood – we’d just have moved her on.”
- Sharing the learning with other team members and taking proactive action: “We looked further into non-ascribed Roma pupils and used the findings to inform staff training, resulting in significant upward revision in Roma pupil numbers at one school.”

1.4 Roma demographics

Most respondents did not know whether the numbers of Roma people using their services or living in the area had increased or decreased in the past few months. Those who did express a view had no hard evidence, relying on observations. For example:

- “Going up, based on admissions”
- “There have been big increases in Peterborough”
- “The sense is yes figures are continuing to rise” - Peterborough
- “It’s stayed about the same – you see a few new faces; some are moving back” - Peterborough
- “I believe that the number is staying the same at the moment because of the current situation with Covid-19. However, I think before it all started the numbers increased. We had more and more Roma families coming to our centre” - Luton
- “Reasonably stable” - Luton
- “It’s levelled out – last year it hit a bit of a peak for my schools” - Luton

1.5 Additional support needs

Respondents were able to identify a number of different support needs and/or suggestions, including:

- Providing refresher sessions/input to wider team members who were unable to attend the training: “Run it again!”
- Making the workshops sustainable: “Paying Luton Roma Trust to deliver further training could be negotiated”
- Having information about local support organisations: “To have contact details, newsletters etc for an existing organisation for support”

- Having information to put on other organisation’s websites: “It would be good to see the reports written up. And it would be good to see Jake’s video if that’s about to be sent, and we can share it and put it on our website and some of the reports”
 - Supporting members of Roma communities “Online resources in Romanes for Roma community members”
 - “Make it mandatory for all employees”
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Results: East and South of the region

14 interviews were completed by the project worker who led the project in the East of the region. The key areas were Ipswich and Southend-on-Sea. The interview transcripts are at Annex B.

1.1 Workshops contents and methods

The project worker found that a variety of professionals attended the workshops. Several people were already working with Roma people and came to the session to reinforce and develop the knowledge that they already had. “It really helped me validate the way I was working with families.” Other people were trying to engage with the Roma community or just recognising that Roma people have different culture and history to other migrant groups. “It allowed me some insight into the historical context and cultural differences and some opportunity to see how I can change my practice.”

The training provided by Roma Support Group was a unique experience for many people. It offered a safe environment for individuals to meet a member of the Roma Community, share concerns and ask questions. These were often quite sensitive questions regarding racism, sexual health and stereotyping. The way the training was delivered also provided an opportunity for different professionals to meet, share experiences and discuss partnership working. Videos and group work helped engage participants and they felt educated not lectured. “The visual learning was great, the films definitely stayed in my memory.”

Workshop Relevance

The feedback from each person that was interviewed highlighted the relevance and importance of the workshops. Several people were actually surprised by how relevant the training was to their work. Through the training some individuals recognised that they had unintentionally created barriers for Roma communities and several people said they would share their learning with colleagues to adapt engagement materials and techniques. It was recognised by many people that cultural awareness is essential, and many organisations believed that it is important to make this training mandatory to support professional development. It is part of the project legacy that many different organisations have created relationships with Roma Support Group and will be looking to continue training with the charity. This helps to ensure professionals continue to be educated and supported in order to understand the specific engagement and integration needs of the Roma Community.

“It was really relevant. I have been engaging with the Roma community for a long time and it can be quite a challenging process, but things are definitely changing. Understanding the history and culture of the Roma community is very helpful in developing work practice.”

1.2 Improving enhancing the workshops

This was quite a challenging question for many of the people who were interviewed. The training had been unique for the majority of participants and the only element that the several people mentioned was the length of the training. The three-hour session provided professionals with an insight into Roma history and culture, but many people wanted more knowledge and guidance. “It could have been longer, there were a lot of questions to ask! It would also be good to hold a multi-agency session.” Most of the workshops delivered were in fact multi-agency, but a small number were occupation-specific, in response to expressed need.

It is important to remember that people retain information in different ways and the feedback indicates that the success of the training is linked to the different activities that met the needs of different learners. The workshops highlighted the importance of having relevant knowledge to successfully engage with communities. “Really relevant, it helped the knowledge I had make a lot more sense. I am used to working with different ethnicities, but Roma are very different and need a lot of support to communicate. It is these language barriers that stop the Roma community getting the services they need.”

1.3 Acting on the learning

“Whilst I have not had any personal experience of supporting Roma people in my work the awareness training taught me that there are cultural complexities that we need to consider and that these are relevant, not just in the context of supporting Roma people, but in how we support and interact with everybody. That there are specialist support groups for Roma people”

For many professionals there was a feeling that there needs to be a change in mindset to improve integration and engagement. This is from Roma people and professionals. It was recognised that communication is the key and that the culture of written materials can be changed to Infographics. Telephone calls can become ‘face-timing’ and meeting venues can be flexible, instead of ‘you come to us’ it will be ‘we will come to you’. It was really evident throughout the training that professionals really care about Roma communities. There were obviously frustrations with language barriers and a reluctance of members of Roma communities to engage, but the training provided reasons and solutions, which enthused the practitioners and helped them to start considering practice adaptations. Professionals were looking to view communication methods from a different perspective; to be more approachable and accessible to Roma communities.

The networking opportunities provided by the training have been remarkable and again demonstrate a sustainable element of the training. The project team has placed a lot of effort into connecting professionals working with Roma communities throughout the region. This has enabled people to share experiences, both positive and negative and also share best practice. One interviewee said that these relationships had made

them feel confident about their practice and it is very rewarding for people to be able to talk to people working in a similar manner to them.

1.4 Roma demographics

For many of the interviewees Covid 19 has had a significant impact on the Roma community. In Ipswich, it has been reported that many Roma families have returned to Romania to be with extended family and because they feel it is safer than the UK, therefore Roma community numbers have decreased. Because Roma communities are very hidden in Southend, professionals are unsure of numbers although one professional noted working with more Romanian Roma people and previously the majority of Roma were Polish.

Prior to Covid 19 the number of Roma people living in the region seemed to be changing due to the concerns of families obtaining settled status. Professionals reported that families felt unwelcome in the UK and the evidence some families needed to achieve settled status felt overwhelming and inconsiderate of the challenges Roma people had faced to start their lives in the UK.

It is essential to mention that this project has highlighted the importance of recognising that Roma community members cannot be defined as one group of people. Roma come from different clans and each clan can have a different language dialect, history and culture. Roma communities can be modern and engaging – desperate to learn and create new opportunities to enable them to lead successful lives. Roma communities can also be traditional, untrusting and reluctant to change and it is these communities that will require extra support and time to adapt to life in the East of England.

1.5 Additional support needs

“I am very interested in finding out what cultural awareness training new employees receive and seeing whether the Roma information is something that can be added. I think the opportunity to take part in Roma cultural awareness training with other professionals would be extremely productive and would be something I would be interested in developing with colleagues.”

There was a feeling amongst the majority of professionals that were interviewed that the workshop was the starting point for their learning. It was recognised that Roma knowledge was sporadic amongst professionals and their colleagues and this was something that people wanted to change. The quote above comes from a professional who wanted to ensure new colleagues were receiving appropriate cultural awareness training in recognition of the community groups they would be supporting in the region. There was a similar discussion with a lecturer who emphasized the importance of knowing not only your community, but also the other professionals working with the community to ensure there is always a multi-agency support network.

1.6 Project Legacy

The project has provided professionals within the region and around the UK with a multitude of Roma community advocates to help promote best practice and also create a professional support network. An interactive website has been developed to share information about Roma communities and the support groups that exist within the region. The Parallel Lives Project has recognised and highlighted the excellent Roma community engagement and integration work taking place around the region and it has also identified

challenges and solutions to support professionals and their practice. The workshops, conferences and website materials will be a legacy to the project and ensure that education and adaptations will continue to take place through networking and learning from experience.