

Appendix 2: Why are we waiting? A Case Study on Traveller Accommodation

Context to Labre Park and Breda's Story

This is a story of Breda, a Traveller woman who lives in Labre Park in Dublin, and a story of her, the residents and supporting organisations' efforts to improve the living conditions of Labre Park. Labre Park was the first Traveller specific accommodation to be built in Ireland and opened in 1967. Some of the families that moved in at the time of its opening are still there today, with many who were young children at the time now grandparents with grandchildren living on the site.

There are 42 families - 179 people, living in Labre Park.¹ 22 families live in houses, and 19 families are in trailers waiting for their permanent accommodation needs to be met by the Local Authority - some have been waiting for as long as 20 years. One of the 19 families in a trailer has no access to water, sanitation or electricity, and the other 18 families awaiting permanent accommodation have their water, sanitation and electricity supplied from a steel shed² meters away from their homes.

Breda is in her early 40's and was born and reared in Labre Park. Breda has eight children, and the children who still live at home range from 4-22 years of age. Her eldest child lives on her yard with his wife and three daughters. Her son's family are also waiting for a permanent accommodation and only have access to a steel shed for water, sanitation and electricity. The number of families living in inadequate accommodation has significant consequences for Traveller women. Women spend more time in the home and as primary carers bear the brunt of having to cope with poor conditions, such as lack of clean running water, adequate refuse collection, poor sanitation and unsafe areas for children to play.

Timeframe for the Developments in Labre Park

- In **2004** the need for a redevelopment plan for Labre Park was agreed to improve conditions and address the lack of basic services, such as water and sanitation facilities.
- In **2005/2006** a consultation process was undertaken with families for the redevelopment.
- In **2008** an approval to proceed with the redevelopment was granted by the then Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. However, Dublin City Council (DCC) did not inform the families in Labre Park, Ballyfermot Travellers Action project (BTAP) or the Traveller Interagency Group of this development. The approval only came to light when BTAP was lobbying for the redevelopment and provision of basic services on the site. This information was provided in correspondence issued by the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government in responding to a question by a local TD.
- In **Oct/Nov 2010** all of the families living in trailers awaiting permanent accommodation were living in intolerable conditions without water, sanitation or electricity. When representatives of families from Labre made a presentation to the Dublin City Council South Central Area Committee (SCAC) they were informed that there was no money for basic facilities. Breda was one of the residents at the meeting and said at the time: ***"Can you imagine not knowing where you will get water to boil the kettle or wash your children, having to take your child out of their bed in the middle of the night and go across to a relative to use the toilet? Well that's what I have been forced to do as I wait on the permanent accommodation that was promised to me over a decade ago by the Local Authority"***.
- In **2012** the residents of Labre Park had lost all hope of DCC ever delivering on the redevelopment, and began to explore alternative possibilities with BTAP and Clúid Housing Association to see if Clúid was open to exploring the possibility of driving forward the redevelopment of Labre Park.

¹ Based on a count of the number of families and individuals living on the site in November 2016.

² The first set of these sheds (13 initially) were only provided to the families in 2011.

- In **November 2013**³ it came to light that DCC was one of a number of Local Authorities that failed to draw down an allocated 50 million Euro for Traveller accommodation. Between 2008 and 2013 the DCC had failed to draw down 12.5 million of the allocated money towards Traveller accommodation provision. Yet, in **Oct/Nov 2010** and in a number of other occasions Breda and BTAP had been informed by the DCC that there was **no** funding available to improve the living conditions of Labre Park. Crucially, the redevelopment of Labre Park had been identified as an action in every Traveller Accommodation programme that DCC had produced to date. Yet, it was never advanced by the Local Authority.
- In **December 2013** a redevelopment plan for Labre Park was accepted by DCC and submitted to the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government⁴ for consideration.
- In **2014** Clúid Housing Association undertook a site suitability and feasibility study for the redevelopment.
- In **early 2015**, and in full collaboration with the residents, a proposed plan to meet the accommodation needs of all families living in Labre was finalised.
- In **March 2015** the plan was submitted in the call for development projects under Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). BTAP and Clúid were informed that this would be submitted by DCC as a priority project. However, when the list of approved projects was announced by the Department of Environment, Labre park was not included in the list of approved projects.
- In **September 2015** Clúid Housing Association informed DCC that they were going to plan the redevelopment under private finance and would only seek funding from DCC for a community house, four bays, and playgrounds. Clúid was not seeking funding from DCC for the 22 houses that were needed on the site. However, even this was not enough for DCC to secure the project approval from the Department of Environment. Despite many communications from Clúid and BTAP to DCC they were unable to get any update on the status of the application for many months.
- **During 2016** a fire audit carried out on Labre Park found it was one of the most overcrowded Traveller sites in the State.
- In **May 2016** the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC) visited Labre Park. At a meeting between the NTACC and Local Traveller Consultative Committee (LTACC) which followed the site visit, the BTAP and representatives of the residents of Labre Park highlighted the impacts of living in the intolerable conditions
- **On July 20th, 2016**, a fire broke out in Labre Park.
- **On 23rd July, 2016**, the BTAP received a phone call from DCC that the redevelopment had been approved in principal and it would be funded completely by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.⁵

Labre Park Today

After all the developments, Breda and her family are still waiting to be offered permanent and safe Traveller specific accommodation. In November 2016 they were offered a very small 3 bed house in Labre Park, but it could not meet their needs due to size of their family. The family has also been offered a 3 bed house in a standard, non-Traveller accommodation that didn't meet their cultural needs. At a recent visit (May 2016) by the NTACC to Labre Park, Breda's family hung a banner which said *"WE have waited 20 years for Traveller Specific Accommodation NOT Assimilation"*.

This unwritten policy of assimilation has impacted four other families. Having lost all hope for any improvements to take place in Labre Park, the families were forced to move into standard housing.

³ Holland. K., 'Traveller Accommodation Crisis', *Irish Times*, 23 Nov, 2013, <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/traveller-accommodation-crisis-1.1604315>

⁴ The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government was renamed in May 2011 to Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government.

⁵ The Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government was renamed the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on the 23rd July 2016.



Clúid are now working closely with the families to redefine their accommodation needs and finalise the plan to proceed to stage two of the redevelopment process. Breda and her extended family, have waited over two decades, are hopeful that they won't have to endure the intolerable conditions for much longer.

The story of Breda and Labre Park is a story shared by many other Traveller women and families across the country. They represent forgotten lives and prolonged and systemic failures by the State to promote and protect Travellers' basic human right to safe, adequate and culturally appropriate accommodation.