



PAVEE POINT
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

Unseen Homelessness

In the Traveller Community



Unseen Homelessness

January 2022

Produced by Men's Health Programme, Pavée Point Traveller
& Roma Centre in conjunction with poet Geoff Finan and with
funding from North West Area Partnership.

Contents

5 **Introduction**

7 **Foreword**

By Paddy Nugent

8 *My Demons*

10 *Wants and Needs*

11 *What Now?*

By Martin Reilly

12 *Untitled*

14 *People I admire*

15 *Homelessness*

17 *The Good Times*

19 *Going Into Homeless Accommodation*

Poems

21 *Housing Lists*

by Michael Stokes (Bucko), Darren McDonagh, Val McDonagh

24 *This Is Who We Are*

by Michael Stokes (Bucko), Darren McDonagh

27 *Gloke*

- written by Geoff Finan after workshops with Michael Collins, Alan Hanley, Martin Ward, John Paul Collins and Martin Rattigan.

Introduction

Michael Collins

The collection of stories and poetry in this booklet will give you an insight into the lives of Traveller men affected by homelessness. This group of men worked together over a series of workshops to raise awareness about the issues they face while living in homeless accommodation. This creative programme provided the group with time and a safe space to open up about the issues they face.

For me as a Traveller man and men's health worker in Pavee Point these stories show how the experience of homelessness impacts on Travellers, their families, their health and hopes for the future. All too often these days Traveller men have to up and leave their family homes, sites and communities with little option but to end up in this type of accommodation away from everything they know, with no sense of how or when they'll find a home of their own.

According to recent homelessness figures approximately 10-11% of all families accessing emergency accommodation are Travellers. The 2016 Census reports that 39% of Travellers live in severely overcrowded conditions, experiencing what has been termed 'hidden homelessness'. Although the impact of homelessness and systemic discrimination on Traveller health and mental health is severe, Travellers remain effectively invisible in the broader homelessness debate in Ireland.

My hope for the book is that it helps to raise awareness, impressing on decision makers the need to end this systemic discrimination and for local authorities to fully spend allocated budgets to ensure less Travellers end up in homeless accommodation.

I'd like to thank Geoff Finan for his creative guidance and Andy O'Hara for his leadership throughout the process. Thanks also to the Dublin Northwest Area Partnership for funding this initiative and booklet. Finally, I'd like to thank each of the Traveller men who participated here for being confident and brave enough to speak up in this way

Foreword

Geoff Finan

I was very proud to have worked on the project *Unseen Homelessness* in the Traveller community . Each man that took part showed great courage and bravery in opening up about their experiences as homeless Travellers in Ireland today. The workshops were meant to run over the summer of 2020, but due to unexpected lockdowns from Covid-19 they were delayed constantly and eventually finished in December of that year. These delays did not impact the men whatsoever. Every time they turned up for a workshop they brought an energy and determination to face the issues of their lives head on; to discuss them openly and to tell their story.

Unseen Homelessness does more than just show the harrowing experiences of Travellers who are experiencing homelessness in Ireland, it follows the hopes and dreams of men who have been failed by the system and who deserve better. My hope is that people read this book and connect with the honesty within its pages. From it, I hope that real change can be made so that these men, and other families in the same situation as them, can be given a future to look forward to, so that their incredible potentials have a chance of being fulfilled.

My Demons

Paddy Nugent

My journey in my recovery has been the toughest thing I have ever come through, apart from the death of the mammy of my children. Since Feb 2019 I have been through Coolmine Rehab and I'm due to graduate on Monday the 28th of September 2020.

Every day I am fighting my demons. I know my life is a bit better since I've become drug free and been able to rebuild a proper relationship with my children and things that I am getting back in my life that I'm so grateful for. I just wish after everything I have gone through and everything I'm doing to change my life, my biggest fear is being homeless and being left to the curb; no home for me or my children to go and be a proper family, to be a good father and stay on the right path in life, never going back down the road I've been on in the past with drugs, crime and horrible stuff I am not proud of what I done.

I really like the person I am today and being able to do good by others. I am just so afraid of being homeless and ending up losing everything in the blink of an eye. I am so proud of the way I am graduating, but on top of that the fear of losing everything keeps popping up. I am not looking for pity or that. I just want the opportunity in life like everyone else to

be a good person and stay doing the right thing in life, not only for myself but for my family, friends and any others that I can help along the way.

Wants and Needs

Paddy Nugent

I want a house anywhere in Ireland just to have my children back. I don't really care what the house looks like once it's liveable and I can do my own few things with it.

I want not to do drugs again and to be able to control my temper.

I want to help people not go down the same road as I did.

If I could wake up tomorrow to any life, I just want peace of mind.

I want to be a proud father with a home for us and food on the table.

I want to be able to leave most of my past life in the past, to keep on my road to recovery and rebuild my life.

I want to improve a lot more in my education and work with others and hopefully help them, like others helped me.

I want to go on the right track in life.

I don't want to be rich, or nothing,

I just want to be happy and be the best by my family, friends and others.

I want to be a good person not just to others but myself as well.

Most of all, I want to make my children so proud of their daddy

What Now?

Paddy Nugent

My treatment is finished. I am in aftercare and happy with how well I am doing and where I've come from to get to where I am today. But some days, I feel helpless and very bad with my depression. And... I don't want much, just a little home so I can be a father to my children, lead a happy life and make my children happy. Have good memories, not to be waking up every day knowing I have come from hell and back. And I'm grateful to be alive, to be able to say that but to get to where I am today, from where I was, it would be great if I could just get a little help with a new home, anywhere.

Where I am today, I have built up full access with my older children and I can't even have them for an overnight, or to just even to sit around and watch a movie together. What would it feel like to be able to get up, eat breakfast and sit as a family together and be the daddy I have missed out on being. I wish my past would stop holding me back when I am really giving this my hardest. I just would like it if people would understand the way things are for me or ever give us the chance to be a proper family.

Untitled

Martin Reilly

For a lot of young Travellers, myself included, there are a lot of barriers in Life.

It's hard for Travellers to get a good education. 1% go to college and 85% of Travellers are Unemployed.

Travellers are 0.6% of the population but Travellers make up 39% of the Homeless figures. A lot of the sites are overcrowded and have very poor conditions.

The Council sends money back to the State every year instead of building Traveller Accommodation. Travellers that are trying to get houses face landlords discriminating against them.

So if you are a young Traveller in Ireland trying to start a family it is hard to get a job, or to find a place to live. There's a lot of racism towards Travellers so young Travellers suffer with their Mental Health and that leads to a lot of Suicide.

Suicide rate for Travellers is 7 times higher than the General population. So we need a targeted initiative for Travellers.

In Europe we have the Youth Guarantee because we have an unemployment rate of over 25% for young people. This is

obviously a good thing but I don't think it worked for Travellers or other Ethnic Minorities.

Travellers have an unemployment rate of 80% so like the Youth Guarantee we need an employment strategy for Travellers.

A lot of Travellers go for Interviews and when people realize they are Travellers they are refused.

People I admire

Martin Reilly

A person I admire from when I was younger is my father because he would do anything for us. Even now, when I am married and have 2 beautiful boys and my beautiful wife, if we needed a lift to the far side of the country, he would drop other plans to bring us; if we were ever short of anything he would give it to us. Including my mother, she would do anything for us as well and that's for all my family. So I look up to all my family because they would do anything for all my brother and sisters, let it be babysitting or ever help us if we run short of anything.

Homelessness

Martin Reilly

Look at the bigger picture. Do you live with strangers, share kitchens, live with people that you have never seen in your life before?

It's hard for me and my family. I would only love to live next door to my family and friends and have my own home, but that's what I have to put up with and I just don't like the fact that people always talk about homelessness. But it's always about a site, not Travellers living in homeless hotel accommodations and hostels. In the hotel I am living in I have to get permission to stay out nights with my family if there's a family occasion or get together. I'm stuck here. My son is starting to crawl and the room is that small. There's nowhere to crawl or walk in the walker.

Doors close at a certain time it's like you're locked in a prison, that time being a kid again your mother and father would call you in because it's getting too late and that's only at 10 o'clock or half 10. The kitchen in the hotel to make food closes at a certain time and only few people are allowed use the kitchen, so you have to wait your turn, which is fair, but there could be 10 or more people in front of you.

You're not allowed toasters, microwaves any electrics in your room so you have to be up and down the stairs for hot water for the baby's bottles and food, so it's hard, and people don't see this. People complain about not having a big house or not enough space but they're not homeless. They have a home, so they should count their selves LUCKY.

The Good Times

Martin Reilly

The best days of my life for me were years ago, as being a kid, 15 years young. Me and the boys were in the one school and we would mitch off school and we would go up the fields. It was an everyday thing, even if we wasn't in school we would be up with the horses, or playing hide and seek around the old castle and up the stables up until around 8 or 9 o'clock. When it would be nearly dark we would know we would have to go home. They were the best days, not a care in the world.

Another one was when we were in school, we would wait for our lunch break and mitch from school and run out of the gates. I realize now it was very stupid, but I still wouldn't change it because they're all memories for me. When we would mitch, the principal would get in his car and follow us but we would run down the "Rats Lane" which is a nickname for a shortcut to go home. So then we would go up to the fields from there when we got away from the teacher, but the principal would ring our fathers, or brothers and they would come up, because they would know where we would be and they would bring us home and we would get grounded and the next day in school we would have to do detention and not be allowed out on our lunch break because the teacher

would know that we wouldn't return from our lunch. But we thought it wasn't any harm mitching from school. We would understand now because if any of my children mitched from school I would be worried about them leaving school by themselves.

When we would get hungry we would have our lunch money and we would cross the rusty ladder across the water, go to the shop get sweets and come back, eat them and try catch the little Fellabella horses and Shetland ponies and canter and gallop them around the fields. Some laugh that! We would tie the horses up for the next day and the lads that owned the horses would come to us and give out about tying the horses, but they wouldn't be mad over us being on them, just over tying them up. We would be gone across the river thinking these are going to get us, but we were only kids at the time in our uniform, destroyed, going home lol.

Going Into Homeless Accommodation

Martin Reilly

When I got married on the 16th of November 2018 I needed somewhere to stay because I wanted my own space and to be comfortable and to come and go when I wanted and not to be in peoples way. But that didn't work out. It was about 2 weeks after I got married, I was staying in my sisters up until then, me and my wife decided we need our own place, so my father brought us in the car to Parkgate Street. So me and my wife were called into the room and we explained we needed a place to stay, so they gave us an address. My father gave us a lift down and when we got there I went in and the man said this hostel is only for men. I went in and had a look and I got shocked of the state this place was in. You wouldn't put a dog in this. And my wife was the same. She went to another place and she went in and came back out scared. She said "I am not going in there, never mind sleep there." So we went back to Parkgate Street and told them we weren't going there, so we went back to my parents house for a couple of days. Then we got a phone call to come in and they gave us an address to go to, so we went and got the address and we went to look at the place that we were going to stay. We went in and seen how clean it was. It was like winning the lottery in my eyes. We couldn't believe we got this.

Now 2 years later we wish we had our own place because I have 2 babies, one is 16 months old. My wife just had our 2nd new-born son who is 2 weeks old. My son who is 16 months old needs somewhere to play and walk around. There's nowhere for him to do this. I don't want him thinking that he has nowhere to play like the other kids. Especially when I do visit my family with their kids, with back gardens. Hopefully we will be housed soon because I am 2 years now and the Council seems to be doing nothing for us. I just want my own home for my wife and kids and to start my life off in our own permanent home, to have a back garden for my kids so they can play around and have loads of space and invite family over, because it's no place to be for years and especially with kids. I don't want to be here for years, which I am 2 years now.

Housing Lists

Michael Stokes (Bucko), Darren McDonagh, Val McDonagh

I have no home now,

No real home

Temporary accommodation doesn't feel like your own

But we did the best we could there

Made that small room ours

But it wasn't

It never will be

There's no security

You can be thrown out at any minute

Still, it can be better than the sites, isn't it?

I'm not sure anymore

They're over crowded and too much trouble

There's no protection and no security

I just want a home

Somewhere I can make sure my family is safe

Do you know what it feels like to be on a housing list

The numbers are so big they feel infinite

Any hope of a future dwindles every minute

I still won't give up

If this is my test then you'll see my best

I'll never give up

Even though each day seems like I'm loaded with more and
more bad luck

Life is on top of me

I feel like I'll never be free

And all I want is a home for my family

"But what about HAP" they say

Couldn't I just take that payment and get a place?

It's not as easy for a Traveller

Nothing is

With have to fight harder for everything

You text a million landlords and it feels pointless

Even if you get in they can use loopholes to get rid

We're not wanted anywhere

And all we want is a home

It's not much to ask

This Is Who We Are

Michael Stokes (Bucko), Darren McDonagh

A man is someone you can look up to, depend on

A rock at the centre of the community

He takes care of all life's worries

A man is to be relied on

A man puts his family before all else

Makes sure they're always safe and provides a nice house

A man takes care of everything

A man is strict but fair

A man keeps good company,

works hard to provide everything he can for his family

A man can show vulnerabilities

This shows he's trustworthy

A man grows old with clean living,

doesn't get his family into debt and doesn't mess with drugs
either

Drinking is allowed but don't be an eejit

A man is likeable

A man can have fears but he's told not to show them

It's a misconception that a Traveller man has to fight

He lives his life full of his family's pride

It's how a real man lives his life

A man strikes a balance based on love, respect and truth

A man is flexible and responsible

A man teaches his children these lessons

Bring them up to get the best from each of them

Provides education in the form of different life lessons

Cares for them

Puts them first

Loves them, even if he doesn't say it much

This is how we live

Gloke

- written by Geoff Finan after workshops with Michael Collins,
Alan Hanley, Martin Ward, John Paul Collins and Martin
Rattigan.

Child is woken,
Excitement rises.
Child is about 4 or 5 now
His mother's boy
Eats his breakfast and ask what it'll be like.
Today is his first day in Junior Infants.
The whole summer seemed to lead to this moment.
His parents look on with pride.
His face is washed and his uniform ironed.
He leaves the family home.
Across the grassy land that protects him and through the
gates.
Sees all the children with the same worry and excitement on
their face.
It quickly becomes his new favourite place.

Years goes by and the school work is getting harder
And for the first time now he's classed as a Traveller.
"What's that?" he asks
"It's what you are" says this kid in the yard
"It's why you're different to me"

But he doesn't seem different as far as this young boy could see.

So he goes back to his home,

Waits until he's with his parents all alone and asks

"Am I a Traveller?"

"Of course you are son."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you come from a very exclusive ethnic minority.

We're different than the general population.

Our traditions have been passed down through time and generations.

We use to roam the country helping the locals and we did it with pride,

Even during the famine we'd the skills to survive.

We're good with our hands,

Hard workers that could toil any land.

We can fix anything that's broken and we're good with the yarns.

We're a really close community.

Where the most important thing is family

And that's why you're so important to us."

Child smiles. He feels special.

Goes to school and soon there's a turn in this table.

Kid shouts

"You're not special, you're scum.

I'm not allowed to play with you

My ma told me where you're from!"

Child stands alone not sure what he's done wrong.

He grows up, starts seeing other inequalities,
Like why is it only Travellers that have to live at the edge of a
motorway.

And why isn't there running water on his site?

He was taught in school that this was a basic human right.

Just like sanitation,

But there's no toilets on his site either,

Just 4 portaloos between over 50 people

If this happened to anyone else in Ireland it'd be classified as
evil

So why is it ok for Travellers?

His grandfather blames the politicians.

Says it's them who've promoted this vile segregation.

Teaches him of the 1963 commission.

How Haughey labeled the forced settling of Travellers as 'The
Final Solution'

Taught him how it's the people outside that strive to make
him different.

That's why they insult with names like pikey, knacker and
itinerant.

That's why he's stuck between a motorway and a wasteland.

A wasted land of barren land separated by spiked railing so
Travellers understand

That they're not welcome here

It's why Travellers feature last when it comes to public planning.

Even though there's mass overcrowding.

Why the councils funds for Travellers are given back almost every single time.

It's why no one listened through the flames of the tragedy of Carrickmines.

It's why some politicians have celebrated when they've kept Travellers out.

If you don't believe it just look at Dublin south.

Or even check around the country and

Listen to words that come from some politicians or even judges mouths.

Beasts, Neanderthals

How is this allowed?

Hate speech at any other time is called out

But not now

His father teaches him that it didn't start here.

You don't have to go back many years to see school yards divided with a yellow line.

Most of the school playing normally with Travellers separated on the other side.

Or special classes for Travellers,

And it didn't matter whether the child was doing well in school at the time.

Segregation...

That slowly seeps into the subconscious mind of a nation.
A lifetime of clear divides that make sure you don't rise above
your station!

He's angry now and feel more isolated.
Why is his birth a reason for hatred?
Grows older,
Reads as much as he can.
Educates himself, he strives to understand.
Reads comments sections online.
Sees that people blame Travellers for drugs and crime.
And call them lazy
This seems crazy.
Travellers were always know for their hard work.
And yeah there's crime but that's across all society.
Why do people only focus on this and not positive parts of
his community.

He grows up.
Learns that he'll have to pretend to be different if he wants
equal rights.
"Travellers are scum, they smash up places and fight"
He's never wrecked anywhere in his life.
He was brought up with this incredible sense of pride.
But having to deny who his is leaves him feeling empty
inside.
"I'm sorry I don't serve your kind"

"Why?"

"You're a Traveller mate?"

"No, I'm just up from the country for the day"

"Are ye up for the match?"

"Yeah, something like that"

These lies of a lifetime hard to comprehend.

Why does he have to live with this shame,

Especially when he's done nothing wrong?

They chip away at his self worth.

He's lived a lifetime of pain and a lifetime of hurt.

All he ever wanted was to be accepted,

But nothing in this life has ever let him.

He feels segregated, castigated, degraded and hated.

Even parts of his own government seem to be ok with this.

What is there to hope for when there's no hope left?

How can you see the light when your whole life has been
spent in darkness?

Years later a study is done,

Comparing Travellers to the general population.

Shows suicide is 7 times more prevalent in Traveller men and
5 times more in women.

Some people start to take notice.

They want to know how's its come to this.

He's brought in front of them.

They ask him for reasons.

He stands there quietly.

States that he doesn't have all the answers,
All he has is this story.

Pavee Point Men's Health Programme would like to thank the following people -

- The Traveller men who participated in the creative writing process
- Geoff Finan for his creative guidance
- Andy O'Hara for his leadership
- Greg Clifford for completing the graphics for the booklet
- Dublin Northwest Area Partnership for funding this initiative and booklet
- Eastern Region Traveller Health Unit



PAVEE POINT

TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre
46 Charles Street Great, DO1XC63,
Dublin 1. Ireland.

Telephone: (+353) (0)(1) 878 0255

Email: info@pavee.ie

www.paveepoint.ie