SUBMISSION FROM ARTICLE 12 IN SCOTLAND

Article 12 in Scotland is pleased that the Equal Opportunities Committee is, once again, taking evidence on the Gypsy/Traveller community. Our work, through our Young Gypsy/Travellers’ Lives project, focuses primarily on the participation rights of young people from the community. The right to participate in decision making processes that directly impact on their lives, and the lives of their families, is a key strand of this work.

A key driver of the discrimination and prejudice faced by Gypsy/Travellers on a daily basis is the lack of long-term and halt sites. This lack of provision, along with the closing off of traditional stopping places, leaves the community with little choice but to establish ‘unauthorised encampments’ in, at times, high profile public spaces.

Whilst acknowledging that much work still has to be done to build bridges between the Gypsy/Traveller and settled communities, we are of the belief that the establishment of a network of halt sites and an increase in private [Gypsy/Traveller owned and managed] and public [Local Authority] long term pitches – at present, a number of families are having to ‘double up’ in order to address the shortfall - would be a good starting point in the process. Central to the effectiveness of this will be the participation of Gypsy/Travellers in the planning, development and on-going management of all new and existing provision to ensure their social and cultural needs are being met. Intrinsically linked to this is meaningful participation in the design of Local Development Plans. Sites are a key consideration in these plans, and given that Gypsy/Travellers are the experts on their own realities it is crucial that they are involved in discussions concerning where sites should be built, particularly, but not exclusively, in relation to access to schools, health services and so on.

Finally, it has been mooted in the past that there is neither the capacity nor the willingness within the community to participate in planning and development processes. This may or may not have been the case; but a lack of engagement in the past is no excuse for excluding the community from decision making processes now and in the future. The community is mobilising: as an example; Article 12 in Scotland, in partnership with Planning Aid Scotland, is currently working with groups of young Gypsy/Travellers informing them of planning processes and supporting them to participate at the local and national level when decisions are being made regarding site provision. This work is on-going and we anticipate that a network of skilled and informed young people will be firmly established across Scotland in the coming years. Nonetheless, the success or otherwise of their meaningful engagement will be dependent on the willingness of key decision makers, including elected representatives, to facilitate their participation – participation requires a commitment from all players: without it there will be no change.

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