A big part of our work with MECOPP over the last year has been the awareness-raising training. We have tried to increase knowledge and improve understanding about the kind of issues faced by carers in our community. It is our way to start the dialogue.

In the three areas, we’ve done 8 training sessions with over 116 service-providers, people have come from health, education, housing, social work and even a few police officers!

We try to make our training as informal as possible, put people at ease, educate but also have quite a few laughs too. For many service-providers it is the first time they have actually met a Gypsy/Traveller.

The seminars are run by Gypsy/Travellers and that is really important, it is not people talking about us, we are leading the sessions. It is about dialogue, starting the communication. We obviously can’t cover everything in one morning or one afternoon, nor can we represent all the different views, but it is a start, you have to start somewhere.

At first people are nervous, maybe feeling a bit awkward, so are we sometimes to be honest, but by the end we are all more relaxed and having a laugh. We start as strangers and end as friends.

We usually start the seminar with First Impressions, putting people in small groups to think about the first time they heard or saw anything about Travellers, it is usually negative, especially if it comes from the media. Then we use the Myth Buster quiz, to dispel the myths they’ve maybe heard about our community. Many folk find the answers surprising and it is a fun and entertaining way to get lots of information across quickly. After that we usually show a DVD, and the new one about issues faced by carers in our community you will see later today. The DVD is important because it lets other Travellers get involved; they hear other views, not just those who attend on the day.

Then again we put people into small groups and do the Case Studies, looking at real situations that Travellers have faced. Nothing in our seminar is fictional - real issues that real people face. Often people are surprised and shocked at what they hear and how difficult it can be to get a compromise especially when there is so little communication and decisions being made without involving the people who are most affected.

At the end of every session we ask people to complete an evaluation form, telling us what they liked and didn’t like. It helps us to change or add anything that could make the seminars more useful.
Form the 8 sessions we’ve done this year, 96% of service-providers completed an evaluation form, which is a very good response rate. The feedback was very, very positive as these quotes show (quotes will be on the slides).

There were also suggestions for the future which we are looking at now. In January we did a ‘taster’ of our training here at the Parliament, maybe one of the MSPs could say what they thought?

Georgia McPhee
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