1. Gypsy/Travellers in Grampian: the main issue

The main issue faced by gypsy/travellers in Grampian is the serious lack of short term and permanent halting sites. This is the view expressed by gypsy/travellers in Grampian when interviewed for the 2008/9 Craigforth Report, and the view expressed by gypsy/travellers at a well attended “Dialogue Day” on Tuesday 5th April 2011. A copy of the Craigforth Report is attached, along with an Executive Summary of the results of the Dialogue Day.

There is only one permanent halting site in Grampian, located at Clinterty in Aberdeen City which has 21 pitches, which is usually full. There is also a seasonal halting site at Greenbank in Aberdeenshire which is open March –September. There is no other provision in Grampian. This means that the large number of gypsy/travellers coming to Grampian have no alternative but to park in lay-byes and other areas of spare ground. This results in:

- Complaints by local residents to their Councillors
- Harassment of the gypsy/travellers by some local residents
- Residents putting pressure on their Local Councils who respond by taking out Court Orders to moving on the gypsy/travellers, who move a few miles down the road, until the next Court Order arrives
- Complaints by local residents to a local newspaper in Grampian who have mounted a negative campaign against gypsy/travellers for several years. The newspaper paints a consistently negative image of gypsy/travellers, exacerbating the situation.

The simple solution to this problem is the creation of sufficient permanent and short term gypsy/traveller halting sites by the three local Authorities in Grampian, namely Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and Moray Council.

Until this happens, this cycle of gypsy/travellers parking on unauthorised sites, being harassed by local residents and repeatedly moved on by the Councils will continue.

This issue leads to stress and conflict for gypsy/travellers and makes providing health care to the gypsy/traveller communities in Grampian challenging.

2. Providing health care for gypsy/travellers in Grampian

Many NHS Grampian health care staff have regular contact with gypsy/travellers in a number of ways. For example:

(i) Outreach

- One of our local GP Practices is responsible for provides GP services to the gypsy/traveller Site at Clinterty. The Clinterty Site also receives regular community nursing and other health care input.
• Community nursing staff visit unofficial gypsy/traveller encampments and provide health care services, especially where there are pregnant ladies, young children and elderly people with chronic illnesses. However, the constant moving on of gypsy/travellers makes it exceptionally difficult for community nursing staff to provide health care services on a regular basis. It is not unusual for our community staff to go to an unofficial halting site they have recently visited, only to find that the gypsy/travellers have been moved on.

• The Aberdeen City Community Health Partnership also have in place a Gypsy/Traveller Health Improvement Worker who works closely with gypsy/travellers in the Aberdeen city area.

(ii) Accessing NHS Grampian Health care premises

From the Craigforth Report, the Dialogue Day and the regular contact between NHS Grampian staff and gypsy/travellers, we know that:

• Gypsy/Travellers, especially women with young children, are very conscientious about registering with local GP`s as temporary residents to access health care services. Although approximately half do not state that they are gypsy/travellers.

• Gypsy/travellers make regular use of our A&E Departments. Again, approximately half do not identify themselves as gypsy/travellers.

In the Craigforth Report, on page 56, paragraph 3.47 it was noted that

1.1. “Gypsies/Travellers were asked if they had experienced any discrimination from NHS staff. The majority of households (89%) indicated that they had never had any problems; however, 11% of households indicated that they had experienced some discrimination from NHS staff; with it proving difficult to be seen or being unable to register due to the lack of a permanent address.”

While 89% is a very positive figure, NHS Grampian has continued its work to further improve access to health care for gypsy/travellers.

3. Other initiatives

The nomadic lifestyle of gypsy/travellers makes continuity of health care and the availability of Health Records an issue when gypsy/travellers move area to area. To try and overcome this, NHS Grampian has re-launched the gypsy/traveller Hand Held Record on two occasions. The Hand Held Record was a Scottish Health Department initiative in 2005, designed to give health care providers some background information about the previous health issues and treatments provide to a gypsy/traveller elsewhere in Scotland.
The first re-launch in 2008 was done in co-operation with the Gypsy/Traveller Education and Information Project (GTEIP) North East. This was most successful. Shortly after this re-launch, some Local Authority funding for GTEIP North East was withdrawn and the organisation ceased to function in this area.

In early 2010, it was realised that few gypsy/travellers were presenting at GP Practices or Hospitals with their Hand Held Record. Accordingly, the Hand Held Record was re-launched in co-operation with Dave Black, a Gypsy/Traveller Liaison Worker, who works for the Grampian Racial Equality Council. Dave took up post in October 2010, his post is funded by Aberdeenshire Council.

In 2010, in addition to the hand Held Record, NHS Grampian also produced and circulated a poster for display in health care premises, encouraging gypsy/travellers to ask for a Hand Held Record. A copy is attached. The poster received a wide distribution.

4. Conclusions

- NHS Grampian will continue to seek every possible opportunity to provide health care services to gypsy/travellers in Grampian.

- The serious health care issues experienced by many gypsy/travellers across the UK and their unacceptably low life expectancy have been well documented on many occasions.

- More temporary and permanent halting sites should be provided by the three Local Authorities in Grampian. If these were provided, they would become centres where health care input could be focused and give gypsy/travellers some continuity of health care. They could also be used as centres for health education and health screening.

- More halting sites would also reduce the stress caused to gypsy/travellers by harassment from local residents and the constant threat of being moved on. This stress has a detrimental effect on both the physical and mental well being of gypsy/travellers.

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