SUBMISSION FROM NHS TAYSIDE

NHS Tayside covers three community health partnerships, Angus, Dundee and Perth and Kinross. Each of these areas have a responsibility for managing the health and wellbeing of vulnerable groups including Gypsy/Travellers who come under the Health and Homelessness agenda.

Historically health and homelessness sat within Public Health and is now with Community Health.

The designated local authority site for Gypsy/Travellers in Angus is at Tayock, Montrose. (There is also another site at Tealing but, although it is within the Angus boundary, it is operated by Dundee City Council.) Most of the pitches at Montrose are occupied by long-term tenants who have been there for several years and have access to health services through being registered with local GP practices in Montrose.

In addition, the remit of the national 'Keep Well' project has recently been extended to include vulnerable groups such as homeless people and Gypsy/Travellers and, as none of the Montrose practices are participants in Keep Well, the Angus Keep Well Outreach Nurse is targeting the site offering cardiovascular health risk assessments to eligible residents. In the case of Gypsy/Travellers the age range for Keep Well is 35-64 years.

The other group of Gypsy/Travellers who may have difficulty in accessing health services are the itinerant ones who, from time to time, set up illegal encampments (usually in the Montrose seafront area) and so have no fixed address. If such an encampment is reported, the local authority and the police (Community Safety) are responsible for visiting the location and, following an assessment, would take relevant action in terms of the law/policies. The initial assessment involves completion of a checklist which allows any issues to be flagged up and referred to the appropriate agency. If any child health/protection/welfare issues were identified, for example, the case would be referred to the CHP's Child, Family and Public Health Service. Several years ago there was a designated Health Visitor/Public Health Nurse from that service with a liaison role in relation to Gypsy/Travellers but that is no longer the case and referrals are now dealt with by the community nursing teams according to geographical location. It has been our experience, however, that Traveller families passing through the area when they are 'on the road' are often registered with a GP in their area of origin elsewhere in Scotland where they may have a house or caravan site pitch for use during the winter months.

There is no training/awareness raising in relation to Gypsy/Travellers currently going on in Angus although, again, this is something that was organised in the past as part of the Angus Health and Homelessness Project.

We have been rather fortunate in Perth and Kinross for some time because of the close working between Health and Local authority when targeting Gypsy/Travellers. This is part of a wider service of targeting Health inequalities and vulnerable groups.

We have 2 local authority static sites in P&K for Gypsy Travellers who have chosen to stay in the area, these are Double Dykes on the outskirts of Perth and Bobbin Mill at Pitlochry. Although officially these individuals can't be deemed as travellers because they are living in static accommodation, they are all originally from Gypsy/Traveller backgrounds. The transient population, who primarily come into the area from March through till November for seasonal work etc, tend to pitch their caravans at unlawful encampments, these are usually areas of waste ground, lay byes, quiet roads etc. There are also some travellers who appear with local Fairs and carnivals and these individuals will be based where ever the fairs/carnivals are taking place.
We are able to engage with any of these individuals either by adopting an open referral Nurse led service based within Perth or utilising community nursing staff who undertake outreach. Transient travellers are usually brought to our attention by our colleagues within the Local Authority who will inform us of where travellers have appeared. Our staff will then arrange to visit these areas, usually jointly with local authority staff in Perth and Kinross also have a Health Visitor who has 10 hours per week dedicated to Gypsy/Travellers and a primary part of her role is to undertake child screenings and provide parenting advice/education. Although we have attempted to make our service as flexible and open to access as we can there are still barriers to engagement, some of these come directly from the perceptions of the traveller community as they sometimes believe that as part of a large government organisation we are scrutinising them and trying to impose our own opinions and beliefs. There are however difficulties with the traveller community being able to access mainstream services due to attitudes, availability and resources. For instance it is difficult trying to engage male travellers and this is increased due to a severe lack of male nursing staff within our service.

As a Perth and Kinross wide process we have been holding regular Gypsy/Traveller meetings, these have consisted of various statutory and non-statutory organisations as well as representatives from the local Gypsy/Traveller community, and the aim of these meetings has been to look at and plan how services can be more flexible and user friendly towards Gypsy/Travellers. Last year we held a Gypsy/Traveller information day and another one is planned for this September. This is open and accessible to all Gypsy/Travellers and it was requested by the local community to hold it on a Saturday for ease of access. Information stalls, local and historical interest are present relevant to Gypsy/Travellers, Health Checks, Benefits advice, Housing Advice, Police presence as well as other services are committed to this.

Finally, as part of the Scottish Governments Keep Well agenda, Gypsy/Travellers have recently been included into the targeted cohort to help reduce cardio-vascular disease. The KeepWell Staff within Perth and Kinross are now utilising the above links and staff/community knowledge to help engage with the Gypsy/Traveller community.

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