

Interim Evaluation
of the
Traveller Conflict and Mental Health
Partnership Initiative

known as the
**Travellers Transforming Conflict
Initiative**

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Abbreviations

CMHI	Conflict and Mental Health Initiative
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
HSE	Health Service Executive
EHINTS	Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service
ITM	Irish Traveller Movement
NTRIS	National Traveller and Roma Integration strategy
TMS	Traveller Mediation Service
TCS	Traveller Counselling Service

Executive summary

There is increasing recognition that inter-family violent conflicts in the Traveller community are leading to widespread trauma in affected families, seriously damaging mental health and undermining progress in other areas such as education and accommodation. The Conflict and Mental Health Initiative (CMHI) is a pilot programme implemented by The Traveller Mediation Service (TMS), Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service (EHINTS) and the Traveller Counselling Service (TCS).

The CMHI sets out a number of broad aims; working collaboratively, reducing interfamily violent conflict, bringing an end to the cycle of violence as well as addressing the effects of trauma on individuals, families and the community as a whole. The initiative is significant and timely as it brings together three organisations with comparative advantages around conflict, mental health, trauma, family separation, access and related issues.

The initiative is at an early stage of development but has made good progress and is well positioned to contribute to a reduction in violent conflict and to addressing related trauma and mental health issues. The three organisations have invested time in developing the partnership and engaging with Travellers to deepen their understanding of the factors contributing to violent inter-family conflict, the interaction between these conflicts and mental health and possible ways forward. The research initiative launched in early 2023 is a key component and will further enhance this work and feed into the development of new responses and policy formulation.

The evaluation has found that the initiative is highly relevant and timely and is aligned with the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 (NTRIS) and the work of other Traveller organisations in these areas. The evaluation concludes that the initiative has been quite effective in several important areas, strengthening partnerships and collaboration between the three organisations, raising awareness of the links between conflict and mental health and developing new models of working on these issues.

The initiative has already generated a number of important learning points including the importance of framing the issues and setting the agenda, the value of developing more holistic approaches to these intertwined problems, the need for increased focus on preventive work and the importance of real collaboration among Traveller organisations.

Under this initiative the three partners have implemented three pilot projects which are generating important learning for the future;

- TMS has developed a programme of work which involves bringing young Travellers through a basic programme to raise awareness around conflict and how young people can respond more effectively and prevent escalation. This project has been rolled out in five locations to date (Tullamore, Longford, Ballina, South Dublin and Kilkenny) and has the potential to influence the attitude and behaviour of young Travellers and develop a cohort of young leaders with increased capacity to deal more effectively with conflict situations.
- The Traveller Counselling Service has worked on the development of a culturally appropriate and family focused approach which can respond to the cyclical nature of many conflicts. It is investigating how family therapy and trauma informed approaches could be developed to work on a more sustained basis with families to address trauma and prevent reoccurrence. The first phase of this project involved in-depth consultations with Traveller families affected by conflict, the establishment of an expert advisory group and the recruitment of a part-time trauma-informed family therapist.
- The access project developed by Exchange House Ireland builds on their ongoing work to support individuals and families affected by separation and estrangement. The model developed by EHI provides a more integrated access programme which addresses the

multifaceted aspects of conflict and separation. It has already supported several families and has the potential to make an important contribution in this area.

The conference in Dublin Castle pointed out the need for increased attention to women's perspective in relation to conflict and mental health. The initiative has made progress in this area and has also put increased emphasis on young Travellers. Understanding the role of women in conflict, the impact of conflict on their lives and strengthening their contribution to conflict resolution should be a central theme going forward. At the same time, it is important to work with those more directly involved in violent conflict and to develop strategies to engage with more hard to reach groups in the Traveller community. Working to change attitudes and behaviour among men is a more challenging task but is critical to the overall strategy.

The projects have already resulted in changes at both the personal and organisational levels. The work of TMS with young Travellers, the access support provided by Exchange House and counselling work by TCS with families have directly impacted on individuals and wider families.

At an organisational level there is evidence of increased trust and willingness to collaborate among the partners, a commitment to bringing about real change and more focus on the interconnected issues of conflict, trauma and mental health. At this stage there has not been time to impact at policy level but the project has the potential to do this and to bring forward evidence-based approaches which could inform policy making.

While the project has been quite effective in several key areas it has been less effective in the area of joint implementation. During the first phase the three organisations have focused on getting their own projects up and running, and should now put increased emphasis on joint implementation with agreed priorities, develop a theory of change and identify collective outcomes.

The steering group has been a key mechanism in developing this project and facilitating sharing. The partners should review the overall structure, streamline the steering group, draw up a memorandum of understanding and strengthen collaboration among staff. There is good potential for sustainability of some aspects of the initiative particularly the partnership between the three organisations, the emphasis on research and gaining a deeper understanding of the drivers of interfamily violent conflict and the opening up a wider conversation on the link between violent conflict and poor mental health outcomes.

Recommendations

1. The Traveller Mediation Service, Traveller Counselling Service and Exchange House should further develop this initiative and continue to work on strengthening this partnership.
2. The Dept of Children Equality, Disability and Youth should continue to support this initiative and ensure it has adequate resources to operate at a scale and have a national impact.
3. The partners should use the learning and experience from this initial phase and the upcoming research on conflict to set out agreed priorities for the next phase, to develop a theory of change and to identify collective outcomes which they can all work towards.
4. This should maintain the focus on new approaches which can bring about changes at individual, organisational and policy levels with an increased focus on the role of youth and women in this regard.
5. The three partners should ensure that the project maintains its emphasis on preventing and resolving inter family violent conflict, developing trauma informed approaches, addressing the drivers of these conflicts and engaging with those directly involved in violent conflict.

6. The partners should streamline the steering group and draw up a Memorandum of understanding (MOU) to facilitate effective operation and management of the project.
7. There should be increased emphasis on staff collaboration including joint training and reflection workshops to help refine and improve the work.
8. The partners should review the budget and ensure that resources are allocated to maximise effectiveness and develop new approaches and models.
9. The partners should focus on implementation and aim to bring forward specific outcome and models from the next phase of the initiative which can influence the policy agenda and feed into the new NTRIS.
10. The partners should develop a monitoring and evaluation framework which can capture the different outcomes and how the partnership approach and the new models are being integrated and bringing added value.

1. Introduction

The Traveller Counselling Service, Exchange House Ireland, and Traveller Mediation Service have come together to respond to specific identified needs within the Traveller Community. These needs were highlighted at a national conference on *'Inter-family Violence and its impact on Traveller Mental Health'* in April 2019. In 2021, the three organisations received funding from the Department of Children Equality, Disability and Youth for a one year pilot initiative on Traveller Conflict and Mental Health with three strands, a Traveller Youth Conflict Skills Programme, Trauma informed Family Counselling and a Family Support initiative. The three projects are being implemented over a one year period from May 2022 to April 2023. The evaluation was carried out over a two month period from mid Sep to mid Nov 2022. As the projects were in the initial stage of implementation the focus was mainly on the identification of good practice and learning from the project in order to inform the next phase of the initiative. The evaluation applied the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability as the basis to assess progress so far.

Traveller Mediation Service

The Traveller Mediation Service (TMS), is a national service, based in Athlone, Co Westmeath. TMS is a partnership initiative, supported by Restorative Justice in the Community (RJC) and funded by the Department of Equality. They work to assist their clients and stakeholders to find ways to prevent, manage, and transform conflicts peacefully and effectively. TMS accepts mediation case referrals from Travellers, communities, and agencies. TMS also promotes and delivers a number of training programmes in the area of conflict prevention and intervention.

Traveller Counselling Service

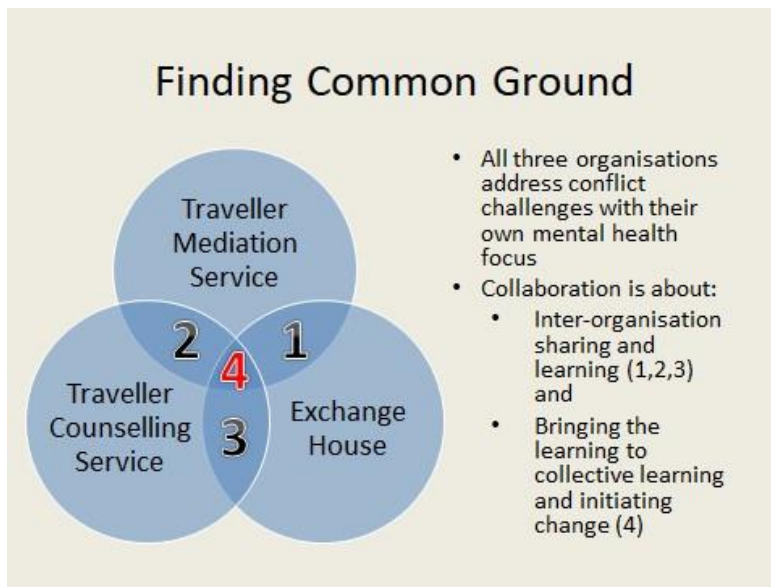
The Traveller Counselling Service (TCS), was launched in February 2008, initially as a one-year pilot project which has since developed into a community-based counselling service that provides counselling to Travellers in a number of local areas. The service works from a culturally inclusive framework that respects Traveller culture, identity, values and norms and works from a perspective of culturally centred counselling and psychotherapy.

Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service

Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service (EHINTS) has over 40 years' experience providing Traveller specific professional, front-line family support, counselling and psychotherapy, crisis intervention, education, training and services for children and young people in Ireland. Exchange House is one of the largest Traveller specific service providers in the country and is comprised of Travellers and non-Travellers who endeavour to work towards an inclusive society.

EHINTS team of trained therapists and social workers are skilled in trauma work. Travellers accessing the services are offered a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary and holistic approach to their concerns.

Overview of the project¹



Overview of the evaluation

The overall aim of the evaluation was to assess the progress of the initiative in the first phase of its development and to identify learning and good practice emerging. The evaluation was carried out over a two month period, from late Sep to early Dec 2022 and involved a review of documents, interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders including;

- Management and staff in the three partner organisations; the Traveller Mediation Service, Exchange House and the Traveller Counselling Service,
- Focus groups with the project steering group, staff at Exchange House and with participants on the TMS courses in the midlands
- Interview with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability and Youth, Tusla, the Gardai, Offaly Traveller Movement, the Traveller Mental Health Network and the Irish Traveller Movement.

As this is a pilot project which was implemented by a new partnership between three Traveller organisations, the evaluation shows a strong focus on learning and identifying good practice. The evaluation applied the criteria of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability as the basis to assess the initiative. The evaluation was affected by a number of limitations namely;

- The project was still in the early stage of development and the three projects were still in the start-up phase. As a result, it is too early to identify outcomes and impacts,
- This is a pilot initiative and there is limited awareness of the work outside of the three implementing partners,
- There are sensitivities around work relating to conflict, mental health and trauma and it was not possible to consult with programme participants/service users.

2. Context

The link between violent conflict and mental health in the Traveller community is a major concern and agencies working with Travellers are increasingly concerned about the impact of these conflicts on individual mental health and on the overall well-being of the Traveller community. Travellers have been recognised by the Irish State as an ethnic minority group since 2017 and

¹ Outcome of joint planning workshop 1/11/22

represent 0.7% of the overall population, with 30,987 Travellers residing in Ireland, according to recent statistics². The majority of the Irish Traveller Community lives in the greater Dublin area (over five thousand people) with the population well dispersed around Ireland according to recent Census figures³. The State has acknowledged that poverty, poor housing and socio-economic factors, as well as prejudice and discrimination, contribute to a mental health crisis in the Traveller community⁴. Discrimination is a serious barrier towards equality for Travellers in Irish society where a recent survey found that 65% of Travellers reported experiencing discrimination⁵. Compared to national averages, a recent study states that suicide is six times higher than the national average, and there is a consensus that mental health issues are common in the community⁶.

There is increasing recognition among agencies operating in conflict environments of the link between conflict and mental health and an awareness that direct exposure to traumatic events and ongoing stress and anxiety linked to conflict can cause significant mental health issues particularly for children. Research indicates that people impacted by conflict and living in conflict environments experience a range of mental health problems including depression, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), grief, and harmful use of alcohol and drugs. The conference on Inter-Family Violence and Mental Health organised by the TMS, TCS and EHINTS was an important event as it examined the links between the high levels of conflict in the Traveller community, resulting trauma and the serious mental health problems which has impacted on virtually every Traveller family.

The National Traveller Mental Health Network identified a range of contextual factors⁷ which are negatively impacting Traveller Mental Health. Conflict and violence were included as one of these factors. *“There are issues with conflict and violence within the Traveller community and directed against Travellers. Violence, both domestic violence and what has been termed feuding, or inter community violence, have also caused huge emotional, distress for families.”*⁶ Other factors identified were discrimination, socio-economic exclusion, cultural issues, lack of appropriate accommodation, lack of education, unemployment, gender issues, alcohol and drug abuse and a lack of suitable culturally appropriate services.

According to a 2014 report⁷, figures suggest Traveller men are between five and eleven times more likely than other men to be imprisoned, while Traveller women face a risk of imprisonment as much as eighteen to twenty-two times higher than that of the general population. Domestic violence is also a major issue with a report stating that Traveller women are thirty times more likely to suffer domestic violence in Irish society⁸. Understanding these trends is a work in progress, together with the task of connecting the narrative between the root causes of marginalisation of the Traveller Community, the mental health crisis and the escalation of violence especially inter-family violence.

Statistics provided in this report highlight the extent of the problem and the challenges faced by both Travellers themselves and agencies working to support Travellers. The 2016 census highlights suicide to be six times higher for Travellers than in the general population and 82% of

² HSE, ‘Traveller Mental Health Initiatives Evaluation Report’, (2020), [s3-hse-mhi-evaluation-final-051120.pdf](#)

³ Central Statistics Office, ‘Irish Travellers - Demographics’, (2016) [Irish Travellers - Demographics - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

⁴ Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills Debate, ‘Traveller Education Discussion’ (2019)

⁵ EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, ‘Survey of Rights and Living Conditions of Travellers in Ireland’, (2020) ⁶ HSE, ‘Traveller Mental Health Initiatives Evaluation Report’, (2020), [s3-hse-mhi-evaluation-final-051120.pdf](#) ⁷ National Traveller Mental Health Network: ‘Strategic Plan’, (2019-2021)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Travellers in the Irish Prison System, A Qualitative Study’, (2014)

⁸ Women’s Health Council, ‘Translating Pain into Action - Gender Based Violence and Minority Ethnic Women in Ireland’, (2009)

the community have been affected by suicide. 56% of Travellers reported that poor physical and mental health restricted normal daily activities. The situation is exacerbated by the low uptake among Travellers of mainstream mental health supports. This is caused by a combination of a lack of cultural awareness among service providers, Travellers feeling disillusioned and misunderstood, together with feelings of shame and fear related to these issues.

Currently, the State framework which endeavours to take responsibility for policy issues relating to inter-family violence and mental health issues largely comes under the remit of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth who fund and manage the current initiative. Their Integration Unit coordinates the '*National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2017 - 2021*', (NTRIS). This policy, though out of date, aims to support and coordinate policy in relation to Traveller and Roma people in Ireland. NTRIS commits to a variety of actions to work towards Traveller Integration and well-being. Action 138 commits to fund projects which work to end 'feuding'. European policy is rooted in the '*Strategic Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion, 2020 - 2025*', which guides and informs Irish policy. The Department of Justice takes responsibility for Traveller issues relating to the law. The Department of Health is responsible for the health of Travellers and fund the 'National Traveller Mental Health Service' which is provided by Exchange House.

At policy level the NITRIS made a number of recommendations regarding mental health supports for Travellers including recommendations that the HSE will support and further develop culturally appropriate services in consultation with Traveller and Roma organisations; will develop targeted interventions and educational materials to support good mental health, suicide prevention and promote and develop self-esteem; and support communication campaigns to reduce stigmatising attitudes to mental health and suicidal behaviour.

A range of initiatives are in place to address conflict and mental health including work by the three partner organisations.

- The National Traveller Mental Health Network aims to develop a collective space that is Traveller community led, where local, regional and national Traveller mental health issues are highlighted, discussed and addressed.
- The Traveller Mediation Service uses mediation, restorative approaches and training to raise awareness and build capacity among Travellers to prevent and resolve conflict and to more effectively deal with the impact of these conflicts. It also works with agencies working with Travellers including recent work in prisons.
- Exchange House Ireland provides a suite of support services for Travellers including, crises intervention, addiction services, domestic violence support and prison work. As part of its mental health services it provides individualised mental health support, education and training and cognitive behaviour therapy.
- The Traveller Counselling Service provides addiction counselling, family therapy and delivered the Minceirs Mental Health Course in 2021 TCS also provide an advocacy service for clients, and community development approach that's
 - seek to empower local Traveller groups to address the mental health crisis at a local level.
 - Pavee Point have launched the new mental Health Website for young Travellers - Mind your Nuck. This platform offers culturally appropriate information on many areas impacting on young Travellers' mental health – racism, discrimination, drug issues and unemployment – and offers signposting to services.

While there is significant focus on Traveller mental health and a range of recommendations on this ⁹issue there are two significant gaps. Many of the recommendations relate to responses and efforts to address the effects of poor mental health with limited focus on prevention. While

⁹ Barriers to Justice for Irish Travellers seeking to Challenge discrimination. Irish Research Council 2019

conflict is identified as a contributory factor there is limited attention given to how this problem is contributing to mental health challenges and how it could be addressed.

Dublin Castle conference on conflict and mental health

The three organisations collaborated and organised a conference in 2019 to:

1. Highlight root causes of inter-family violence and its impact on Traveller mental health,
2. To examine the impact of inter-family conflict on Travellers in terms of trauma and mental health,
3. To explore solutions and ways of supporting the community to address these issues.

This event highlighted a number of common issues related to inter-family violence and mental health including:

- environmental - poor and overcrowded accommodation with no option for families to move from and avoid conflict situations,
- Racism and discrimination combined with high levels of poverty and unemployment,
- Internalised oppression among Travellers leading to feelings of shame,
- The normalisation of violence, viewing it as acceptable and necessary to protect one's self and family,
- The capacity for a small incident to escalate quickly into full blown conflict, with pressure from family being a major contributory factor. The cyclical nature of conflict also emerged and how difficult it is for Travellers to break free of this cycle. Many participants spoke of conflict as a learned behaviour.
- Escalation happens quickly with more and more people getting involved and the situation becoming increasingly violent. The longer conflict continues, the more people become involved,
- The role of social media especially the use of videos which incite violence and reinforce negative stereotypes of Travellers,
- Exposure to violence and trauma in childhood predisposes children to violence or offending behaviour in adulthood. The impact on children was highlighted and the need to protect children from exposure to violence.

The Conference proposed ten recommendations (See Appendix 1). Four of these recommendations, numbers five to eight, were considered most relevant to the impact of inter-family violence on Traveller women, youth and children.

Education

Training and educational initiatives to address, (a) Traveller youth to include a focus on Traveller culture, internalised oppression, Traveller rights, activism, conflict resolution etc., (b) the inordinately high levels of unemployment amongst Travellers, (c) the impact of violence on children specifically aimed at Traveller parents, (d) the current lack of focus on Traveller culture at present in primary and secondary curriculums.

Services

There is a need for increased resourcing of current services as well as resourcing for the initiatives recommended in this report. Ongoing cultural awareness training for mainstream service providers engaging with Travellers (teachers, social workers, Gardaí etc.) and the recommendation of a specific initiative to address and build trust between Travellers and An Garda Síochána.

Support

Create specific supports for Traveller women and children impacted by inter-family violence and increase resourcing of current support services such as mediation, counselling, training, education and youth and children's supports. Ensure there is a supportive space for Traveller

activists to come together to discuss the challenges they face as a collective working on behalf of the community.

Research

There is a need for an in-depth piece of research, preferably carried out by Travellers, or certainly, Traveller led, that would provide an analysis of the root causes of inter-family violence, the implications of inter-family violence and would correspondingly offer recommendations to address the issue.

The Impact of Covid 19

Traveller agencies reported the Covid-19 emergency had particular negative impact on Traveller health and well-being. It led to increased stress, anxiety, depression, and poor mental health with increased alcohol abuse in a community with existing poor health (compared to the general national population). This had very serious consequences for the community.

3. Overview of the Traveller Conflict and Mental Health Initiative

The Traveller Conflict and Mental Health Initiative (TCMHI) was support under the Dormant Accounts fund and contributes to NTRIS action 138: 'The Department of Justice and Equality will put in place and fund an effective and sustained programme, in partnership with the Traveller community and all relevant Departments and agencies, to bring feuding to an end definitively over a period of time. This will include development of mediation services and embedding mediation services and capacities in local Traveller organisations.' The TCMHI was develop in response to the crises in the Traveller community and the recommendations emerging from the Dublin Castle conference. The project partners aim to work collaboratively to bring an end to this cycle of violence and trauma while at the same time addressing the effects this trauma has had on numerous individuals and families and the community as a whole. The initiative has worked to build a framework and develop new and more appropriate responses which can tackle conflict at different levels. In this first phase it has focused on laying a solid foundation which can then be used for wider engagement and more proactive work in the Traveller community. The overall initiative comprises three elements:

1. The delivery of three pilot projects focusing of different aspects of conflict and mental health
2. A research project to analyse the causes of inter family conflict
3. An awareness campaign

This evaluation is reviewing the first element of the initiative which has three strands, namely, a Traveller Youth Conflict Skills Programme, Trauma-informed Family Counselling and a Family Support initiative. The Traveller youth conflict Skills was implemented by the Traveller Mediation Service and aims to equip participants with a range of communication and conflict related skills. The Traveller Counselling Service implemented a trauma-informed counselling project which aimed to provide culturally sensitive family therapy to children and families who have experienced or witnessed high levels of conflict. The Family Support programme was implemented by Exchange House and provides support to parents from the Traveller community who are separated from their children.

- **Traveller Mediation Service:** To equip the participants with a range of communication and conflict related skills, and to provide them with knowledge, skills and competence in the areas of conflict management and personal and interpersonal development.
- **Traveller Counselling Service:** To provide culturally sensitive trauma-informed Family therapy for children and families who have experienced or witnessed high levels of conflict.

- **Exchange House:** Supporting parents from the Traveller community who are separated from their children (due to family conflict and/or imprisonment).

3.1 Details of implementation

Project Steering Group

A project steering group with representatives from the three partner organisations was established at an early stage and has met regularly since early 2022. Their role has been to provide overall direction to the project, plan activities, monitor progress, establish networking and sharing approaches, and facilitate learning. The Group is currently focused on monitoring the ongoing work in the three organisations and planning for two important elements of the initiative, a Traveller-led piece of research on conflict, and a communications/media campaign.

3.2 Financial summary

The overall funding package for this one year pilot initiative was €177,000 with the three partner organisations receiving between €40 -50,000.

The budget breakdown was;

Traveller Youth Conflict skill programme (TMS):	€40,000
Trauma informed Family Counselling (TCS):	€50,000
Family Supports (EHINTS):	€47,000
Other costs (research, administration and conference):	€40,000

The grant allowed the partners to employ part-time staff to implement the 3 projects:

- TMS employed a part-time trainer to deliver the Traveller Youth Conflict Skills Training programme.
- Exchange House employed two part-time access workers to implement their new access project.
- TCS employed a part-time family therapist to work with families.

3.3 Traveller Mediation Service

The TMS has delivered five Conflict Skills Training courses for young Pavees, in Tullamore, Ballina with Southside Travellers Action Group in Dublin and two courses in Longford. A total of 35 young Travellers have participated with young females participating in some (3 in Tullamore and five in Longford). These courses were introductory courses designed to raise awareness around conflict in the Traveller community and to develop basic skills to prevent conflict and reduce the risk of escalation. The course involved attendance of two hours per week over eight weeks and was delivered by an experienced TMS mediator/trainer. TMS has scheduled two further courses in Tullamore and Kilkenny in early 2023.

TMS also plans to offer an accredited Mediators Institute of Ireland mediation course for participants from these five basic courses. This course is planned for early 2023 and will involve 80 hours of training (one day per week over twelve weeks). The aim is to develop a cohort of young Travellers with skills and confidence to prevent and resolve conflict.

The initial target was to deliver a larger number of training course around the country. The strategy was overly ambitious given the allocated time frame and given its part-time basis (two days per week). The plans also did not factor in the need for pre-development work in the community to raise awareness and recruit young people. This is a key element of the initiative and has proven to be time-consuming. However, it has meant that the initiative is more grounded and integrated at community level, and it has developed good relationships and identified young people at risk of involvement in conflict.

Consultations with participants highlighted several important aspects of the course, including the course delivery which was facilitated by a Traveller, given it was based on the reality of the

participants' lives, and given that the course encouraged mixing between Traveller families. Young Travellers feel under pressure to get involved in inter-family conflict as a result of worry about the family name and the necessity to save face. However, young Travellers are also looking for help to enable them to handle conflict situations, avoid getting involved and develop some skills to resolve issues at an early stage. The participants also felt that developing new approaches and language can help them deal more effectively with disputes with agencies and to have their voices heard. Participants commented that it was good to learn about conflict; how conflicts start, escalate and get out of control, and to gain an understanding of the emotional triggers which can exacerbate the situation. Participants noted that the training helped them to step back, develop awareness of how conflict can escalate and develop the confidence to try to deal better with conflict situations. Participants stated that they joined the course because of the level of feuding in their communities, and the fact that young people were under pressure to get involved. They were also positive about mixing with other Travellers from different families and getting to know Travellers from outside their normal circle.

3.4 Exchange House Ireland

Exchange House Ireland developed a new Access initiative which aims to support families affected by separation through imprisonment, conflict, parental/guardian separation and family estrangement and division. It is working to develop appropriate models and approaches which can help break the inter-generational trauma in families and address adverse childhood experiences. The project employs two part-time access workers under this initiative, one of which is a member of the Traveller community. The key elements of the service are the fact that EHI is a trusted organisation, it is seen as a safe neutral venue and can provide integrated supports to services users. The Access service is integrated into the Family Support and Crisis intervention Service which provides other key supports such as play therapy, Mental Health Support, and Counselling.

EHI invested time in the start-up phase to build the capacity of new staff and ensure that the new project was properly integrated with other services. Since it got operational the project has dealt with three referrals (two from Tusla and one from a family law solicitor) which have involved around 7 access visits per week. The project has facilitated a family reunification and reports improvements in the well-being of children supported by this service. The service and the EHI venue are seen as welcoming and appropriate for work of this nature and is valued by Tusla and the family law sector. The project has identified a number of important developments for the next phase including developing referral pathways with TMS and the Traveller Counselling Service and with Domestic Violence Services. EHI has also been working in partnership with the Prison Service to develop access programmes in the prisons but this has been delayed due to staff shortage in the prisons.

3.5 Traveller Counselling Service

The TCS is working to develop a trauma-informed and culturally appropriate service for families affected by inter-family conflict. They have employed a part-time Family therapist and aim to create a safe space for families to deal with the trauma of these events. The project has also convened an advisory group to support and guide the work which includes representatives of the other two partners, TMS and EHI. This project is working with Traveller families to understand the causes and issues underlying these conflicts and to promote real change. It focusses on the family as well as individuals and is looking at how to work more proactively, how to engage the wider Traveller community and how to prevent escalation and reoccurrence. Stage one was an initial development stage to put in place the right structures, recruit a worker and set up the advisory group. This group is central to the developmental nature of the work and to bring in different perspectives to guide the new process. It includes both Travellers affected by conflict and experts in areas such as family therapy and trauma. Stage 2 involves the employment of a community links worker, engagement and consultation with Traveller families affected by conflict, develop referral mechanisms and build a service which can work for families.

A key element is to identify any barriers to engagement with counselling and the factors that might encourage and enable greater engagement with Counselling services. Some of the key issues that have emerged are the sense of hopelessness among Travellers caught up in long running conflicts, trauma, fears around safety, a sense of loss related to family separation and estrangement and practical issues such as loss of the network of support and access to education and childcare.

There are also other long terms impacts on identity when people have to relocate due to conflict. Through this process of engagement the project aims to develop culturally appropriate, and more holistic family therapy approaches to address the interlinked problems of conflict and mental health.

Summary of progress to date

Developing the model: The three partner organisations have invested significant time and effort to define the model and approach, to develop the consortium and build relationships, establish a steering committee, and plan for the roll out of the three components (the three projects, the research project and the awareness campaign).

Project implementation: The three partners have established and progressed their own projects

- The Traveller Mediation Service has delivered five Conflict Skills training Courses (Tullamore Longford x2, Ballina and Southside Traveller Group) with a total of 36 participants. Two further courses are planned in Tullamore and Kilkenny.
- Exchange House Ireland has developed a new Access programme, recruited two part time staff, established working relationships with key agencies (TUSLA and the Family courts) and provided support to three families impacted by conflict and separation.
- The Traveller Counselling Service has worked to develop a trauma-informed service geared towards families affected by inter-family conflict. TCS has recruited a part-time family therapist, established an advisory group, carried out consultations with families and Traveller groups, developed referral processes and provided support to families affected by conflict.

Research initiative: The consortium has commissioned a research project to identify the contributing factors to inter-family conflict and the Impact of Traveller interfamily con individuals and families. A researcher was appointed in later 2022 and an inception report was due in mid Feb. The research is expected to be completed by the end of September 2023.

4. Analysis of the Initiative

4.1 Relevance

The Traveller community is impacted by a complex range of factors which are driving conflict and negatively impacting the mental health of both adults and children in the community. This in turn is setting back other educational, health and economic development initiatives, creating a negative spiral which many Traveller families are struggling to escape from. Consultations with Traveller agencies as part of this evaluation and the Dublin Castle conference on Inter-Family Violence have highlighted the damage caused by violent conflict and the link between conflict and mental health problems in the Traveller community. Given this context the CMHI is highly relevant and appropriate. It brings together three organisations with different mandates and approaches in an effort to tackle these complex issues and focuses attention on the inter-connection between conflict and mental health. It provides a more integrated approach to these intertwined problems and how different groups and agencies can respond in a more structured and culturally appropriate way. The fact that three organisations have collaborated to bring their perspectives and experience to the initiative is both timely and appropriate. This sends out a clear message to Travellers and wider society that Travellers are serious about addressing these issues and want to bring new thinking to these problems. The three projects being implemented are also relevant

to the wider context and the particular issues associated with Inter-Family violence and its impact on mental health. The three projects have attempted to develop new approaches to these issues.

- The TMS has developed an initiative targeting young Travellers and working to enhance their understanding of conflict and how young Travellers can avoid and prevent conflict. Given the inter-generational nature of conflict, and the high percentage of young people in the Traveller community it is critical that young people are included and provided with skills and approaches to change these dynamics. The core aim is to change attitudes among young Travellers, to raise awareness about non-violent conflict resolution methods and to build confidence and basic skills to help them realise that they have a role to play.
- The Traveller Counselling Service has focused on the link between conflict, trauma and family relationships. This approach is particularly relevant given the strength of family ties in the Traveller community, the reliance on family networks and the damage caused to these relationships by violent inter-family conflict.
- Exchange House developed an access programme to facilitate enhanced access between children and parents in cases where there is separation due to conflict or other family problems. This programme aims to provide a more culturally appropriate, family-friendly support system and location to facilitate access. The initiative is filling a gap in provision and developing a new model of working which is designed to help individuals and families affected by conflict and family breakdown.

4.2 Effectiveness:

The project sets out several broad aims; to reduce interfamily violent conflict, bring an end to the cycle of violence and address the effects of trauma on individuals, families and the community as a whole. This is a pilot initiative and was still in the development stage when the evaluation was carried out. Therefore, it is too early to fully analyse the overall effectiveness of the initiative.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that the initiative has been effective in several important areas; strengthening partnerships and collaboration between the three organisations, raising awareness of the links between conflict and mental health, and the development of new models of working on these issues.

4.2.1 Partnership approaches

There is a consensus on the need for increased collaboration between Traveller organisations to address the multi-dimensional issues which cause and sustain conflict in the Traveller community. One of the main achievements of this initiative has been the establishment of a strong partnership between TMS, TCS and EHINTS which provides a solid platform for further work. The organisations had worked together to deliver the 2019 conference in Dublin Castle and to follow up on the recommendations. Those involved have noted the levels of trust between the three organisations, the increased understanding of the work of the respective partners and the value of developing and testing new approaches.

While a lot has been achieved in a relatively short period of time there is a need to further strengthen this aspect of the initiative and improve collaboration, particularly at operational level. The Covid 19 pandemic and resulting restrictions did limit progress in the early stages of this initiative. During the first phase of the TCMHI the partners needed to develop their respective responses and get the projects up and running before they could truly engage with external partners. This stage has now been completed and there is scope to further develop the partnership at the steering group and staff levels as well as developing and strengthening partnership and working relationships with other organisations and agencies.

4.2.2 Developing new models of work

As outlined above the three organisations were allocated funds to develop pilot projects and explore new initiatives on conflict and mental health. The TMS developed a programme of work with young Travellers which had a strong preventative element. This has involved recruiting young Travellers and bringing them through an introductory programme on

understanding conflict. Overall the initial round of training appears to have achieved its objectives and to have created a small cohort of young Travellers in Longford, Tullamore and Ballina who are willing to engage on these issues and are interested in further training. Another important aspect was the involvement of young Traveller women who feel they can play a more positive role but need support.

The TCS has focused on developing a more family-centred trauma-informed approach to counselling for people in conflict situations. TCS has established an advisory group to support this initiative and has carried out consultations with Traveller groups around the country to gain a better understanding of the factors causing conflict, how counselling services could support people to deal more effectively with stress and tension and contribute to conflict resolution. This initiative is significant as it focusses on the family rather than individuals and is examining how counselling services could work with families to both address the effects of conflict and to engage more proactively in efforts to prevent escalation and reoccurrence.

The access project developed by EHINTS builds and is integrated into their ongoing work to support individuals and families. Through this initiative, EHINTS has been able to recruit two part-time access workers to work with families and enhance the access facilities in the EHINTS Dublin centre and ensure it is a safe neutral space for these activities. Family separation and estrangement are significant problems within the community, both as a cause and an effect of conflict. Efforts to address these issues are affected by a lack of trust between Travellers and social workers, shame and secrecy as well as a lack of resources. The model developed by EHINTS is addressing these issues and provides a more integrated and culturally appropriate response which is approved and valued by Tusla. The project is still in the development phase but it does have the potential to make an important contribution.

4.2.3 Setting the agenda

The Dublin Castle conference and the work undertaken through the three projects have highlighted the links between inter-family conflict and mental health problems. Both have been effective in articulating and framing the issues and in building consensus on the need for collaboration and for more specific and focused action. The NTRIS had 149 actions over ten thematic areas with only one specific action aimed at ending conflict. The collaboration by the partners, the work undertaken through the pilot projects and the research project have sustained the momentum and are building a platform for further work at both the policy and programme levels.

4.3 Issues for consideration

While the project has been quite effective in some areas there are a couple of areas where it needs to develop further. The three organisations have focused on getting their own projects up and running and have made good progress in this regard. There has also been good progress in developing the consortium and in launching the research project. The projects did need time to recruit staff, build staff capacity, set up systems and implement these new actions. One of the strengths of this project is that it builds on the comparative advantage of the three partners. However, it should strengthen its focus on how the three partners can jointly address these challenges and bring added value. There is a risk that the three project will continue to operate separately with sharing and integration happening at steering group level. The steering group has been a key mechanism in developing this project and facilitating sharing. However, there is a need to streamline this structure and to strengthen collaboration among staff involved in implementation. The strategy of sharing out the grant among the three organisations has enabled the organisations to expand their own programmes and develop the three projects described in this report. However, it may not be the most effective mechanism to address the complex issues relating to conflict and mental health and the three partners should look for opportunities to

develop innovative interventions which draws on their comparative advantage and brings in other actors.

4.3 Sustainability

Sustainability looks at the extent to which the benefits of the initiative will continue or are likely to continue. At this stage there is potential for sustainability of some aspects of the initiative particularly the partnership between the three organisations, the emphasis on research and gaining a deeper understanding of the drivers of inter-family conflict and the increased focus on the link between these conflicts and mental health. A key factor is the fact that the three projects implemented through this initiative are grounded in the work of the three partners and integrated into their ongoing programmes. As a result of this integration the relatively small investment by the Dormant Accounts Fund brings considerable added value to the work.

4.4 Learning

The main learning points emerging so far include;

- There is increased awareness among Travellers of the damage being caused by conflict to the overall mental health and well-being of the community and an urgency around dealing with it,
- Conflict and mental health have been taboo issues and partnership approaches are more useful and less contentious,
- The intertwined nature of the problems being addressed and the value of collaboration among organisations with different objectives and distinctive approaches,
- There is a lack of knowledge on these issues among service providers, a low level of uptake among Travellers for mainstream services and in some cases a fear and suspicion of these services,
- The importance of trust in the partnership as this facilitates real sharing and enhances the likelihood of the partners making progress on difficult and sensitive issues,
- The importance of preventative work and the need to develop interventions which provide people with skills to resolve and prevent conflict at an earlier stage.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The conflict and mental health initiative is at an early stage of development and has made good progress in a relatively short period. The initiative is significant as it brings together three organisations with comparative advantages in working on conflict, mental health, family separation, access and related issues. The evaluation has found that the initiative is highly relevant and timely given the crises affecting many Traveller families. It is aligned with the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 -2021 (NTRIS) and the work of other Traveller organisations to address inter-family conflict, and the mental health crises. Traveller organisations are actively working to address the contextual issues and to improve the social, economic and cultural situation of Travellers. However, there is also a need for more timely and focused interventions to prevent and resolve inter-family conflict, to deal with trauma and reduce the likelihood of reoccurrence. This initiative is starting to do this in a more strategic manner and provides a good foundation for future work.

The evaluation also concluded that the initiative has been quite effective in its initial work and is well positioned to build on this and develop more effective interventions. It has already generated a number of important learning points which can inform both future work and policy development. These include the need to focus more directly on the drivers of conflict, the importance of the holistic approaches being developed by the partners, the need for increased focus on preventive work and the value of real collaboration among Traveller organisations. The projects have already resulted in changes at both the personal and organisational levels. The

work has directly impacted on individuals involved and brought about changes in their attitudes and lives. While the numbers involved are still small, it does indicate that the project can have a larger impact. There has also been change at organisational level with increased trust and willingness to share as well as a more focus on the intertwined issues of conflict and mental health. At this stage there has not been time to impact at policy level but the project has the potential to do this with the new NTRIS strategy being developed. There is an opportunity to bring forward evidence-based actions from this initiative which could inform this strategy.

The work of TMS to develop appropriate interventions for young Travellers is critical to breaking the cycles of violence which have been occurring. This has been limited in scope because it is a part-time role and the vital development work prior to the training courses has been time-consuming. This project would need to be on a much larger scale to have a real impact at national level and to engage with hard-to-reach young Travellers who are at risk of being drawn into violence. The project is working to raise awareness of conflict and how to deal with it and also looking to identify young people willing to do more advanced training to become certified mediators. Based on this initial assessment the project should maintain a strong focus on the initial awareness-raising element and try to scale this up to meet needs around the country. Young Travellers will face significant challenges in trying to shift attitudes towards conflict and violence among male Travellers and will need ongoing support for this. The project should look at how it can support these young people to develop leadership skills and work internally to bring about change. There are also significant challenges for young Travellers taking on a mediation role and this will need to be handled carefully and resourced properly.

TCS has been exploring how to develop more appropriate and family-orientated responses to interfamily conflict and how to develop trauma informed approaches which can help families address the impact of conflict and prevent further escalation and outbreaks. This approach has the potential to change the dynamic and breaking the cycles of conflict. It will be important that this is resourced adequately going forward and that the partners look at how this can be linked more closely to mediation work. ct.

The 2019 conference in Dublin Castle pointed out the need for increased attention to women's perspective in relation to conflict and mental health, how the fear around these issues are held by women, and the impact on their health and wellbeing. There would be merit in exploring this issue further and looking at how women can play a more active role in conflict prevention and resolution. The roles of women and young Travellers will be important themes going forward but given the urgency of the situation this initiative also needs to ensure it targets and works with men who are directly involved in inter-family conflict. Working to change attitudes and behaviour among these men is a more challenging task but is critical to the effectiveness of overall strategy.

The issues being addressed by the project are complex and this pilot offers potential to generate new approaches and interventions. It is important that the CMHI put increased emphasis on the causes and drivers and the research project will be key in this regard.

One of the strengths of this project is the focus on collaboration and this should be maintained; both among the current partners and with other organisations and agencies, particularly the Dept of Children, Equality Disability, Integration and Youth. The project should put increased emphasis on joint implementation, demonstrate that the combined efforts of the three partners can lead to real change and that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. To achieve this, the partners need to develop a clearer strategy with agreed priorities, a theory of change and develop collective outcomes i.e. agreed results or impacts which the three partners work towards. This will help shift the work towards outcomes - the change the project is working towards at different levels- personal, organisational and policy levels. The planning workshop held in Nov 2022 has progressed this work and it will be important that this process is maintained

and the results are communicated to external stakeholders. This type of joint planning will be also be useful in developing clearer monitoring and evaluation systems for the initiative.

5.2 Recommendations

1. The Traveller Mediation Service, Traveller Counselling Service and Exchange House should further develop this initiative and continue to work on strengthening this partnership.
2. The Dept of Children Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth should continue to support this initiative and ensure it has adequate resources to operate at a scale and have a national impact.
3. The partners should use the learning and experience from this initial phase and the upcoming research on conflict to set out agreed priorities for the next phase, to develop a theory of change and to identify collective outcomes which they can all work towards.
4. They should maintain the focus on new approaches which can bring about changes at individual, organisational and policy levels with an increased focus on the role of youth and women in this regard.
5. The three partners should ensure that the project maintains its emphasis on preventing and resolving inter family conflict, developing trauma informed approaches, addressing the drivers of these conflicts and engaging with those directly involved in violent conflict.
6. The partners should streamline the steering group and draw up a Memorandum of understanding (MOU) to facilitate effective operation and management of the project.
7. There should be increased emphasis on staff collaboration including joint training and reflection workshops to help refine and improve the work.
8. The partners review the budget and ensure that resources are allocated to maximise effectiveness and develop new approaches and models.
9. The partners should focus on implementation and aim to bring forward specific outcomes and models from the next phase of the initiative which can influence the policy agenda and feed into the new NTRIS.
10. The partners should develop a monitoring and evaluation framework which can capture the different outcomes and how the partnership approach and the new models are being integrated and bringing added value.

Appendix 1 Summary of Conference Recommendations

1. National Response

- A Traveller-led, state-supported, national response to the problem of inter-family violence to include the re-convening and re-activating of the NTRIS Action 138 Sub-Committee.

2. Accommodation

- The State needs to be pressed on (a) the lack of transient sites for Travellers, (b) a lack of accountability for county councils who fail to spend their Traveller accommodation budgets.

3. Legislation & Policy

- Legislation which is perceived as anti-Traveller (anti-trespass, market trading, keeping of horses etc.) to be re-examined in light of its impact on inter-family violence.
- An examination of current judicial practice to address the perception that Traveller sentences are more lenient when involving Traveller on Traveller violence.

4. Awareness Raising

- An awareness-raising campaign for both Travellers and the wider community addressing (a) the history of the Traveller experience in Ireland and (b) the issue of internalised oppression, and (c) challenging stereotypes around Travellers.
- A national anti-racism strategy to address the ongoing issue of racism that Travellers experience in Irish society.

5. Education

- Training and educational initiatives to address (a) Traveller youth to include a focus on Traveller culture, internalised oppression, Traveller rights, activism, conflict resolution etc., (b) the inordinately high levels of unemployment amongst Travellers, (c) the impact of violence on children specifically aimed at Traveller parents, (d) the current lack of focus on Traveller culture in present primary and secondary curriculums.

6. Services

- There is a need for increased resourcing of current services as well as resourcing for the initiatives recommended in this report.
- Ongoing cultural awareness training for mainstream service providers engaging with Travellers (teachers, social workers, Gardaí etc.) and the recommendation of a specific initiative to address and build trust between Travellers and An Garda Síochána.

7. Support

- Create specific supports for Traveller women and children impacted by inter-family violence and increase resourcing of current support services such as mediation, counselling, training, education and youth and children's supports.
- Ensure there is a supportive space for Traveller activists to come together to discuss the challenges they face as a collective, working on behalf of the community.

8. Research

- There is a need for an in-depth piece of research, preferably carried out by Travellers, or indeed, Traveller led, that would provide an analysis of the root causes of inter-family violence, the implications of inter-family violence and would correspondingly offer recommendations to address the issue.

9. Representation

- Increased Traveller representation in Government, the Seanad, County Councils and State Agencies such as An Garda Síochána as a way of ensuring that the Traveller community is represented fairly and that the Traveller voice is heard in these state bodies.

10. State Apology

- The final recommendation as a goal for this collective was to initiate the process towards an official apology from the State to members of the Travelling community for the denial of Traveller culture and ethnicity and the impact of the State Assimilation Policy since the 1960s.

Appendix 2; List of people consulted

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Aileen O Brien	Traveller Mediation Service
Frank Kavanagh	Traveller Mediation Service
Chris Mc Donagh	Traveller Mediation Service
Sharron Kelliher	Traveller Mediation Service
Thomas Mc Cann	Traveller Counselling Service
Annmarie Walsh	Traveller Counselling Service
Jules McDonagh	Exchange House Ireland
Kevin Burn	Exchange House Ireland
Kevin Kelly	Exchange House Ireland
Caroline Boyle	Exchange House Ireland
Suzie McCarthy	Traveller Counselling Service
Conor Mc Ginn	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
Jessica Perrolat	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
Geraldine Green	Garda National Diversity and integration Unit
Sandra Mc Donagh	Offaly Traveller Movement
Celine Mc Inerney	Offaly Traveller Movement
Etsuko Ito	TUSLA
Mags Casey	National Traveller Mental Health Network
Bernard Joyce	Irish Traveller Movement