



STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2026

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Background and Context

Origins of the Traveller Mediation Service (TMS) go back to the establishment of the Midlands Traveller Conflict Mediation Initiative (MTCMI) in 2009. The initiative, supported by the Department of Justice, was in response to the ongoing conflict in a midlands Traveller community at the time.

Based initially in Tullamore, and now in Athlone, the initiative later developed as a service working with a range of voluntary and statutory bodies¹. The service, best known as TMS, provides mediation as a way to prevent, manage and transform conflict peacefully and effectively. TMS is a partnership initiative, supported by Restorative Justice in the Community (RJC), and funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The service has been funded through the Restorative Justice in the Community since 2014 up until the present..

Restorative Justice in the Community (RJC) is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status whose purpose is to advance restorative justice and alternative dispute resolution in the Community. RJC incorporates two branches to its work, adult restorative justice referrals from the District Court and providing a governance and employment structure for the Traveller Mediation Service.

The partnership with RJC and increased funding from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has allowed for the service to grow from 2014 into its present form. The TMS team now consists of a full-time Programme Coordinator, a full-time Mediator/Trainer; a part-time Mediator/Trainer (4 days per week) and a part-time Project Management Officer (2 days per week). Currently there are two further staff members employed on a 12 month contract for one day a week as trainee mediators/trainers.

A panel of Traveller mediators/trainers has also been created over the past few years (through a dedicated Mediators Institute Accredited training programme). The role of the panel members is to assist TMS with mediation cases and training as required. The panel meet regularly and receive Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training from core TMS staff

These factors have resulted in the expansion of the Traveller Mediation Service - not only in terms of its capacity to respond to requests for intervention and its proactive approach to conflict prevention through capacity building, but also in terms of its national profile (within the Traveller community, as well as across a broad range of mainstream service providers).

¹ Statutory body: a body set up by law (statute) that is authorised to implement certain legislation on behalf of the relevant country or state

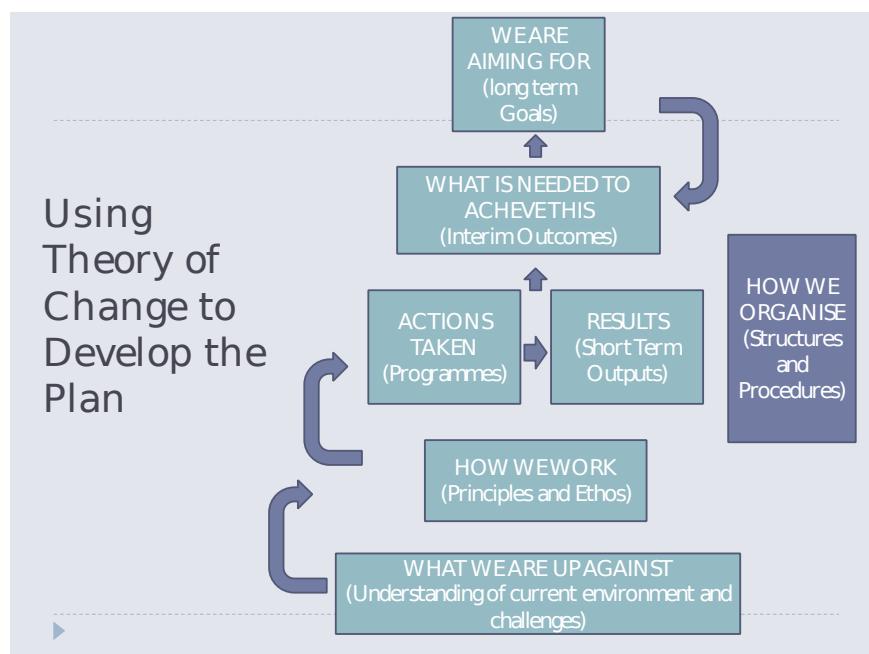
The Strategic Planning Process

In developing a plan for the coming three years, the Service now sees itself at a critical stage in its development cycle. The process of growth and expansion, as well as demonstrating successful outcomes in conflict mediation, has also served to highlight a growing demand for the service.

The strategic planning process was aimed at developing an approach and structures that would meet the following objectives:

1. Building up an understanding of current priority needs and challenges for the Traveller community in relation to the causes and consequences of conflict.
2. Identifying programmes and actions that would guide TMS in its continuing efforts to mediate conflictual situations, and to strengthen capacity within the community to address challenges and lead the change that is needed.

This plan is the result of a series of planning workshops with the TMS staff team and RJC Manager, as well as a review of activities and outcomes to date. Using the 'Theory of Change' approach, the central voices in this process were voices from the Traveller community.



The overall engagement and consultation process led to an agreed statement on our 'vision statement' to provide direction and guide the organisation's actions and approach for the coming three years

MISSION STATEMENT

“Our aim is to achieve de-escalation and reduction in the levels of conflict that affect the Traveller community. In doing so, to build a platform for understanding whilst tackling the causes of conflict and to pursue both these aspirations through skilled mediation; listening and understanding; increasing awareness and building self-determination”



Travellers and Conflict:

Understanding the Causes and the Consequences

The term conflict means many different things to different people and groups. An important piece of research, undertaken in the Midlands in 2008², formed the basis for establishment of the MTCMI, and subsequent development of the Traveller Mediation Service as a national service. There was a clear commitment, from the outset, to develop an understanding of Traveller conflict that is interconnected, and looks at all or as many as possible aspects. This clear understanding remains as an

² Midlands Traveller Conflict & Mediation Initiative Laois, Offaly, Longford, Westmeath; Sean McGearty, Ian White and Hannagh McGinley, 2008

important starting point in developing an intervention strategy that has the potential to be effective and result in longer-term benefits.

The report summarised the main factors and process that contribute to both the causes and the consequences of conflict in the Traveller community.

The Causes of Traveller Conflict

In reaching a working understanding around the *causal factors* contributing to conflict, it is important to acknowledge that these can be complex and ‘multi-faceted’. For example:

- For such a small community that consistently experiences exclusion and marginalisation from mainstream society in both social and economic terms, there is also the experience of a ‘power deficit’ in relation to the majority settled community. With the continuation of exclusion and marginalisation over a long period of time and through generations, power imbalances inevitably develop within the community itself.
- The experience of oppression for many communities can also result in increased competition over scarce resources and opportunities denied. This can lead to what is known as ‘internalised oppression’ and can result in conflict and violence – directed at other members of the oppressed community, and not informed by reasons or root causes of the oppression being experienced by all. This characteristic is common to many indigenous and/or nomadic communities internationally, and is also true if oppression of indigenous community is examined in terms of Irish history³.
- For a minority of Travellers, there is the perception that displays of power and the use of violence can pay off and become effective ways of maintaining vested interests.

Conflict in individual or family-linked cases are often interpreted as caused by more immediate events or reasons for hostility (for example long-standing family differences, insults traded on social media, retribution for previous attacks). These events are in fact merely what is known as ‘triggers’ that set off the violent behaviour. Addressing these ‘triggers’ through effective mediation can certainly diffuse the situation in any given circumstance. But any longer term aspiration to bring these situations to an end must acknowledge the root causes – most especially the contributory factors associated with marginalisation and exclusion. The most important of these are connected with:

1. *Poor quality of life experienced through inappropriate social accommodation and / or poor living conditions.* In addition to problems associated with poor and inadequate accommodation, there is the near impossibility for Travellers in accessing appropriate accommodation. Families are left with little choice but to accept housing in certain areas or circumstances, even when they know this can lead to problems (including violent conflict). This short term approach often causes

³ Relevant international comparisons can be made with the indigenous and nomadic people of North America, New Zealand and Australia. Comparisons can also be drawn with the unprecedented incidences of faction-fighting and feuding within the indigenous Irish ‘settled’ community in the pre-famine era – at a time when the penal laws represented a denial of rights, resources and identity.

longer term problems. Allocation policies can frequently have a directly negative effect on the potential for conflict – with a lack of knowledge around the wisdom of making neighbours out of families with historical grievances. At the more extreme end of the accommodation problem for Travellers is the level of homelessness within the community. There is clear evidence that this problem is growing nationally, with levels of homelessness within the Traveller community now the highest of any grouping in Irish society.

2. *Mental Health*. While no precise and updated estimates are available, feedback from within the Traveller community points to ever-increasing incidences of suicide – and to fears in relation to the risk of suicide. Many of the fears expressed were in respect of young Travellers – with continued exposure to discrimination and a lack of hope in the future being cited as principle contributors.
3. *Education and Progression*. The continuing trend of low levels of participation in the formal education system acts as a major barrier to progression. Low expectations are based on the reality of exclusion from employment opportunities.
4. *Inter-generational poverty*. A significant body of knowledge exists on the relationship between poverty and conflict. Research undertaken internationally, has shown that low per household income drastically increases the chances that a community will experience violence
5. *Culture and Identity*. The discrimination and prejudice experienced by most Travellers in their everyday lives adds to the sense of alienation. There is, on the one hand, the likelihood of experiencing negativity and even hostility for no other reason than ‘you are a Traveller’. Added to this, on the other hand, is the gradual erosion of many aspects of Traveller culture. A central part of this erosion has been the destruction of a nomadic way of life – arguably taking away inherently community-based means of mediating conflict through respect and creating enforced living conditions where the prospects of conflict are increased.

To acknowledge these realities we see as an important starting point in efforts to effectively address conflict.

Consequences of Traveller Conflict

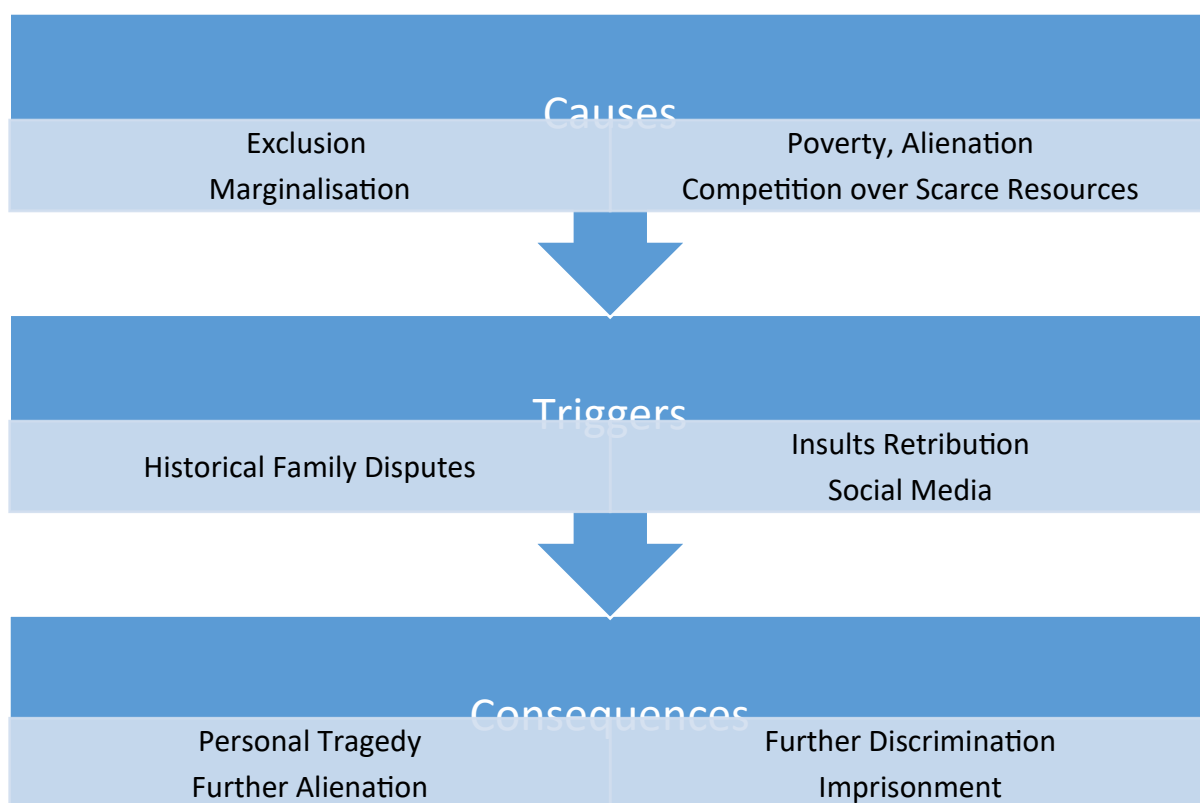
It is equally important, however, to take into account the grave consequences of conflict and violence within the Traveller community.

The Midlands report completed in 2008 concluded that:

“Violent conflict is hurting Travellers, destroying Traveller society and is negatively impacting on virtually all aspects of life, on all section of the Traveller community and is damaging the work of other development programmes”

The hurt for Travellers adds to the already severely disadvantaged position they find themselves in Irish society through:

- The ultimate sense of loss through death and serious injury in the most extreme cases.
- The fear and sense of foreboding around the prospect of retaliation where violent conflict does occur.
- The more specific fears for safety and security felt by many who may intervene in conflict situations
- Bringing more Travellers into the criminal justice system, increasing numbers in the prisons where Travellers are already over-represented.
- The tendency for conflict episodes to add to an already stereo-typed and prejudiced view held by many in wider Irish society – in turn increasing the potential for discrimination. More extreme versions of this stereo-typing can actually set out to portray violent conflict as part of Traveller culture.
- Difficulties faced by those attempting to built unity and agreement in the Traveller community. Divisions and disputes involving extended families can be represent a serious impediment to these efforts at bringing about much-needed change.



Rationale and Approach: Guiding Principles and Values

The experience and learning gained by the Traveller Mediation Service since our inception allows us to have confidence in the approach needed to continue our work in addressing conflict in the Traveller community. Principles and values underpinning our work going forward relate to both:

- TMS role in conflict resolution

- Our role in conflict prevention

Conflict Resolution

In order to maintain and expand our capacity to successfully mediate in disputes and situations of conflict, we recognise the central importance of:

1. Maintaining and strengthening trust that the service has built within the Traveller community. This will become even more important as we develop our capacity to anticipate or receive forewarning of the potential for conflict.
2. Maintaining and strengthening the confidence the service has built amongst other key stakeholders (most notably referral agencies such as those engaged in law enforcement, but also in other fields such as accommodation provision and community development)
3. Creating a space that is equitable and is seen to be equitable, especially to the extent that all relevant people are offered the opportunity for engagement; and that all those engaging can feel that they are being heard and listened to.
4. Avoiding what may be seen as conflict of interests or bias in relation to particular families or sections of the community.
5. Continuing to share and expand the skills and knowledge in mediation within the Traveller community – strengthening our capacity to meet demand for delivery of the service on a Traveller-to-Traveller basis.
6. Offering protection and support insofar as possible, to those engaging with us, notably in situations where personal safety and security may be threatened.
7. Ensuring that all engagement with the service is entered into on a voluntary basis.
8. Maintaining a commitment to follow-on review and assessment of outcomes.

Conflict Prevention

Quite clearly an ambition to end conflict and violence in the Traveller community is dependent upon change at much broader societal level being brought about. Continued alienation from mainstream society and from opportunities for progression; the continuing potential for competition over scarce resources; continued maintenance of a power deficit between the settled and Traveller communities. All these will continue to contribute to the potential for internalised community conflict and violence.

But we do consider the contribution that TMS can make to prevention as being significant, in the sense that:

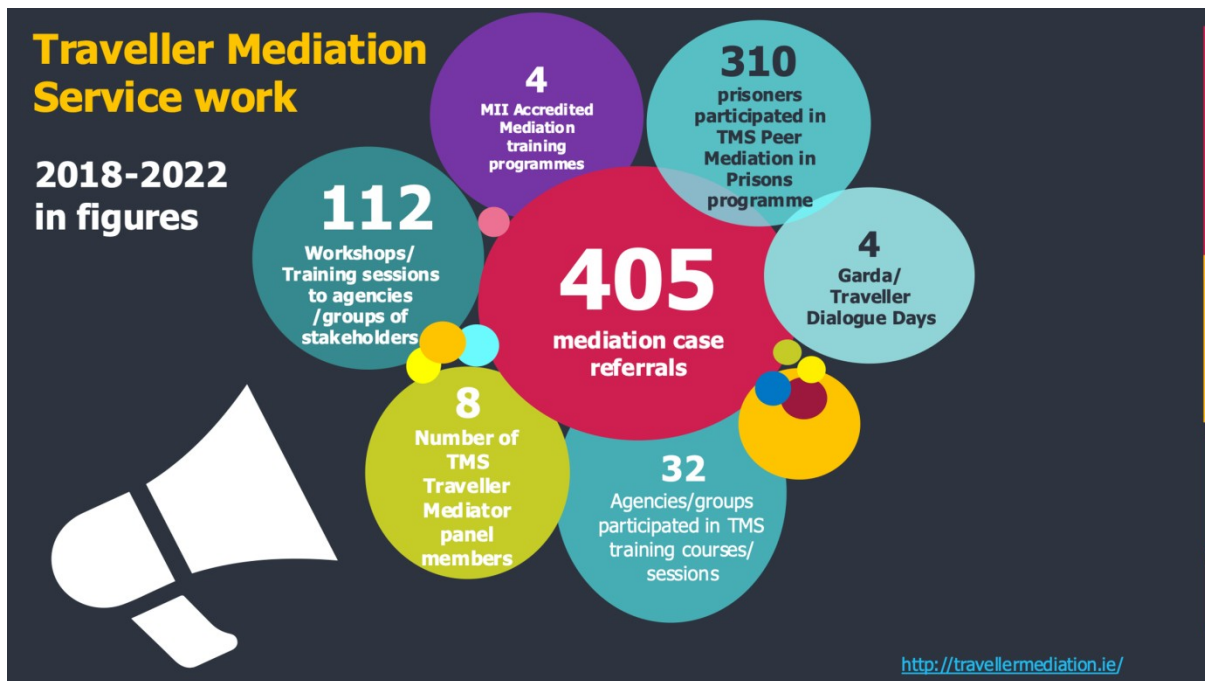
1. In the short-term, we remain committed to **building awareness around alternatives to conflict**. This can be most effectively achieved through:
 - a. Understanding and embracing differences between different sections of the Traveller community, and consequent differences in the potential role they may have in conflict or conflict resolution. TMS to date has designed and delivered specific programmes with Traveller

women, Traveller men, young Travellers and Travellers in prison. Successful interventions have begun with 'where people are at' or where their points of interest might be. Progress has been made to date on developing points of interest into alternatives to conflict.

- b. Demonstrating and exploring the consequences of conflict. These again can be very different for different age groups and genders within the community.
2. In the medium-term, maintaining a commitment to developing and **strengthening capacity** within the Traveller community for conflict mediation, resolution and prevention
3. In the longer-term, we will continue with our efforts to **build awareness around the causes of conflict** in the Traveller community. We see this as the starting point in a journey that needs to end with self-determination. We are convinced that Travellers themselves must be at the centre of change, and in control of designing their own future, if real and lasting change is to be achieved⁴. It remains important, however, that levels of awareness are also increased within mainstream agencies with responsibility for service delivery, as well as those responsible for formulation of policy and design of development programmes in appropriate areas.

There are social and economic contributors to high levels of conflict within the Traveller community. But there are also significant social and economic benefits to be achieved through ending Traveller conflict. In addition to the personal and tragic costs, the continuation of conflict brings significant costs in across a wide range of services, development programmes and supports (including law enforcement, family support, mental and physical health services). TMS remains committed to demonstrating the potential benefits associated with conflict resolution in the short, medium and long-term. We recognise the importance of evaluation in these efforts, and of our ability to make a convincing case that is based on evidence of outcomes and impacts.

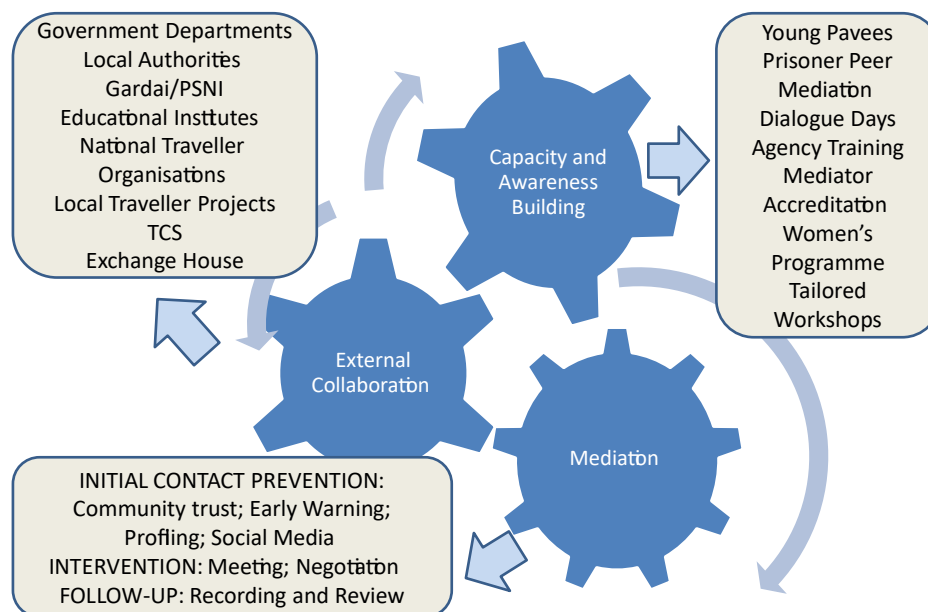
⁴ Freire (1993, p. 29) argued that 'to surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognise its causes, so that through transformation they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity'



Programmes and Actions

Over the coming three years, TMC will be working across three main development programmes:

Three Arms of the Work



1. The first is aimed at maintaining our capacity to deliver high-quality and effective mediation services; to respond to requests for intervention from our wide range of referral stakeholders; and to record and review the results of this work.
2. The second is aimed at building capacity and strengthening awareness – both within the Traveller community and also amongst the wider range of external stakeholders we work with –

as well as consolidating and expanding upon the capacity of Travellers to deal with conflict in an informed and professional manner.

3. The third is aimed at positively influencing the range of stakeholders (at local, regional and national level) who can shape policy and practice.
 - The focus will be on bringing informed improvements to the approach taken by service providers and practitioners in the short to medium terms, in their understanding and responses to conflict in the Traveller community.
 - We are also committed to bringing this understanding to the much needed longer-term strategies at national level – in recognition of the many broader social and economic factors impacting on Traveller conflict and violence.
 - Building this understanding and response will involve maintaining collaborative partnerships with a range of organisations within the Traveller community.
 - It will also involve establishing and maintaining working alliances with governmental agencies and programmes at the national level⁵.

Critically, these three arms of the work are linked and inter-dependent. For example:

- Success of our external collaboration with relevant stakeholders depends significantly on our capacity to demonstrate successful and sustainable outcomes – using an evidence-based approach – from our mediation work on the ground.
- Conversely, our capacity to maintain timely and effective intervention in conflicts that arise depends strongly on the confidence we have built with our main referral agencies (most notably and Garda Síochána and accommodation sections of local authorities)
- We are also aware that the sustainability and growth of TMS into the future depends, above all else on our success in imparting the knowledge and skills needed to a wide section of the Traveller community – ensuring the continued delivery of a high-quality and effective service, as well as recognition and accreditation for the learning involved.

The interdependence of these functions means that significant importance is placed on central coordination – ensuring that a team-work approach, and the space for peer learning is maintained. Each of the three programmes are outlined in more detail in the next section.

⁵ As well as strong working relationships with Irish government agencies, TMS has also begun engagements with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), and we will be pursuing opportunities open to expand our practice and our model on an all-island basis over the course of this plan.



Mediation Programme



Programme	Actions/Approach	Allies/Partners	Outcomes
Networking	Profiling the service Traveller community engagement	Garda Siochana Prison Services Health services Education/schools Traveller projects National Traveller Organisations PSNI	Broad awareness of the service, referral procedures and approach used
Initial Contact/ Pre-Assessment/ Pre-emption	Local Outreach and Liaison Engagement Feedback from post-conflict review	Local Traveller Projects Social media presence	Intervention in pre-conflict situations Work on alternatives to conflict
Intervention	Identifying participants Assessment Facilitating Discussion Registering agreements Peer evaluation	Traveller families Members of other communities Affected stakeholders	Agreed resolution Signing off on agreements
Follow-up	Post agreement assessment Further intervention where required Documenting outcomes	All parties in the dispute	Increased chances for long-term sustainable agreement

Key to delivery of the programme will be:

- A structured approach to profiling and explaining the service
- Where the potential for conflict to arise is anticipated, a commitment to respond in preventative terms
- The maintenance and expansion of strong TMS links with Traveller families and with different regions
- Equal space and opportunity for all participants
- Transparency in relation to commitments made and agreements reached
- Providing the space for all participants to review the process
- Revisiting stakeholders post-mediation: assessing outcomes and seeking renewed agreements where necessary
- Documentation and recording of outcomes, and of lessons learned. This is important as feedback for externally affected stakeholders and referral agents (within the confines of the TMS confidentiality policy). It is also important for TMS role in bringing forward evidence-based lessons for policy.

Capacity and Awareness Building



Programme	Actions/Approach	Allies/Partners	Outcomes
Traveller Awareness	Delivery of specific programmes with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Young Travellers •Travellers in prison •Traveller men •Traveller women 	Prisons Irish Prison Service Schools Traveller Primary Healthcare Programme Youth Groups Horse Associations Women's groups Traveller projects	Reduction of conflict levels in prison Longer-term positive effect on recidivism Greater knowledge and confidence around causes and effects of conflict in the community Alternatives to conflict identified and supported
Stakeholder Awareness	Delivery of specific programmes, including with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Garda Síochána •Prison authorities and staff •Social Workers •Sports organisations •Local councils •PSNI 	Professional education bodies Mediators Institute of Ireland Local authority accommodation units Education and Training Boards Irish Prison Service	Broader understanding of causes and consequences of Conflict in Traveller community Enhanced understanding of culture positively impacting responses to conflict

Key to delivery of the programme will be:

- Continuation and strengthening of TMS capacity to design interventions which are specific and relevant for different participant profiles. This is true for different members of the Traveller community (youth, men, women, prisoners); and is true also for different providers of mainstream services. There is no 'one-size-fits all'.
- Continue to support and build the TMS Panel of qualified Traveller mediators and trainers to assist with mediation referrals and to co-deliver training as required on Peer Mediation, conflict management and cultural awareness in prisons and to community groups/agencies, etc. on a contractual basis with TMS/RJC. This building process will include the expansion of our panel in geographical terms.
- Inclusion in all interventions of learning resources that serve to deepen understanding around the causes, as well as the consequences, of conflict in the Traveller community
- Identifying options for and with Travellers in relation to alternatives to conflict and providing support for Travellers choosing those options

- Imparting knowledge, and support if necessary, on the risks involved in conflict resolution and ways to counteract risk.
- Giving priority to increasing the competencies of Travellers themselves to gain a holistic and contextual understanding of conflict, including continuing to offer MII accredited mediation training programmes. Producing and making available TMS resources will be key to spreading this knowledge and embedding capacity within the community

External Collaboration Programme



Engagement	Actions/Approach	Allies/Partners	Outcomes
Government Departments/State agencies	Engagement with agencies to share TMS knowledge & experience of wider determinants of Conflict: •Accommodation •Health •Education •Progression •Criminal Justice	Government Departments Local Development Companies Northern Ireland stakeholders	Recognition of the need for a more holistic and multi-disciplinary approach to ending Traveller conflict
Education	Negotiating the inclusion of 'understanding and responding to Traveller conflict' as element in professional training	Garda training Prison Officer training Teacher training Social Worker training	Culturally appropriate and informed responses to conflict across relevant professions
Traveller Projects and Organisations	Building comprehensive understanding of conflict into development strategies and plans	Exchange House Traveller Counselling Service National Traveller organisations Local Traveller projects	Strengthening of leadership and capacity of community to identify needs and drive solutions

Key to delivery of the programme will be:

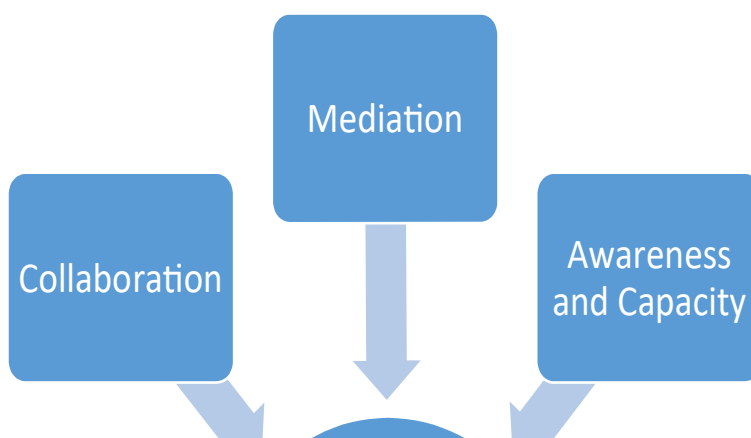
- Strengthening of TMS capacity to bring lessons from practice to written form.
- A commitment to ongoing evaluation and review (as well as external evaluation) as the principal evidence-based source for submissions and negotiations
- A commitment to building our own capacity to expand on an all-island basis.
- Strengthening of alliances (and the potential for consensus building) across all national Traveller organisations. The joint initiative TMS is now involved in with the Traveller Counselling Service and Exchange House we see as the beginning of this consensus-building process.



Organisational Structure and Staffing

TMS views the next stage of our development (over the three years of this plan) as being one of expansion. This will be necessary if the organisation is to respond, to any degree, to the ever-increasing demand for our services. Expansion is of even more critical importance, however, if we are to ensure that long-term benefits can accrue from our work. This can be achieved through the employment of:

1. One member of staff with responsibility for each of our three development programmes.
2. Two/three members of staff within central coordination (one with overall management and executive responsibility and one with financial management/administrative/project development responsibilities).
3. Two/three other staff (drawn from our pool of people trained in mediation skills) to work as local mediators.



Evaluation and

Central
Coordination/
Administration/
Project
Development/
M & E

The Traveller Mediation service is committed to evaluation as an integral part of our development activities throughout the strategic planning period because we recognise the importance of:

1. The ever increasing need to demonstrate results in relation to resources invested. We are committed to demonstrating that the service not only succeeds in achieving the objectives and targets we have set ourselves, but that it also makes economic sense in terms of outcomes, and demonstrates value for money.
2. Secondly, we are aware that potential impacts of TMS go beyond the benefits to individuals participating in our programmes. We are committed to demonstrating the benefits of our approach for the wider Traveller community, for mainstream service-providers and for Irish society generally.
3. Thirdly, we are also strongly aware that successful outcomes are very much dependent upon the approach taken by project workers and volunteers. Our evaluation efforts will not only show what we have achieved; we will also focus on how these achievements have come about. We are committed to ongoing critical reflection on what works well and what may not – informed at all stages by participant and community feedback. As a result we will be able to demonstrate (and share) our ‘model’, and show how particular approaches and interventions can contribute to particular results.
4. Finally, we see lessons and insights emerging from the work as being of significant importance in shaping effective mainstream responses to social exclusion, education, health and other key challenges faced by the Traveller community. Our evaluation and review process provides a mechanism through which these lessons are captured, and then shared with our working partners within mainstream service provision and policy development.

We will facilitate the participation of staff, volunteers and programme participants in a review process. An annual cycle will result in the production of a yearly report: summarising progress towards achievement of strategic objectives and highlighting issues for future planning.

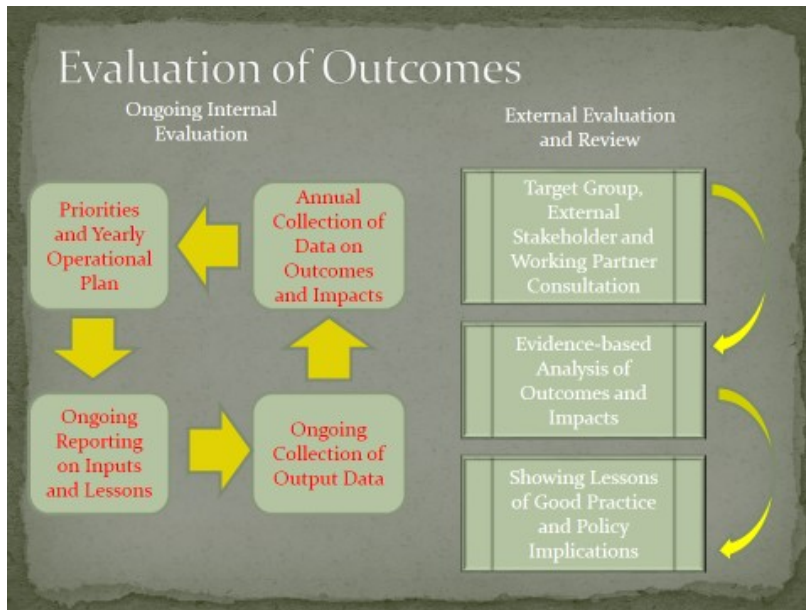
The plan, and review approach, is based on the ‘Theory of Change’ model: with an emphasis on understanding changing and evolving circumstances; setting clear aims, and increasing the organisation’s capacity to link and understand inputs and outputs on an ongoing basis.

The evaluation system will also be used to assist staff with preparation of monthly progress reports to co-ordinator.

Internal evaluation and outcome-data collection will be built into all programmes and actions. Weekly staff and volunteer meetings will facilitate ongoing monitoring and re-focusing of efforts where required.

The overall plan will also be externally evaluated to demonstrate outcomes, impacts and lessons for the future.

The basic elements of the evaluation model are presented overleaf.



THEORY OF CHANGE MAP

