

The BARRIE NEWS

Dedicated to printing good news stories about Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland

ACCOMMODATION FUND MONEY ALLOCATED

ABERDEEN City, Clackmannanshire and Fife Councils will receive funding from the 2021-23 allocation of the £20 million Scottish Government Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund.

The fund can be used to renovate existing sites or to build new ones and can cover the costs of pitches, amenity blocks, chalets, buying land or preparing land for building.

The Clinterty site in Aberdeen will be refurbished with improvements including new amenity blocks, increased pitch size and landscaping which includes a playpark and fencing. At the Westhaugh site in Clackmannanshire the council will use the PLACE Standard tool to work with the community to completely redesign the site to bring it up to modern standards. Fife Council's proposal for Tarvit Mill and Heatherywood sites met with approval when a panel from the Gypsy/Traveller community questioned

the council on its plans, commenting that: "The council seem to have really listened to the views of residents."

An important part of the application process is for councils to work with the residents and the local Gypsy/Traveller community to make sure the plan meets their needs. The council will be asked to use the Interim Site Design Guide in developing their project, which was developed with Gypsy/Travellers.

The councils will be able to provide more information on expected timescales for work starting on site. The councils have wider work to do before the on-site phases can begin.

Successful councils will also contribute towards the costs of their plans. The Scottish Government hopes this will mean that the total amount spent on sites will be more than the £20 million they are contributing.

THROUGH THE LETTERBOX

AFTER 18 years with no door-to-door postal services, residents at the Gypsy/Traveller site in Larkhall have finally succeeded in getting their service reinstated.

The withdrawal of the service 18 years ago had been because of a dog attack and Royal Mail would only deliver mail to the site office where residents had to collect it.

When the pandemic struck the site office was closed and the residents were left for weeks without mail, getting bills

late, with some letters going missing too.

To get their mail service back, residents contacted their local MSP Christina McKelvie who approached Royal Mail on their behalf. After some negotiation an agreement was reached to ensure the safety of the postman and to restart the door-to-door delivery. Royal Mail apologised to the residents because they hadn't realised the service had not been reinstated for such a long time.

One lady who suffers

ill health said: "What a difference it makes getting my mail delivered to my door rather than having to go away down to the office to collect it when I don't feel well and am struggling with walking a distance." Another younger resident said: "I can't believe we have mail on a Saturday. Last year my birthday cards were delivered on the Friday and I didn't get them until the Monday when the office re-opened."

SPRING 2022
FREE

IT has been another hard year with the continued impact of COVID-19 and the restrictions we have learned to live with. In spite of this life goes on and positive stories emerge.

In this issue *The Barrie News*, the first in a while, brings you a wide range of stories that illustrate the resilience of Scotland's Gypsy/Traveller communities and the organisations that support them.

We hope that you will find something in these pages to warm your heart and inspire you in these challenging times.

A GELLY IN THE GARDEN



ON a rainy day in Oban in early September people from the local community learned to build a gelly. Their teacher was David, a local Traveller man who had spent his early life on the road with his family, living out of tents.

Peter from MECOPP worked closely with Elspeth from Hope Kitchen's Green Shoots Project, based in Glencruitten Walled Garden, to organise the event.

The day started with David checking that the hazel boughs, donated by Kathy Potter-Irwin, a local basket maker, were suitable. He reckoned they were not quite thick enough but could be used to make a model of a gelly, a traditional tent sometimes also known as a bough tent.

Bad weather forced everyone into the yurt where David shared stories of his early life. Everyone was inspired by David's stories and so, despite the rain, set about building the gelly guided by David.

At the end of the day everyone learned something new and was proud of their achievement.

SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE



Photo courtesy of Auchindrain Township Museum

KATHY Townsley-Maguigan has been on the staff at Auchindrain Township Museum since 2014 and has worked her way up through the ranks. She is the Farm Supervisor with responsibility for the upkeep of the grounds and supervising the maintenance team. The museum which is the best preserved remaining Scottish Highland farm township lies six miles south of Inveraray in Argyll. More recently Kathy has been working with the museum to build up a collection of Gypsy/Traveller objects, and to ensure traditional Gypsy/Traveller crafts and skills are preserved.

Her work has gained her wider recognition from curators in the world of outdoor museums and Gypsy/Traveller collections. She has recently been involved in seminars with the Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore, and invited to be on a panel of experts at an event organised by the Rural Museums Network.

Curator at Auchindrain Township Museum, Bob Clark says, "Here we are seven years later and Kathy has not only got to being in a senior position, she has also, through her excellence, become a Subject Specialist in Traveller History and Tradition."

GYPSY/TRAVELLERS GIVE GUIDANCE ON DESIGNING THE PLACES THEY LIVE

COMMUNITY members from across Scotland have been working with officials from the Scottish Government and COSLA to draw up a Design Guide for Gypsy/Traveller Sites in Scotland. The Design Guide will be used by councils when planning a major refurbishment of an existing Gypsy/Traveller site or developing a new one.

Supported by MECOPP's Women's Voices worker, Shirell Johnson, community members have been advising on what things should be taken into account when planning and designing them.

The online meetings have presented challenges for those with poor internet connections or who have to connect using their mobile phones but in spite of this the meetings have been well attended and fruitful.

The guide includes sections on consulting with the community when designing a new site, where sites should be, the layout of sites, the size of pitches and the type of accommodation.

The Guide is very detailed but rather than offering a one size fits all answer, it encourages architects and developers to work closely with residents to design a site that suits their particular needs.

The Design Guide is intended to ensure that the £20 million Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund fulfils the Scottish Government's commitment to improve the lives of Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland by providing 'safe and culturally appropriate places to live'.

GETTING TOGETHER TO GET INTO WORK

A project called Getting Together has been seeing if there is a need for a support service for young Gypsy/Travellers to help them get into work, training, education or volunteering. Aimed at 16 to 24-year-olds living in the City of Edinburgh, Getting Together offers opportunities to get work experience, develop work skills, CV writing and applying for jobs, job searching and finding out about training and college courses. They can also help with applying for a passport or other ID, a bank account and getting information about starting a business.

As well as supporting and finding ways of improving work related skills and opportunities, Getting Together, run by Cyrenians, organises some fun activities for the young folk who get involved.

Based on what they have learned, Cyrenians are looking into getting funding to continue the project after its first six months ends at the end of March.

GREENBANKS TRAVELLERS' SITE UPGRADE

THE chalet accommodation at Aberdeenshire Council's Greenbanks Seasonal Travellers Site in Banff was finally upgraded during 2019 and 2020, to meet the Scottish Government Minimum Site Standards. The Council's Strategy Housing Manager and the Chair of the Gypsy/Traveller Sub Committee met residents of the site to discuss options for the upgrade, which were agreed and progressed. The upgrade was much needed, the site having been open for more than 30 years, with only essential maintenance being carried out.

As a result of the pandemic it was not possible to open the site as usual at the end of March 2020. When it was finally opened in August 2020, many of the previous year's occupants were very happy to come, albeit for a shorter season. The occupants have given positive feedback on the upgraded chalets, which is very encouraging. Occupants on site said, "Everyone is very impressed with the refurbishment".

If you would like further information on Greenbanks Travellers Site please contact: gypsytravellerliaison@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

CHIT CHAT

SINCE her appointment as MECOPP's Mental Health and Wellbeing Worker, Donna Lawrie has been hosting her Chit Chat online events. People from the community can join the event to have a chat about anything they want. Sometimes Donna invites guests to speak about specific topics that can affect our mental health. So far topics discussed have been about wellbeing such as sleep and anxiety, discrimination and general chit chat about what is going on in daily life.

In the next series of Chit Chat events Donna has invited a guest to discuss their family's experience of having a family member with addiction problems. Other guests will talk about the digital world and mental health support services.

Call Donna on 07527611974 to join in.

RESIDENTIAL FOR WOMEN

WOMEN'S Voices Development Worker, Shirell, is planning the first of two 'learning' residentials, one in late spring and the other in the autumn. Unlike the residentials MECOPP has organised in the past these are not respite breaks.

The Women's Voices residentials are for women of all age ranges and abilities. They are designed to help build confidence, gain new skills, and increase knowledge to help and encourage Gypsy/Traveller women to attend meetings and consultations with decision makers and to have their lived experiences, views, and solutions taken into account.

Community members attending these events and speaking out has gradually seen some positive changes to site standards, the future provision of culturally acceptable homes, better health outcomes, negotiated stopping places with adequate services, getting school children online during the pandemic and giving digital devices to some of the most vulnerable and isolated community members.

The first residential will be advertised on social media in the coming weeks and applications to attend will be open to women from Scotland's Gypsy/Traveller communities.

BASKET MAKING IN ARGYLL



MAKING and selling baskets was one of the traditional crafts that some Gypsy/ Traveller families earned a living from in the past. With the introduction of plastics, the traditional, hand-crafted, willow baskets became less popular and the cheaper mass-produced plastic baskets captured the market. With no way of selling their baskets the willow weavers had to turn to other ways of making a living and the skills started dying out.

When collecting stories and organising events for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month it soon became clear to MECOPP's Peter Ross that there is still a great deal of interest in this traditional craft. Having successfully applied to Argyll and Bute Council's Supporting Communities Fund, MECOPP was able to organise a series of workshops, with an Argyll basket weaver, for some of the community members in north Argyll.

Requests soon started coming in from mid Argyll so funding was found from Shared Care Scotland's Creative Breaks Fund to put on another series of workshops for the folk there. Creative Breaks supports carers to get some time away from their responsibilities and offers creative activities to them. Carers from the mid Argyll Gypsy/Traveller community were able to take part.

The workshops were led by Kathy Potter-Irwin who has learned many of her basket-making skills from Gypsy, Travellers and the Roma of central Europe. One of her big influences has been local basket weaver Sandy Cameron, who learned his skills from his father.

Betsy, whose family used to make baskets and took part in the workshops with her daughters, says: "This course is amazing. I'd advise anyone who hasn't tried it before to give it a go and it's so therapeutic. Me and the rest of the group have really enjoyed it."

CREATIVE NATIVES



A group of young Gypsy/ Travellers have been taking part in a range of activities run by Cyrenians Key to Work project. They have visited Cyrenians' cook school, farm, got involved in some environmental activities and have been going to Creative Natives at the Palette in Edinburgh. At Creative Natives they learned about stop motion animation and explored various other creative ideas

and techniques with the artist and designer at the studio there.

The project, which ends in March, is aimed at young people about to leave school, or who have already left, to help them transition into employment, training or education. The six who joined the group undertook various other tasks to help them on their way towards their chosen career.

WHO OWNS SCOTLAND?

RIGHTS campaigner and activist, Davie Donaldson recently appeared on the BBC Scotland programme 'Who Owns Scotland?' The series of three programmes looks at who owns the land in Scotland, how it is used and how it might be reformed.

In episode two Davie Donaldson, who is a Nawkin, spoke about the loss of traditional stopping places and the privatisation of common land and how it has impacted on Gypsy/Traveller lives, culture and tradition. He explains how for hundreds of years Gypsy/Traveller families would have places to camp in woods, fields and on common ground and how that is becoming less possible as time moves on. He emphasised the deep spiritual connection Gypsy/Travellers have to the land and how important that is to keeping their culture and traditions alive.

You can watch this episode and Davie's contribution on the BBC iPlayer at www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m00118p3/who-owns-scotland-series-1-episode-2

APPEAL SUCCESS

A community member whose application for the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) was turned down won their appeal to the Department of Work Pensions (DWP). Supported by MECOPP they submitted their application for a Mandatory Reconsideration. The appeal was successful and the DWP awarded them both components at the standard (lower) rate with a backdated payment of around £3,000.

Alex Hendrikson of MECOPP said: "it is worth adding that even if a Mandatory Reconsideration is unsuccessful, you can still appeal to the First-Tier Tribunal."

MEN ALOUD

TWO online training events will take place in March in an attempt to improve the way men from the Gypsy/ Traveller community are involved and listened to when decisions are made that affect their lives. The events are part of Men Aloud, an initiative to find out the issues faced

by men, why they don't participate in meetings and what might encourage them to do so.

The events are hosted by MECOPP's Peter Ross and community member Tommy Bennett. Invitations to participate will be sent to Police Scotland, NHS, local

authorities and other organisations that work with Gypsy/Travellers.

MECOPP will be publishing a document that sets out what Men Aloud has discovered from conversations with men in the Gypsy/Traveller communities.

GYPSY, ROMA, TRAVELLER HISTORY MONTH 2021 ONLINE

FOR the second year in a row the pandemic forced Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTHM) online with no in-person events. The www.grthm.scot website hosted contributions from all over Scotland and beyond, and was once again managed by Article 12 and supported by MECOPP.



This drawing by Summer can be seen online. She wrote on the back: "I miss shifting with my family, I always made friends wherever we went."

GRTHM kicked off with Tim Neat and Hamish Henderson's 1976 film 'Summer Walkers', documenting the lives of some of Scotland's Highland Travellers. This rare footage recorded the economic lives at the time, showing tin-smithing, pearl fishing and basket making. There are songs and stories and interviews that show how much things have changed since then. Unfortunately, it was only available for viewing in June.

A number of poets shared their work, some of which you can see on this page, and there were podcasts from Jess Smith, and community members from Argyll and Perthshire talking about work, how things have changed within a generation and the experience of caring for a family member.

From the upcoming generation there are videos, art, poetry and music, proving that the creativity in the community will continue to flourish well into the future.

There were demonstrations on how to do traditional crafts, recordings of Duncan Williamson and Essie Stewart from the archives and the history of Gypsy/Travellers in the Gairloch area. This is just a sample of what can still be seen if you visit www.grthm.scot.

Everyone involved in GRTHM hopes that next year will allow us to put on more in-person live events as life gets back to normal.

MY GYPSY GRANNY!

by Kasey Spiers

Everyone knows having a Gypsy Granny is like having a second Mammy.
 Maybe even better, as they let you stay up later!
 They cook the best food and give you sweeties when you are good,
 if you aren't sleepy at night, they will try to give you a fright!
 "Watch out for that shan gadjie!" They yell "He's a radjie!"
 "But there's nae one there!" we yell.
 So she gives up for the fight and lets us stay up all night!



A still from the video of Duncan Williamson performing at Tales of Martinmas Storytelling Festival, Allness, Ross & Cromarty in 2003. Courtesy of Bob Pegg.

TIMES HAVE CHANGED

by Michelle Foy

A pheasant a rabbit, a big broon hare
 always something to eat back there
 beg the farmer, for milk or eggs
 my old mother making the pegs

Back in the camp, we would play,
 hiding in bushes day by day,
 running wild and running free,
 the travelling life, it was for me

Times have changed, for us much more
 bricks and mortar, and a big front door
 So sad to say, its come to an end
 The laws that are made, we cannot bend

TREE

by Jessie Jones

Against the shades of colour
 The yellow brown and green
 Stands a lonely lifeless tree
 The saddest tree I've ever seen

Her echo talks the softest tones
 As she tells stories she's heard spoken
 When her branches climbed toward the sky
 Before her big strong heart was broken

My own heart aches to see her bare
 Where once tiny leaves would glisten
 I imagine her crown of gold displayed so bold
 As she beckons me near to listen

She says I was once the fairest tree
 With colour that flourished all year
 But all my branches are barren now
 A leaf fell with each new tear

ARTS&CULTURE

JAMIE 'FIDDLER' MACPHERSON OUT OF SITE OUT OF MIND



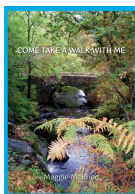
Photo: Jim Dunn. © Clan Macpherson Museum

ONE of the key exhibits at the Clan Macpherson Museum in Newtonmore is the fiddle and sword belonging to Jamie 'fiddler' Macpherson a famous Robin Hood like character. He was hanged for being a Gypsy in Banff, Scotland, on 16 November 1700 and is famous from the Robert Burns song, based on Jamie's poem Macpherson's Lament. Jamie's mother was a Traveller and part of the exhibit is a short story from her point of view written by Maggie McPhee of Perth.

Maggie, who has regularly contributed poems to MECOPP's Our Creative Community blog, wanted to write something from a personal angle on Jamie's tragic tale and so chose his mother's voice to be the character in her piece, she called her story 'Heartbreak Through Her Eyes'.

The story has a prominent position because it has been printed on the wall of the museum as part of the exhibit. Maggie says, "I feel very proud that a group of women got together to create this piece. It is good how she is brought back into history and is very much present here."

Maggie has recently published her first book called *Come Take A Walk With Me*, which has a selection of her poems and stories. She has written for years but until recently kept it to herself thinking that no-one would be interested. Followers of the 'Our Creative Community' blog will be familiar with her work as she is a regular contributor to it.



THE annual mental health art exhibition, Out of Sight Out of Mind, was showing at Summerhall in Edinburgh in October. MECOPP's Gypsy/Traveller Carers' Project has supported the community to contribute to the exhibition since it first started in 2013. The theme for 2021 was 'Normality?', though contributors could work to that theme or choose their own.



MECOPP contributed a group installation of dream catchers made by community members who placed words and phrases in the middle of their dream-catcher. In traditional Native American dream-catchers, the holes in the middle of the dream-catcher are meant to allow good dreams through while the solid parts stop bad dreams. In the MECOPP installation the negative words and phrases the artists put in the middle of the dream-catcher stopped the good dreams getting through. This represented the way that negative attitudes in society can stop some Gypsy/Travellers fulfilling their dreams.

One artist, who wishes to remain anonymous, created their artwork, 'Pushed Around - From Pillar to Post', using a child's toy pram with things that had been said to them when asking for support or wanting to access services. This is how the artist described it: "I feel like I'm being pushed around like a baby in a pram. The excuses I get from professionals are printed on the hood of the pram, the baby has all the labels I have been given attached to its clothing, and the emotions on the baby's hat is how I feel."



The exhibition was on from 13th - 30th October at Summerhall, for those who were not able to go in person the exhibition can be seen online at www.outofsightoutofmind.scot/2021-online-exhibition. If you would like to be involved in next year's exhibition call Donna on 07527611974.

THERE is a lot of talent in the Gypsy/Traveller community in Scotland and it deserves to get a lot more attention than it does. In response to this MECOPP has created a blog called 'Our Creative Community'. It is designed to be a showcase where creative community members can share their art, poetry, stories, podcasts, videos and music with their own community and a wider audience. MECOPP publishes the blog then promotes it on social media.



Recent contributions have included work by the Robot Maker, a story from the past about trucks and vans and lots of poetry.

You can see what people from the community have been creating by going to the MECOPP website www.mecopp.org.uk/our-creative-community or if you have created something you want to share on the blog contact peter@mecopp.org.uk

FRIGHT NIGHT IN LARKHALL



HALLOWEEN proved to be full of fun, fright and ghostly costumes for the young folk on the site at Larkhall in South Lanarkshire. The community put on a great party and lots of the children turned up in costume to dance and enjoy the goodies on offer. It is a bit unsure whether the children or the adults got a bigger fright but the screams soon turned to laughter and everyone had a great time.

The community centre in the portacabin has become the place where lots of activities, many of them organised by the residents themselves, happen. They have organised a regular Spa Night when women on the site can get a bit of pampering, Arts and Crafts workshops, Movie Night with films for all the family, a Disco Night so people can show off their fancy dance moves, a Dance Class led by one of the mums whose daughter is a prize-winning dancer and a homework club. The next big event will be a Santa's Grotto for the children which the volunteers are organising to make sure it will be a very merry Christmas.

All these activities have been organised and run by volunteers and the whole community has been involved in deciding on how it is run and what the rules are. South Lanarkshire council has provided them with computer equipment, a smart TV, games consoles and games to play along with other useful items all of which were chosen by the community.

The council's Education Resources department provide on-site secondary education two days a week. The child-centred, culturally appropriate service has been popular and successful, having already helped four young people get into college to further their studies. They focus on developing the skills the young people need in an environment free from discrimination and bullying.

There are also Adult Education classes for people who want to improve their reading and writing and numeracy skills. One of the classes teaches how to work out electricity bills from meter readings, a very practical and much appreciated skill.

The community centre is also used to provide some health services such as NHS Lanarkshire's Keep Well service. This is a nurse led health check service that visits local communities to help them make health improving life style changes. Gypsy/ Travellers who are not resident on the site can also come along to the community centre for this service. The dental health of children is encouraged and supported by the visits of Child Smile, an NHS Scotland service. They help the young people establish good oral hygiene which means that they can have a better chance of good dental health throughout their lives.

Plans are well ahead for a bigger and better community centre on the site to build on the enthusiasm for the activities on offer and their success in providing the services that the community wants and needs.

Work to upgrade the Larkhall Gypsy/ Traveller site has been making progress recently with upgrades including refurbished amenity blocks, new fencing and extensions to pitches. The site is also being provided with free internet access for three years through a wifi network with mini masts on site. The work is ongoing with regular meetings continuing between the tenants and the council. The improvements were co-designed with the community. Chair of the Tenants Group, Tommy Bennett said of working with the council: "From start to finish they have explained things. Everyone has been heard and everyone feels they have a voice."

FUNDING SUCCESS FOR MECOPP

THE MECOPP Gypsy/ Traveller team received a welcome boost on hearing the successful outcome of its funding application to the Scottish Government Equality and Human Rights Fund. With funding for the next three years, work to support community members who live in more remote and rural areas and work with women in the community is secure and can continue. A new post to provide specialist advice and support to community members on accommodation and housing related issues is now up and running thanks to the funding award.

Team members will provide direct support to young people experiencing poorer mental health, their parents and guardians in a variety of ways. More details will be available on our website once the service begins. Suzanne, the Gypsy/ Traveller Manager says: "Getting sufficient funding to continue our work is always a challenge, particularly in these current times. It is unsettling for the community who do not know if, and when, vital support services will disappear. So, I am delighted that the award we have received from the Scottish Government will remove that uncertainty and provide us and the community with some longer term stability."

In the coming weeks a new service to support the mental health and wellbeing of young Gypsy/ Travellers will also start.

HATE CRIME REPORTING

MECOPP has been working with Police Scotland in order to become a Hate Crime Reporting Centre. A hate crime can be defined as a crime that has been aggravated by hate. For example, if someone was causing a disturbance by shouting in the street using racist or offensive language directed at a person's ethnicity this could be considered a Disturbance of the Peace aggravated by Hate.

Of the nine protected characteristics defined in the Equalities Act 2010, race, disability, transgender identity, religion and sexual orientation are recognised by the Scottish Government when defining a Hate Crime.

If you are the victim of a hate crime or you witness a hate crime you can report it to a member of the MECOPP Gypsy/ Traveller Carers' Team. They will take you through the process and lodge the report on the Police Scotland website.

#DIGIMANG - LEARN TO USE YOUR COMPUTER

DIGITAL Support and Development Tutor Gil Gillies has been working with the community to help them learn how best to use their laptops or pads. He has created a webpage with lots of helpful advice and information and links to video tutorials at www.mecoppdigital.org.uk There is advice on everything from online safety to getting started on a Chromebook or iPad. There is also a link to Gil if you need advice or support on other computer things than those on the website.

You can contact him at gil@mecopp.org.uk

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLBEING

COOK AND BLETHER COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS



Top, preparing freshly picked produce for soup and jam in Oban. Bottom, cooking at the Cyrenian's kitchen in Edinburgh

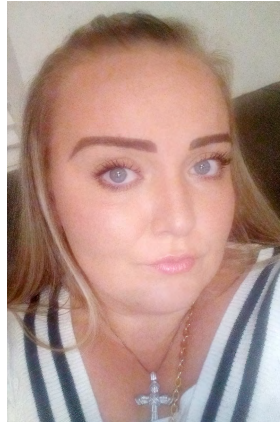
IT was a busy summer in Oban and Edinburgh last year!

At the "Cook and Bletcher" events in Oban, people from north and mid Argyll got together at Hope Kitchen's garden to pick fruit and vegetables to make some nutritious soup and jam to share around the fire. At the Cyrenians' kitchen in Edinburgh people from Edinburgh and the Lothians made delicious banana bread, scones and curry and enjoyed them around the table. Both events were organised by MECOPP's community food worker, Valerie Cherici.

Sharing tasty and nourishing food, around a fire or table, has been

an opportunity for many Gypsy/Traveller community members to reconnect with other members they have not seen in a long time due to covid, and also a chance to meet new faces. There have been many laughs and chats about traditions and favourite foods to eat. Among the traditional foods talked about were skirly, mince and tatties, stews and campfire scones.

Interestingly, everyone added a personal touch to the same recipe, making each one unique. These recipes have been proudly passed on from generation to generation and hold with them lots of memories.



Community Health Worker Janie Stewart.

THE new Community Health Matters Service has been busy recruiting five Community Health Workers from the Gypsy/Traveller community. They are delighted to welcome Charlotte McKenzie in Edinburgh,

Betsy Macdonald in Argyll & Bute, Georgia McCann in Forfar/Aberdeenshire, Janie Stewart in Irvine and Virginia Francis in Larkhall to the MECOPP team.

Before they start working directly with community members to identify health issues and concerns, they are doing some training and induction. Their role will be to act as a contact point for the community, to gather views and opinions on health matters and to work with the community to develop and distribute health information. They will also be helping to organise health awareness activities, link individuals into health services and advising how health services can be improved for the community.

Janie Stewart, who is one of the new workers says: "Being from the Gypsy/Traveller community myself, I am so excited to be involved with helping other Gypsy/Travellers with so many different things. I think we have an amazing team and I'm excited for the weeks and months to come."

If you want to find out more you can call or email them:

- Charlotte - 07984 234 419 charlotte@mecopp.org.uk
- Betsy - 07984 234 420 betsy@mecopp.org.uk
- Georgia - 07984 234 396 georgia@mecopp.org.uk
- Janie - 07984 234 417 janie@mecopp.org.uk
- Virginia - 07984 234 398 virginia@mecopp.org.uk



OUR HEALTH MATTERS

REGISTERING WITH A GP

It's now easier than ever to register with a GP practice in Scotland. You don't need a fixed address or ID, but if you have any then take it with you. You can ask for help, from the practice, to fill out any forms or to explain any leaflets and letters. Phone NHS Inform on

0800 22 44 88 to find out where your nearest GP practice is.

Like all new patients, you will be asked about your ethnic background when you register. This is so that the practice can offer high quality, individualised care which respects your values, history and way of life.

Everyone registered with a GP is given a CHI number, you don't need to remember your number. It is used by NHS staff to help provide you with the best care possible, for example in emergency situations.

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

Everyone in Scotland over 16 is now being offered the COVID-19 vaccination. Not only does the vaccine offer you the best protection against COVID-19, it will also protect your family, friends and community. NHS Scotland strongly recommends you get the vaccine when offered it or you can go along to a drop-in vaccination clinic. The national COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline can provide more information 0800 030 8013.

Getting the Right Care Right Place

To help us all keep well and get the care we need quickly, safely, and as close to home as possible, changes have been made to A&E hospital services in Scotland.

In a life-threatening emergency always phone 999 or go directly to A&E.

For illnesses which are non-urgent or not life-threatening, contact your GP practice during opening hours or phone NHS 24 on 111, day or night. You can also speak to your local pharmacy for advice about minor illnesses; treatments, and medication; contact a local optician if you have an eye problem; visit a dentist if you have a problem with your teeth.

If you think you need to visit a Minor Injuries Unit (MIU), call NHS 24 on 111. A MIU can help if you have a cut, a minor burn, a sprain or strain or think you have broken or fractured a bone. Visiting a MIU can often be quicker than going to A&E.

NEWS FROM THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

written by the Equality & Inclusion Division of the Scottish Government

THE GYPSY/TRAVELLER ACTION PLAN

OCTOBER this year will see the end of the current Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan, which has been running since 2019. It has been a great starting point for government, local authorities and community members to come together and move equal rights forward for the community. During 2022 we will be reflecting on the successes and failures of the plan. This summer we will be keen to consult with community members on their thoughts, not only on the work so far but also on what they would like to see come next. If you are interested in taking part, we will be in touch in May to organise opportunities to get together and share ideas!

GYPSY/TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION FUND

THE Gypsy/Traveller funding for development **A c c o m m o d a t i o n** projects up to 2023. We Fund from Scottish are also working with Government has made East Dunbartonshire £20 million available Council on their proposal to renovate existing sites All these projects and to build new ones. will be developed with residents input, taking into account their needs and preferences, so all sites will be unique.

NEW ARGYLL WORKER



MECOPP has appointed Ali Martin as their new Remote and Rural Support and Development worker who will be working in north and mid Argyll.

Ali has had a varied background doing youth work, supporting young people and children with learning disabilities and, for the past five years, working for the Carers Centre in Oban. She has a keen interest in the Gypsy/Traveller community, having supported some families in her previous post, and has an understanding of the added challenges the Gypsy/Traveller community face. Ali says: "I am so excited about joining the MECOPP team and am looking forward to getting out and about supporting carers in the Gypsy/ Traveller community, developing the service and raising awareness of the added challenges carers from Gypsy/Traveller community are facing."

In the coming months, Ali will also be working with community members and service providers to improve the quality and extent of consultation and engagement activities. Ali will also be organising a range of workshops and information sessions to ensure community members are fully aware of their rights.

Ali can be contacted on ali@mecopp.org.uk or call 07398830408.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

WE are gearing up for our first Community Conversation of 2022 which is scheduled to take place online on Teams on Thursday 10 March, at 10.00 am.

This will be a fantastic chance to engage directly with the Minister for Equalities & Older People, Christina McKelvie, who has returned to work after an extended period of sick leave.

There will also be a chance to hear updates about the Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan, and to ask questions or bring up topics important to you. This first session will focus mainly on housing but you are welcome to raise anything you like.

If you are keen to take part, please speak to Peter or Shirell at MECOPP who will make sure everything is set up!

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

THE Early Learning and Childcare team at Scottish Government are going to fund materials for 'Home Starter kits', which will be given out to all Gypsy/Traveller families with children under eight in Scotland. These will contain materials used in nurseries and play-schools, that encourage creative and child-centred play. They will also include culturally-relevant books and images, puppets and masks for role play and a range of arts and crafts materials. It is hoped children will go on to add objects of interest they find in the natural world as well. The kits will contain 'Starter Cards' with a QR code linking into a section of the STEP website that offers additional activity suggestions so parents and carers can find ideas to set up, organise and support their children's play.

Our education team looking after older children have also been busy! There are now new online courses for teaching and school staff, including cultural awareness training that aims to increase representation of Gypsy/Traveller culture in the curriculum. Teachers are being encouraged to support young Gypsy//Travellers toward positive destinations beyond primary school, with more planning and delivering of lessons online to enable 'on the road learning'.

FIGHTING HATE CRIME, STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

MANY of you will be using our funding to be familiar with the raise awareness of hate organisation Progress crime experienced by in Dialogue who we are the community. They currently also supporting will also be working to create relationships with in their fight against the other organisations, such as hate crime, stigma and discrimination faced by other organisations, such as mainstream media, to gain support and help by the Gypsy/Traveller community. in raising awareness of both the impact of these behaviours and the fact that acting in this way is a criminal offence.

We know that this increases poor mental health and wellbeing and that acting in this way is a criminal offence. Progress in Dialogue will

SOCIAL SECURITY SCOTLAND

SOCIAL Security Scotland have been striving to work with local authorities and other organisations to ensure Gypsy/Traveller communities are aware of the benefits they deliver and how to access them. They are looking into offering some work experience to interested community members.