

The BARRIE NEWS

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

£2 MILLION FOR ROADSIDE FUTURES

A NEW UK wide £2 million fund to improve the lives of roadside Gypsies and Travellers has been launched.

The Roadside Futures Project was awarded the £2 million pound National Lottery Community Fund money to improve life for nomadic Gypsies and Travellers and the communities in which they live. The project will be delivered by [Moving for Change](#), a new membership organisation, who will distribute funds to its membership. Organisations and individuals who aim to improve the lives of nomadic Gypsies and Travellers can become members and are invited to apply for funds.

As well as providing funding, members will have access to research, training and capacity building activities, and advice and advocacy services to members of the community.

At the launch, Helen Jones, member of the Moving for Change Board and CEO of Leeds GATE said: "The launch today shows that Gypsy and Traveller people, their colleagues and friends, care enormously about securing the traditional nomadic ways and culture which have been part of the UK landscape for hundreds of years. Moving for Change will support Gypsies and Travellers, wherever they are in the UK, to make the case for preserving this important aspect of our shared history and culture, positively and in collaboration with their settled neighbours." To join go to www.movingforchange.org.uk/get-involved/

ACTION TO SUPPORT SCOTLAND'S GYPSY/TRAVELLERS

THE Covid-19 emergency came out of the blue and created a lot of worry for people across the world. In the UK the Westminster Government took steps to support workers through a variety of schemes from business loans to furlough payments and, to prevent spread of the virus, severely restricted people's lives.

In Scotland, the Scottish Government were quick to realise that Gypsy/Travellers needed specific culturally appropriate support. In a bid to address this, it allocated £120,000 of its Community Support Package to Gypsy/Travellers to provide tailored financial advice, telephone-based self-directed mental health and wellbeing support, 'health boxes' and sanitation in the form of toilets and showers.

Recognising that many Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland are self-employed a series of videos about the UK government's financial support were made to try and make it clear who could apply, how they should apply and what kind of support they might get. Other videos were made for carers in the community and those on benefits about what is available to them and where to get support when applying for benefits.

A Financial Resilience service, run by

MECOPP, has been set-up to help with income and benefit related issues. Call Alex on 07931 55390.

Local authorities have been encouraged to support roadside Travellers rather than to move them on and advise them on what to do if they get the virus. Wherever possible the Scottish Government wants roadside Travellers to be provided with refuse collection, toilets and washing facilities and the possibility to self-isolate if needed.

The Covid-19 emergency and the impact it has on people's ability to live their normal lives and earn a living can create anxiety and stress and so a self-help support phone line for people suffering from mental distress has been set up. Anyone feeling they could benefit from this can call MECOPP to arrange for some support.

Covid-19 is likely to be an issue for the foreseeable future and the Scottish Government and the local authorities will continue to provide support for Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers. To ensure this is done in the best possible way a senior officer multi-agency group, successor to the Gypsy/Traveller Impact Group, will continue to monitor the situation and advise the Scottish Government.

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COVID-19 IMPACT

WE have all had to change the way we live in order to stay safe and to keep the ones we love safe. Many things seem to have ground to a halt but life does go on, and so we are bringing you another issue of *The Barrie News*. In it you will see that there are still plenty of positive things going on in spite of the pandemic and the lock-down.
Happy Reading!

MINI MASTERCHEF COOKS UP CASH FOR CHILDREN'S HOSPICE

ROCCO MacPhee, a P7 pupil at St Frances Primary School, has been working with STEP and his teachers to create a flexible learning timetable that matches up with his interests. As part of the programme Rocco decided he wanted to raise money for children in need. Margot MacAlister, the head



teacher said, "Rocco is a really talented boy and he has strong values from his Gypsy/Traveller family culture that he brings to everything he does. We wanted to work with him to create learning activities that recognised his strengths and personal interests."

Rocco has become a whiz kid using an iPad through STEP's digital families programme and he researched several charities before settling on CHAS (Children's Hospices Across Scotland). His money raising idea was to make soup to sell to the school staff once a week. He researched healthy soup recipes, created a budget, did all the shopping for ingredients, made the soup and designed a soup stall. His project has been a great success and all the proceeds are going to CHAS.

The scheme has helped Rocco's learning in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. When we asked Rocco what was the best thing about the work he said, "I loved everything about it and looked forward to getting the soup ready every week- and I make sure that the teachers pay up!"

ST ANDREW'S DAY KINDNESS



COMMUNITY members in Edinburgh and the Lothians and in Perth & Kinross received free afternoon tea boxes as part of Scotland's Winter Festivals Act of Kindness on St Andrew's Day campaign.

MECOPP staff delivered the boxes that were filled with traditional Scottish fair such as Dundee cake, scone and shortbread. Chrissie from Perth (see photo) said: "It made my day!"

REALISING YOUR RIGHTS

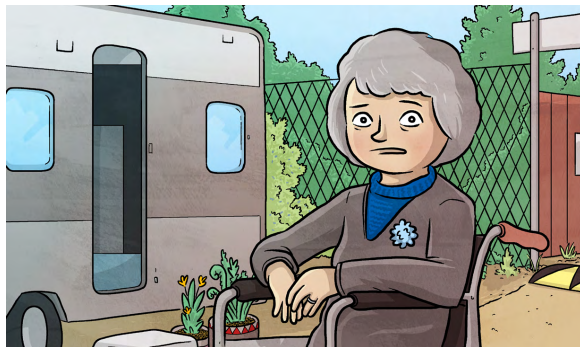
A community member who had made a homeless application a year ago but hadn't heard anything from their council recently contacted MECOPP for advice.

MECOPP contacted the Homeless service on their behalf and asked if the person was on the homeless register and was told they were not. She then requested that the council contact the community member and guide them through the process taking into account that they had children and had waited so long.

Following MECOPP's advice the community member regularly called the council Homeless service for updates which really paid off because they have been offered a brand-new home that satisfies the family's needs perfectly.

If you need advice about accommodation or other issues such as benefits contact MECOPP (see page 6).

ANIMATION PROMOTES GREATER UNDERSTANDING



AN animation has been created based on *Two Sides of the Same Story*, a booklet aimed at local government, the NHS and other service providers to encourage a greater understanding of the barriers that people from Gypsy/Traveller communities face when trying to access services.

Gypsy/Travellers speak most of the parts for themselves in the animation, with MECOPP workers and volunteers speaking the rest.

The animation can be seen on the MECOPP website, www.mecopp.org.uk/two-sides-of-the-same-story-animation, where it is hoped it can add to greater understanding of existing barriers and in future ease access to services for the community.

COVID-19 ADVICE LINE

A new advice line service has been launched to support Scotland's Gypsy/Traveller community through the current COVID-19 pandemic. The advice line worker, Liz Quinn, will provide a telephone based advice and information service available to community members across Scotland.

Liz previously worked for Shelter as a Family Support Worker, helping families with young children experiencing homelessness and other issues including domestic abuse, mental health, family relationships, childcare and financial problems. She is passionate about supporting people and helping the Gypsy/Traveller community find the right support and information during this difficult time.

Liz can help with explaining the public health information about COVID-19, what the restrictions are in different areas across Scotland, especially in relation to travel, gatherings and services, and linking people up with community based support, including making referrals for further support if needed.

You can contact Liz on 07931 555 419 or by email: liz@mecopp.org.uk.

VOLUNTEER FOR THE BARRIE NEWS

THE Barrie News is published by MECOPP Gypsy/Traveller Carers Project to highlight positive stories from Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers. More often than not, the mainstream media publish negative and stereotyped articles that unfairly represent the community. By volunteering with *The*

Barrie News you can help to put this right

If you have good news stories that you would like published or would like to volunteer with the publication of the paper then please contact Peter Ross by email at peter@mecopp.org.uk or call 07852 303925.

LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS IN TIMES OF COVID-19

IT is clear 2020 has been no ordinary year. Whether we look at the ongoing debates about Brexit, the sheer mess of the US Presidential elections or the disastrous global COVID-19 pandemic, this year will not be forgotten for a long time to come.

It is useful to rewind back to 2019. Life seemed very different then. In October of that year the Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) 'action plan' for Gypsy/Traveller communities was launched. A fund of £3 million was set aside to assist with matters such as education, accommodation, healthcare and welfare rights.

One year on, the world has changed significantly, in almost unimaginable ways. However, it still makes sense to look at what difference the action plan has made, and how COVID-19, in particular, has changed the game.

Unfortunately, many of the ambitious plans within the action plan have been effectively derailed by the virus. For example, 'maximising household incomes' has not seen progress and, if anything, COVID-19, has made things even worse. Financial hardship is being felt in very real ways by many Gypsy/Traveller families across Scotland as work dries up, jobs are lost and businesses adjust to social distancing and isolation measures.

Similarly, plans for expanding and upgrading site accommodation across Scotland have been delayed or cancelled due to the virus, as have measures to improve access to public services. With building works halted, initially through the furlough scheme, not much has happened in terms of new sites and pitches, or even improvements to existing provision. In terms of public services, one of the big shifts since March 2020 has been the adjustment to online ways of accessing key services. This is difficult for many families, if you have no reliable broadband, 4G service or enough data allowance.

Back in June 2020, a complementary Scottish Government framework was partially added to the 2019 action plan - a framework for local authorities and other agencies to help Gypsy/Traveller families adjust to life in times of COVID-19. This 24-page document acknowledged that communities faced extra hurdles because of the impact of the virus. Indeed, social distancing and periods of shielding and self-isolation to recover from symptoms of the virus can be difficult, for example, in a trailer on a roadside encampment.

The public health and poverty relief aspects are underlined in this 2020 framework document. But still, the underlining emphasis is on 'managing unauthorised encampments' and some local authorities have pushed ahead with evictions of roadside sites and have tried to police the situation out of a crisis. Although 'Local Resilience Partnerships' are being presented as a solution, it is evident to many families that second-class services are being offered with the excuse of lock-down and changes to how agencies are operating. Extra funds of just £120,000 from the Community Support Package do not buy very much at all: it's not even £10 a head. The impact on mental health, as much as finances, has been severe and felt.

Overall, there is a need to get organised and working together. The current situation demands that collective approaches to community development and social policy planning are essential. This is not a time for lone entrepreneurialism or individual political advancement or point-scoring. The Scottish Government, COSLA and other agencies, would do well to ensure, moving forwards, that the policies and services that are created are genuinely co-produced via systems of democracy, transparency and accountability. This has not been the case to date and in a post-COVID-19 environment the means and manner of community voice and representation demands a serious rethink.

Colin Clark
Colin Clark teaches sociology and social policy at the University of the West of Scotland. He is co-author of 'Here to Stay: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain'.

ARTS & CULTURE

MUSEUM BUILDS ITS COLLECTION OF GYPSY/TRAVELLER OBJECTS



AUCHINDRAIN Township, near Furnace in Argyll, is continuing to develop its collection of objects donated by Gypsy/Traveller families with links to Argyll. This project is led by Auchindrain's Farm Manager, Kathy Townsley McGuigan, a Traveller who is passionate about the objects, textiles, songs and stories of her culture.

Gypsy/Travellers would have stopped at townships like Auchindrain as they traveled the country, helping with agricultural tasks such as thinning turnips and mending household items, and so the museum is the perfect base to preserve and celebrate the objects of a community that has been under-represented in museum collections.

Kathy says: "It means a lot to me personally to have been given this status, and it's good that we have the chance to recognise our history... to have a collection and to leave something for the future for Traveller kids, to tell them

their history, culture and traditions, is important for them and the wider Traveller community."

The museum has been building the collection since 2018 and has already gathered a silver plate teapot hawked by the donor's brother and mended by her father, hand-made and dyed wooden flowers, a Gypsy pinnie, and a model Gypsy wagon based on the maker's childhood memories. Kathy hopes that the collection will continue to expand, and that other Travellers recognise the importance of being proud of their heritage.

Auchindrain have made several videos that focus on Gypsy/Traveller crafts and traditions such as making paper flowers, and have more lined up for the upcoming months. To find out more you can go to www.auchindrain.org.uk, or search for the museum on Facebook.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

OVER the past few years, Gypsy/Traveller culture and heritage has been gaining more recognition within the world of museum collections. Rhona Ramsay, of the University of Stirling, has been studying how objects that have connections to the community are represented in Scotland's museums and Kathy Townsley McGuigan and Rachael Thomas have been building the collection at Auchindrain Township of Gypsy/Traveller objects.

In a bid to share their experiences with the wider

museum world they are writing an article together for the journal *Social History in Museums*. In it they write about the way that Auchindrain Township, a small museum, has re-imagined its approach to historical collections. They describe how Kathy and her family have used their skills to bring paper and wooden flowers, wooden pegs and a bough tent into the museum, things that are often lost through time. Kathy also shared information based on her own experiences

and family history which allowed the museum to better tell the story of Auchindrain Township and its relationship to the Gypsy/Traveller community.

Rhona says: "In my own work and in the work at Auchindrain it has been so valuable to work with and learn from members of the Gypsy/Traveller community." Kathy hopes that in the future the Gypsy/Traveller objects she has been collecting with the museum can be put on show.

BOOK OF TRAVELLER STORIES PUBLISHED

THROUGH TRAVELLERS' EYES, a book of poems, stories and snippets of conversation, was published by MECOPP and launched in September.

The book came out of a series of workshops and conversations with community members who have a connection with MECOPP's Gypsy/Traveller Carers' Project.

The project started almost two years to the day before the book was launched, at a Creative Breaks residential at the Bield

near Perth. Argyll based author and poet Leonie Charlton led a workshop using plants and fruits she had collected on a forest walk. This stimulated a lot of conversation and from that a number of poems and stories emerged.

Over the next year there were more workshops, in Edinburgh poet James Aitken led one and some great wee stories came out of it. Lochgilhead was the venue for the Argyll workshop where Leonie worked with local Gypsy/Travellers to develop their stories and poems, using recordings of Travellers singing traditional songs to get the conversation going.

Margaret Bennett, writer, storyteller and folklorist, joined a group in Pitlochry at a Creative Breaks residential to read some stories. Margaret's visit was made possible by the Scottish Book Trust's Live Literature Fund. One of her stories in particular made an impression, it was about her friend, a well-known piper, who was the grandfather of some of the group. This was a big hit and, inspired by what they had heard, led to a very lively and productive workshop.

When lock-down came in March 2020 the planned workshops had to be abandoned and the only way to collect more stories and poems was to call folk up. From the collection of stories, poems and snippets of conversation Leonie and Peter Ross edited and designed *Through Travellers' Eyes*. The artwork for the cover is by the well known Pitlochry artist Shamus McPhee.

For the online launch of the book some of the contributors were recorded reading their poems or stories and this was put on the MECOPP website and promoted through Twitter and Facebook. This led to the book being included in the Portobello Book Festival in Edinburgh and to it being sold in a local bookshop.

Margaret, from the settled community, having read the book said in an email "I'm ashamed now of the attitude my parents and many others had. I would like to think that things had moved on, but fear there are people who still think like this."

Katrina, one of the poets says: "I feel proud that I've had some of my poems published. I've not achieved much in life but this is one thing I've really achieved and I'm proud of. It's something that my grandkids can look at when I'm no longer here and hopefully they'll be proud to say that their granny had poems published."

Through Travellers' Eyes is available from MECOPP at www.mecopp.org.uk/shop for £8.99 plus postage.



GYPSY, ROMA, TRAVELLER HISTORY MONTH WEBSITE GETS 500K HITS

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month in Scotland 2020 was a huge success despite the coronavirus. A large number of organisations and individuals created work that could be seen or heard on a specially created website at www.grthm.scot.



The website was designed and managed by Article 12 in Scotland on behalf of all the contributors. The site was well-designed and easy to navigate and as Gil Gillies of Article 12 says: "With total hits of 498,222 and visitors from as far afield as Canada, Russia and New Zealand, it's safe to say GTRHM2020 was a resounding success." Community organisations, organisations working with Gypsy/Travellers and individuals could all have their work included on the website.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month was established in London in 2008 as a way of raising awareness of these communities and their contributions to society, and to counteract negative stereotyping and prejudices. In Scotland it has grown from strength to strength over the last few years, but this is the first time that people and organisations have come together in one place to show their work.



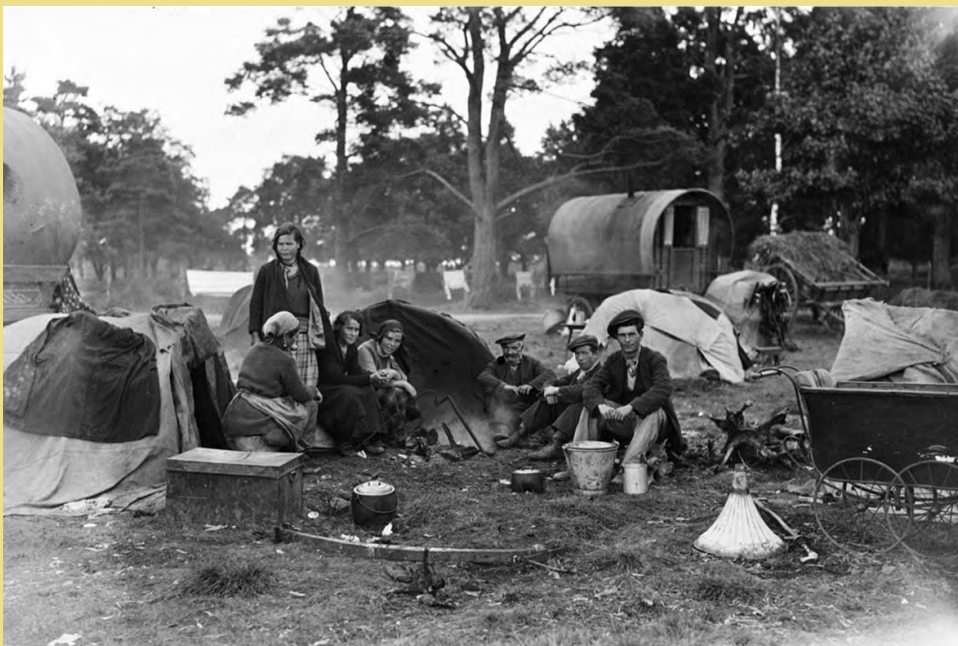
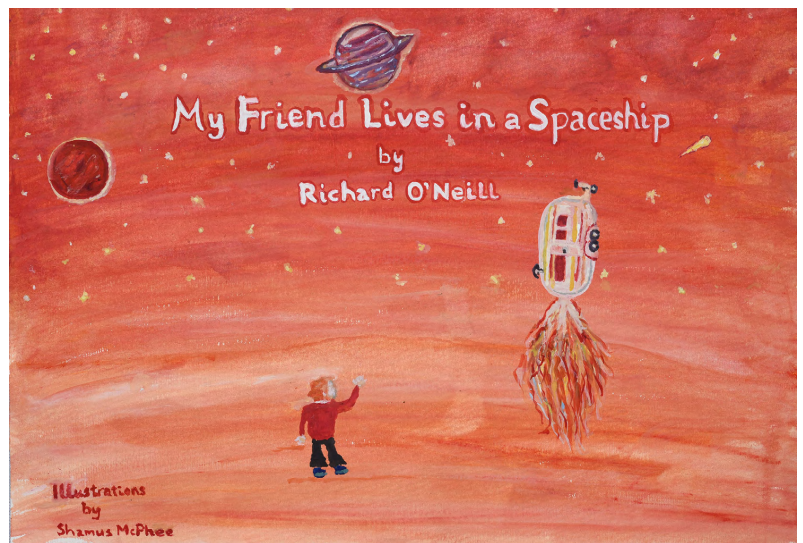
Although the get togethers, exhibitions and audience events that were so popular in 2019 were not possible because of lock-down restrictions, the programme still had a wide range of offerings. From podcasts of community members talking about their lives to a presentation by Rajpot and Mangin' Manushees called [Proud in Perthshire of our Cultural Heritage](#) and the lighting up of the Perth Bridge in yellow from the 19th–21st June. There was something for almost everybody.

The impact of WW2 on the Roma in Europe was the subject of a couple of offerings: [Porajimos: origins, history, aftermath](#) a video talk by Professor Donald Bloxham of the University of Edinburgh, illustrated by artist Stacey Hilton. Stacey was the subject of a [podcast](#) where she talked about her approach to creating the painting for Professor Bloxham's video. Shannon MacDonald's video interview with the late [Raymond Gureme](#) (see opposite), a French resistance fighter during the Nazi occupation, added to the coverage of Roma in World War Two.

Children's books with stories for and about Gypsy/Traveller children were also covered in a [podcast](#) with the author of *Wee Bessie* David G Pullar and illustrator Ruthie Redden talking about the process of creating the book. *Wee Bessie* is aimed towards children aged three to six years.

In another [podcast](#) Article 12's former national co-ordinator, Lynne Tammie interviews Jess Smith about her work.

Among other visual art, a gallery of Shamus McPhee's [illustrations](#) for Richard O'Neill's forthcoming children's book *Spaceship* was on show, an example of which can be seen here.



There was a lot of partnership working to produce the content for the website. Culture Perth & Kinross (CPK) worked with MECOPP and some community members to produce a [video slideshow](#) of photographs, from the CPK collections, taken in the Berry Fields of Blair in the first half of the 20th century.

Gypsy/Traveller encampment, with bender tents ('benders') and bow-topped wagons, July 1933.

Courtesy of Perth Museum and Art Gallery, D Wilson Laing Collection, 1933.0907.

Davie Donaldson, of Progress in Dialogue, hosted a number of awareness raising events that participants could join, covering topics such as *Who Are We?* and *A Community Through the Lens of Equality*.

There were a number of videos of the late Alec Williamson telling stories and singing songs. The videos were shared by Bob Pegg, a friend of Alec's, who has collected an extensive archive of videos of storytellers over many years. There is a selection of them to watch on the website at www.grthm.scot/alec-williamson/.

Funding is in place to host more content and advertise events online in 2021 and everyone involved will be hoping to have more face to face events such as those in 2019 alongside videos, podcasts and other events online. All the content from this year's history month is still available at www.grthm.scot.

Lynne Tammi who had been at the helm of Article 12 for many years, and was a driving force behind the website, has now left to take up a new position at the University of Dundee. Part of her legacy will be the success of the website and the plans to develop it as an archive for photos, art, videos, podcasts and writing about the history of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in Scotland.

Lynne handed over the reigns of Article 12 to Beth Cadger and Leslie Drury who, as co-ordinators, will take the work with young Gypsy/Travellers forward.

NO NEED TO SUFFER IN SILENCE

FOR too long mental health has been a taboo subject with people suffering in silence or not even being aware that anxiety, low mood or feeling stressed out are signs of their poor mental health. This has been made worse by the Covid-19 emergency and restrictions which have made life a lot more stressful for many people, especially in the Gypsy/Traveller community.

Friends Families and Travellers, the campaigning and support organisation based in England, recently published some guidance for health service providers which includes some shocking statistics: Compared to the settled population Gypsy/Travellers are three times as likely to suffer anxiety, twice as likely to suffer depression and six times more likely to die by suicide.

A new service, funded by the Scottish Government and run by MECOPP, has been set-up to provide telephone self-directed support for people who feel they could do with some help to improve their mental health during the pandemic. If you would like to use this confidential service call MECOPP who can put you in touch with a team of experienced support workers on 07931 555 419.

MECOPP are currently recruiting for a Gypsy/Traveller mental health worker, who will be offering community members training in courses such as Mental Health First Aid and SafeTalk to increase people's confidence and skills in supporting friends or family who may be struggling with anxiety or stress. They will also run mental health awareness sessions and social media information campaigns and, working in partnership with community members, will develop a mental health page on the MECOPP website specially for the Gypsy/Traveller community.

BIG CHANGES FOR CARERS' PROJECT

MECOPP Gypsy/Traveller Carers' Project has faced some big changes to add to those caused by Covid-19. Lucy Arnot who worked in Perth & Kinross and Siubhan O'Rourke who worked in Argyll, two of its longest serving and most experienced workers left for pastures new. Both Lucy and Siubhan will be sorely missed because they had built up such strong relationships with members of the community. The Womens' Voices Development Worker, Dominic Barr, who had been in post for only a year also left.

The Covid-19 restrictions have made it very difficult for the Gypsy/Traveller Programme Manager, Suzanne Munday, to recruit new staff but the good news is that two of the posts have been filled. Mhairi Craig joined the team and is now working in Perth & Kinross. Mhairi has a lot of experience, gained when she was Shelter's Gypsy/Traveller worker in Edinburgh and the Lothians, and has quickly settled in. Shirell Johnson has taken charge of the Womens' Voices Project and although this is her first job working with the community, brings a wealth of experience from working with other groups across Scotland.

While MECOPP looks to fill the Argyll post, Alex Hendrikson, an experienced rights worker, has taken on some of Siubhan's responsibilities.

The new Advice Helpline (see page 2) will be run by Liz Quinn who joined the team at the start of December.

"And we have even more exciting developments to tell you about." Suzanne Munday tells *The Barrie News*, "We will be launching a major new community health project shortly with funding from the Scottish Government. 'Community Health Matters' will work with the community to reduce health inequalities and improve health outcomes. We are particularly excited as the project will employ community members as community health workers. The community health team will eventually be joined by our new mental health and wellbeing worker and a new food development worker. So watch this space!"

If you are a carer and would like some support or want to get involved in the MECOPP Gypsy/Traveller Carers' Project, you can contact one of our team:

Suzanne is the Gypsy/Traveller Programme Manager based in Edinburgh. Call her on 07957 652413 or email suzanne@mecopp.org.uk.

Mhairi works in Perth & Kinross. Call her on 07906 365883 or email mhairi@mecopp.org.uk.

Donna works in Edinburgh and the Lothians. Call her on 07527 611974 or email donna@mecopp.org.uk.

Alex covers North and Mid Argyll. Call him on 07931 55390 or email alex@mecopp.org.uk.

Shirell is organising women's projects' in all three areas. Call her on 07582 303941 or email shirell@mecopp.org.uk.

Liz runs the Gypsy/Traveller Helpline. Call her on 07931 555 419 or email liz@mecopp.org.uk

Peter organises arts projects in all three areas. Call him on 07852 303925 or email peter@mecopp.org.uk.

TACKLING HATE THROUGH ART

AN artwork created by a mother and son from the Gypsy/Traveller community was exhibited at Summerhall, the prestigious art gallery in Edinburgh, as part of Out of Sight Out of Mind 2020.

Out of Sight Out of Mind is an annual exhibition, now in its eighth year, that features the work of people who have experience of mental health issues. The 2020 show was an ambitious multimedia event featuring art by 100 individuals.

Encouraged by MECOPP Gypsy/Traveller Carers' Project, people from the community have taken part in this exhibition since it began in 2012. For the 2020 show Joe and Sharon from Edinburgh have helped to create an artwork that tackles the hateful abuse that the Gypsy/



Traveller community experience on social media. Using print outs of real Facebook postings of hateful messages attached to a tailors dummy the artwork, called *The Embodiment of Hate*, explores how this type of social media messaging can affect people's mental and physical health.

One of the creators of the artwork Sharon (see photo) says: "It was good being involved with the project but it made me really angry reading all the

stuff that people have said on Facebook. I think it is disgusting and should be acknowledged as a hate crime. After doing this and talking about it more, I would be more likely to report this in the future. I think it's important to show others the type of things that are said to the community on a daily basis."

For the first time the exhibition was shown online and it is still possible to see it at www.outofsightoutofmind.scot

SUCCESS OF THE EASY A PROJECT

ARTICLE 12 and Falkirk Council joined forces last year to run a pilot programme, offering educational support to young Gypsy/Travellers who were not in mainstream education.

The combination of academic subjects alongside personal development sessions and life skills led the young people to give consistently positive feedback and to vote with their feet, with attendance being almost 100% for the duration of the six-week pilot.

There were many highlights from this project - from the day that Stirling Dog Behavioural Centre joined them and taught everyone some tips and tricks of dog training and animal care, to the Dragon's Den session with Business Gateway guru, Alasdair Busby, where the participants had to compete with one another by presenting the best business idea, it



was clear that the young people had begun to find learning fun! One participant said, "I never thought I'd like to be in a class with strangers...but I get excited to come here every week." Another said, "I never liked school but this is great. You don't realise how much you are learning".

The success of this project has led Article 12 to explore scaling the idea up and developing new partnerships in order to provide this opportunity to more young Gypsy/Travellers. They have some very exciting things in the pipeline, so watch this space!

WOMEN'S VOICES PROJECT WELCOMES NEW WORKER

THE Women's Voices Project has restarted with a new development officer. Shirell Johnson, who joined the team in October, has a wealth of experience to bring to the job. She is a carer herself and understands well the challenges of caring for family members. She has worked in a variety of roles supporting people with a wide range of issues including mental health, homelessness, domestic abuse, crime, and drugs and alcohol addiction (dependency).



Shirell has connections to the community and says: "I have a mixed heritage of different Gypsy/Traveller ancestors and have a keen interest in their lives, as well as in the lives of Gypsy/Travellers now, and in social justice and equality for all."

Covid-19 restrictions mean, that for the time being, Shirell will not be able to meet many of the women already involved in the Womens' Voices Project face to face. However, she aims to be in touch with the women who were already involved with the Women's Voices Project very soon.

For any women who haven't been involved with the project before but are interested they can find out more by calling her on 07931 555 417, or emailing shirell@mecopp.org.uk.

FOOD BANK GENEROSITY

EARLIER this year, at the start of the pandemic, a group of Gypsy/Traveller men from across Scotland decided to help the community as the Covid-19 emergency took hold. Using Face Book each man would nominate another from the community to collect donations and deliver them to their local food bank.

The idea really took off and more and more men joined in to help not just other Gypsy/Travellers but their wider community. The success of their food collections and the generosity of Gypsy/Travellers meant that the food banks soon filled up and eventually they couldn't accept any more donations.

CAREER MOVE

DOMINIQUE Barr, who ran MECOPP's Womens' Voices project, has joined the Confederation Of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

Dominique, who is from a Gypsy/Traveller family, has had a key role in advising local authorities on how best to support the community during the pandemic.

Before joining COSLA she supported community members to have a say in the

development of the Scottish Government and COSLA policies in their joint published plan, *Improving the Lives of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers*.

Dominique says: "I've been busy in my new post with Covid-19 but am now looking forward to supporting local authorities to deliver the actions of the plan and to work alongside Gypsy/Travellers to make real change for our community".

MANGIN' MANUSHEES CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF GYPSY/TRAVELLER'S

MANGIN' Manushees is a new community group that has started up in Perthshire. It was the idea of a small group of women who think the Gypsy/Traveller community should be able to represent themselves when decisions are made that affect them.

Their aim is to campaign for improvements to the lives and living conditions of all Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland whether they live roadside, on sites or in houses. They will use their own experiences to inform government, local authorities and statutory service providers on how best to make much-needed improvements.

In its early days still, Mangin' Manushees hope that in the long term it can build a Scotland wide membership organisation open to women and men from the Gypsy/Traveller community. Betty, one of the founders of Mangin' Manushees said: "Travellers have been hidden for years and it's high time for us to speak out and get our proper rights."

If you want more information or are interested in joining Mangin' Manushees contact Betty on 0775 710 3629 or email elizabethmclaren72@icloud.com or Jacquelinemccallum68@icloud.com.

APPEAL SUCCESS

MECOPP has supported two people from the Gypsy/Traveller community in appeals against their awards by Social Security Scotland.

In both cases the appeals were challenging the awards for Personal Independence Payments (PIP) which the applicants felt were insufficient to meet their needs.

PIP is a benefit for people with long-term ill-health or disability to help with the extra costs they face. Before the applicant is awarded the benefit, which can be between £23.60 and £151.40 a week, they have to be assessed by a health professional.

With MECOPP's support both appeals were won and the applicants had their weekly PIP increased, receiving almost £8,000 in back payments between them.

CREATIVE THINKING

MANY of the community activities that would normally be put on are not possible during the ongoing Covid-19 emergency and so MECOPP Gypsy/Traveller Carers' Project has had to come up with new ways of organising its activities and events.



For many years the project has Kelly-Jay with her Christmas hamper. In it there was a selection of traditional Scottish fare to enjoy.

been funded by Creative Breaks to organise family fun days, residential breaks and other activities that give carers and their families some respite from the everyday challenges they face.

In December team members distributed Christmas hampers to communities in Perth and Kinross and the Lothians and earlier in 2020 development workers Siubhan, Donna and Mhairi visited Gypsy/Traveller communities in Argyll, Edinburgh and the Lothians and Perth and Kinross to deliver afternoon teas to carers. The afternoon teas certainly went down a treat: "Thanks again Donna, my mother was so happy it made her day". "Afternoon tea was great, definitely enjoyed it, it lasted me the whole day - I was absolutely made up with it!" and "Honestly, really it was beautiful, everything in it was lovely. My wee niece popped in, she wanted a scone and had the jam and cream all over herself! We loved it." were just some of the responses.

In the autumn the team came up with another idea, Pamper Packs! The packs contained all the products needed for a facial and nail and hand treatments. Most of the packs were designed for women but male carers weren't left out with some of the packs being specially designed for them. To help the carers who received the Pamper Packs, a video was made with Beauty Therapist Laura Wyse who demonstrated how to use the products and get the most out of them.

Project leader Suzanne said: "We were delighted to be able to do this with the support of our funder. Carers are vital to the life of a community and even more so during the current situation. So being able to provide even a small 'time out' for carers to enjoy tea and cake or a pamper was something the whole team enjoyed"

HAS COVID CHANGED YOUR LIFE ?

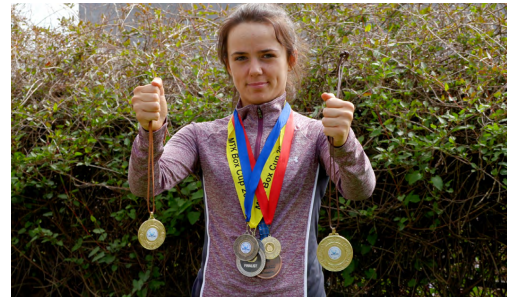
HAS my life changed since the pandemic is a question I have been asked a lot in these recent months, and the answer is yes, more than I realised.

Just going to the shop was very scary at first and when people approached me my anxiety levels would go through the roof. You are so very conscious of everything you touch that you just constantly clean your hands. Even just going for a walk is stressful. You feel like you can't pick a flower or sit on a bench without wondering who'd sat there before you.

But I am starting to adapt to this new way of living: it's not good but it's not bad either, it's definitely different. For some people it's not such a big change, or they don't really care and go on about their day regardless of what's going on around them. To others, it's affected them so much that they have very low days and can't or don't want to go out. That's the reality of how much of an impact it has on people's mental health.

Maggie McPhee

FIGHTING FIT VIDEO



PRIZE winning boxer Maggie White, aged 17, has made *Fighting Fit* a video to help people look after their physical and mental health during the pandemic. Working with Donna Lawrie and Peter Ross from MECOPP, Maggie devised a routine of exercises for the video that are examples of what can be done. As she says in the video: "Training is really important to me because it lifts my mood. When I feel down and I exercise it makes me feel so much better afterwards."

Maggie shows that you don't need to go to a gym or have your own fancy equipment to stay fit. You can see her video on-line at vimeo.com/415117412

SITE REFURBISHMENT TO BEGIN

THE Planning Department of the City of Edinburgh Council has given the green light to a £2 million plan to completely refurbish the North Cairn Tow Traveller Site at Duddingston in Edinburgh.

The design of the site, the type of accommodation and the landscaping were decided in consultation with the residents, the

council and the architects. Residents will move into temporary accommodation, which they have chosen from a number of options, and the work is expected to begin early this year. The complete refurbishment of the site will see residents moving into their new chalets a short while after the development has been signed off.

LAPTOPS FOR LEARNING

TWO young women and two young men from the Greenacres site in Perthshire were successful in applying for laptops from YouthLink Scotland, the national agency for youth work. The laptops were provided to help them continue with their Personal Development Programmes which they are doing supported by Angie MacInnes from Perth & Kinross Council's Adult Literacy Programmes and Tracey Gregor from Perth College.

The courses are designed to build their confidence, self-esteem and resilience, and to develop skills in team work, communication, problem

solving, research and self-management. The young people use photography and writing to record their progress.

The Covid-19 emergency interrupted their learning and has had an impact on their feelings of isolation. The laptops will give them the opportunity to reconnect with workers and continue their learning and help them communicate with their peers to reduce the effects of isolation. Courtney Townsley said: "I miss going in to the class every week and doing the work, I'm looking forward to getting my brain working again!! Having a laptop will be great!"