



EXCHANGE HOUSE IRELAND
National Travellers Suicide Prevention Service

**ANNUAL ACTIVITY
REPORT (2014)**

Section 1: Introduction

- 1.1 In 2014, following discussions with the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP), The National Traveller Suicide Prevention Service (NTSPS) introduced a strategic operational planning process, the result of which would form the basis of the all the work undertaken by the service. The following strategic goals were agreed:
- **Goal 1** - To Promote Exchange House National Traveller Suicide Prevention Service
 - **Goal 2** - Build resilience in individual Travellers, Traveller families and the Traveller Community
 - **Goal 3** - Reconstitute the responsibilities' of NTSPS Advisory Group
 - **Goal 4** - Inform and impact upon local, regional, national and EU policy development in relation to Traveller specific service provision within the context of suicide prevention.
- 1.2 In this activity report, we provide a detailed account of the work of the NTSPS within the context of these goals and the accompanying actions. 2014 was an extremely important year for the service and the changes that were made have allowed us to ensure clarity of focus, purpose and approach, as well as facilitating us to map our provision and provide specific information on the outputs achieved by the service.
- 1.3 Moving forward into 2015, as a result of this process, we are now in a position to evidence the need for additional resources which will enhance the service and facilitate the development of a regional approach to the provision of suicide prevention services to Travellers.

Section 2: Achieving Operational Goal 1

Promotion of Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Suicide Prevention Service

- 2.1 NTSPS, although highly regarded and known in certain Traveller services of Ireland, was not widely known to all service providers who support Travellers. Within this context, NTSPS made significant new connections with Traveller services nationwide, mental health service providers and general service providers that work with Travellers at a local, regional and national level.
- 2.2 NTSPS promoted its service through online social media such as Twitter. This was a first for the service and there is a steady growth of followers to the @NTSPSIreland account. All events and trainings are tweeted. The immediacy of this media helps to connect Travellers and services with NTSPS and provide a platform for moderated interaction and discussion.
- 2.3 In 2015, NTSPS will further develop its online presence through an updated website and a Facebook account. NTSPS will research other appropriate social media forums and adopt as suitable. Currently, we are also in the process of finalising our 2015 “poster” campaign, the aim of which is to ensure that every mental health service provider in Ireland is displaying appropriate, relevant and accessible information for Travellers.



Section 3: Achieving Operational Goal 2

Building Individual, Family and Community Resilience

3.1 Evidenced Based Approaches

On the basis of international evidence based practice in suicide prevention, it is clear that building resilience results in a reduction in deaths by suicide – specifically amongst indigenous ethnic minority groups. Within the context of NTSPS, our focus has been to work within the context of local Traveller community organisations to build partnerships which enhance opportunities for individuals, families and the community as a whole to access services and build resilience.

3.2 Building Individual Resilience

Throughout 2014, NTSPS has worked closely with Travelling to Wellbeing (T2WB) - a Genio funded, Traveller specific, mental health support service for which Exchange House Ireland holds the contract. Our T2WB colleagues in West Cork, Offaly and Dublin support the work of NTSPS one day a week, providing culturally appropriate mental health support. Although a limited support, T2WB clients met with 24 Travellers in 2014 that expressed suicidal ideation. On average each client met with a worker 12 times, accounting for 244 engagements.

In addition, NTSPS and T2WB have worked together on a number of local and regional events in 2014 e.g. World Suicide Prevention Day and Offaly Mental Health Talk Week.

- 3.2.1 In late 2014, NTSPS provided funding to each T2WB site to support a counselling service. It is expected that a counsellor will be in situ in each area by February 2015. This counselling service will be limited to the funding allocated to each site and referrals to the counsellor will come directly from the T2WB mental health worker and must be related to suicide prevention work.

3.3 Building Family Resilience

NTSPS, as part of the wider Exchange House Ireland service, has access to the Family Support and Crisis Intervention service. NTSPS promote and refer organisations, individual Travellers and Traveller families to Family Support and Crisis Intervention.

In 2015, NTSPS and Family Support and Crisis Intervention will be working even closer. A national contact/referral system for Family Support and Crisis Intervention service will be developed and promoted through the work of NTSPS. NTSPS will run training for staff and group work for clients of Family Support and Crisis Intervention service.

3.4 Building Community Resilience

3.4.1 Local, regional and national service partnerships

NTSPS continues to liaise at a local level with Traveller services. Throughout 2015, we held various events with local Traveller services including:

- Longford Traveller community celebration event
- Pavee GAA celebration event
- Magpies on the Pylon with Clondalkin and Tallaght Traveller Development Groups.
- Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group: Promoting Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Services in Dublin 15
- Offaly Traveller Movement: Promoting Positive Mental Health Within the Traveller Community
- Offaly Traveller Movement and Kerry Travellers Community Development and Primary Health Care Project: World Suicide Prevention Day 2014

The Suicide Prevention Facilitator made partnerships with various organisations in 2014 including Samaritans, Irish Prison Service (IPS) and BeLonGTo. In addition:

- Samaritans supported NTSPS events in Offaly and Dublin and attended our Promoting Traveller Culture in Mental Health conference in Blanchardstown.
- NTSPS has had several meetings with IPS on how to meet the mental health needs of prisoners from the Traveller community. NTSPS provided cultural training to IPS officers.
- NTSPS and BeLonGTo met in 2014 to begin the conversation of LGBT Traveller issues, more work will arise from this in 2015.

The Suicide Prevention Men's Development Worker developed connections with **53** service providers including the An Garda Siochana, Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Midlands Men's Health Network and the Gaelic Athletic Association. (GAA).

- NTSPS sponsored a Traveller soccer team to participate in a cross border soccer tournament promoting positive relationships with policing bodies (An Garda Siochana and PSNI).
- NTSPS invited the GAA to support the NTSPS Play and Say It mental health sporting initiative. The GAA actively support and encourage greater diversity in their clubs. NTSPS, with the GAA, organised a tour and a jersey presentation for the Pavee GAA club in Croke Park July 2014.
- NTSPS Men's Development Worker joined and is supporting the Midlands Men's Health network. NTSPS will assist and guide best practice approaches to working with Traveller men in Offaly, Longford, Laois and Westmeath

Agreed strategic work for 2015 with partners includes;

- Supporting Samaritans in providing listener training to Traveller Primary Health Care Projects

- Increased work and training with IPS officers in 2015 and the delivery of 1 SafeTALK to prisoners from the Traveller Community
- Raising awareness of LGBT issues with BeLonGTo in the Traveller community and providing training to employees of Traveller services
- Supporting Longford Traveller Primary Healthcare unit, Laois Traveller organisations in implementing specific men only mental health and suicide prevention training initiatives.
- National roll out of the **“Play It and Say It”** mental health sporting initiative
 - Continued involvement with Longford Wanderers Football Club (F.C.) and Pavee GAA to promote inclusion through sport alongside the benefits to a person’s mental and physical health through participation.
- Establish connections with the National Men’s Forum as well implement a Traveller Specific Men’s Health Network with focus on Traveller specific mental health training into mainstream services.

In addition:

- NTSPS became members of Mental Health Reform and Irish Association of Suicidology (IAS).
- NTSPS were involved in the Mental Health Reform working group on Ethnic Minorities and Mental Health; a position paper.
- NTSPS attended the IAS Conference in October 2014 and the Contact NI Conference in November 2014. At the IAS conference NTSPS were invited to present on their service provision. Both conferences were key highlights of 2014 and allowed NTSPS staff to raise the profile of the service and to network and learn from peers within the suicide prevention services.

3.4.2 Training

Training remains a core component of the work of NTSPS. Training was completed in 17 of the 26 counties in 2014. This training included positive mental health, suicide awareness, culture and mental health. All training was evaluated by the trainees and the majority has been very positive.

Role	Description	Total
Suicide Prevention Facilitator	Training	22
	Training participants	303
	SafeTALK training	7
	Service meetings (Traveller, mental health and community services)	28
	Local, regional and national events	5
	Local, regional and national event attendees	249
Suicide Prevention Men's Development Worker	Training – Programmes and Initiatives	28
	Total participants	521
	SafeTALK training	5
	Service meetings (Traveller, mental health and community services and other agencies)	54
	Local, regional and national events	5
	Local, regional and national event attendees	278

3.4.3 Groupwork

3.4.3.1 “Play It and Say It”

The “**Play It and Say It**” mental health sporting initiative was piloted with 10 young Traveller men in Dublin. They met weekly for 8 months and trained in their chosen sport but also in mental health awareness, SafeTALK, leadership and communication skills.

This initiative also supported the involvement of Travellers in Sport Against Racism Ireland (SARI) national event in the Phoenix Park in September 2014. NTSPS sponsored 6 teams of Travellers to compete in the event. The initiative also supported the United Nations Anti-Racism day in November 2014, by staging a Traveller specific soccer event with 20 Travellers.

The “**Play It and Say It**” mental health sporting initiative is currently being provided to Traveller men in Longford through our partnerships with Longford Travellers Primary Health Care Unit and Longford Wanderers F.C.

The “**Play It and Say It**” programme will be launched in Longford with Longford Travellers and Longford Wanderers F.C. on 29th of January 2015. This launch will commence the national roll out of the mental health sporting initiative.

3.4.3.2 Traveller Specific Train the Trainer in Cultural Aspects of Mental Health Treatment

NTSPS devised a train the trainer programme specifically for Travellers working in Traveller services such as Traveller community development projects or Primary Health Care Projects. This training provides Travellers with the skills to organise, host and lead workshops with their peers in mainstream services and mental health services in relation to Traveller culture and mental health.

The training was piloted with the Offaly Traveller Movement Primary Health Care Project and evaluations suggest that overall the training was positive and reflected the culture well however there are adjustments required to make the training more accessible, to allow room to tailor certain Traveller customs that are strong in certain areas and greater detail in how to promote culture appropriate treatment.

3.4.3.3 Youth Mental Health

Thirteen young Traveller girls, aged 9-11, worked with NTSPS to enhance their emotional understanding and coping skills. Using art and drama, the young girls showed what different emotions look like and what can help someone who is sad to feel better. The girls explained each of their art works and the NTSPS facilitator reinforced positive messages and prompted discussion.

3.4.3.4 Youth Mindfulness

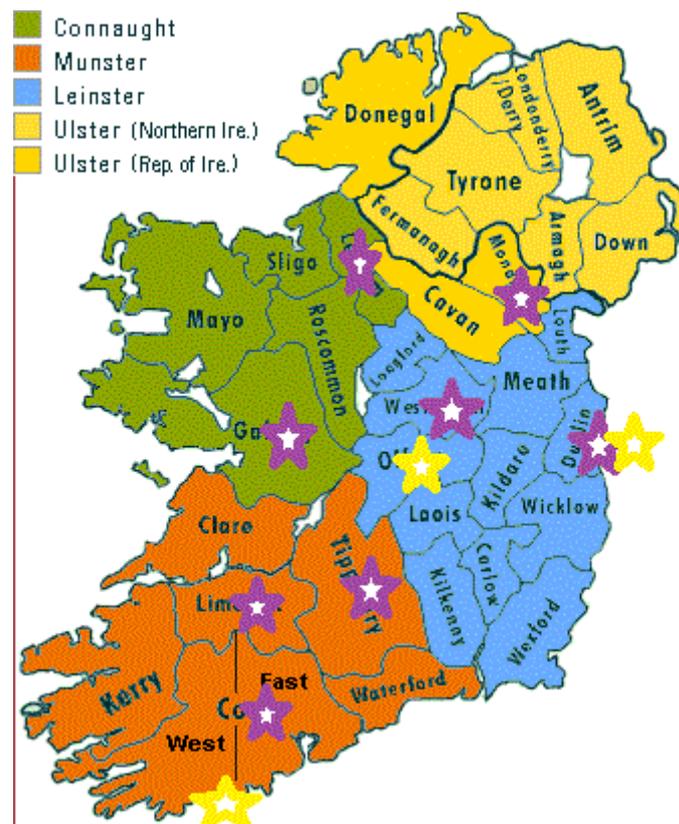
NTSPS ran 6 mindfulness sessions over six weeks with a group of 8 young Travellers. The aim of the programme was to alleviate anxiety as the young Travellers made the transition from secondary education to adult education. The topics covered in the six weeks included recognising emotions, bodily sensations/pains to emotions, relaxation techniques and communication skills.

The programme challenged the young people as this was their very first experience to this type of work. As the weeks progressed, positive changes in the young people's behaviours were noted by their tutors.

3.4.4 Establishment of Regional Resilience Hubs

Following discussions and support from NOSP, NTSPS released a grant scheme in late 2014 to support organisations to design, develop and deliver – on the basis of their local knowledge and understanding of the issues facing their particular communities - suicide prevention programmes within local communities.

Combined with the counselling service funded by NTSPS in Travelling to Wellbeing sites, NTSPS have a greater and strategic reach across Ireland. As displayed on the map, the purple stars signify grant recipients and the yellow stars represent the location of counselling services. In 2015, NTSPS will support these organisations extensively and build greater recognition and relationships with Travellers and their communities in those counties. It is the aim of NTSPS to establish a staffed regional hub in Cork in 2015.



3.4.5 National and Regional Events

The NTSPS hosted 9 large scale regional and national events in 2014.

With the support of colleagues, there were three World Suicide Prevention Day Events. The events took place in Dublin, Offaly and Kerry. Travellers were engaged with the issue of mental health through film. There was a great turn out at each event and they were a huge success. NTSPS would like to acknowledge the support of Offaly Traveller Movement, Kerry Travellers Primary Health Care and Community Development Project and all the staff of Exchange House.

In partnership with Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group, the Suicide Prevention Facilitator organised and hosted Promoting Traveller Culture in Mental Health in October. All mental health service providers in the Dublin 15 area were invited. Feedback from attendees suggests that the day was informative and provided them with key skills to bring back to their services in relation to Traveller culture and mental health treatment strategies.

As part of Offaly Mental Health Talk Week in November, NTSPS, in partnership with Travelling to Wellbeing and Offaly Traveller Movement, held a day seminar on Traveller History and Traveller Resilience. The #littlethings campaign was highlighted during this daylong event and positive mental health skills were demonstrated and shared among the group. This event was attended by over 40 Travellers from Offaly, Laois and Westmeath. Feedback was extremely positive.

Two sporting recognition events were held specifically for members of the Traveller community; Pavee GAA and Longford Wanderers F.C. The events highlighted the achievements and the roles of Traveller men within sport and within the Traveller community. These celebration events occurred in Longford in partnership with Longford Traveller Healthcare Project and in Dublin with The Parish of the Travelling People.

In partnership with the Northern Ireland Community Safety Partnership, NTSPS hosted a cross border cross cultural event with the PSNI and the Garda. This event took place in Downpatrick Co Down with over 50 people were in attendance.

NTSPS, in partnership with Tallaght Travellers Development Group and Clondalkin Travellers Development Group, sponsored and hosted a Mental Health and Suicide Prevention day in Red Rua Theatre in Tallaght. As part of the day, there was production of the play, Magpies on the Pylon, by Michael Collins and information of local statutory and voluntary mental health services was provided.

Section 4: Achieving Operational Goal 3

Increased Governance and Oversight

4.1 Reconstitute the Responsibility of the NTSPS Advisory Group

In 2014, significant time was given at Advisory Group level to discuss the future and progression of the NTSPS. It was agreed to reconfigure the Advisory Group to reflect national representation of Travellers and of experts in Suicidology and Mental Health service provision.

The reconfigured Advisory Group will be chaired by Siobhan O’Neill, Professor of Mental Health Services; University of Ulster. Members of the Advisory Group will provide specific expertise in relation to key issues at local, regional and national level. Members will give input on yearly operational plan, formative evaluation methodologies and inform and impact on upon policy development.

Section 5: Achieving Operational Goal 4

Policy and Research

5.1 Policy Development

In 2014, NTSPS has raised the profile and need for cultural appropriate policy development, delivery and practice within mental health services.

NTSPS joined the Mental Health Reform and has campaigned heavily for greater recognition of indigenous ethnic minority needs within mental health services. NTSPS provided input for the recent Mental Health Reform publication; **‘Ethnic Minorities and Mental Health; A Position Paper’**

NTSPS, through its ‘Promoting Culture in Mental Health Treatment’ trainings has provided clear and practical steps services can take to develop cultural appropriate policies and practices. In 2014, this training was provided to:

- European Psychiatric Association,
- Psychiatry and Psychology Departments, Beaumont Hospital
- Social Work Department, Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown
- Mental Health services in Dublin 15

NTSPS presented at the Irish Association of Suicidology 18th Annual Conference on its specific service provision in suicide prevention to the Traveller community. The presentation highlighted how NTSPS is culturally appropriate to Travellers from policy to practice.

In 2014, NTSPS, with wider Exchange House Ireland services, created a working group to provide accurate information to St. Stephen’s Green Trust on the current mental and physical needs of Travellers within the Irish prison service. Exchange House Ireland is now part of the Steering Group of the SSGT Travellers in Prison Initiative to address the inequalities Travellers face within the prison service.

Throughout 2014, NTSPS worked extensively with the Irish Prison Service to develop Traveller specific protocols for the Irish Prison Services which address the mental health needs of Traveller prisoners.

5.2 Research

NTSPS has a growing concern for the current lack of reliable statistics or studies on the rate of suicide within the Traveller community. To provide a robust and evidence based service, NTSPS has begun to look at the current needs and concerns of the community regionally and nationally.

From our research on the ground, NTSPS has identified the following areas that need future investigation.

- Rate and Type of Self-Harm
- Current Contact and Experiences of Travellers engaged with Mental Health Services
- Use of Prescribed and Non-Prescribed Mental Health medication in the community
- Experiences of Suicide within Traveller Families

The aim for 2015 is to begin researching the experiences of suicide within Traveller Families nationwide. The outcomes of this research will inform future NTSPS operational planning.