

Dublin Committee
FOR Travelling
People
FOR 1977

DUBLIN COMMITTEE FOR TRAVELLING PEOPLE

Patron: The Most Reverend Dermot Ryan D.D. Archbishop of Dublin.

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Kearney.

Youth Workers: Mr. V. Foley, Mr. H. Kane, Mr. M. Ennis.

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COMMITTEE

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Mr. G. Bowler
Sister Colette Dwyer
Mr. M. Bermingham
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Mr. M. McGinley
Mrs. E. Nolan
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DUBLIN COMMITTEE FOR TRAVELLING PEOPLE. REPORT FOR 1977.

"Is anything being done for the Travellers now, I haven't heard anything about them lately?" From time to time I am asked this sort of question. It usually means that the speaker has not for a while seen or heard anything on Radio or Television, or in the press. The fact that such comments are made shows the importance of the News Media to progress in provision for Travellers and it would be appropriate here to say how much we appreciate and have been helped by the Media year after year. We do thank them sincerely for their helpful contribution to progress.

The above question also reminds us of all the dedicated people who work quietly, without publicity, year in, year out, and without whose efforts in a whole variety of ways, progress would not be made. These include Local Authority officials, committee members, Teachers, Social Workers, Youth Workers, a whole variety of voluntary helpers and, of course, the Travellers themselves. It is people such as these who maintain their interest and activities throughout the years, even when no-one hears anything about them, that makes progress possible.

PROGRESS: Another question that is asked is "Are you making any progress. Has public opinion changed at all?" Yes, I think it would be correct to say that public opinion has changed considerably. We still face all the difficulties we did 13 years ago, the same hostility, prejudice, ignorance and indifference. But they are less, and there are far more people who are interested and helpful. Far more people now know Travellers personally, and where there is division and prejudice, it makes a difference when people get to know each other as people.

Are we making progress? If this means is progress being made in helping the Travellers to become more accepted, to get the living accommodation that meets their need, and education, again the answer is 'Yes,' even if there is still much to be done.

SETTLEMENT: A lot has happened since the Committee first helped two families to settle in caravans on privately owned ground, early in 1966. We have discontinued supplying caravans now, except in exceptional cases, as living accommodation is provided by the Local Authorities.

The survey of Travellers carried out in October, 1977 shows the following result:-

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Families in Standard Housing | 734 |
| Families in Chalet Sites | 258 |
| Families in Trailers on Approved Sites | 107 |
| Families on Roadside | 854 |
| TOTAL | 1953 |
| Total number of families provided for | 1099 |

Of the 854 families on the roadside, 107 were living under canvas and 12 in shacks, 263 were considered to be transients, who were not interested in settlement. This latter figure is smaller than we had expected. There are therefore about 591 families who would like some form of settlement. Most of these families would like standard housing, as this continues to be the type of accommodation preferred by most Travellers.

COMPARISON WITH 1960 CENSUS:

It is interesting to compare these figures with those of the census carried out in December, 1960. At that time, there was a total of 1198 families in the Republic, of which only 43 were living in houses, 399 were living under canvas, although 64 of these also had horse caravans. Over 900 families at that time expressed a wish to settle. There has been a big drop therefore, in the number of families living under canvas, and since then, accommodation has been provided for a total of 1099 families, which is more than the number expressing a wish to settle in 1960. So far, however, we have failed to provide for the increase in the number of families since that time.

EDUCATION:

A minute of the Committee held on February 1st 1966 records that with the assistance of the Sisters of Charity "a school for Itinerant children had been started in Milltown. The school is held from 3.00 – 5.00 p.m., daily, and at present 18 children are attending." A minute of a meeting on March 8th 1966 tells us that 25 children were on the roll, and adds that "as the families were constantly being moved on, a Minibus had been purchased to collect the children for school."

The 1960 census reports that in November 1960, only 160 children of Travellers were on the school rolls throughout the country, of whom 114 were said to be regular attenders. A report compiled by Sister Colette Dwyer, in January 1978, records that there are now 3,002 children "attending school with sufficient regularity to ensure that they could make some real progress, and emerge at the end of their time in school with the basic skills of literacy and numeracy."

Sister Colette's report continues:- "there is still a complete tie-up between the progress in settlement and the progress in education for Travelling children, in every county in Ireland. Where settlement is good, education is making satisfactory progress, where it is not, little can be done. In many cases, the provision of serviced Halts where families could pull in, be ensured of the essentials for basic human living – water, sanitation, etc., and be free from the continual fear of being "moved on" out of reach of the school their children are attending, and often with nowhere else to go, could cause school attendance figures to rocket."

In addition to the 3,002 children attending school, there are at least a similar number of school age who are not able to attend school for the reasons mentioned by Sister Colette.

Compulsory movement of families, without their being offered any suitable alternative, is still being carried out in different parts of the country, including County Dublin. This practice must be strongly condemned. Not only does it cause considerable hardships for the Travellers, but it creates bad relationships with Travellers and the settled community, particularly with those in authority. As already mentioned, it causes great hindrance to education, and often stops it completely for the families concerned. The seriousness of this, must be strongly stressed. I have heard some of the teachers of these children speaking almost with despair

as families are moved again and again. One teacher remarked "these children come here to school, and we are supposed to educate them to be good citizens, yet by being forcibly moved time after time, they are already hostile before they come here. The seeds of delinquency are already sown." We must heed the warning contained in these words. We cannot treat our fellowmen in this way and not have repercussions in anti-social behaviour and delinquency.

In our Annual Report for 1974, we emphasised the need for a Site or Halt for 15 to 20 families in South County Dublin, and quoted from a report of one of our Social Workers as follows:- "Social work in this area is a frustrating job, dominated and restricted by its lack of a site of reasonable size in the area, and the general lack of facilities. St. Kieran's School, is really the only service provided for the Travellers in the area. I work closely with the staff of St. Kieran's, and I know how difficult and frustrating their job is because of the constant movement of the families, often involuntary."

This year, 4 years later, an extract from our Bray-Dun Laoghaire Committee Report reads as follows:-

"The Committee is still frustrated by the lack of even a Halt for the many Travelling families in the South County Dublin-Wicklow areas. Apart from the fact that there are fewer and fewer places where the families can camp, they are perpetually being moved from one place to another. This, apart from all its other attendant problems for the Travellers, completely disrupts their schooling, which is particularly sad when one looks at the facilities currently being provided in St. Kieran's School and Training Centre."

The provision of a Halt in South County Dublin, is one of the greatest needs in the county, at the present time. Let us hope that it will be provided before we write our report for another year.

Statistics for County Dublin:

The figures for the survey already quoted, are, of course, the figures for the whole of the Republic. The figures for Co. Dublin are as follows:-

| | Standard Housing | Chalet Sites | Halts | Roadside | TOTAL | Total Provided for |
|------|------------------|--------------|-------|----------|-------|--------------------|
| 1977 | 65 | 132 | 12 | 132 | 341 | 209 |
| 1976 | 60 | 106 | 30 | 163 | 359 | 196 |
| 1975 | 48 | 131 | 1 | 178 | 358 | 180 |

Of those on the roadside, only 15 were considered to be transients, 12 were living under canvas and 5 in shacks.

Last year, we reported that the chalet site for 15 families at Holylands, Rathfarnham, was nearing completion. The families moved into it nearly a year ago, and are very happy in their new accommodation. All the families on this site belong to one family group. Sites such as this, allow congenial family groups to live together in a way which would not be possible in a housing estate. It is interesting to record that the residents on the site requested that a notice saying "No Dumping" be placed at the entrance of the road leading to the site.

Work is proceeding on the site for 40 families at Clover Hill, Clondalkin and it should be ready for occupation before the end of the Summer. This site will provide much needed accommodation in this area. 10 new Chalets will shortly be erected at Labre Park, so there will be a big increase in chalet accommodation, this year.

More houses are needed. Only 5 families were housed during this year. A number of families are waiting for houses.

Hard surface, water and light have now been provided on one of the two Halts on the North side. Sanitation will also be provided. The same facilities are required at the second Halt.

SOCIAL WORK:

The corporation have now appointed two Social Workers to work full time with Travellers. We welcome this action. Accordingly, when Eilis Gough left us last year to take up another position, we did not replace her. We should like to record our appreciation of her work while with the Committee. We wish her well in her new position.

We now have 2 Social Workers doing general Social Work, 2 working specifically with those who have a problem with alcohol, and 3 Youth Workers, in addition to the staff at Trudder House.

THE BRAY-DUN LAOGHAIRE COMMITTEE REPORT AS FOLLOWS:

EDUCATION:

St. Kieran's School has been recognised since January 1st as a Special National School, which means that the Department of Education pays the teachers' salaries, and a Grant of £16 per child per year for all other

expenses. This is a great help, although our other expenses are in the area of six to seven thousand pounds a year! However, we are hoping for some help from the Department of Health with these extra expenses, which include feeding the children, having their medical needs attended to, paying 25% of the cost of running the minibus, etc.

There have been 123 children on the rolls this year, with an average attendance of about 70 children per day. We have added a Vocational Class to the school, which is catering for the 12+ age group, and will hopefully help to bridge the gap between the school and the Training Centre. One of our past pupils, at present in The Training Centre, and with children in the school, is a member of the new Management Committee of the school.

THE TRAINING CENTRE: is flourishing, under the able direction of Mr. Michael Bermingham. AnCO has done a wonderful job on the reconstruction of the old burnt-out school building, and twenty-four boys and girls (the maximum we are allowed to take) are training there. The boys do courses in Literacy, Woodwork, Metalwork, Welding, Repair services, etc., and the girls in Literacy, Industrial machining, dressmaking, cookery, crafts, child care, hygiene, etc. The V.E.C. pays the teachers in the Training Centre.

There are now 5 Training Centres in different parts of the country. They are providing a very important service for teenagers, particularly for those who have had little previous education. We need more such centres in County Dublin.

Mervyn Ennis, our Youth Worker in Finglas has now completed his post graduate course in Scotland, and we are glad to have his active help again. He sends us the following report about activities in Finglas.

AVILA PARK.

31 children are attending 2 special classes in St. Joseph's School. 35 girls are integrated throughout the school. 9 boys attend the local National School for boys. The pre-school class on the site continues.

ROADSIDE – Finglas catchment area. There is a special collection run organised by Sister Margaret Mary. She collects over 80 children and brings them to three schools, Priors Wood, North William St., and Hill St. Each school provides two special classes. Hill Street also has a number

integrated throughout the school. Sister Margaret Mary's figures of children collected, are a good indication of the numbers of Travellers on the roadside with no facilities other than school to cater for their various needs. The cold reality of the situation, is that for roughly 75 families within the catchment area, there are no planned activities or outlets for them. It is a fact of life that most Travellers are socially handicapped due to their culture, lifestyle, living conditions, illiteracy, lack of life chances, negative self image, and the prejudice of some of the settled population directed against them.

The small social centre on the site at Avila Park, and the small playground, are the only facilities provided for the Travellers at a recreational level.

RECREATIVE ACTIVITIES:

The range of sporting or recreational activities available to adult travellers is quite limited. They consist of Sunday Football match "Avila Gaels," their own Gaelic Football Team. Attending the occasional Meath – Westmeath – Kildare G.A.A. football teams.

The daily Horse Racing.

The occasional game of Pool, but Pool is usually confined to pubs and Travellers are very often refused service in pubs while Pool Halls also exercise their rights to refuse admission.

For women there is nothing organised and little available. Illiteracy bars them from the simplest game of bingo.

At the moment, the centre functions solely for the children and adolescents. It aims at providing play opportunities for the youngest, 5 to 12, the most active and extravert of all age groups. They enjoy chasing, climbing, aerobatics, ball games, imaginative adventure play. The Corporation has provided a hard surface play area and some equipment which should be a great asset in organising the Summer play scheme. The fact that we have the equipment means that we can use it as a carrot to bring in the settled community and have our centre designated one of the play areas for Finglas, and thus achieve a certain degree of integration.

Our affiliation to the mini-ball league has been of great benefit to us. From it, we gained one invaluable youth worker, Finnuala McInerney, who works with the girls – and invitations to many schools and clubs where we are accepted as equals and where real integration is achieved.

With the aid of an old minibus, we have tried to get out of the site as much as possible and concentrate on getting as wide a variety of experience as we can.

We visited the Museums.

National Museum – via Stephen's Green Duck Pond.

Animal Museum – and adventure playground.

The Moving Crib – via Chapelizod Playground Phoenix Park.

The Hell Fire Club.

Other trips organised through St. Brendan were (i) a trip to Funderland, (ii) The Children's Traffic Safety Exhibition Centre.

A visit to National Stud is due to come off later this month.

For the Senior Club, life has not been so hectic. Table Tennis has been the main interest and a number of inter club matches. Three of the senior clubs are taking part in the Leinster Table Tennis Coaching Course. This is only a small step towards developing leadership skills among the Travellers themselves. Though it is hoped that through increased efforts in youth work, an indigenous movement of Travellers will emerge to control and advise on decisions about their own needs.

OBJECTIVES AND PROBLEMS:

The chronic lack of facilities curtails arts and crafts classes, workshop activities, such as metal work, woodwork, home management, etc., P.T. classes. Informal communal gatherings in a coffee bar/lounge (there is a real need for such a provision for the women). Disco's, films, light drama productions, but particularly adult education courses. A proper centre would facilitate the growth of this wider range of sporting educational and cultural activities.

For reasons already outlined (in existing facilities and services) the Traveller is in a situation where there is limited access to cinemas (some of the men attend films but due to high cost and other social – cultural reasons, women don't attend).

No theatres, no places where teenagers could dance, only one small cold place where some can meet and enjoy themselves. The first thing that is needed is entertainment.

There is a general tendency among some who view Travellers as shiftless, lazy or on "permanent holidays," as well as some who seek the development of Travellers, to underestimate that which is only entertainment. Art and Craft pursuits are seen as more socially relevant, making work for

idle fingers yet also breaking down taboos and barriers with settled population by showing them what Travellers can do. This is all perfectly valid. But the "Travellers" need a breathing space, to have an incentive to laugh. On the northside we are starting from scratch and are trying to establish a firm connection by using the universal need "entertainment" and then under its wing to develop other smaller specialised activities. As such recreation is not merely relaxation, it is not an insignificant past-time, it is a means of getting to know the Travellers, of getting to know their views, their needs, of making them aware of their responsibilities and rights. It is a solid bridge to reach the Travellers and help them to help themselves.

Money spent on adequate facilities geared to the proper development of Travelling people for active recreation, personal development, and education, will be recovered tenfold from savings on delinquency, crime, medical care. For participation in sport is known to condition the whole of one's behaviour vis-a-vis food, hygiene, smoking, alcohol, resistance to stress. Sporting activities develop physical aptitudes (agility, stamina, better balance). Mental aptitudes (reaction to environment emotional control), social aptitudes (sense of responsibility).

We believe that substantial headway can be made in social integration of Travellers into settled society using sport as the medium. It is a positive way of breaking down barriers and of building bridges.

The work at present is indeed modest, but a lot of positive ground work has been done in building up positive relationships with Travellers. We are happy in the knowledge that, though we may be progressing at a snail's pace, we are, nevertheless, progressing.

This report from Mervyn Ennis, sets out clearly the tremendous need and opportunity for an extension of recreational and educational activities at the Social Centre in Finglas. This simply cannot be done in the small building at present there. It consists of a prefabricated one-roomed building bought second-hand by our Committee 10 years ago. A small kitchenette and toilet have been added. The building is utterly inadequate for the present purpose and is now not worth repairing. It originally cost us £120, so it owes us nothing. It should be demolished, and we sincerely hope the Corporation will provide the much needed new building in its place.

In addition to the inadequate premises, our work in this area has been greatly restricted by lack of funds. We urgently need more financial support to enable us to carry out this work properly.

TRUDDER HOUSE: The Department of Health have now bought the house for us and are also paying for necessary repairs and alterations. We greatly appreciate this assistance, which gives us more adequate premises and relieves us of £2,000 p.a. in rent. There are, at present, 20 boys in the house. Four boys are now in fulltime employment. The others attend school or Vocational School, or special classes in the home, according to their need and ability.

FAMILIES WITH PROBLEMS: In our report in 1974, we quoted from a report from one of our Social Workers referring to families where there is a problem with alcohol. The report reads as follows:-

“The children from these families constitute the biggest single social work problem in this area They are on the streets at all hours of the day and night, begging and stealing. Their parents are all closely related, all problem drinkers and the children are very deprived and neglected A special site for these families is an essential step towards helping the children. Some system of day care is necessary to cope with the problem. The worst aspect of the problem is that the children spend so much of their lives on the streets, even at night, that they have now picked up all the vices that one would expect in an urban area.”

We are glad to report that with financial assistance from the Department of Health and promises made available to us on a temporary basis, that we were able to start a Day Care Centre for some of these children, before Christmas. The Department of Education have now recognised the Centre as a temporary special National School, and we are indeed grateful for this further assistance. At present, we have 13 children on the roll, with an average attendance of 10. We hope to increase the number to 20 very soon. The following extracts from a report from one of the teachers gives examples of some of the basic difficulties which have to be faced, and of progress which is being made.

“The first week was chaotic. The children were disruptive, cross with each other, hard to contain in the building. They did not want to take any direction whatsoever

The children are rough with each other, they fight a lot, but they have quietened down considerably since their first days at school. I might use an example here – when playing with the football, at first one child wanted it all to himself, and if another tried to take it, he got a kick, dig or punch, and there were tears all round.

With time, two played, kicking it to each other, and now we can play a fair game of football when we all can “rush” for the ball – no kicks, punches, etc.

Meal times at first were a disaster. Sitting at a big table with everybody else, was just too much sandwiches were thrown, soup was knocked over, and there were plenty of fights over places, etc., but the children soon quietened, and now we all can eat a satisfactory meal

As yet, the children are unsettled their behaviour is not constant. One day it is good, one day bad. We have to take them as they come – who really knows what happens to them at night – what time they get to bed, where they sleep, whether their parents are drinking, if they had a beating, etc. I see a change in them for the better, nonetheless. They are tamer and quieter than they were in the beginning.”

We are thankful that at least we have been able to make this small beginning to help these children, who must be some of the most deprived children in the city. We shall later need to extend it, or to start another similar centre to cater for all the children, who would need it. There are probably only between 30 and 40 families who would come into this category, but it is they who need our help most.

Our aim in this work is that where there are problems in a family, we should try and assist the family, as a whole unit. The solution is not to remove the children, which only takes the parents responsibility from them and creates new problems for both children and parents. As already mentioned earlier in this report, we have two Social Workers who spend their whole time trying to assist these parents to cope with their problems. Their work is undermined however, when the parents are living in absolute squalor. Four years ago we mentioned the need for small sites for these families to live on. We have mentioned it many times since, but so far without success.

There is much talk, at present, about providing a Detention Centre for children at immense expense. We firmly believe that the work which we are engaged in, both at the Day Care Centre and the Social Centres, in Education and Training, is a constructive contribution to reducing the number who might otherwise become delinquent and anti-social. Now is the time to act to avoid problems, rather than have to deal with them at much greater expense later.

This report is a report of progress, and of needs.

The needs which we feel are most urgently required in County Dublin, at present, are —

1. A Halt in South County Dublin.
2. A new Social Centre in Finglas.
3. Small sites where families with problems can live in proper conditions, while being assisted to overcome their problems.

The cost of providing all of these, will be infinitely less than the cost of not doing so.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, we should once again like to thank all those who take an interest in our work, and assist us in so many ways. Especially, we should like to thank the Patron of our Committee, Most Rev. Dermot Ryan, D.D., Archbishop of Dublin, for his continued interest and support.

We should also like to record our appreciation of the help and interest of Mr. J. Tully, T.D., while he was Minister for Local Government. We remember with gratitude his excellent speech at the Annual Dinner of the National Council for Travelling People, last year.

We welcome the interest of Mr. Sylvester Barrett, T.D. Minister for the Environment, and are encouraged to know that during his time in office, the needs of Travellers will be kept to the fore.

To all who help us in whatever way, and to those who continue to supply the financial help on which our work depends, we say a very sincere 'Thank You.'

V. E. H. Bewley
Hon. Secretary