

Donegal Travellers Project (<https://www.activelink.ie/node/92561>)

Donegal Travellers' Project, founded in 1996, has been an important part of the wider struggle for Travellers' rights, both through its work locally and in solidarity with others at regional and national levels.

DTP is one of the longest established and locally based community development organization working for and with the Irish Traveller community. The local Traveller population fluctuates between 250 and 350 families.

The establishment of DTP represented a marked and welcome change in the approach to Travellers' concerns by involving members of the Traveller community in discussions and decisions related to the issues they faced. Prior to that, committees working in Letterkenny on Traveller issues from the early 1980s had not viewed meaningful participation of Travellers as an essential part of their work, which was conducted using more of a charitable model.

All that would change with the coming of Donegal Travellers' Project, a collaboration between members of the Traveller community, members of the settled community, and the local social inclusion manager of the HSE, with support from the IFI Communities in Action Programme.

The ultimate aim of Donegal Travellers' Project is to achieve equality and recognition for Travellers as a uniquely marginalised minority ethnic group. The Irish State's recognition in 2017 of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish nation is central to equality of status for the Traveller community, providing the basis for new relationships of respect, inclusion and solidarity between the Traveller community, the settled community, and other ethnic minority communities.

At the core of DTP are the five principles of community development: collectivity; community empowerment; social justice and sustainable development; human rights, equality and anti-discrimination; and participation. Those principles underscore every initiative the project undertakes.

In recent years, DTP has broadened its reach to work with the Roma community and to work in collaboration with the Donegal Intercultural Platform and the communities the platform supports.

Through active engagement with the Traveller and Roma communities, DTP works with individuals and families on day-to-day issues, as well as providing courses, training, health programmes and other initiatives for men, women, children, and families. The work of DTP not only addresses pressing needs and advocates for marginalised communities, but also builds capacity for the members of their communities to become advocates for their communities in their own right.

The DTP Primary Health Care Project is an example of the success of DTP. A core initiative of the Donegal Travellers' Project, the Primary Health Care Project is now staffed by members of the Traveller community, who as community health workers are out among the community on a daily basis.

DTP works throughout the county, with Traveller families who are nomadic on a cross-border basis and also those living in rural areas close the county border. The work is wide-ranging and includes community development, health, early years and adult education, youth work, information and advocacy, accommodation, and anti-racism work and intercultural training.

Donegal Travellers' Project also maintains a very strong policy and representational role, ensuring that issues relevant to members of the Traveller and Roma communities in rural and border areas are included in wider, regional and national discussions.

Through its advocacy work, active engagement, and services, Donegal Travellers' Project continues to move forward in the struggle for human rights and equality for Traveller, Roma and marginalised communities.

The overall mission of Donegal Travellers Project is to contribute to the improvement in the quality of life, living standards and status of Irish Travellers and Roma through working creatively for greater solidarity, social justice, community development and human rights. Donegal Travellers Project works in accordance with its core principles:

Collective action

Solidarity

Empowerment

Social Justice

Conflict Resolution and Peace building

Equality and Discrimination

Participation

Partnership

Cultural Diversity

- To create the conditions within the work of the organization where members of the Traveller community are taking on leadership and promoting community activism in the community-work approach to promoting social change.
- To consolidate and strategically influence policy and the approach to equality and anti-racism work in the county, regionally, and nationally, so that Traveller culture, issues, and ethnicity is included from a rights-based position.
- To continue the work towards the eradication of racism, poverty, and oppression in solidarity with the community/voluntary sector and statutory agencies.
- To develop a model of management which has the distinct role of ensuring that all actions and work is based on the principles of community work, active citizenship, and collaboration across teams, and which supports individual team members to increase their capacity within their posts.
- To develop the capacity of the management committee so that they have the opportunity to actively manage, evaluate, and relate to the work of the organisation in collaboration with Triskele, the support agency.
- To analyze within the organization and with the wider Traveller community the National Traveller Education Strategy, so that we can identify how we would like to see it implemented locally in our role as a community organization working towards the elimination of the educational disadvantage that the community experiences here in the county and nationally.

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