

Belfast travellers: a case study of the provision of housing and services for the travelling community in Belfast

by Ann le Mare, August 2006

This is a case study about the provision of accommodation and services for travellers in Belfast that spans a 30-year period. It takes an historical approach showing the way in which ideas and actions develop as a result of the interplay between the state and the voluntary sector within a particular political and economic context. Although this case study takes place in Northern Ireland (NI), where there are additional problems of governance and community violence, the situation for travellers in other parts of Great Britain is similar. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 (England and Wales) repealed the duty of councils to provide legal sites and toughened up their eviction powers. The UK Government's position is that the future lies in private sites. However, only 8 per cent of planning applications (Ellery, undated) from travellers to local authorities are successful.

Travellers, as they prefer to be called in the UK, are also known as gypsies and Romanies and have lived in many parts of Europe for centuries, where they continue to face prejudice, social exclusion, and difficulties in obtaining secure livelihoods. Their lives are often hidden from the settled community¹ and the institutions of the state, civil society and the private sector have had little contact with or felt much responsibility for travellers.

Many travelling families have settled around Belfast, where economic and social changes within the wider society have contributed to changes to their own lifestyles and customs. Legislation has been used at times to manage and control travellers and their supposed, or feared, impact on the wider society, and at other times, to facilitate better access to services. The responses of the travellers to change, and what they perceived as their needs as a community, have also changed. The case study will highlight the role of the state, through legislation, funding, policy, and provision of services and financial benefits; the roles played by the voluntary sector in defining needs, highlighting problems, stimulating advocacy on behalf of the travelling community, and working with travellers to address their concerns; and the role of the private sector in providing paid work that has included casual, self-employed work (horse trading, tin-smithing, lace making) and short-term funded voluntary sector community work. Unfortunately, links between the travellers and the formal economy are rare. The 'development

¹Settled community is the term given by travellers to people who are not travellers.

problem' that is being discussed is how to provide adequate housing for the travelling community, as well as addressing the health, education, and social needs of individual travellers and their families.

I Background: the travelling community in Belfast

The number of travellers in NI is small – an estimated 1400 people, roughly 0.07 per cent of the population (Molloy, undated). In Ireland there are approximately 22,000 travellers, and in the UK 350,000. Travellers consider themselves an ethnic group with their culture rooted in a nomadic style of living. Until the 1950s travellers were mainly rural, working in such activities as tin-smithing, horse trading, seasonal farm labour, and door-to-door selling. Nomadism was a distinctive feature of the 'travellers economy' as it enabled access to a broad range of markets and areas, allowing them to make such marginal activities a viable source of income.

The growth of towns and cities in Britain and Ireland has made it difficult for travellers to continue to move around and to support themselves through casual employment. Farm mechanisation, rural depopulation and the mass production of plastics goods have also hurt their traditional trades (PSI report, 2003). There is less available land for them to settle on for short periods. In addition, many of the rights, benefits, and responsibilities of citizenship are connected to a permanent address. Welfare support, medical services, schooling and voting rights depend on a person having an address for entitlement and a place where services can be delivered. Travellers are often seen as living outside the law, and they often experience racism and prejudice from the settled community. Thus, the 'problem' for travellers is that their lifestyle does not give them automatic right to the services and benefits of a modern welfare state, and the lack of understanding, contact and respect between them and the settled population leads to many problems of prejudice and marginalisation.

Since the late 1960s, NI has experienced considerable violence, within and between Catholic and Protestant communities, resulting in the breakdown of local government in the province. Both communities have paramilitary groups, who act in what they perceive as being the interest of their people. There was little consensus on how NI should be governed, for many Catholics favour a united Ireland, and most Protestants want to remain within the UK. Discrimination of Catholics was widespread in housing, employment, and civil rights, as many in the majority Protestant community interpreted Catholics' wish for a united Ireland as a threat to the Protestant way of life and to the survival of NI.

In the early 1970s, at the direction of the UK Government in Westminster (London), local government in NI was reorganised into twenty-six district councils. Services such as housing, health and social services, and education were taken away from local government and were administered through a range of state-run agencies. These were responsible directly to appointed UK ministers of state for 30 years until the restoration of a province-wide Assembly in 2001 as part of the Peace Process and Belfast Agreement of 1998.

There have been extended periods when the province-wide Assembly has not been in operation and services are then run by the UK ministers and the civil service. Local and district councils have continued to operate. Many of the statutory services have had to reform and reorganise, and move towards policies and practices that are responsive and available to both sections of the community (Catholic and Protestant), as well as maintain delivery of services during periods of violence, both within communities and across community lines, associated with 'The Troubles'.² The people who work in such services are having to respond to a range of demands, while at times working in situations of heightened tension with fears for their own safety.

Community development has been a consistent strategy of both the statutory and voluntary sectors as a means to deal with the sectarian nature of the conflict, and to improve social and economic conditions in the numerous poor neighbourhoods in the province. Many statutory agencies, such as the education service, health and social services, and district councils have employed community development workers. The NI voluntary sector has benefited from substantial additional funding, for example three cycles of European Union (EU) Peace and Reconciliation funding, so there has been a huge growth in voluntary and community sector jobs. Community development is a development process where work is done at a community level, often through the growth of community groups and the appointment of local community development workers who engage with the community to identify needs, raise issues, and develop programmes and activities with statutory agencies to address those needs. Development in NI has had a focus on 'empowering communities' (McCready, 2000) in order to address both social deprivation and sectarianism between different religious groups. There has been less focus within the development community on engaging with political processes (for example at an Assembly level), with community relations' activities (though the Community Relations Council has been active in this area), or developing and maintaining links with the private sector.

1.1 The position of travellers

Indicators show that the travellers are a disadvantaged section of the community with many complex problems related to health, education, unemployment, poor housing and low self-esteem:

- adult life expectancy is 11–15 years less than that of the rest of the population
- infant mortality rate is ten times higher than that for the rest of the population
- there are high rates of hospitalisation for preventable disease
- adult literacy is estimated at 10–15 per cent (Noonan, 1996, p. 12).

²'The Troubles' is a common term used to describe the violence between Protestant and Catholic communities, and the breakdown of governance in NI.

A report by the Social Exclusion Working Party on Travellers (cited in ERP, 2002) found:

- low educational achievement: very few children attend secondary school, only 8 per cent with GCSEs³ and virtually no attendance at tertiary level
- evidence of consistent, long-term unemployment: only 11 per cent were in paid employment, 70 per cent having had no paid work in the last 10 years
- travellers are eight times more likely to live in overcrowded conditions in comparison to the general population.

In the same report, research with the settled population (ERP, 2002, p. 3) suggested that:

- 40 per cent do not believe that the travellers' right to a nomadic life is a valid one or that it should be supported by government
- 57 per cent did not want travellers as residents in their local area
- 66 per cent would not willingly accept a traveller as a work colleague.

Appendix 1 to this case study gives some excerpts from *'In Our Own Way: Tales from Belfast Travellers'*, which is written by travellers and gives, in their own words, a description of their lives.

2 State policy towards travellers; legislation and early attempts to provide sites

The Caravan (NI) Act (1963) regulated caravan sites, and although intended for the regulation of casual and holiday use, was used to control the movement of travellers, which led to a reduction in the number of legal or semi-legal campsites that could be used by travellers. By 1985, only seven of the twenty-six councils in NI had made any provision for travellers. An early site in Belfast had been totally destroyed by local residents who were opposed to the site when it neared completion.

The Local Government (NI) Order (1985) empowered, but did not oblige, councils to provide sites for travellers. The Department of the Environment (DoE) had the responsibility to encourage district councils to provide sites and would fund them with 100 per cent capital grants. Local councils were given the power to give 'designated status' to certain areas, that is, land suitable for temporary caravan use, and to allow for eviction on all other land. These powers were used to control the growth of long-term residency of travelling people on unapproved sites. As travellers are not indigenous to one particular council area and because they want to maintain their lifestyle of travelling and stay for short periods in different parts of the province, it was easy for councils to move them on without feeling a sense of responsibility for their

³ GCSEs are taken at the end of 11 years of schooling. Students take examinations in eight to ten subjects, the completion of which is the end of schooling for most children in the UK. Some students take A-level examinations (two further years of schooling) or go on to a form of higher or vocational education.

welfare (Noonan, 1996). There was a feeling that if sites were provided, travellers from other areas would come in ever-greater numbers.

2.1 Providing sites in Belfast

In 1974 Belfast City Council (BCC) agreed to provide serviced sites, but it was not until 1992 that they actually provided two serviced sites in Belfast – Glen Road and Colin Glen – 18 years after the vote to make site provision. Each site provided twenty caravan pitches (a concrete square to park the caravan) and an amenity unit (kitchen, toilet/bathroom). It is estimated that each amenity unit cost £39,250 to build (an average four-bedroom house built by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) cost £35,000). The environment was bleak, on a road on the outskirts of town with no transport links, no community or public buildings, and no provision for children to play safely or workspace for traditional trades or other income generation activities. Services such as water, sanitation, electricity, and waste disposal, when provided, were inadequate.

The Colin Glen site was substantially overcrowded, and families who were not related to other families on the site had been moved in causing considerable tension. There had been little consultation with the travellers, and many families who had an alternative moved out due to the poor site, and the growing conflict between residents. The community was disintegrating, and although non-governmental organisations (NGOs) issued reports and recommendations (e.g. BTSP, 1997c), the situation was not addressed. In 1998 the remaining families left, while the site was extensively vandalised and remaining units burnt down. Approximately £1 million had been spent on building the site.

In 1988 a third site was sought in Hannahstown. However, due to mistakes in the vesting order, the compulsory purchase of land by government, and insufficient funding the site has never been built. Residents groups from nearby housing estates also vigorously opposed the plans for the site. Many travellers waiting to be moved to the Hannahstown site camped illegally on the Glen Road site. Although BCC tried to get them evicted, the High Court granted the travellers 'adverse possession' of the land, because many of the families had lived on this site for 20 years. The fourth site in Belfast was Monagh Wood. Unfortunately, immediately following the construction of the site it was declared unfit because the gradient was too steep for safe parking of caravans. A great deal of money had already been spent on the site, but the DoE refused to spend additional money to improve it, so the site was never used.

All the serviced sites provided for travellers were intended to be self financing, with the rental charge covering the salaries of site wardens, and/or traveller liaison officers, rates, water, electricity for street lighting, repairs and maintenance of the sites. The rents are much higher than for a normal house, and no other publicly provided accommodation is expected to 'pay for itself' (BTSP, 1997a). The high rents trapped travellers into a cycle of benefits, since an average income could not cover the rental charges.

Of the four sites built during this time, only one site, Glen Road, remains in use. This legacy of failure influenced the attitudes of council employees and

civil servants. The legislation during this period empowered, but did not oblige, local councils to provide accommodation and worked against developing a long-term strategy. Plans for site provision included only cement pitches and amenity units. Many travellers, however, wanted a unit with bedrooms – but this would become a home; and providing homes is not the responsibility of local government, but of the NIHE. The NIHE had not been given a legal remit to provide housing for serviced sites. It could only offer accommodation in housing estates, something which the travellers did not want because of the hostility from the settled community, and also because they would be separated from their extended families. Thus, it is not surprising that during this period little was achieved for travellers.

In 1999, responsibility for housing was transferred from local councils to the NIHE. Since then, some families have been housed in normal social housing with the settled community. Group housing has also been developed, through the use of housing associations who manage the sites and select, in consultation with the travellers, the families that will be housed. Some travellers, however, want to remain in caravans on serviced sites. These have been improved, but still have many problems in relation to adequate services. It is estimated that 50 per cent of travellers are now living in houses and four out of five travellers now want to live in a house (ERP, 2002, p. 11). Table 1 summarises these changes. Initially BCC provided sites, but often they were inappropriate, poorly serviced, and completed without adequate consultation with travellers. Since 1999, when the NIHE took over responsibility, significant improvements have been made. However, there is still a need for more housing and for more serviced sites to be developed.

Table 1 History of housing sites in Belfast for travellers (Note: a ‘family’ can represent from eight to fourteen people, or even up to twenty.)

Location	Under local council authority (up to 1999)	Responsibility of the NIHE (since 1999, at 2006)
Glen Road	The oldest and largest site; ‘unofficial’ with no services; cement pitches; no electricity supply; only water taps; crowded with no open space – fourteen families	Serviced site for ten families, improved services Group housing for six families
Glen Road Heights	Pitches with amenity units; unstable with internal feuding; should be provision for forty families – five families	Redeveloped as a permanent site for ten families Paid family worker on site
Colin Glen	Pitches with amenity units; unstable with internal feuding; should be provision for forty families – five families	Gone – no longer any pitches
Monagh Bypass	Unofficial site; no electricity supply; water at a central tap; freestanding toilets – eight families	Nine families live on the site, services have improved (electricity, surfacing, fencing) Plans for sixteen homes

3 Campaigning for change: the voluntary sector

This section discusses the ways in which voluntary organisations, community groups and advocacy groups were active in attempting to respond to the needs of the travelling community, and to work with government agencies to provide appropriate services.

An intergovernmental group produced a report in the early 1980s, *Services for Travelling People in NI* (CCSP, 1980), that highlighted their distinctive lifestyle, and the need for properly serviced sites as a first step for those travellers who wanted to settle and as a means to get access to other services. It also suggested that work areas should be provided so that travellers could continue in trades such as scrap metal and tarmacking. Coordination between all government departments and cooperation with the voluntary sector was called for in order to meet the challenge (Coordinating Committee on Social Problems). Although there had been no consultation with travellers, in general it was felt by the various agencies that 'they had effective policies' (*Services for Travelling People*, 1980) and that travellers could make use of services, such as health, education and training, through the normal channels. It was considered that the problems arose, because 'Travellers did not access existing services', and that their lifestyle created problems for them and the agencies. The range of services was thought to be appropriate, and broadly, the policies were correct.

The Advisory Committee on Travellers (ACT) was set up by government in 1985 and continued until 1992; it provided a forum for government consultation with travellers and voluntary groups, with a brief to stimulate progress and to indicate the way forward. Their first period of office (1986–89) was characterised by attempts to get sites developed and to address practical problems. The second period (1990–93) saw a continuation of these policies, but also a move to emphasise travellers as a distinct ethnic group facing discrimination, attempts to encourage agencies to change their approach, and an endorsement of a community development strategy (ACT, 1993). They produced several consultative documents.

The voluntary sector was also becoming more active. In 1985, The Belfast Travellers Site Project (BTSP), having a committee of 50 per cent travellers and 50 per cent settled people, was established to improve the sites in Belfast and to have an input into general policy regarding travellers. The Belfast Travellers Education and Development Group (BTEDG) was involved in campaigning and advocacy. From 1986–92 travellers and the voluntary groups campaigned for 'Rights for Travellers' (Noonan, 1996), and there were calls to introduce anti-discrimination legislation. Reports were commissioned which detailed the social, economic, cultural, and political exclusion faced by travelling families.

3.1 Moves to a community development strategy

Due to a lack of progress in site provision and a growing awareness that travellers faced multiple problems that agencies – in their current modes of delivery – could not address, it was decided by several of the groups

working with the travellers that a community development strategy should be pursued. The aims of this approach were to involve the travellers in assessing their own needs and in working out ways to tackle them. In 1992, as one of its last activities, ACT held a conference, *With – Not For, Community Development With Travelling People*, which brought all key policy makers from the statutory and voluntary sectors together. The conference produced a long list of recommendations. Various agencies did appear to see the need to change and to become more flexible in their policies and practices in regard to travellers (NICTP, 1992). In moving to a community development strategy the groups working with the travellers were following the dominant approach to development in NI. It was natural that through links with other community workers and the funding policies that reflected a community development philosophy, that this would be their preferred strategy.

BTSP, which had concentrated primarily on housing issues in the past, decided to initiate a number of community-based activities and identified the following priorities:

- accommodation
- benefit advice
- adult education
- women's development
- cultural and heritage issues.

They worked with a range of agencies and a number of important initiatives were started:

- They negotiated with the education authorities to provide additional services to traveller children in schools and outreach services on the sites.
- A traveller-specific youth project was started, managed by BTSP with funding to provide activities and opportunities to young people.
- European Commission funding was obtained to provide culturally specific pre-occupational training with travellers, particularly women.
- BTSP ran its own after-school activities on sites, as well as pre-school playgroups.
- Travellers were employed to work as community workers in their own communities.

At the time these were innovative activities, and a first for both agency staff and travellers who had to adapt to new procedures and relationships. In their own evaluations, the committee of BTSP felt that the community development approach had had some success in bringing services to the sites and in making agencies more flexible and accountable in their services (BTSP, 1998b, 1999, 2000). Many more travellers were able and willing to take part in educational and health related activities. The strategy had also contributed to an increase in the travellers' sense of their worth and the value of their particular culture. For example, they ran cultural events, designed a calendar with pictures depicting their lifestyle, and through oral

histories, cooperated with the book, *In Our Own Way: Tales from Belfast Travellers* (Keenan and Hines, 2000). However, many of the structural causes for the discrimination and marginalisation of travellers remain. Most travelling families were dependent on state benefits and did not have a secure means of paid work. There was little contact with private sector employers, or the opportunity to learn skills necessary to secure paid work or to set up their own businesses. There was little contact with the settled community where relationships remained strained. While absolute poverty may have been reduced, relative poverty and exclusion from the wider society had still not been sufficiently addressed.

The Traveller Movement (NI), commissioned a study of the policies and treatment of travellers, and concluded that there had been 'a policy failure of staggering proportions', and emphasised that accommodation policy will have to recognise nomadism as a way of life:

The failure to recognise this central feature of travellers cultural tradition and incorporate it into legislative and policy initiative is at the core of the accommodation crisis. Public policy, as practised over the last decade, has not served to end social exclusion but rather to intensify it. Deprivation has not been tackled but deepened.

(Molloy, undated, p. 1)

Thus, there was a prevailing feeling amongst the voluntary sector that in spite of their efforts and advocacy, the central problem facing travellers was that their way of life was not respected as equally valid to that of other groups in society. Public policy and actions ought to accommodate their lifestyle. However, even at this time, the 'lifestyle' was changing, and perhaps, was never just one type of life. While many travellers favoured serviced sites so they could continue to travel, increasingly, there were travellers that wanted permanent housing.

4 Building on the past: recent change

Given the sense of failure felt by many involved with travellers there was a sense that a new beginning was necessary. The late 1990s saw a number of initiatives involving both the state and the voluntary sector in finding new ways to tackle the deep-seated problems faced by travellers. There was also a feeling that accommodation and services for travellers needed stronger coordination and a lead taken by one agency. At the same time there was a growing sense of optimism and hope within NI as a result of the negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement, approved on Friday, 10 April 1998.⁴

⁴ The Good Friday Agreement, or the Belfast Agreement, laid out plans for devolved government in NI. It included the establishment of the NI Assembly and created a Human Rights and Equality Commission. Additional aspects of the Agreement included the early release of terrorist prisoners, decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, and reform of the criminal justice system with a new police service being established (<http://www.nio.gov.uk/the-agreement>)

This section will discuss the topics that have featured in the previous section: the role of the state through legislation, policy and provision of services, and the role of the voluntary sector in responding to the new situation. The private sector has only been referred to briefly in previous sections where the main transformation has been the movement of many travellers from self-employment to dependence on state benefits. A section on the private sector follows this section in order to highlight the need for more attention to the continuing problems of finding secure paid work for travellers.

4.1 The state: legislation, policy and services

The nature of the state and of society was changing rapidly in NI. First, as referred to above, the governance of the province appeared to be making progress, as relationships within NI, and between NI and London and Dublin had improved. More attention was being given to the idea of a rights-based approach to development, and to social exclusion, increasing attention to any group that was facing marginalisation in NI. The continuous advocacy work to raise the profile of travellers and their problems was bearing some results, as politicians, agency personnel, even the media were more aware of the need to tackle the issues. The Race Relations (NI) Act (1997) for the first time recognised Irish travellers as an ethnic minority group within NI. In 1998 the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was established in response to demands from many civil society groups, which among other things could be used by travellers to make official complaints. The establishment of the commission helped to strengthen the idea of rights for all the people living in NI, including rights for the travelling community.

In 1998 the DoE had another consultative process on accommodation for travellers and produced a report. Many groups working with travellers felt that the report continued to 'define the travelling people as the problem, and with little movement to treating them as citizens with rights to services and accommodation.' (BTSP, 1998a). In 1999 a new policy was announced. The DoE and district councils would no longer have responsibility for travellers or for provision of serviced sites. Instead, The NIHE should be the 'one central strategic agency to deal with Travellers accommodation' (DoE, 1999). This policy was implemented in April 2001, with the following guidelines:

- the 'toleration policy' to be updated in the light of the Race Relations (NI) Act (1997) to a 'cooperation policy', and the DoE will take the lead in activating such a policy (ACT had recommended a tougher non-harassment policy)
- ownership and management of all existing sites to be transferred to NIHE
- transit sites and sites for trading travellers, will continue to be the responsibility of the district councils (DoE, 1999).

This was quite a significant development, as the NIHE had acquired a great deal of experience in working with local communities and through their

staff at local offices, were aware of the problems and issues facing the travellers.

In 2001, the DoE was divided into three departments, and the new Department for Social Development (DSD) became responsible for policy towards travellers. The DSD set up a working group on 'Promoting Social Inclusion', which produced a report that included thirty-three recommendations in relation to the travelling community. The working group consisted of a wide range of stakeholders: several government departments; the NIHE; Barnardos; BTEDG; Belfast Travellers Support Group (BTSG); Derry Travellers Support Group; Save the Children; Traveller Movement (NI); and the police. All the recommendations were accepted by the government and form the basis for current government policy. Government reports suggest that progress is being made on all the recommendations (DSD, PSI website). Appendix 2 to this case study, is an institutional document prepared by the DSD and summarises their policy and recommendations. The fact that the DoE was divided into three departments meant that social development, including support for community development, could be given sufficient attention and not be swamped by the greater pressures of environmental and economic concerns driving the former DoE.

4.2 Gains made in housing

Appropriate housing has long been the main demand from the travelling community and finding a way to provide such housing has been the central feature of policy towards travellers. However, it has often been difficult to accommodate what travellers wanted because they did not fit with the public policies and rules of the agencies involved. Even if a person was sympathetic to demands, they often were limited in what they could do because of institutional structures.

Legally the NIHE can only allocate houses individually according to a transparent points system. Some individual travelling families do opt for housing on normal housing estates. This gives them better access to medical facilities and schools, removal from the threat of eviction from illegal sites, and protection from winter weather. However, it also makes it more difficult to continue with their travelling lifestyle, and thus, many families leave standard housing and return to a traditional lifestyle. With those that remain, there are constant problems, and travellers' support groups are active in negotiating disputes between neighbours.

Many travellers want to be housed in areas allocating several houses to related families. In order to meet the demands for group housing, where a group of individual houses are allocated to related families, the NIHE has worked with specialist housing associations. NIHE does the planning and consultation, the housing associations build and own the houses, and both organisations are involved in allocating the houses. This has provided a significant breakthrough in providing the kind of housing that travellers want. While travellers appear to be consulted, they are not active in the running of the housing associations.

The remaining serviced sites are still inadequate with many families still waiting for houses, although there are some families that have refused housing and want to remain on sites that are suitable for caravans. Transit sites have not been provided by BCC. This is likely to be because of pressure on them from settled communities who are often opposed to permanent sites, and a concern to limit financial responsibility for sites and their continued upkeep. Thus, the picture is still mixed: while some families have been satisfactorily housed others are still waiting.

4.3 Response of the voluntary sector

People working in the voluntary sector were encouraged by the new legislation and also by the setting up of the DSD, which through their recommendations as part of the PSI process, gave the voluntary sector a focus and the chance to relate to the attainment of specific policies. The funding arrangements were also beginning to change as more organisations were competing for funds. The various voluntary travellers groups had been active for many years in running a range of projects. Increasingly, however, the different NGOs and community groups felt they were duplicating activities, and with a target group of 1500 it was also made clear that the government would not continue to fund several small groups. Thus, in 2005, after considerable tension and a long process of discussion, which included the need for an outside facilitator (interview manager, 24 June 2006) several voluntary groups came together to form a new support organisation for travellers, An Munia Tober. This process included the need to agree joint policies and structures, to acknowledge the contribution of each individual organisation to the new organisation, and to accommodate the views of several experienced workers and committee members. The purpose of An Munia Tober, meaning The Good Road, is to continue to provide services and to act as an advocate for travellers (An Munia Tober, 2005), as well as offering opportunities for travellers to be involved in their own development. As a sign of the increasing recognition of travellers, the launch of An Munia Tober was held in a room at Belfast City Hall, with various politicians attending, including the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese.

Their current projects suggest a step up from local community development projects, in that they are supported by a wide range of funders, and also include the active involvement of a range of other agencies and not just those who provide services. While maintaining the ethos of development at a community level they are also making links and connections to the wider society through joint projects. For example, they are included in the work of the Health Action Zones, a partnership approach that includes statutory bodies, community groups and voluntary bodies. Appendix 3 to this case study includes institutional documentation from An Munia Tober about several of their projects: a community health project; youth project; educational projects; and heritage and cultural projects. The document includes a statement of their aims and their approach to the problems experienced by travellers. An effort has been made to evaluate some of their programmes, for example in the list of 'outcomes' under the Community Health Project.

A consistent strategy of the voluntary sector has been to facilitate the active participation of travellers in decisions and in the management of projects. However, fatalism and a lack of confidence have made it very difficult for travellers to take an active and equal part in discussions. It has been complicated to reach consensus on important policies and initiatives as there can be many differences of opinion within the travelling community. Several agencies and consultative groups have included representatives from travellers. In spite of this, travellers still complain that there is a lack of meaningful consultation with their community. Although they participate, they do not feel that their views are taken seriously. Thus, a continuing concern for groups that work with travellers is to promote the active participation of travellers and to help them acquire the skills they need to do this effectively.

Travellers in NI often have family links to travellers in Ireland and regularly visit their relatives and travel to other parts of Ireland. They see themselves as one group and the border between Ireland and NI has little meaning for them. Thus, there is also cooperation between the voluntary groups in both parts of Ireland that work with travellers. This involves sharing of information and support for each other's projects. For example, a group of Irish travellers are staging a play, written by a traveller, to which Belfast travellers' organisations have been invited (email communication, 7 August 2006). A significant initiative is the proposed 'All Ireland study on Travellers' to be started in 2007. The intention is to train travellers as peer researchers and for them to collect the data and to contribute to the data analysis. In addition to learning useful skills, the process of doing the data collection and analysis will, hopefully, give increased ownership to travellers in the study, increase their ability to state and argue their case, and improve their confidence in dealing with government and agency personnel. It is also likely that the survey itself will be improved by having travellers involved in these processes.

5 Paid work and the private sector

The 'private sector' is a general term used to refer to the actions of actors within the economy, and the many ways in which individuals can use their labour to gain paid employment. The private sector is also the site of development actors as many firms, businesses, and employers are active not only in providing jobs but in contributing to the conditions and circumstances that become 'the market'. Some private sector organisations also work with and fund voluntary projects, provide charitable grants, and are involved in developmental partnerships. The Northern Ireland Partnership Board facilitate, through funding from the EU, strategic partnerships between district councils, community and voluntary representatives, statutory agencies, and representatives of trade unions and business. The West Belfast Partnership Board, the area where most travellers live, includes the aim to 'maximise economic growth, employment creation and training opportunities for all residents in West Belfast ... [and to] ... promote genuine inclusion and equality ...' (www.westbelfast-partnership.com). Partnerships give out small

grants and support larger programmes. Although these partnerships appear to be very active, there is little obvious involvement, or benefits, for travellers.

The economy of NI has been both depressed and in transition as a result of a move from heavy industry to light industry and service sector jobs. Unemployment rates have been high and many communities have felt the effects of a shift from secure jobs in the shipyards, mills, or engineering, to insecure, part-time work and the need to retrain and develop new skills. In addition, the business environment has suffered because of the violence and inconsistent governance. However, there have been improvements, and in 2006 the unemployment rate of 4.4 per cent was at an historic low, and the growth rate of 5 per cent also compared favourably with the rest of the UK rate of 4.6 per cent (www.detini.gov.uk). The state has been active in promoting new industry and providing incentives to business. The economy is seen as distorted with a large public sector, and a private sector that is growing as a result of 'low value added sectors' and part-time work, rather than high value exports. A main problem facing the economy is the high level of economic inactivity (DETI, 2006). There has been a big increase in the number of voluntary sector and community-based jobs that are often short term and funded by the state or donors. The community development strategy employed by the voluntary sector has largely focused on increased access to improved services and social well-being. There has been much less attention on jobs, vocational training, or specific links to employers and the business community.

This has also been the case with groups that work with travellers. While there have been recommendations in connection with the private sector and finding ways to support travellers' livelihoods, action on such recommendations are limited. In 1980, the intergovernmental report recommended that serviced sites should have working areas so that travellers could maintain some of their traditional trades. In 1999, when the NIHE took over the responsibility for housing travellers, the local councils were left with responsibility for providing work related site. Neither of these recommendations relating to work have been carried out. BCC no longer has responsibility for transit sites, but will be given this responsibility again in 2009. The council has done little to further the economic development of travellers.

As their traditional sources of income, mainly linked to casual work and travelling, have disappeared, it has been very difficult for travellers to develop new means of securing livelihoods. Very few have the education or skills to work in the formal economy, and when they do, they face considerable prejudice in getting hired. As with other groups in long-term unemployment, many need experience in the discipline of regular working. Self-employment and developing small businesses would seem a possibility, but would involve training and investment in building/work spaces. There are some travellers that run tarmac businesses, and also some involved in casual selling, such as carpets (interview, 2006). A few travellers are being employed, either full or part time, in community based jobs, though these are insecure because of funding cycles. Due to the difficulties in maintaining

traditional sources of income through casual self-employment and selling, and the lack of attention to developing new sources of paid work, the majority of travellers have become dependent on state benefits. Another factor in their dependency is the high cost of rents. Housing benefit, which is available to travellers, is means tested and acts as a disincentive to paid work.

At present and historically, there have been very few links made by the voluntary and community sectors with the private sector. There is also little contact between individual travellers and employers or services geared to improve employment opportunities. Projects providing vocational training have not led to significant employment opportunities. There are not many joint schemes between travellers and employers/businesses, nor are travellers included in deserving causes and donations from the private sector.

6 Development as process: different standpoints

There are many actors that have been involved in the development of appropriate housing, and access to and the design of services for travellers. There are organisations that have been active from the state sector – a range of ministries and representative political bodies such as BCC. There have been many service providers, both public and private, struggling to provide adequate services in challenging circumstances to a range of client groups. Finally, there is the growth of voluntary and community groups, sometimes working together, sometimes with tensions between them, all with particular perspectives. And, of course, individual travellers have their own way of looking at things. All of these groups have legitimate concerns that have to be understood: all have values and experiences that shape the development processes. This section considers the ‘development problem’ from the perspective of the different actors.

6.1 Central government: the DoE and the DSD

For many years the DoE was the main agency involved in provision for travellers and many community groups and travellers have been antagonistic to their policies. The DoE saw themselves as less central; it was not their responsibility to provide accommodation, but to encourage others to do this, namely the twenty-six district councils. A few councils did provide adequate provision, but most, like Belfast did not. The DoE would provide the funds, but the district councils had to plan and manage the sites. The department saw its role in terms of policy formation and the correct interpretation of the law.

The DoE was a huge department and travellers were not seen as a priority. The department included responsibility for the environment, for public utilities and infrastructure, and for local government. Given the crisis in NI in terms of governance, their main aim was to facilitate cooperation amongst the main political groups who were involved in local government. It was also their responsibility to provide the right infrastructure for economic

development, a huge task given the depressed state of industry in the province and the loss of jobs in many of the traditional industries such as ship building, linen, and tool making. The DoE's main concerns in relation to the travellers were to limit the potential for violence between travellers and their neighbours, and to minimise the eyesores created by illegal sites. Even these limited objectives were not met.

In 2001 the DoE was divided into three departments, and the new DSD took over responsibility for policy to travellers. The department has been more proactive towards travellers' concerns, perhaps because the department's responsibilities were more limited and focused on social development, so included many of the concerns of the travelling community. Appendix 2 is an extract from an institutional statement of their policy and recommendations for the future.

6.2 BCC

BCC is a divided, sectarian council, with many local decisions and concerns being subsumed into issues of national identity, with an 'if they win, we will lose' attitude to many decisions. Travellers are too small, and too marginalised to have any real power in this political landscape.

Finance has always been a central concern for the council. This is a reasonable view given the multiple deprivations in many areas of Belfast and their need to set priorities. Eventually BCC agreed to provide limited site provision, thinking that it would cost them nothing – the DoE would pay for capital costs, and the rents would pay for maintenance. However, this depended on the sites being full and well managed, which was never the case. Thus, the BCC was drawn into significant expenditure for which they had not planned and continuous problems over adequate planning and management of the sites. When damage was done to the sites it confirmed their worst views of the travellers. Over time, even council employees became averse to getting involved with travellers and their accommodation problems.

Now that the NIHE provides all accommodation needs for travellers, the only responsibility left with BCC is refuse collection. In the near future they will also have a responsibility to provide transit sites for travellers who want to continue a travelling lifestyle. There has been little action on providing appropriate workspaces. BCC is probably pleased that many travellers are now being accommodated in houses and the unofficial sites are gradually being replaced by permanent NIHE housing.

6.3 Politicians and political parties

Unfortunately, none of the political parties are particularly interested in travellers. Travellers are not active members of political parties and they have only recently started to register to vote. Travellers are not employed in any of the important industries in NI. Many politicians are against doing anything for travellers, considering them to be idle and 'spongers' on the state at best, and violent and criminal at worst. Other, more helpful

politicians do not want to be seen to be against travellers, nor do they want to be too closely identified with them, in case it annoys their core supporters.

6.4 The NIHE

Responsibility for housing in the province is managed centrally by the NIHE. It was established in 1971 and has overseen one of the biggest programmes in housing renewal in Europe and through the application of a points system has allocated housing in a transparent manner. Previously, local councils had at times allocated housing unfairly partly on the basis of religion or political allegiance. For a long time the NIHE, resisted the idea of getting involved in providing separate accommodation for travellers, feeling that it would lead to 'an initial conflict of interest on priorities for the travellers with the poorly housed citizens in West Belfast'. Housing for a relatively small group such as the travellers would entail 'adaptation of housing regulations, schemes to cover their needs would be complicated' and a 'wasteful use of designated staff to over see the needs of Travellers' (DoE, 1984).

The NIHE also had problems accepting the type of allocation that travellers preferred – housing in groups with a right to exclude other families. However, the NIHE view has changed due to the lack of progress made by district councils. There has also been a slowing down of overall demand for new housing in the province giving them more time and resources to deal with travellers. Considerable progress has been made over the last 5 years since the NIHE has had responsibility for accommodation for travellers. Appendix 4 to this case study gives a summary of an interview with an NIHE manager, where he describes some of the challenges in working with the travelling community.

6.5 Provision of public services

It has been very difficult to maintain an adequate provision of services for travellers that other citizens take for granted. The local electricity company was willing to provide power, but had two main concerns: (1) that the supplies would be paid for; (2) that its staff would be safe. How to pay for the electricity was a problem, because a site had only one supply of electricity, and it was hard to work out what each family used. Efforts to improve the supply at one site were mismanaged, proved unsafe, and the supply was cut off. Workmen did not want to return to the site to repair it. Eventually a limited electricity supply was made available to serviced sites. The rise in group housing where individual houses are let as a group with the involvement of a housing association has lessened these problems.

Water supply and services such as drainage, disposal, and sanitation are part of the local rates in NI, and therefore payment is included automatically in monthly rental bills (known as rent and rates bills). However, water is not provided to individual caravans, but normally to a central tap, with no provision for waste drainage.

There are no routine services for the delivery or collection of post at the sites. Travellers have to collect post at a Post Office.

6.6 Service providers: social services, health, and education

Originally, service providers expected travellers to fit into their way of doing things. More recently, especially after the reports on social exclusion, the provision of services has improved with many of the agencies providing services on site, working with the travellers' support groups, and having designated personnel who are known to the travellers and who they can approach directly. The provision of services through specialist structures was among the recommendations in the 2001 consultation with travellers, and such initiatives have improved the take up of services by travellers. However, there remain many problems. Individual staff members have had to implement new policies and have often felt unprepared for their new roles. A recent research project interviewed people responsible for providing services to travellers, including those working in health, social services, education, housing, and the police (ERP, 2002). Below, a range of staff speak of their need for additional training, of institutional limitations, and of the racism that affects attitudes towards travellers:

I felt certainly whenever I came into the role, it was one of those, you know, broken down relationships. Where we didn't really have any relationship.

... I had no training, I mean I walked into the post basically with no training for the post.

Not within my own organisation I have never heard it (racism stated), anything said to me directly but what I have noticed is that everything is fine in theory; when something becomes practice that's when people's attitudes are actually challenged.

Now I have advised them that they have an option of going to the equal opportunities, but they don't seem to want to do this. They just say, 'that's part of life, we're travellers and we won't get these houses'.

Difficulties between travellers and the settled community were also a common theme:

... I have been involved ... in trying to get rented accommodation for travellers and they have been refused on the grounds of the way they talk. That's what it looked like to me, but I know and everyone knows it's because they're travellers.

I worry that traveller parents would have a fear that their children in mainstream schools, because they fear they might be neglected or discriminated against.

They're wasting rate payers' money.

An interviewee raises the interesting point that agency personnel are held accountable, by their agency and by the public, and this influences their behaviour. Many personnel do want good relationships with travellers:

... but you know, people are aware that they will be held to account for the level of service they give and their relationships with any minority grouping, and I think that would cause a small amount, I suppose, of uncomfortableness for some people within the organisation ...

On the personal side as work colleagues we would hope within our team to engage, to use travellers as part of the field work ... that would be as work colleagues.

An important question to many staff is whether this approach – of specialist service provision – is increasing or decreasing the marginalisation of travellers and their problems:

... It's like a traveller walking into a sub-office ... the first thing they do is contact me or someone who works with the travellers, whereas if it were a person from the settled community they would deal with that query ... I believe that as a traveller living in that community he or she should be able to go into that office and get a query sorted out the same as anyone else ... All the sub-offices refer them on to ourselves.

This report, and other communications with agencies, suggests a complex picture. While travellers may be critical of the level of service provision and of prejudice against them, many individual workers are trying to make the situation better and are sympathetic to the plight of travellers. Many professionals would recognise the tensions between an individual's sense of his or her own job, and the limitations imposed by their agency: financial constraints; limitation of time and heavy workloads; lack of support from others in the agency; and working within institutional legislation, guidelines and targets. Many individuals working in service providers are also trying to change and improve the institutional context, and thus contribute to development in its widest sense.

6.7 The travelling community

The travelling community is the main stakeholder in this case study. Ethnic minority groups are often written and spoken about as if they were a unified, undifferentiated group. However, it is always the case that every group includes different individual perspectives, problems are seen and what individuals prefer as solutions to those problems. Some of these differences come out in Appendix 1, *In Our Own Way: Tales from Belfast Travellers*, which includes a range of views on their travelling lifestyle. It also demonstrates how closely the travelling community history is entwined with that of the settled community, for instance in responses to 'The Troubles'. However, there is information that is missing. We do not know much about the views held by women, or those of young people, both men and women. Most of the representatives of the travellers, and the workers, are older men.

6.8 The settled community

The settled communities' main concerns seem to be around law and order – that the travellers behave and do not damage property, and that roadside sites do not hinder road safety. The travellers are not directly part of 'The Troubles', but would be identified with the Catholic community, as they are Catholic, though neither the Catholic nor the Protestant settled communities feel a responsibility towards them.

Many problems can occur when travellers move to social housing surrounded by settled families. Each week, two to three families are in crisis as a result of the additional problems of living with settled communities, and voluntary groups are actively involved in providing support and guidance (interview, 24 June 2006). Newspaper articles suggest that the settled community has limited sympathy or understanding of the travelling community. However, little detailed research has been done on the attitudes and concerns of the settled community, nor have there been many attempts to engage directly with them. Recently, proposals have been suggested for joint projects with the settled community.

6.9 ACT

The ACT was a semi-autonomous advisory body set up by the government to advise the DoE on matters related to travellers. It had specific responsibility for 'promoting serviced sites, to involve travellers in the design of sites, and to promote good relations between travellers and the settled community'. There was little participation from travellers. Unfortunately, ACT had limited powers and could only advise and raise issues. At the time, their impact appeared limited and many of their recommendations were not implemented. However, in retrospect it would seem that they helped to foster concern, and to create 'space' for questioning the policies of various agencies, which contributed to the development of better legislation, increased government action, and the growth of an active voluntary sector.

6.10 Voluntary groups: BTSP, BTSG, Traveller Movement (NI), BTEDG, An Munia Tober

Although there are differences between these voluntary organisations, they were all established initially to improve the serviced sites for travellers in NI, particularly in Belfast. They have been extremely critical of the DoE and BCC, feeling that in spite of some consultation, these two agencies have never accepted the views and experiences of the travellers in their policies. They were pleased when the NIHE took over provision of accommodation for travellers. Those involved in providing services adopted a community development strategy. They also tried to encourage statutory agencies to broaden their provision. There are growing moves to improve relationships with the settled community. While many local projects have been successful, the limitation of community development strategies alone, in removing the causes of disadvantage and discrimination, has also been evident. Appendix 3

gives information on a range of An Munia Tober projects, written by them at the time of the launch of the new organisation. Appendix 4 includes an extract from a discussion with a director of An Munia Tober, reviewing some of the issues which he felt were particularly important in considering development work with travellers.

6.11 The author

The author, while not an actor in the case study, is an important influence in the writing and interpretation of the material for the case study and of its presentation to students. The author has worked in NI as a development worker and has been involved in a range of activities in NI throughout the period of the case study. An attempt has been made to read widely, to interview relevant people, to visit sites, and generally to gain a sound knowledge of the case study topic. However, as with all academic or developmental reports, it has a particular perspective, and while trying to be balanced, the writer has to make judgements about what is put in and what is left out of a study. Part of the approach has been to highlight issues and themes that are studied in the course, such as the interaction between the three arenas: the state, civil society, and the private sector. The case study links purposeful development activity to the wider context; to the political, social, and economic processes that are going on at the same time, and to which development initiatives are often a reaction. Such actions from development actors in turn create reactions and challenge the state and other actors to respond to the changing circumstances.

Appendices

Appendix 1: *In Our Own Way: Tales from Belfast Travellers*

Appendix 2: DSD: policy and recommendations

Appendix 3: An Munia Tober: description of projects

Appendix 4: Extracts from interviews: NIHE manager, Director of An Munia Tober

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Appendix I

In Our Own Way: Tales from Belfast Travellers

Keenan, J. and Hines, D. (eds) (2000) *In Our Own Way: Tales from Belfast Travellers*, Belfast, Belfast Travellers Support Group.

Nan Joyce

‘You used to be shifted and the Corporation or the Health Department used to give us a big fine for campin’ which was twenty-five pounds for having no toilets, having no facilities ... so we would shift, we would go out maybe the Antrim Road ... Glengormley ... Shore Road ... Lisburn Road ... those were all camping grounds ... All around Belfast and we knew every one from every area, ... and then they come on with another summons, you know, you have no toilets, no sanitation, you’d be brought to court over it. And it wasn’t our fault because there was no facilities; there was no sites for Travellers you know. And this is the way we were treated.’

Michael Mongan

'All those romantic stories about life on the road are a load of bullshit really. There were some nice times. When you were moving in the summer all the ones who were of walkable age would be walking behind the cart ... and you were in and out of the houses getting cuts of bread and boiled spuds ... You'd light a fire and make the tea and give the horse a break, if you were going on a bit of a journey ... You'd be travelling 2 or 3 miles an hour. You'd cover maybe 15–20 miles a day ... But in the winter-time we didn't move whatsoever; we'd pick out a camp somewhere at the edge of town, a good dry place and safe place where there'd be wood for fire and the water was close ... we could usually stay there from September or October till March.'

'I now live on the Monagh Bypass ... we've been there 7 years. We moved from Poleglass and the Markets ... we didn't decide to move from there ... (the local politician) started up a protest to move us on, he got the gangs started up it got dangerous ... He was looking for votes, you see the Travellers don't vote, so at the time he wanted all the voters to vote for him, he was a good politician – he got rid of the Travellers! ... We often get bricks being thrown through the window at the Monagh Bypass, into the caravans. That happens regularly, not intimidation, its hooligans ... They throw a beer bottle and shout ... and call you other names, then drive on down the road.'

'I was working the last 25–30 years at the scrap but the scrap days are gone. It's history; there's nothing to be made in scrap anymore. I lost my driving licence one time and ... I couldn't move scrap with no licence. So I went to night school for a while and this job of community development worker came up and I just put in for it and got it. ... I think I was the first Traveller here to go for a settled job ... I found it interesting ... I know what people are thinking and talking about, what they want and don't want.'

Molly Keenan

'We used to go out every day and hawk for clothes and we'd pile up all the clothes of a Saturday and all the women would gather round us ... and we used to sell ... all the clothes ... But there was no bins or anything ... there was no such a thing as rubbish. There was no milk cartons ... you got your milk in a shop and if you didn't wash those milk bottles you wouldn't get no milk ... There was a big line out for clothes and when one nappy would get dirty you'd wash it and hang it out on the line. There was no rubbish in them days. God was walking the world in those days, so he was.'

'But you're afraid now to go out on the roads. Times are not like the times that use to be and there's none of those old fairs ... there's not a road left, all M1s and things like that ... And we use to love to see a lovely summer's day. Because some of us had wagons but more of us had tents ... We'd have a big green cover that we'd throw up to the sun. And those lovely bedcovers and pillowcases that I used to make ... It if was over again there'd be photos taken of those lovely things ... As long as I remember

back there was always Travellers ... I think, Our Lord travelled, ... I think they took his footsteps.'

Bernie Mongan

'I just loved the travelling. In the good weather ... I just passed time going around in a horse drawn caravan. Every evening you'd choose a spot near a river or a well. You'd stop there as long as you'd be left, you'd put the horse in a field, but they didn't like that. You'd have to move on ... When I was a child we'd all live in a tent, the whole family. It was hard enough like, we got along ... I never had nothing, no I had nothing. Still it takes all kinds to make a world.'

'I made my living with horses. I started by training horses for farmers. Breaking them in it was called. I had a gift for that ... I use to shoe horses as well. I had horses since I was able to drive them ... I've never learnt to drive a car. I did not. I travelled the 32 counties ... When we first arrived in a town we'd pitch camp ... put the horse in the field. Mary and the kids would light a fire and make a bit of dinner. I'd go into town ... go to the shops, get a few orders for tins, cans or whatever ... I'd be enquiring you know I'd have it all written down for me ... and then I'd show it to somebody and he'd know where to send me. That's how I got around. They'd order such and such a thing and I'd make it for them, and the next person would do the same thing.'

Johnny Purcell

'That was 1971 we moved to Frederick Street. We were there 11 years, we were living in a house. People got schooling, they learned Irish dancing – it was lovely. A few of the families had their own caravans across the road. Things were all right that time ... After Frederick Street we moved to the Markets, we were a long time down there, 3 years ... That was right in the centre of the town, now there are all factories built around it. There was a scrap yard. We were a long time in Colin Glen, 13 years, we made our own place at the top... They still came and put us out of it ... we didn't attend the courts you know. The bailiffs came ... at 6 or 7 in the morning ... they took the world of stuff off us ...'

'The time of The Troubles we were all over here in Belfast ... Families were being burnt out of their homes. The boys had a big lorry ... Johnny's Famous Lorry it was called. Me and the boys was going as fast as ever we could to get back for another load, to go back for another crowd of children and women ... We did very well to save them. The people appreciated it ... refugees they were. We helped the whole lot ... whether they were Protestants or Catholics ... they had to get out. It was terrible bad that time ... coming down they fired stones at us and broke part of the lorry, and we kept going the whole time, we didn't stop ... we saved the poor people ... They were very good to us then, they were nice people to us ... they classed us like their selves you know.'

Nan Donahue

'They were very hard times. We were reared in a tent on the side of the road with a bit of straw and we only lived on what my mother begged for us ... so we took off, me and my two brothers, I was only 16. We didn't want to go back, it was too cruel. My mother wasn't cruel but we got no education or nothing ... I was 18 myself when I got married ... And I had eleven children ... my husband, he was a half Traveller and he died in the police barracks in Belfast. He went down and he never came back. They say he died of an internal haemorrhage – what's that? I only heard it after. He was very young when he died, only 40 so I was left with 9 children ...'

Appendix 2

DSD: policy and recommendations

<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/travellers> accessed 9 October 2006.

Policy objective

To improve the living conditions for travellers in NI.

Here you will find information on the department's responsibilities, policies and actions in relation to travellers in NI including:

Travellers accommodation

The DSD is involved with the NIHE and Registered Housing Associations in the provision of accommodation for travellers. Following the transfer of responsibility for traveller specific accommodation from district councils, NIHE carried out a comprehensive assessment of the accommodation needs of all travellers in NI.

This review indicated that the majority of travellers wish to live in 'settled' accommodation either in existing social housing estates or specific 'group housing' schemes which cater for travellers' desire to reside in extended family groupings. As a result NIHE has drawn up and submitted to the department, a programme of traveller specific schemes to cater for this need. These schemes will be delivered by housing associations. Group housing is relatively recent and it was decided to progress on the basis of four pilot housing schemes:

- Tattykeel – Omagh (complete)
- Hillhead Road – Castledawson (complete)
- Glen Road – West Belfast
- Monagh Road – West Belfast.

A number of travellers also indicated a desire to live on serviced sites, which provide facilities for travellers residing in static 'mobile home' type accommodation. There are currently five occupied serviced sites in NI and the NIHE is in the process of upgrading these. Some travellers wish to remain nomadic and their needs will be provided through 'transit sites'. There are currently no transit sites in NI and the NIHE is currently working in conjunction with district councils, traveller representative groups and travellers to determine the specific need for such sites and where these should be located.

Targeting social need

Under the Targeting Social Need Initiative, the department set up a working group on Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) to consider factors that could put travellers at risk of exclusion. The aim of the group was to recommend an integrated policy strategy and an action plan. The final report, which made thirty-three detailed recommendations to government aimed at improving the lives of travellers in areas such as health, education and accommodation, was presented to government ministers. On 25 February 2003 the Office of the First Minister/Deputy First Minister published a response to the PSI Working Group Report on travellers. All of the recommendations relating to DSD and NIHE have been progressed.

Cooperation policy

It is important to stress that the policy that allows travellers to camp on a temporary basis is not a substitute for permanent or transit site provision.

The policy is still seen, therefore, as a humane requirement and a necessary addition to adequate permanent provision. Once the policy is in place travellers should be allowed to remain on the land subject to the following conditions:

- occupation does not constitute a measurable public health hazard or cause pollution to water supplies – district councils should liaise with the landowner, support groups and traveller families to ensure services (e.g. refuse collection) are in place to eliminate any public health hazard
- occupation does not create a traffic hazard
- occupation does not create a right to long-term use of the site – the situation should be reviewed at regular intervals not exceeding three months
- there is no current or immediate use for the land
- the travellers behave in a reasonable and orderly manner.

It is recognised that in exceptional cases there could be circumstances attached to a particular occupancy, which would require a different approach.

Appendix 3

An Munia Tober: description of projects

<http://www.anmuniatober.org/projects/> accessed 16 October 2006.

Ongoing projects

An Munia Tober is more than a collection of worthwhile projects. It is an environment where travellers can feel comfortable and secure. It is a place where people are listened to and can also tell their story.

The many projects undertaken have been developed through the hard work and dedication of the staff and volunteers at BTEDG.

We are extremely grateful to all our funders who make all the projects possible.

Youth project

The youth project is supported by two workers and runs on a daily basis from the Blackstaff Complex on the Springfield Road. We offer a secure comfortable environment where young travellers have a sense of ownership.

The activities include:

- LIP (literacy, ideas, personal development) – this activity includes one hour literacy and two hours arts and crafts
- health and fitness – includes literacy while learning about healthy eating and a Saturday morning workout in the gym
- ‘Can’t Cook Won’t Cook’ – participants are given a budget, where they plan a menu, buy, prepare and cook the food.

Heritage and cultural project

The amazing results from this project can be viewed in the An Munia Tober Centre. Throughout the life of the BTEDG and the BSTG the history of the traveller community in Belfast has been recorded. This has also added to the fine display of additional traveller customs captured by skilful craft work in the construction of model Barrel Wagons.

Gayla Expression Arts project

The Gayla Expression Arts group was set up within BTSG in 2003 supported by the ‘Children’s Fund Unit’. It is a 3-year project which works with traveller children between the ages of 4–12.

The children are encouraged to learn in a creative environment using a variety of arts materials.

The children will use the skills developed to create a number of projects namely, radio play, self portraits and sculptures. The artwork has already been exhibited at the Water Front Hall and the Play Resource Warehouse.

This summer the traveller children from the Glen Road designed and created window boxes which reflected on their lives. The children learned how to decorate window boxes with mosaic tiles and with the help of conservation volunteers they planted them with wild flowers. The window boxes were presented to settled residents of the Glen Road at the Tullymore Community Centre. The evening was a great success.

Gala Play programme

The Gala Play programme offers high quality child centre play opportunities for traveller children of primary age within the Belfast area.

We have thirteen places in our Glen Road premises and also offer a full summer scheme programme for all traveller children living in the greater Belfast area during the summer months.

All our work with children is based upon an evolutionary play work ethos where children are encouraged to make choices and decisions about their own play opportunities.

The Gala Play team is very committed and have a wealth of experience in the work play area.

Children also take part in the following projects/workshops:

- music workshop and sessions
- arts and crafts
- outings
- cookery
- computers
- photography.

Staff also regularly visit the children's homes and where possible encourage parental involvement.

Traveller health development

The original Community Health Project was developed in 2001 in recognition of the severe health inequalities experienced by the traveller community. Following a positive evaluation of this 3-year pilot phase, the project became mainstreamed through funding by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

A new wider health strategy was agreed which aims to support the health development of all travellers in the Greater Belfast area, regardless of age and gender.

The new key aims of the Health Development Strategy are:

- to increase the skills, knowledge and confidence of travellers around health and well being

- to develop specific programmes and activities in response to the identified health needs of travellers
- to increase the capacity of travellers to act as resources and advocates for health and well being within their own community and with wider health providers
- to work in partnership with relevant statutory, voluntary and community groups to highlight travellers' health needs and work together to address these needs
- to promote best models of practice in working with travellers to increase travellers' participation in health development.

Educational projects

The causes and effects of early school leaving is well documented in all communities. Within the traveller community early school leaving has been a considerable concern with the lack of opportunities widely recognised. The Alternative Education Programme opened on the 6 October 2003. The project was specially designed for young travellers, aged between 14–17, who have left mainstream education for various reasons. The programme aims to enable young travellers to gain a range of accredited qualifications to increase their self esteem, encourage active citizenship and seek to remove the barriers leading to social inclusion.

The project has mainly attracted young women however we are currently developing programmes to encourage young men to participate in training and education. This year we have a number of young people taking their GCSEs and we will also be offering participants a 6-week work placement, with either statutory or community organisations.

List of courses we currently offer:

- AEB literacy and numeracy
- CEA essential skills numeracy and literacy
- National skills profile
- Active citizenship
- Traveller pride
- Citizenship through the creative arts
- Basic introduction to cookery
- IT computer courses
- Life skills
- Careers advice
- Driving theory test
- Educational trips
- Social trips.

Gala arts play – collection of songs

To showcase the achievements of our children we have added a collection of songs, poems and stories recorded by the children at St Mary's primary school, Belfast.

Appendix 4

Extracts from interviews: NIHE Manager, Director of An Munia Tober

Comments from an interview with David Bass, Manager, NIHE, responsibility for Greater West Belfast 24 June 2006

I was asked what I thought the most important issue was in terms of housing in Belfast. I answered 'The travellers', because they are the most disadvantaged group and live in the worst housing conditions now. Also it is a challenge to work with them, to have travellers involved in decisions working with the NIHE. However, this was not the view of many of the people I work with. There is great demand for housing in West Belfast and there are many families that need new houses. Then, there are community groups and politicians that are effective in putting pressure on the NIHE, and the travellers don't have that kind of support.

There are also many problems with the settled community in regard to travellers. Often, they do not want to have travellers as neighbours, and people will then object to our plans to provide housing for travellers in our social housing schemes. The attitude of the general public to travellers has not changed – it is really disappointing how much prejudice they face.

It is a difficult community for official agencies to work with. They have different patterns of living, and with their travelling lifestyle, one cannot always know where they are. We can have a large group of travellers living at the side of the road, and then, suddenly one day they are all gone. We do not know where they have gone or why they went. Then, suddenly, there is a group back again, living on the same bit of land. It might be the same families or different ones. It can be hard to maintain consistent relationships with them as residents, certainly harder than with our other families. It can be difficult to maintain communication – the low level of literacy within the travellers complicates this. Written documents, reports and letters often don't work – we have to speak to them personally and arrange visits to the site. This we are willing to do, but it does take time, and sometimes it is different people we are talking to, so it can be frustrating.

Local government was not really interested in doing anything for the travellers. The situation was better once the DSD took over responsibility for the travellers, and when all their housing needs became part of the NIHE's responsibility. Then, serviced sites, group housing, or giving a house in one of our housing estates to an individual family could all be considered as

possible solutions. For the group housing, we work through housing associations. This has worked well, but it all takes time as so many agencies and departments are initially involved. I know the travellers think it takes too long.

The travellers face many problems related to education, getting the right training for work, health issues, poor facilities, lack of contact with other groups, and low self esteem. Housing is one big issue but so too are the others. They all need a response from the government and from other service providers.

**Comments from an interview with Derek Hanway, Director,
An Munia Tober 24 June 2006**

My work with the NGO is to provide support to our various services and projects, and an advocacy role, to work on policy in regard to travellers. I have a lot of contact with both the various travelling families and also with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations. In many ways I act as a facilitator, I mediate between them and try to get travellers and agencies talking and working together.

There are three big issues, or concerns, that dominate my work now. The first is should we be 'exclusive' or 'inclusive' in our approach? Should specific and different services be provided for travellers, or do travellers and the settled population have the same service? For a long time travellers wanted separate services, services that recognised their particular culture, with provision at their housing sites, and with a recognised, named official that worked primarily with travellers. Many agencies have done this for them. Provision of appropriate services definitely works better than it did before, where travellers had very little contact. But, now, travellers are questioning this: it keeps travellers in their enclaves, both physically and socially. Yes, it was important first to do things separately, to build their confidence, but now it might be best to integrate travellers' programmes, to have more joint programmes, and hopefully to move to a situation where travellers are treated just like anyone else.

The second problem area is around participation and ownership. Many of the previous attempts to provide appropriate serviced sites failed through lack of real involvement by travellers. We have participation of travellers on committees and in consultations, but much less involvement in the running of organisations. We have tried several things to encourage more participation and a sense that the community owns our projects. We started a newsletter – it seems popular, and helps to keep people informed of what is going on. We also started a Users' Panel that meets bimonthly. It discusses the projects, their concerns, and what we could do better. It has been really useful to the workers. Next we want to talk to the people who are not involved in the projects, and here we want to use the current Users' Panels as advocates. This is our plan.

The third area is implementing a learning/action approach. This has been written into several recommendations, and it is our ideal, but it's not easy.

We can get lots of different ideas, and some are in conflict with what is possible, or what has funding. An interesting example of where a learning/ action process was successful was in the Community Health Project, where consultation with women showed that there was a huge lack of understanding about how to use drugs, leading to the wrong use and overuse of some drugs. Also, many could not read the instructions. So, we have started a programme with a group of pharmacies to explain about various drugs, to increase their knowledge about drugs and the role of medicines in health care. Also, we are developing visual rather than written instructions. There are many women who want to join this programme – it has been quite successful because it is meeting a need that the women raised themselves and they are working with us to find solutions.