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Culture and Education: researching the impact of detached youth work on a South Yorkshire Roma community

Helen Jones

With thanks to Meranda Russell

What do you know?

1. When did Roma arrive in Europe? From where?
2. What religion do Roma follow?
3. What was the *Porrajmos*?
4. How many Roma live in the countries of the EU?
5. Roughly how many Roma are in the UK?
6. In 2013, 60.6% of all pupils in England got 5 x A*-C GCSEs. What was the figure for Roma pupils?

Angry villagers warn of riots unless police act on Roma: Residents say they will take law into their own hands if authorities do not take action over anti-social behaviour

- Residents of Hexthorpe accuse new arrivals of fly-tipping and littering
- Noise is forcing elderly to sleep with earplugs, they tell police at meeting
- The 500 Roma residents are said to arrived since January

By [CHRIS BROOKE FOR THE DAILY MAIL](#)

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Trouble brewing: Residents of Hexthorpe, South Yorkshire, said people would take the law into their own hands unless the authorities step in to combat anti-social behaviour they blame on Roma immigrants

The Youth Association's role in Hexthorpe

- The Youth Association (TYA) was approached to undertake detached youth work in Hexthorpe with young Roma people, urgently;
- They had started work by autumn 2014 and found that many young people did not have school places so they set up supplementary provision;
- Subsequently TYA was successful in securing funding from the Big Lottery funding for longer term work;
- The University of Huddersfield was invited to evaluate the Lottery funded work;
- It was agreed that we would focus on the impact of TYA's work on Roma attitudes to education and to ascertain the extent to which detached youth work methods could promote integration through positive educational engagement.

What did TYA do?

- TYA employed detached youth work methods; meeting young people on the streets, listening and using conversation;
- TYA was able to achieve consistent staffing over 3+ years: 1 current worker in particular was involved from the beginning;
- The workers took their steer from the young people and learned about cultural norms;
- During the year Nov '15- Oct '16 TYA worked with 252 young people (156 male, 96 female, mainly 13-19 yrs and mainly with roots in Slovakia).

- How were we to measure the impact of TYA's work on young people's attitudes to education? We got involved too late to design a longitudinal study;
- TYA advised us that the young people often talked about the future;
- Following discussion with TYA, 'Utopian future' enabling techniques were used;
- The TYA worker undertook the interviews.

Roma experiences of schools / education

- Some parents moved here because they'd heard good things about schools;
- This appears to concern the way their children are treated rather than the achievement of qualifications;
- Parents don't necessarily understand systems such as attendance requirements and may not know months and dates or tell the time;
- Their children have learned about systems such as attendance and are ambitious for their own (as yet hypothetical) children who will gain qualifications and have a 'serious job ... like doctor';
- 'We are not bad at English but our kids, they will grow up here, they will know perfect English so they can have a better chance of doing well'.

What do the young people say about the youth workers and youth work?

- They link the youth workers with education;
- ‘You help us grow’;
- ‘[You] actually care for [us] and ... want [us] to have a better future’;
- ‘Every time we have an idea ... you never say like, “no you can’t do that”. You’ll arrange it or say “we’ll talk about it next time” so we feel really good about that’;
- ‘Me and [my friend], if we say “Let’s go to the studio”, it’ll never happen but we told you guys and after 2 or 3 weeks we actually went to a studio and made a song and that’ll stick with us for a lifetime’.

Building bridges?

- Young Roma men from Hexthorpe have been on very successful residentials with young people from other communities;
- To date, young Roma women haven't been allowed to participate;
- Young non-Roma people from Hexthorpe have been difficult to engage and some remain hostile.

- Culture is evolving, attitudes are shifting and young people have aspirations to work in different ways to their families:
- [I want to] have a job which I want to wake up for ... I don't want a job which I hate where I feel forced going to my job (YM2).
- Basically what I want is a really good job ... [to be a] manager ... if people ask, 'What do you do?' I'm like, 'I'm a manager'. They start respecting you [...] I'm very keen... come home, go to sleep, wake up, back to work. I only have two days off [when I] go out with friends... come home, go to sleep, wake up, do the same thing again, work, work (YM3).

The impact of detached youth work

- Some young Roma people are rejecting aspects of Roma culture and outline an approach akin to assimilation: is this a negative or positive outcome?
- Integrating Roma people with the wider community in the locality remains a challenge: what strategies would be worth exploring?

QUESTIONS / DISCUSSION