

The Outreach Centre, Annual Report, 2011

Priorswood CDP & TravAct



Contents

- Introduction....p1
- Community Supports....p4
 - Information & drop-in
 - Priorswood Community Playgroup
 - Primary Health Care Team
 - Housing/accommodation advocacy
 - Education Liaison
 - Outreach
 - Community Liaison
 - Extent of TravAct services
- Overview....p11
- Sources of Funding and Budgetary Breakdown....p13
- Personnel & Contacts....p14



INTRODUCTION

The Outreach Centre is located on Clonsaugh Drive in Priorswood (pop. 4,500), on Dublin's Northside, seven miles from the city centre. The area, which was built during the 1970s, consists of mixed private and public housing in Clonsaugh, Moatview and Ferrycarrig, and Traveller accommodation in Cara Park, Northern Close and Tara Lawns; the estimated number of Travellers living in the area is 450. The area has a relatively high youth population, and although there is a social mix, it has marginal levels of socio-economic disadvantage (point 4 on Pobal's 8-point scale). In general, social issues in the area arise because of the youth profile, early school-leaving, youth unemployment, and substance misuse; some of these issues arise as a particular concern for the Traveller population.

The Outreach Centre was established in 1993 as a Community Development Project; until two years ago it was funded through the Government's Community Development Programme, which was re-structured and amalgamated within the Department of Environment's Local and Community Development Programme – now funded nationally by Pobal and delivered locally through Partnership companies, in this instance, the Northside Partnership.



Mary Doheny, Northside Partnership, Manager of Outreach Centre & Marian McKenna, Outreach worker, TravAct.

INTRODUCTION (Contd.)

Since its formation the Outreach Centre has become a vital part of the community, working persistently to support and empower local people through actions with anti-poverty / social inclusion aims. The Centre operates an 'Open Door' policy which enables it to be in constant touch with the community. Working from the principles of community development and equality, we try to attain:



The kitchen area in the Outreach Centre is used on a daily basis by individuals and community groups seeking advice & sharing information

- A warm and friendly atmosphere
- Effective teamwork between staff and management
- Professional work atmosphere, good administration and staff support
- Following good workplans and clear goals

The Centre has been closely involved with and facilitated the work of TravAct, formerly Northside Travellers Support Group. The work of this group has grown significantly in recent years. The *Annual Report 2011* showcases TravAct's different programmes, covering primary health care, community development, housing advocacy, educational support and outreach support for alcohol, drugs and related problems.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

1. INFORMATION & DROP-IN

From its outset the Outreach Centre has been committed to operating a drop-in policy for community residents, who are welcomed into the centre for advice, information, administrative services or simply to share ideas about community development over a cup of tea/coffee in our kitchen. We consider this informal, open door approach a vital component to our work as firstly, it plays an important role in maintaining contact with the community, its residents and its various groups, and secondly, it is the basis whereby ideas for more formal programmes and activities are conceived and developed. As a back-up to its day-to-day operations the Centre operates a Community Employment scheme, and during 2011, 23 persons participated on this scheme.

2. PRIORSWOOD COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP

In addition to basic advice, information and drop-in, the Centre also continues to provide back-up, administrative and supervisory support to the Priorswood Community Playgroup, which is located at the Centre, and which during 2011 provided 30 child care places.

3. PRIMARY HEALTH CARE TEAM

The Traveller Primary Health Care (PHC) team provides basic health information and advice services to the Traveller community. It is funded through the HSE's Traveller Health Unit, which recognizes that Travellers health compares poorly with the general population and that improved health care requires Travellers involvement in

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS (contd.)

service provision. National research reports:

- 11- 15 year gap in life expectancy between Travellers and settled people;
- Travellers have 3-4 times the mortality rate of the general population;
- Suicide is 6 times the rate of the general population;
- Infant Travellers have 3.5 times the mortality rate of the general population.

At the Outreach Centre, the Primary Health Care team regularly discuss ways to improve Traveller Health, through information and education. The team is conscious that Travellers are often unwilling to deal with health issues, sometimes because of literacy problems and a reluctance to

discuss matters of a personal nature. The team regularly explore new ideas for getting health information across and for involving Travellers in improving their own health. The team's core work is visiting Traveller families on a regular basis to assist them with health issues.

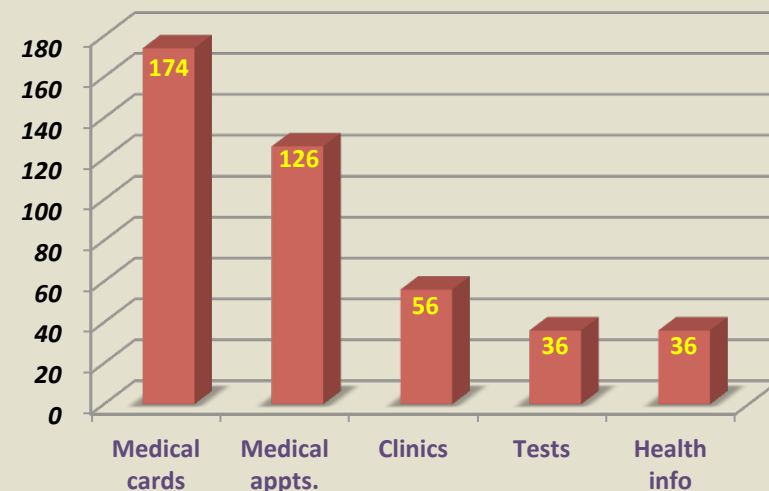


Fig. 1: No of contacts with families per five health categories

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS (contd.)

During 2011, the team visited just over 100 separate Traveller families, and in all they had over 400 different interventions / contacts with these families.

As illustrated by *Fig. 1, (p. 5)* the most common contact – at 174 - arose because of medical cards, helping families to fill these out, signing them up to a GP and having their applications processed and updated. The second most common reason for contact was assisting families and their members with medical appointments; making the appointments, reminding them of appointments, accompanying them and representing them during appointments, when required. In 2011, there were 126 such contacts. Fifty-six contacts arose from helping people attend clinics, such as child

development, physiotherapy or family planning, and 36 arose from helping people get eye, dental and blood tests. A further 36 contacts arose from Travellers seeking basic health information on general health care.

During 2011, the team was also involved in health education days – such as a Traveller Men's Health Day - and general health promotion. The team's coordinator Brigid Nevin attends consultative meetings with the HSE Traveller Health Unit, to advise on progress and on other Traveller health matters.

4. HOUSING/ACCOMMODATION ADVOCACY

TravAct provides a direct housing/ accommodation advocacy service, recognizing that

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS (contd.)

special issues and additional demands arise in dealing with these issues for Travellers.

Firstly, with an increase in the number of Travellers there is a follow-on increase in those requiring accommodation.

Secondly, the continued young age profile of newly-formed families generates a further demand for accommodation, and

Thirdly, large family sizes have an ongoing impact on need for maintenance and repairs.

During 2011 TravAct's Housing Worker, Winnie McDonagh, dealt with 61 separate Traveller families, requiring just over 500 contacts mainly through home visits. As illustrated in *Fig. 2*, the vast majority of these contacts – 417 in total – were for housing maintenance. Requests for

housing allocations numbered 59, and 26 contacts arose from housing transfer requests.

Winnie maintains direct links with the Council through its Local Area Office and Traveller Section and this contact is helpful for dealing with specific issues and problems as these arise from her work

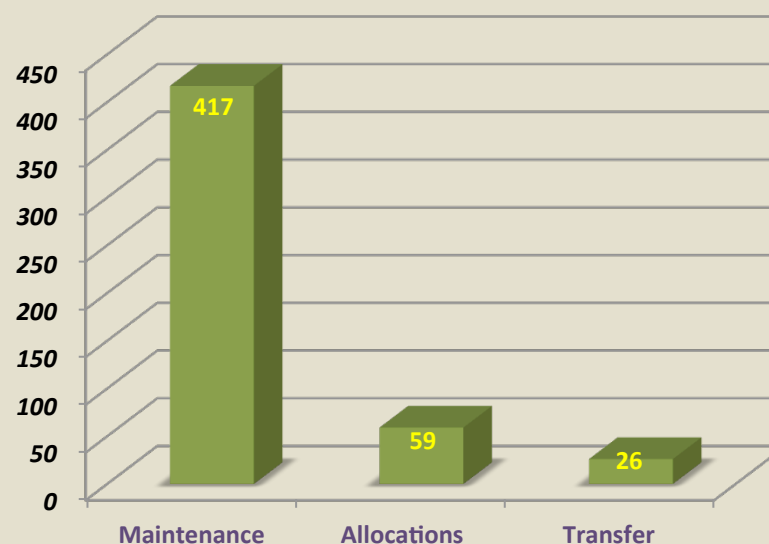


Fig. 2: No of contacts with families per three housing categories

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS (contd.)

with families, but also for dealing with many of the same issues, from a policy perspective. She is a Traveller representative on the Local Traveller Accommodation consultative Committee in the Council, which acts under the aegis of the National Traveller Accommodation Committee.

In addition to contributing to policy through this mechanism she is also able to work with council officials and representatives in developing their relationships with Travellers and linking together for different community projects, for example in relation to environment improvement.

5. EDUCATION LIAISON

TravAct has a role in supporting Traveller education, through the work of its Education



Nellie Ward, Education Support Worker

Support Worker, Nellie Ward. Each year it organizes a Traveller Education Week, involving art and essay competitions, giving talks in schools about Traveller culture and organizing a visit, talks and presentation by the Traveller Living History Project, based in Navan. This project's visual representation of Traveller culture, can help bring about a realization of the past absence of formal education for Travellers and the importance of keeping Traveller children in education today.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS (Contd.)

Nellie also has a role in providing direct support to families on education matters, especially since the Department of Education withdrew the Visiting Teacher for Travellers on Dublin's Northside and since this happened in September 2011 Nellie has worked directly with 13 families providing back-up to help them to sort out absenteeism and school relationships.

6. OUTREACH

TravAct also provides an outreach service for persons with alcohol, drug and related problems. Research on Travellers accessing addiction services highlight that:

- Travellers are uncomfortable attending first time;
- Outreach contact is an important source of referral;

- Word-of-mouth and peer-referral are important;
- Confidentiality of prime importance;
- Pro-active approach for engaging Travellers required;
- Services need to engage family members.

TravAct's Outreach Worker, Marian McKenna has overall responsibility for alcohol and drug services with Travellers. This is a low threshold service; prospective participants are not required to provide extensive details of their addiction problems nor make specific treatment commitments. The central focus is to engage them with sensitivity and a non-judgemental approach.

The service involves relatively few persons, but the general level of contact with these and their extended families is extensive, with the worker providing support around relationship issues, social welfare entitlements, as well as addiction

COMMUNITY SUPPORT (Contd.)

matters. Some participants have been referred into more formal treatment, and although these numbers are generally small the overall percentage of Traveller participants in treatment in this local drug task force area is at 3% almost twice that of the norm. During 2011 the outreach worker was involved directly with several different individuals from five extended families providing information, support and referral on addiction problems. In addition, the outreach worker was also involved in organizing addiction awareness training on an ongoing basis.

7. COMMUNITY LIAISON

TravAct's Community Worker, Paddy McDonagh acts as a liaison between Travellers and settled communities, processing information through

local media, and playing a particular role in organizing different Traveller events at the Outreach Centre and at other venues. He also acts as a support to TravAct's Housing Worker, Winnie.

8. EXTENT OF TRAVACT SERVICES

During 2011 TravAct had a direct involvement with 132 families, providing services to 291 individuals (M: 44%; F: 56%). Over a third were under the age of 18, and a quarter were in the next significant age category of 36-45. In all, these services had 1,097 separate intervention contacts with these families and individuals; almost 50% of these arose from housing and accommodation issues and more than 400 were in relation to primary health care. This involvement represents an important service to Travellers in the area.

OVERVIEW

2011 was a busy year for the Outreach Centre, one in which, despite significant changes in funding and structural arrangements, we managed to maintain our core work and identity and engage in and support new developments.. In particular, during 2011 the Centre played a significant role in supporting TravAct and its various, health, housing and outreach and community activities.

Giving a specific focus to one group or issue is consistent with the manner in which the Centre has operated. Since its formation almost 20 years ago in 1993, the Outreach Centre's has had a dual focus of, on the one hand, setting up and supporting specific local initiatives, while on the other supporting ongoing core activities. For example, the Centre provided facilities for the

Youth Diversion programme during the late 1990s, in partnership with the Gardai and City of Dublin Youth Services Board. This directly led to setting up a joyriding initiative, where a local group was brought together, commissioned research and developed awareness and preventive activities in conjunction with the Gardai and Dublin City Council. The Centre initiated



Winnie McDonagh, Accommodation Worker, TravAct

OVERVIEW (Contd.)

Priorswood Youth Project and it also managed Bonnybrook Youth Project and the Traveller Youth Project, which all subsequently moved to the regional youth service, based in Darndale

The Centre was also highly involved in community art, for example in 2007 the *In Your Face* project, celebrated the diversity of women who work in and use the centre, photographed by Derek Speirs. The Centre continues an involvement with community art through other local projects and providing a base for the National Community Arts body, *Blue Drum*, which itself brings community art skills to family resource centres throughout Ireland. In this regard, the Centre was directly involved in 2011 in organizing the *We Are Family* event in Thomond Park in July,

which showcased family centres use of art in their ongoing activities.

The Centre of course, could not have survived without funding support: the breakdown and use of which is illustrated by the graphic (on page 13).

This is the Centre's Annual Report for 2011, its first paper-free annual report, and it is hoped you will now email this to your colleagues and others who may wish to view it.



Paddy McDonagh, Community Worker, TravAct

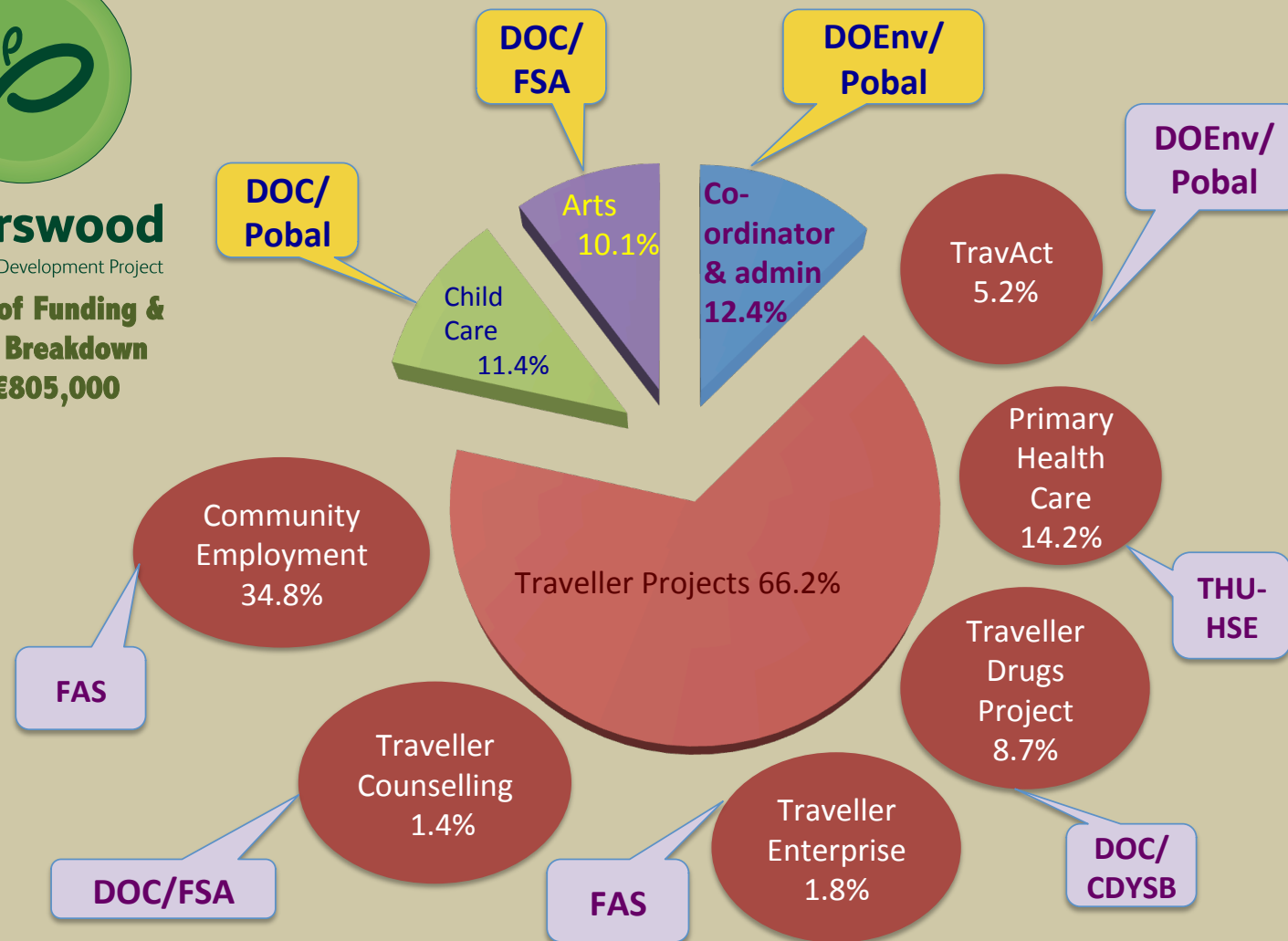


Priorswood

Community Development Project

Sources of Funding & Budget Breakdown

Tot: €805,000



DOC-Department of Children; FSA – Family Support Agency; DOEnv – Department of Environment; THU-HSE – Traveller Health Unit, Health Services Executive; CDYSB – City of Dublin Youth Services Board; Pobal – Intermediary funding/management agency for Local and Community Development Programme; FAS – State training and employment agency

PERSONNEL & CONTACTS

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Dublin North East Drugs Task Force

