



Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown
County **Childcare Committee**

Childcare Needs of the Traveller Community in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown



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Front page photo: Josie Connors & John Traynor, Southside Travellers

Section 1

Research Brief and Methodology

The research on which this report is based had two broad aims. Firstly, that it should identify the current levels of participation by children in the Travelling Community in the county's childcare services, and secondly that it would identify Traveller childcare needs, including any current or previous barriers Travellers have experienced in accessing childcare.

There were six objectives associated with these aims as follows:

1. Identify the childcare needs of the Travelling Community in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown (DLR)
2. Identify the extent to which existing childcare services meet the needs of Traveller families
3. Document details of any barriers that Travellers have experienced in accessing and participating in childcare services.
4. Detail positive experiences / suggestions which support Travellers to access and participate in the county's childcare services.
5. Document the experiences of childcare providers that have Traveller children attending their service as well as any barriers they might face in supporting the integration of Travellers in their service.
6. Identify future recommendations that support the access and participation of Travellers to childcare services.

The research was carried out by means of a) a review of relevant literature, b) a survey of Traveller parents, c) a focus group of Traveller mothers, d) an in-depth interview with a Traveller member of Southside Travellers, and e) a focus group of community childcare providers. The County Childcare Committee and Southside Travellers designed and administered the survey in autumn 2009, and the author of this report collated and analysed the returned survey forms. Thanks are due to the many people who gave of their time and experience in developing and administering the survey and in taking part in subsequent one to one and focus group interview processes.

This report is divided into seven sections. Section two, which follows this introduction, provides a literature review which focuses on Travellers in education, the importance of early intervention, working from an anti-bias perspective, the involvement of parents, and issues related to Traveller attendance at school or childcare facilities. Section three provides an overview of Traveller statistics for the DLR county area. Section four details childcare provision which is accessible to Travellers. Section five provides a historical overview of attempts to establish Traveller childcare facilities in DLR, detailing the contributions made by a variety of organisations and agencies in this regard. Section six begins with profile data on those who took part in previous Traveller childcare research in DLR and those who took part in the 2009 research process, so as to establish the validity of the subsequent presentation of research results. These results are provided under several headings ranging from current childcare arrangements, barriers to access, the views of providers, and respondent views on who is or should be responsible for Traveller childcare provision in DLR. Section seven completes this report and provides conclusions and recommendations arising from the research process.

Section 2 Literature Review

The literature reviewed for this survey was restricted to the areas of Traveller education, early childhood care and intervention, and inclusion of minority cultures. A synthesis of that literature is presented here under the following headings:

- Travellers and Education,
- Importance of Early Intervention,
- Working from an Anti-Bias Perspective,
- Parents as Partners, and
- Attendance

2.1 Travellers and Education

The National Children's Strategy notes that "*Traveller children have special needs which have to be considered*", and that Traveller children experience poverty and discrimination, are vulnerable to ill health and poor physical development, and are subject to disadvantages in emotional and cognitive development. In considering Traveller childcare needs it is necessary to look not just at the extent of provision available or needed, but at the manner in which it is provided. Collette Murray, the Early Years Coordinator at Pavee Point, in her comprehensive essay "*The Traveller Child, A Holistic Perspective*"¹ states that we need to "*take account of Traveller attitudes, values, and the structures within the Traveller Community ... The Traveller child lives in a community that has a long shared history, a distinct language and oral tradition, and a distinctive extended family structure*". She holds that while Traveller childhood has changed in recent years many Traveller parents still maintain traditional principles and that Traveller culture holds the view that family identity takes priority over individual identity. Childhood is not viewed as a distinct period of dependence and children are considered part of the economic and social unit. The Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education (CECDE)² echoing these views states that this can cause cultural conflicts with the practices of the dominant settled population. Murray identifies that the marginalisation of Traveller children is compounded when they enter school and are "*faced with a highly formal institution, where every aspect of ... physical and psychological demeanour is alien to his/her culture.*"³ This marginalisation is evident in the 2006 census (Table 1) which shows that 77% of the Traveller community have achieved primary level education or less, compared to 19.1% of the general population. This figure is dramatically higher than any other ethnic group. Less than one percent of Travellers have achieved third level education.

Murray stresses that participation in education is about much more than attendance and that Traveller children need acknowledgement, understanding, and support to access a curriculum which was developed

¹ Murray Collete, "*The Traveller Child, A Holistic Perspective*", (in *Diversity in Early Childhood – A Collection of Essays*) The National Childrens Resource Centre 2002

² *Submission to the Curriculum Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science regarding the Promotion of Anti-Racism and Inte-culturalism at all levels of the Education System CECDE 2002*

³ Ibid

Table 1: Educational Attainment by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Primary only or less	Secondary only	Third level or higher	Total
White Irish	20.2	50.7	29.1	100
White Irish Traveller	77	22.2	0.8	100
Other White Background	4.9	54.8	40.3	100
African or other Background	7.4	43.6	49	100
Chinese	13.3	45.2	41.5	100
Other Asian Background	4.8	23.1	72.1	100
Total	19.1	50.7	30.2	100

Source: Census 2006

from a majority perspective.

Smart (2009)⁴ notes that when Traveller children get to school many “*have been inappropriately placed in the special needs category because teachers have failed to recognise that they are not dealing with a child with learning difficulties, but one who has had little opportunity for formal learning*”. According to the Survey of Traveller Education Provision⁵ carried out by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science (DES) just over 15% (compared to 3% to 4% in the general population) of Traveller children were assessed as having a special educational need. That document states that some visiting teachers for Travellers have expressed a) concern about the disproportionate number of Traveller pupils assessed as having a general learning disability and b) doubts about the use of culturally inappropriate material in psychological tests. They note for instance that the most common tests used are language based, while the remaining items are mediated through language, and that it is quite possible that the vocabulary used in these tests is unfamiliar to Traveller children. Where non-verbal performance tests are used they involve items of the perceptual-motor type, which may also be unfamiliar to Traveller children. Familiarity with jigsaw puzzles, picture sequencing, block designs, and following patterns would be advantageous in such testing. Notwithstanding that this is the literature review section of this report; the following paragraph from the in-depth interview carried out for this report demonstrates well the challenges for Traveller children entering the school system.

“I don’t think other people really realise the effect it has when a child is going into school at four or five, who has only mixed with other Traveller kids who I have to say would be used to rough and tumble. And it’s not that they are being bold, they have a different voice, a different tone, to a settled child, to a child who has been around mammy and daddy all the time and around adults all the time and not wheeling car wheels round and picking up bits of scrap and stuff like that. ... I don’t think the wider community realise as well that when they do go into school at four or five, not having had (crèche) before hand, not maybe having the abc’s, having books around, (and) maybe parents who wouldn’t be literate enough to help with homework – nearly every Traveller child that we know, a lot of them, would have special teachers. Every Traveller child that we

⁴ Smart D “Teaching Traveller Children – Maximising Learning Outcomes” (in International Journal of Lifelong Education Vol 28, July 4th 2009)

⁵ Survey of Traveller Education Provision – Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science

know would have to go into a special class for different things. And then they get through primary school by the skin of their teeth and then into secondary school, they're in for that first year and then they are out again because it's so much hard going, and I don't think that people realise the benefit of the year or two before hand, to give them a real good start."

Expectations of achievement also play a role in what is achieved. The Survey of Traveller Education provision found that members of both primary and post-primary teaching staff referred to the low expectations that Traveller parents have of education and that conversely, Traveller parents felt that some teachers had low expectations for the children.⁶ Murray notes that in addition to low expectations, the absence of Traveller role models within professions such as nursing and teaching coupled with the difficulties Traveller children experience in accessing the curriculum play a part in levels of early school leaving and feelings of not belonging.

In contrast, however, the 2003 evaluation of Traveller preschools found that engagement with Traveller preschools is a positive experience for Traveller children and their parents and that such engagement may enhance the engagement of Travellers with the educational system in general. In addition, the Survey of Traveller Education Provision found that Principals' suggestions for improved educational provision for Traveller children included the availability of pre-schooling that *"concentrated on oral language development, on appropriate competence in pre-school literacy and numeracy, and on the enhanced involvement of Traveller parents in the education system."*⁷ The same survey recommended that the role of visiting teachers for Travellers should be reviewed and clarified, and that the visiting teachers should concentrate their resources on several areas including *"ensuring that young children have access to pre-school education"*⁸ Circular 20/88 from the Department of Education and Science acknowledges *"that few initiatives in the area of Travellers education have been as successful as the appointment of Visiting Teachers. Visiting Teachers liaise between families, schools, boards of management, the DES, and statutory and voluntary agencies."*⁹

2.2 Importance of Early Intervention

The online document "Irish Travellers in Education: Strategies for Equality"¹⁰ notes the importance of *"identifying those at risk of leaving school before they become alienated from the school system"*. That this process needs to start early is confirmed by the CECDE¹¹ who point out that recent research into brain development in young children has confirmed *"something that early years practitioners have known for a long time – that the earliest years of a child's life are the most crucial"*. In addition, given the views

⁶ Survey of Traveller Education Provision – Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science 2005

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Duignan M and Fallon J "On Target - An Audit of Provision of Services Targeting Disadvantage and Special Needs among Children from Birth to Six in Ireland"

¹⁰ http://www.itmtrav.com/publications/edu_equality.html (last accessed 7th December 2009)

¹¹ CECDE Submission to the Educational Disadvantage Committee, January 2003

expressed in the National Children's Strategy¹² that the "*family generally affords the best environment for raising children and external intervention should be to support and empower families within the community*", it becomes clear that avoidance of alienation is best begun early in the education process and in cooperation with the family.

Early intervention is not only effective at the human level, but also at the economic level. Dr Doyle of the UCD Geary Institute of Public Health and Population Science cites US figures¹³ which show that well designed early childhood interventions generate a return to society ranging from \$1.80 to \$17.07 for each dollar spent. She also notes that early intervention is key to school readiness and that poor school readiness can lead to poor peer relationships, lower academic achievement, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, criminal activity, and poor psychological well being. In a presentation made to a Community Childcare and Education Conference organised by the Clondalkin Partnership in November 2008 Dr Doyle identified the elements of "school readiness".

- Cognitive development and general knowledge (child's overall general knowledge),
- Physical well being and motor development (child's health status, growth, disabilities and fine motor skills),
- Social and emotional development (ability to take turns, display empathy, express feelings),
- Approaches to learning (inclination of child to use skills, knowledge and capacities), and
- Language development and emerging literacy (child's ability to listen, speak, and understand vocabulary).

In a 2009 article¹⁴ Doyle also makes the following critical points which emphasise the importance of the early years of development:

- Intervening in the zero to three period when children are at their most receptive stage of development, has the potential to permanently alter their development trajectories and protect them against risk factors present in their early environment. Skill begets skill, and early skill increases the efficiency of later interventions.
- Evidence also shows that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds may benefit more from formal childcare early in life than children from higher socio economic groups.

2.3 Working from an anti-bias perspective

All of us are raised in specific cultures with specific values. Children learn about these through their observation of our attitudes, words, and behaviours. They learn which groups are held in high regard in a given culture and which groups are not. They take prejudice on board whether or not they have direct contact with other cultures. Box 1 shows the five stages in children's development of prejudice as identified in "Eist"¹⁵.

¹² The National Children's Strategy(<http://www.omcya.ie/documents/Aboutus/stratfullenglishversion.pdf>)

¹³ Doyle O (UCD Geary Institute, and UDC School of Public Health and Population Science: Presentation to Community Childcare Conference 2008)

¹⁴ Doyle, O., et al., Investing in early human development: Timing and economic efficiency. Econ.Hum. Biol. (2009),

Box 1: Five Stages in Children’s Development of Prejudice

1. Awareness: Being alert to, seeing and noticing difference among people.
2. Identification: Naming, labelling, and classifying people, based on physical characteristics that children notice. Identification through verbal comments is the child’s attempt to break the silence of the adult and make sense of the world.
3. Attitude: Thoughts and feelings that become an inclination or opinion toward another person and their way of living in the world.
4. Preference: Valuing, favouring and giving priority to a physical attribute, a person, or a lifestyle, usually based on similarities or differences.
5. Prejudice: Preconceived hostile attitude, opinion, feeling or action against a person, race, or their way of being in the world without knowing them.

Early childhood practitioners must work from an anti-bias approach, have a high degree of awareness of societal bias, and the skills to support children to develop age appropriate awareness and anti bias behaviour. The need for, and complex nature of, the anti-bias approach is discussed in the OMCYA document “Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers”¹⁶, which acknowledge that children can have identities based on the multiple groups to which they belong, including family, home, culture, gender, language, ethnicity, nationality, and ability. That document stresses how important it is to help children “*build a comfortable and confident identity based on the multiple groups to which they belong ... without feeling superior or inferior to anybody else or any other group*”.

That prejudice is developed at an early age is also affirmed by the CECDE ¹⁷ who note the recommendations of Connolly et al (2002) in “*Too Young to Notice? - The Cultural and Political Awareness of 3 – 6 Year Olds in Northern Ireland*”. Aimed at supporting the development of an anti-bias culture, they recommend that children aged 3+ should be encouraged to explore and experience a range of different cultural practices, events, and symbols and to appreciate and respect difference and cultural diversity, and that children aged 5+ should be encouraged to understand the negative effects of stereotypes and prejudices and be able to identify them in their own attitudes. They further note that to ensure success early educational settings have to find ways to engage and work with parents and the local community, and to connect with Cultural Diversity Initiatives locally.

An anti-bias approach challenges all forms of bias and racist behaviour at all levels; admission policy, parental involvement, recruitment, management, and assessment. To this end the CECDE identify four specific goals of an anti-bias approach as follows:

1. Nurture each child’s construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-concept and group identity,

¹⁵ Eist: Respecting Diversity in Early Childhood Care, Education, and Training (Pavee Point 2001)

¹⁶ “Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers” OMCYA December 2006

¹⁷ *Submission to the Curriculum Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science regarding the Promotion of Anti-Racism and Interculturalism at all levels of the Education System CECDE 2002*

2. Promote each child's comfortable, empathic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds,
3. Foster each child's critical thinking about bias, and
4. Cultivate each child's ability to stand up for her/himself and for others in the case of bias/discrimination¹⁸

The OMCYA Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers reflect these principles specifying that there is a distinction between teaching a culture and actually valuing a culture. Boxes 2 and 3 show how the OMCYA suggest that practitioners can develop personal awareness and a critical reflection process in terms of creating an anti-bias approach to their practice. They include a focus on practitioners own behaviour and attitudes, and on supporting anti bias behaviour and attitudes among the group of children with whom they work.

Box 2
Supporting Children's Development

- Support children's identity and sense of belonging.
- Support children to become comfortable with difference.
- Foster each child's critical thinking about bias.
- Empower children to stand up for themselves and others in the face of bias.

Box 3:
Developing as Adults

- Be conscious of one's own culture, attitudes and values and how they influence practice.
- Be comfortable with difference, engage effectively with families.
- Critically think about bias and discrimination.
- Confidently engage in dialogue around issues of bias and discrimination.

We cannot assume that childcare providers have awareness of these issues, despite the fact that equality and diversity training has been available and attended. The implementation of what is learned does not always follow a training process. The OECD (2006)¹⁹ quoting the National Child Care Census states that less than one-quarter of childcare services have written policies on equal opportunity or non-discrimination. If there is no written policy we could safely question whether there is a high level of awareness and proactive work in this area. In addition, the OMCYA document notes that childcare training itself can have inherent bias in that it often assumes a "*universal understanding of child development, overlooking cultural and class variations in attitudes to child development or different parenting traditions*". It is evident then that anti-bias approaches in policies and procedures, and associated engagement with children and their parents, need to be put in place and put into practice.

¹⁸ Submission to the Curriculum Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science regarding the Promotion of Anti-Racism and Interculturalism at all levels of the Education System CECDE 2002

¹⁹ OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Ireland (2006)

2.4 Parents as Partners

Involvement of parents is critical in breaking down barriers. The Irish Travellers in Education: Strategies for Equality document states that “*The lack of parental involvement as partners in their individual children’s education, as decision makers within the various layers of the system and as managers of educational institutions, is perhaps the most serious obstacle to equality for the Traveller Community*”.²⁰ Similarly a report of conference proceedings “Foundations for Equal Opportunities for all in Early Childhood Care and Education”²¹ noted the importance of seeing children and parents as partners in constructing new professional concepts to enhance the inclusion of children in preschool settings, especially the children and parents who are seen as “other”. This, they note, can involve not only getting Traveller parents involved in representative structures and building understanding of the value of education and direct parental engagement, but also ensuring a proactive response to the educational needs of Traveller parents which includes providing childcare while they return to education, training, or employment.

The OMCYA notes that families from minority cultures may have a fear that they and their children will be treated differently when using a service. This is a valid concern among the Traveller community given the historical, and in many cases current, discrimination they experience. Even where providers maintain a welcoming and inclusive approach in their childcare service this fear is still valid and both sides may have to work to overcome its consequences.

2.5 Attendance

The attendance of Traveller children at school and at childcare facilities can vary. The 2003 Traveller preschool evaluation notes that attendance can be affected by a number of factors, including seasonal migration, travel occasioned by family and social events, and even the day of the week, attendance being poorer on Friday. The “Irish Travellers in Education: Strategies for Equality” notes that “*Poor accommodation is a strong factor in determining ability to attend school regularly and get equal benefit from participation*”²². Notwithstanding that there may be good reasons for irregular attendance in some instances, it can be associated with irregular payment of childcare fees and may have a negative impact on preschool providers capacity to manage their costs. This in turn may lead to a reluctance to offer a place to a child where there is a perception that irregular attendance may lead to irregular payment.

²⁰ Irish Travellers in Education: Strategies for Equality http://www.itmtrav.com/publications/edu_equality.html (last accessed 7th December 2009)

²¹ Foundations for Equal Opportunities for all in Early Childhood Care and Education (in Pavee Point Vol 3 Issue 9, January 2008)

²² Irish Travellers in Education: Strategies for Equality http://www.itmtrav.com/publications/edu_equality.html (last accessed 7th December 2009)

Section 3 Traveller Statistics

The 2006 census shows that there were 10,929 Traveller children in Ireland. This accounts for 1.1% of the total child population of Ireland and 48.7% of the total Traveller population. More Traveller children live in Dublin and Galway than in any other county²³. The DLR County Council Traveller count carried out in November 2009 shows that there are 73 children under the age of 14²⁴. The County Council count was conducted by means of a) door to door questionnaires on each halting site and grouped housing scheme, b) questionnaires (with free post envelopes) to all members of the Traveller Community now living in private accommodation or who are on the DLRCC housing waiting list, and c) a drop in option at Southside Travellers on the day of the count so that forms could be completed with the assistance of Southside Travellers members. Some members of the Traveller community availed of this option.

The County Council figure contrasts sharply with the Southside Travellers Youth Service figures which show that in 2008 there were 146 children 14 years of age or under. Table 2 gives a breakdown of the figures by age group category.

Table 2: County Council and Southside Travellers counts of children under the age of 14.

Count Provided by	Age Category	Number in Category	Total
DLR County Council 2009	0 to 4	22	73
	5 to 12	37	
	13 to 14	14	
Southside Travellers Youth Work Section 2008	0 to 4	47	146
	5 to 11	58	
	12 to 14	41	

The discrepancy in count may have arisen because of:

- Literacy difficulties among those who were not available for the County Council door to door survey (this is not to assume that all who were unavailable that day have literacy difficulties but that it may have been an issue in some cases).
- Some Southside Travellers staff hold that they did not receive questionnaires in the post, and thus wonder how many other travellers did not receive the form.
- Travellers experience with officials tends not to be positive and this may have affected engagement with the counting process.

²³ State of the Nations Children, Summary (OMCYA 2008)

²⁴ Calculated by the Traveller Accommodation unit for this report

Section 4 An Overview of DLR Childcare Provision Accessible to Travellers

This overview provides information on current childcare provision for Travellers in DLR. It is divided into the following six sections;

1. Community Childcare Provision
2. The Early Childhood Care & Education Scheme (ECCE).
3. Traveller Preschools
4. The Early Start Programme
5. Barnardos
6. Unmet Childcare Needs

4.1 Community Childcare Provision

The cost of private childcare is generally prohibitive for the Traveller community who experience high levels of unemployment. More affordable are those services which operate under the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS)^{25 26} because the fees paid by parents are calculated across various bands depending on parental income and the hours of service used. There are eight such facilities operating under the CCSS in DLR which are open to the public. These are:

- Ballyogan Community Development Group
- Childplay Holy Child Community School
- Dalkey Community Pre-school Playgroup
- Hillview Community Resource Centre
- Mountwood Fitzgerald Park Community Development Project
- Naionra Pobail Seanchill
- Shanganagh Park House
- Urban Junction (now Blackrock Community Playgroup)

Only three of the CCSS supported facilities are within walking distance of Traveller housing or halting sites. These are Ballyogan Community Development Group which is near Traveller Accommodation at Ballyogan Grove (4 houses), and the Blackrock Community Playgroup which is near St Louise's Park (6 houses).

There are three other facilities operating under the CCSS scheme which are not open to the public in the same way as the above eight. These include two Barnardos facilities, and one facility at Dundrum VEC which is open only to students attending the VEC. The Barnardos services cater for Traveller families as a

²⁵ In September 2010 some changes will be made to the CCSS, and these changes are detailed at Appendix 1

²⁶ The Community Childcare Subvention Scheme will be known as the CCS rather than the CCSS from September 2010

target group. However, they specifically work with families who are in difficulty. Access to the Barnardos service is gained through social worker or self referral.

While CCSS supported childcare is available to the Traveller community, the research conducted for this report identified that a barrier exists where community childcare facility policies prioritise specific catchment areas and generally it is only after local children have been accommodated that spaces are made available for children from outside the area. Historically there have been few spare places in community childcare centres, and with increasing levels of unemployment it is unlikely that this situation will improve. Thus while the prioritisation of places in line with the location of a childcare centre is valid in terms of the remit of Community Development Programmes and Family Resource Centres to provide facilities, it may unwittingly exclude Travellers who do not live within the catchment area of any community provision.

A DLRCCC (2006) survey of twenty two community childcare providers in DLR sought to identify the availability of community childcare places. Twelve providers responded to that survey and revealed eleven places available at that time. None of the available places were located near Traveller halting sites or group housing. The survey also asked responding community providers if they had a policy of reserving places for marginalised groups. Not all of the services (like Barnardos or services associated with VEC Colleges) are open to the general public and thus a reservation policy for members of marginalised communities was not relevant to them. Three respondents state that they do not have a reservation policy and a further two reserve places for children referred by the HSE. One operated on a first come first served basis in a RAPID area, and the remaining three reserved one or two spaces for children living in marginalised circumstances. The variety of responses demonstrates that among respondents there is no clear inclusion policy or system for self referred members of ethnic minority communities.

Pobal, who administer the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP), carry out an Annual Childcare Beneficiary survey²⁷. The 2008 beneficiary report shows that among those who responded:

- Just under 50% of community providers had “immediate” waiting lists – where those on the list would take up a place immediately if it was offered. (The equivalent figure for private providers is 32.3%).
- The need for places was more evident in urban areas.
- 45.2% of places required immediately were pre-school places.
- 17% of parents availing of services in community based childcare facilities are unemployed. The equivalent figure for 2007 was 11.6%.
- 16 of the responding services across the country classified themselves as catering specifically for the Travelling Community.
- 202 services across the country (20.6% of all respondents) reported having at least one Traveller accessing services. Thus almost 80% of responding providers do not have Traveller children among their cohort.

²⁷ 2008 Childcare Annual Beneficiary

The in-depth interview conducted for this report showed that there may be a perception at Southside Travellers that there are no Traveller children in community facilities. However, other aspects of this research reveal that while the numbers are low and there are inclusiveness issues to be addressed, there are in fact some Traveller children in those facilities. The following comment from the in-depth interview demonstrates some of the difficulties members of the Traveller community have had in accessing community childcare:

“You could say that all child care is open, but in practice it doesn’t happen. Private would be out because nobody would be earning enough. There are very few Travellers employed and those who are would be on very minimal wage. ... The problem with the community is that most community crèches are in estates and they cater for estates and the surrounding areas. So the Travellers that are in those could be okay, but then Travellers on sites would be considered outside of that catchment area. And even if they are in the area, people go to put down their name, and there’s not a willingness, like it happened even in my own daughters case, you’re told the waiting list is full and people just stand and they don’t offer to take out a book and write down the name. They just stop like that, so unless the person is really confident and assertive and says well I’d like to put down the name, it just ends there.

4.2 The Early Childhood Care & Education Scheme (ECCE)

In 2009 the Government announced that an Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) would replace the childcare supplement paid directly to parents. This scheme provides one year’s free pre-school education for children. Private preschools can apply to operate this scheme. Community childcare services that operate under the CCSS scheme and provide a preschool service will be required to register for the ECCE scheme. The scheme will hopefully have the effect of widening the pool of preschool services available to economically disadvantaged parents who have thus far either only been able to access community based preschool facilities because of the subvention available in that setting, or not able to access preschool services at all.

4.3 Traveller Preschools

Several Traveller children from DLR attend a Traveller preschool in Bray. Traveller preschools emerged in the 1980s²⁸ from “community initiatives among Traveller parents and others determined to raise the educational standards among the Traveller community”. They are managed by voluntary bodies or Traveller support groups, avail of the Visiting Teacher scheme whereby a trained teacher visits the preschool and the parents (usually the mother of each child), and are 98% funded by the DES. The objectives of the preschools include:

- The provision of educational experiences through play and active learning,
- The development of the children’s cognitive, language and social skills,
- Preparation of the children for entry to primary school, and

²⁸ Evaluation of Traveller Preschools (DES Inspectorate 2003)

- Provision of a foundation for further learning.

A 2003 evaluation of the preschools shows that at that time there were fifty two throughout the country. However, DES policy has shifted since the preschools were set up and the DES document “Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy” (2006), set the goal that half of the Traveller preschools would operate as integrated preschools within five years of the report, and that full integration would be achieved at ten years. The policy is now characterised by a commitment to partnership, interculturalism and anti-racism²⁹. Integration can mean simply changing the enrolment policy to allow children from the wider community have a place in the preschool. As of December 2009, 29 of the 52 preschools had not become integrated services.

The OMCYA ECCE scheme, as noted above, comes on line in 2010, and in mid December all County Childcare Committees received correspondence from the DES to the effect that the remaining segregated Traveller preschools around the country have to either apply for inclusion in the ECCE scheme from September 2010 onwards or look at closing their pre-school where there are alternative places available within a community or private preschool service. That correspondence notes that “*When these alternative funding arrangements are in place, the DES funding arrangements for Traveller preschools will cease*”. The 2010 timeline is less than half the original ten year integration target.

There has been no audit of the number of Traveller children in newly integrated preschools, and so it is not possible to say if the process has resulted in a reduction in the number of Traveller children attending those preschools. It is clear from the Department however, that shifting to the ECCE scheme will mean that the associated benefit of transport which is available under the Traveller Preschool system will be lost. Given that the 2003 Traveller Preschool Evaluation identifies the provision of supervised transport as a “*factor having a positive effect on attendance*” this may have a negative impact. Other factors identified in the Traveller preschool evaluation as having a positive effect include the careful monitoring of attendance, the work of the Visiting Teacher for Travellers, and the involvement of parents in the life of the preschools. It remains to be seen whether those positive factors remain in play in the integrated setting.

4.4 *The Early Start Programme*

The Department of Education Website notes that the Early Start pre-school project offers one year of pre-school to children in designated areas of disadvantage and that the key elements of the project are that:

- Parental involvement is core to the Early Start project, and aims to develop the parents as prime educators, providing them with the relevant skills to maximise their child’s participation in the pre-school process, thus laying the foundations for future educational achievement.
- The Home School Liaison staff work with Early Start staff to develop structured plans to support parents.
- The Early Start project collaborates with relevant local agencies to ensure that places go to those who most need a place.

²⁹ Duignan M and Fallon J “On Target - An Audit of Provision of Services Targeting Disadvantage and Special Needs among Children from Birth to Six in Ireland”

Early Start programmes in the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown county area include St Colmcille's (Ballybrack), St John's NS (Ballybrack), and Holy Family (Monkstown). Neither St Colmcille's nor Holy Family Early Start programmes have Traveller children among their current cohort. It was not possible to establish whether there are children from the Traveller community in St John's.

4.5 Barnardos

Barnardos provides childcare support to families under stress in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. These services are accessed through social worker referral or self referral basis. They focus on family support and intervention rather than on child care provision per se. Some Travellers from DLR have accessed these services. Traveller children are a specific target group for Barnardos work.

4.6 Unmet Childcare Needs

The childcare mapping process carried out by DLRCCC shows that there is no Traveller childcare provision in DLR and that there is a need for quality, affordable community childcare facilities in all areas of DLR as well as a need for afterschool services in Ballybrack, Dundrum, and Dunlaoghaire. The mapping process also states that there is considerable demand for childcare places to facilitate training and education for parents. The mapping exercise specifically states that members of the Travelling community, particularly in Ballyogan and Sandyford have had trouble in securing childcare places.

Section 5 What has Happened So Far - Developing and Supporting Traveller Childcare Facilities in DLR?

Responsibility for the development and/or support of childcare services to which the Traveller community not only have access but are proactively included lies with a range of organisations in DLR. Among these are the County Childcare Committee, Southside Travellers, the County Council, and the range of other member organisations of the Traveller Interagency Group which comes under the auspices of the County Development Board. The approach of each of these organisations to the issue of Traveller childcare is outlined below.

5.1 DLRCCC

DLRCCC which, like all other childcare committees, is a working group of the County Development Board, has a Social Inclusion Sub-committee which focuses on community childcare and equality and diversity issues. When the 2007 – 2010 DLRCCC strategic plan was developed the membership of the Social Inclusion Sub-committee included FAS, SSPDLR, a Parent Representative, a community childcare representative, and Barnardos. Since that point the membership has expanded and now includes Southside

Travellers, St John of Gods/Carmona Services and the SSPDLR. The DLRCCC Social Inclusion Sub-committee met an average of eight times in each of the years 2007, 2008, and 2009.

The strategic plan 2007 – 2010 shows that DLRCCC has been active with regard to the childcare needs of Travelling community through its support of SCAN and its work prior to 2007 with the Childcare Steering Group of Southside Travellers. It has also supported Southside Travellers in its search for childcare premises. Recognising the need for a Traveller childcare facility, the plan includes three actions to support such a development:

- Support the Travelling community to access premises,
- Co-ordinate training for management and staff of the Traveller Childcare service, when that service is established.
- Collaborate with the County Development Board to implement the childcare aspects of their plan to support the Traveller community.

Since premises were not secured the second of these actions could not happen.

DLRCCC supported Southside Travellers in their ultimately unsuccessful attempt to secure childcare premises in relation to which an application for EOCP/NCIP capital funding could be made. In addition DLRCCC provided approval for the forwarding of the Dormant Accounts Playbus Application from Southside Travellers to Pobal.

DLRCCC also provides funding for a part-time Development Worker who is employed by SSPDLR and works with the Community childcare sector through SCAN. The Coordinator of DLRCCC is a member of the steering group which supports and directs the work of the SCAN Development Worker.

5.2 Southside Travellers

Southside Travellers was established in 1984 by a coalition of local residents and members of the Traveller community in response to a proposed eviction. Since then, the organisation has grown and become a significant voice in the social inclusion landscape of DLR. Southside Travellers works with over 140 families resident in the county through its core programmes:

- Financial, Administration and Resource Centre Management
- Promoting Awareness of Traveller Culture and Traditions
- Advocating on Accommodation
- Community Health and Well-Being
- Developing the Potential of Traveller Children and Young People
- Providing Education, Training and Employment Services and Supports

Southside Travellers now employs thirty five people and has fourteen women trainees. Of the thirty five employees twenty four are members of the Traveller Community. Of the thirty five, sixteen employees and one supervisor are employed under the FAS Community Employment scheme. Southside Travellers is

core funded through a range of supports from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Dun Laoghaire VEC, the Department of Education and Science, the Health Services Executive, Dundrum VEC and FAS. Several of the current part time staff were originally full time but had to reduce their hours due to childcare constraints.

Southside Travellers has recognised the need for childcare for the Traveller community for a long time, and with the support of several other local agencies sought to secure suitable premises or a site on which to establish a Traveller child care facility for the county. The capital funding stream for such a facility closed in 2009. When DLRCoCo were unable to provide a site or premises for a Traveller childcare facility Southside Travellers moved on to make an application for funds under the Dormant Account Fund Playbus Measure. The Playbus application process opened on January 11th 2008 and applications were due to be submitted by March 20th. Southside Travellers proposed that the bus would operate in the morning at Southside Travellers premises and in the afternoons at Traveller halting sites and group housing. Although the time span in which to submit this application was too short to secure additional sources of funding to meet the ongoing running costs, Pobal who administer the fund discussed the application and changes needed with Southside Travellers and invited them to resubmit a month after the original closing date. Southside Travellers sent letters to several bodies including the HSE, Department of Social Welfare, and the County Council in an attempt to secure funding for ongoing costs, but no such funding was available. Thus no further application was submitted. However, even if it had been resubmitted the criteria of having three years childcare experience would not have been met.

Although Southside Traveller's last work-plan names childcare as the second highest priority within the project the plan does not name children as a "direct target group" or identify specific actions which would attempt to resolve the lack of childcare. This is mentioned here for two reasons. First is that Southside Travellers works with very limited resources and as such is unlikely to have the staff or finances necessary to focus on all of the issues that arise. Secondly, it is evident that issues that are not given priority in terms of action tend to elicit a reactive approach to funding streams rather than a strategic approach to development.

The new Southside Travellers strategic plan *Southside Travellers: Building for the Future (Strategic Plan 2010 – 2012)* which will be launched shortly takes a different approach and contains actions which focus specifically on children. These include the development of an informal playroom for parent supervised play for 2 – 4 year olds (subject to success in getting an additional unit from which to operate this service), and of a mother and toddler group. In addition Southside Travellers has applied for €5,000 funding under the European Year to Combat Poverty to pilot a project which would develop the capacity of a targeted group of Traveller parents and children to develop and sustain an understanding of their children's early childhood developmental needs. Southside Travellers anticipates that this will actively support the children concerned to engage in the ECCE scheme which comes into effect in 2010. The application for funds states that the project would involve the cooperation and engagement of Traveller parents, SSPDLR, SCAN, and the County Childcare Committee.

5.3 *Southside Childcare Action Network*³⁰

Operating under the management of the SSPDLR, SCAN represents a group of statutory, voluntary and community interests as well as specific target groups including members of the travelling community and refugee/asylum seekers within the DLR area. SCAN members have been working together since 1997 to promote and implement a framework for community based childcare in the SSPDLR area. SCAN meets on a monthly basis, has an elected committee structure, and a range of sub groups which work on specific areas of SCAN strategy.

SCANs mission is *"To initiate and support the development of a high quality, integrated childcare strategy, through a community based network, responding to the needs of children and families in the SSPDLR area"*. The network, has a clear focus on the development and support of quality childcare services at community level and also on the promotion of social inclusion objectives through the increased provision of quality, affordable, community childcare provision targeted specifically at those most disadvantaged. Through the projects it has initiated and supported, SCAN has enabled the increased participation and re-entry of many women (in particular young single mothers, early school leavers, and those at risk of substance abuse) into education, training and employment.

SCAN is represented on the board of DLRCCC. Since June '03, the Childcare Development Worker who is employed by SSPDLR has been funded by the DLRCCC. The Coordinator of DLRCCC is also a member of the steering group which supports and directs the work of the Development Worker. SCAN has provided support to Southside Travellers in seeking to develop childcare for members of the Traveller community and in identifying and applying for funding streams.

5.4 *Traveller Interagency Group*

In March 2006 the Government High Level Group for Traveller Issues recommended the set up of Traveller Interagency Groups (TIG) across the country with the aim of coordinating the development of Traveller-related services and supports at local level. Each TIG draws up an integrated strategic plan for service delivery to Travellers. The County Manager chairs the DLR TIG, and the Department of Environment, Culture, and Community at DLR County Council provide administrative support. Members of the TIG in DLR are detailed in Box 4. The DLRCCC Interagency Steering Group established the "Better Services for Travellers" Action Plan and the Travellers Co-ordination Group promoted, supported, and monitored the implementation of the plan in DLR. The plan was made in line with government directives and addressed Traveller needs in the following areas: health, education/training, income/employment, culture, accommodation, and law and order.

The national report "Traveller Interagency Process: A Progress Report"³¹ identifies that one of the *"most salient challenges currently facing the Traveller interagency process (is) the impact of the recession on*

³⁰ This information is drawn from the SSPDLR website www.southsidepartnership.ie

³¹ Traveller Interagency Process: A Progress Report (Pobal 2008) available at www.pobal.ie

resources.” That report notes that this has been particularly felt by CDBs, many of which have *“lost personnel and have even less capacity to undertake administrative tasks and engage in the networking necessary to maintain interagency actions”*. This is on top of CDBs’ already reporting that they are underresourced to organise all interagency activities.

It suggests that the response to cutbacks is likely to be a concentration on core activities, dispensing with anything that might be seen as peripheral, and that this has already become evident in the unwillingness of some beneficiaries to commence projects, despite funding

being available. *“If interagency work is dispensed with”*, it says, *“gains made through Traveller involvement and the growth of Traveller representation will be lost”*. It further suggests that if relevant government departments and statutory agencies at national level are not wholehearted and vocal in their support, the process has little prospect of success in many local authority areas, and that while capacity and resource issues can be managed, TIGs need to be

convinced that the effort required is necessary to ensure that an already marginalised community is not further isolated by recession. This is not to suggest that the above is currently occurring in DLR, but is to say that all TIG committees operate in a national economic context where there is economic pressure to reduce activities.

Action J under the DLR county wide *“Better Service Delivery to Travellers”* plan 2007 – 2008 was to *“make childcare available to the Traveller community”*. To this end a goal was set to establish a centrally located crèche in the DLR area, train future crèche workers, and address the management requirements for the proposed crèche. Southside Travellers and SSPDLR were identified as the lead agencies, with the DLRCCC, Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (JELR), County Council, Local Employment Service, FAS, National Adult Literacy Agency, and Barnardos identified as support partners. In identifying possible funding sources it was made clear that only a site or premises was required at local level. It specified that JELR, the Department of Health, DLRCCC, County Council, and FAS could make funding or other resources available. It was also identified that funding for a feasibility study needed to be sourced. Ultimately it appears that this goal was not achieved because the County Council was not able to provide a suitable site or premises, and none of the named partners were in a position to provide financial support for the action.

Box 4: Membership of DLR TIG

- DLR County Council (Chair, and Departments of Community and Enterprise, Environment, Traveller Accommodation section, and Culture, Community /Amenities)
- County Dublin VEC
- Dunlaoghaire VEC
- Department of Education and Science
- Department of Social and Family Affairs
- FAS Community Services Loughlinstown
- Fingal Adult Education
- An Garda Síochána
- HSE
- SSPDLR
- Southside Travellers
- Venture Point

5.5 *Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council*

Although Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is part of the Traveller Interagency Group, they are included as a separate section here because of their core position regarding potential premises or sites for the development of childcare for the Traveller community. This section is sub divided into three sections as follows:

- Southside Travellers Attempts to Secure Premises in preparation for EOCP/NCIP fund application.
- County Council Policy on the Provision of Childcare and of Community Facilities in DLR
- Southside Travellers potential to Acquire a County Council Premises for Traveller Childcare

5.5.1 *Southside Travellers Attempts to Secure Premises in preparation for EOCP/NCIP fund application*

In anticipation of a possible application for capital funds under the EOCP/NCIP, Southside Travellers sought to secure from the County Council a suitable site or premises from which to set up and deliver Traveller managed childcare services. The proposed services would have been accessible to Traveller children and children from the wider community. Ultimately attempts to secure suitable premises were unsuccessful. A chronological account of the interaction between the County Council and Southside Travellers in relation to those attempts is set out below:

October 2004	Southside Travellers invited DLRCC Director of Housing as well as various Councillors to discuss a draft business plan and funding proposals for Traveller Childcare Facilities within the DLRCC area.
Feb/March 2005	Letter from Southside Travellers Manager sent to DLRCC Director of Housing inviting DLRCC to enter discussions to explore the possibility of a site or existing house being made available for Southside Travellers to develop childcare facilities in the Ballyogan/Sandyford area. Administrative Officer responded that the Council would need more specific information to determine whether it had suitable premises available. County Council also clearly expressed that “the Council would not be in a position to subsidise or financially assist such a proposal”, and, “the management, maintenance, insurance and security of the premises would be the full responsibility of Southside Travellers and the Council would have no involvement whatsoever”. ³² Southside Travellers advised the Council that potential childcare premises should be able to cater for 28 children with a maximum of 52 children up to 10 years of age, and that a space of approximately 120 square metres with adequate space for outdoor play and vehicles would be required.

³² Letter from DLRCoCo to Southside Travellers March 2005

- May 2005 Administrative Officer of County Council advised Southside Travellers that DLRCC was not in the position to facilitate Southside Travellers with a premises for childcare facilities
- June 2005 County Council Minutes show that a discussion took place at the Dun Laoghaire Area Council Meeting at which a County Council Senior Executive responded to Member queries about the Southside Travellers application for a site or premises, to the effect that the matter would be brought back as a “headed item” in the Dun Laoghaire Area Committee Meeting in September³³.
- July 2005 Discussion took place between the DLRCC Construction/Traveller Accommodation Administrative Officer and Dundrum Community Services regarding Traveller Childcare provision.
- Nov 2005 Dun Laoghaire Area Council Meeting minutes show that the Housing Department having considered all of the information/requirements submitted by Southside Travellers were unable to identify any suitable vacant premises in its housing stock for such a facility, and that land at Ballyogan Grove was not available because it was included for development in 2007 in the Council’s Social & Affordable Housing Action Plan 2004-2008. An additional reason for the decline was that there were site management difficulties within the adjacent Traveller Housing Scheme. The minutes also show that the Housing Department was prepared to consider the possibility of providing a site for such a facility in one of the sites included in the current Traveller Accommodation Programme, and would examine the feasibility of such a proposal³⁴.
The DLRCC Traveller Accommodation Unit offered a site at Rathmichael Road for the development of potential Traveller specific childcare facilities. This suggestion and the subsequent offer of a site at Rathmichael was declined by Southside Travellers because it was not considered to be a suitable location for a Traveller childcare facility given the geographical spread of the Traveller population in the County.

5.5.2 County Council Policy on the Provision of Childcare and of Community Facilities in DLR

DLR County Council documents note that in line with the “*Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities*” (DoEHLG, 2001), it will advocate for suitable locations for the provision of childcare facilities including in residential areas, employment nodes, large educational establishments, major towns/district/neighbourhood centres as well as areas convenient to public transport networks. They further

³³ Dunlaoghaire Area Council Meeting Minutes June 2005

³⁴ Dunlaoghaire Area Council Meeting Minutes November 2005

note that they fully support the development and delivery of accessible high quality and affordable childcare facilities to address the overall development needs of the County. In addition, it is Council policy to encourage the provision of childcare facilities as an integral part of proposals for new residential developments in line with the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government guidelines. Generally this takes the form of requiring one childcare facility with places for twenty children per seventy five dwellings. However, such facilities are reserved for children from the communities in which they are based, and thus are not likely to be accessible to the majority of Traveller Children in DLR.

Up to 2007 there was no formal policy on the provision/management of community facilities on council land. This led to questions arising as to the ownership and governance of facilities, and the existence of different working arrangements in such facilities around the county. In 2007 DLRCC adopted a “Facilities Management Policy” in order to support the strategic development of community facilities within the county. This policy includes that:

- DLR County Council Manager has directed that where there are projects being planned for Council Land and where capital funding is sought through various funding streams for such projects then the Council must be the project promoter not the local community group.
- Applications to the Council for premises or sites must show not only a proven need for the proposed service, but also that the contents of any proposal are in line with national policy and funding streams, and that the applicant body has a proven capacity to deliver the relevant service. If the Council decides to proceed with a facility they will often work in partnership with relevant community bodies but will retain the lead role in the management of new facilities.

Where empty County Council premises appear as available, it is important to note that vacancy does not necessarily mean availability since reduced funds and increasing pressure on County Council resources means that there is greater competition for those resources.

5.5.3 Southside Travellers Potential to Acquire a County Council Premises and/or Planning Permission for a Traveller Childcare Facility

In response to submissions on the Draft County Development Plan 2010 – 2016, the DLR county manager notes that he fully supports the development and delivery of accessible, high quality and affordable childcare facilities to address the overall needs of the County. While the Council is supportive of Southside Travellers efforts to achieve this goal, the Council is clear that it has “no financial or other resources available to facilitate such a development”.

Even if resources were available, a challenge for the Traveller community is that because Traveller children numbers are small relative to the overall population of children in the county and because there are other communities who may also be excluded from accessible, affordable childcare on the basis of their location, it may be difficult to demonstrate a need that is sufficient in terms of raw numbers for the allocation of council accommodation for the exclusive use of Traveller children. Previous Southside Travellers

documents do include provision for children from the wider community and this inclusion should continue. However, to secure County Council approval, even if a need is proven and space is available there is the additional challenge of needing to have proven ability and previous experience of managing a childcare facility before the Council would consider an application for accommodation. In addition, it is the case that because of increased demand on existing housing stock, Southside Travellers or any other community group are unlikely to be allocated premises for the foreseeable future. This is increasingly the case as there have been significant changes at national policy level with the introduction of the subvention structures and the ECCE scheme, which are placing severe pressure on some long established community childcare providers currently supported in accommodation units in the County.

The issue of planning permission is relevant to any potential development of Traveller childcare services in DLR. If such a facility was on County Council property a planning application under Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations would have to be made. This process is subject to a public consultation procedure. It requires that notice of the proposed development be given in the public press and that a site notice be erected. If any submissions or observations are received a report is presented to the members of the Council listing the names of objectors, a summary of the points made by them and the Local Authority's response. Arising from consideration of responses or objections a report is then prepared which sets out whether or not the proposed development can proceed as originally planned, as a modified proposal, or not at all. Part 8 comes into play for anything from road improvement schemes, to civic buildings and amenities such as the Samuel Beckett Centre in Ballyogan, community buildings, car parks, and remedial works.

Since Southside Travellers is not operating out of a council premises it is likely that the normal planning permission application process would apply in the event of establishing a childcare service within the existing or any new premises. This is separate to meeting the HSE childcare provision regulations. Planning and legal advice should be sought on this matter in particular because Southside Travellers is located in an industrial area and there may be health and safety issues which need to be examined.

Section 6 Research Results

6.1 Introduction

This section provides the results of research carried out in the Autumn of 2009, and combines those with the results of earlier research from 2005. The 2009 research included a survey of Traveller parents, a focus group of Traveller mothers, an in-depth interview with a Traveller member of Southside Travellers, and a focus group of community childcare providers. The 2009 survey resulted in forty completed survey forms. Because the themes covered in the survey and focus group processes overlap the results of both are combined in this section under the following sub headings.

- Profile of 2005 and 2009 research respondents and focus group participants,
- Current childcare arrangements of respondents,
- Research Participant views on the benefits of childcare,
- Type and quality of childcare needed,
- Childcare access barriers,
- Impact of lack of childcare arrangements,
- Community providers experience of working with traveller children in their facility,
- Attendance,
- Provider views on encouraging greater uptake of places by Traveller children,
- Affirming Traveller Identity,
- Provider engagement in equality and diversity training, and
- Research participant views on who is responsible for Traveller childcare provision

6.2 Profile of 2005 and 2009 Research Respondents and Focus Group Participants

6.2.1 Traveller Children Covered by the Research

Southside Travellers carried out a survey of Traveller childcare needs in 2001 and 2005. While the results of the 2001 survey are unavailable, Southside Travellers correspondence shows that the 2005 research culminated in a Childcare Business Plan. That plan identifies 126 Traveller families in DLR at that time with a total Traveller population estimated at six hundred people. Within those families there were 88 children under nine years of age as follows: 24 at 0 to 2 years of age, 27 of 3 to 5 years of age, and 37 between 6 and 9 years of age.

Those who completed the 2009 survey represent 114 children under the age of 14. Table 4 provides a breakdown of the 114 children covered by the survey. This number of children is closer to the 2008 Southside Travellers Youth Work Section survey results which show 146 children of this age in the Traveller community, than it is to the County Council 2009 Count number of 73.

Eleven Traveller women took part in a focus group which formed part of this research process. Six had children of preschool age and several more had children at school. In total, the women attending the focus group represented eight children of preschool age, eighteen of primary school age, and twenty nine children under the age of fourteen. Notwithstanding that the women were at different stages in the parenting process and that some had finished rearing their children, all contributed to the focus group process. A large proportion of the women present were taking part in childcare training and this may have influenced their responses. It is also certain that some of the focus group participants also completed the survey form, and so numerically combining the needs of the focus group participants and the survey respondents is inadvisable.

Table 4: Age Breakdown of Children Covered in 2009 Survey

Age Range	Total in Range
Under 1	8
1 to 3 years	22
4 to 6 years	32
7 to 10 years	29
11 to 14 years	23
total	114

6.2.2 Traveller Parent Living and Working Locations

Sixty five of the families identified in the 2005 research lived within a six mile radius of Southside Travellers. Table 5 shows that among those who responded to the 2009 survey nine women live in Sandyford, seven live in Ballyogan, and the remaining twenty three women who responded to question are spread across thirteen other areas of the county. Twenty eight of the forty responding women state that they are working. All but four of these are working in Sandyford. It is likely that a large proportion of these women are working or training at Southside Travellers but this cannot be confirmed because the survey only asked respondents to identify the location of their work and not their actual workplace. Eleven respondents are not working, and one did not respond to this question.

Table 5: Living and Working Location

Live in	Work in			Not Working	Total
	Sandyford	Bray	Not Stated		
Ballybrack	3				3
Ballyogan	7				7
Blackrock	1				1
Cherrywood				1	1
Cois Cairn		1			1
Firhouse	2				2
Leopardstown			1		1
Loughlinstown	2	1			3
Rathfarnham	1			1	2
Rathmichael				1	1
Sallynoggin				2	2
Sandyford	7			2	9
Shankhill		2		2	4
Stepaside				1	1
Stillorgan	1			1	2
Total	24	4	1	11	40

6.2.3 Community Providers' Focus Group

Representatives of five community childcare providers attended a focus group on the issue of Traveller childcare provision. The five who attended have capacity of between twenty and seventy places in their respective facilities; some are full to capacity while others are not. Most have waiting lists for next September. Many parents will put their child's name on more than one waiting list, and so a waiting list does not always imply a shortage of places. However, as one participant noted *"I'd have five or six names looking for places in January, and they won't get them unless someone leaves"*. Another participant has a waiting list of five who would take a place in their afterschool programme now. One who is currently full to capacity has a waiting list of thirty children for September 2010, and given that they have a capacity of thirty six and that many of their children will be remaining for another year, they are significantly oversubscribed.

Four of the five who attended the community providers' focus group either currently have, or have previously had, Traveller children in their facility. The one who has never had Traveller children in their facility is clear that all children are welcome. Two providers described that they had turned Travellers away because of lack of spaces at the time that they applied, and when those children were followed up later they had secured places with Barnardos. A separate participant stated that *"we have had a number of Traveller families on the waiting list but when we've come around to offer places they've actually been un-contactable or have moved from the locality"*. Another participant described the lengths to which their service had gone to inform local Traveller families of the availability of the service.

When the community providers at the focus group were asked how far their facility was from the nearest halting site or group housing, most were within ten to twenty minutes walk. One focus group participant noted that there are not a lot of Traveller families in her area, and while another felt that although distance might be an issue it is *"hard to tell whether that is actually the reason why more Travellers are not in (the) centre"*. One stated that while there were no halting sites or group housing near their facility there were Traveller families living in the area and that these families had been approached to let them know that childcare was available. Participants noted that some Traveller children from one area go to the Traveller pre-school in St Kieran's in Bray.

Those present were also asked if they had ever advertised their service directly to the Traveller Community. The responses show that levels of advertisement in general are low because historically the services have had no trouble filling places and thus advertising hasn't been seen as a need. Exceptions to this were one centre which includes information about their childcare facility in their bi-monthly newsletter, and another who advertises in health clinics. The SCAN development worker who was present at the focus group pointed out that many Travellers wouldn't attend health clinics because visiting nurses come to the halting sites or group housing. Those present felt that word of mouth, Barnardos, and social workers were the main ways that Travellers knew about their service.

6.3 Current Childcare Arrangements of Respondents

6.3.1 Overview of Respondent Current Arrangements

Thirty one women provided information on “who is minding their child now”. As is evident from Table 6, the children of twenty two women are cared for by relatives or friends, five have their children in a crèche, three have children with childminders, and one has her child in preschool. While the majority of women specify that they are using some form of childcare only fourteen children from nine families are identified as being in “paid” childcare. Paid childcare appears to have been understood as including payment made to relatives. It is important to note that the phrasing of the question as “who is taking care of your children now” appears to have been interpreted in some cases as meaning “right now” and thus the responses may not be reflective of a daily or weekly arrangement. All of the eight preschool age children of focus group participants were being minded by a relative and seven additional children currently take part in afterschool provision.

Relative/Friend	22
Crèche	5
Childminder	3
Other (preschool)	1
Total	31

The survey asked respondents if they used a local childcare service, and if they did whether this service was a private or community facility³⁵. Twelve of the women who responded to this question said that they used a local childcare service, and eleven of those twelve said they used community childcare. It appears however, that the terms “service”, “community”, and “private” may not have been fully understood. Cross referencing responses shows, for example, that five who said they use community childcare have their children minded by friends or relatives, one is identified as being cared for by a childminder, one is in a preschool, and two are in a “crèche”. Thus relying on these results as a basis for saying how many of the surveyed group use community based childcare facilities is inadvisable.

6.3.2 Cost of Current Childcare Arrangements

Seven of the 2009 survey respondents stated what they pay for childcare on a monthly basis. One respondent who has three children pays a total of €400 per month for that care, the equivalent of just over €133 per child. Another pays €144 per month, and the one woman who says that her child is in a paid childminding setting pays €200 a month for that care. The four women who identified that their children were in a paid crèche pay €60, €142, €160, and €200 per month respectively for that service

6.3.3 Satisfaction and Preference with Childcare Arrangements

Sixteen respondents say that they are happy with their current childcare arrangement, and five gave no information. Of the five who gave no answer three specify that their children are in school.

³⁵ They were also given the option of saying that they “don’t know”

Nineteen respondents who say that they are not happy with their current arrangement, and four of the sixteen who are happy, say that they would prefer an alternative arrangement. Only seventeen of these twenty three women identified a specific type of childcare that they would prefer for their family. Table 7 gives an overview of those preferences and shows that ten respondents would prefer a crèche, two would prefer an afterschool arrangement, four would prefer drop in or playschool, and one would prefer a relative cared for her child.

Table 7: Current and Preferred Childcare Arrangements

Current Arrangement ↓	Preferred Arrangement			
	Crèche	Afterschool	Drop in or Playschool	Relative/Friend
Relative/Friend	6	2	3	
Crèche	1 (*)			1
Childminder	2			
Afterschool	1			
Self			1	
Total in each preferred arrangement category	10	2	4	1

* Although this individual is currently in a crèche she would prefer a crèche located nearer to her area

It is evident from the current childcare arrangement section of this survey analysis, that the Traveller community rely heavily on relatives or friends to mind their children, and two respondents make the point that it is not always possible or fair to rely on relatives as they may have other commitments.

6.4 Research Participant Views on the Benefits of Childcare

Survey respondents were asked, “If one of your children attended a childcare service and your other children didn’t, did you notice any difference when they went to school?” Twenty seven respondents provided no data and two said that there was no difference. The remaining eleven women felt that there was a difference and identified these as including that the child who had been in crèche went to school much easier, was more confident, more used to the environment, and had more interest as a result of their time in formal childcare than the child who had not attended formal childcare. The following respondent comments demonstrate the differences that they noticed.

“They were much more confident and knew the basic abc’s and 123’s”,

“Both my youngest children attended nursery school in England. I found this very good for my child’s learning and found it prepared my children for school”

“Yes, the child that went to the creche was more advanced”

Traveller women in the focus group similarly identified several benefits that professional childcare provision can offer to their children. These include;

- Mixing with other children,
- Preparing children for starting school,

- Helping with homework,
- Mixing with children their own age,
- Gaining independence, and
- General development.

6.5 Type and Quantity of Childcare Needed

There is no doubt that Traveller childcare is needed, and no doubt that women have left work and training programmes because of lack of childcare. The following comment from the in-depth interview process makes this point clear.

“I know I lost four after last Christmas, husbands weren’t willing to mind the kids and they were depending on sisters and brothers, and they had maybe four or five kids of their own and then it would affect absenteeism as well because if my fella has chicken pox ... I can’t send him over to my sister who has five kids. You just can’t load it onto someone. FAS pays €37 a week for each child from the training programme, but most of them get their sisters or family to mind the kids. I think we have only five women who applied for the childcare allowance this year ... You give them a couple of weeks to try and get childcare and then he won’t mind them and he said he’d mind them, and then they do if for a few days, and then it’s a hit and miss thing, he mightn’t get up or he might have a few days work, and it falls through.”.

That there were only five women who applied for the childcare allowance at Southside Travellers is not evidence of low need, it is evidence of insufficient childcare to meet the needs of other women who have dropped out or who have not considered engaging in training or employment because of a lack of childcare. This is affirmed by thirty of the 2009 respondents who said that they had a current need for childcare. Twenty seven of these women specified the time of the day for which they require childcare, with sixteen having a morning only requirement, five having an afternoon only requirement, and two having an evening only requirement. The remaining four need a combination of those times (Table 8). When the women were asked how many days childcare they needed, twenty six said that they need it five days per week (Table 9). Focus group participants identified eleven children from their families would use afterschool provision if it was available, and that a Playbus would be good for the Traveller community.

Table 8
Current Childcare Need/ Desire

Morning only	16
Afternoon only	5
Evening only	2
Morning and afternoon	3
Afternoon and evening	1
Not needed	13
Total	40

Table 9
Number of Days Childcare is Required

Number of Days	Number of Respondents
2 Days	2
3 days	1
4 Days	1
5 Days	26
don't need it/no info	10
Total	40

6.6 *Childcare Access Barriers*

The business plan which concluded the 2005 Traveller childcare needs research affirms the information provided in sections two and three of this report, and lists its key findings as follows:

- There were no childcare facilities for Traveller children in DLR,
- Access to other childcare facilities were denied because of,
 - A lack of places,
 - Unwillingness to accept Traveller children,
 - Unwillingness of some Travellers to avail of services in the settled community and/or
 - A lack of capacity to pay for the service
- There was a growing need for childcare facilities in the Traveller community because, while the overall population remained steady, there were increasing numbers of Travellers working, taking part in training courses or education, or seeking such opportunities.
- Lack of childcare facilities was a barrier to progress for Travellers, especially Traveller women.

The 2005 business plan also identified that the most convenient location for a childcare facility for Traveller children was in the Sandyford/Ballyogan area where *“many Travellers attend training programmes and work”*. The 2009 research asked respondents whether they had completed the 2005 Southside Travellers survey, and if so whether they had secured childcare after that survey. Eleven of the current research group had contributed to the 2005 research and of those only one had secured childcare after completing the survey.

Twenty two of the total forty respondents in the 2009 research said that they had had difficulty securing childcare either in the past or at present. Eight women specified that they found that waiting lists were full and that they couldn't get a place. Three raised the cost of childcare as a barrier. Focus group participants echoed this difficulty with several stating that that they had found that waiting lists were full.

Three women identified the location of childcare as a barrier but this affected each woman differently. One said that there was none in her area, another stated that there was no suitable crèche near her job, and the third stated that she does some sewing work in the evenings and can't find childcare for that time or in the school holidays. Four women specified that they had difficulty finding childminders or babysitters and another woman specifically mentioned that there is *“no one to take care of small kids”*.

6.7 *Impact of Lack of Childcare Arrangements*

When the women were asked if they had ever turned down employment or a training course due to lack of childcare twenty two said they had, twelve said they had not, and six gave no information. The comments provided by respondents in relation to having turned down work or childcare make general reference to having looked for and not found childcare. They also reflect a clear need for childcare for children younger than school age. The following comments help to demonstrate this issue:

- *“in the past when children were younger before school, I turned down work”*,
- *“because at the time I could not get my child into a crèche”*,

- *"Before the kids were school age I left (Southside Travellers) because of lack of childcare".*

One respondent raised the distance from childcare services as a reason for turning down work or employment, while others were specific about what they had turned down, or when it had happened. For example two women mention FAS courses and another says *"I was offered a place on a training scheme two years ago, couldn't get childcare places for children, so I had to turn a place down for a scheme"*. These views were echoed by the focus group participants who also identified that childcare provision would allow the women to take part in training, and work opportunities, and allow them to attend doctor visits, shop, and/or "get peace".

6.8 Community Providers Experience of Working with Traveller Children in their Facility.

Those who took part in the community providers' focus group were asked to describe their experience of working with the Traveller children who used their service. One stated succinctly that *"There was never any comment or trouble"*. And another stated that *"Generally the other children wouldn't be aware of what community they came from they'd just be a new child. We found that with previous children that came through and have now moved on, unless someone actually said that X is a Traveller you wouldn't necessarily be aware."*

Another focus group participant ultimately had a very positive experience which had a difficult beginning, but that difficulty was resolved through open communication between all parties.

"There was no problem from other children or from parents. But the mum was very sensitive. When she came initially her little boy wasn't old enough, we had an insurance thing where you couldn't take a child that was under two years and ten months, and he was two years and eight months. So I explained that when he was old enough we'd take him, and I got the feeling that she didn't believe me, and I was wondering what to do about it, maybe I would contact her again. And then a social worker contacted me and said that the mum had got this feeling that we didn't want her child. So I explained to the social worker that it was nothing like that at all, and she had a chat with her and then the mum came back and we had a chat and I explained to her that it's the same rule for everybody and that the playschool is open to everybody. And after that she was fine. But initially she had a sensitivity about it".

Another provider has had both a positive and a negative experience of providing childcare for Traveller children.

"We had one little boy on his own who was perfect as everybody else. His mum did her day (at that stage we used to have parents do a day) and mum took part and he was super. But the other two were difficult children, and no matter we would speak to mum and you were automatically accused of treating them

differently, it wasn't easy. She just had the attitude that I'm a poor Traveller and you're putting me down. You didn't know when they were going to be there, if you had known you could have organised an extra pair of hands because they were work. And it could be organised if you knew when they were going to be there. And we were a community run place and the mums helped out but that particular mum wasn't interested at all. ... (and) ... Initially they were fine and then they'd start missing a day or two and then they'd miss a week or two. I think at one stage they did go away for family reasons"

The focus group participant indicated that all of the other mothers did their day in the crèche. She also noted that dropping off and picking up was an issue and that on several occasions the boys mentioned above were not picked up on time. Attempts at resolution of the difficulties that arose did not succeed. In response to this point another focus group member stated that their mother *"may not have had a culture of dropping off and picking up"*

6.9 Attendance

Community provider focus group participants were asked about child attendance in terms of any effect absenteeism might have on a facility covering their running costs. One respondent noted that when she had a Traveller child payment wasn't an issue because payment was made through the supplementary welfare system. Another responded that she *"Remember(ed) when (they) had children there was one who was very good, but the other two were very hit and miss, and if they didn't come you didn't get paid. You have two children taking up places that you aren't getting paid for and you have to cover your costs"*.

6.10 Provider Views on Encouraging Greater Uptake of Places by Traveller Children

Focus group participants were asked if there was anything they could do to encourage greater uptake of places by Traveller children. Some suggested directing advertising directly at halting sites, and one noted that a member of their committee had taken that approach without success. She commented,

"We've had some members of the committee go down to halting sites and actually talk to parents of the children, and they're just not interested. We've tried and we've gone down and said that places are available do you want to put your child's name down, and they've just never come forward. We've never refused a Traveller child. I know someone on our committee goes down a lot and encourages them to come"

It was also noted that the new ECCE scheme might encourage greater uptake since cost was often a prohibitive factor to engagement. In that context the need to be three years and four months to avail of the ECCE scheme was raised. One respondent suggested that because the ECCE scheme will be funded by the state it might, like school, be considered more official. She commented;

“So personally I think – do they go to primary school and if they do then they value it because it’s state run, so with the free preschool year they might value it because it’s state run, because you know the way “it’s just mothers that run that place”, so it might be more official with the free preschool year.”

It was also pointed out that distance is a factor and that most people who need childcare, whether they are from the Traveller or settled community, like for it to be very close to home.

“I’m sure having preschools on the site, not to divide, but in our own housing estates we want one up the road, we’re not going to go all the way across town, so near to or in sites because then you would have your transport problems solved as well. I can’t see how we’d get people to come that distance, as a mother myself I’d always go for the one that’s up the road”

6.11 Affirming Traveller Identity

The Traveller Women focus group participants were asked to identify the main things they would like childcare workers to know about Traveller culture, and the main things they would suggest childcare workers should do so that a Traveller child would feel they were included and respected. There was some discussion within the group about whether or not there is a Traveller culture today, and a comment that with the curtailing of the nomadic way of life maybe there wasn’t one. Others however, felt that it was still very important to raise Traveller children with traditional Traveller cultural values, and to “stick to your traditions”. What is important about that discussion is not so much that there was disagreement, but that members of any minority culture do not necessarily hold the same views any more than do all members of a dominant culture. Participants did not specify which elements of Traveller culture should be known by childcare workers, but did discuss how childcare providers should promote the inclusion of Traveller children in their care. Their views included that:

- All children should be treated equally,
- Childcare staff should be used to working with Traveller children,
- Childcare staff should have a knowledge of Traveller culture,
- The person working with Traveller children should be a Traveller,
- They should understand how to work with a diverse group of children, and
- Materials used in a childcare setting should reflect Traveller culture.

Community Provider focus group participants were asked if there is anything in particular that they do to reflect Traveller culture in their childcare setting. The following comments give a general feel of focus group participants’ response to this question.

“Nothing specific but as a whole we’d link in with various aspects with Pavee point, so I suppose we’ve taken on bits for the centre as a whole, but not necessarily for the children specifically. We have posters on the way into the playschool, for instance all the different occupations from an architect to politician to a nurse, but at the end it said about them being from the Traveller community, the one we had and used was people who had progressed through different careers”.

“And even like there’s a little book about places about where people live, and there was a picture in that of a Traveller family in a caravan. But that’s got lost over the years”.

“The posters came with a pack that had cards with different types of lifestyle, caravans, and I remember a particular picture of someone reading a book, but it was inside in the caravan and the two children with their wellies on them reading a story, but that is a while ago now”

Some focus group participants also noted that a centre did not need to have Traveller children attending in order for it to be important to reflect Traveller culture in the childcare setting.

“I think just the fact that you don’t have Travellers (in your centre) shouldn’t mean that you don’t have the material, because it’s making the children aware of their society. You’re picking up ideas, I remember seeing little caravans for play, and we had that when the boys were there. But there’s no reason not to have it when the boys aren’t there.”

To place the affirmation or otherwise of Traveller culture in context participants in the community providers’ focus group were also asked about their practice with regard to reflecting a wider diversity of cultures. They were specifically asked a) whether there are any specific ways in which they ensure that children from minority cultures feel their culture is acknowledged in their childcare centre, and b) whether they have materials, toys, or books in their centres that reflect different cultures and/or ethnicities. It is clear that equality and diversity as a general issue is taken seriously and that those present at the focus group do have a focus on inclusion of minority cultures in their childcare setting. SCAN, for instance produced a pack showing children in non traditional roles, such as boys pushing buggies, and children from several ethnic minority cultures. The following comments demonstrate the commitment of focus group participants to general equality and diversity principles.

“We have a little book called ‘celebrations’ which we use and we read it at the beginning of the year to talk about celebrations and what a celebration is and then go on from that, and usually Halloween is the first that comes up, and then Thanksgiving, We have a little girl whose parents are American. And then Hanukah and we do have a Jewish girl and her mum is going to come in and help us celebrate that, we try and talk about Ramadan; we have some Muslim children from one family. Other than that there are the

materials and trying to represent things in that, and the figures are multicultural – we don't have any Caucasian dolls left!"

"When I first started I suggested to the staff doing theme weeks and we were coming up to Chinese new year, and the response was oh but we don't have any Chinese children, so I said no I'd like you to go down that road, and then quite soon afterwards by chance we did have two Chinese children. And for them I believe it was a learning lesson about having cultural theme weeks no matter what's coming up. My point was that if you don't have ... (minority cultures) ... now, children will come across them in school or in other settings."

"We have the dressing up clothes as well from different cultures, even though I don't think we have anyone other than Irish this year. But I don't think that matters, when we got a bit of money we got all the dolls, African and Asian, different cultures, not just black or white, like white with a different look, and we don't tend to call them toys so much as equipment really because they are chosen by the centre for a particular reason. And I do know that one of our children, her grandparents are Chinese, her mother is Chinese, but the doll she always picks to play with is a Chinese doll, her mum looks like she's from Connemara and she speaks Irish, but this is the doll she always goes for"

"We do a thing with the globe, and it came up around Christmas and we had some Indian children at the time and a Chinese boy and they were going back for prolonged Christmas breaks, and we got the globe out and looked at where they were going, and we talked about this is where so and so's mummy is from and they're going back to see granny and granddad."

6.12 Provider Engagement in Equality and Diversity Training

All of those who took part in the focus group had taken part in equality and diversity training. The training attended was delivered by a range of organisations including the IPPA, SSPDLR, Pavee Point, and the equality and diversity modules within the FETAC level five childcare training programme. Participants noted that there was a lot of training quite a few years ago, but that given the stability of the current core staff in community crèches, and the move away from being fully dependent on CE workers, the need for ongoing equality and diversity training had reduced. One participant noted that staff in her centre have done a lot of training on this issue and don't feel the need for further training. SCAN recently planned an equality and diversity training event, but it was cancelled due to lack of interest.

While SCAN training is sometimes targeted at specific levels of staff (core, CE, supervisors etc), equality and diversity training is still available for anyone who wants to take part. In addition, most CE childcare workers are encouraged to take part in the FETAC level five training, which has an equality and diversity module.

6.13 Research Participant Views on Who is Responsible for Traveller Childcare Provision in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown

Traveller women focus group participants were asked who they thought should be involved in planning childcare for members of the Traveller community. Those identified in response to this question were as follows:

- The Mothers,
- The Department of Education,
- The County Childcare Committee,
- Youth Workers,
- Childcare workers,
- School Principals,
- DLR County Council (as funders), and
- Southside Travellers.

Participants emphasised the importance of funding for Traveller Childcare Provision.

The literature review conducted for this report shows the importance of parental involvement in Traveller childcare development. Community providers describe the involvement of Traveller parents in their facilities in two ways. Firstly there are, as noted above, some cases where Traveller mothers along with their settled counterparts help out in a community setting. The second form of involvement seems to be around discussing either sensitivities or difficulties that arise, and those relationships vary from family to family. For example, one provider attending the focus group noted that their centre had *“Built up a good working relationship with the parents of the Traveller children as well, where if an issue arose they’d feel that they can approach directly and I’d know them by their first name”*. In an instance where difficulties were present another provider noted that *“We discussed a lot with that particular mother to try and get the children to settle and to try and sort out between Barnardos and ourselves what would be best for the children”*. None of the community providers described Traveller involvement in the development of services.

Section 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

The way in which we define a problem influences the way in which that problem is resolved. It is clear that in considering Traveller Childcare Needs we are looking at more than simply the provision of childcare places. Thus when considering Traveller childcare needs several questions need to be asked:

1. What are the childcare needs of Traveller children?
2. What are the childcare needs of Traveller parents?
3. What is the importance of Traveller childcare for society as a whole?
4. Why have Traveller childcare needs not been met to date?
5. What are the childcare engagement experiences of Community Providers and Traveller families?
6. What is the role of Traveller parents in the development of non familial childcare options?
7. Who has responsibility for ensuring that Traveller childcare needs are met?

These questions are discussed below and are followed by a series of recommendations aimed at improving Traveller childcare provision in DLR.

7.1 What are the childcare needs of Traveller children?

It is clear from that literature that Traveller children can and do benefit from early childhood care and education. Given the challenges that Traveller children experience in the education system as a whole early intervention which includes preschool and the zero to three period when children are at their most receptive age of development, has the potential to permanently affect their development and can generate improved engagement with the education system. Poor school readiness can be improved through early intervention, and may reduce the disproportionately large numbers of Traveller children assessed as having “special needs”. This is particularly the case where early intervention has a focus on oral language development, preschool literacy and numeracy, and creating familiarity with the tools of educational assessment such as jigsaw puzzles, picture sequencing, block designs, and following patterns. Given these facts, there is a need to broaden Traveller access to childcare, and to support and track Traveller children’s uptake of the ECCE preschool year. An associated issue with regard to school readiness and achievement is that Traveller children may benefit from increased numbers of parents, childcare workers, and teachers having greater expectations of what they can achieve.

However, accessing childcare is only part of the picture. Traveller childcare needs must also be viewed from the point of view of the environment in which that care is provided. While it is clear that multicultural education is taking place it is important to acknowledge that teaching about a culture is very different from valuing a culture. We can teach about a culture on the basis of our knowledge of that culture and because there is a requirement that we teach it, but that does not necessarily mean that we place a value on the culture. Thus in this regard it is necessary for providers to have an anti-bias approach that goes beyond inclusive materials and curriculum, or attending diversity and equality training. It must inform policy, practice, and engagement with children and their parents, and become embedded in the culture of the

childcare provider organisation. As noted elsewhere in this report an anti-bias approach also requires that staff engage in ongoing reflective processes at a personal and organisational level and maintain awareness of new thinking on anti-bias approaches as they develop.

7.2 *What are the childcare needs of Traveller parents?*

Traveller parents, like their settled counterparts, should be free to choose the circumstances under which they send their children to childcare. This is true notwithstanding the additional benefits that members of the settled and Traveller communities believe that Traveller children can gain from early childhood education.

It is difficult given the disparity between Southside Travellers and DLRCoCo Traveller counts³⁶ to say precisely how many Traveller children would take up childcare places if they were available. It is however clear that:

- a) Traveller parents need more childcare than is currently available to them, and that the main reason Traveller parents who took part in this research seek childcare is to engage in training or work.
- b) There are many Traveller parents who have left or not engaged in training or employment because of the unavailability of childcare places.
- c) There is insufficient supply to meet the demand. The DLR childcare mapping process showed that there is no Traveller childcare provision in DLR and that there is a need for quality, affordable community childcare facilities in all areas of DLR as well as a need for afterschool services in Ballybrack, Dundrum, and Dunlaoghaire.

The children of the Traveller parents who took part in this research are predominantly cared for by relatives and while there is no implication that the care provided by relatives is of other than good quality, twenty three respondents say that they would prefer an alternative arrangement. The preferred arrangements identified include crèche, afterschool care, playschool, drop-in facility, and in one case a relative. The time of day for which childcare is required varies, with the greatest requirement being for morning care, fewer requiring afternoon or evening care, and four requiring full-day care. Barriers respondents identified to accessing childcare other than that provided by relatives were identified as including waiting lists, cost, and location of facilities.

The bias in the research results on which this report is based exists because the focus group and survey respondents represent a disproportionately large number of Traveller women who are employed or engaged in training. Several respondents are engaged in childcare training and this will most likely have influenced their views on the benefits of childcare in a child's life. However, it is important that consideration is also given to Traveller parents who have not previously had their children in childcare. While it is not appropriate to assume that those not in work or training are unaware of the benefits of childcare it may be beneficial to work with Traveller parents to promote the benefits of childcare and of engagement in the ECCE year for its own merit and as a precursor to more positive engagement with primary school. The people best

³⁶ The number of children accounted for ranges from 73 to 146.

placed to do this are Traveller women who have observed benefits in their own children as a result of childcare experiences.

7.3 What is the importance of Traveller childcare for society as a whole?

All children need to engage with and be aware of their peers from other cultures. Thus while it is important for children from the Traveller community to access childcare, it is also important that children from settled communities engage with their Traveller counterparts in an atmosphere of respect for and value of difference. The previously noted point of the distinction between teaching about a culture and valuing a culture is critical in terms of educating children in an age appropriate manner about the five stages of developing prejudice – awareness, identification, attitude, preference, and prejudice, - and the link between prejudice and active discrimination. This is necessary for both Traveller and settled children.

The economic and human cost of not providing childcare to members of the Traveller community has been noted elsewhere. While the human cost is most relevant to members of the Traveller community who are failed by the education and childcare systems, there is also a human cost for the settled community who, through lack of positive engagement, fail to gain from what the Traveller community have to offer to society as a whole.

7.4 Why have Traveller childcare needs not been met to date?

There are several reasons why Traveller childcare needs have not been met to date:

1. Private provider childcare is inaccessible to most Travellers because of how much it costs.
2. Community childcare has, for the most part, been inaccessible because most community based CCSS funded providers have a requirement to cater for children from their geographic community before opening places beyond that group, and historically there have been few vacant places. This is in addition to the fact that, as identified in the DLRCCC childcare mapping process, there is a general under-provision of community childcare places in the county.
3. Where community childcare does exist it is often quite distant from Traveller halting sites or group housing.
4. Travellers have perceived as prejudice their exclusion from community childcare facilities and this may have led to reluctance to approach such facilities, or to take up places even when directly approached with the offer of a place.
5. In Traveller culture it has predominantly been the case that childcare is sought only when a Traveller mother is engaged in work or training. Otherwise children are cared for in the home. The difficulty Travellers have experienced in securing childcare places may enhance that preference and contribute to a reluctance to seek childcare outside the home.
6. Historically there has been segregation in the provision of Traveller preschool facilities and integration has only recently become national policy. This may have contributed to a sense that Traveller children did not need to be catered for in mainstream childcare. In addition, while segregation was policy and

Traveller preschools were established to meet the early education needs of Traveller children, there was no Traveller preschool in DLR.

7. Although making childcare available to the Traveller community is included in the Better Services for Travellers plan for the county (Action J), and that includes an intention to “provide a centrally located crèche in DLR area”, the absence of the provision of a site for this development, and consequent non-eligibility for capital funding available at that time, followed by the recent move to a policy of integration, means that this action cannot be achieved.

In response to submissions on the Draft County Development Plan 2010 – 2016, the DLR county manager notes that he “fully supports the development and delivery of accessible, high quality and affordable childcare facilities to address the overall needs of the County”. The Council is also clear that it does not have the resources to support such provision. However, full support for quality accessible childcare for an excluded group without the provision of a site or premises on which to establish such facilities will mean that organisations like Southside Travellers are curtailed in their attempts to establish Traveller managed affordable childcare facilities for the Traveller and wider community.

8. The application timescale for the Dormant Account Fund Playbus Measure was too short to secure ongoing funding for the operation of the Playbus. However, notwithstanding that shortcoming in the application, and the submission date extension granted by Pobal to secure such funding, it is unlikely that the application would have been accepted because it did not meet other funding criteria such as three years’ experience of childcare provision. Nonetheless it is important to note that the absence of co-funding for ongoing costs was a critical factor in the application not succeeding, and that a body like Southside Travellers which secures funding on a project basis does not have the flexibility of finance to divert current funding to such an operation.
9. The variety of responses to the community childcare provider survey (2006) demonstrates that among responding providers there is no clear policy of inclusion other than a general openness to all children in the area. Acceptance of all children will not promote the inclusion of minorities unless it is accompanied by anti-bias policies and proactive engagement of minority groups.

7.5 What are the childcare engagement experiences of Community Providers and Traveller families?

As noted above Traveller parents who took part in the survey and focus group for this research have had difficulty accessing childcare. However, where they have accessed childcare there are some parents who clearly identify the positive difference it made to their children including mixing with other children, increased confidence, readiness for school, gaining independence, and general development. Where unsuccessful attempts were made to find places there was a sense of being excluded because of being Travellers and of centres refusing to put children’s names on a waiting list.

It is important to acknowledge that the Traveller community has experienced racism and exclusion in Irish society. Oppression which exists over time becomes internalised and members of an oppressed community then come to expect prejudice and exclusion, and as a result there can be sensitivity to events such as a refusal for a childcare place, even where that refusal is handled respectfully. It is important that providers respond to that sensitivity in a proactive rather than a defensive manner and seek to a) have good customer relations with members of the Traveller community, b) have an understanding of why members of the Traveller community may be sensitive when a childcare place is refused, and c) work cooperatively with other agencies where necessary to handle any difficulties that may arise.

In as much as Traveller parents had mixed experiences of accessing community childcare, community providers who took part in the focus group had varying experiences of caring for Traveller children in their facility. Some had positive experiences, some had experiences which had to be worked through to a positive conclusion, and some had more negative experiences. What is interesting is that the language used in describing the experience focuses in some cases on the absence of negativity and difference rather than the presence of positivity and diversity. Comments such as *“There was never any comment or trouble”*, and *“Generally the other children wouldn’t be aware of what community they came from they’d just be a new child. We found that with previous children that came through and have now moved on, unless someone actually said that X is a Traveller you wouldn’t necessarily be aware”*, demonstrate this point. Traveller children need to feel that their culture is valued in their childcare setting. Being thought of as “the same” is valid from an equality standpoint, all children are equal, but it is not valid from a diversity standpoint; there are differences and these need to be respected and valued. Not being recognised as diverse from but equal to their settled counterparts may have a negative impact on Traveller children’s sense of self development.

Notwithstanding these comments it is important to stress that the providers present at the focus group were active in having and using multicultural equipment in their childcare setting. Members of the community provider focus group noted that their staff have done a lot of training on this issue and don’t feel the need for further training. A consequence of this is that SCAN recently cancelled a planned equality and diversity training event due to lack of interest. However, it may be useful for staff, as noted earlier in this report, to reflect on whether or not Traveller culture is as articulated and valued in the childcare setting as Chinese new year or Ramadan, and to attend workshops that include tools for self reflection, reflection on practice, discussion of successes and difficulties, and exploration of putting an anti-bias culture into practice throughout the organisation and not just in the educational curriculum.

7.6 What is the role of Traveller parents in the development of non familial childcare options?

The literature reviewed for this report makes clear the importance of including Traveller parents in the education system. There is no reason to think that this is any less important in the childcare and afterschool care settings. As noted in the Irish Travellers in Education: Strategies for Equality document *“The lack of*

parental involvement as partners in their individual children's education, as decision makers within the various layers of the system and as managers of educational institutions, is perhaps the most serious obstacle to equality for the Traveller Community".³⁷

Traveller parents should be involved in the design and implementation of an anti bias approach, and their involvement needs to go beyond the concept of parental engagement in promoting the education of their own children as is the case with the Early Start programme. While that engagement is important in terms of supporting a more positive experience of primary education among Traveller children, it is critically important that Travellers have representation at county level. The current inclusion of Southside Travellers on the Social Inclusion Sub-committee of DLRCCC is an important positive move in this regard.

There is an additional challenge in the fact that community childcare is managed primarily by residents of the community in which the facility is located. The fact that for the most part Travellers are not located in areas where community childcare is operating under the CCSS scheme mitigates not only access to those CCSS services but against having strategic input on inclusion of Traveller children and on the development of anti-bias approaches. While this cannot be defined as discrimination it is a structure which inadvertently excludes Traveller input into community childcare development in the county.

7.7 Who has responsibility for ensuring that Traveller childcare needs are met?

The literature review conducted for this report identifies several bodies that have a role in supporting the development of Traveller access to childcare. These include DLRCCC, DLRCoCo, Southside Travellers, SSPDLR, and the range of other member organisations of the Traveller Interagency Group which comes under the auspices of the County Development Board. All of these organisations have had that responsibility for some time and several have been at a minimum verbally supportive, and at a maximum actively supported applications for childcare funding for the Traveller Community. The development of Traveller childcare has historically been hindered by the absence of a location on which to establish a childcare facility, and Action J of the Better Services for Travellers Document has not been achieved. Southside Travellers was named as the lead agency for Action J, but notwithstanding the support it received in particular from DLRCCC, and SSPDLR, it had neither the human or financial resources to develop or maintain a facility, or to allocate a specific staff member who could move the childcare development process forward. This under-resourcing was further evident in the difficulties Southside Travellers had in securing funds from other named agencies in the County for ongoing Playbus costs. While the Southside Travellers request for funds to support the ongoing costs of running the Playbus came at a time when most government departments were forced to cut back on expenditure, it is nonetheless problematic that the organisation with most responsibility for

³⁷ Irish Travellers in Education: Strategies for Equality http://www.itmtrav.com/publications/edu_equality.html (last accessed 7th December 2009)

developing Traveller childcare is the least resourced organisation. In addition, as noted earlier in this report, it is not until recently that Southside Travellers has named childcare as a key action in its workplan.

While having Action J in place is positive in that it names Traveller childcare as a focus of activity, in essence once it was clear a site would not be available, it may have stood in the way of actual development. It is the case then that a more creative, solution focused, collaborative approach is called for in facilitating Traveller childcare in DLR. Goals need to be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic/resourced, and time-bound, and the range of bodies and groups involved in Traveller childcare development should be expanded. This is particularly important in the context of the ECCE scheme, and the newly emphasised policy of integration. The Traveller focus group identified several of the above organisations as having a responsibility for the development of Traveller Childcare in DLR. Additional groups identified, who are not currently included in the developmental process, include Traveller parents (particularly Traveller mothers), the Department of Education, Youth Workers, and School Principals.

7.8 Recommendations

These recommendations are provided under the following eight headings:

1. Improving overall access,
2. An anti-bias approach,
3. Early care and afterschool care,
4. Supporting childcare at Southside Travellers,
5. Collaborating for success,
6. Attendance, and
7. Representation of Travellers.

7.8.1 Improving overall access

- In theory Travellers have access to childcare but in practice access does not happen. The ECCE scheme will hopefully have the effect of widening the pool of preschool services available to economically disadvantaged parents who have thus far either only been able to access community based preschool facilities because of the subvention available in that setting, or not able to access preschool services at all. However, the fact that the pool of places widens for this service will not automatically mean that Traveller children access it. Providers need to proactively include children from the Traveller community and Traveller uptake of the ECCE scheme needs to be tracked. If places are not accessed an assessment needs to be carried out to find out why this is the case.
- Providers of Community childcare operating under the CCS scheme should be supported to identify how they can be more inclusive and proactive in their inclusion of Traveller children
- Traveller parents should be supported, where necessary, to engage in childcare services. There needs to be a greater degree of general engagement between Traveller representatives and Childcare providers to break down existing barriers, prejudices, and fears.

- For access to occur, information on availability of childcare must be clear and continually promoted. Childcare providers and groups such as Southside Travellers, Barnardos, Home School Liaison Officers, Early Start Projects etc should collaborate to ensure that the information on options available is easily accessed.

7.8.2 *Anti Bias Approach*

- Private and community providers need to be encouraged to a) develop an anti-bias approach as well as an anti-bias curriculum, b) practice ongoing reflection on their anti-bias culture, and c) value as well as teach diversity.
- All childcare providers should be supported to create and adhere to written policies on equal opportunity and non discrimination. Case studies and ongoing reflection on good practice in working from an anti-bias perspective may help this process.
- Traveller parents who have experienced exclusion, or are fearful of exclusion, need to be encouraged to avail of childcare where it is available. This is true of those who are engaged in work or training, and those who are not. Childcare providers need to be encouraged to view this issue sensitively.

7.8.3 *Early Care and Afterschool Care*

- It is important that the emphasis on inclusion is not restricted to the preschool year, and that Traveller parents and providers are supported to include provision for Traveller children who are in the zero to three age group which the literature shows is the most receptive age of development and has the potential to *“permanently alter their development trajectories, protect them against risk factors, and generate improved engagement with the education system.”*

7.8.4 *Supporting Childcare at Southside Travellers*

- The Southside Travellers shift in focus on childcare within the strategic plan that it will shortly launch should be acknowledged and supported. Such a strategic approach may help to prevent reactive applications for funds that have criteria which Southside Travellers cannot meet.
- Southside Travellers needs to be resourced to provide on-site, or close to site, childcare facilities for those who take part in training or employment in Southside Travellers premises or in the Sandyford area. This needs to be done in collaboration with agencies at local level. The DLR Traveller Interagency Group is committed to supporting Travellers in DLR and already names children as a priority group. Thus the TIG should convene to review the Southside Travellers strategic plan and identify what resources they can put in place to support the development of quality childcare for Travellers in DLR.
- Effective support for Traveller childcare should include the provision of key, qualified, early years staff funded by the OMCYA and/or the HSE

7.8.5 Collaborating for Success

- All players in the provision of Traveller childcare, including those noted above as identified by the Traveller focus group should be brought together for a collaborative workshop to move beyond naming problems and to take a solution focused approach to this issue and develop realistic solutions to the lack of provision. Where statutory agencies are involved those present should be in senior positions within their organisation as recommended in the TIG report.
- Childcare facilities operating the CCSS and ECCE scheme need active promotion among the Traveller community within DLR.
- The Traveller preschool evaluation notes that the work of Visiting Teachers for Travellers has had a very positive effect on Traveller children. Any collaboration should include representation from this group with a view to supporting Traveller uptake of any available places in the DLR area. The Home School Liaison Officers who work with Early Start staff and visiting Public Health nurses may also have a positive contribution to make to any collaborative process.

7.8.6 Attendance

- Traveller attendance at childcare facilities can vary and can be affected by a number of factors, including poor accommodation, seasonal migration, travel occasioned by family and social events, and even the day of the week, with attendance being poorer on Friday. In supporting greater inclusion of Traveller children in community childcare settings there is a need for discussion around how to support community childcare facilities that cannot absorb any such loss in fees.

7.8.7 Representation of Travellers

- Consideration needs to be given to how Traveller parents and other ethnic minorities might be represented in the management of community childcare facilities which operate the CCSS scheme.
- While national policy now centres on integration rather than Traveller specific facilities there is no reason to think that Southside Travellers cannot set up an integrated service. Previous Southside Traveller childcare proposals have specified such integration. Care needs to be taken that the shift in policy does not further mitigate against Southside Travellers setting up a childcare service should they choose to do so.
- Care must be taken that there is no drop in the number of Traveller children attending newly integrated facilities. Simply being open to Travellers, as demonstrated elsewhere in this report, does not mean that Travellers actually have, or can avail of, that access.

Appendix 1 - 2010 Changes to Community Childcare Subvention Scheme

The following changes to the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme will take place in 2010.

- The Rate of Subvention for Band A parents will remain at €100 per week for a Full Daycare place, with pro-rata reductions for part-time, sessional and half sessional places
- The Band A rate will be extended to include recipients of Family Income Supplement (FIS), who are currently on Band B
- Weekly Subvention for recipients of Jobseekers Benefit/Assistance will be capped at 2 ½ days per week, i.e. a part-time place each day. The rate is unchanged, and so full capitation will apply to such parents availing of sessional and half-day places, but where the child attends full daycare, no more than €50 subvention will apply per week. This will NOT apply to other Band A parents, e.g. One Parent Family Payments.
- Consideration is being give to introducing a capitation fee to provide ringfenced free childcare places in daycare services which will be made available to qualifying FAS trainees and VEC students. This would replace the current system where such parents can avail of €70 Band B subvention plus €63.50 FAS/VEC childcare allowance. It is expected that the capitation offered will be up to €170 per week for a full-time place.
- Band C parents (i.e. low income working parents above the FIS threshold e.g. medical and GP visit card holders) will be reclassified as Band B and will qualify for an increased rate of €50. This new Band B may also apply to parents who were Band A last year, although most of these are expected to qualify for Band A as a result of the re-classification of FIS.
- Places of exactly 3 hours 30 minutes duration will be brought in line with the Pre-School Regulations, and will be classified as sessional places. Places of at least 3 hours 31 minutes, but no more than 5 hours duration, will continue to be counted as part-time places
- The baby supplement of €30 p.w. will be discontinued
- The minimum grant for services on the islands or isolated rural locations will be retained at the current rate.

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