An Evaluation of The Role of
The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse
in Carlow and Kilkenny
Summary Report
Developing the role of the Traveler Mental Health Liaison Nurse

THE STORY SO FAR

May 2015

Getting to know the services and structures
Traveller Culture Awareness Training
My title ‘The Wellbeing Nurse’

Reflections...

‘Bridging the Gaps’
Wellbeing Education builds resilience
Building Trust is key to success
Fear and Stigma are key barriers

Working in partnership with other services will support Travellers
Flexibility and outreach working is essential to success
Practical Support and advocacy builds engagement
Mental Health cannot be viewed in isolation
Quality Proofing Matters

Staying on Course...

Formal Evaluation 2018

2015 2016

2016 2017

2017 2018
I am delighted that this evaluation of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse in Carlow and Kilkenny is being launched. When developing the South East Traveller Health Unit (SE THU) Strategic Plan 2015 -2020, it became very evident that there was a need for a targeted approach to support Travellers to look after their mental health and wellbeing. The need to further develop supports for Travellers experiencing mental health difficulties who were not sure where to go for help, or who may not have known that any help was available, became a key priority for the South East Traveller Health Unit. The importance of addressing this within a sociodeterminants of health approach was an important principle.

It was in this context that a Mental Health Liaison Nurse for Travellers (TMHLN) was appointed. The role of the Traveller Mental Health Nurse included providing support to members of the Traveller community in understanding concepts of mental health, recognising when they experienced mental health difficulties and helping them to access primary or specialist services/supports if this became necessary. Building trust with the Mental Health Nurse was recognised as essential for successful outcomes to be achieved. The South East THU recognises that mental and physical health is closely linked and approaches Travellers’ health holistically, acknowledging that one can impact / complement the other. If Travellers’ mental health is not in a good space, it can be extremely hard to provide support to look at what is necessary for good physical health. Supporting Travellers’ mental health is essential to enhance general health and wellbeing of members of this community.

The community development model whereby Travellers were involved at every stage of the development of the work of the TMHLN - from when this role was just an idea right through to the completion of this evaluation - is especially positive. With recognition by the SE THU that Travellers are the experts of their own lived experience, members of the Traveller community have shaped the role of the TMHLN – this was effected through the participation of Traveller Community Health Workers on the South East Traveller Mental Health Advisory Sub Group as well as via participation in the Evaluation Sub Committee where cultural appropriateness of the approach and tools used in the evaluation was assured.

The collaborative nature of the development and implementation of the TMHLN post and its associated evaluation was further underpinned with involvement of a range of key people, including the South East’s Social Inclusion Department, Mental Health service and Primary Care and Traveller Health Projects.

I would like to thank The School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin, for their professionalism, patience and ethical approach to undertaking this evaluation. Their ability to listen to all parties and to understand the unique issues in consideration of Traveller health offered confidence that evaluation of the role of the TMHLN would be respectful of the perspectives of all parties involved – and with ability to conduct the evaluation through the lens of members of the Traveller community.

The recommendations contained in the evaluation report are evidenced and achievable and I am committed to support all efforts of the SE THU towards their implementation.

**Diane Nurse**
National Lead: Social Inclusion
HSE National Social Inclusion Office
The HSE National Social Inclusion Office

The HSE National Social Inclusion Office supports equal access to health services for people from vulnerable groups (HSE 2017). One of the groups that they support is the Traveller community. The South East Traveller Health Unit (SE THU) strategic Plan (2015-2020) has prioritised mental health as a pillar of change for this community as part of their holistic approach to health and wellbeing. Figure 1 provides a summary of the factors that affect Traveller mental health.

The South East Traveller Health Unit

The South East Traveller Health Unit works across five counties, Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford.

The work of the HSE National Social Inclusion Office is carried out through the regional Traveller Health Units which work to:

• Improve the health of Travellers
• Help the health services to understand the needs of Travellers.
• Respond to the social factors that affect Traveller Health (Health Service Executive 2017).

Figure 1: Factors that affect Traveller mental health.
SE THU Holistic Approach to Traveller Health and Wellbeing

Cardio-Vascular Health & Diabetes Type 2

Family Health & Wellbeing

Mental Health & Wellbeing

Signposting, Health Self Assessment, Treatment, Screening & Disease Prevention

Respiratory Health - Asthma, COPD, Smoking
Traveller Health Projects

The South East Traveller Health Unit supports eight Traveller Community Health Projects and four Traveller Men’s Health Projects in Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford. The Traveller Health Projects work to support Traveller health and are made up of a range of health workers including peer workers. This evaluation focuses on Traveller Health Projects in two counties; Carlow and Kilkenny.

The Traveller Health Projects in Carlow and Kilkenny are made up of Traveller Community Health Projects which employ:

- Part-time Traveller Community Health Workers.
- Traveller Community Health Project Coordinators.
- A Traveller Men’s Health Worker.

Establishing the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse Role

In 2014, funding was sought from the St Stephen’s Green Trust by the Carlow Kilkenny Traveller Mental Health Sub Group of the South East Traveller Health Unit to appoint a Mental Health Nurse to help address the mental health and emotional needs of Travellers in the area. In 2015, a Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse (TMHLN) was appointed. In November 2017 the authors of this report were commissioned by the HSE Social Inclusion Office to evaluate the role of the TMHLN.
Study Design

The evaluation used a mainly qualitative methodology. Interviews and focus groups were used to collect the data. Key stakeholders including the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse, members of the Traveller Community, staff from the Traveller Health Unit, the Traveller Health Projects, Mental Health services and other health and social agencies were interviewed by the research team. Ethical approval was provided by the Health Service Executive South Eastern Research Ethics Committee.
The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse became known as the ‘Wellbeing Nurse’ by service users. The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse told us about the role and how the role helped Travellers. A summary of the activities of the TMHLN and how she supported wellbeing for the Traveller Community can be seen in figure 2.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse

- Provision of psychosocial interventions to members of the Traveller community.
- Provision of health and wellbeing education to Travellers and their family.
- Provision of an active listening service.
- Liaison with other health and social care agencies.
- Crisis intervention.
- An appointment reminder service and follow-up for Travellers.
- Providing cultural awareness education to health and social agencies.
- Advocate on behalf of the individual Traveller and on behalf of the Traveller community.

The Day-to-Day Work of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse

- The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse used a narrative approach where she listened to the Travellers stories about their lives.
- The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse worked in recovery-orientated ways and used the Wellness Recovery Action Plan when she was working with the Travellers.
- The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse also used peer support to help the Travellers maintain social contacts and develop social networks.

Supporting wellbeing

Figure 2: Supporting wellbeing
Governance of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse Role

- The governance of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse is a joint venture between the Traveller Health Unit and the Mental Health Nursing Division.
- While there were positive perceptions of the governance arrangements, there was also recognition that they needed to be strengthened.
- With strengthening, the Governance structures in place for the TMHLN has the potential to provide a blueprint for shared governance arrangements in Ireland.
Impact of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse Role

Some of the key stakeholders talked about how they were able to tell Travellers about the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse. They also talked about how the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse told Travellers about the different services that were available to help them.

Service Users’ Perceptions of the Impact of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse Role

- The Travellers we talked to placed a high value on the work of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse and were extremely positive about the role of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse.
- They described the different ways that the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse helped them, and these mainly fell into four areas: therapeutic activities, liaison interventions, educative interventions and follow-up interventions.

Key Stakeholders’ Perceptions of the Impact of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse Role

The key stakeholders talked about how the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse:

- Helped Travellers with their mental health needs and often helped with some of the social difficulties they were experiencing, such as accommodation.
- Told stakeholders about Traveller’s cultural needs which made stakeholders more aware of the how to respond effectively to Travellers’ needs.

Facilitators and Barriers to the Development and Sustainability of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse Role

- There were a number of things without which it would not have been possible for the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse to do her job; these included the Traveller Community Health Projects, the Traveller Men’s Health Project the Traveller Health Unit and the Traveller Mental Health Advisory Group.
- There were also several things that may affect the role in the future, such as the amount of work that the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse does, working over two counties and the risks associated with being a single-post holder.
Based on the findings of this evaluation we make recommendations for the development, governance and sustainability of the role of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse.

**Recommendations for the Development of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse Role**

- The job description of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse has changed over time and should be amended to reflect the current roles and responsibilities, with an emphasis on the role of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse as a Mental Health Liaison Nurse.

- The complexities of the interventions and the specialist nature of the work of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse should be reflected in the grade; current and future Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurses should be employed at Clinical Nurse Specialist grade.

- The core concepts set out in the Framework for the Establishment of Clinical Nurse Specialists (2008) outline the key roles of the Clinical Nurse Specialist and these should be used to detail the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurses activities. The role should continue to have a strong clinical focus and should be aligned with the core values of Mental Health Nursing as described by the Department of Health and Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (2016). Other core concepts of Clinical Nurse Specialist role activity include patient/client advocacy, education and training, audit and research and consultancy.

**Recommendations to Support the Current Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse**

- The Current Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse should be supported to meet the criteria for Clinical Nurse Specialist as outlined by the Department of Health (2017). This should include educational support to help develop skills in audit and measurement of clinical outcomes.

- Audit and research are essential roles of the Clinical Nurse Specialist. The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse should audit and evaluate nursing practice to ensure there are improvements in health and social care outcome for Travellers.

- The Traveller Mental Health Advisory Group should support the audit and evaluation activities of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse and formulate key performance indicators to ensure quality outcomes.
Recommendations for the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurses’ Clinical Practice

- The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse should continue to advance a recovery-orientated ethos in the area of Traveller mental health and recovery-orientated approaches should continue to underpin the role.
- Consideration should be given to using a standardised recovery-orientated assessment tool (e.g. the Recovery Star), which could be adapted for use with the Traveller community.
- It is recommended that the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse forge links with the Recovery College in the area with a view to increasing their knowledge of Traveller mental health and widening Traveller access to the services and courses provided.
- The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse should continue to receive external clinical supervision.

Recommendations for the Governance of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse Role

- The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse should continue to be located within the primary care services.
- Governance structures need to formalise the professional relationships between the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse, the Mental Health Nursing Division and the South East Traveller Health Unit in consultation with the HSE National Social Inclusion Office and the Health Service Executive.
- There needs to be clear policies in place to support the work of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse. The current policies that are in place to guide the work of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse need to be made explicit, and a plan put in place to address gaps in policy provision. Key areas within these policies must identify:
  - Risk assessment/escalation policy
  - The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse’s scope of practice
  - The boundaries of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse’s role
  - Referral pathways and accelerated referral pathways
  - Data Protection Policy/Health Service Executive Data Protection Policy, and
  - Contingency plans for sickness and other absences.

The governance arrangements should be reviewed regularly.
**Recommendations for the Traveller Mental Health Advisory Group**

- The terms of reference for the Traveller Mental Health Advisory Group should be reviewed.
- The Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse should be a member of the Group.
- Consideration should be given to the role of the Group in the strategic development of Traveller mental health initiatives in the area.

**Recommendations for Sustainability of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse Role**

- The South East Traveller Health Unit should scope out the business case for the provision for a more comprehensive service.
- In light of the risks associated with single-postholders such as the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse, it is recommended that a critical mass of Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurses be created within each Traveller Health Unit.
- An evaluation of the professional development needs of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse should be completed. This should include access to peer networks for both professional development and supportive needs.

**Recommendations for Resources to Support the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse Role**

- Resources should be available to support activities used by the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse to engage in shoulder-to-shoulder work with Traveller men and women.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

- To support research activities, it is recommended that the Traveller Mental Health Advisory Group build a relationship with an academic environment to develop a research strategy to support the work of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse.
- Future research could explore the relationship between consistent engagement with the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse and the frequency of crisis presentations among Travellers.
- Future research could explore gender differences in the mental health needs of Travellers.
- Future research could explore the work of the Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse using a longitudinal mixed methods approach.
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Citation


‘The story so far’ and ‘Supporting wellbeing’ images designed by Mary Byrne (Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse).

The SE THU Holistic Approach to Traveller Health & Wellbeing image is taken from the SE THU Traveller Health Chronic Conditions Programme Toolkit.

A copy of the full report is available on request.

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