

Meath Travellers' Employment Initiative (MTEI)



Response to Project Evaluation Recommendations 2010



Meath Travellers Employment Initiative

Meath Travellers' Employment Initiative

Response to Project Evaluation Recommendations 2010

Prepared by

Ms Sheila Comiskey, Co-ordinator, Jobmatters

Ms Leisa Colligan, Jobcoach, Meath Travellers Employment Initiative

In Association with

Meath Travellers Employment Initiative Management Committee



Background Information

In 1993, Government set up the Task Force on the Travelling Community, publishing a report in 1995 containing 345 recommendations on accommodation, health, education, training and employment. A Committee, chaired by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform was set up in 1998 to report on the difficulties associated with translating policy into action and a progress report was published in 2000.

Under the aegis of the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, a High Level Group on Traveller Issues was established in 2003. Its remit was to focus on the delivery of services to Travellers by relevant statutory agencies. The approach included specific inter-agency initiatives and pilot projects. An interim report was presented to the Cabinet Committee in October 2004.

A special Initiative to expand the Employment Prospects of Travellers was launched by the Government in April 2005 and four regions (Clare, Cork, Dublin and Galway) received grants to run pilot projects. An integral part of the initiative was an inter-agency approach. FÁS acted as the lead agency and local steering groups comprising relevant agencies were established in the regions to manage the pilot projects.

In March 2006, as a follow-on from the pilots and in the response to the report of the High-level Group on Travellers Issues a circular was issued to the Manager of each Local Authority concerning the development of strategic plans at county and city level to implement a coordinated inter-agency response.

The Office of Community and Enterprise, Meath County Council, on behalf of Meath County Development Board, commenced the process of developing the Meath Interagency Strategy for the Traveller Community in July 2006.

Navan Travellers Workshops (NTW), a traveller-led organisation with over 40 year's experience supporting and advocating for Travellers in County Meath, was involved in the Traveller consultation process in October 2006, which informed the "Meath Interagency Strategy for the Traveller Community 2007-2009"

According to the Census data during the period 2002 -2006 the Traveller population in Navan rose by 5.4%. However, an annual count of Traveller households, as undertaken by Meath County Council Housing Section in 2006-2008, suggest the census figures may underestimate the Traveller population in County Meath and the true growth rate in Traveller population was increased by approximately 18%.

NTW had expressed concerns that despite the increase in Traveller population in Co Meath and economic upturn in Ireland since the mid 1990s, Travellers have not benefited and unemployment remained high in the Traveller community. Employment prospects for young Travellers in Navan and elsewhere in County Meath were sparse

It was in this context and following an action in 'Meath Interagency Strategy for the Traveller Community 2007-2009' that the Meath Traveller Employment Initiative (MTEI) project emerged in late 2007.

The Meath Travellers Employment Initiative (MTEI) has three main aims and one linked objective, which developed prior to the project starting in January 2008

- To facilitate the integration of Travellers into paid employment in the open labour market
- Provide support and assistance in the integration process
- Meet the labour requirements of employers

The initial linked Objective was for the pilot project to concentrate on the availability of employment in the private sector. This was subsequently modified during the course of the project due to labour market changes. The project would now seek to access employment across private, community, voluntary and public sectors.

The MTEI project developed as a result of a number of important influences:-

- The importance of addressing Traveller issues particularly within the Employment, Enterprise and Training strand of Meath Interagency Strategy for the Traveller Community. It was felt that there was a need to address the access to employment for Travellers in County Meath.
- The pilot initiatives run in four geographical areas under the 2005 special initiative, which was introduced to expand the employment prospects of Travellers.
- FÁS, who had been the lead agency in the 2005 special initiative
- Access to the proposed target group through Navan Travellers Workshops Ltd which was a long established Traveller-led organisation

A further distinctive element in the MTEI project was that it sought to use the model of 'Supported Employment' to working with Travellers. The key point of such an approach was the use of an Employment Support Facilitator to act as a support and advocate for the jobseeker, with the employer, both before and after employment. It drew on the experience of Jobmatters, a supported employment organisation and part of the National Supported Employment Programme, which focused on employment for people with disabilities.

The Office of Community and Enterprise, Meath County Council, were responsible for co-ordinating the interagency strategy, organising all the meetings, drawing up minutes and communicating with all the relevant agencies. The Management Committee² for the MTEI project was drawn from the members of the Employment, Enterprise and Training Issue Working Group.

¹ **Jobmatters Ltd** is an independent company based in Navan that provides support services to people with a disability to find and secure employment. It is part of the National Supported Employment programme funded by FÁS. Jobmatters Ltd has a county wide remit. A core part of the Programme is the use of an Employment Facilitator who acts as a mediator between jobs seekers and employers. Both job seeker and employer can avail of supports from the Supported Employment Agencies

² **MTEI Management Committee Members:** Chamber of Commerce, Community and Enterprise Meath Co Co., FÁS, HSE, Jobmatters Ltd, Meath VEC, Dept. Social Protection, Meath Partnership, NTW, SIPTU.

As the model being used had been practised by Jobmatters, it was felt that they should take a key role in the supervision and development of MTEI in conjunction with NTW. The Office of Community and Enterprise Meath Co Co held financial administration responsibility.

Traveller participation in a project, such as this, is crucial to its long-term success. Navan Traveller Workshops Ltd, as the lead agency in the project, plays a key role in the referring participants to the Employment Support Facilitator. Not all Traveller families engaged in the project at that location. In order to address this, MTEI provided outreach clinics in various locations to increase awareness and convenience.

An Evaluation Report of the initial pilot phase was commissioned and it was carried out by Gerry Mc Keever and Associates in 2009 on behalf of the stakeholders. The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to develop a project evaluation framework. It recognised the limitations of the MTEI pilot project as dealing with a relatively small number of clients over a specific time frame. The study considered the circumstances of the participants in terms of age, education, gender, employment status, and means of recruitment. Semi structured interviews were held with the various stakeholder groups to build a comprehensive picture of stakeholder expectations, the process involved and the outcomes that resulted.

The Evaluation Report recommended that in order to retain the valuable learning achieved in the course of this pilot project, the project should be mainstreamed within the National Supported Employment Programme framework, having due regard to the distinctive aspects of Travellers as a target group. The MTEI project managed to overcome considerable initial hurdles, many of which have deep cultural roots, to achieve significant employment placement rates and training outcomes.

With reference to the Evaluation Report for the Meath Traveller's Employment Initiative 2009, a summary of conclusions and recommendation were extracted from the text in order to retain the valuable learning achieved in the pilot project to date. These conclusions and recommendation were formed with the view of developing the project for mainstreaming within the Supported Employment Programme.

During the pilot year 2010 the recommendations were actioned and the findings of the actions are detailed below.

Recommendation 1:

The Monitoring and Management functions of the project should be separated, with the Monitoring being taken on by the current inter-agency group on a quarterly basis while a Management Committee comprised of 'front – line' agencies should provide a more 'hands-on' and 'problem- solving' approach.

The above recommendation was put in place with the appointment of the new Jobcoach as of 1st April 2010. The Jobcoach was based within the existing Supported Employment Agency - Jobmatters, where the management was in charge of day-to-day running of the project.

The Interagency Management Committee comprises of Meath County Council - Community and Enterprise, Navan Travellers Workshop, Department of Social Protection, FAS, HSE, VEC, Meath Partnership, SIPTU, and Jobmatters. At the regular meetings the management committee receive reports on the performance and progression of the project and an update of the financial status.

Any issues arising are discussed in full and solutions are reached in a democratic manner using the knowledge and experience around the table.

Recommendation 2:

A realistic target for a placement rate should be 50% achievable over one year. Placement numbers for the coming year should be 10, adjusted in subsequent years as overall economic conditions improve. A realistic participant to placement ratio for the project should be 2:1, meaning that to place 10 participants, it would be necessary to recruit 20 job ready participants to the project.

The above target of 50% placement rate included in recommendation 2 is not supported by any empirical data. Although we endeavour to meet this target the current economic downturn and the high levels of unemployment in the Meath area have severely impacted on placement opportunities. Despite there being a notable increase in job ready participants accessing the service (current ratio 41:1) job placements are below target. Evidence of job seeking activity for example job applications and interviews are recorded, but unfortunately few have been successful with only six new placements during 2010. The availability of FÁS employment grants and supports as provided for Jobmatters Target group would improve the competitiveness of the traveller participant in the open labour market.

To encourage the motivation shown by our participants we have looked at other options such as, up skilling, further education and training to maintain engagement and personal development.

Recommendation 3:

An integrated 'case-load' approach should form the basis for sharing information about potential participants and developing a way out of the 'training merry go round'.

The relocation of the Job Coach to Jobmatters offices for four days per week has proved to be beneficial to both the job coach and the participant. The support provided through working as part of a team with experienced job coaches, shared knowledge of local employers and employment opportunities have given the job coach confidence and eliminated the issue of lone working. By delivering services one day per week in the Navan Travellers Workshop links to training has been maintained and support in understanding the traveller culture is provided.

Recommendation 4:

The project should remain flexible in how it deals with Travellers who do not want it to advocate for them as Travellers and instead emphasise individual and work skills.

The ethos of support employment is to develop individual supports. Underpinning this ethos the project is very flexible towards individual Travellers needs. We operate from two office locations Navan Travellers Workers and Jobmatters Office, so participant can choose to engage at either of the two offices. We can also provide outreach at any reasonable location to facilitate participants' needs. All information received is kept strictly confidential; participants are involved at all levels.

Agreement is sought regarding disclosure at initial engagement stage.

Recommendation 5:

Sectoral targets for employment should be spread over the private, public and community sectors, adjusted annually to reflect economic conditions. At present, no more than a 50% employment target for the private sector is realistic.

The above sectoral targets need to reflect the current economic climate and down turn of the labour market. Daily job search includes public, private and community sectors. The moratorium currently imposed in the public and health sectors has impacted on employment opportunities. All employment opportunities are explored, the emphasis being on "getting the job" regardless of the sectoral target.

Recommendation 6:

Access to local training opportunities is beneficial to the 'Job Ready' status of the participant and to successful job placement and retention rates within the project. For this reason the continuation of the training budget is desirable.

In 2010 the project has not had a significant Training Budget the Department of Social Protection has provided through matched funding a small grant for job ready clients who have a valid job offer and require some up skilling. A contribution of 30% is requested from the participant.

Most training opportunities are now accessed through FÁS training centres. Identified training such as updating of specific machinery licenses etc are not on offer due to the lack of demand in the construction industry but are necessary to allow the participant to engage in the his area of expertise. In this case we have to outsource the training and apply for funding through FAS or avail of DSP grant aid

Recommendation 7:

The HSE is the best long- term public sector prospect for the employment and sub-contracting opportunities for Travellers. There is a 'good-fit' with the skills base of Travellers and current and potential opportunities within the HSE. Negotiations should start with a view to a medium and long-term strategy.

We would agree that the HSE is one of the best long- term public sector prospects for employment and sub-contracting opportunities for Travellers but due to the current moratorium in recruitment we cannot provide any evidence to this effect. Past training for traveller females have been in the areas of Childcare and Care of the Elderly.

Others public sector employers identified are VEC or County Councils. At a minimum work experience placements within any of these statutory bodies would provide an opportunity to develop and improve participant skills. This in turn would increase the chances of securing employment by providing experience in the said role and the availability of a recent reference.

The management committee is representative of community and statutory agencies in Co Meath, part of our ongoing agenda is to establish contacts and form discussions regarding long term strategies when recruitment in these agencies are reopened.

Recommendation 8:

Development of a network of informed employers is critical to the long-term success of the project. New employers to the Meath area, those with 20 employees or over and those with a Corporate Social Responsibility Programme provide better long-term potential for employment prospects.

Due to the current economic downturn there has been very little new business development as described in Recommendation 8. The absence of employment incentives for companies to employ travellers and the high competition in the open labour market for the available positions limits the employment prospects for travellers.

Established employer group Navan Chamber of Commerce have been fully briefed on the project and in the early days of the project a certain buy in was experienced. This has not been sustained.

Recommendation 9:

Where required, work placement and employee awareness training should form part of the services offered by the project.

Where relevant, participants are encouraged to avail of a work experience placement to gain practice in the work place. In preparation for this all participants are given advice around time keeping, attendance and general expectations in the workplace. Work experience placements are advised but in some cases travellers do not want to work without remuneration - they want to earn an income.

Recommendation 10:

Exiting CE participants and participants from other training programmes that are deemed to be job ready should form part of the potential recruits to the project.

MTEI works very closely with CE supervisors identifying CE participants who may meet the referral criteria of the project. We meet with the participant prior to them completing their CE scheme.

Ideally, if we could engage at the start of the CE placement, during the Individual Personal Plan stage to discuss current market trends, their preferred employment area and training to support this. MTEI is available to everyone in the travelling community aged 18-65 and for the pilot phase people can self refer.

Recommendation 11:

The physical presence for the project should be outside NTW but within the Navan town centre area.

MTEI operate a service in NTW (one day per week) and Jobmatters offices in Academy Street Navan (four days per week) and are very willing to do outreach in other facilities to meet participant's needs.

Recommendation 12:

A Project Operational Handbook should be developed as a means of dissemination information about the project and act as a tool to replicate and project nationally. This will detail in a clear 'step-by-step' fashion how the project may be set up by an inter-agency group. The handbook should be a preliminary guide, which will be reviewed as the project progresses.

Draft Operational Handbook has been completed. This is a preliminary document and is currently being updated to reflect the developments/ improvements made to the operative procedures. The aim of the handbook is to give a functioning guide to the project and outline operational procedures.

Recommendation 13:

The Supported Employment funding stream and Jobmatters as a local delivery agent is the most practical and effective long-term future for the project.

Using the model of Supported Employment and Jobmatters for the operational management of MTEI has strengthened the project in 2010. By continuing in this direction it will prove to be the most practical and effective long-term solution for the mainstreaming of the project.

Recommendation 14:

Provision of the inter-agency training for staff, the development of a written inter-agency protocol and integration of inter-agency working into job descriptions and promotion criteria are ways of embedding inter-agency working within agency organisational culture.

This recommendation is aimed at the members of the inter-agency group established in relation to the Meath Interagency Strategy for the Traveller Community, and is outside the control of the MTEI project. Past practice would guide the member groups to develop inter agency protocols and related training to their staff.

Inter-agency co-operation is evident in the Management Committee of the MTEI project. It brought the roles of various agencies together, to share their specific expertise, knowledge and previous experiences, to support the success of the project.

At the MTEI project level, the job description of the Job Coach includes a desirable criteria request for previous experience of inter-agency working. The Job Coach works closely with the Department of Social Protection, VEC, FAS and Meath Travellers Workshop.

In conclusion, by following the recommendations as highlighted in the MTEI Evaluation report 2009, the MTEI project experienced a vast improvement in the number, and level of engagement of Travellers in the project.

When given the choice to access the project from an independent location, more traveller families regularly engaged with the service in a productive manner. Referrals increased through word of mouth: travellers were recommending the service to each other. Participants acknowledge the benefit of working with the job coach to help them achieve their goals. The understanding that this was not another avenue into CE placements became quickly apparent and participants, who were serious about their career prospects, continued to engage with the service in a positive way. As a result Job Seeking activity in the open labour market was increased within the project.

Unfortunately the efforts of the job seekers and job coach were not always rewarded due to the current economic downturn, the high numbers of experienced qualified applicants, and the lack of employment opportunities in the open labour market. All employment sectors displayed a lack of vacancies suitable to the skills of the target group.

In some cases the small investment for training and up skilling proved fruitful and some jobs were secured, but few permanent contracts of employment have been offered to date.

Looking forward to 2011, the project is to be mainstreamed through partnership with the existing supported employment agency Jobmatters and the continued support of the interagency management committee. This would result in giving travellers a service that would be delivered nationally; to encourage and support travellers into open or self-employment and provide further supports to assist them in retaining employment.

The overall summary for 2010, the national financial situation has been very difficult, and budgets have been cut. The current economic climate has resulted in decrease in job opportunities.

However on a positive note - the number of clients engaging has increased. We are encouraging people who were previously not engaging with MTEI, when it was based totally in NTW, to engage in either Jobmatters offices or other outreach venue. We have also managed to secure more relevant training identified by the Travellers and Job Coach during the needs assessment phase, by either using FÁS services or outsourcing accredited training providers. Therefore the jobs that travellers are applying for are in areas where they have benefited from recent training to enhance existing skills. This in turn has made the Traveller more competitive in the labour market.

The outlook for the Traveller jobseeker engaging with the MTEI service is more positive, there has been a marked increase in the number of participants being called back for interview and successful job placements have been made. The additional support provided from the MTEI service will assist the Traveller jobseeker to remain in those placements, thus increasing the job retention rate and client satisfaction.

Members Meath Travellers Employment Initiative Management Committee

Tadhg McDonnell	Director of Services, Planning & Community, Meath Co Co.
Ciaran Mangan	County Librarian, Meath Co Co.
Sheila Comiskey	Co-ordinator, Jobmatters
Leisa Colligan	Jobcoach, MTEI
Anton McCabe	SIPTU
Bernie McKeivitt	Meath VEC
Robert McCulloch	Meath Partnership
Michael McDonagh	Meath Travellers Workshop
Daren Malone	Dept. Social Protection
Sean Roche / Margaret Cranney	FAS
Tom Oxley / Eileen Gilsenan	Health Service Executive
Sean Boyle	Chamber of Commerce
Maureen McKinley	Meath Co Co
Assumpta Kelly	Meath Co Co



comhairle chontae na mí
meath county council



Meath County Development Board
c/o Office of Community & Enterprise
Meath County Council
County Hall
Navan
County Meath
Tel: 046 9097400
Email: info@meathcoco.ie
www.meath.ie