The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

#VitalSignsNI

Vital Signs NI Report 2018–19

connecting people who care
with causes that matter

Community Foundation
NORTHERN IRELAND

VITAL SIGNS NI 2018

Welcome

Welcome to the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland's **Vital Signs 2018**. Vital Signs reflects factual data and the voices of the community at local levels across Northern Ireland; sharing lived experiences about the challenges our communities are facing.

People on the edges:

Vital Signs is a global project, run by community foundations, who want to listen, to understand and appreciate the communities in which they work. It takes the temperature of how our communities are faring, across ten key quality of life areas and asks people across NI what is working and where we could prioritise our actions – be these personal, professional or philanthropic.

Last year we published our 2017 Vital Signs report which looked at two of these ten themes; Health and Wellbeing, and Education and Skills.

From our report in 2017 we identified three areas for further focus and research, looking at education in more depth, as well as support for the LGBT community, and the Travelling community in Northern Ireland. The research was carried out with key stakeholders and experts, knowledgeable in each area, through focus groups and roundtables, as well as desktop research. The information has been distilled to provide an overview of the research findings.

There is much to celebrate about life in Northern Ireland, however, this report highlights that there are some particular challenges that people are facing, and that there are communities more marginalised than others.

We hope that this focused report enables the start of a wider conversation amongst the community and voluntary sector, public sector, public representatives, and donors, on the issues of education in Northern Ireland, and support for the LGBT and Travelling communities.

For more information or detail on previous Vital Signs Reports and the work of the Foundation generally, please visit our website **www.communityfoundationni.org**

Overview   A snapshot of our research findings:

Education

In terms of education, Northern Ireland's academic performance, as measured by international benchmarks, emerges as only a little above the average. The unavoidable truth is that the main factor which influences the selection of children is their social background, and the system is designed to measure performance in this way.

LGBT

The high levels of homophobia in Northern Ireland - reflected in hate crime statistics, the five-year delay in removing the ban on gay blood donations and the fact that it is now the only region of these islands without marriage equality – mean that the rates of mental ill-health are significantly worse among members of the LGBT community. Gender identity services in Northern Ireland, in particular, fall far short of international good practice, with high levels of gatekeeping reported.

The Travelling Community

Some of the most socially marginalised children in Northern Ireland are Traveller children. Traveller children are ten times more likely to die by the age of ten than their settled counterparts.

Community Foundation Grant-Making

110 Education
8 NEET
5 LGBT community
0 Travelling community

Out of **960** applications
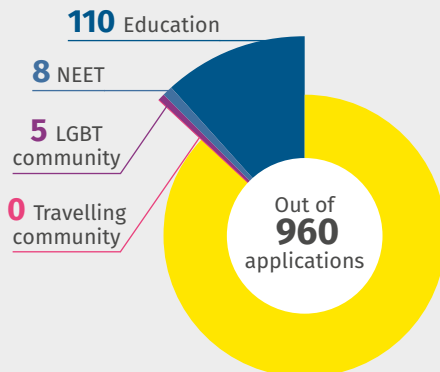
In the financial year 2017-18 the Community Foundation received 960 applications, and approved 473 awards, totalling £1,412,586.

Of the applications received, there were none directly supporting the Travelling community, five directly supporting the LGBT community, and eight were directly supporting NEETS (young people not in employment or education). There were a further 110 applications received for projects supporting learning and education, 64 of which were successful, with a total amount awarded of £185,242.

Education

VITAL ISSUES

When placed in a wider European context, Northern Ireland emerges as only a medium-ranking performer. There is a long tail of underachievement, associated with the continuation of academic selection at 11.

UNSUSTAINABLE SYSTEM

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO, 2015:6) reports that in 2014-15 there were 71,000 surplus places in the system, at the same time as almost 300 primary schools who were below the Department of Education's enrolment thresholds for sustainability.

In August 2018, the Permanent Secretary of the Department, publishing its 2017-18 accounts, admitted "it is inevitable that increasing numbers of schools will move into deficit as there is exceptionally limited scope to generate alternative cuts in running costs."

There are inadequate resources, bureaucratic approaches from Departments, and packed curriculum's, which leads to constraints for teachers.

According to the NIAO the current system cannot provide the level of choice that some parents would want, and leads to difficulties in area planning, often adding excessive transport costs, if parents are choosing to send their children to schools outside of their catchment area.

DIVERSITY

Teachers need help to deal with diversity.

An Education and Training Inspectorate report in October 2018 found that 580 schools, and some 60,000, children were now involved in shared-education projects.

We are now more culturally diverse, linguistically and religiously. This presents an increasing challenge to teachers to develop new ideas and solutions to ensure equality of achievement and development for all. (ARNESEN ET AL, 2009: 49)

WELLBEING

There is also a systemic challenge to education providers to invest in the "preventative curriculum" - to address mental health, self-harm and addictions.

RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL DIVISION

The education system in Northern Ireland is still heavily segregated along religious lines, with 93% of children* attending a school which is predominantly, or entirely, attended by children from the same religious background. This despite a legal duty on the government to promote integrated education, and consistent evidence (e.g. latest lucid talk poll: "78% said they would support cross-community mergers of schools" ** that a substantial majority of parents support reforms to the education system that would enable children from different backgrounds to be educated together.

Currently such a choice of mixed schooling is not available for many parents, and considerations of educational quality will always take precedence.

The education system is flawed. We have two fault lines; one, where we are divided by social class, and two, where we are divided by religion. This is unique in Europe.

We now have separate State and Catholic Maintained transfer tests, which are unregulated. This is despite the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in June 2016, calling to "abolish the practice of unregulated admission tests to post-primary education in Northern Ireland."

The Grammar School lobby have resisted all moves to come into line with the rest of Europe.

* (www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/integrated-schools)

**www.ief.org.uk/2018/03/22/poll-shows-ni-parents-want-education-reform/

There is clear evidence that within Northern Ireland the public want more choice. **68% of Protestants** and **70% of Catholics** want one single system, and believe this is the best way to deliver education in the future, a ratio which rose to **82%** among those **under 45s with a child at school.**

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) (2015:8) point to "a significant tail of underachievement, especially amongst pupils suffering social disadvantage." This in large measure is a product of selection: with middle class pupils more likely to attend Grammar Schools, while working class pupils, non Grammar Schools.

More than
79,000 (22%)
have some form of recognised special educational need- increased since 2003-4.

The Department of Education (DE) school enrolment data for 2017-18 shows that:

more than
100,000+ or **3 in 10**
school pupils are entitled to free school meals

3 in **10** school leavers do not secure **5 or more GCSEs** including English and Maths, at A* to C grades. This rises to more than half of those attending non-grammar and/or entitled to free school meals.

State schools are further disadvantaged; as voluntary grammars, whose pupils are in theory the most advantaged, tend to enjoy the highest budgets, which are not top sliced by the Education Authority, or the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, and who also have the ability to generate private parental contributions.

The school population is also not so easily divided between Catholic and Protestant.

15.5%
other Christian

7%
non Christian

Out of **343,574** children and pupils enrolled in the education system (including early years) in 2017-18, **22.5%** come from households which designate as 'other Christian' or 'non-Christian/no religion', or which were agnostic or atheist. Yet only **7% (23,088)** attend integrated primary or post primary schools.

Our research has shown that the system is fragmented, with schools seeking to outperform their neighbours. Grammar schools are particularly concerned that collaboration with secondary schools might dilute their results profile. There is, however, a need to ensure that all of our schools have the capacity, and capability, and commitment, to develop all children to reach their full potential.

LOW PAY/LOW SKILL EQUILIBRIUM

Department of Education data on school-leaver destinations shows that fewer than one in ten leavers go into training from school. This route is even more closed off to girls, with only one in 20 taking it - hence the value of non-traditional skills training for women.

This, along with the divided nature of our education system, helps to explain **Northern Ireland's high rate of young people not in employment (NEETS), education or training.**

1 in 8 (12.2%)
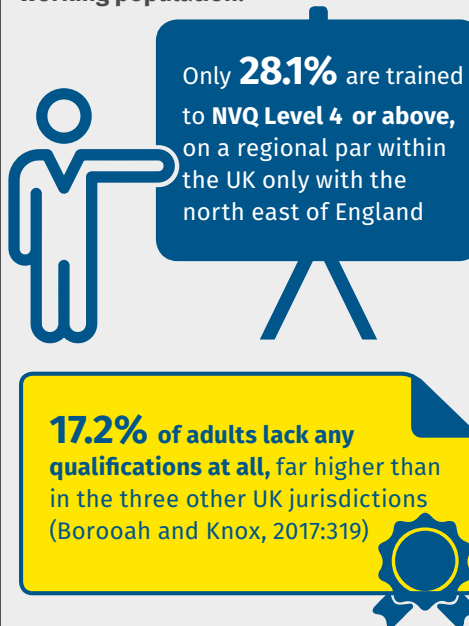16-24 year olds are not in employment
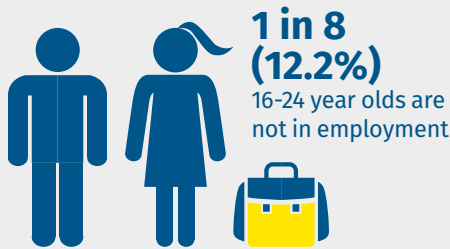
The quarter two Labour Force Survey for 2018 indicated that there were currently **25,000** such **NEETs,** or nearly **one in eight (12.2%)** of the **16-24 year old** cohort - the highest rate of the UK jurisdictions.

NEETs tend to be the children of single parents, or single parents themselves. They are heavily concentrated in **areas of high social exclusion,** such as **North and West Belfast and L/Derry.**

L/Derry

North & West Belfast

The system poorly prepares the working population.

Only **28.1%** are trained to **NVQ Level 4 or above,** on a regional par within the UK only with the north east of England

17.2% of adults lack any qualifications at all, far higher than in the three other UK jurisdictions (Borooah and Knox, 2017:319)

A report by the Department of Employment and Learning, published in July 2015, showed how in a comparative context Northern Ireland was stuck in a low pay/low skill equilibrium, performing worse in this regard than the rest of the UK and Ireland and much worse than the high performers like the Nordic countries.

Weak levels of skill (including basic skills) among the adult population are matched by weak investment in the education and training of that population.

Northern Ireland also performs poorly in turning out graduates in "STEM" subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), essential to the knowledge economy.

While **Northern Ireland's unemployment rate was only 3.6%** in the second quarter of 2018, this concealed the much larger number of those detached from the labour market, estimated at **28% in the quarter,** and by far the **highest of any UK region** - leaving an employment rate of little over two in three, well behind the percentage rates in the high 70s, characteristic of the Nordics.

28% detached from the labour market in the quarter, by far the **highest of any UK region**

Most of those economically inactive lack any qualifications.

Schools are not the only place to look to do something about inequalities. If we want to do something about class inequalities in education, early intervention is the place to start.

Local firms are concerned that there are inadequate workforce skills. The cap on NI students means many of our able young people are going to Britain to study, and many never return. 27% of our NI young people attended universities in Britain in 2016-17.

Brexit also threatens our Universities, with the **potential loss of grants** gained from involvement with partners in the Republic, particularly Magee, where staff travel across the border every day.

TEACHING, METHOD AND PRACTICE

Teacher training in Northern Ireland reproduces the fragmentation of the education system, with the training institutions each having a particular religious ethos, training teachers in line with that ethos. All efforts in recent decades aimed at integrating teacher training education have been blocked by clerical resistance, with support from others. Is the level of pastoral care and bureaucracy, preventing teachers spending more time on actually teaching?

From our research there is a suggestion that teachers are often grammar school educated themselves, which isn't always conducive to facilitating active learning methods and practices, and supporting non academic pupils.

There has been a failure of the education system in Northern Ireland to diversify; few newcomers or non Christians joining the profession.

There is very little research on pedagogy - how teachers teach - in Northern Ireland, which, perhaps reflects the 'taken for granted' narrow conception of the role of education, and further embeds traditional approaches to teaching.

There is a concern that schools are more interested in performance league tables, rather than the interest of the child, and drawing out the particular talents of each pupil.

There is an argument that students should be facilitated, rather than simply presented with facts, teaching them what to do with knowledge once they have it, enabling critical thinking, reasoning, openness and collaboration. 21st century learning. The current system is too narrow.

VITAL ACTION

We need to break down the dividing lines of religion and class. We need to provide all children with the necessary competencies, theoretical and practical, to act as rounded citizens. Education should be made available in an inclusive and non rival way, embodying the right to an education for all children, on equal terms, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We need to educate our children for a modern world, rather than simply passing exams. Children should leave school able to lead a fulfilling life as an active citizen.

There should be a single employing authority for all teachers, with no exclusion of religions, or those with no religion.

Over the next year the Community Foundation will further scope the opportunity to lead on a Commission or Citizens' Assembly, to review the education system in Northern Ireland.

The Foundation will continue to voice support for, and actively lobby for, the withdrawal of academic selection.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community/individuals

VITAL ISSUES

The current needs of LGBT individuals in Northern Ireland cannot be fully appreciated without recognition of the long shadow cast by a culture of intolerance and associated violence over decades past.

DEVOLUTION AND EQUALITY

There has been a heavy burden of stigma on those who are not heterosexual and therefore not fitting within the perceived normal view of preferred sexual orientation.

A sexual orientation strategy drafted in 2006 is still in limbo.

Gay men are still unable to give blood on fully the same basis as their counterparts in Britain.

There has been quite a shift in attitudes, with a more welcoming attitude to diversity within Northern Ireland, however, there remains people in Northern Ireland, particularly some older people and those who are religiously conservative, who are against reform in Northern Ireland and the legalising of Same Sex Marriage.

The major area where reform is therefore required is marriage equality. Legislation in Northern Ireland is out of line with the rest of the UK. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is no sign of the Westminster Government assuming responsibilities for Northern Ireland under direct rule. This denial of marriage equality in Northern Ireland can imply "second class citizenship" for LGBT individuals.

The Equality Commission has identified a clear link between politicians' language and the levels of perceptions of discrimination among communities in Northern Ireland. The Commission calls for "strong and positive political leadership" to promote positive attitudes.

There's strong evidence that attitudes to LGBT issues are generational, with younger people much less likely to take a conservative view on LGBT issues. Attention is turning to transgender concerns, where making progress on legitimacy, recognition and visibility, could reduce suicidal ideation among transgender individuals.

Religious conservatism continues to lead to feelings of being second class citizens, and young LGBT individuals, consulted with in 2016, have said that difficulties faced around their sexuality would be eased by more inclusive sex education in school, less religion in public life, and more family support.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

There are still pressures on the LGBT community, with many having higher levels of mental stress, and worrying levels of self harm.

Hate crime continues to be an issue for the LGBT community, as articulated by the organisations and individuals consulted.

73%
Verbal abuse

Verbal abuse continues to be experienced by **73%** of respondents in a 2016 survey of young LGBT individuals

52%
Self harm

The proportion of **self harm** has doubled to **52%** from a similar survey in 2003

30% of those surveyed were under medication for depression

61% had experienced suicidal thoughts
(Neill and Meehan, 2017: 14)

The Young Life and Times survey evidenced that:

44%
Lesbian

25%
Gay

50
40
30
20
10
0
%
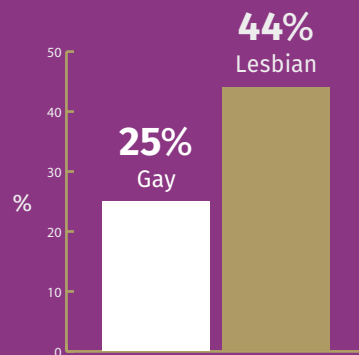
25% gay and 44% lesbian 16 year olds, scored above the four point threshold on the General Health Questionnaire

27%
Female

14%
Male

30
25
20
15
10
5
0
%
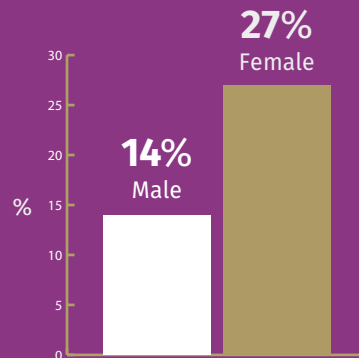
Compared with 14% heterosexual male, and 27% heterosexual female peers, they were also four times as likely to have self harmed
(Schubotz and O'Hara, 2011: 497:9)

EDUCATION

There is a reluctance among schools to address homophobic bullying. The role of Christian churches is powerful within communities, and often demonizes sexual diversity.

There is a need for more inclusive sexual education in schools, an end to the dominance of conservative religious views, with a less binary understanding of sexuality, and more family support.

Education remains an area of huge concern, particularly because of the denominational system, which can prevent rational discussion on LGBT issues.
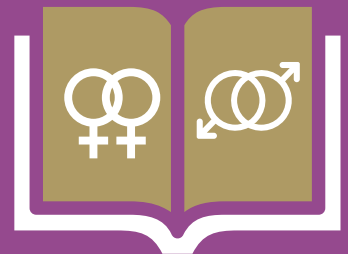
According to the most recently available statistics for Northern Ireland, approximately:

1.6% of the NI population identify as gay males

0.3% as gay females

There were **172 patients** for gender reassignment in 2017-18 compared to **10 surgery requests in 2012-13.**

SUPPORT NETWORKS

LGBT support centres provide a safe hub for the community, and have been invaluable in terms of support and making social connections, but they are understaffed and overworked, and rely heavily on voluntary effort.

There has been a reduction in hate crimes, and more proactiveness within the PSNI to deal with crimes. Participation by the PSNI in Pride has been positive, however, there are barriers to reporting, particularly as a result of historical mistrust of the police, embarrassing and invasive questioning, and potential sensational coverage of trials.

LGBT individuals still feel that it is high risk to **show affection** in **public.**

An absence of core funding for LGBT organisations, means that they are constantly fire fighting.

There is a need to develop work with older LGBT individuals, who are "two and half times" as likely as their peers to live alone, and "four and half times" as likely to have no children to call in on them when they need.

It is easier for people to be themselves in urban areas such as Belfast and Derry, whereas it is more difficult in rural areas. Social spaces are needed in rural areas.

Transgender Issues

18 month to **2** years
waiting list

There are long delays in terms of gender identity treatment for transgender individuals, with an initial appointment time of **18 months to 2 years**. Many will seek private treatment where the model is "informed consent", as in the Republic of Ireland, whereas attendees at the Gender Identity Clinic NI must demonstrate that they have been living out their desired identity.

There is a need to follow the **World Health Organisation** guidance of "sexual health" rather than "mental health", removing trans identities from mental disorder. This would reduce time for psychiatric assessment and would accommodate individuals identifying as non binary.

Transphobic bullying is a common cause of distress, which can lead to children dropping out of school.

TECHNOLOGY, TALENT AND TOLERANCE

Businesses have also made the links between **tolerance** and firm success. Economic development now depends on a triad of **"technology, talent and tolerance"** if creative people are to be attracted to a region, and **innovation spurred.**

There are now a large number of businesses supporting campaigns such as the **Love Equality Campaign.**

Many LGBT individuals find it more welcoming and easier to move and work in areas where they are better supported. There is a perception that the Republic of Ireland is more welcoming than Northern Ireland, with those consulted saying that many LGBT individuals are **seeking employment** there, **where they are celebrated,** rather than having to "keep their head down".
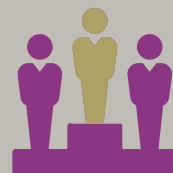
There are still challenges in public life.

Those transgender individuals living in rural areas face more challenges than those living in urban areas, such as Belfast and Derry, with a focus group participant stating that they had faced constant harassment on the street and attacks on their home, and forced to move. Workplace abuse is also a reality.

VITAL ACTION

Invisibility and isolation are the biggest issues facing the LGBT community. The support structures are at capacity, under resourced, and reliant on volunteers. Relatively small amounts of support could further develop the already existing collaboration and partnership oriented work of activist organisations.

There is a need to support the development of a wider geographically based network, particularly for people living in rural areas, including older LGBT individuals.

There is a need to continue to provide more opportunities for supportive social interaction.

There is a need to provide training to teachers, to deal with diversity and enhance their own capacity.

There has been good practice in some schools, where there are groups set up, led by teachers, with pupils setting agendas, combatting homophobic and transphobic bullying, and normalising issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Schools can learn from this best practice.

The Foundation will provide financial support for the development of a rural outreach programme for LGBT individuals.

The Foundation will source funding to support the ongoing work, and strategic development of existing support organisations, and enable more proactive support in areas where the support is most needed. This funding will be focused on building the capacity of the organisations internally, to enable them to better support their beneficiaries externally.
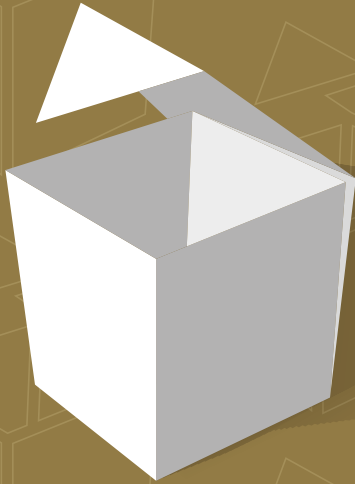
The Travelling Community

VITAL ISSUES

There are approximately **1000** to **1500** Travellers in Northern Ireland.

In 2014

almost **50%** were living in settled housing

only **12%** on a serviced or transit site

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Travellers in Northern Ireland face severe social marginalisation, reflected in extreme levels of mortality, including from suicide, and of morbidity, disability and mental ill health.

Principal causes of mortality were **respiratory** and **cardiovascular disease.** There are high rates of suicide, especially among young men, linked to poor self esteem and an unsupportive environment.

There is a shame around mental health, leading to high suicide rates, particularly in men. There is a distrust of psychiatric services, and women are fearful that attending as patients could lead to them losing custody of their children.

Travellers have a higher burden of **chronic diseases,** with higher measures of risk factors such as:

smoking

high blood pressure

cholesterol

dietary consumption of fried foods

Fewer travellers drink than the rest of the population, but those who do, drink more frequently.

There are high levels of disability.

3 in **10** traveller women have lost a baby

Women, who are largely confined to marrying young, and having children, can have a high dependence on prescription drugs.

DISCRIMINATION

Attitudinal surveys reveal very high levels of inhospitality towards Travellers.

NI Life and Times Survey data for 2017 shows that:

38% of respondents would not willingly accept Travellers in a house in their locality

39% would not accept a Traveller as a work colleague

52% would not accept a Traveller as a close friend

56% would not accept a Traveller as a relative by marriage

Companies advertising jobs, or hotels taking bookings for functions, have made opportunities unavailable once they find out that the person/s are Travellers.

EDUCATION

Education is widely recognised as a critical concern. There is a tendency for early withdrawal from school. There are also problems around bullying, and perception that teachers are negative towards Travellers, which leads to early school withdrawal. (Bloomer et al, 2014)

Schools can see Traveller children as an object of care, rather than the subject of education.

Traveller children are not being integrated into our schools. There are schools that Traveller children tend to be educated at, which may not necessarily be the closest school to where they live, for example St Mary's Primary, Belfast.

Attendance at schools has increased over the years from **52%** to **90%**
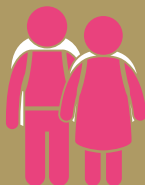
In the last five years, however, the big problem is that there remains a **high dropout rate,** particularly **in the last two years of compulsory education.**

Homework help
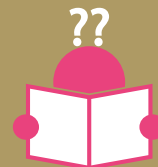
There is an inability on the part of the parents to **help with homework** as a result of their own limited numeracy and literacy skills, and the cultural and historical lack of importance given to education.

Absence of role models

There is an absence of role models in the Traveller community, to encourage education. There is a perception among Travellers that options are limited for adult Travellers.

Toybox initiative

Early intervention, within initiatives such as **Toybox,** which uses toys for children to work out solutions to problems they may have, during regular domestic visits, has helped prepare Traveller children for school and ensure they are equal to their peers.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation remains the most pressing need, including for serviced sites.

The Equality Commission argue that given the relatively low numbers of Travellers still wishing to live on sites, there should be more availability in Northern Ireland. They argue that the stumbling block has been planning permission at Council level.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission published a report in 2017 which stated that this was based on the fact that no one authority was taking responsibility for the problem.

Spending money on sites is **lower in Northern Ireland,** in comparison with **Scotland and Wales.**

SUPPORT NETWORKS

There is a strong case for third sector organisations, which can be responsive and sensitive to Traveller needs, working particularly on early years and on wrap around interventions such as homework clubs, to enable Traveller children to keep up with their peers.

New Traveller support groups have the potential to develop, within the Traveller community, the sense of agency and collective empowerment, that is not currently there.

The idea of developing role models is often discussed, but individual success can, at times, be dismissed from within the community.

Community development is vital; building from the ground up.

Prolonged investment of "effort and time" is required to build trusting relationships.

Support for self help organisations, led by Travellers, is essential, therefore enabling Travellers to empower themselves.

There is a need for a holistic, integrated, long term approach to improving the lives of Travellers, and reducing their deaths, involving the community at each stage of development.

There is a need for more after school activities, more classroom assistance, and summer schemes, as well as classes for women, to combat isolation.

There is a need for a more joined up "interagency" approach of committed practitioners.

There is an opportunity to support employers to appoint Travellers, perhaps developing apprenticeship opportunities and providing bursaries for those who want to seek employment and gain valuable skills.

There is an opportunity to sponsor Traveller Role Models, and to support organisations led by Travellers, whose aim is to address Traveller specific needs, using a community development approach. This could also include Breakfast and Homework clubs, reading groups, and parental training opportunities.
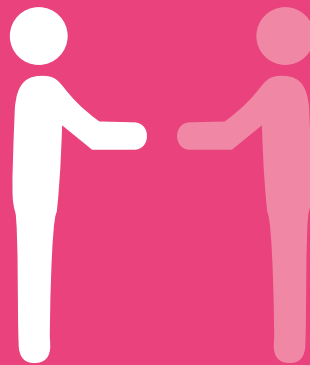
The Foundation will further scope the needs of the Traveller community by actively engaging with organisations currently supporting the Travelling community, to identify specific needs, and focus on specific support.

The Foundation will allocate financial support, as part of its new strategy post March 2019, to lead on work supporting people on the edges. This may include potential funding for Traveller support organisations, which are led directly by the Travelling community, with knowledge of the issues that the community faces. The focus of this support will be to empower and develop role models and enable opportunities for all within their community.

Visit our Website:

🖥 **www.communityfoundationni.org**

Join the Conversation on Twitter:

🐦 **@CFNIreland #VitalSignsNI**

On our Website you can:

- Read more of our Vital Signs research
- Find out how to get in touch and give us your views
- Get the latest news on Northern Ireland's Vital Signs
- Connect to the national and international Vital Signs movement

METHODOLOGY

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland have compiled this research using publicly available data, statistics and research. All information is considered accurate as of October 2018. The information included here should be considered a snapshot and only analyses a limited amount of the available data. If you have any queries or believe any information provided in this report to be incorrect, please contact us and we will do our best to undertake corrections.

Any quotes or opinions from individuals have been obtained via an open community consultation conducted on behalf of the Community Foundation. The identity of any individual(s) quoted within this report has been anonymised to protect their privacy.

For media enquiries or further information on the sources used, original research or analysis, or to request a hard copy of the report, please contact:

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