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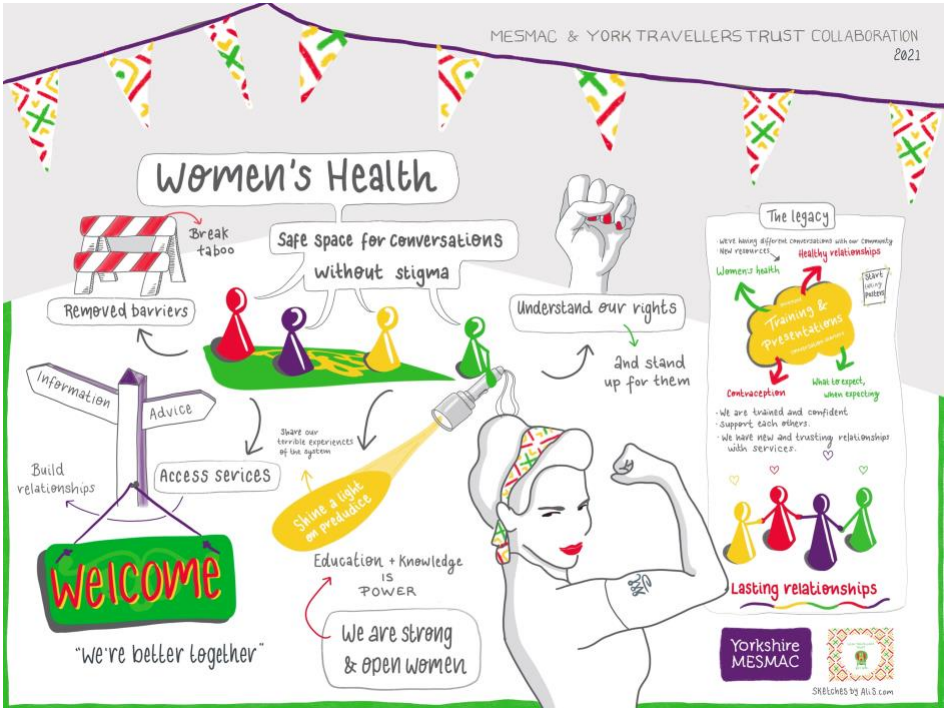
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# FINAL REPORT

MESMAC & YORK TRAVELLERS TRUST  
COLLABORATION ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

## **Reference:**

Mason-Jones AJ, Storey P, Allenby L (2022)  
Final Report: MESMAC & York Travellers Trust  
Collaboration on women's health. Yorkshire  
MESMAC.

## **Acknowledgements:**

Heartfelt thanks go to York Travellers Trust  
and the Women's Advisory Group members  
without whom this project would not have been  
the success it has been though such a difficult  
time.

## FOREWORD

The project was set up initially by MESMAC for the purpose of improving the accessibility of its services to a group that has traditionally been underserved. Despite the pandemic a small group came together to discuss and plan a way forward. There were many laughs and surprises along the way. There was generosity of spirit and a real camaraderie that developed. The project leaves a strong legacy and a relationship that can be built on by others.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Romani, Gypsy, Traveller and Roma are recognised minority ethnic groups with their own histories and cultures. Unfortunately, these distinctions are not often understood, recognised or appreciated in policy and practice by service providers. As a result they can not only experience a range of inequalities due to marginalisation and discrimination,<sup>1</sup> but also may be invisible in administrative datasets,<sup>2</sup> such that their specific health needs, for example, may be overlooked or ignored.

## HEALTH INEQUITY

Romani, Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities have poorer health outcomes than many other groups that largely stem from direct or indirect discrimination<sup>3</sup> and barriers to accessing health and social and support

services.<sup>4</sup> They may have problems registering with GP or other services and often report negative experiences. Part of the reason for this may be the lack of understanding, training or 'cultural competence'<sup>5</sup> and therefore services that are ill-equipped to support them. There are many assumptions made about these communities that are incorrect and that often a focus on accommodation issues to the neglect of other issues such as tackling the wider issues of discrimination, inequity and inequality. Trust between the communities and services is low due to historic and ongoing discrimination and where good practice exists, it is often driven by individuals and is not always embedded into wider practice.



## THE PROJECT

The need for community engagement training was identified as being central to the project. It is known that women in the

traveller community have the highest rates of stillbirth and maternal death out of any other ethnic group. A logic model was developed (Figure 1) and the project was set up to raise awareness and potentially address these issues with a community-led programme of training, resource development and education to improve the knowledge, access and uptake of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services for Gypsy and Traveller Women (GTW) within the City and Vale of York. The project planned to innovate by working in partnership with the York Traveller Trust (YTT), training YTT staff as



'Reproductive and Sexual Health Champions' (RSHCs) to act as contact points for GTW and sources of referral to local services. The RSHCs and Yorkshire MESMAC agreed to work with a group of GTW to understand their needs, identify gaps in service provision and have sensitive but honest conversations about how their needs could be met effectively.

The overall aim of the project was to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes for Gypsy & Traveller women (GTW) in York



The project had three objectives:

1. To enable Gypsy and Traveller women to access sexual and reproductive health information & signposting through a trusted person based in the

community.

2. To understand the needs of GTW with regards to their reproductive and sexual health and identify current gaps in service provision.

3. To empower GTW to guide sexual and reproductive health services to develop effective community services and interventions.

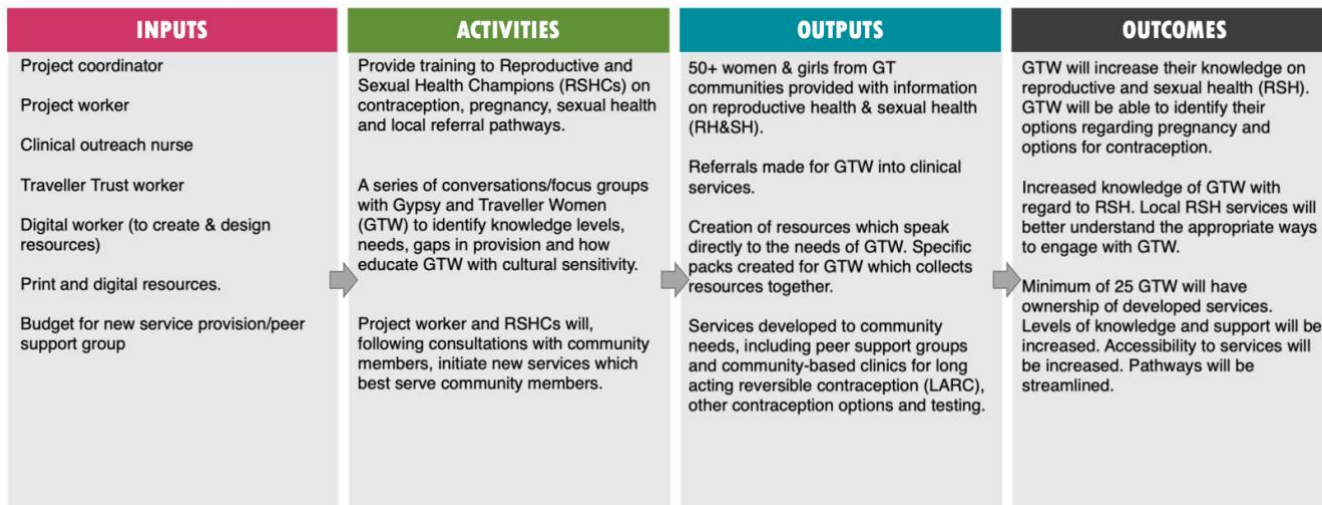


Figure 1: Logic model developed for the project

## CHALLENGES

The project began in 2021 and took place during the SARS-CoV2 pandemic. The team experienced lock downs, physical distancing, acute and chronic illness and as a result the ambitious plans for the project had to be altered. Redeployment of staff also meant that the planned human resource for the project was no longer available.

It became apparent that there were very different approaches, communication styles and views about sexual and reproductive health issues within the group. However, the safe space created for honest and open discussions enabled the group to talk these through

Near the end of the project the funding for MESMAC's work in York and North Yorkshire came to an end. This meant that the longer-term sustainability plan was passed onto the

new service providers to ensure the relationships developed and support can continue.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The project resulted in the participant-led development of educational resources (See Appendix) which will be made freely available so that others can utilise and benefit from them, the formation of a peer support group, clarity about effective pathways into local clinical services and the planned implementation of more sensitive and appropriate community-based clinical services.

The training of the RSHCs will ensure that knowledge sharing and clinical referrals for GTW can continue and the creation of resources will ensure that GTW can continue to access information in both print and digital formats.



## NEXT STEPS

It was clear that there were gaps in provision and a lack of understanding of the needs of this group of women by some service providers. The terminology used in particular needs to be explored to ensure that it is culturally appropriate and further training of service providers will be necessary. There are plans to work with York Travellers Trust to provide such training and also to deliver services through

them such as a dedicated family planning clinic.



## CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges the project has been very successful and has left a legacy that can be sustained by the ongoing collaborative efforts of all partners.

## REFERENCES

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4. House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee. *Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities*. London House of Commons; 2019.



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## APPENDICES



# SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS



Women's health





# YOUR HEALTH MATTERS.

We can test you for conditions  
which may affect your fertility.





# IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP HEALTHY?

Do you have to explain yourself to family,  
friends or your partner?

A healthy relationship consists of:

- Respect, honesty and trust.
- Consideration.
- Communication and support.
- Fun, laughter and happiness.
- Consent.

If this gets you thinking, please speak to a member of  
York Travellers Trust.





# SOON TO BE MARRIED?

We can arrange tests for conditions that could affect your fertility.





# WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU ARE EXPECTING.

Ask a member of staff about your rights while pregnant and giving birth.



# What to expect when you are expecting

