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Developing entrepreneurship programmes for female members of the Irish traveller community

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the distinctive challenges faced by female travellers (Roma, Sinti and Gypsy) in starting their own business.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper details a pilot “start your own business” programme that was delivered in Ireland to 12 women from the traveller community.

Findings – Four distinct categories of entrepreneurship barriers faced by female travellers were recognised: self-esteem, traveller identity, welfare trap and family responsibilities.

Research limitations/implications – The findings are based on just one programme and so no general conclusions can be drawn.

Practical implications – The paper identifies the successes and failures of the programme, plus it highlights the future steps that need to be taken to bring appropriate entrepreneurship support to traveller women who experience triple discrimination – discrimination as women, as travellers and as traveller women.

Originality/value – Very little is known about female travellers in terms of entrepreneurship activity and so this is a significant addition to a very small body of knowledge.

Keywords Ethnic minorities, Social alienation, Entrepreneurs, Women, Discrimination, Ireland

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The position of Irish travellers within Irish society has long been a complex one. While travellers are native to Ireland, they have much in common with the European Roma, Sinti and Gypsy communities, particularly in their desire to live a nomadic lifestyle and their resistance to being assimilated into the majority population. Members of the traveller community view themselves as a small indigenous ethnic group, with a shared history and value system which distinguishes them from the majority population, but this self-identity has frequently caused it to suffer both at the hands of the majority population and through institutional bigotry. According to O’Shea and Daly (2005, p. 5), “the Traveller community is widely documented as suffering severe social exclusion [...] and lack access to and participation in the systems which exist to benefit all Irish citizens”. Indeed, until recently there was no legal redress for travellers experiencing discrimination, but with the Equal Status Act and the Employment Equality Act, travellers are now beginning to challenge the negative treatment that they receive. This paper reflects on the position of the traveller community within Irish society, the role that women play within that community and the challenges that female travellers face in seeking to establish their own business.



Understanding the context of the traveller in Irish society

The discrimination endured by the traveller community is deeply embedded in Irish culture and arguably has been reinforced by government policies over many years. In 1963, the Commission on Itinerancy was established to enquire into the problem arising from the presence in the country of “itinerants” in considerable numbers, to examine the economic, educational, health and social problems inherent in their way of life, and to promote their absorption into the general community (Commission on Itinerancy, 1963). It is clearly evident from these objectives that the starting point for the commission was that travellers were a problem and that the problem was best solved by rehabilitation and assimilation into the majority population. Amongst the many complaints travellers felt towards the commission, the term “itinerant” was viewed by many in the traveller community as offensive since it was generally associated with vagrancy and deviancy. Additionally, there was no explicit examination by the commission of the discrimination that the travellers might have experienced towards them. A later commission took a different approach and sought to examine the needs of travellers who wanted to continue a nomadic way of life (The Report of the Travelling People Review Body, 1983). While prejudice, hostility, and harassment were acknowledged as issues, the Review Body was “pleased” to record that there was no evidence of discrimination against travellers in the granting of social welfare assistance and in gaining enrolment in local primary and second level schools. The Review Body did note that there were many instances of bias against travellers in the allocation of tenancies of local authority houses, but it also highlighted that authorities deserved recognition for their accomplishments, often attained in spite of considerable local opposition. The Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) finally appeared to officially recognise the different types of discrimination faced by travellers at individual, interpersonal and institutional levels. Indeed, it argued that the forms of prejudice and discrimination experienced by the traveller community equate with racism in the international context. However, this recognition of racial discrimination against the travelling community would not be, and is still not, recognised by all government departments.

The way in which Irish travellers are officially recognised by the Irish Government has become confused in recent years. McVeigh (2007) traced the development of the policy of ethnicity denial towards Irish travellers and examined its causes and consequences. He emphasized that in a submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Irish Government declared that Irish travellers do not constitute a distinct group from the population as a whole in terms of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin (Government of Ireland, 2004) and that the government went on to argue that travellers did not appear to fall within the definition of racial discrimination. The government was not suggesting that discrimination against travellers did not occur, but that when such discrimination did occur it could not be termed “racial discrimination”. In its 2006 report on traveller ethnicity, the Equality Authority (2006, p. 65) recognised traveller ethnicity and recommended that:

[...] the Government should now recognise Travellers as an ethnic group and that this recognition should be reflected in all policies, programmes and institutional practices that impact on the Traveller Community.

While many government agencies and representatives now recognise travellers as an ethnic minority, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform continues to take a different approach.

It is arguable that because of the lack of clear government leadership on this issue, anti-traveller discrimination and racism remains a significant issue within Irish society. As O'Connell (1998, p. 11) highlighted:

Individuals, when recognised as travellers, are sometimes arbitrarily refused entry or access to public places or services such as: shops, pubs, restaurants, laundries, leisure facilities and such like. Individuals often experience verbal or physical abuse because of their identity. Individual travellers have also reported incidents of insurance companies refusing to provide them with motor insurance cover. A number of public houses consistently refuse to serve travellers, while others do so now and then. Travellers frequently have difficulty obtaining hotels for wedding receptions.

These examples serve to illustrate the extent of discrimination that members of the traveller community face on a regular basis. However, the most public and controversial area of discrimination continues to be with regard to accommodation. According to the traveller support organisation Pavee Point (2005), it is a myth that traveller accommodation nearby lowers house prices and that independent research has shown no drop in house prices occurs due to adjacent traveller accommodation. Pavee Point argued that this myth is generated to keep travellers out of a locality and results in travellers being deprived of a place to live. O'Connell (1998) contended that the accommodation issue highlights the underlying contradiction of the settlement project in that the majority population continue to believe that travellers living in houses will be "settled" and thus conform to what is considered the norm, although they still would not treat travellers as equals. Additionally, while the broad policy is to have travellers settle through local authority housing, few people actually wish to have travellers settled near to them.

While some progress has been made in recent years towards the recognition of the traveller community as a distinct ethnic minority through the application of equality status by official agencies, the majority population still attach a number of offensive and incorrect labels to travellers according to Pavee Point (2005). In a promotional brochure about the traveller community, Pavee Point highlighted that all travellers do not chose to live on the side of the road, that travellers do want to be part of Irish society, that travellers are frequently blamed incorrectly for crime and anti-social behaviour, that travellers are condemned for halting sites being badly maintained, that travellers are regularly labelled as cheats who do not pay taxes and do not pay for the services that they receive on halting sites, that travellers are often associated with violent behaviour, and that travellers are labelled as being work shy. These discriminatory perceptions continue to thrive and ensure that the traveller community remains marginalised in Irish society.

Profile of the traveller community in Ireland

Central Statistics Office – CSO (2004) published a report focused on the traveller community based on data gathered from the 2002 census. This report stated that there was 23,681 travellers living in Ireland (0.6 per cent of the population in Ireland), with 11,708 of these male and 11,973 female. The report also identified that 42.2 per cent of travellers were aged less than 15 years in 2003 compared to 21.1 per cent for the

population as a whole. It additionally stated that 3.3 per cent of travellers were aged 65 and over compared to 11.1 per cent for the general population. Pavee Point (2008a) highlighted that the infant mortality rate for travellers was 18.1/1,000 live births compared to a national figure of 7.4; at birth, male travellers can expect to live 9.9 years less than settled men, while female travellers can expect to live 11.9 years less than settled women. An examination of the traveller community in comparison to the majority population highlighted how life expectancy differed between the traveller community and the general population, and that a distinctive age structure resulted in a median age of 18 for the traveller community compared with 32 for the general population. Indeed, the Department of Health's National Traveller Health Strategy (2002) acknowledged that the poor conditions in which many travellers live was an important factor in these statistics, with one in four travellers having no piped water or electricity, and 17 per cent of travellers having difficulty in registering with a doctor because in many areas it was found that only a small number of doctors provided services to travellers.

The report by CSO (2004) also identified that approximately 66 per cent of travellers left education before the statutory minimum age, compared with 15 per cent for the population as a whole. Almost 66 per cent of all school-leavers among the traveller community were educated to at most, primary level, compared with 21 per cent for the overall population. Table I highlights the data regarding the educational attainment of Irish travellers. Binchy and Healy (2005) noted that the participation in education of travellers remains low and that increased participation will only occur with additional supports and financial resources. They also stated that third level education was not a possibility for the vast majority of travellers (as evidenced in Table I).

According to CSO (2004), the Census 2002 data highlighted that unemployment among male travellers measured 73 per cent according to the self-assessed principal economic status question on the census form. The national measure of unemployment for males on a comparable basis was 9.4 per cent. Meanwhile, the corresponding rates for females were 63 per cent for female travellers and 8 per cent for the female population overall. A report by Pavee Point (2007) argued that travellers wanted to access waged employment but that frequently meant having to hide their traveller identity. The report also propounded that a lack of recognised skills and low levels of education among travellers, plus discrimination in the marketplace, meant that more proactive measures were needed to address the exclusion that travellers experience in the labour market. Any discussion amongst the majority population regarding traveller employment will frequently cause significant negative reaction. Pavee Point

Sex	Total (whose full-time education has ceased)	Not stated	Highest level of education completed				Degree or higher
			Primary (incl. no formal education)	Lower secondary	Upper secondary	Third level Non-degree	
Persons	11,035	1,565	7,491	1,444	338	81	116
Male	5,423	772	3,786	632	138	33	62
Female	5,612	793	3,705	812	200	48	54

Source: CSO (2004, Table 15, p. 27)

Table I.
Educational attainment
for Irish travellers aged
15 and over

(2005) highlighted that travellers were often labelled as being work shy but argued that in reality discrimination was the main barrier to travellers joining the mainstream labour market.

As well as possessing its own cultural identity, language and oral customs, the traveller community has a long and proud tradition of craftsmanship and self-sufficiency, with the Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) highlighting that the traveller culture and way of life values enterprise. In the face of discrimination in accessing the waged labour market, many travellers have turned to self-employment as a solution to achieving an income that will sustain themselves and their families. Trading, and market trading in particular, has always been an important economic activity within the traveller economy (McCarthy and McCarthy, 1998). According to Pavee Point (2008b), the “Traveller Economy” is the term used to describe work that the travellers initiate themselves. Pavee Point contended that there are a number of key features to the traveller economy that distinguishes it from general economic activity and these include:

- *nomadism* – where mobility makes marginal activity viable;
- a focus on income generation rather than job creation;
- the extended family as the basic economic unit;
- home base and work base is one and the same; and
- *flexibility* – often in response to market demands.

Pavee Point further argued that the barriers and challenges facing the traveller economy stem from a lack of recognition of the skills acquired through this way of working and its contribution to the mainstream economy. However, the lack of acknowledgement of the traveller culture within public policy has resulted in both direct and indirect discrimination, with changes in the law on street trading having a particularly adverse effect on the economic life of travellers in comparison with other groups. The designation by local authorities of specific trading areas made transient and door-to-door trading illegal, and reductions in the size of the trading pitches within designated markets meant that some products traditionally sold by travellers (e.g. carpets) could no longer be offered from the market stall. According to McCarthy and McCarthy (1998), competition for a smaller number of trading pitches in fewer markets had a negative impact on travellers who were not resourced or organised to compete. High license fees also reduced the opportunity for travellers who had no start-up capital or access to legitimate credit facilities.

The boom of the Irish economy between 1995 and 2005 affected the economic activities of the whole population of Ireland. However, it is arguable that it had an even greater, and negative, impact upon the traveller community as traditional crafts and skills were no longer required in such demand, as previously experienced, while the move towards a knowledge economy further widened the skill and education gaps. Additionally, travellers have difficulty in accessing start-up finance, experience a lack of credibility with agencies who can offer grant aid, and the increasing demand for accreditation and certification has placed even more obstacles towards any entrepreneurial ambitions that they might possess (O’Shea and Daly, 2005). The result of these changes and new challenges has been a significant reduction in the economic opportunities available to members of the traveller community, particularly

within its traditional areas of economic activity, and the further marginalisation of the community within Irish society.

Female travellers and entrepreneurship

The traveller community is recognised generally as being a strong patriarchal society, and so the role of women is heavily orientated towards motherhood and homemaker. McDonagh (1994) argued that traveller women, as mothers, home-makers and carers, have to make do with low incomes, in poor living circumstances, without basic facilities such as running water and sanitation. As seen from the CSO (2004) statistics in the previous section, female travellers also experience higher rates of infant mortality and will live 11.9 years less than a settled woman. Table II gives a breakdown of the female traveller population by age group and marital status.

In addition to the gender-specific difficulties that women experience within the traveller community, Crickley (1992) argued that there is also a clear gender dimension to the traveller experience of racism. According to McDonagh (1994), many traveller women are more easily identifiable than traveller men, and are, therefore, more likely to experience discrimination. Pavee Point (2008c) contended that traveller women actually experience triple discrimination – discrimination as women, as travellers, and as traveller women. Pavee Point further argued that like women from other minority ethnic groups, traveller women experience an intersection of a number of oppressions through racism and sexism. The Task Force on Violence Against Women (1997) highlighted the difficulties for traveller women in addressing this issue since it can involve facing an invidious choice between raising the issue of sexism within their own community and being in solidarity with their own community in resisting external oppression. The report argued that both the internal and the external discrimination experienced by traveller women need urgent responses and for this to begin to happen such discrimination must be named in ways which do not further marginalise traveller women. This emphasis on knowing one's position within the community was observed by Daly (2007) whose work documented how female travellers can experience hostility from within their own community for “getting above themselves” and that participating on a pre-enterprise programme can alienate some people in the community due to a lack of understanding. Daly additionally found that the prospect of

Age group (years)	Single	Married	Marital status		Total
			Separated females ^a	Widowed	
0-4	1,622				1,622
5-14	3,291				3,291
15-24	1,805	606	62	5	2,478
25-34	483	1,051	211	26	1,771
35-44	157	838	188	41	1,224
45-54	70	521	79	55	725
55-64	30	296	33	81	440
65 and over	45	149	5	223	422
Total	7,503	3,461	578	431	11,973

Note: ^aIncluding divorced

Source: CSO (2004, Table 4, p. 16)

Table II.
Marital status by age
groups for female
travellers

being ridiculed for stepping outside of their usual role was a significant barrier to traveller women participating on a pre-enterprise programme.

Female travellers wishing to start their own business also face an additional challenge, that of being a female entrepreneur in Ireland. The Small Business Forum (2006) stressed that there was a need to stimulate latent entrepreneurship potential in Ireland, particularly amongst women and ethnic communities (both target groups incorporate female travellers). A recent GEM (2008) Report for Ireland recorded that the gap between men and women engaged in an early stage of entrepreneurial activity had improved significantly over the past five years, with a ratio of 1.8 men to 1 woman being the figure for 2007, down from 3.4 to 1 in 2003. However, the report also noted that a stepped change had occurred over the previous year and that evidence on a sustained yearly basis would need to be seen before one could definitively state that change had taken place on a permanent basis. Research by Henry and Kennedy (2003), Bray (2004) and Browne *et al.* (2004) have identified that female business owners in Ireland tend to be highly educated and in the 35- to 40-year old age bracket.

The reasons for the lower levels of entrepreneurial activity by women against men have been the subject of much international research over the past decade, and a body of work now exists on this topic (see, for example, the following collected works: Fielden and Davidson, 2005; Brush *et al.*, 2006a, b; Carter *et al.*, 2007). Still (2005) identified a number of constraints faced by women motivated into starting their own business and these included: gaining the necessary confidence to start the business, finding adequate sources of assistance and advice, gaining access to capital, lack of mentors and advisors to sole traders, sense of isolation/adaptation problems in moving from organisational employment to self-employment, gaining acceptance from suppliers and clients, difficulties in managing a home and a business, issues of self-management, low levels of entrepreneurial spirit, risk aversion, lack of skills and access to business networks. She also noted that not all constraints impact upon all women and that the levels of intensity will vary with different individuals. However, the list does emphasise that women face significant challenges in establishing their own business. In Ireland, Goodbody Economic Consultants (2002) summarised that the principal reasons for lower levels of female participation in entrepreneurship were social conditioning, perceptions of demands on the entrepreneur, glass ceilings, lack of female role models, lack of self-confidence and difficulties in reconciling work and family life. Henry and Johnston (2003) reported that the main barriers to self-employment for Irish women were associated with funding, not being taken seriously and time management, while Limerick City Enterprise Board (2003) found that women tended to be less confident and assertive in the initial researching and selling of their business idea, and in the acquisition of resources. There is also evidence to suggest that both nascent and established female entrepreneurs experience greater difficulties in financing their business ventures in comparison to their male counterparts (Bray, 2001; Henry and Kennedy, 2003; Gender Equality Unit, 2003). Henry *et al.* (2006) concluded that there was a need for a concerted effort on the part of government and support agencies to promote research and understanding of the barriers and issues facing female entrepreneurship. For female travellers who are poorly educated and suffering from a multitude of other challenges because of their background, these challenges must appear mountainous.

Programme design

The Institute for Minority Entrepreneurship at the Dublin Institute of Technology was invited (by an organisation that promoted initiatives to help disadvantaged communities) to design and develop a tailored programme for female travellers. The objectives of the programme were to:

- offer participants an alternative career/life option;
- introduce key considerations in setting-up and running a small business;
- deliver relevant information on sources of assistance; and
- highlight the challenges that a participant might face and how these could be overcome.

The initial programme was to be targeted at a group of 12 female travellers. The programme was to take place within the training centre that the participants already attended on a daily basis. The participants were all in receipt of social welfare benefit and attended the training centre as part of a programme to encourage them to build a skill-set that would enable them to identify and successfully attain job opportunities for themselves.

The programme was designed around eight workshops of two hours duration (one workshop per week). The design of the programme was heavily influenced by similar programmes that had been designed by the programme providers for other minority communities and also integrated what had been learned from a review of the literature in this area. The programme design additionally incorporated feedback from in-depth interviews with people from the traveller community and those who worked with relevant support agencies. The content of the each workshop was tailored to be inclusive of all participants, as many had low levels of education attainment. The content was also customized to recognise the distinctive challenges faced by female travellers based upon the issues highlighted in the previous section. The programme, therefore, included the provision of personal development sessions, plus guest speakers from agencies that could offer appropriate support to the participants.

In order to achieve its objectives, the programme was constructed on the philosophy of “Build the Person, Build the Business”. It was determined that the programme should include elements of personal and business development, plus it should be pitched at appropriate levels of ambition and abilities for the target audience. Each workshop would be based around a key question highlighted for that week and would be broken into three sections. The first section of the workshop would discuss the question of the day and offer some content based both on research specific to this group and on material used for programmes with other ethnic minorities. The second section of the workshop would involve a guest speaker who would be invited, based on their expertise, knowledge or experience regarding the central question for that particular workshop. The final section of the workshop would relate the learning from the first two sections to a practical example that the participants could clearly understand. It was decided that the practical business example selected by the participants during the first workshop would then be used throughout the programme to demonstrate all the issues to be considered when starting a business.

The programme would take place from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. one morning per week for an eight-week period. At the end of the programme, the participants would then have

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three weeks to prepare a business plan about their business idea which they would present informally to a group of judges taken from those involved in the programme. There was to be no formal accreditation to the programme as it was a pilot programme, but certificates of completion would be given at a specially convened awards ceremony when the programme was finished.

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Discussion

The original invitation to attend the programme was offered to everyone who was already attending the training centre in which the programme was to take place. From this general invitation, 12 people requested to be allowed partake in the programme and each of them was accepted. While the participants were a broad age group ranging from teenage years to someone in their 50s, they could broadly be broken into two groups: young female travellers with limited or no family responsibilities, and older female travellers with family responsibilities (some of whom were also either separated or widowed). These groupings were not readily identifiable at first but became clearer as the programme developed and as the commitment to the programme differed between the two groups. Almost all the participants had low levels of educational attainment.

The first workshop discussed the barriers the female travellers believed that they faced in starting their own business. Four distinct categories of responses were elicited from this discussion and these were: self-esteem, traveller identity, welfare trap and family responsibilities. The discussion highlighted the strong depth of belief that participants possessed with regard to these barriers, each one carrying its own significant set of obstacles. The issue of self-esteem was particularly strong as none of the participants believed that they could ever own a business one day. One participant said that it was her dream to have her own flower shop but that she knew that it is not possible. When questioned as to why she could never have her own business, she said it was because she just knew that she could not do it. Throughout the duration of the programme, the issue of low self-esteem was a constant feature amongst the participants, and it was clear that the workshops designed to deal with personal development would be challenging. As with similar experiences with other minority groups, there is frequently little desire to address the issue of low self-esteem as it raises many uncomfortable emotions, and so is considered best ignored by many participants. The issue of low self-esteem would also have connections with low levels of educational attainment. The participants also spoke of their lack of confidence in asking people to give them money for their products. However, it should be noted that the participants themselves and the manager of the training centre believed that they get great personal self-assurance from their sense of belonging within their own community.

The barrier of traveller identity was one based primarily on experience. Some participants stated that many of their previous interactions with the majority population had been negative experiences, because once people heard their traveller accent their attitude immediately altered apathetically. Each participant firmly believed that a traveller was at a distinct disadvantage in the business community due to the common negative perceptions that are held about the traveller community. The barrier regarding the “welfare trap” is one that can be commonly found within all socio-economically disadvantaged communities. The participants noted that while they would prefer to earn a waged income, or take the risk of self-employment, and generate income approximate to their current social welfare benefit, they would feel

threatened by how it might affect their rent allowances for the houses in which they live, and were even more concerned about how it might affect their medical card status. As one participant highlighted, they were not concerned about the loss of a medical card for themselves personally, their fear was how it might affect their children's access to proper health treatment. Given the earlier discussion in this paper on the poor health status of travellers, such a concern has great currency.

The final barrier identified was family responsibilities. As mentioned above, approximately 50 per cent of the participants were mothers and many of these were lone parents. While they were interested in having their own business, and even if they could get past the barriers already highlighted, the reality of the situation was that they needed to stay at home to take care of their children and to ensure that the children did not get themselves into any mischief. They wanted the children to have better education and health than they had enjoyed, and they needed to stay at home to ensure that such a future occurred. These barriers reinforce the point mentioned previously by Pavee Point (2008c), that traveller women experience triple discrimination – discrimination as women, as travellers and as traveller women.

The first workshop was generally considered a success, as it also included a speaker on co-operatives who spoke about not having to start a business on one's own, and the practical example centred on having a flower shop, as that was mentioned specifically by one participant. The programme had made a highly promising start and most were looking forward to the remainder of the programme. However, Workshop 2 brought an abrupt halt to the positive expectations as the behaviour of the participants altered dramatically. Only four participants attended the start of the next workshop, although three more arrived later. The participants regularly left the room and would rejoin again some time later, occasionally with someone from outside the course accompanying them. There was quite a deal of general talking amongst themselves, while the use of mobile telephones had also become an issue. Several attempts by the trainer to address these behaviours were initially met with an acceptance to work within the general behavioural expectations, but little actually changed during the course of the workshop. The situation was further exasperated by the continuance of the behaviour during the delivery of the section by the guest speaker who used training exercises to discuss creativity. This speaker had been employed many times previously by the trainer for a wide variety of different groups, and every time had received very positive feedback. The style and format of the first workshop had been retained, but the reaction from the participants was completely different. However, the behaviour in this situation was not unique to this set of participants because, according to Stokes (2004, p. 2):

In the experience of YouthReach practitioners, young travellers seem to live for the present. They often appear restless, unable to sit for long periods. They present as self-confident in their known world and lacking in self-confidence of the unknown and of unfamiliar situations. Other difficulties include poor social skills, low self-esteem, immaturity and superstition. Frequently, they may have unrealistic ambitions regarding future employment, this lack of realism ranging from negativity to naivety. This is not unique to young travellers. Often their cultural focus on, and prioritising of, attendance at festivals, funerals, weddings and family anniversaries can lead to absenteeism, and consequently to difficulties in school and in future work placement.

Between Workshops 2 and 3, the issues that arose in Workshop 2 were discussed with key stakeholders, and different strategies for addressing them were considered. Eventually, it

was decided that at the beginning of Workshop 3, the trainer would discuss the concerns directly with the group, seek to identify why the behaviour had changed, talk about what could be done to change everyone's behaviour (including that of the trainer), and how the programme should be structured for the remaining workshops.

The discussion at the beginning of Workshop 3 could be termed as "frank and open". The trainer highlighted the concerns that had arisen and how they might impact upon the outcomes of the course, and the participants discussed their reactions to the issues. It should be noted that the general approach from the participants was that they believed that they had not behaved in a way that was inappropriate and they were genuinely regretful that any negative feeling might have resulted. It was clear from the discussion that there were different cultures operating within the room causing different expectations, and that dialogue was needed to find agreement between both parties. Indeed, the ensuing discussion was of such merit that the original programme was discarded and a new approach was adopted. The participants themselves wanted to do something that was practical at all times and did not want to be discussing their issues in too much depth. The trainer proposed that the participants be broken into three groups and each group would be given the challenge to establish a stall at a farmers' market of their choice with products of their choice. The products selected by the groups were: flowers, cakes and second-hand products (mainly clothes). Following the workshop, the trainer and the programme sponsors decided to inject further funding into the programme and offered seed funding to each of the groups for their market stall. The groups were asked to work out a budget for their costs and to make a presentation to the programme provider requesting a specific amount of seed funding. It was subsequently agreed that they would not have to repay that money and that whatever income was generated could be retained by the group. The purpose of this decision was to eliminate any financial risk for the participants and to maximise their reward incentive. It was believed that if they had nothing to lose then they could relax and enjoy the experience. Additionally, the style of the workshops changed so that they became much more focused on establishing a stall for the markets, and future workshops discussed issues such as which market in the greater Dublin area would be most appropriate for their particular products, how could they secure a pitch at that market and what paperwork would need to be completed; where would they source their products and how much would they cost; how would they promote their products and what should be the design of the stall itself. The groups would then have to run a market stall for one day within three weeks of the workshops being completed and, thereafter, they would have to make an informal presentation discussing their overall learning experience to a group of three judges. Two of the participants decided to leave the course at this time because they felt that it was not what they had expected it to be. For the remaining ten participants, the change in workshop format and goals meant that everyone was refocused once again. It must be highlighted also that the attention and concentration of the group improved dramatically thereafter. One possible reason was that the bond between the participants and the trainer took some time to develop, as the trainer was not a member of staff, and so it took time to build a new relationship between both parties, as learning was required on both sides.

The groups had varying degrees of success due to an assortment of reasons. One group undertook little research in their choice of market, and discovered on the day that very few people went to that market, resulting in very low sales. This group

consisted of young travellers (all were teenagers/early 20s), and their level of commitment to the programme and to the task was not as dedicated as with the other participants (it must be noted that one member of the group was dedicated but was unable to get the other members to be highly active). A second group worked extremely hard and received tremendous support from other stallholders, but their products (fresh flowers) did not sell in that market. The third group included two women with prior experience of operating a stall, and their wide collection of second-hand products proved to be a huge success. This final group had been advised by the trainer to take a more focused approach with their product range (e.g. only sell second-hand clothes), but they argued that their prior experiences at markets indicated that their proposal of a wide product range would be more effective, and they were proved to be correct. Groups 2 and 3 both constituted women who were older and had family responsibilities. Their commitment to the programme had been constantly strong and they actively engaged in the workshops.

The programme concluded with the presentation of certificates at a specially organised ceremony which included a speech from a highly successful businessperson, plus a photographer from a local newspaper who printed a photo in one edition of the newspaper. The ceremony was held in a prestigious location and the programme sponsors funded a buffet lunch to mark the occasion. Subsequent discussions with participants highlighted the importance of the event, with one person stating that “I will remember this day forever”.

Conclusion

The feedback provided by the participants judged the programme to be a success. The participants stated that they had benefited from their involvement in the programme and that they had learned quite a lot from it. However, in terms of changing their behaviour and starting their own business none of the participants believed that they would start their own business in the near future, although two participants did mention that it might be possible when the children had been reared. The challenges for women from the traveller community to establishing their own business are complex, and positively changing their environment is beyond the bounds of any single initiative. The discrimination that the travelling community experience must be altered at a societal level and led by government, but the prejudices are so deep that it could take generations for effective change to occur. Female entrepreneurship generally is a broader societal and economic issue that is being addressed here, but again, it may be many years before Ireland will see men and women engage in entrepreneurial activity at the same rates. The role of women within the traveller community is something that is being addressed currently by a number of state and voluntary agencies who are seeking to eliminate the very difficult life circumstances that most traveller women now endure. Issues such as health and education are the starting points to bringing such change to fruition. Possibly one of the key benefits to this programme was that it gave people an injection of self-confidence and it helped them to consider what might be possible. It also allowed the women to think about becoming economically independent, which would in turn change their standing within their community. What was critically needed was for one woman to break through and become a role model for other traveller women within their locality. A few female entrepreneurs do exist currently within the traveller community but they are

viewed as being “special people” and having abilities far greater than the ordinary traveller woman. This myth needs to be challenged within the community, and local heroines need to be promoted to show what is possible for everyone. Only then can the issues of low self-esteem, lack of confidence and strong cultural obstacles be addressed. Any future programmes need to be of a longer duration and should incorporate a mentoring system that enables individuals to receive one-to-one support over a prolonged period of time (e.g. one year). Any solutions to the other issues identified in this paper would have to be highly innovative and long term in vision. Indeed, the challenges are so great and varied that many previous programme providers had decided to no longer work with the traveller community. That is not the solution!

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