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EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ROMANI AND TRAVELLER PEOPLE



ROMANI CULTURAL & ARTS COMPANY

Making a difference with Gypsies, Roma, Travellers in a climate of anti-Gypsyism

Dr Adrian Marsh, PhD.

Empowerment through arts and culture

The Romani Culture and Arts Company is the leading Romani organisation in Wales and the strongest Romani and Traveller led organisation in the United Kingdom (other GRT organisations are not led and managed by Romani and Traveller community members, though they may be represented on the management committee or board), with an extensive network across Wales, England and into Europe. The RCAC has an impressive portfolio of activities, programmes and projects, that have stretched its field of vision and engagement well beyond the usual parameters of what constitutes arts and culture. To build self-confidence,

resilience and give a 'voice' to the usually 'voiceless', RCAC has extended its activities to include work on strengthening self-identity and Romani and Traveller 'pride', through arts and drama workshops with children of all ages, embarked upon a large, community-based early years creative education programme on (caravan) sites, worked with Romani and Traveller artists with international reputations, undertaken work in local primary schools across Wales to improve understanding around Gypsy, Roma, Traveller history, language and culture, especially through Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month (GRT HM), built stronger social and cultural relationships between Romani and non-Romani communities, carried out a unique and highly successful health

and wellness project (in partnership with the Centre for Equality and Human Rights, Public Health Wales), organised

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10 years of community strength and success!



2009-2019

As a Gypsy, Roma, Traveller led organisation, we are at the heart of OUR community; we understand the issues, challenges and obstacles that the community faces and we have a fundamental understanding of culture, traditions and resilience that these provide, through being immersed in them from early years, rather than from theoretical, scholarly research or 'on-the-job' learning.



Isaac Blake (centre), Director of RCAC and Community Champion Jamie James (right) at the launch of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Health and Wellness report, 27th April 2017
 Replace with Romani Arts Flickr photo

exhibitions about Traveller lives and experiences, and delivered high-level, international symposia on the arts, education, government strategy, policy and Romani rights.

The RCAC also, through its consultants and experts, provides social justice and anti-bias training for local government officers in housing, planning and community provision services, voluntary-sector and non-governmental (NGO) organisation staff, early years pedagogues, teachers, educators and education managers, health professionals and practitioners, social workers, community-development workers, fire service officers and police officers, as part of its commitment to professionals and practitioners, to provide practical, continuing professional development. Tailor-made support and training are also delivered to individual institutions and organisations (such as Public Health Wales).

What we do

Whilst the projects undertaken with children from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities are arts and culture-based in inspiration, under-pinning all of RCAC's work is an approach that promotes community education and life-long learning, self-empowerment and rights programmes, for Gypsies and Travellers. The most common approach to addressing exclusion, marginalisation and prejudice (anti-Gypsyism) is aimed at *non-Gypsy* professionals and practitioners, but RCAC believes that this approach ignores the more important

and fundamental need to equip Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, with the skills and knowledge to *genuinely empower* them in challenging prejudice, discrimination and exclusion and the effective means to building social cohesion and community inclusion, at its core. RCAC works from each vantage point, Romani, Traveller and 'gorjer' or 'gadjo' (non-Romani) perspectives to address these issues and challenges. This complex, nuanced approach is essential in avoiding privileging a non-Romani perspective that Romani and Traveller communities are more 'challenging', 'harder-to-reach' or more difficult to 'engage' with than other communities.

Partnership between GRT communities and service providers, educators, planners and policy-makers as a means of improving service-delivery or consultation, is the basis for all of RCAC's work.

Who we are

The Romani Cultural and Arts Company was formed in September 2009 (following the very first GRT HM national event in Cardiff Bay area), as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee (No. 07005660) and is a registered charity (No.1138150). The RCAC has solid systems of financial management and good governance structures, with a Board that includes local councillors, representatives from organisations that promote black and minority ethnic (BME) equality and inclusion, professionals and members of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities.

RCAC timeline

Some key dates in the history of the organisation

1. Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month 2009

June 2009 the first regional GRT HM event was organised in the country to draw attention to Romani and Traveller culture, arts and history in Wales

2. RCAC is established

September 2009 the RCAC was founded, with support from the Romani and Traveller communities in southern Wales

3. GRT HM 2010

June 2010 saw a major expansion of the previous year's programme with a activities in Newport and Cardiff, a poster competition, traditional Romani story-telling, waggon painting, the children's performance, 'Me, Us & You'. The National Film School (Wales) documentary about Dale Farm and a Romani rights workshop, led by Dr Adrian Marsh (a Welsh Romani-Traveller by birth) examined the issue of accommodation and eviction. Cardiff's GRT HM events, saw No Fit State Circus deliver children's workshops in Shirenewton, dance and hip-hop performances, 'dukking' (traditional fortune-telling), more waggon-painting and story-telling, at the Pierhead Building.

4. Cinetig animation project 2010

Children's animation workshops at the Shirenewton site, over ten-weeks produced a short film about Gypsy and Traveller history, culture and arts in Wales., delivered in partnership with SEWREC and Cardiff TES. Funded by the BBC Children In Need.

5. Gypsy and Traveller sites projects 2011

BBC Children In Need funded RCAC arts and culture projects at six Gypsy and Traveller sites across South Wales, over three-years, in partnership with Cardiff TES and the Black Voluntary Sector Network

6. 'Pots & Pans: Gypsy and Traveller Way of Life' exhibition, 2012

Cardiff Stories 'City Showcase' Past and present life on the two Cardiff Gypsy sites; Shirenewton and Rover Way, explored through artefacts, stories and oral history, from a Romani and Traveller perspective

7. Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month National Symposium 2012

International event at Cardiff City Hall, with Romani Studies scholars, activists and experts from the communities, Welsh Assembly ministers and over one hundred and fifty delegates attending. Funded by the Open Society Foundations

RCAC timeline

Some key dates in the history of the organisation

8. Heritage Lottery Fund project, 'Remembering the past, recording the present' 2011–2012

Oral history project with St Fagans National Museum of Wales, created a touring exhibition about Romani and Traveller history and memory in Wales

9. Holocaust Memorial Day exhibition, Barry, 2012

Romani and Traveller communities were the focus of this exhibition in Barry, to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day

10. Meeting the Prime Minister, 2012

Isaac Blake, Director of the RCAC, was invited to the home of the Prime Minister, 10 Downing Street, London, as part of an event to recognise the work of charities working with children in the UK, acknowledging the important contribution RCAC makes to the lives of Romani and Traveller families in Wales

11. 'Shine: exploring the power and influence of Romani visual culture' exhibition, Daniel Baker, 2013

Romani artist and scholar, Dr Daniel Baker, was supported, through the 'Gypsy Maker' programme funded by the Arts Council Wales, for a focused period of studio research and practice which resulted in the production of a new body of artworks that examine the aesthetic power and wider influence of Romani visuality across the boundaries of culture and language. Funded by the Arts Council, Wales

12. Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month National Symposium, 2013

Held at Cardiff City Hall, with speakers and presenters from Roma, Traveller and Gypsy communities, National Assembly of Wales ministers, academics and scholars from around the world and differing Romani and Traveller groups, joined by over a hundred delegates. Workshops on improving service delivery, developing practice and policy, and supporting early childhood development in Europe, amongst Romani and Traveller communities were presented. Funded by Open Society Foundations

13. Romani and Traveller skills and trades report, 2013

RCAC commissioned research and a report into Gypsy and Traveller skills, trades and employment, in Wales, through funding from the Big Lottery 'Awards for All'. The aim of this research and report was to demonstrate the diversity amongst Romani and Traveller communities, in these areas.

Dr Adrian Marsh, Newport GRT HM Symposium, 2010



The organisation has been especially successful in attracting funding for its programmes and activities from a wide range of donors, frequently on a repeated basis, including the BBC's 'Children In Need' Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Open Society Foundations (OSF) Early Childhood Programme, the Open Society Initiative for Europe, the Joseph Rowntree Trust, Save the Children in Wales, MENCAP Wales, Welsh Strategic Partnership for Minorities, Swansea Crime Prevention Trust, the Big Lottery Wales, Allen Lane Fund, Esmée Fairburn Foundation and the Centre for Equality and Human Rights at Public Health Wales.

Working through the arts, the RCAC raises funds to take community development and early educational projects into Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (caravan) sites and communities, local preschools and primary schools and into non-Romani communities across Wales.

The RCAC has an effective web presence and is particularly adept at using a variety of social media, including its very popular Twitter feed, in promoting its work and the success of its projects (see <http://www.romaniarts.co.uk/>), including the events organised for GRT HM (<http://www.romaniarts.co.uk/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-history-month-in-wales-2019/>) and its previous national symposia (<http://www.romaniarts.co.uk/grthm-national-symposium/>).

Advocacy activities

Advocacy at RCAC is a series of activities that aims to influence decisions within political, economic, society and governing institutions. Our advocacy can include many activities, including media campaigns, arts exhibitions, cultural events, workshops and training, public speaking, commissioning and publishing research reports, conducting interviews and surveys or polls or more often, a combination of all these. The target for 2019 advocacy raises the challenges faced by gay, lesbian and trans-gender Romani and Traveller people (see <http://www.romaniarts.co.uk/lgbtiq-gypsy-roma-traveller-conference/>), a 'minority within a minority' and like many of the RCAC's events before, is supported by the Welsh National Assembly with representation from a Deputy Minister and Chief Whip.

Engagement with local and national government in Wales is at the centre of RCAC's programme of advocacy and outputs include impacting upon national policy and strategy objectives for GRT communities. The positioning of the symposia that RCAC organises and delivers each year, at the highest levels, means that these advocacy messages and the concomitant Romani and Traveller rights agenda, are delivered to decision-makers and opinion formers, from local, national and international bodies and institutions. The local-to-global perspective that underlies all of RCAC's programmes activities ensures that Gypsy and Traveller communities in Wales are not represented merely as a 'nationalised' minority within the context of Welsh national policy and strategy, but as a community connected to other linked Romani communities across Europe and the world.

Romani experts, Romani expertise

International expertise and consultancy, delivered by scholars and academics from the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities, has been at the core of many of RCAC's advocacy initiatives, including the 2012 and 2013 GRT HM National Symposia, held in Cardiff City Hall, where Romani

academics, advocates and activists from the United Kingdom, United States, Hungary, Sweden, Slovakia and Croatia led discussion workshops and mini-training sessions. Other events, such as the 'Great Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Debate' in autumn 2014, brought together local Romania and Traveller communities with international Gypsy, Roma, Traveller experts and scholars from Serbia, Scotland, England, Slovakia, Turkey, Welsh politicians and ministers, Third Sector representatives from the BME communities and NGO's, and professionals from education, health, local government planning and accommodation services, police and fire service officers, and a broad range of attendees from the general public.

These events built upon a series of highly successful prior projects and programmes that have strategically extended the advocacy base for the RCAC, working with local authority education, health, housing, social services officers and members of the judiciary and police services (2009–2011). In the first National Symposium (2102), the RCAC sought to 'scale up' its advocacy by engaging the Welsh National Assembly (WNA), international donor organisations such as Save the Children, Open Society Foundations and the Roma Education Fund, with a high-profile event that took place in the capital (Cardiff) and attracted the participation of the Leader of the Assembly, the Finance Minister and the Assembly Member (AM) leading the policy initiative for Gypsy, Roma, Travellers. The advocacy aim was improving the Welsh national Gypsy and Traveller inclusion strategy, in the context of European Commission National Roma Integration Strategies for EU member states. The Welsh *Travelling to a Better Future* policy lacked, at that time, a Roma component, despite there being an increasingly large number of Czech and Slovak Roma in south Wales' schools, accessing social services and employment

support programmes. The advocacy outcome was a consultation process (2015) that led to a revised national plan in June 2018, *Enabling Gypsies, Roma, Travellers* (<https://gov.wales/enabling-gypsies-roma-and-travellers>).

Practice and professionals

Practitioners' demands for expert guidance on effective methods of engagement and interaction, when working with Romani and Traveller communities, in their settings, were addressed through four thematic workshops around Romani and Traveller early years education, health and wellness, Romani arts and culture, community representation and the law. RCAC's commitment to addressing practitioners' and professionals' needs, through continuing training and development, has led the Company, from 2013, to implement a training programme, delivered by consultant experts and Community Champions,



across the width and breadth of Wales.

A dialogue with government

Events such as these are part of the RCAC dialogue with government, local authorities, voluntary and Third Sectors, NGO's, other service providers and the wider community in Wales, to extend and improve the delivery of provision to marginalised and excluded communities, such as Romani and Traveller populations.

It's also part of the conversation with the general public, regarding the negative

attitudes and prejudices towards 'Gypsies' and 'Travellers', that exist and have existed, for many centuries in Welsh society. Improving social cohesion through social engagement and

which includes the support the national advocacy event in Wales for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month. This event encourages members from Local Authorities, the Welsh Assembly Government and Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities to discuss openly the challenges faced by them in accessing quality early years care and education provision and services in Wales and further afield, through the participation of international attendees.

offers an opportunity to bring Welsh Assembly Members, international ECD professionals and Roma rights advocates together with members of the communities in a dialogue that is intended to change policies and influence practise.

Research and reporting

RCAC has carried out a number of significant and important research projects, from examining the question of Gypsy and Traveller NEETS (those young people not in education, employment, training or school), through traditional skills and crafts amongst Romani and Traveller communities, to a nation-wide health and wellness research report that was used by Public Health Wales to implement an online training programme for health professionals and practitioners, aimed at improving delivery of services.

In education, the recent report regarding Elective Home Education and its impact upon the schooling of young Gypsy and Traveller people represented the first attempt to bring the perspective of Gypsy and Traveller parents, carers and children into this question, alongside those views of teachers and educators. The health and wellness research sought to interview one-hundred Gypsy, Roma, Traveller

A decade of effective community engagement!



2009-2019

We are *trusted* by the community. Individuals in our community often feel a sense of shame and lack self-confidence, because of their low levels of educational attainment after poor experiences of school and are therefore unwilling to speak to 'outsiders'. We are part of the community; 100% of our staff, consultants and volunteers are Gypsy, Roma or Irish Travellers and 75% of our staff live on sites within the South East Wales region.



Think you know who Gypsies, Roma or Travellers are? St David's Hall, June 2015
replace with Flickr photo

people, from ages seven years old to seventy years old, about their experiences of accessing health care services and their own perceptions of what constitutes health, wellness, and well-being. Health practitioners were also interviewed and these combined views, together with a unique research methodology (utilising the unparalleled access to the GRT communities that RCAC has, through its Community Champions), produced a ground-breaking and powerful report that was launched at the Pierhead Building, Cardiff, with the support of Welsh Assembly ministers, Public Health Wales officials and a broad cross-section of representatives from the voluntary (Third) sector in Wales, 27th April 2017.

Research and reporting, in the process of providing the data necessary to 'evidence' advocacy taken up by RCAC has been, and remains, one of the cornerstones for the effective community development, promotion of rights and equity, challenging inequality and exclusion, and empowerment through the arts. The development of empowerment through the arts and culture can only be effective, as a tool for strengthening self-confidence, self-identity and community cohesion, with evidence of where the obstacles, challenges and inequalities exist.

Community championship

The RCAC has, since its foundation in 2009, always believed in the capacity of community members to become advocates of their own rights and identifiers of the community's most

urgent and pressing needs. The RCAC has built upon this approach to develop the Community Championship programme, identifying those community members that seek to promote, through the activities and programmes, the aims of the RCAC in its pursuit of social justice, equity and equality of opportunities for Romani and Traveller communities in Wales and across the UK.

Community Champions have been the means by which many of the workshops, meetings, community development programmes, schools' workshops, health and wellness research, support for elderly Gypsies and Travellers on sites and a host of other activities have taken place. The success of the RCAC's work rests upon the trust and access that these Community Champions represent; reaching the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities in Wales can only be achieved through careful, respectful and trustworthy nurturing of these deep relationships between organisation and community. As the RCAC draws upon the knowledge, traditions and 'lived expertise' of Romani and Traveller communities, so the communities draw upon the advocacy skills and representation of the RCAC, trusting in the organisation's capacity to deliver genuine empowerment and community development, through the Community Champions.

RCAC timeline

Some key dates in the history of the organisation

14. BBC Children In Need grant 2014
The RCAC received a further three-years funding from the BBC Children In Need

15. Great Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Debate, 2014

The October 2014 "Great Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Debate" will bring together members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community with politicians, policy makers and public servants to address the issues that have become so prevalent in the past few years. The invited panel of experts will address these questions and others, in an "any questions" panel and discussion with the audience. Funded by OSIFE

16. 'Family Lines, Family Trails' exhibition, 2014

'Family Lines, Family Trails' was a 100% community-led project and focussed on identifying, recording and gaining a better understanding of Gypsy and Traveller family heritage and culture, aimed at changing the negative attitudes and behaviour of the wider public towards this marginalised group in society by ensuring that people can learn more about this 'hidden' culture. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund

17. 'No Travellers!' Project, 2016

The work will see the gathering of oral histories, photographs and artefacts to chart, record and archive the fascinating and significant stories of Romani and Traveller people. With participants from the regional Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople communities, the final collection will prove to be enlightening and an essential archive of the experiences and memories of this unique people. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund

18. Stories of Health & Wellness: GRT Communities in Wales, 2016-17

A partnership between the RCAC and the Centre for Equality and Human Rights, Public Health Wales. A team of trained Community Champions from the communities carried out over 100 interviews with young parents and older carers about their experiences of accessing health and wellness provision in Wales. Funded by Public Health Wales and CEHR

19. GRT Arts & Culture Symposium III, 2018

International Romani arts symposium, in partnership with g39 and the Taliesin Arts Centre in Swansea, with Dr Ethel Brooks, Dr Daniel Baker, Rosemaria Cisneros and the Roma Digital Archive

<http://www.romaniarts.co.uk/projects/>

Romani Cultural and Arts Company

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Mission Statement
The RCAC exists to promote a better understanding of Gypsy,

Roma and Traveller culture within and beyond these communities. The aim of the RCAC set out the changes that we are trying to bring about to make the world a better place:
– to advance the education of the public in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture, in particular but not exclusively, by promoting arts-based community activities

– the promotion of ethnic harmony for the public benefit
– promoting knowledge and mutual understanding about different ethnic groups in Wales
– advancing education and raising awareness about different ethnic and cultural groups to promote good relation between persons of different groups

All the people

The Romani Cultural & Arts Company is pleased to announce that it has received a Big Lottery grant of £99,680 for a two-year project to engage elderly people in the Gypsy and Traveller communities, across South-East Wales, particularly targeting support for the elders of the local Gypsy and Traveller sites by providing support to this section of our community, through Community Champions. These essential posts will organise regular social events and meetings for the elders of the Gypsy and Traveller community, seeking to improve community access to services and provision and understand the obstacles that exist in delivery of those services. The project will also develop 'pathways' for improving relationships between service-providers and community, with Community Champions acting as 'cultural navigators' between non-Romani practitioners and professionals of services, such as elderly care, social services and non-governmental organisations in Wales who engage with elderly people, and the Romani community elders.

Many of the older adults feel at a disadvantage, in dealing with service providers, often attributable to experiences of discrimination, exclusion and racism, and are hesitant to speak to 'outsiders', even those from agencies set-up to support them. RCAC is part of the community, with our staff and volunteers from Gypsy or Irish Traveller backgrounds and most of our staff living



Laurel Price, 'Nothing happens on site. We are abandoned and I think its great to have someone looking out for us.'

on sites within the South East Wales region.

This is a ground-breaking initiative will enable and empower the elders of this vulnerable, marginalised community to stand up, be heard and to grow in confidence so that they can better engage with Third Sector agencies and public services.

Isaac Blake; Director of The Romani Cultural & Arts Company said: 'As a Gypsy who has lived on local authority sites, I know that there is very little in the way of provision or services available for the elders. They can feel very isolated. This project will go a long way to addressing this.'

Rona Aldrich, Wales Committee Member for the Big Lottery Fund, said: 'Programmes like People and Places are making a difference to the lives of so many people in communities across Wales.'

Schools' workshops and performances

Working with teachers, early-years educators, schools and schoolchildren has always been a priority of RCAC from its earliest work. The celebration of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month was the initial spur that led to the organisation's establishment in 2009. RCAC's programme has sought to promote inter-cultural education practice in Welsh schools, through training teachers and educators, delivering practical schools' workshops in Gypsy, Roma, Traveller history, culture, language, arts, crafts and story-telling, and through strengthening the curriculum content of Welsh education with lesson-plans, topic-sheets and educational resources aimed at supporting diversity in the classroom. A regular programme of these workshops and those involving Romani and Traveller artists from our 'Gypsy Maker' projects over the years, has led to some extraordinary performances and exhibitions from children and young people across all communities. The aim



Schools workshops and performances at the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month celebration, St. David's Hall, Cardiff

of these endeavours has been to challenge the stereotypes and negative attitudes that begin at a very early age and bring better understanding and relationships into being as a result. Many of our activities have led directly to the spectacle of children from differing communities at Welsh schools coming together to perform at the GRT HM celebrations, at St. David's Hall in Cardiff, to perform dance, music and drama based upon, or drawing from, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller traditions and cultural models

Engaging with early learning

School's engagement has also meant that RCAC recognises the

importance of beginning at the beginning, the crucial role of early years learning and early childhood development. Parent and toddler groups, on-site play-groups and advocacy around the issue of Romani and Traveller early childhood inclusion have been part-and-parcel of the programme of activities and advocacy since 2009.

The pilot programmes and projects that RCAC has initiated in this field have yielded important initial results, with Romani and Traveller parents improving their knowledge regarding early childhood development milestones and outcomes, but the RCAC seeks to build further in this regard and will be, over the next decade, targeting the issue, securing major funding to carry out early years programmes, parent's support programmes, early childhood pedagogue and professional's training, and significant policy change as regards national government, to ensure the

future well-being of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller culture, language and communities, through engagement with flexible, quality, inclusive early learning provision and services in Wales.

Such provision and services will need to address the very real issues of social inclusion, anti-Gypsyism, economic exclusion, racism and marginalisation in order to strengthen social cohesion in Welsh society, particularly with the advent of a departure from the European Union and the consequent changes in funding priorities, minority protections and shifts in community provision and priorities.



EQUAL RIGHTS
FOR ROMANI
AND
TRAVELLER
PEOPLE

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