

**Final Summary Review**  
**Supporting Employment & Enterprise Development among Traveller Men**  
**St. Margaret's Traveller Community, Ballymun**

**Presented to FAS February 2007**

**Background**

In 2005 Ballymun Regeneration Limited contracted with the National College Ireland to explore and support the establishment and development of employment and enterprise opportunities of Traveller men at St. Margaret's Traveller Community, Ballymun. The Nurture Programme was asked to undertake the initiative. In June 2005 the Nurture Programme began a six month process to engage with Traveller men at St. Margaret's.

The Nurture Programme proposed to follow a model researched and implemented by the Nurture Programme in 2003/2004 working with Traveller men in the Blanchardstown area. Nurture Programme activities would involve a development/support worker to set out at the grassroots and directly engage Traveller men at St. Margaret's to listen, develop a clear understanding of specific needs and issues among individuals interested and most importantly, develop relationships of trust. Areas of interest would be identified and specific employment and enterprise supports would be developed based around the individual needs and interests of the participants. The following is a summary review of the project as well as a report of the developments that have followed a year on after the initial input of the Nurture Programme.

**Taking the First Step: Access & Relationships**

The first and most difficult hurdle in the St. Margaret's process was gaining access to the men on site and developing some relationships of trust. The involvement of men in programmes offered and delivered by St. Margaret's Community Development Programme located on site at St. Margaret's had historically been limited and difficult to achieve. The first point of access to the men on site came through building relationships with key individuals namely, Jimmy Maughan, a traveller leader living at St. Margaret's and Damien Smith, the head of St. Margaret's Community Development Programme. With their assistance some initial discussions and meetings were held with men on site. The initial process of connecting with the men was slow and tedious, but the presence and consistent involvement of a Nurture Programme development worker, often during evening hours, helped to allay skepticism and build enough trust to allow the project to get moving.

The development worker listened, gathered feedback, and developed an understanding of interests and needs of potential participants. It became apparent that directly pursuing avenues for small enterprise development would not be an optimal course of action. Even though the men were coming from a self employment culture and most men had worked with other family members who ran small businesses of their own, starting off with discussions of developing a small business was not where the potential participants interests were focused or coming from.

The men were expressing a high level of interest in acquiring more specific skills and qualifications such as a driving license for a car or lorry, skills to fix electrical appliances or for landscaping. Such things were recognised as potential progression routes and door openers to employment and enterprise activities. Most of the men expressed a desire to obtain a driver's license. In response the development worker decided to pursue this avenue as a viable means to engage the participants in the developmental process.

## **B License Driver Theory Test Training**

The Nurture Programme organised a driver theory test training programme as a developmental progression step to respond to the men's expressed interests and to continue to engage the men and build trust and relationships. Driver theory training software was obtained and, using the facility and the computers on site at St. Margaret's CDP, Nurture helped to facilitate the training process.

The training programme was organised in a way to respond to traditional barriers and to make the programme as accessible and user-friendly as possible. The CDP centre on site was opened for a few hours on designated evenings which made it extremely accessible for participants. The men would come into the centre and set themselves up at a computer with self-directed driver theory training (CD) software. The Nurture development/support worker was present and available to assist, answer queries and to engage in one-to-one conversation with individuals. Individuals were encouraged to work at their own pace and level of interest and spend as much time as they felt necessary which suited the participants. This informal, flexible, low pressure and self-directed environment proved optimal for participants as reflected in the growing numbers who came to avail of the training.

Word of the driver theory spread to other men within the community and attracted more than fifteen different individuals who lived on or near the site. On some evenings every computer station was occupied and some had to come back when others were finished with their practice session. Although several participants were more sporadic in their attendance over the course of the training sessions, many regularly attended and continued to practice over several weeks often until they were achieving perfect theory scores.

The following is a record of Traveller men at St. Margaret's who participated throughout the entire initial driver theory training and those who went on to pass the theory test and/or obtain their full license.

Name	Passed theory test	Full License
Thomas (Dan) S.	X	X
Peter M.	X	X
Patrick M.		
Thomas (Lester) M.	X	X
Michael M.	X	X
Christopher M.	X	
Patrick M.	X	X
Michael S.	X	X
Anthony S.		
Bernie M.	X	

Out of the ten individuals who participated regularly in the trainings, eight passed their theory test and six have obtained a full Irish license. The theory test CD's have remained on site and additional individuals from the site continue to come into the centre to practice on their own as well as practicing for theory tests for larger scale vehicles.

In addition to the accomplishments of successful driver theory test results and driving licenses, a number of other important side benefits were achieved. Firstly, many men were acquainted and became more familiar with the operation of a computer. The informal environment gave participants of a variety of computer skill levels the opportunity to try things out and experiment in a low pressure setting. Secondly, the theory training involved individuals working on their literacy skills. Even though the theory CD contained a 'point-and-click' audible option for those with limited literacy skills, it enabled participants to practice their reading skills by listening to the CD and by following the on-screen text. Thirdly, the training also assisted in the development of trust and relationship building between the development worker and the men and between the men themselves. Finally, the initial success of the training sessions and the results obtained helped to build a feeling of accomplishment and empowerment among the participants. This was evidenced in the level of interest expressed to continue the development process.

### **Ongoing Developments: C License - HGV & Safe Pass Training**

The driver theory training was a central motivator and is something that continues to engage men at St. Margaret's CDP. Several of the men who participated and successfully completed driver training and obtained their license began to express a high level of interest in acquiring a heavy goods vehicle (HGV) or 'Class C' license, a skill which could potentially lead to future employment and enterprise opportunities. Several men at their own initiative had in fact already begun to train for the HGV theory test which was contained on the same software training CD as the car theory. Two of the interested individuals on site who were working part-time on small landscaping and gutter installation/repair businesses also expressed an interest as they saw the potential of developing their business further by obtaining larger vehicles and proper HGV licenses.

### **Ballymun Partnership and FAS**

In late 2005 Ballymun Partnership were actively researching methods of engaging with traveller men. The partnership was interested in promoting employment opportunities including self employment options to traveller men based locally in Ballymun.. As part of the research Ballymun Partnerships, contacted the Nurture Programme to discuss how employment opportunities including formal self employment might arise out of traveller men obtaining a driving license. Bill Abom from the Nurture Programme explained the involvement and the interest in HGV driving license and Safe Pass training. Up to 10 traveller men based on the St Margaret's site had shown an interest in taking part if a training course could be arranged. We worked to develop a proposal aimed at assisting 10 men take HGV lessons and a relate test. Once complete and having gained formal certification the men could consider entry into formal employment or self employment..

After some initial meetings and presentations Ballymun Partnership successfully secured funding from FAS to run a pilot HGV driver training project for ten men at St. Margaret's

which also included funding to run a Safe Pass course. St. Margaret's CDP agreed to support a part-time support facilitator to assist in the process.

Similar to the initial driver theory training, participants were supported in obtaining their theory test for a 'Class C' HGV license on site at St. Margaret's. This was done by using existing driver theory software. Those who passed their theory test were then entitled to receive a total of ten, 2-hour lessons from instructors contracted through the Irish School of Motoring. After participants completed the lessons and achieved a good level of competency they took their driving test. This process was initiated in late Spring 2006.

The following table represents a breakdown of the results achieved by the projects participants the HGV training programme as of December 2006.

<b>No.</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Vehicle Class</b>	<b>Theory test pass/fail</b>	<b>Driving test pass/fail</b>
1	John C.	HGV Class C	Pass	Pass
2	Anthony M.	Bus Class D	Pass	Pass
3	Thomas L.	HGV Class C	Pass	Delayed
4	Martin M.	HGV Class C	Pass	Pass
5	Lester M.	HGV Class C	Pass	Pass
6	John M.	HGV Class C	Pass	Fail
7	Patrick M.	HGV Class C	Fail	n/a
8	Anthony M.	HGV Class C	Pass	Pass
9	John M.	HGV Class EC	Passed Prior	Delayed
10	Martin R.	HGV Class C	Pass	Pass

Eight of the nine participants who were seeking to pass the driver theory test did so. Interestingly one individual mistakenly registered for the Class D or 'Bus' license. He did not learn this fact until he arrived at the driver theory test centre. Despite this he surprised himself and everyone else by passing the bus theory test (unknown to everyone, he had been reading and practicing some of the bus questions from the driver theory software). He therefore went to train on buses and successfully obtained his Class D license. Six out of the ten individuals passed the driving test and obtained either his C or D license. One individual pursuing an EC or 'Articulated' license and another individual pursuing the C license had to delay their training for personal reasons, but they seek to complete their training sometime in 2007.

In addition to the Driver Training, one-day Safe Pass training was also held on site at St. Margaret's. Seven individuals were able to attend the one-day course and each of these earned their Safe Passes.

## **Future Progression**

Six individuals have recently received their Class C or D licenses. The individual who obtained his Class D (bus) license is currently exploring the possibility of starting a bus service. He has been connected with a development worker with Travact who is currently assisting him in developing plans to obtain a Transport Operator's License, something he would never have imagined doing before this programme. Another participant has since purchased a vehicle that he is planning to use to develop a refuse and recycling business with some other family members. He is still at the early stages of this process. Interestingly he has been reluctant to fully share the details of his plans apparently because he does not want the others on site to know his "business" which is quite understandable. Several individuals have been able to use their Safe Pass to access building sites for some temporary work. Other participants have not yet put their new license "to work" yet are hopeful to explore opportunities in 2007, however as mentioned there seems to be a reluctance to fully share these plans and details as they would like to keep them private from the others for the time being.

At least three participants and others on site have expressed interest in continuing their develop progression towards obtaining an initial C license or continuing on to achieve their EC Class "Articulated" licenses and Class D "Bus" licenses which would give them even more scope for future enterprise and employment opportunities. These options are to being explored by the Ballymun Partnership and the CDP with participants.

## **Some Keys to Success**

There were several keys to the successful outcomes of the development process thus far. Each factor was important and in put combination with the other elements helped to address some of the significant traditional barriers of engaging in employment and enterprise development with Traveller men.

### *1. Flexible/Informal approach*

The open environment for training/learning that was created, firstly, enabled individuals to experiment, explore and to try things out before making larger commitments. Secondly, it allowed individuals to work at their own pace and at a level which suited participants without feeling unnecessary pressures on themselves or from others. There were no specific set timetables for completion. Thirdly, it gave an opportunity for participants to get to know the development worker and to ask questions one-on-one in a relatively private manner without an entire crowd watching. Fourthly, the set up allowed individuals to attend when they were able to do so. The driver training through the Irish School of Motoring also worked well as participants were able to book sessions when they were able to attend at times which suited them.

### *2. Local and familiar*

The course was administered at the Traveler's halting site which made access much easier for participants. Transportation and time restrictions were less of an issue. The centre is also a

known location to participants and participants were relatively familiar and comfortable in these surroundings.

### *3. Presence of a facilitator/support person*

Having someone available throughout the project to be of assistance in the evenings or “on call” via a mobile phone was a great help to participants. The support person also helped to keep things on track. Participants frequently would bring queries to the support worker in respect to test dates, directions to test centres or queries concerning paperwork one needed to complete. Some simply wanted to get things off their chests or had queries unrelated to the training programme. People knew that someone was available for assistance that they could trust if it was needed. The presence of a support person allowed for informal discussions and for participants to explore ideas together.

### *4. Starting where people are*

From the initial stages of the initiative the development worker listened to and developed an understanding of the specific interests and issues of those involved. This not only helped in putting together a programme which the participants felt was extremely useful to them and their situations, but also helped to build trust and a real sense that those seeking to work with them were interested in them. By starting where people are/were in this case also helped to build some momentum and, based on these successes, take on future challenges. The interest among those engaged remains high and much has already been accomplished.

### *5. Trust & Relationships*

Relationships and trust were primary factors in gaining access and buy in from those involved initially and throughout the process. This took time and was not rushed. The early discussions and listening that took place were essential in getting things off on the right foot. Throughout the project the presence of the development/support worker helped to demonstrate this trust. The men were listened to and from there they engaged and listened to the support worker throughout the process.

## **Difficulties**

The flexible and open ended nature of the project has meant that things have taken more time than other similar training projects of this nature. This has been one of the major strengths of the programme but such programmes are not as economical to administer and some momentum can be lost as things happen. This was the case for two individuals who began the HGV training who had things come up in their lives and they ended up having to delay their progression.

In discussions of future plans with some of the men regarding how they would use their new found skills there was a bit of a reluctance to share information. This was apparently because they did not want the others to know their private plans. This is an understandable concern of individuals who live in close proximity to one another. As a result channels have been opened up channels with other support organisation such as Travact for those who want to explore ideas more privately.

## Some Participant Reactions

The reaction from participant has been a positive one. When asked what they thought about the project participants felt overall it was a very good opportunity for them and that it has given them choices. The following are some of the statements made by participants.

“This has really helped me. I have a good chance now if something comes up to get a job.”

“I thought it was arranged very well. I would do it again if it was offered for the arctic lorries or the buses.”

“It was really helpful to me and all. The driver instructors were very good too. They really helped you and I was able to pass. I’d be looking for the EC license now.”

“I think it has been good thing. I can get a job if I want one you know.”

“The whole thing was brilliant really. I couldn’t fault a thing. It couldn’t have been any made any easier for us.”



*Some of the participants of St. Margaret’s HGV Training Programme (October 2006)*