

# **STRONGER TOGETHER**

**North Tipperary  
Traveller Pride Week**

**20  
21**

**27 September – 28 October**

**Nenagh Arts Centre**

# INTRODUCTION

The past year and a half have been difficult for everyone. The Covid-19 pandemic, and the restrictions placed on society, have caused much hurt, suffering, and isolation. Yet, the difficulties wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic have not been equally distributed. Across the world marginalised communities have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19 and the social restrictions introduced to curb the spread of the virus. In Ireland, the Traveller community has been particularly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is in large part due to the history of government policies that have generated considerable inequalities in relation to health, housing and education. The Covid-19 pandemic has not simply shed light on the inequalities the Traveller community experience, but in many circumstances exacerbated these inequalities. In the Stronger Together Exhibition poems by Nellie Hutchinson, a Traveller poet based in Nenagh, speak out against the historic exclusion felt by Travellers as well as the discrimination they continue to be exposed to. Piercing, poignant, and powerful, Nellie's poetry gives voice to what it means to be proud about Traveller identity and community in the face of ingrained social prejudice.

In the face of the challenge created by the Covid-19 pandemic many people have exhibited fortitude, while communities have banded together with great community spirit. Across Ireland, individuals, community groups and non-profit organisations have worked tirelessly to support all members of the community, but particularly those who are vulnerable. Such acts have shown that when people come together and unite for a common purpose, we can overcome even the greatest of challenges. Members of the Traveller community are no different in this regard. In the Stronger Together exhibition many of the works on display are collaborative efforts that have involved multiple people working together as part of an initiative to support each other as well as to make something beautiful. This includes a community blanket made of crocheted/knitted squares made by both Traveller and settled community members. It also includes plant boxes made by a Traveller men's woodwork group that have been painted in the traditional barrel-top style.

The 'Stronger Together Exhibition' is a celebration of Traveller identity and culture in North Tipperary. It also applauds how members of the Traveller community have held firm and supported one another throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. We hope the audience will engage with the exhibition with an open heart and mind.





# COMMUNITY QUILT

The community quilt initiative was developed by NTDC's Family Support Worker as a means to reach out and support older members of the community. Older members of the community are at increased risk to Covid-19 and restrictions meant many older members of our community have experienced considerable social isolation. The community quilt initiative hoped to reduce feelings of isolation by connecting people through a love of needle work.

Participants were provided wool as well as needles so that they could knit/crochet squares and a 'how to video' was also made and shared to assist participants. The finished quilt symbolises the different ways members of the community members have come together to provide support and comfort to one another during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Participants included:** Kathleen Crowe, Mary (Gooney) Maloney, Rosie Delaney O'Grady, Mary O'Donoghue, Anne Neville, Martina Phelan, Bridgit Doyle, and Margret Doyle.



# GROWING TOGETHER

Prior to Covid-19 pandemic young Traveller men in North Tipperary faced marginalisation and exclusion within education and employment. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic education and employment practices changed, leading to many people's education and employment going online, at home. This created challenges for many young Travellers who lacked access to the adequate space, technology and connectivity to make the most out of the virtual educational and employment opportunities that became available.

As restrictions began to ease NTDC's Travellers Men's Project initiated a woodwork group. The aim was to provide a supportive environment around a practical educational opportunity that had employment possibilities. The woodwork group involved participants learning how to make items, such as dog kennels and plant boxes, that had the potential to be sold. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the woodworking sessions also provided a space for participants to discuss any the issues they were experiencing.

On display in this exhibition are plant boxes that have been hand-made by participants of the Traveller Men's Project. The plant boxes have been painted in the traditional style of barrel-top wagons. As such, the plant boxes are emblematic of the way that over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic Travellers and non-Travellers from across the generations have supported, shared skills and grown together.



**Participants:** Michael (Mixy) Donoghue, Jesse Donoghue, William Hutchinson, Charlie O'Reilly, Para Havatitye, and Kieran O'Brien.

# WORDS OF TOGETHERNESS

Words of togetherness is a collection of poems by Traveller poet Nellie Hutchinson. These selected works express the great sense of pride Travellers feel for their ethnic identity and cultural heritage, but also the bittersweet memories many still hold of a life no longer possible.

Nellie's words move beyond description to provide a critical analysis of the history of settlement and assimilation of Irish Travellers, eloquently describing the economic and social marginalisation Travellers experience today as a result.

In this collection of poems, Nellie also provides heart-wrenching insight into the pain and suffering many in the Traveller community experience due to family tragedy. Suicide continues to disproportionately affect members of the Traveller community. Nellie's words point to personal devastation suicide leaves in its wake.

Provocative and piercing, uplifting yet devastating Nellie's words highlight the need for Travellers and non-Travellers to come together and speak out about anti-Traveller prejudice and discrimination. Her poetry speaks out against the historic and contemporary forces

driving this prejudice and discrimination. And, points to the vital need for concerted political action to reduce experiences of marginalisation that Travellers continue to experience.





# HOLDING FIRM

Over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic the NTDC Traveller Programme, which is staffed by Traveller and non-Traveller staff, undertook a range of initiatives aimed at supporting the Traveller community in north Tipperary. This ranged from working to meet the basic needs of Travellers living in precarious living conditions, to delivering public health information about Covid-19 and the Covid vaccine, to organising activities aimed at promoting the health and wellbeing of Traveller families. Support and care were offered over the phone as well as online via social media during the difficult periods of 'lockdown.' In more recent months, we have returned to in-person forms of engagement by facilitating education and employment opportunities through small group work.

The holding firm gallery is a collection of images from some of these initiatives. Included are images from the Family Support Project's community blanket initiative (Littleton and Thurles), the Traveller Men's Project woodwork group (Roscrea and Templemore), the Traveller Advocacy Project's horticulture projects (Borrisokane and Templemore) and computer courses (Nenagh), and images from a wood sculpture course (Littleton).

This collection of images shows the hard work and dedication shown by both Travellers and nontravelers to hold firm in the face of the adversity brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

# TRAVELLERS TOGETHER PREVENTING SUICIDE CONCERT

Research shows that every 8 out of 10 Travellers are affected by suicide. The Travellers Together Preventing Suicide campaign aims to raise awareness and solidarity about the impact of suicide in the Traveller Community and prevent future suicides.

For 2021 a concert of Traveller artists was organised with the aim of bringing attention to suicide prevention and highlight the root causes of Traveller suicide. The concert was pre-recorded and streamed online on Friday 10th September 2021 to coincide with World Suicide Prevention Day.

The concert was organised by a wide range of Traveller organisations and funded by Dublin City Council and Dublin North East Inner City.

The concert brought together a wide range of Traveller artists from across the country, including Sharyn Ward, Trish Reilly, Helen (Nellie) Hutchinson, Steo Wall, David Collins with musicians Andy Barron and Ger O'Foghlu -Arguello, Kathleen Keenan, David Keenan, Joe Reilly, The Feekers (John Keenan, Darren Lynch) and Martin Mahon. Performances from the concert will be shown within the exhibition space.

It can also be watched via the Travellers Together Preventing Suicide

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# Special thanks to all the people who contributed to the Stronger Together Exhibition, including:

Anne Neville, Kieran O'Brien, Breda Doyle, Margret Doyle, Martina Phelan, Joanne McCarthy, Michael Murray, Nellie Hutchinson, Charlie O'Reily Kathleen Crowe, Mary (Gooney) Maloney, Rosie Delaney O'Grady, Mary O'Donoghue, Michael (Mixy) Donoghue, Jesse Donoghue, William Hutchinson, Para Havatitye, Sarah Ryan, and Philomena Ryan.

**The organisers are grateful to the organisations that funded the Stronger Together Exhibition.**



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth



This exhibition was organised by the North Tipperary Development Company Traveller Programme. To find out more about the NTDC Traveller Programme visit our Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/ntdcprimaryhealthcare>

