*Positive Engagement Through Youth Work: Working with Roma children and young people in Derby, supporting their wellbeing.*

Abstract

**Introduction**

Roma migration to the city of Derby in the UK is disproportionately high for a city of barely a quarter of a million people. There are between 4,000 and 6,000 Roma migrants in Derby located in a densely populated area of approximately five square miles. As with all new migrants in significant numbers the question of integration and the provision of services by the Local Authority and other statutory and voluntary agencies becomes a topic for discussion. Despite the desire to integrate new arrivals and those Roma migrants who have settled in the city since 2005 there are few parts of the statutory sector able to engage with Roma communities effectively. The barriers to engagement are not merely a matter of language, but involve a cultural disconnect associated with a lack of understanding of Roma, their heritage and years of discrimination, segregation and other forms of social exclusion they have suffered in their countries of origin.

Derby however has developed networks of positive engagement, and being one of very few cities in the country where working with Roma families holistically is having an impact on the futures of young people, albeit is early in the process to extrapolate clearly what future outcomes look like for young Roma migrants. The development of Roma-led advocacy organisation (Roma Community Care) supported by the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby has taken a youth work led approach that puts Roma children and young people at the heart of its work. It has adopted youth work values to engage, and educate informally in ways that seek to reflect a positive sense of wellbeing for children and young people involved in the programmes. The project promotes access to supported youth work and its potential to generate a sense of wellbeing, based on its ability to empower young people and to offer culturally sensitive models of engagement that are Roma led. As Clark (2014 www.extra.shu.ac.uk [online]) contends, "it is notable that some of the most successful 'on-the-ground' projects [in the UK] are Roma-led." This article seeks to explore that premise and unpack the arguments associate with youth engagement migration and integration.

**Context and Background**

Roma migration to Derby is not only associated with the recent inward migration within the European Union (post 2004) and movement east west since the A8 accession states had restrictions lifted on rights to work. It goes back to a period in the 1990s when Roma

refugees seeking asylum came to Derby as a direct result of fleeing war zones in Bosnia and later in Kosovo. Between 2000 and 2004 Roma from Czech and Slovak republics, in small numbers, came to Derby seeking asylum (none of these asylum seekers achieved refugee status and were subsequently returned to the countries of origin) but many came back to the UK after the restrictions on movement were lifted. Subsequent "chain migration" (McDonald, 1964:82) of families from eastern Slovakia and the Czech Republic to the UK has seen significant numbers settle in Derby, the majority of whom originate from three large towns and cities; Kosice, Presov and Michalovce and the rural areas in their hinterland.

This article concentrates on the experiences of mainly Slovak and Czech Roma who make up the largest population of Roma currently residing in Derby (between four and six thousand), with Polish as the next significant group by number, followed by Latvian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Slovenian and Romanian Roma in much smaller numbers. Ethnic Roma are in most instances native speakers of the national languages of their countries of origin. However, within the homes of many Slovak Roma families *romanes* (romani) is spoken, but few if any can write it as it follows an oral tradition. In the context of the interrelatedness of the largest demographic group of Czech and Slovak Roma there are significant kinship links and ethnic sub-group associations pre-dating the formation of the former Czechoslovakia. A shared heritage exists, albeit one with as many disconnections over time as connections through trade and travel and traditional familial clan-like links for more than four hundred years.

**Method**

Methodologically the researchers are working with self-designated Roma young people and children using a case study approach (over two years).  They adopted an ethnographic framework which involved them as participants to varying degrees raising questions about their membership status as both insiders and outsiders. One is leading the activities with the young people involved, the other as a volunteer (but holding an overarching strategic position in the organisation when it comes to decision making about the use and function of the youth work provision). Both are aware of the nature of 'insider/outsider' dilemmas (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) associated with observation research and levels of participation. The researchers are 'participants as observers' (Gold 1954) given their roles within the group. They are insiders as members of the target population (that is part of the youth group setting), but outsiders in the context of ethnicity and in the differing roles within the group. What is important here is what Dwyer and Buckle (2009:54) identify, which is not to treat their membership roles as part of a dichotomous relationship with the observed but one that occupies the space between insider and outsider allowing the researchers to be both

simultaneously using informal education as a model adopted by the youth workers in those organisations. The case study through observation and informal conversation evidences the nature of reciprocal relationships in establishing trust with young Roma people and their families and the wider community, against a back drop of negative stereotypes associated with media and popular discourse in a national environment that seems to have adopted an anti-Gypsy and anti-migratory sentiment (McGarry, 2013 [online]). The article draws on race and ethnic studies unpacked through the medium of social identity. It culminates in an assessment of well being of the young people in the case study correlated with the positive engagement of youth work through informal education. The authors are the Director of the Multi-Faith Centre (academically a sociologist) and the Lead Youth Worker. The latter comments on his personal experience of working directly with young people as well as examining the conceptual frameworks set out herein. The model adopted reinforces the use of ethnographic approaches "used very effectively to explore aspects of transition and some of the structural factors that impact upon young people's lives" (McDonald *et al.*, 2001 cited in Heath *et al.*, 2009:103).

**Establishing Roma Community Care**

Roma Community Care (RCC) was established in 2013 as a co-created response to the needs of the Roma Community in the city. At the point of this development the outreach team (who are a mix of Czech and Slovak Roma) had worked with the MFC for the previous 15 months as volunteers. The Multi-Faith Centre, (through the Director, lead Youth Worker and staff team) created the opportunities for additional outreach support for RCC in 2014 towards it becoming a self-sustaining and ultimately self-reliant organisation based on a three year capacity building plan. The RCC team comprises a lead advocate and a team of four, three Czech Roma and two Slovak Roma and in that sense is 'Roma-led'. Their work is divided up between offering outreach support, signposting and assisting families across a range of social and mobility issues, which in the main relate to housing, welfare, education and health.

These initiatives are new and have developed organically based on need and identifying gaps in provision since 2011-12. RCC has galvanized trust within the community, and particularly with the youth work activity with young people led by the MFC Youth work team. In addition it has been able to involve other youth work agencies, has developed a successful partnership for youth work with Peartree Baptist Church in the city who host one session a week and are now running two additional evenings a week in the Mandela Centre. RCC has office space at a local primary school community centre. MFC is currently

responsible for working with RCC in a co-creative relationship and acts as a critical friend, but one, which in the early stages of development embraces the workers under its own legal framework.

For two years The Multi-Faith Centre and RCC staff teams in partnership with Peartree Baptist Church and later The Mandela Centre, have provided 48 weeks a year of consistent youth work and in the process established itself as a regular and important feature in the lives of young Roma in Derby. Testimony to this consistent approach is more than six hundred young people registered with the youth work provision, and many going on to become volunteer helpers in those settings when too old to attend due to age restrictions (that is over 16). In addition the volunteer group, who are on average between 17- 24 years of age, have become role models within the community.

**Is Youth Work with Roma Effective?**

Youth Work has often been described as being one of two things 'Activity' and/or 'Informal Education'. Activity is seen as "diversionary activity", it distracts 'bad people from doing bad things'. Informal Education however, is about building relationships, learning together, and developing critical thinking (Jeffs and Smith 2005:5).

Youth Workers should never be about control or distraction, but should always be based in empowerment. This is manifest by engaging young people through voluntary participation to develop equality and raise aspirations, allowing them to become empowered to see the world as a place where they can develop and grow as people and citizens. Jeffs and Smith, claim:

> Informal education is a tool that Youth Workers use to help establish these things. Informal education flows from the conversations and activities involved in being a member of youth and community groups and the like. In these settings there are workers whose job it is to encourage people to think about experiences and situations (2005:5-6).

There are many differences and some similarities between informal and formal education. Formal education is situated around a curriculum and is measured by a learning process that requires a regurgitation of the information, whereas informal education is situated around people and is measured by the challenges it provokes. Informal education can happen anywhere with anyone. Formal education relies on boundaries associated with schools and colleges across public and private sectors. It functions around attainment based on grading and obedience to be able to achieve its goal (often 5 GCSE's). Informal education's goal is embedded in the journey with the learner; it is not means ends driven. Its *reason d'etre* requires flexibility and the ability to travel with others and learn together. As Batsleer points

out, "the role of educator and learner are each present in informal education" (2009:5). Formal education is based around a master of knowledge who fills the uneducated (Freire 1970). Informal education sees each participant as valuable in a 'person centred' context and a contributor to everyone's learning. Formal education has similar aspirations but regularly fails to achieve them for a range of reasons associated with formalised learning regimes, exam-based learning styles and systemic weakness through inflexible curricula, disproportionate teacher pupil ratios and government standards and expectations. In this sense its person centeredness (Rogers, 1961) can be lost against the pressure in formal educational settings to achieve against benchmarks and targets. However, both types of education seek an increase in knowledge among their learners and that the knowledge they gain will positively affect their world and improve their lives.

Youth Workers value informal education as it is based in the principles of democracy and equality. Both of these enable young people and workers alike to be challenged and educated about the world around them (Beck and Purcell 2010).

When working with Roma young people and children in Derby in various youth work settings informal education has been an invaluable tool for both workers and young people to develop a deeper understanding of each other's culture, history, life styles and experiences. It could be argued that informal education as a model for youth engagement has ultimately led to better understandings as the co-participants journey and share experiences. This sharing extends the reach of the engagement beyond the meeting spaces and has also reached into their families who see value in the youth work being provided. This is evidenced by cooperation from family members and community leaders, suggesting positive recognition by the community of the youth work offer, which is reflected by the continual engagement by the young people. The increasing sense of belonging associated with the young people's attendance at the youth work sessions forms part of a reciprocal trusting relationship based on the community's understanding of youth work and its intension to support the integration and development of their children and young people. As a parent said in support of the activities being offered (translated into English):

> Three of my boys come and it is the place where we know they will not get into trouble, or be bothered by people who want to be rude and disrespectful to them. We are happy they come and we know its important for them and for us, we want them to be safe (Roma mother in Derby).

Informal Education and Youth Work are based on trusting professional relationships as alluded to above and yet there is no magical formula for developing these. A recent report from The Roma Support Group in London highlighted the necessity for trusting relationships when working with Roma clients, stating:

> The cornerstone of our approach [Roma Support Group] and the key to our success is our ability to establish and maintain trust with Roma children, their families and communities. Building a trust-based relationship stems from having respect for our clients and their culture, as well as compassion and understanding of their problems and needs. www.romasupportgroup[online]2014

Many youth workers will have a 'tool kit' – these are things that over the years of their experience they use to enable degrees of engagement, through conversation, which starts the journey of building relationships.  These may consist of questions, or activities, pictures or sports. As identified below:

> When I first started working with the Roma community I always carried a pack of cards with me, this was a great way to engage young people, even those who spoke little English - 'Snap' - the game to match alike cards is truly universal! As young people began to know and recognise me, they shared space with me and we were able to start developing a relationship, eventually they sought to teach me their card games. There were also some games they refused to teach me, as I was often told, "I wouldn't play good enough!" (Lead Youth Worker).

Informal education focuses heavily on conversation, but starts earlier with a shared space, a watching of each other, sometimes leading to questions that stimulate discussion. However workers have to allow time to be in a shared space, there is no rush in building and developing a relationship and if it is rushed, it will often be perceived as hollow and tokenistic (Packham 2008).

Therefore workers need time, space, activity and discussion to be able to head towards developing those relationships. Unfortunately the current climate of austerity effecting both statutory organisations and the community and voluntary sector in the UK, has resulted in youth work posts being lost. The legacy of cuts in budgets may continue for some years yet. The consequences of the dramatic demise of youth work in many areas will have a serious effect on the development of relationships with young people in society and especially the marginal and/or harder to reach.  Stability and reliability are crucial to developing trusting relationships, especially since many young people may lack this in other parts of their lives. Developing trusting relationships will also be impacted by the need for trust and honesty, wrapped around appropriate boundaries, as people grow closer and journey together. Workers need to remember their professional position and remain focused on what is best for the young person.  Being honest can often raise negativity, however, dealing with situations honestly, appropriately and within an established trusting relationship will allow a more constructive space.  To use a fairly mundane example; discussing personal hygiene can often be seen as a very difficult topic, and speaking to a young person and exploring with them the embarrassing subject of body odour could be seen as very offensive (despite the reality). However, when people trust each other and provide space, a discussion around issues like personal hygiene is often better received.

There is a generational moral code evidenced by community members, which adopts the principles of shame and honour developed among the Rom for centuries in which a basic division between the Rom and their worldview and that of the *gadze* (stranger – or non-Romani) world becomes a starting point for decision making. There are obvious consequences for those decisions for family in the first instance (including the extended family), and then within the wider Roma community more broadly, but the latter does not take precedence over the former. Despite a tendency to homogenise Roma among the general population there is little grouping unity across Roma populations in Europe (Hancock, 2013:xxii). This distinction is premised on centuries of protecting the family and its extended group in the face of what for many is basic human instincts for survival, shelter, food, trade, and until the post World War II experience of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe, varying degrees of nomadic lifestyle. Clan groups are effectively extended families, which may have as many as four generations as part of the group (Matras, 2014: 40). The importance of the Roma extended family cannot be overemphasised and the necessity to gain the trust of that family when working with their young people is summed up in Matras' assessment, in which he states:

> Roms cherish the spirit of solidarity and mutual support that characterises the Romani extended family. They view it as a unique part of Romani culture of which they are proud, and as one of the things that separates them from the customs and habits of the Gadje, or non-Roms (2014:44).

Working with Roma Communities in Derby has informed the youth work team of the vital importance of trust.  Being part of communities that have historically experienced discrimination, abuse and even persecution has produced a people who cannot be blamed for a lack of trust in authority, be that state sponsored or otherwise.  Any kind of rumour within the community can have devastating effects regardless of its provenance. The reality of working with the community means that youth workers need even more time for exploring relationships, honesty to remain open and transparent and consistency to build reliability (Soni, 2011).  We know that a lack of trust can have an adverse effect on community cooperation.

Social Services are one such service that currently lacks trust among the Roma communities in Derby and elsewhere. There are a number of reasons for this, based on misunderstandings and a lack of cultural awareness by Social Workers. An example of where cultural practice is misunderstood impacts on shared childcare arrangements, where extended family members take responsibility within families for the wellbeing of children and young people.  However, the lack of trust in this service filters out to others, and makes it increasing difficult to assure Roma family members that not all those offering services from

seeming positions of authority within society, are linked into Social Services. The fear among many Roma is that service providers could be presenting Social Workers with intelligence about neglect or abuse within Roma families. Many families believe the rumours that Social Workers have an agenda to remove children from Roma families without good reason and that they are prepared to sell their children to British families who are childless. These rumours are foundationless yet are spawned by social media, through word of mouth and various media stories from the countries of origin, many that started in the UK.  BBC News [online] 20th December 2012, reports: "a highly sensationalized documentary aired on Slovakian television, painting a picture of British social workers out to make money from vulnerable Slovak children." BBC Radio 4's 'The Report' programme aired on the same day, reported the rise of Roma children in Care across the UK and the mistrust between the Roma families and Social Workers. A general lack of trust in authority and those in power also affects wellbeing as people mistrust doctors, teachers, police, the fire service etc.  This leads to many misunderstandings and people taking unnecessary risks with their lives, not always finding support or intervention when it is needed. Often not recognising in the systems in place, in health or social care the UK States propensity to intervene in people's lives, as this had never happened in the experience of most Roma in their countries of origin, unless it came with negative consequences?

Youth Work, using informal education, helps provide space to tackle many of these issues. It provides space to examine self-worth and identity, it allows space to discuss rumours and reflect on different versions of reality, and it also provides space for discussions that would be considered taboo or controversial.  Yet youth workers need to make sure that this is based in the needs of young people and is a safe space, by having appropriate boundaries and awareness of local issues (Coleman *et al* 2005). They also need to recognise cultural sensitivities around a range of aspects including: gender, family values, codes of conduct and shame and honour, as well as an awareness of race, discrimination and other forms of marginalisation, stigmatization and stereotyping. This includes understanding a tendency towards early marriage, often arranged, or at least recognition of how young people are responding to this previously fairly strict cultural norm? Youth workers should appreciate where young people are in terms of reconciling their own views on these issues, and how in the UK context there may be additional generational tensions between young people who may be questioning previous historic norms.

The legacy for many South Asian young people in similar geographic locations as their Roma counterparts, is reflected in a third generation in the UK still apparently living 'parallel lives', between family and community on the one hand and wider social norms and other

social groups on the other.  Cantle's (2001) report into the race riots in northern towns/cities, and his later works (2008a, 2008b) identified "the separation of communities by ethnicity and/or faith meant that there was a lack of shared experiences, with little opportunity for the emergence of shared values" (Cantle, 2008b:1). Deborah Phillip (2006) reinforces Cantle when she talks about the "processes involved in the racialization of space and to challenge the view that British Muslims wish to live separately from others and disengage from British society." Roma young people in Derby, in the post 2004 migration generation were in many instances between 6 and 11 years of age on arrival in the city (now between 16 and 21 years of age) and are living lives with one foot straddled either side of the parallel divide, between family heritage and UK society more broadly (not quite the parallel lives scenario expressed by Cantle or Phillips). However the generation of young people that follow (the children of the post 2004 generation) may be more inclined than their older peer groups or their parents towards the perpetuation of 'parallel lives'. If, in particular, the example of the current older generation is anything to go by then marrying outside the community becomes an increasing option. Current evidence of Roma women marrying into the Kurdish community in Derby (many of whom are entrepreneurs with shops in the Normanton and Peartree localities of the city) is one example of the changes and challenges for communal lifestyles for Roma in the UK. Will the generation that follows, who already carry the legacy of their heritage with them in terms of discrimination and racist stereotyping, withdraw solely into communities for protection and support or will the opportunities that life in the UK presents impact negatively on Roma culture and traditions as they seek to move away from the communal lifestyle? The tension between the States desire for greater community cohesion (Cantle, 2008a) and a dilution or even loss of Roma tradition will not be taken lightly by older Roma, and yet there seems to be a recognition of a better future as a potential outcome to life in the UK, which many see as a compromise they are prepared to face, as families and communities.

Youth work with young Roma has another significant dynamic to consider if parallel lives are to be avoided and wellbeing is to be seen as more than just an aspiration. It comes back to the development of trust and relationship building in order to empower young people to test and discuss matters they are unsure about and be challenged about their own perspective on what might be considered to be 'traditional thinking'. That is, ideas that emanate from the heritage of their parents and families and what affect and impact that might have in Derby today? As self-worth and aspirations rise there can be a turn away from risky behaviour and a pursuit of self-fulfilment.  In short it is the development of critical thinking that supports cohesion and citizenship from a community development perspective and this leads to a positive sense of self and a shift in thinking abut 'the other' at a personal level.

Youth Work, based in core professional values against the backdrop of family life enables workers to foster critical thinking and anti-oppressive practice through participation. As Packham suggests:

> Enabling participation is a central aim of Youth and Community work. Facilitating effective participation enables communities to have a voice and agency, and it assists service providers and policy makers to make sure that what they do is wanted and required, so being more efficient and effective (Packham 2008:69).

For many young Roma people there are structural issues in their lives that they have little control over. For example, family lives are affected by: living in poverty in rented homes that are in very poor condition, often severely damp, with leaks, old and dirty carpets, poor but expensive heating systems and unsanitary rooms. These houses are often over-occupied by large extended families, where sharing the home is a norm, due in part to welfare benefit constraints, in part as a cultural response to communal living, and in the basic human need to exist against mounting odds. It raises the question of wellbeing, and what impact such living conditions will have on individuals and specifically children growing up in this kind of poverty. The effects on young people's health through poor housing naturally reaches out affecting other aspects of their lives such as education and employment futures (Batsleer 2013). If we understand 'wellbeing' as "the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy," (oxford dictionaries [online] 2015) these young people should not be failed by the system that could hold them in the poverty trap. Even with the advantage of shared family income and pooled resources, gaining consistent sustainable work is critical to overcoming poor living conditions, as current state welfare reform is having severe impacts on many Roma families economically and socially.

This potential uncertainty about instability in the family also leaves the door open for social care and social work professionals to question values, and this is exacerbated by poverty, which may be used as a factor to assess neglect or abuse? It may even raise the spector for some of where in fact they feel they are better off? Already in 2015 (January alone), Roma Community Care has worked with 4 clients wanting to leave the UK and be repatriated in the country of origin and there has been a steady trend since late 2014 towards this kind of decision. For some Roma the vulnerability of a lack of understanding about systems and structures, coupled with no consistent work, abject poverty, anti-migratory sentiment, unscrupulous landlords seeking to exploit them and poor experiences associated with racism and/or discrimination have helped make up their minds to return to central and eastern Europe. In the country of origin they are at least connected through language and an awareness of expectations for life, albeit many times one of oppressive discrimination and segregation, or living in the shadow of violence perpetrated by extreme

right wing groups. The dilemma however of life in former homelands versus the unfamiliar pressures of living in the UK seem for many to be weighed in favour of resettlement in places like Derby. The motivations of families are generally in search of a better life for themselves, but ultimately there is evidence to suggest that what matters for the future of these families is the search for a better life for their children. Evidenced by a Roma Father from Slovakia, stating:

> My daughter is at school from five. I want that she will be educated here. I want to stay here. I will not return back to my country in Slovakia. I want that she will receive a good education here and then she will have a job. I want that she will not have to work hard like me and that she will have a better job, and easier job than me (Slovak Roma informant).

How then do those who provide services and support for Roma make the most of the opportunities to do so without alienating families and communities? No one is suggesting that creating false hope is a positive outcome and youth workers are one of few professionals in the lives of young people and ultimately their families, who do not offer what is not achievable or realistic in the circumstances. But what they do offer is equality as a crucial aspect of service provision and democracy as a model to underpin that equality of opportunity and choice. For many Roma this is all they are seeking. A young man of 15 years of age in the youth club on Tuesday evening said:

> I don't mind being different and I am proud of my culture but I want to be given the same chances as anyone else, not to be discriminated against because of my colour or how I speak or where my family comes from.

The development of a safe space allows some issues to be explored at grassroots level, however, if matters are only dealt with at this level it can too easily become a blame game. This may not take into consideration the wider impacts of heartfelt inequalities affecting health and wellbeing, which may require workers to be involved in lobbying outside the youth work environment (Disability Rights UK 2011). Youth Work can affect change through the development of young people by forming leadership groups and being advocates of/with young people to challenge discrimination and oppression at all levels and to show democracy in action, even if this causes conflict for workers who can sometimes end up challenging work partners or funders.

**Conclusions**

Working holistically with children, young people, young adults and their families helps to create a community profile around housing, health, education and employment which can enable better informed approaches to understanding the complexity of needs, the effects of identity, and the formulating of a youth led approaches to targeting issues.  As Roma young

people take the lead on projects and concerns around their wellbeing, it removes the feeling of being targeted by other organisations. Health and wellbeing are of course personal (Laverack 2007) and this can mean that perceptions of healthy behaviour and outcomes associated with wellbeing are relative to people's culture, experience and understanding. The sensitively around being told to be more healthy can also be insulting, as it doesn't acknowledge the wider determinates associated with ones life that can impact on our sense of health and wellbeing, including how these things affect social capital and our environments (Dahlgren and Whitehead 1992). Good health is not always a choice.

The communities are often very aware of being targeted by organisations to reach their own organisational targets, and may react by withdrawing their engagement. As a consequence MFC and RCC are constantly monitoring organisational agendas of others that are not necessarily youth led, and does all it can to mediate those experiences to prevent relationships being undermined and to retain the safe space for young people. To enable positive engagement, activities need to be centred on young people's needs. This may take extra time as relationships are built and developed, but in the end provides constructive activity that has a chance of producing positive change as young people value it because of their input into its creation. It also ameliorates aspects of 'hopelessness' associated with studies of Roma adolescents in Slovakia (Kolarcik *et al* 2012) where they scored high for feelings associated with a lack of a sense of wellbeing based on no constructive future in their country of origin due to multiple factors, many of which related to poor social mobility, discrimination and a lack of opportunity.

If wellbeing is the aspiration for young people as they develop through life then advocacy as a model to enhance wellbeing generally needs to be given serious consideration. RCC has adopted a Roma-led model of advocacy, which is demonstrating positive outcomes through the power of one-to-one support for adult Roma clients. Evidence from school-based studies in Australia also reflects the potential power to affect wellbeing in schools, suggesting:

> the provision of a secure and reliable relationship with a teacher-advocate who engages with the student empathically and non-judgmentally has a positive impact on the adolescent's emotional wellbeing (Henry *et al.* 2003) and psychological development (McCann 2008).

The youth work setting is interconnected with families and family life, trust ensures family support for the youth workers and what they are achieving in the construction of positive safe spaces for development for young Roma. In those spaces the challenges and opportunities of life and many of life's lessons are being learned, informally for the most part, but effectively. This can be evidenced by behavioural change among young people who others, such as school and elsewhere have labelled 'problematic' or worse, and are therefore in

danger of reinforcing the stereotypes youth work seeks to move away from. RCC volunteers and workers in the youth work setting now understand the value of youth led approaches, and one-to-one advocacy through relationship building. Adopting a person centred attitude (Rogers, 1961) when working with children and young people in a safe space is critical to any hope of releasing a persons potential. The question of creating hope for the futures of young Roma is critical to those adolescents who see the UK as a place of opportunity, thus dispelling the high levels of hopelessness reported in the Slovak study (above). In order to maintain a youth led approach MFC is introducing youth workers from the Roma community. This 'passing of the torch,' enables communities to take ownership, provide an example of good practice, and allows a 'first-hand experiential' approach, to working. The 'insider' source of knowledge enables better and more appropriate responses to needs, thus being more effective in promoting wellbeing. It cannot however become a sustainable model without committed support from others who believe in the value of youth work, and who continue to walk the journey together as 'critical friends'. As suggested in the introduction to this article, access to supported youth work has the potential to generate a sense of wellbeing, based on its ability to empower young people and to offer culturally sensitive models of engagement.

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