



### Transcript:

**Because of a shortage of legal campsites, there are around 25,000 gypsies and travellers classed as homeless in the UK.**

**The life expectancy of a gypsy is 25 years shorter than the UK national average.**

**Gypsy pupils have the worst school attendance profile of any minority ethnic group in the UK.**

Narrator: In response to these troubling statistics, the charity, Friends, Families and Travellers is one of many set up to help seldom heard groups like this access social care and health and education services. Henry Chapman, a Romany gypsy himself, is a former service user of FFT and is now currently using his experience and knowledge of gypsy culture to help the charity offer support.

Zoe Matthews: Henry first came to FFT as a client, and we always where possible, try and get clients involved in gypsy traveller issues because obviously they're the best people to speak about the issues that face them, like living on unauthorised encampments and the evictions that go with that, being moved into bricks and mortar accommodation which affects a lot of travellers. Obviously this impacts hugely upon their mental health, and Henry has also experienced homelessness. That brings a richness to his role within our organisation and we're able to capitalise on that really.

Narrator: In his early years, Henry travelled around the UK with his family living the gypsy way of live until they settled in Eastbourne where Henry now lives in bricks and mortar accommodation.

Henry: I've been quite settled for many years now, and em ... but when I was little I did travel around and I remember the time when I was about eight or now that our travelling times was very, very difficult in, by getting evicted from where we lived, and as a child to have that

instability as well while travelling around. I thought it affected me because I was bullied, I didn't want to go to school, I just kept myself in the room, I had to have help from a child psychologist because of what I did go through, and then years after, me and my dad, we never had the best of relationships, we was always arguing, so I decided that I needed to move out. So the first thing was, I went to a local authority and they put me in a B&B and there was no after care, there was no care around, how's your mental state – that's when a spoke to Friends, Families and Travellers, and they put me in touch with so many organisations that could help me and support me. They cared about you, and at that time I didn't feel I was being cared for by anyone. I owe that organisation everything, for being here today and being back on my feet.

Narrator: Today, Henry has a number of appointments with his first being at a gypsy site in Tunbridge Wells. Henry works mainly with rural gypsies. He provides advice and support on a wide range of issues. He's been called here today by Louisa, a Romany Gypsy. Her family has had a land dispute with a local farmer, and they're now being forced to leave by the council, even though they own the land.

Henry: I'm here today on this campsite with a family who have got issues. They've been here for, I'm aware, of five years, and they are now in the process of being evicted. So I'm here today to see what kind of support I can give them.

Henry: *How many families here in total?*

Louisa Smith: *There's three families on here.*

Henry: *Three families. What's the correspondence at the moment you've had from the local authority.*

Louisa Smith: *They had a public enquiry on us last year. The inspector come and looked and that, he failed us. On this road what you've just come in, we've actually got the benefits of the rights to use that road, but our neighbour, he said that he'd dig that road up, but we already had a solicitor saying that if he dug that road up, he had no rights to do it,*

*and he's endanger our lives and me grandchildren's lives like if we wanted a fire brigade or ambulance or anything like that down.*

*Henry: Do you think this is having an affect on you as a person and as a family?*

*Louisa Smith: Yeah, my husband is, he's had a stroke, and he's supposed to have a bypass, a serious bypass, but he's too frightened to have that, in the hospital. I've got, well I suffer with me nerves and that.*

*Henry: Is you and your family on medication for the health issues, yeah?*

*Louisa Smith: Yeah, yeah.*

*Henry: And how have you found access with your medical care?*

*Louisa Smith: Well I did actually ask one doctor if we could have a letter to say like we had health issues and that was going up for planning, and he said that he wasn't happy.*

*Henry: Why?*

*Louisa Smith: He didn't like doing it. He said it's ...*

*Henry: Is this your doctor who you're registered with now?*

*Louisa Smith: One of them, yeah.*

*Henry: Right.*

*Louisa Smith: But we don't actually see him now, we see another doctor, but he's in the same surgery.*

*Henry: So can we try and have a chat with him and see what he says?*

*Louisa Smith: Well ...*

*Henry: What I can provide for gypsies and travellers is support with accommodation, health and education. What I'm finding when I'm visiting roadside gypsies and travellers is, they are being turned away from doctors surgeries, and why they're being turned away from doctors surgeries, is because they've not got no fixed address. We*

have the rights of seeing a doctor at a point of contact, and I think a lot of gypsies and travellers are still finding their own treatments, the old type treatments, they try and treat it at home before they will go and see these professionals because of the trust issue. That's a big challenge for me to get gypsies and travellers to trust organisations because they feel that they've been let down in the past.

*Henry: Every local authority or anyone in Britain matters to me, okay. Especially from the gypsy, because I'm one of them.*

*Louisa Smith: Right.*

*Henry: When there's children involved, people have to give me a good reason why they should be up and moved, because that has an affect on the children in later life. It did me, as a young gypsy, travelling around. So what I'm going to do, there's six things that I want to do when I leave here, and I need to look at the public enquiry, if I can get access with that, with Angus ...*

Narrator: Not only is Henry an expert by experience, he also understands the need of the gypsy community. This helps Henry to gain the trust of his service users and enables him to do his job more effectively.

Louisa Smith: But it's nice to know that we've got somebody like Henry to represent us and talk for us. And really, it seems like gypsies ain't got a voice, and we're not getting anywhere, so if we can have somebody on our own side, like being a gypsy and that, I think it would make better headway for us because he understands what we're going through.

Narrator: Henry is travelling to his next appointment which is in Battle, near Hastings. This family are in the process of being evicted after they erected permanent dwellings on their land without the correct planning permission. They did this so they could have a permanent base from which to access social care, health and education services for one of their children who has been diagnosed with attention deficient hyperactivity disorder.

Henry: I've moved on now to this traveller family's property where I have met this family on a numerous occasions regarding their planning

application. It is an ongoing issue for this family, and I'm just here really today, just to touch base with the family to see if they've received any correspondence or any updates that I really need to be informed about, and just to share some information really.

*Linda Smith: I had another letter from the enforcement officer about the stables and the gates.*

*Henry: Right.*

*Linda Smith: Said we're not supposed to have boarded fencing or gates up which I explained what the little'un, need to keep her in safe because she's got ADH, so we've tried to get planning permission, and they won't give it to us. They've got nowhere for us, they won't help us, there's nobody coming out to suggest anything, so we're just being left here. In September / October, I've got to make myself homeless.*

*Henry: The way I see it, the future is quite bleak isn't it, for a lot of gypsies and travellers, who are trying to find planning permission and have got places to live. So you want a stable home for your family, and at the moment, you don't know what tomorrow is going to bring, do you, so ...*

*Linda Smith: I don't, I don't know what's going to happen.*

*Henry: You don't know, so ... would you say this is having an affect on your mental state?*

*Linda Smith: I've got a nurse that comes out to me and I have to go to her at the local health centre because of what it's doing to me. I don't sleep, I worry about ... you know, people keep saying to me, don't worry, that's a few months away yet, but those few months then will soon be here. The time will be here, and what do I do then? Where do I go?*

*Henry: When I look at my own people and see the struggles they have in life, and because they're not very well educated, I feel that I can make a changes in peoples life from my community. I enjoy every day that I'm going to someone and those people are looking at me and they are knowing that I'm going to go away from there and try and do something for them.*

Linda Smith: Henry helps me with, like I can't use a computer, don't know the first thing about internet or anything, so if I want to know something, somebody will say to me, can you go on to www. whatever, and I've not got the faintest idea, so I just write down what they tell me, pass it onto Henry, Henry will look it up, and then he'll get back to me and tell me what it's all about.

Zoe Matthews: Henry is a real asset for organisations like ours, specifically organisations that are working with what are deemed as hard to reach groups, although I think these groups are quite reachable if you actually make the effort. Obviously you know, having service users and clients working with us, brings their experiences which in a way brings the policy issues that we try and work with to life.

Henry: Working with gypsies and travellers, I can relate to them what they've been through, so I try and minimise those challenges for them, and when I look at my past experience and what I've been through, and what I take on board in every day of my work, means a lot to me, because I've had it first hand.

[End of recording]