



20 Years of the Roma Support Group

1998-2018

ROMA
SUPPORT GROUP

Introduction

This special edition of our Annual Report will not only reflect on our last year's work but it will also celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Roma Support Group (RSG).

Twenty years on and the RSG is as true to its organisational aims and values as it was at the beginning, empowering Roma people, their families and communities to fulfil their potential and challenge discrimination and inequalities in British society. During the last two decades, we have not only assisted thousands of Roma community members arriving first as asylum-seekers and later as EU migrants with advice and advocacy but we were also the first in the UK to act as a bridge between Roma and non-Roma communities helping to build an understanding of Roma culture and heritage. We were also the first to channel the community's voice through Roma-led campaigns to create the conditions for integration of Roma migrants and shape (and inform) the policy conversation to ensure that the longer-term needs and rights of Roma in the UK are considered and respected.

We have pioneered and continue to share our models of engagement and good practice with young and older Roma people, proving that no community is 'hard to reach' but there are those communities who may be marginalised, overlooked and under-served due to a lack of political will, resources, prejudice and discrimination.

The Roma Support Group can mean different things to different people – so please read through the text of this report to hear what our work meant to our community members, volunteers, professionals and other stakeholders.

Twenty years on from establishing the RSG and facing Brexit makes us reflect on the cyclical nature of history and approaching end of the first chapter of Roma migration in the UK. But as we have supported many Roma individuals, their families and communities in their settlement, ensuring that they can exercise their rights, achieve and fulfil their potential, we have become custodians of Roma history of migration while witnessing a process of forging a new Roma identity in Britain.

This, being a privilege is also a responsibility, which we would never be able to shoulder without the ongoing support from our Funders, Donors, Partners and the dedication of our Trustees, Staff and Volunteers. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all, who, during the last year and over the past two decades have contributed to our work and development. Thank you for all your support, encouragement, enthusiasm, hard work and commitment!

Sylvia Ingmire, CEO & Roza Kotowicz, Chair

Celebrating Roma Support Group's 20th Anniversary

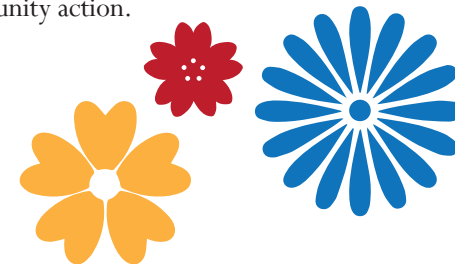
The crumbling of communism at the beginning of the 1990s brought crisis for Europe's Roma. In Eastern Europe, Roma were the biggest losers from the transition to neo-liberalism. In Western Europe, governments took fright at migration from the former socialist countries, and the modest policy gains made previously by Roma organisations stopped dead as the "Roma problem" was scrutinised.

Roma organisations in the West did try to reach out to the new Roma migrants from the East but they often did not understand their problems, or the exclusionary racism of Western governments. In 1998, however, Roma themselves began to come together with their supporters to create a Roma-led organisation with practical goals, at first in Kings Cross, and then with advice sessions in East and West London, culminating in their present office in Canning Town.

Giving advice taught them what else was needed. The RSG set out to change the public mind through offering them publications starting with "Colours of Hope" in 2003. There were also films, music CDs, concerts, exhibitions and talent shows, which emphasised the positive role of Roma culture. With musical and artistic training the RSG engaged the talents of the community, whose members sang for the Papal visit in 2010 and later joined the celebrated Roma Bridging Sounds Orchestra. And the process of enabling Roma talent to give back to the community included coaching sporting activities such as the iconic Roma FC and the Roma Karate Club – open to all and prepared to study the art of defence in Romani and Japanese...

Finally, the RSG realised it should not just cope with what the local and national policies sling at them; it could campaign to change policy, from London Councils' attempt to withdraw funding from the frontline voluntary sector organisations in London to Newham Council's attempt to sabotage independent advice and to the present Government's attempt to undermine the EU Roma Integration Strategy. The Roma Support Group is one local organisation, but its influence has spread throughout Roma, Gypsy and Traveller community action.

Professor Thomas Acton
Patron of the Roma Support Group





Our Mission

We aim to empower the Roma community with the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to challenge any discrimination that might prevent them from integrating into UK society and fulfilling their potential.

In parallel, we aim to raise awareness and help build an understanding of Roma culture, heritage and the challenges which Roma refugees and migrants face in the UK today.

Our Vision

Roma communities are empowered through the realisation that their strength lies within every individual and his/her fulfilment as a member of society.

Timelines...

**History of Roma Migration in the UK
and
History of the Roma Support Group**

1989 - 1990

The collapse of communism in Europe mark the beginning of a new migration westwards as racially-motivated violence against Roma increases.

Volunteers



The RSG has been able to achieve much more than its resources would allow thanks to the hard work and dedication of our volunteers and work experience students. They are involved in and help with all our projects, e.g.: Advice & Advocacy, Arts (music, forum theatre and visual art), Education Support, Aspiration, Early Years, Oral History, Policy & Campaigning projects, as well as website, graphic design, interpreting and administration.

The RSG has also benefited from its partnership with the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace, which enables us to host volunteers from an EU country on a full time basis for the duration of one year.

During 2017-18, **29** volunteers have contributed an average of **124** hours per week. Thank you!

“Work experience at RSG was an eye opener as I understood what other Roma people go through and has helped me gain more confidence and made me realise that being Roma is not something embarrassing or something you should be ashamed of... I took part in various activities such as helping with the Early Childhood Project, working with the RSG colleagues and attended events. Doing activities as such has helped me gain knowledge on working with young children and their parents, understand different issues regarding the Roma community in the UK, and different laws and policies regarding children and Roma. The things that I have learnt will stick with me my whole life and will help me with my future career.”

(Andreea Ioana Popa, Work Experience Student)

1998

The Roma Support Group is established at a meeting attended by over 80 Roma people at the Holy Cross Church in Kings Cross, London.

1999

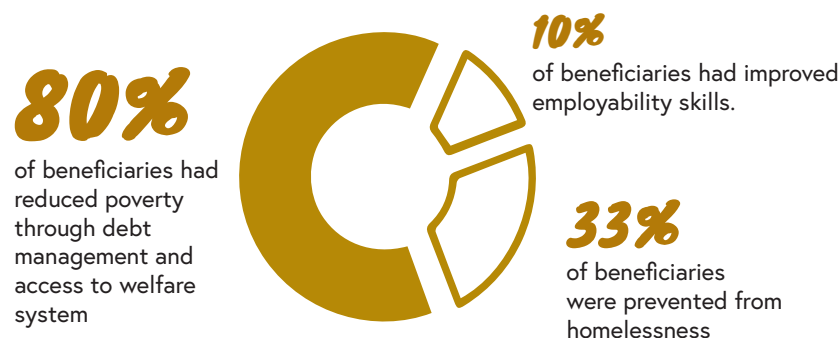
An advice service and social activities are launched at RSG's first base at St Stephens Church in Royal Oak, London

Advice & Advocacy

Our Advice and Advocacy support enables Roma beneficiaries to overcome some of the problems, which they face every day, i.e.: poverty, homelessness, housing issues, health inequalities and employability problems. This support is delivered from our two centres in East and West London (Canning Town and White City) through appointments and drop-in system.

Among our beneficiaries are some of the most vulnerable and excluded members of the Roma community, including: older people, single parents, people with mental health issues and physical disabilities. They are mainly residents of the London Boroughs of Newham, Hammersmith & Fulham, Redbridge, Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Ealing, Enfield and Waltham Forest.

Last year, we have offered this support to **2,100** Roma refugees and migrants from Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic, Lithuania and the Balkan region, achieving the following outcomes:

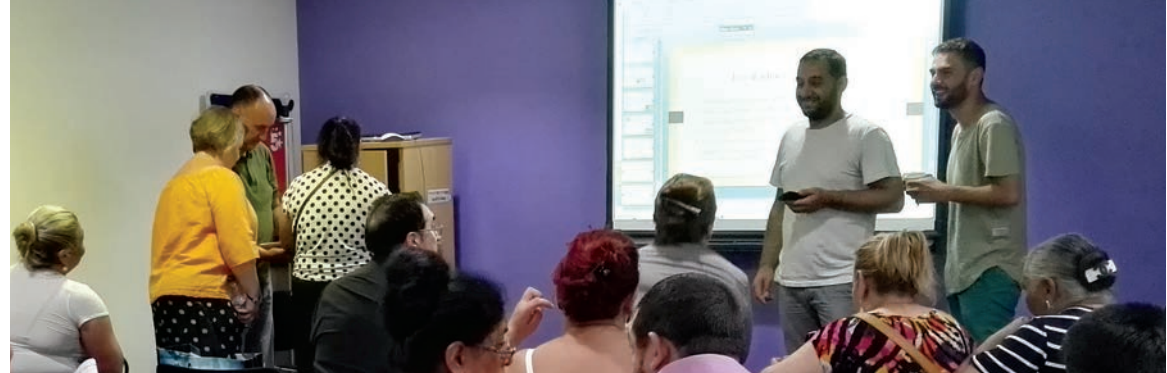


“RSG office helps us with all our major life problems making us feel stronger and safe.”

(Roma Beneficiary)

1990s – 2004

Roma asylum-seekers from Eastern/ Central Europe arriving in UK are met with hostile reaction of British media. Roma asylum claims are refused by the Home Office point-blank on the basis of failing to demonstrate "a well-founded fear of persecution" within the terms of the 1951 United Nations' Convention in their countries of origin.



Roma Housing Advocacy Project

Roma Housing Advocacy Project aims to enhance integration of Roma migrants by addressing their housing needs and homelessness issues in London through a combination of one-to-one advocacy, community training and policy initiatives.

Last year, the Project supported **132** beneficiaries with their homelessness and housing related issues, including homeless applications, evictions, housing benefit, housing register, disrepair, deposit dispute, etc. **97%** of beneficiaries reported an improvement in their housing situation as a result of the Project's one-to-one advocacy.

In partnership with Deighton Pierce Glynn Solicitors, the Project also organised community consultation meetings and training sessions, focusing on evictions, stages of possession, defences to possession claims and new Homelessness Reduction Act legislation, attended by **114** beneficiaries. As a result, **96%** of beneficiaries reported an increased knowledge in their housing rights and **94%** of beneficiaries reported an increased confidence to share their views.

“Without this training, I would not have the confidence when looking for a new place to rent. I would not have the stability I have today, and I would still be afraid whenever I have to engage with someone from the council. Today I know so much more about every aspect of my rights in this country.”

(Roma Beneficiary)

2000

An advice service starts at White City Community Centre and Froud Community Centre in Manor Park.

2001

A grant from the Association of London Government enables us to develop our Advice & Advocacy Project.



Roma Community Advocacy Project

Roma Community Advocacy Project aims to reduce the social exclusion of Roma refugees and migrants in London by empowering them to bring about change in their communities through one-to-one advocacy, community training sessions, consultations with service providers and decision makers, focus group meetings, and the Forum Theatre. Last year, our achievements included:

461 Roma community members benefited from 1-2-1 advocacy & floating support.

5 Roma Peer Advocates were supported and trained, which empowered them to participate in meetings with decision makers and professionals from education, social care, health and local/ central authorities.

157 Roma community members participated in 9 peer advocacy training workshops, which enabled them to learn more about their rights and responsibilities within the British system.

19 Roma community members participated in 28 Forum Theatre sessions including 7 performances, with 202 beneficiaries in the audience. The themes explored barriers to health services, hate crime and safeguarding issues.

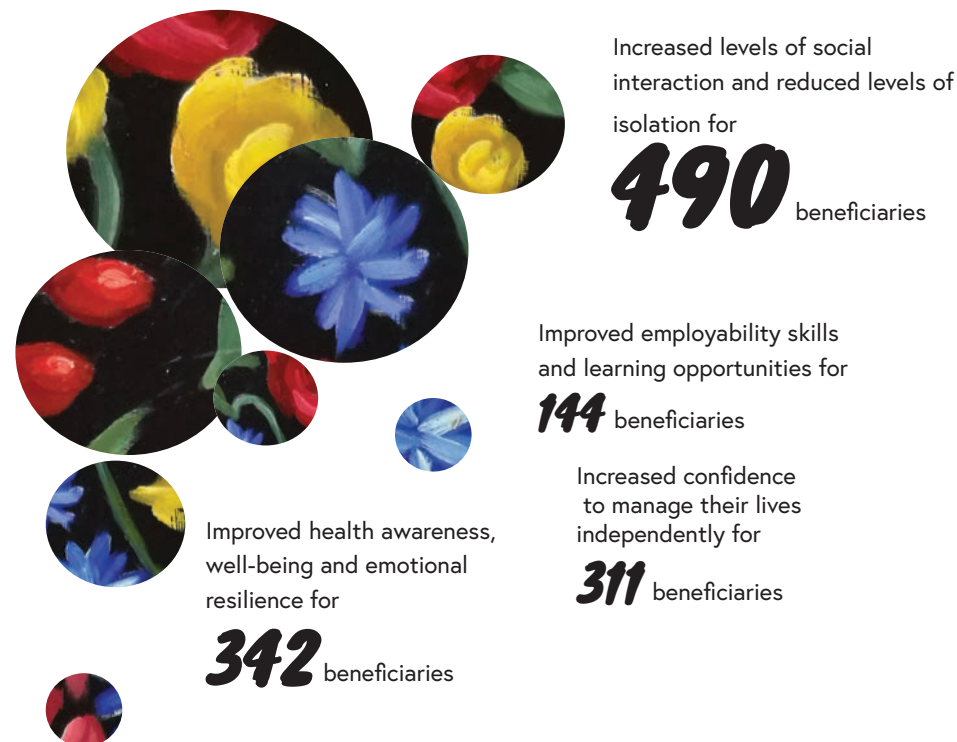
2002

Our new venue in Harold Road Centre, Upton Park opens. Our services expand and an art & sport project is established thanks to funding from Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund.

2003

The production of our first publication – 'Colours of Hope: A Little Book by Roma Refugee Children for Everybody'.

The impact of combined one-to-one and group advocacy tools has led to a greater empowerment of Roma migrants resulting in:



“With Brexit, we’ll be back to where we were at the beginning of our learning journey. Over the years, we gained so much knowledge, but the rules will change again and we will have to start everything from the beginning.”

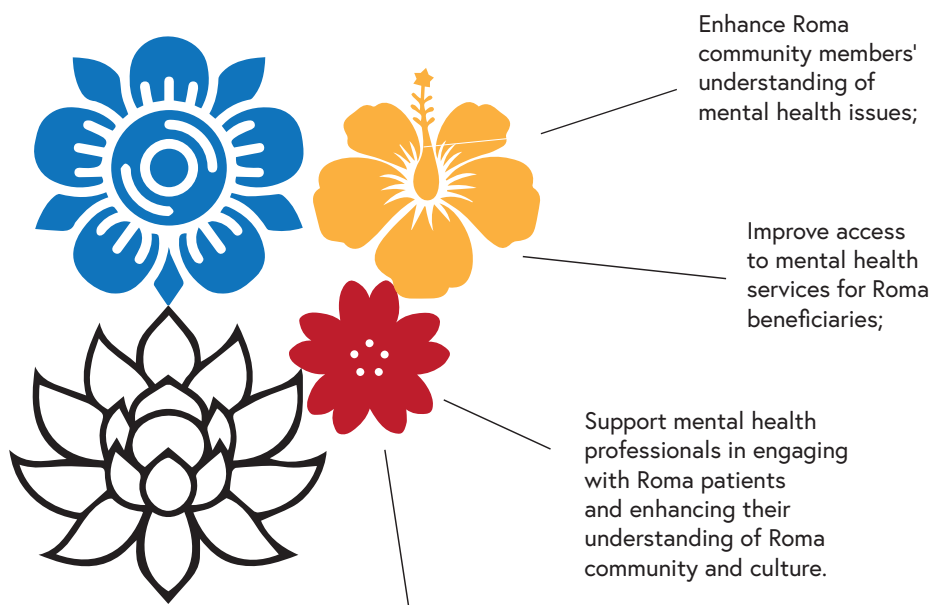
(Roma Peer – Advocate)

5 –14 April 2004

The Home Office informs 2,614 families, most of whom are Roma asylum seekers that their subsistence support will end and they must leave their accommodation by 30 April or be evicted as they are due to become EU nationals on the 1 May. Three 'choices' are offered: 1) destitution; 2) finding employment; 3) 'voluntary' return to their countries of origin. The 2nd choice is impossible due to lack of necessary ID and documentation.

Roma Mental Health Advocacy Project

Roma Mental Health Advocacy Project aims to:



Last year, the Project has supported **190** beneficiaries in securing referrals to mental health services and ensuring that they are satisfied with the quality of mental health care that they are receiving.

“It was an eye-opener for us to know that there are different sections in the Roma community...The training gave me a clear idea about the community and how health services could support them.”

(Health Professional)

2004

From mid-April until the end of May we supported over 500 Roma families to submit individual appeals to the Asylum Support Adjudicators and numerous Local Authorities across London. The capacity of the organisation was at breaking point as we manage the crisis.

In addition to face-to-face advocacy, we have also organised 11 peer support and mental health awareness sessions, which have focused on topics such as depression, anxiety, dementia, children's mental health, and housing/ immigration insecurity's impact on mental health. By hosting mental health awareness sessions delivered by practitioners, our Project has helped to foster direct engagement between Roma community members and health professionals, enabling beneficiaries to overcome some of their internal barriers to discussing mental health issues and accessing services.

As a result of the Project's activities, **78%** of beneficiaries reported increased understanding of mental health issues/ services; **70%** reported increased satisfaction with mental health services and **50%** reported increased self-empowerment when interacting with health professionals.

The Project has also supported **123** health professionals through Roma Culture Awareness training, direct consultations and leaflets for mental health professionals enhancing their understanding of Roma culture and health needs.

“This training has changed my perception and boosted my confidence to work effectively with this community.”

(Health Professional)

“At the beginning I was afraid to reach out for help. I was afraid of going to a psychologist and talking about my problem. On top of that I was afraid what will other people say about me having a mental health issue. After attending a few meetings at the Roma Support Group about my anxiety and depression I realised that I need to reach out for help. Thanks to your support after years of struggling and battling with my depression I finally received professional help.”

(Roma Beneficiary)

26th April 2004

Pierce Glynn Solicitors applied for Judicial Review in the High Court appealing against the Home Office decision. On the 4th May 2004, permission is granted to challenge the Home Office, but before the final hearing, the Home Office decided to reinstate support to destitute Roma families until they find employment and readjust to the new situation.

Roma Aspiration Project

“Let them see that we are not just begging on the streets; we have a beautiful culture. We, young people might be able to change the bad stereotype of Roma community. We just have to try hard.”

(Young Roma)

Roma Aspiration Project supports Roma refugee and migrant children and young people through a combination of one-to-one education advocacy, in-depth outreach work and a programme of after-school activities and outings. These activities shape our holistic approach to working with young Roma people aiming to enhance their self-confidence, life aspirations and improve their health and well-being.

Last year, 128 young Roma benefited from our one-to-one education advocacy and outreach work, which assisted them with school registrations/ transitions, exclusion appeals, access to education welfare provisions, CV writing and Child Protection conferences. The Project has helped to tackle bullying, supported beneficiaries with disabilities and health issues, while ensuring that professionals are well informed about the barriers Roma children and their families face.

The Project also supported young Roma to participate in our after-school activities, such as karate club, art sessions, homework tuitions, the Roma Bridging Sounds Orchestra (RBSO), as well as taking part in outings to local parks, London Zoo, London Sea Life, Royal Observatory, Trampoline Park, sport tournaments and concerts, including the RBSO's outstanding performance at the National Holocaust Memorial Commemoration Ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre.

The Project has channelled beneficiaries' artistic and literary creativity through the making of a 'Young Roma Calendar 2018', giving them an opportunity to share their artwork, poems and short stories, which boosted their confidence and helped to deal with their Roma identity.

“For the first time in my life I was happy to be called Roma and was not afraid to say it.” (Young Roma)



2004

With the accession of their countries into the European Union on 1st May 2004, Roma from new EU Accession states, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia are granted freedom of movement as their status within Western Europe changes from that of asylum-seeker to EU migrant.



“My daughter has joined the homework club and I can see a massive improvement in her literacy and maths which was also noticed by her teacher. She is not afraid of going to school anymore...”

(Roma Parent)

As a result of the Project's activities, young beneficiaries made significant progress by achieving the following outcomes:

52% of beneficiaries increased their life aspirations and satisfaction with their educational attainment;

59% of beneficiaries enhanced their self-confidence in relation to their chosen areas of interest such as sport, music and arts;

54% of beneficiaries felt that their health and well-being have improved due to their participation in sporting activities and an increased level of health awareness.



2005

Release of CD 'Journey' by our cultural project - Romani Rad

2006

Launch of the DVD 'Be Roma or Die Tryin'
Participation in oral history project
'Belonging: Voices of London's Refugees'
at the Museum of London



Roma Early Childhood Education Programme

Roma Early Childhood Education Programme (RECEP) aims to tackle the multiple disadvantages faced by Roma refugee and migrant children in London by enhancing social inclusion of Roma children 0-5 years old. The Project is delivered in partnership with the Altmore Children's Centre to run weekly 'Stay and Play' sessions for Roma children under 5 years old and their parents.

Last year, 29 families attended our sessions during school term times and participated in holiday activities. Roma Champions and the Project Coordinator have also attended weekly 'Stay and Play' sessions at Oliver Thomas Children's Centre, collaborating with their staff to outreach and support Roma families.

The Project has also delivered regular Parent Support Programme sessions based on 'Parenting with Confidence' modules. The adapted materials and linked activities (both in the Children's Centre and during outings) have encouraged parents to discuss and share their childhood experiences as part of learning more about their own children's development. All the parents attending these sessions are more confident to support their children's early learning within the UK education context.

Furthermore, the 'Parenting with Confidence' sessions, training opportunities on Child Protection, 'Roma in a Safeguarding Context' and visiting St Edmunds Children's Centre in Bradford have developed Roma professional capacity in the field of Early Childhood Education.



2007

After Bulgaria and Romania join the EU on 1st January 2007, Roma from these countries can also travel freely within Member States.

2007

The First London Roma Talent Show is organised. The grand finale takes place at Stratford Circus.

Our weekly Advice & Advocacy sessions, delivered as part of the programme have made a difference for Roma parents and their children, who have been assisted with access to school and their welfare, employability, health and housing needs.

'Stay and Play' sessions delivered in two different Children Centres' settings provide high quality, play based and child centred early learning for young Roma children. And with the inclusive group singing at the end of each session at the Altmore Children's Centre, Roma children and parents have an increased confidence playing, having fun and learning together alongside non-Roma families

Karate - Building Bridges & Breaking Barriers



Last year, 12 young Roma and non-Roma people took part in our karate sessions in East London, which focus on building self-confidence and strengthening mental and physical development, i.e. movement fluency, motor-spatial skills, determination and well-being. By engaging local Roma and non-Roma young people, karate also plays an important role in developing their social skills and community cohesion.

"I thought I will learn how to fight but actually I learnt how not to get into trouble. Karate makes me calm and confident because I know I can protect myself."

(Young Roma)



2008

Organising the first national celebration of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month in London and Leeds

2009

Organising Young Roma Awareness Seminar, our models of good practice are shared with over 100 professionals, launching of the Mentoring Project's evaluation report



'Roma Stories' – Oral History Project

'Roma Stories' – Oral History Project works with Roma researchers, volunteers, community members, London Metropolitan Archives, museums and academic institutions to explore, archive and share the unrecorded stories of Roma refugees and migrants in London.

The main themes, which the Project explores are:

Roma Porrajmos and anti-Roma persecution

Migration and changing Roma identity

'A Sense of Belonging' as understood and experienced by individual Roma refugees and migrants in London.

2010

Organising 'The Big Issue for Roma: Exclusion or Engagement?' conference at the Old Town Hall, Stratford

The Roma Support Group's service users successfully challenge in court London Councils' decision to terminate their funding for frontline voluntary sector organisations in London.

The Project gives the Roma community a rare opportunity to capture their knowledge and histories, which have been 'passed down' across generations, orally - rather than in a written form - before they are lost.

Last year, we have collected interviews from 33 people, which have been audio-recorded, filmed, transcribed, and translated. The interviews are in the process of being analysed and will be stored at the London Metropolitan Archives, as well as in other London museums. In collaboration with our partners, we are ensuring the quality of the material, its accessibility, longevity, and sustainability.

We have created a dedicated Facebook Group page for Roma Researchers and Volunteers, as well as an Oral History blog and a Twitter page. We are also working with Southern Road and Redbridge Primary Schools to produce a Digital Teachers' Resource Pack, incorporating the Project's findings, which will be used in the school curriculum for Year 5 and 6.

"I found the interview really interesting. An 'Uncle' was very welcoming and honest in his answers. It was particularly interesting to interview him because he is very traditional – he has not lost his Roma culture despite all his time here."

(Roma Researcher)

"I've really enjoyed volunteering for the Project, and reading through the interviews has been particularly interesting especially reading about the different journeys taken by people in order to get to England. Something mentioned in almost all of the interviews was how important it was to feel respected and to be treated with dignity, which is something I have certainly taken for granted".

(Volunteer)

2010

Romani Rad are invited to take part in the Hyde Park Evening Vigil during Pope Benedict XVI visit to London.

2011

Launch of Roma Support & Engagement Programme, our first national project

Policy & Information

Our Policy and Information work has one ambition - to try and make sure that the concerns and problems (and satisfactions) of Roma community members are recognised well beyond our office in Canning Town, and outside East London. Roma enjoy many freedoms in London and the UK that are denied in their countries of origin - but life in Britain is not without difficulties. We can help by responding to each person but we can also try and find ways of preventing problems arising in the first place. For example, we worked to ensure that:

- **Staff in GP practices are more aware of Roma culture and attitudes to healthcare;**
- **The councils deal with problems that Roma families face, instead of creating problems for Roma families;**
- **The Mayor of London supports Roma people, who might be in temporary difficulties (having nowhere to sleep) rather than collaborating with authorities trying to detain and deport them;**
- **The Government recognises that Roma communities live in London and throughout the UK, stands up for equal treatment of Roma, and combats discrimination.**

Last year, we have produced three newsletters, which were sent to over 500 subscribers, including supporting 'One Day Without Us' - a National Day of Action on 20 February 2017 to celebrate the contribution of migrants to the UK.

We provided evidence to Parliament about how the new system of disability benefits - Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) assessments - have frequently failed Roma applicants. We also provided evidence about how the government's new approach to ensuring equality - the Race Disparity Audit - was going to have little impact for Roma communities, as there is virtually no visibility of Roma people in the endless tables (apart from Roma pupils at school).



2011

RSG starts the campaign to 'Save Independent Advice in Newham' and one of our service users legally challenges Newham Council's decision to terminate independent advice provision in the borough.



We have also published a report about how and why Roma children are much more likely to be excluded by schools than other pupils, and that Roma students' exclusion is growing very quickly. This has subsequently been identified by Ofsted as an important contribution and indirectly has led to an independent inquiry being commissioned by the Government into school exclusions.

The Ofsted school inspection update (2018) stated:

"....the independent Roma Support Group's report 'Exclusion of Roma pupils' found that Roma pupils are the group most likely to be excluded from school.... The DfE has accepted the findings from the report and is taking it into account as it develops its future policy in this area. It has commissioned an external review on exclusions and carried out visits to local authorities to identify good practice. It has already found that low exclusions are not necessarily a sign of good practice, for example if GRT pupils leave by other means such as agreement from parents to home educate." (Our emphasis)

We have spoken at the final meeting of the National Roma Network meeting in London in December 2017 - which was addressed by MP, Kate Green (Labour). We were also invited to address MPs on the Parliamentary Women & Equalities select committee on two occasions - once about the virtual absence of Roma from Government data; and once about the absence of Government policy to generally recognise and support migrant Roma communities in the UK.

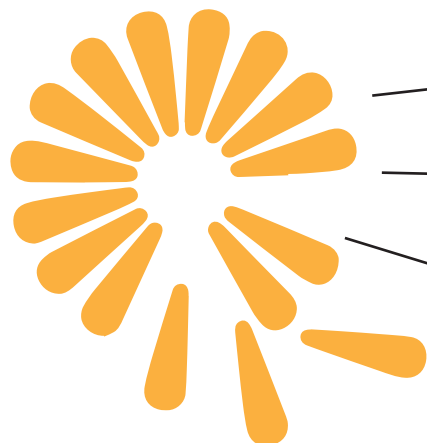


2012

Roma FC becomes an officially recognised club affiliated to Essex FA and goes on to compete in Ilford & District Football League. They also win their 1st official football tournament, organised by the City of London.

Roma-led Advocacy & Campaigning Project

Roma-led Advocacy & Campaigning Project aims to:



Improve the social inclusion of Roma refugees and migrants;

Increase the voice of Roma communities and their participation in the local/ regional decision making processes

Influence policy-makers and service providers, while encouraging changes in practice so that it is more responsive to the needs of Roma migrants in London.

Last year, the Project has engaged 150 Roma community members through:

9 focus group meetings with Roma community members across London and Peterborough Prison;

7 training sessions for Roma Champions to develop their campaigning and media relations skills;

22 strategic meetings with decision-makers to influence public authorities;

3 Roma Refugee and Migrants Forum meetings;

7 Roma Culture Awareness training sessions which engaged **132** professionals;

8 Roma Culture workshops in schools, which engaged **323** school children and **24** educators.

2012

Organising an exhibition 'From India to Islington: a 1,000 Year Roma Journey' in partnership with Islington Museum

2013

Release of CD, 'Roma Youth Music', recorded by young Roma and their music teachers



Roma Champions, who met decision/ policy-makers have highlighted their community's issues related to Brexit and their rights to reside; strategies for Roma migrants' integration in Newham; accessibility barriers to public services (i.e. health, employment and language support); recommendations on the best ways to support Roma victims of hate crime; and representation of Roma experience during the national Holocaust commemorations.

Furthermore, Champions have contributed to our newsletter's special edition published as part of a campaign "One Day Without Us", which supported migrants' rights in the UK. They were involved in a social media campaign "My London" coordinated by Media Trust, which interviewed them with regards to their life as migrants in London.

Roma Champions were also involved in a Roma Awareness Campaign delivered by Newham LGBT Police in partnership with the Roma Support Group. As part of this campaign, they helped to develop video material that explains in Romanes language, what hate crime is and how it can be reported. The campaign reached all Youth, Engagement and LGBT Police Teams in London.

The Project took part in a joint campaign to put an end to the Home Office policy of deporting rough sleeping EU nationals and collaborated with Migrants Rights Network, North East London Migrants Action (NELMA), Public Interest Law Unit, Lambeth Law Centre, Praxis and Migrants Voice.

2013

The RSG, represented by two Roma Trustees, officially contribute during the Holocaust Memorial Day UK Commemorative Ceremony in London.

2014

Citizens of Bulgaria and Romania can work without restrictions across the EU.



As part of this campaign, we have worked closely with Lambeth Law Centre to connect them with homeless Roma; promoted findings and recommendations from our own report - *Rough Sleeping Roma in the City of Westminster* (2016); met with homelessness charities; communicated with the Mayor of London and met senior officials at the Greater London Authority and Government to discuss the situation of detentions and deportations of homeless EU nationals.

The campaign was successful and the Home Office policy regarding 'abuse of treaty rights' as well as all their operations targeting rough sleeping EU nationals since 2010 were deemed unlawful by the High Court in December 2017.

Hate Crime Advocacy Project

Hate Crime Advocacy Project was delivered in partnership with East European Resource Centre and UK Race and Europe Network (UKREN) to increase reporting of hate crime/ incidents among Roma, Polish and Romanian communities in London and build their confidence in exercising their rights.

During this 6-month Project, we have outreached 90 Roma community members in our offices, their homes, workplaces, streets, cafes and prisons.



2014

Launch of The Roma Bridging Sounds Orchestra (RBSO) in partnership with Newham Music

Organising "From 'Extra' to 'Ordinary'" exhibition at Romanian Cultural Centre in London

We supported 10 Roma beneficiaries to report hate crime/ incidents which took place at their work, on streets, when using public transport and in hospitals.

Furthermore, the Project has also improved the understanding of Roma experience of hate crime among the police services through strategic meetings with Met Police at New Scotland Yard, National Scrutiny Panel, Ilford Police, and Newham Police, as well as events based on Forum Theatre performances.

The Forum Theatre performances, which portrayed a situation experienced by one of the beneficiaries of the Project, were followed with a discussion with 40 Police Officers and Home Office staff. The scene depicted the systemic barriers our beneficiary experienced when engaging with the Police, including a lack of language support, lack of awareness of Police procedures, lack of awareness of her rights as a victim, etc.

The methodology of the Forum Theatre ('Theatre of the Oppressed') has enabled the Police and Home Office staff to explore these barriers and replay the scene until the right course of action and solutions were recommended. This interactive seminar was summarised by one of the police officers (LB Newham) as "... a very original session with learning going both ways" and "an excellent and thought provoking way of getting the message across."



2016

Publishing two reports: 'Education – a Roma Perspective' and 'Rough Sleeping in the City of Westminster'

Release of the CD 'The Roma Bridging Sounds Orchestra'

The Roma Bridging Sounds Orchestra plays at the Music for Youth Proms in the Royal Albert Hall.



Roma Support & Engagement Programme

Roma Support & Engagement Programme (RSEP) aims to support statutory and voluntary agencies to respond effectively to the needs of Roma refugees and migrants across the UK.

In 2017-18, five members of our staff and 12 Roma professionals took part in the delivery of this programme, including:

- A specialist intervention service for professionals working with Roma individuals and families
- Training for professionals and the community
- Specialist support for research and consultation

Last year, we delivered:

21 training sessions and presentations;

21 commissioned interventions and consultations;

Support for **519** professionals who work with over 2,144 Roma individuals;

Over 93% of respondents rated our training as 'excellent' or 'good'.

Some of the agencies and organisations supported by the RSEP include: Newham NHS; Harringey Council; Children's Services in Barking & Dagenham, Hammersmith & Fulham, Sunderland, Stoke-on-Trent; Adult Social Care – Westminster; Universities – Sheffield, Nottingham, Kent Law for Life, Community Renewal Trust – Glasgow, Barnardo's and others.

"It was very informative session! I learnt a lot and it helped me to put things in perspective with this family! ... I will be closing this family's case to Social Services ... and wanted to thank you both for all your support and help in getting a good result for this family. It was a very complex and dynamic family case but through your support we were able to help with the reunification for this family."

(Social Worker, L.B. Barking and Dagenham)

"The drama presentation was very effective in making us realise that at the end of the day we are dealing with human beings. Roma communities have been labelled and demonised by many and the theatre presentation makes the audience see beyond the labels and negativity."

(Community Engagement, Reach Out Project Worker, Barnardo's East Region, Rotherham)

"Firstly can I say that I attended the Roma awareness training in Sheffield recently and was utterly blown away by Gaba and her team. I found the day to be insightful and informative. It made me aware of my own ignorance and the need to learn more in order to do the best I can be when working with Roma families."

(Parenting Practitioner, Early Help Team, Children and Young Peoples Services, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council)

2017

The Home Office policy to detain and deport rough sleeping EU migrants was ruled as discriminatory and unlawful by the High Court.

2017

Publishing a report: 'Fulfilling their potential? Exclusion of Roma Pupils in the English Education System

Publishing 'Young Roma Calendar 2018'

2018

Addressing MPs at the Parliamentary Women and Equalities Select Committee (WESC) with regards to the Race Disparity Audit and the absence of Government policy to generally recognise and support migrant Roma communities in the UK

What RSG means to us? – Roma Perspective

Advice & Advocacy

“It is all about trust. I understand that you can’t change the system or government policies but I know that you will do your best to help. You will never need to look for your service users – they will always find you.”

“I come here for advice when I need it the most, when I don’t understand what I should do, when I feel lost and when all doors seem to be closed. There are many people who feel the same way I do. The support I get here helps me to tackle my problems and gives me confidence. There is no another place in London like that for us.”

Peer Advocacy

“We cannot say on a daily basis what the RSG means for us. We cannot thank simply because there is no appropriate word to thank for what the organisation has done and is still doing for us, Roma... Also, why should we thank? We made the organisation and we are still making it as we go along. We entrust you with the information, which we would not entrust to anybody else, so you can open the door for us. And when one door is open, we will give you more information to open another door... So the process has started and will continue for as long as the organisation exists.”

(Roma Peer-Advocate)

Aspiration and Education Projects

“I spent most of my teen life acting as a translator for my family who did not speak a word of English and were unfamiliar with the local culture and ‘norms’. Their language barrier meant I was always expected to be available to attend appointments with them. This had a major effect on me as I missed out on a lot of things that normal teenagers did. It felt like I had to carry their problems on my shoulders which at times I felt was unfair. However I felt responsible. I was the only person in my family that spoke English. How could I not help them out? I constantly began to worry about my family’s troubles and the difficulties they experienced. It began to affect me more than I realised at the time... The pressure I felt enveloped me in a tight grasp.



I could not concentrate at school and my behaviour and attitude towards learning became increasingly negative. During the summer holidays it was always the same. More appointments, form filling, translation... At times I felt I had just had enough. But as the proverb goes, when the going gets tough, the tough get going! I realised that there must be many more Patricks out there, experiencing all the things I was. I began looking into other ways of helping members from my community. I started volunteering for a charity called the Roma Support Group that was based in London. It was a group offering advocacy and support to the Roma community in order to tackle the language barriers. They also carried out many projects focused on working with Roma youth. Finally, I felt a huge sense of relief, there was help out there for me, my family and others! They inspired me to stay in education and gave me a lot to think about. I was beginning to think about my future, not only as a teenager but as a young Roma person living in Britain. I have been living in Nottingham for some time now and I can see the universal issues affecting my community. Doesn’t matter what city we live in, we all face the same barriers in education, community integration and employment. So, I have a vision! I want to set up a group which could help local young Roma stay in education and not be consumed by their family’s troubles as I was.” (Patrick Neuman)

Roma Culture Development Projects

“Taking Roma music out of its community and family context and introduce it to other non-Roma musicians and students is an amazing professional challenge to me. I’m learning something new all the time. I’m proud to take part in this piece of work [Roma Bridging Sounds Orchestra], which helps people to learn about and understand my culture better. It has most definitely inspired me to progress as a music teacher.” (Roma Music Tutor)



What RSG means to others? - Professionals' Perspective

“We were able to observe first hand that the Education Project launched by the Roma Support Group has had a significant impact on preventing offending and reoffending. Their specialist knowledge about Roma issues is invaluable and irreplaceable.”

(Olga Heaven, MBE, Director, Hibiscus)

“Roma Bridging Sounds Orchestra is a unique approach to ‘Roma arts’. It’s the first time that something like this is happening. It helps to enhance public opinion about the Roma community and its culture and it promotes Roma music through intercultural collaboration. It’s a unique way for Roma children and others to gain new skills.”

(Newham Music Tutor)

“Partnership with the Roma Support Group was important because it enabled us to positively engage with the Roma family we worked with. We were also provided with advice about Roma culture which enabled us to adapt our parenting mentoring programme. As a result, we were left with a bespoke programme for other Roma families as well.”

(Children Services Manager, South East England)

“The trainers had a really good insight into the practical issues that Roma communities face in accessing services and solutions to effective partnership working, a must for any public organisation who wishes to reach out to under-served communities.” (Trainee’s Feedback)

“I have found the reports on your website to be of great value, in particular the report on Roma Rough Sleeping in the City of Westminster.”

(Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association)

How is RSG perceived?

“I am impressed by the initiatives that you are taking forward. ... I commend the work that you are achieving and hope that working together we can achieve a key step forward to make sure that all children from these communities are offered the chance to feel safe and secure in our schools and achieve their full potentials.” (Schools Minister, Lord Adonis)

“I welcome the good practice RSG has established supporting families to overcome exclusion... I am certain the Group’s model could usefully be studied and learnt from by others.” (Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham)

“The challenge from Roma service users and the Roma Support Group... was an extraordinary act of courage, which other much bigger and more powerful organisations have not shown. It deserves commendations and applause as it has inspired the whole voluntary sector, as well as securing services for the most vulnerable residents of London.” (Elizabeth Henry, CEO, Race on the Agenda)

“The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund (the Fund) is proud to have been one of the first funders to have supported Roma Support Group and has watched it develop over the years into the well-established and respected organisation that it is today... The Roma Support Group provides an exemplary model for how to engage holistically with people on the margins of society. If they were to lose any of their services then this would be detrimental to the vulnerable client group that they serve.” (The Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund)

What RSG means to us? - Volunteers Perspective

“Even on the first day, I was immediately struck by the remarkable dedication and adaptability of the people I met. At times, the situation that the Roma asylum seekers in England are put into, can seem devastating. However, I am continually amazed at how well the RSG’s clients accept and adapt to the many predicaments and policy changes (including Poland’s accession into European Union and the consequent termination of their asylum-seekers financial support) that they must face. I am utterly impressed by both the clients’ and staff’s patience, adaptability and strong-will in handling what seems to me – at times – an impossible situation. What often strikes me most is the way the Roma Support Group and Roma asylum-seekers work together in the face of adversity to overcome obstacles that at first appear insurmountable. The sense of friendship along with advice and assistance that I have witnessed between the RSG and its clientele is unique and essential to the success of their work. Never have I before encountered so many determined, dedicated and persevering people as I do daily working with inspiring RSG staff and the incredible clientele they support.”

(Elana Resnick, Volunteer, 2003-04)

“My experience of volunteering with the RSG has been through mentoring some Roma children, and I am constantly rewarded and overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and the warm welcome I receive in people’s homes.... The organisation does not have a strict hierarchical structure and for this reason is easily accessible by the community. It is encouraging to note that the RSG is not paternalistic and involves community in all stages of its decision-making processes. The RSG allowed me to experience an organisation with a small but extremely dedicated staff, who continually and persistently work against the odds to achieve the insurmountable for the Roma community.”

(Charmaine Murray, Volunteers, 2004-05)

“It was important for me to volunteer for the RSG, because what the organisation has achieved, is important to take back to Slovakia. What I learned is that you can connect people, you can open the doors, listen to people, give advice, work in schools; that you can support teachers and organise projects. This contact is missing in Slovakia, where Roma



children are often sent to “special schools” because Slovakian parents feel opposed to have them together with their children in schools.... My dream for the future is to form or to work for such a Roma support organisation back in Slovakia.”

(Patricia Bednarikova, Volunteer, 2008-09)

“I have spent half a year at the Roma Support Group and I can truly say that this was one of the greatest experiences in my life. People who are working there and the atmosphere are amazing... They are always ready to help others with a smile on their face. I can’t describe how many new things I have learnt there. I am grateful for this opportunity and a chance to learn administrative skills, improving my ‘can do’ attitude, and enabling me to become a better and more qualified person. I am impressed how fast and easily they can resolve sometimes very difficult issues. But this organisation also is a meeting place and a culture centre where Roma community members can spend such a lovely time. I would like to thank everyone for the wonderful time that you have shared with me.”

(Klarysa Glowacka, Volunteer, 2015-16)

“...I did not have any contact with Roma before I came to London, so their ‘world’ was new for me. During my placement at RSG I could listen to their stories, hopes and fears. I tried to understand them and help as much as I could. They became part of my ‘story’... That’s how I understand volunteering now, that you have to become part of someone’s life, so someone could become part of yours.”

(Karolina Piecuch, Volunteer, 2016-17)

Extracts from the Audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 January 2018

	Unrestricted Funds 2018 £	Restricted Funds 2018 £	Total Funds 2018 £	Total Funds 2017 £
Income from:				
Donations	5,541	362,357	367,898	275,292
Charitable activities	29,712	-	29,712	40,434
Investments*	19	-	19	31
Other*	-	-	-	131
Total income	35,272	362,357	397,629	315,888
Expenditure on:				
Raising funds	422	33,321	33,743	33,036
Charitable activities:				
Advice, Advocacy & Campaigning	-	162,872	162,872	145,874
Art & Music Development	-	-	-	44,636
Early Years Education	-	26,632	26,632	18,469
Education Support	-	31,968	31,968	24,506
Mental Health Advocacy	-	41,661	41,661	41,570
Sport Inclusion	2,368	961	3,329	4,112
Support & Engagement Project	45,604	-	45,604	39,880
Total expenditure	48,394	297,415	345,809	352,083
Net income/(expenditure)	(13,122)	64,942	51,820	(36,195)
Transfer between funds	-	-	-	-
Net movement in funds	(13,122)	64,942	51,820	(36,195)
Reconciliation of funds:				
Total funds brought forward	107,425	90,204	197,629	233,824
Total funds carried forward	94,303	155,146	249,449	197,629

	2018 £	2017 £
Fixed assets:		
Tangible assets	468	-
Current assets:		
Accounts receivable	4,513	3,735
Accrued commissioned income	-	450
Prepayments	1,099	1,402
Cash at bank and in hand	333,199	319,533
	338,811	325,120
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(89,830)	(127,491)
Net current assets	248,981	197,629
Net assets	249,449	197,629
Funds of the charity		
Restricted funds	155,146	90,204
Unrestricted funds:		
General funds	94,303	107,425
	94,303	107,425
	249,449	197,629

The full audited financial statements were prepared in accordance with section 415A of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies and FRS 102 Section 1A.

They were approved and authorised for issue by the Board of Trustees on 16 October 2018.

A full set of audited financial statements is available on request from the charity's registered office.

The accounts were audited by Vivek Kapoor, Senior Statutory Auditor, for and on behalf of Ferguson Maidment & Co.

Thanks to...

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who supported the work of the Roma Support Group during 2017-18 through grants and the donation of their valuable time.

Management Committee

Prof. Thomas Acton OBE (Patron)
Ms Roza Kotowicz (Chair)
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Mr Leon Wisniewski

Staff Members

Mihai Calin Bica – Advocacy & Campaigning Project Worker
Edyta Gach-Karapetyan – Advice and Advocacy Casework Supervisor, Mental Health Advocate, Roma Advocacy Project Coordinator (Job Share)
Tania Gessi – Roma Early Childhood Education Programme Coordinator (Job Share) & Roma Oral History Project Coordinator
Szymon Głowacki - Aspiration Project Worker, Mental Health Advocate

Sylvia Ingmire – CEO
Sue Mutter – Roma Early Childhood Education Programme Coordinator (Job Share)
Ewelina Pawłowska – Community Support Worker
Ona Risoviene – Office maintenance
Andy Shallice – Policy and Information Worker (Job Share)
Gabriela Smolinska-Poffley – Deputy Coordinator and Roma Support and Engagement Programme Leader
Aleksandra Staskova – Roma Advocacy Project Coordinator (Job Share)
Sarah Zawacki – Advice Quality Standard (AQS) Supervisor, Mental Health Advocacy Project Coordinator, Policy and Information Worker (Job Share)

Sessional Staff

Marta Babecka
Alan Brzezinski
Daniel Brzezinski
Malgorzata Czureja
Olina Fuseini
Klarysa Glowacka
Erene Kaptani

Stan Kollarik
Mania Malik
Sergio Neuman
Crystal Owen
Ewa Paczkowska
Anita Wesolowska

Volunteers

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Blanka Búza
Andrew Copeland
Robert Czibi
Aneta Dolinska
Szymon Dorak
Jessica Flat
Sean French
Abby Gilbert
Klarysa Glowacka
Rebekka Hölzle
Andy Ingmire
Adam Jack
Anna Lowenstein
Joanna Pienkowska
Diego Garcia – Vega
Malvina Matra
Jeremy O'Callaghan
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Andrea Popa
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Jo Swiecicka
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The Jack Petchey Foundation
London City Airport
London Sport (Sportivate)
Metropolitan Migration Foundation
The National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund
The National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund
Odin Charitable Trust
Open Society Foundations
Trust for London
University of Salford

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Mr & Mrs Chris and Joyce Pountain for their generous donations



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Policy & Campaigning Project
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