

Case Study St Albans Arts Team 'A Day in the Life' Traveller Photography Project



As St Albans has a larger than average traveller population, we used photography to highlight their way of life, in order to break down barriers and stigma, promoting greater understanding and cultural awareness. This was the perfect medium as their trailers are covered with family portraits.

The Arts Team visited the Barley Mow permanent with Hertfordshire's Head of Gypsy & Traveller Section distributing disposable cameras to record images of families, pets and homes. We also hired a professional photographer.

By November we had printed over 200 photos and produced the 'A Day in the Life' 2015 calendar, delivering copies to each family, local businesses and Councillors just before Christmas.

In March, working with Arriva-Shires, we hired a bus for one week to showcase these photos, inviting the public on board. The single decker visited 3 schools, 3 libraries, 1 university and 3 town centres, finishing at the Barley Mow site with a total of 845 passengers. Pupils viewed the exhibition during lesson and playground time; parents visited and two of the 'traveller' children spoke about life on the site. There was also a 'count your chickens' quiz.

15 residents came on board at our final stop, the Barley Mow site, including the men (we rarely saw them) and a dog! We dismantled the exhibition and each pitch shared photos. The eldest resident had recently died and the last portrait was presented to his son. This was an impromptu, but celebratory end to the project and both the photographer and the Arts Development Officer have been invited back.

By using the bus as a travelling exhibition, it was an ideal method to take these photos into the public realm and give an insight into the travellers' 'A Day in the Life'. We accessed the district, rather than being in one static location.

Amongst the comments received were:

It was an opportunity for the general public to have a better perspective of the travelling community. Fabulous to see their own photos on display and also hear them enthusiastic about the project and open for more contact and involvement in the local community'

'The families living on the site were extremely happy with the end result and this will go a long way to break down barriers'.

'It is very difficult to get travellers to engage in any project as they lose interest very quickly. Chris did a wonderful job in keeping the families involved throughout'

As a result of the project, we were invited to the University of Hertfordshire, presented to Herts for Learning Teacher Traveller Network meetings, and addressed a school assembly as part of Gypsy, Roma Traveller History month in June 2015.

Chris Blanch
Arts Development Officer
St Albans Arts Team

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