



## **Realising Women's Right to Health in Ireland**

WHRA Conference, 17 December 2012

### **Testimony 3: Kathleen McDonnell, Pavee Point Travellers Centre**

I come from a family of twelve. I grew up with my extended family, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles on the side of the road. Even though the accommodation wasn't great I still had my family. My mother died at the age of 59 of breast cancer. She depended on public health services but by the time she was referred on to further service it was too late for her she was too sick.

I remember going back a good couple of years I went to the UK and I had a GP here in Ireland and when I came back and went back to register with that doctor that I thought I had built up trust with I was told they were full up. I went further about it and then I got a call to tell me to come back. I didn't go back. Because I knew I wasn't wanted. How would you feel if that happened to you?

Travellers have to get it in writing if they are refused, after three written refusals then the HSE will appoint them a GP. If you have health insurance or you are wealthy you will be a priority. With all the cut backs now that are in place it is going to make things even worse for the poor or people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Health is all about the social determinants model, not only one thing. I see a lot of my community moving into apartments and standard housing because of no proper services on sites. The government is trying to assimilate us. This might seem to you to be better accommodation but it causes isolation and mental health issues.

And the government policy is to negotiate with your landlord. Imagine being a Traveller how hard it is to get accommodation in the first place never mind negotiate. That is very hard to do. Government are talking about the 14% of population unemployed what about the over 80% of travellers that are unemployed. Will there be anything done about that?

Travellers want to get into the work place the same as everyone else. We found that out when we did an internship with South Dublin Council for six months with Travellers, that they are willing and able to work. But there is so much discrimination with employers it makes it very hard to get work.

The All Ireland Traveller Health Study found that the mortality rate is higher for men women and children. We are less than 1% of the population of Ireland we are a very small group and we have the worst health. The study has shown this, Travellers and Traveller organisations are ready, willing and available to play our part. What we need now is an action plan, what's on paper put into action and not left on the shelf gathering dust. We want the 22 million allocated for Traveller health to be used for Traveller health not to balance the HSE books. With the budget cuts this has been cut to 50% which is ridiculous.