

## **‘Roma Stories’ – Roma Oral History Project**

### **EVALUATION REPORT (by Tania Gessi)**

#### **Introduction:**

In 2017 the Roma Support Group (RSG) was delighted to be granted £77,100 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) towards the implementation of the ‘Roma Stories’ Roma Oral History Project (‘project’). The project has been successful and has had an impact that we could not have envisaged. Since the touring of the ‘Roma Stories’ exhibition, the academic seminar and the development of the online ‘Roma Stories’ Learning Resource, there has been a lot of interest from volunteers, academics, heritage institutions, Roma and non-Roma community organisations and society at large to continue and broaden the scope of this project. The project has revealed a need to better understand and interpret both British and European history through looking at historical experiences of Roma people.

At the heart of this project was a desire to promote the ‘voices’ of a group of people that has been often marginalised, or written out of mainstream history, due to discrimination and racism. It provided an opportunity for Roma to start sharing their history within the public domain, to promote greater cultural awareness, challenge negative stereotypes and question the history we have been taught.

The oral history method proved a very effective and powerful way to capture individual Roma stories by Roma people themselves, which have led to a set of findings that have enriched British cultural heritage.

‘Roma Stories’ has been a necessary and timely project as the Roma people are still suffering the consequences of endemic and institutional discrimination, to illustrate, life expectancy for Roma is ten years less than the average European, only one in four Roma children finish secondary school, and in 2012 Amnesty International declared Roma as the largest and most disadvantaged minority in Europe.

Thanks to the ‘Roma Stories’ Roma Oral History project, there is greater public awareness about Roma heritage, and an increased interest amongst schools and other educational and heritage institutions to introduce learning material about the experience of European Roma during the Nazi Holocaust, which until now has been very limited.

This project has also most crucially enabled Roma people to start a process of sharing their stories with post-war born generations, who had not been told what happened by their parents or grandparents, who had lived through it, in an attempt to forget the horrors of their experience and safeguard future generations. However, as we have seen from other socio-political historical contexts, knowing about one’s family history influences one’s self-esteem and sense of purpose, and it becomes a catalyst for change. “There’s lots of evidence that the stories we hear growing up in our families and in our cultures play a major role in how we develop a sense of autobiographical memory, which then leads to a sense of identity.”

James Allen (assistant professor of psychology at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario)<sup>1</sup>

It is through projects like these that we can facilitate meaningful social change and expand our world view.



Artwork by Robert Czibi <https://czibiart.com/>

*Carrying out such work is extremely important. The Roma community is the biggest ethnic minority in Europe, with a population larger than many European countries. And yet our history remains unknown. For centuries our identity and history were denied by the authorities. The Roma genocide remains largely absent from Holocaust Memorial calendars even today. Roma people have endured centuries of slavery and oppression and their history is totally absent from history books. Society is aiming for reconciliation with its past, so in order to build a better future for everyone, projects like the Roma Oral History Project can help make that possible for the Roma people. The UK has just acquired a unique selection of stories and has enriched its knowledge and history about my community. And through making such projects possible the UK is giving an example to the rest of Europe.*

(M.B. project participant, Roma from Romania)

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<sup>1</sup> From 'The Power of sharing stories' by Liz Brazile, YesMagazine, October 2018  
(<https://www.yesmagazine.org/socialjustice/2018/10/17/the-power-of-sharing-stories/>)

## Overview of Evaluation

This report captures the main points that came out of the self-evaluation practice co-developed by the project team and the Tavistock Institute. From the beginning, the project team was committed to self-evaluate their work, wanting to understand whether the project was effective, what the challenges were, and what needed to be adapted or changed as the project progressed.

The methodology that the project team used for the self-evaluation included:

- Analysis of the data and information recorded about the activities of the project;
- Self-evaluation workshops, facilitated by consultants from the Tavistock Institute (*Please see Appendix 1*);
- Capturing participants' and beneficiaries' feedback;
- Perspectives from external stakeholders about the project;
- Online blog capturing reflections from volunteers and participants of the project (<https://oralhistories170251790.wordpress.com/>);
- Monitoring report for the project funder.

## 'Roma Stories' Roma Oral History Project's Aims and Achievements:

The aims of the project were to:

- Empower the Roma community to share their history within the public domain.
- Increase public awareness of Roma history and heritage.
- Challenge negative perceptions and discrimination against the Roma community.
- Enable academics and students to challenge their own views of British and European history and broaden their understanding of it.

The 'Roma Stories' Oral History project has used the oral history method to explore three main themes, which are central to Roma heritage:

1/ Roma Porrajmos and anti-Roma persecution - focusing on individual memories of survivors, as well as memories enshrined within families/ clans' orally transmitted histories; exploring "remembering" and "forgetting" strategies often used as survival mechanisms within individual families; gathering individual memories of post-war experience of ethnocide (enforced settlement of Roma population in post-war Communist countries in 1960s), as well as individual survival routes during more recent (post-Communist) anti-Roma persecution and discrimination in Europe.

2/ Migration and Changing Roma Identity - exploring individual and collective experiences of the impact that recent migration from Eastern Europe has had on the changing and evolving Roma identities in Britain - capturing inter-generational perspectives.

3/ A Sense of Belonging - gathering individual memories and stories, which portray a process of integration in the UK; examining "a sense of belonging" as understood and experienced by individual Roma refugees and migrants.

We explored these themes through recording 37 oral interviews from Eastern/Central European Roma refugees and migrants living in London.

All the interviews we collected were transcribed and are now archived at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA).

The material that transpired from these interviews was used to create a touring exhibition, including a short documentary film, an online Learning Resource for primary schools, and organise an academic seminar for students and academics interested in this subject.

### **The need for the project:**

*“Our mission is to confront ignorance with knowledge, bigotry with tolerance, and isolation with the outstretched hand of generosity. Racism can, will, and must be defeated.” Kofi Annan<sup>2</sup>*

The Roma ‘voice’ has hardly been audible and recognised due to discrimination and racism, which has resulted in the absence of and under-representation of the Roma experience in mainstream historical narrative. The Roma in the UK are a ‘hidden’ community in history, research and statistics.

Unlike any other ethnic minority groups, where progress has been made in challenging racism and discrimination, the Roma still experience overt racism and discrimination within the UK and Europe (Pew Research 2016), and there remains widespread cultural misunderstanding and prejudice about this community.

In addition, the Roma are rarely included in surveys and ethnic monitoring and while a relatively new category of ‘Gypsy and Irish Traveller’ was introduced in the 2011 census, this has been perceived as irrelevant to Roma as the term ‘Gypsy’ is perceived by them as discriminatory. The result is that the Roma are a marginalised community in the UK, and if they remain ‘hidden’ in history, research as well as statistics, this will perpetuate the process of marginalisation and exclusion.<sup>3</sup>

It has also been advocated by specialist agencies like the National Association of Teachers of Travellers that the National Curriculum in schools needs to be more relevant for Roma children by reflecting their communities’ historical experience and culture.

Another need is conveyed by the fact almost all that has been written about Roma (including research) is from a non-Roma perspective and is often experienced as ‘top-down’ by Roma community members. Roma experiences during the Holocaust, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, and more recent experiences of migration are not included in most academic historical accounts (Kenrick and Puxton 2009; Polansky 2008). This project therefore, where the Roma community have conducted their own participatory research and written, recorded, and produced their own material, has provided a unique opportunity to promote greater cultural awareness and understanding, challenge preconceived notions and stereotypes, and create a fairer society.

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<sup>2</sup> Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations from January 1997 to December 2006, from Kofi Annan’s Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/KofiAnnan?lang=en>

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the advocacy and campaigning work of the Roma Support Group and other Roma NGOs in the UK, the Roma community will be recognised in the 2021 Census. For more information, please see: <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/news/roma-community-to-be-recognised-in-the-2021-census/>

Finally and most crucially, as the Roma elders are the main custodians of Roma history and heritage (Roma people have an oral tradition of transmitting knowledge), and given that there hasn't been a systemic attempt at or interest in recording and maximising this human capital, as in the case of the Jewish people's experience of the Holocaust, there is an urgency in capturing their stories before they pass away. And since Roma have a shorter life expectancy compared to that of the average European, it is of uttermost importance to facilitate that process before it is too late.

*Really pleased to finally see Romani history finally being acknowledged! As somebody who is part Romani I can tell you that so much more needs to be done to educate the world of our existence and history. (Visitor to 'Roma Stories' exhibition at The Weiner Holocaust Library)*

*This package of work is incredibly useful and important for raising the awareness of the plight of Roma in history. The history of Roma has its place to educate the wider population and I wonder whether workshops for adults in education would also be a way forward but in all sectors, not just in education. (S.C. Teacher at Southern Road Primary)*

*Ever since I have memories of myself I recall I had no information my community, my identity. I remember my grandparents and mother saying we are Roma and nothing more than that. Then, going through school I discovered my passion for history. Again, I found no evidence or information about my community. Being part of the Roma Oral History project gave me the unique opportunity to find answers about my own family. Most of the information available today about my community was passed down orally and all our culture and traditions we still have today have been passed down orally. A project like this tells the untold stories, provides an understanding of Roma people's beliefs, culture and traditions, and educates both Roma and non-Roma communities. (M.B. project participant, Roma from Romania)*



## Why the Roma Support Group?

The Roma Support Group (RSG) is a Roma-led NGO that has worked with and for Roma communities since 1998, offering advice, advocacy and educational support to hundreds of families each year, helping them to build new lives beyond the reach of persecution and discrimination. We have acquired 21 years of experience working with Roma communities and have as a result built a mutual relationship of trust, which has become an essential ingredient for doing projects like the Oral History project. Thanks to that trust, we were able to conduct the interviews with Roma community members and broach taboo subjects which would not have been otherwise disclosed. The RSG has become a unique outlet and repository of Roma oral stories. Having such strong links and historicity with the community have therefore made this project possible.

*They always find time to help those who need it, whether it's helping you with school applications for your children, or helping you to understand your rights...I can't imagine my life without the Roma Support Group. (C.D. Roma Polish interviewee)*

*The first few months were tough...Roma Support Group started running some English classes and I was able to learn the basics, so I could understand something. There was also a computer in the RSG and I learnt those things there. (R.C Roma Polish)*

## Project Delivery

We delivered the following activities to achieve the aims of the project:

- **Recruiting a Project Coordinator, 2 Roma researchers, and 15 Roma and non-Roma volunteers (8 young people and 7 adults)**

We recruited two Roma researchers at the beginning of the project to conduct the oral interviews. They identified 33 Roma interviewees from different countries (i.e. Poland, Romania, Belarus, Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, and Sweden) and tribal affiliations (e.g. Kelderara, Haladytka, Bergitka) and completed 37 audio recorded interviews, 13 of which have been filmed.

Having Roma Researchers was a crucial aspect of the project as it empowered the Roma community to start the process of recording and interpreting their own history. Through the Oral History project they acquired research skills and oral history skills, such as interviewing, recording, filming, transcribing, translating and analysing.

There was no recruitment for the Project Coordinator, as it was agreed with the HLF that the same person submitting the bid (Tania Gessi) will be fulfilling this role.

We had a total of 16 volunteers who contributed to the success of this Project.

- **3 in-house project training sessions**

The Roma Support Group (RSG) delivered a Roma Culture Awareness Training to introduce volunteers (**7 participants attended**) to our organisation, its activities, as well as Roma culture, customs, history, and good practice when working with Roma communities.

Two Roma Oral History Project Induction sessions were organised to familiarise Project staff and volunteers (**6 participants attended**) with the purpose, aims, themes, activities, projected outcomes and evaluation of the Oral History Project, as well as organisational policies and procedures, including Confidentiality, Data Protection, Health and Safety, Outreach, Volunteer, and Equal Opportunities policies.

- **3 training sessions from the Oral History Society**

The Oral History Society delivered an initial Oral History Training for Project staff and volunteers (**11 participants attended**) to introduce the subject of Oral History, including collecting stories, interpreting oral history, understanding memory and narrative, designing questions, ethical issues, summarising/ transcribing, the use of technical equipment, do's and don'ts, and evaluation of practical work.

The second training session consisted of two group Skype feedback meetings with the Oral History Society to the Project staff/ volunteers (**4 participants attended**) where achievements, progress and areas of improvement were discussed.

The third training session was delivered as part of the 'Roma Stories' seminar hosted by the Raphael Samuel History Centre at Queen Mary University of London. The training was aimed at Project staff, volunteers and students interested in Roma history (**87 people attended**). It explored the ways in which the Project findings can be analysed, explored and presented to a bigger audience.

- **Researchers and volunteers collecting 40 oral-histories and 20 visual-recordings from Roma refugees and migrants, which will be transcribed and translated**

Roma researchers, volunteers and the Project Coordinator have collected 37 oral histories, 13 video recordings and several photographs, new and old. The interviews collected reflect the diversity within the Roma community including oral recordings from Polish, Romanian, Slovakian, Hungarian, Belarus, Sweden and former Yugoslavian Roma.



- **4 training sessions from LMA on archives/collections, conservation, and creating/delivering educational workshops for schools.**

Two training sessions (**8 participants attended**) were delivered by LMA, one on archives, acquisitions and cataloguing, and another one on collections care/conservation and document handling.

Two further training sessions (**3 participants attended**) were delivered by LMA on delivering educational workshops in primary and secondary schools.



- **Producing a Teacher's Resources Pack (TRP), in collaboration with Shaftesbury, Belmont and Redbridge Primary Schools to introduce Roma heritage to the National Curriculum (for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3)**

The TRP, now called the 'Roma Stories' Roma Oral History Learning Resource, has been created as an online resource and developed through workshops with Year 5 children in Southern Road Primary School (London Borough of Newham) and Year 6 children in Redbridge Primary School (London Borough of Redbridge).

It consists of introductory information about Roma. It is divided into eight sections that can be used in Primary (KS2) and Secondary (KS3) schools, with teachers in higher and further education, other professionals and it might also be of interest to non-school audiences to build a broader understanding about Roma history and culture.

The Learning Resource can be used as stand-alone sections or as a whole resource and it can be viewed and downloaded at [www.romaoralhistory.com](http://www.romaoralhistory.com)

- **Delivering 3 educational workshops for 30 teachers (10 per school), with LMA mentoring**

Project staff delivered three Educational Workshops in Year 6 classes (**30 children per class x 3 + 4 teachers attended**), and a final workshop during the School Assembly (**90 children + 5 teachers attended**). As a result of these workshops the pupils have created posters and written work which have been displayed in school.

We also delivered a Year 5 Assembly with an introductory film and discussion at Southern Road Primary School (**90 children + 5 teachers + 3 Teaching Assistants**), and three Educational Workshops in Year 5 classes (**30 children per class x 3 + 4 teachers + 3 Teaching Assistants attended**). As a result of these workshops the pupils produced visual

brainstormed sheets/posters collating their learning which have also been displayed in school.

In total, the project has engaged 360 children and 24 educators in 8 educational workshops.



- **A mobile exhibition touring 6 venues for 3 weeks each: LMA, Institute of Education, Redbridge Museum, Croydon Museum, Hackney Service Centre Library and Roma Support Group's offices thereafter**

We consolidated new partnerships during the life of the Project and as a result we have toured the 'Roma Stories' exhibition in the following venues: University College London, Institute of Education, London (**90 visitors**); Stratford Library, London (**1,148 visitors**); London Metropolitan Archives, London (**180 visitors**); The Vestibules, Bristol City Hall, Bristol (**257 visitors**); Roma Support Group's Exhibition Launch event at Woodgrange Community Centre, London (**110 people attended**); The Weiner Holocaust Library, London (**654 visitors**).

A total of 2,439 people saw the exhibition, which toured in 6 exhibition venues across London, as well as in Bristol.

We could not hold the exhibition at the following exhibition venues: Redbridge Museum, Hackney Library and Croydon Museum due to various logistical and technical issues.

The Imperial War Museum sought our input to be incorporated in their new Holocaust Galleries that are due to open in 2021.



- **An exhibition launch/celebration event at LMA**

An Exhibition Launch event was held at the LMA on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019 (**18 people attended**). Roma researchers and interviewees received certificates of participation, highlighting their contribution, which has made this Project possible.

As a result of hosting the exhibition, we were approached by LMA staff who are leading the Layers of London project (<https://www.layersoflondon.org/>) seeking a partnership with RSG to create and add a Roma 'layer' to London, which is currently not being mapped for lack of data.



- **A workshop, panel discussion and History and Policy Series event at the Raphael Samuel History Centre**

We hosted a 'Roma Stories' seminar on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2019 by the Raphael Samuel History Centre at Queen Mary University of London (**2 Project staff, 3 volunteers, 2 Readers in Modern History and 80 students attended**), which presented an opportunity to discuss the findings and to further understanding about Roma history and heritage. The feedback we received was positive and encouraging.

- **Creating a project website; regularly updated throughout the project**

We created a 'Roma Stories' Roma Oral History Project website [www.romaoralhistory.com](http://www.romaoralhistory.com) where visitors can view and download the 'Roma Stories' Oral History Learning Resource, watch the short 'Roma Stories' film documentary we have produced, as well as a couple of other short films, and listen to interviews' extracts in English and Romanes.

In addition, we developed a dedicated page for the Roma Oral History Project, i.e. <https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/roma-stories-roma-oral-history-project.html>, which includes some blogging tracking the Project's progress <https://oralhistories170251790.wordpress.com/>, a dedicated Twitter page, where we have tweeted regular updates about the Project <https://twitter.com/OralRoma>, we have also used the Roma Support Group Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/pg/RomaSupportGroup/posts/> to post regular Project's updates, as well as a closed Facebook Group for Project's volunteers and staff that acted as a main repository of information, as well as a tool for self-evaluation.

## **Outcomes of the Project**

The Project has achieved the following outcomes:

- (i) **Heritage is identified and recorded:**

Two Roma Researchers and 16 volunteers have identified 33 Roma interviewees from different countries (i.e. Poland, Romania, Belarus, Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, and Sweden) and tribal affiliations (e.g. Kelderara, Haladytka, Bergitka). They conducted 37 audio recorded interviews, 13 of which have been filmed. (We had multiple interviews with some of the interviewees, hence the discrepancy in numbers.)

We had two Roma Researchers who speak different dialects of Romanes, which enabled them to outreach different Roma groups and explore subjects which are taboo in Roma communities, such as ‘Romanipen’<sup>4</sup> and gender roles.

Feedback from Roma Researchers and the interviewees are included in our closed Facebook Roma Oral History Project page, which acted as a central repository for the Project.

*I found it fascinating to interview my aunt, she was ironing her clothes while talking to me and the more she talked the more she started to remember, all the memories suddenly flooded back...*  
(S.G. Roma Researcher)

*Discovering that my great-grandfather fought in the First World War and then escaped from a Nazi forced labour camp was an incredible, emotional experience. And that was possible thanks to this project. Our elderly generation is passing away and because they don't want us to suffer, knowing what they've been through, they take our past with them. And with that, our hidden history. (M.B. project participant, Roma from Romania)*

All of the 37 interviews have been transcribed and translated into English. They have been edited, proofread, catalogued and archived and are now publicly accessible at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA).

*I'm finishing up what I've been doing with editing and standardising the interviews for the archives. This has taken a really long time, and has been harder than expected, especially the editing of the interviews. It's been difficult striking a balance between clarity and accuracy, while trying as hard as possible not to let my own interpretation of the text become part of the text itself. (T.S. Volunteer)*

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Romanipen’ – can be defined as traditional Roma moral code and lifestyle.

**(ii) Heritage will be better interpreted and explained:**

We delivered eight Roma Oral History workshops in two supporting schools where a total of 24 Teachers and Assistant Teachers attended, and 360 pupils participated.

The quality of the workshops can be gauged from the feedback forms we received from teachers and students in both schools.

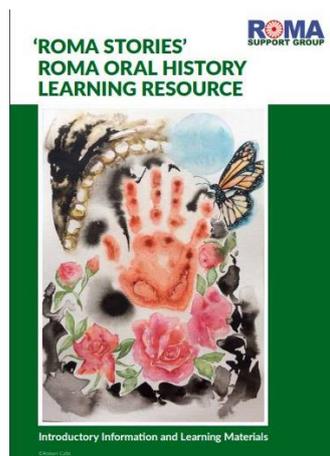
*The workshop generated a lot of interest and the topic has come up a number of times since the lessons. (C.T. Teacher at Redbridge Primary School)*

*Not one child in my class knew that Roma as an ethnic group of people existed. Roma have an interesting history, which the children enjoyed and appreciated. Personally I was really surprised to hear about famous Roma, since the workshop I've been telling my friends who they are. (L.S. Teacher at Southern Road Primary School)*

*We learned what the flag means, we got to know famous people and we didn't know that they are Roma and now we know. (R. from Southern Road Primary School)*

*I really enjoyed the workshop and the dancing at the end. I really understand now how much racism Roma people have suffered. (C. from Redbridge Primary School)*

As a result of the consultations and workshops delivered at Redbridge Primary School and Southern Road Primary School, we have created the online 'Roma Stories' Roma Oral History Learning Resource, it can be viewed and downloaded at [www.romaoralhistory.com](http://www.romaoralhistory.com). The Learning Resource includes introductory information about Roma. It consists of eight sections that can be used in Primary (KS2) and Secondary (KS3) schools and by teachers in higher and further education. It might also be of interest to non-school audiences to build a broader understanding about Roma people. It has been designed to be used in curriculum work focussing on, but not limited to: British Values; Personal, Social, Health and Education (PSHE); Rights Respecting Schools; English: Life Stories; History: Life in the Second World War; Geography: Journeys; Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTM).



This Resource has been developed because Roma people are keen for non-Roma people, and their children, to learn more about Roma history and culture. The positive inclusion of this material in the school curriculum will help to overturn negative stereotypes and create positive relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.

The 'Roma Stories' Roma Oral History Project website also contains interviews extracts that people can watch, and films, including the short 'Roma Stories' video documentary that introduces and explains Roma history and heritage.

*It has been a privilege working with the Roma Oral History Stories Project. Teachers often feedback that they lack knowledge when talking about Roma history and culture. For this reason, developing the Roma Oral History Learning Resource materials has been exciting and particularly rewarding in raising staff awareness and confidence as well we children's knowledge and enthusiasm in this area. (S.M. Education Consultant)*

*I am delighted to have been invited to write a foreword for this long awaited pack of learning material to bring to light the story of the European Roma caught up in the Nazi Holocaust. This story, in my opinion, should have been part of Holocaust education from the beginning instead of the Jewish-only narrative that first emerged. (Ruth Barnett, author)*

Additionally, one of the interviews we conducted now features in the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust's online Learning Resource section (<https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/baronita-adam/>), which can help teachers and students learn more about the persecution and fate of the Roma people during the Holocaust.



We also hosted a 'Roma Stories' seminar by the Raphael Samuel History Centre at Queen Mary at University of London, which presented an opportunity to discuss the Project's findings and to further understand Roma history and heritage. The students who were present were given an opportunity to ask questions and explore research projects within this area.

The feedback we received during the seminar was positive and encouraging.

*I feel privileged to have helped you facilitate such meaningful seminar. Also the turnout was bigger than I had anticipated. I hope we can do more in the future. (N.V. Co-director Raphael Samuel History Centre)*

*It was very nice to meet you this evening. Congratulations on completing such a significant project. Thank you! (Roma Stories Seminar attendee)*

Roma heritage has also been better interpreted and explained thanks to our 'Roma Stories' exhibition, which has travelled across 6 venues, i.e. University College London, Institute of Education; Stratford Library, London; London Metropolitan Archives; The Vestibules, Bristol City Hall, Bristol; Roma Support Group's Exhibition Launch event at Woodgrange Community Centre, London; The Weiner Holocaust Library, London, and has had a total of 2,439 visitors.



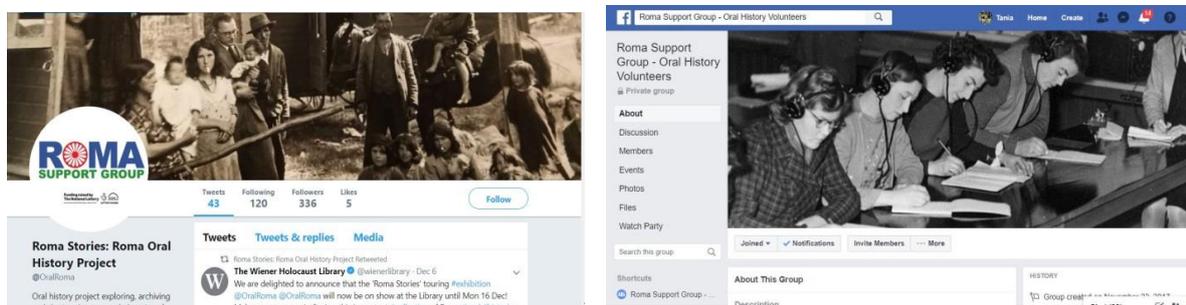
Finally, our online presence has also helped a great number of people to better interpret and understand Roma heritage, as well as forging links with potential new partners (other Roma groups, and academics) across Britain and Europe.

Since we created the Roma Oral History page, <https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/roma-stories-roma-oral-history-project.html>, we have had 42,220 visits over 33 months of the Project (from April 2017 to December 2019).

On Twitter, we have had a total of 60,034 tweet impressions, i.e. number of times people saw our tweets, since June 2018, with an average of 3,161 impressions per month. 42,244 of these impressions have been since we started promoting the 'Roma Stories' exhibition launches in August 2019, with 10,561 impressions per month. We gained more than 1 follower per day in the last month. We have followers from over 12 different countries. The most successful tweet was about the online 'Roma Stories' Learning Resource and was seen by more than 8,000 people, and re-tweeted 32 times.

We used our Facebook account to advertise the 'Roma Stories' exhibition launches and a total of 7,000 people saw the Roma Oral History events page, then a further 2,000 saw our final launch event at The Weiner Holocaust Library and we gained 641 engagements.

Finally, in 2017 we created a closed Facebook page for volunteers and project staff that acted as a main repository of information, as well as a tool for self-evaluation. We have a total of 18 members.



### Website and communication success of “Roma Stories” across 12 countries

Social media	Numbers of viewers
Tweeter impressions since June 2018	60,034
Tweeter impressions when launched exhibitions in August 2019	42,244
Most seen tweet about the online 'Roma Stories' Learning Resource	8,000
Facebook* when launched exhibitions in August 2019	9,000
Roma Oral History page (from Jan 2017 to Dec 2019)	42,220

#### (iv) People will have developed skills:

In the first phase of the project, 15 Roma Researchers and Volunteers attended in-house training in Confidentiality, Data Protection, Health and Safety, Outreach, Volunteer, and Equal Opportunities policies.

In the two phases of the project, through training sessions delivered by the Oral History Society, London Metropolitan Archives, and British Library Oral History Video Consultant, 1 Oral History Coordinator, 1 Oral History Assistant, 2 Roma Researchers and 16 Volunteers (**20 people in total**) have gained skills in research, conducting oral history interviews, using recording and video technical equipment, audio and video software to make film documentaries, as well as archiving, i.e. acquisitions, cataloguing, conservation and handling/caring for collections.

Finally, Researchers and Volunteers have acquired administrative and digital skills through working and volunteering in the office. The skills that Roma Researchers and Volunteers have acquired through these training sessions have enabled them to conduct interviews; audio and video record oral histories; transcribe them, following the Oral History Society guidelines; edit/format the transcribed interviews for the purpose of archiving them; handle

sensitive visual material donated by Robert Dawson<sup>5</sup> included in the final exhibition; and create the video documentary. This has also been measured through staff supervision/observation notes, and Facebook entries.

*I was hesitant at first but then the more I did it, the more I became comfortable with it. I was proud I could use the recording equipment on my own. (K.G. Roma Researcher)*

*The session at the LMA was extremely helpful. Sally's talk showed us exactly how the archiving and cataloguing system worked, and she illustrated this using some examples of previous oral history projects. I feel as if we are now far more prepared for the task of getting our interviews ready to be archived. (T.S. Volunteer)*

Furthermore, Roma Researchers, Volunteers, and RSG's staff have learnt new skills, which have enriched individuals and broadened the organisation's expertise and knowledge through acquiring:

- self-reflective evaluation skills;
- research and analytical skills;
- creating exhibiting material and communicating findings in an accessible manner;
- delivering educational workshops;
- curating and film-making skills.

Members of the Roma community have begun the important process of sharing their history and have seen the value and the impact that this can have on wider society. And our partners, including exhibiting partners, have developed cultural sensitivity that will assist them when working with Roma community members in the future.

**(v) People will have learnt about heritage:**

16 Roma and non-Roma Researchers and Volunteers have learnt about Roma heritage, which has been measured through qualitative feedback.

*Helping with this project has really broadened and deepened my knowledge of Roma heritage. The interviewees are united in some respects by certain things but there is a massive variety of experiences, even among our relatively small sample of people. There isn't one homogenous history or heritage, which is something which isn't necessarily discernible from mainstream discussions of Roma people. (T.S Volunteer)*

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Dawson

24 Teachers and Assistant Teachers in two London Boroughs are able to use and adapt the educational material to support the National Curriculum, i.e. British Values; Personal, Social, Health and Education (PSHE); Rights Respecting Schools; English: Life Stories; History: Life in the Second World War; Geography: Journeys; Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTHM), thanks to the eight workshops delivered at Redbridge and Southern Road Primary Schools.

360 school children have acquired awareness of Roma history and culture, as well as a greater understanding of London's cultural diversity and the experience of refugees and migrants as a result of the workshops delivered in the two Primary Schools. Some of the Teachers' and students' feedback included:

*The staff have gained a greater awareness of Roma Culture.*  
(S.M. Teacher at Redbridge Primary)

*The children had no prior knowledge so the assembly was very effective and interesting and the power points giving historical aspect. The photographs were an excellent resource and very, very effective for speaking and listening activities. A very good resource for developing many more lessons indeed.* (S.C. Teacher at Southern Road Primary School)

*We decided to create posters of the content and English teaching was planned around this work. There is a display of posters showing who Roma are and facts about their lives. Positive comments have been made by visitors in school.*  
(S.C. Teacher at Southern Primary School)

*They had a really hard life, people were aggressive towards them just because of the way they looked. Before this workshop I didn't even know who Roma were.* (G. from Redbridge Primary School)

*I think it's unfair, people never should feel the way Roma people felt, it's sad.* (G. from Southern Road Primary School)



The online 'Roma Stories' Roma Oral History Learning Resource has now gone live [www.romaoralhistory.com](http://www.romaoralhistory.com) and it will be accessible to all the primary schools in London and across the country. We launched the Learning Resource during the GRT History Month event in June 2019 at City Hall, London. Members of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller organisations and members of the public attended and there was an opportunity to ask questions and share knowledge.



*I'm really glad I could attend this event; it is incredibly important that all communities living in London are fairly represented and listened to. I hope this work can continue and that London can remain open for all. (Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London)*

The 'Roma Stories' exhibition toured across 6 different venues across London, including one in Bristol, and as a result 2,439 people have increased awareness about Roma history and heritage.

This is some of the feedback we received (*more feedback is attached with this report*).

*Thank you for inviting City Academy to this wonderful event. It really was great to hear the stories from the Roma community. It really touched our young Roma students.*

*A sensitive and engaging exhibition for a topic which needs to be discussed more by many.*

*An informative, inspiring and profoundly moving exhibition bringing long-neglected history to life. Looking forward to the online resource, and will take my family to see the exhibition.*

*Congratulations for developing a highly significant exhibition and recording stories and experiences of the Roma community. I'm conscious their voices & history needs to be heard & recognised. There's insufficient awareness of the Roma genocide and the displacement and losses during the World Wars. Thank you for your work helping to raise awareness of your community, their skills, resilience and way of life.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed the film; it was very insightful to learn about Roma stories in London. I am interested to see how the project develops and the possibility of expanding the project nationwide, as more Roma stories need to be documented.*

*My first and proper introduction to the history of Roma people during the Holocaust. Very informative, I am leaving with a new perspective on discrimination, minorities and humanity. Thank you and well done for your work and efforts!*

*This exhibition is very informative and would be good as a 'Roadshow' around different communities. Lots of the stories and information within need much more exposure. Well done and thank you.*

*Very interesting, I am from a Romani family from Sicily. It is very good you recognise our heritage and how proud we are of it. I was born in the UK but I am deeply rooted to my family ethnic origin, and feel proud to see Bristol recognise my people and the long journey they have made.*



Thanks to the 'Roma Stories' exhibition, the BBC World Service's World Update programme, broadcasted on the 18th November 2019, featured the Nazi genocide of Roma and Sinti people in an interview with Senior Curator of the Wiener Holocaust Library, Barbara Warnock, who spoke about the work being done by the Roma Support Group's 'Roma Stories' Oral History Project in collecting testimonies of Roma people's experiences in the wartime concentration camps.



Artwork by Robert Czibi <https://czibiart.com/>

Time Out also wrote an article, featuring the Roma Oral History project, which highlights how the persecution of Roma is still left out of the Holocaust story, it can be accessed by clicking in this link: <https://time.com/5719540/roma-holocaust-remembrance/>.

## Project's Findings

### 1) Importance of Roma ownership of the project:

Being a Roma-led project, it was crucial to have Roma Researchers and Volunteers, who developed and delivered the project.

When collecting and recording Roma people's interviews, many variables needed to be taken into account, including the fact that people were initially reluctant to share their stories and make them available in the public domain, their preferred language of interviews, (e.g. Romanes or more specifically one of its numerous dialects, a language of their country of origin or English), age, gender and tribal affiliation.

Each of these factors needed to be addressed by Roma Researchers to develop trust-based relationships and to alleviate power dynamics between the interviewee and interviewer. As we gathered people's stories, it became evident that 'outsiders' (non-Roma researchers) could not have gained the level of trust required to broach certain taboo subjects such as 'Romanipen' and gender roles.

### 2) Importance of multi-sector partnerships:

The multi-sector partnerships that we have consolidated, have broadened the scope of this project and widened its impact, as well as ensuring its long-term impact. To make the collaboration between us and our stakeholders more meaningful we created a Project Steering Group that met quarterly. The feedback and input we have received over the life of the project has been incredibly valuable and transformational. To illustrate, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, Imperial War Museum, and more recently The Weiner Holocaust Library, have helped us to extend our reach to the wider public, therefore resulting in greater public awareness. As a result, Time Out also published an article featuring the Roma Oral History project. (*Please see the link above.*)

The schools whom we have collaborated with, recognising there is a gap in learning, assisted us extensively by giving us their time and input, which helped us to develop learning material that is relevant and complementary to the primary schools' curriculum.

Having a working partnership with the London Metropolitan Archives has ensured the longevity and accessibility of the project, as well as filling a gap, as they have a lack of Roma resources and material.

Finally, heritage institutions such as the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, LMA and Imperial War Museum have willingly guided us along this journey and resourced us to make a difference through this project, especially in the subject of the Roma experience during the Holocaust, which illustrates a real need and interest in this part of history.

### 3) Collaboration between NGOs and academia:

Our collaborations with academic institutions such as the Raphael Samuel History Centre; Queen Mary, University of London; the Oral History Society, which is affiliated with the Department of History, Royal Holloway, University of London; and most recently with Newcastle University, have brought this project to the forefront of academic discourse. Having academic expertise enabled us to analyse the findings of the project in greater depth, to self-reflect and evaluate the importance of this work.

As a result of our partnership with Graham Smith, a professor of Oral History at Newcastle University, we have a brief report produced by him highlighting some of the project findings. He looked at the demographics of the interviewees, and became particularly interested in the inter-subjectivity and shared authority between the interviewer and interviewee, and in the intergenerational dynamics between them. He also looked at the content of the interviews, and the relationship between memory and history in order to enhance our understanding of the significance of the project and also use these findings in his future educational work with students. (*Please see Graham Smith's report attached.*)

### 4) Resilience and empowerment of Roma communities:

The project has revealed that Roma people feel a real need to continue the process of unravelling and telling their 'untold stories'. Although some of our elder interviewees have initially hesitated to share their stories, they felt empowered by this opportunity and saw a value in imparting their knowledge to younger counterparts to ensure that their historical experience, culture and Roma way of life are passed down to the future generations.

The intergenerational dynamics between the interviewee (the elder) and the interviewer (the young person) played an important role in the project, as elder interviewees become active players, who used the oral history tool to convey their own messages within the community. This shows great resilience for a group of people that have experienced hundreds of years of oppression and whom society has repeatedly tried to shun.

From a perspective of younger Roma generations, learning about Roma past has been an enriching and transformational experience, preparing them to better understand reality and challenges of their everyday life. According to one of the Roma Researchers:

*It's been a necessary Project as we are not used to recording our own history, or writing it down! And it's a part of European history that's not been explored much. It's also hugely important for us as a community, as the younger generation don't know much about our own heritage and it is our duty to preserve it and pass it on (S.G. Polish Roma Researcher)*

## 5) Significance of the Project:

From an academic and institutional perspective, there is a profound lack of Roma resources and material and most of what is available is fragmented and written by non-Roma scholars and historians. Hence ‘Roma stories’ as told, recorded and archived by Roma people themselves constitute a pioneering work and present enormous value for further academic research.

To illustrate this point, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust published Baronita Adam’s oral history story, which is one of the interviews we conducted, on their website (<https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/baronita-adam/>), and this has now become an integral part of their online resource section.

Ruth Barnett<sup>6</sup> stated in her Forward to our online ‘Roma Stories’ Roma Oral History Learning Resource: “The source material for learning about Roma in the Holocaust has been very limited and this learning resource is very much needed and particularly valuable as it has been created by Roma themselves. This learning resource, through presenting what Roma families value will contribute much to the understanding that everyone is a member of the one human race.”

## 6) Role of community-led NGOs in delivering heritage projects:

We realise that the Roma Support Group is uniquely placed to implement heritage projects as we have built a trust-based relationship with Roma community members, which has taken time, commitment and dedication. We are the gate keepers, custodians and curators of Roma heritage and cultural capital, which includes oral histories, arts and a collection of Roma photographs and postcards donated by Robert Dawson which has been of great interest to institutions such as the Imperial War Museum and the Weiner Holocaust Library. And in the absence of other institution that safeguards the interests of Roma communities, we, as an NGO, have a responsibility of ensuring that this capital remains in community ownership and directly empowers them, instead of being only accessible and benefiting only specific segments of society such as academics and scholars.

## Recommendations

On the basis of our project and findings we would like to put forth the following recommendations:

Recommendations
Multi-sector stakeholders group to develop and plan strategies to embed and promote Roma heritage in education, heritage and cultural sectors in London and nationally (e.g. to celebrate Gypsy Roma Traveller History month, Holocaust memorial day, etc.)
Engaging central and local authority across the UK to include Roma heritage and culture in their cultural strategies.
Enhancing the scope and further the impact of this current project through connecting with other Roma NGOs across the country, and Europe, to conduct more oral history

<sup>6</sup>Ruth Barnett, author (escaped the Holocaust on the Kindertransport). For more information, please see <https://www.het.org.uk/survivors-ruth-barnett>

interviews focussing on other aspects of Roma heritage, as well as starting a mapping exercise to better contextualise and reference Roma history.

Creating a learning resource for secondary schools and accompanying teacher CPD to introduce and develop teaching and learning of Roma history as part of British and European history in secondary education.

Collaboration between Roma-led NGOs and academic institutions to further explore participatory research opportunities in areas such as: music, mapping of violence and discrimination, marginalisation and environmental change, memory and history, etc.

Partnership projects between multi-sector stakeholders and NGOs to deliver projects that enhance Roma history and culture, such as educational projects in schools, audio trails, storytelling, exhibition in museums, theatres, etc.

