Foundations
What Works Centre for Children & Families

KINSHIP MATTERS: EXPLORING VOICES IN GYPSY, ROMA, AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES

Research protocol

Research team	University of Lancashire, University of Worcester, University of Swansea with GATE Herts, Lincoln Traveller Initiative, Luton Roma Trust, Leeds GATE, Kushti Bok, and Kaskosan.
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Type of project	Collaborative qualitative research study
Age or status of participants	Children and young people aged 7–25 years who are or have been in kinship care.
Number of participating sites	6
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Plain language summary

What is this project about?

Kinship Matters is a research project about kinship care in Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller families. Funded by Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families, it is part of two new research projects aiming to better understand the experiences of minoritised ethnic children and young people living in kinship care. These new research projects will explore children's views on identity, belonging, cultural continuity, trust in services, and what affects their access to support. Together, these projects aim to build evidence about how to improve services, and how to reduce discrimination and racial inequalities in kinship care.

What is kinship care?

Kinship care occurs when children are living with family members or close family friends, rather than with parents. Sometimes this is permanent, sometimes this is for shorter lengths of time. Kinship care can be informal, including culturally embedded forms of extended and intergenerational family care within Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, where families themselves decide on this arrangement. Kinship care can also be formal and supported by children's social care.

Who is involved in the project?

Kinship Matters is a collaborative research project led by the University of Lancashire with the University of Worcester and Swansea University, in partnership with the following community led organisations: Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment (GATE) Herts, Kaskosan, Kushti Bok, Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange (Leeds GATE), Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative, and Luton Roma. It is a collaborative qualitative research project. Universities and community-led organisations will work closely together with adult community researchers and young experts by experience to co-design all aspects of the research.

What will the project do?

The project will use creative activities and discussions to hear from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people who have experience of kinship care. It will involve around 30 children and young people aged 7 to 25.

Children and young people will be invited to meet with peer researchers. They will be able to choose creative activities designed to help them share stories about their everyday lives.

We will write a report about what we find out and try to improve understanding of what is important for children and families.

Why is the project important?

Research has shown that racial inequalities and discrimination affect kinship carers (Tah and Selwyn, 2025). However, not enough is known about children's views on their experience of kinship care. To our knowledge, no research in England has ever heard directly from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children about their experiences of kinship care. So, there is no reliable information about what is happening for these children and what support would be useful for them and their families.

What we do know is that Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children are much more likely to be referred to children's services, to progress to child protection investigations, and to be placed in state care (Allen et al, 2026). This evidence raises concerns about institutional bias, the undervaluing of extended family networks, and the erosion of children's cultural identity. It is important to improve this situation since it relates to the rights of children and families to preserve their identity and family relations.

Contents

Background and problem statement

This project will focus on the voices and lived experiences of children and young people (ages 7–25 years) from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities who are kinship care-experienced, in both formal and informal arrangements. Whilst there is a dearth of research on the lived experience of minoritised ethnic children and young people in kinship care, there is none at all in respect of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller experiences.

Data regarding numbers of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children in kinship care settings is underreported (ONS, 2022; Unwin et al., 2025). Department for Education data (2011–2018) reveal consistent and growing disproportionality in child welfare involvement for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller of Irish Heritage children compared to all other ethnic groups. Referrals to children's social care are significantly higher than all other ethnic groups. In 2017–2018, one in 10 Gypsy/Roma and one in five Traveller children were referred, versus one in 15 from all other ethnic groups. Progression rates to Initial Child Protection Conferences and Child Protection Plans show a similar pattern. In 2017–2018, Gypsy/Roma children were twice as likely, and Traveller children three times as likely as their peers to be subject to protection processes. Placement in state care has also risen sharply: while numbers for all other groups grew by 10.7%, increases for Gypsy/Roma (147.6%) and Traveller children (114.2%) were stark. Recent research has suggested that outcomes (e.g. related to education) for the generalised population of children in kinship care are poorer and there is considerable placement breakdown (National Centre for Social Research, 2025). Overall, the data indicate systemic and escalating disproportionality, with Traveller children most severely affected, raising concerns about institutional bias and the erosion of family and community life. (Allen and Hamnett, 2022)

The above data raises concerns under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998, which protects private and family life and requires that removal be both a last resort and proportionate. In TC v UK 2012, the European Court of Human Rights confirmed that adoption and non-relative care are among the most serious interferences. However, local authorities frequently dismiss Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller kinship networks, contrary to their duties under the Children Act 1989 (Unwin, 2025). This can weaken children's cultural identity, overlook systemic racism, and constitute systemic breaches of Article 8. The research team's considerable experience of working in co-production with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller families suggests that this is because the strengths in these communities are not given the consideration afforded to other minoritised communities, largely due to professional mistrust and attitudes about poor levels of parenting being prevalent (European Roma Rights Centre, 2025). This can lead to a 'double trauma' for children and young people who are removed not only from their home, but from their culture, with children and young people finding themselves placed in environments and cultures to which they cannot relate. Children have the right to preserve their identity and family relations (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC, Article 8) and children's ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic background should be considered when decisions are being made about who they live with (under Article 20 UNCRC).

Research on the perspectives of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children is vital. Many other minoritised groups of children and young people have opportunities for their voices to be heard through community organisations which provide role models in positions of influence. Children have a right to have their views taken into account on matters that concern them (UNCRC Article

12.). Statistics on the health, education, and care needs of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers are spurious due both to a lack of sensitised data collection and a reluctance on the part of community members to declare ethnicity for fear of discrimination (Allen and Hamnett, 2022; Unwin et al., 2023). Publications such as 'Hate as Regular as Rain' (Greenfields and Rogers, 2020) and 'The Last Acceptable Form of Racism' (Traveller Movement, 2017) indicate the levels of epistemic injustice and discrimination visited on Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities at all levels in UK society, and that community members will participate in this kind of research when it is collaborative and based on recognition of centuries of discrimination.

The above has outlined that there is a clear need for collaborative research which focusses specifically on the perspectives of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people. This project will aim to understand how kinship care for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people can promote the best outcomes (Department for Education, 2023) in terms of children being supported by their family network, being safe, and living in stable, loving homes that promote positive mental health and identity, as well as providing a continued link with culture. We will explore the perspectives of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people on their experiences, needs, challenges, and sources of support, as well as what helps or hinders access to this support.

Research approach

Aims and research objectives

This project has been designed to address the phenomenon of interest set out by Foundations in the tender document, namely to:

RO1: Explore the lived experiences of kinship care for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people, particularly those in informal kinship arrangements.
RO2: Explore how cultural, contextual, and other social or systemic factors shape the needs, experiences, and outcomes for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people.
RO3: Understand the experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people in engaging with support services and barriers to this.
RO4: Explore what Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people in kinship care say they need to feel supported, respected, and understood.

Methodology

The research activities are designed to support children and young people by ensuring all sessions are culturally sensitive, fun, creative, and respectful, with options for different types of activities to enable researchers to respond to what children feel comfortable doing. Peer researchers from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities are part of the research team. Children and families will be able to choose who they want to work with and how much they want to share. We will only work with children who are settled enough to reflect on their experiences, ensuring that all sessions are safe, supportive, and trauma informed. The research will involve children and young people aged 7–25 and their families, and it is essential that activities take place in environments where they feel comfortable. To achieve this, the work will be carried out in community settings, homes, or other safe local spaces chosen with families, and will take place across at least six areas in England so that children and young people from different communities can be included.

We will take a phased approach as follows:

- Phase 1 – Set up
- Phase 2 – Recruitment
- Phase 3 – Data collection
- Phase 4 – Co-analysis
- Phase 5 – Dissemination.

Research activities will be primarily narrative interview based, with embedded creative activities. These will be tailored to the ages and individual needs of the children and young people who take part. We will conduct initial interviews with 30 children and young people, and up to two further repeat interviews with those children and young people who wish to provide longer accounts of their experience. In addition, where partner organisations are already working with groups of children, some of the children involved may engage in creative focus group activities.

Ways of working

In order to ensure that the project as a whole is delivered in an appropriate and inclusive way, we will establish five groups who will work together to manage the project, design the research activities, engage children and young people, carry out the research activities and complete co-analysis and dissemination. These groups are:

Group 1: Six Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community-led organisations. Representatives from the six partner organisations will co-design all activities, introduce the project to families, build trust, support safe recruitment, and offer safe spaces for activities. These groups will help check that findings are fair and useful, help with sharing results back to communities, and provide wraparound care and support for children and young people before, during and after sessions. Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller organisations that partner in the project will receive an honorarium for offering insight, facilitating recruitment, providing wraparound support, as well as support with dissemination as trusted bodies. They may also be subcontracted if, for example, they also host a peer researcher and/or support with specific language needs.

Group 2: Academic researchers from the Universities of Lancashire, Worcester, and Swansea will lead the project, maintain relations with the funder, and ensure the research is ethical and high quality. They will facilitate co-learning with peer researchers, oversee the collection and analysis of data, write the final reports and coproduce accessible summaries.

Group 3: Peer researchers are people from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities or with lived experience who help design and carry out the research. They will work with children and young people in their local communities, to do the research by supporting conversations and activities. They will help interpret findings using their own community knowledge and to make the project more trustworthy and relatable.

Group 4: Experts by experience (EbE) comprise a group of children and young people from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities with experience of kinship care, who will share their lived knowledge and guide decisions. They will advise on how to approach children and families safely and respectfully and, help design materials (e.g., information sheets and research activities that are appropriate for different ages of children).

Group 5: Advisory Group (AG) of adult community members and a representative of Kinship Carers UK who have lived experience and professional experience. This group will meet every three months to help monitor what we are doing within the project and help troubleshoot any issues that come up.

The groups have co-developed and agreed a Ways of Working Protocol (see Appendix) which will be reviewed and updated as needed. This approach is based on well-established best practice used across different disciplines for working with children and young people in participatory child and youth research (Nowland et al., 2022).

Population of interest and sampling strategy

We plan to work with children and young people (aged 7–25 years), living in England, who are recognised as 'ethnic minorities' under the Equality Act 2010, namely English Gypsies, English Travellers, Irish Travellers, Welsh Gypsies, and Roma. We will seek to recruit at least 10 children and young people in each of the following three age ranges:

- Primary aged children (7–11 years)
- Secondary aged children (11–16 years)
- Older young people (17–25 years).

Within each of these age ranges we will seek to ensure diversity in terms of genders, disabilities, and membership of different ethnic identities. We will use a purposive convenience sampling facilitated through the research partnership. This approach to sampling is viewed as the only feasible strategy for accessing this population. Individuals will not be selected because they are seen as representative of the population, but because they fit the criteria and are interested in taking part in the research.

Accessibility and inclusivity

The pre-recruitment stage

Many Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller families – even whole communities – may be nervous about contact with research, especially when it is linked to local authorities. We consider that overcoming challenges in recruitment is something that will require our significant attention in this research.

An important phase of the project is the set-up or pre-recruitment stage of the project. This includes time to establish relationships with the network and to establish suitable peer researcher and experts by experience groups. These groups will ensure that the information we begin to communicate about the project answers the questions that families may have about the research, and that there is a sense of ownership of the research activities and findings as they develop. These will also help to sustain involvement in the project.

Lived experience research team

The research team is made up of peer and academic researchers, including a Romani academic and an academic with lived experience of kinship care. At least three peer researchers will be recruited in the set-up phase, and we will seek to reflect different genders and different Gypsy, Roma, and

Traveller ethnicities. The peer researchers – Genty Lee, Martin Gallagher, and Maria Palmai – will work collaboratively in the research because their 'insider knowledge' is seen as advantageous. Peer researchers will work alongside the research team in all aspects of the research. All researchers will be onboarded at an event that allows the team to share knowledge and expertise together.

Representatives from our network of local community-led organisations have all agreed that, in their view, peer researchers with similar ethnic identities or languages, and those already known in their geographic localities, would be the best people to gain consent for children and young people to take part and to conduct data collection, in conjunction with the community organisations. However, we are also aware that, when researching sensitive topics, it is best not to assume that insider researchers will always be preferred in all cases; children and young people will be given a choice where possible. Some may initially meet in a small group with both an academic and peer researcher. Each child or young person may then choose who they then wish to continue to speak to in more depth and we will always respect their decision.

In the pre-recruitment phase, to help introduce participants to the researchers, we will coproduce an infographic which provides a cartoon style or photo of each researcher, as well as a description of them which is light hearted but also gives important demographic information (e.g. "Allison is 61 years old, she lives in Wales, she has four grown up children, two grandchildren, and two dogs. She is a Romani Gypsy and has worked alongside Romani Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people." "Ali is 57 years old, he lives in Manchester, he has two teenage children and a dog called Bobby. Ali is not from a Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller background, but has worked with children and young people from these communities in research in the past."). Children and young people taking part will be given this information which introduces the different researchers in advance of any personal contact being made.

Recruitment and retention

Identifying the sample

Our recruitment strategy will primarily be via a formal research partnership with six local community-led organisations. These are: Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative, Leeds GATE, GATE Herts, Kushti Bok, KaskoSan, and Luton Roma Trust. All six groups are collaborators in this research, and trusted members of these organisations will 'endorse' the research project as being a worthy one that could bring future benefit to communities. Members of these groups will be involved in the initial design and implementation of the proposed research, and all have enjoyed previous positive working relationships with academic members of the research team when addressing sensitive and taboo issues. These groups and their relationships of trust will be central to the project, as they will use their networks and existing relationships with families, children, and young people to enable outreach, especially with 7–17 year olds; for example, by reaching out through youth workers who are already in contact with young people, or through social activities that are attended by families.

A separate avenue of recruitment will be via the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen, and Boater Schools and Higher Education Pledge organisation, based in Buckinghamshire New University. Twenty-one Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have signed up to this Pledge, which requires universities to be authentically welcoming of students from Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showman, and Boater backgrounds. There is a similar Pledge signed by 37 schools. The co-ordinator of this organisation has agreed to promote recruitment with their signatory members, including the

University of Worcester, that have signed the Pledge. This avenue may be especially important in recruiting the older age group (17–25) who may wish to take part independently.

The research team will also promote this research via national Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller organisations which are known and trusted by both the team and the respective communities, and through social media and publications including the *Travellers Times*, with whom we also have positive working relations. Additionally, members of the research team have a number of established relationships with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), as well as with six local authorities who have confirmed that they would collaborate with us on this research.

The national charity Kinship Carers UK has a close working relationship with the University of Worcester and has previously been involved in advising and disseminating research projects. The charity is long established and has approximately 6,000 members. The charity's knowledge of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller kinship carers is very limited, and hence it has indicated that it will provide full support for our proposed research project in terms of outreach and dissemination, as they would like to embrace Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers within their inclusion policies and practice.

Taken together, the above network provides us with a sound basis on which to recruit primary aged (aged 7–11), secondary (aged 11–16) and older (aged 17–25) children and young people.

Coproducing information and data collection approaches

Once ethical approval is in place, we will establish the EbE group and co-develop information about the project that community organisations and peer researchers can use to reach out to families, young people, and children. This will include the infographic about the researchers and potentially a flyer and short audio or video recording about the project and what it entails. These materials will complement the information sheets for informed consent as described in the next section. The experts by experience will also be engaged in co-creating research activities that will be used during data collection.

Informed consent

To limit attrition, participants will be very carefully briefed about the project and what it entails. It is envisaged that the interaction with children and young people will cover up to three sessions of 30 to 120 minutes duration over a four to six-week period.

In all cases we will use information designed with the experts by experience to reach out to potential participants.

Those who express interest in taking part will be given all relevant information about participation, as well as the opportunity to ask questions before giving consent. We will prepare written information sheets, and will also provide information in other forms as required. Written information will include information sheets for children aged under 13, for young people aged 13–25, and for guardians (see Appendix). This will include details of how their data will be used. Young people aged 12–16 will be asked for written consent as well as for their guardian's consent. Those aged 16–25 will consent themselves. Children aged under 13 will be asked to either visually signal or orally provide consent at each meeting.

Once children, young people, and, where relevant, guardians have agreed in principle to participate, we will work with them to identify the most suitable methods for their involvement, agree on a location, and other practical arrangements. Some may prefer to meet the peer researcher or an academic researcher before providing signed consent. Families may wish to bring children to a familiar location (such as a community building) or for their children to be visited by researchers in their homes. Young people in the 11–16 or 17–25 age groups (recruited through link people – education workers, youth workers, or Higher Education Pledge settings) may express a preference through the link person who told them about the research. This will help guide their first meeting with a peer researcher. Children and young people's time will be compensated by vouchers to the value of £27.50 per meeting with their researchers.

Data collection

Summary of data collection methods

Data collection will involve up to three research visits with each participating child or young person, based on the preferences and comfort of the child or young person. Research will take place with young people from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, supported by community-led organisations, academic researchers, peer researchers, and experts by experience. In some community contexts, children and young people may experience multiple and layered forms of trauma, alongside complex family and organisational expectations. These factors can significantly influence how children and young people communicate, engage, and respond within research settings. Data will be generated through a mix of creative, conversational, and participatory qualitative methods, including drawing, crafting, mapping, poetry, walking interviews, and informal discussion. Children and young people will choose which methods they wish to use, with preferences discussed in the first session. Sessions may take place individually or with family members (such as siblings, carers, or parents), depending on the child or young person's wishes. All sessions will be conducted in familiar or agreed safe settings. With consent, discussions and activities will be audio-recorded where appropriate. Data will be transcribed verbatim, anonymised, and analysed thematically using an iterative, collaborative approach involving researchers, peer researchers, and community partners.

Summary of session activities

Session one

This introductory research session will be a 'get-to-know-you session', designed to build rapport with the child or young person, make sure they understand the research, and want to take part.

Things that could be part of this session might include 'things I like to do'.

The emphasis and activities in the first session with young children will establish a safe space to steer conversations and activities back to if upset or distress arises. This is part of a trauma informed approach.

Sessions two and three

In the second and third sessions we will start by returning to the first activity as an established point of safety. Researchers will build out from there in ways which allow children and young people to share elements of their day to day lives, experiences, and relationships with the research team in ways which feel safe and appropriate. This is likely to cover the relationship with family and friends, carers, safety learning and growth, emotional, mental, and physical health, and feeling listened to.

Principles and practices

The following principles will frame all research approaches used in this project:

- We recognise the need for gentle, flexible, and age-appropriate ways of working with children and young people. We will use child-centred practice, a trauma-informed approach, cultural sensitivity, and will respect the personal preferences of children and young people.
- All methods will be co-designed and agreed by the six Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community-led organisations, academic researchers, peer researchers, experts by experience, and the advisory group.
- The data collection will consist of up to three opportunities for children and young people to share their views and perspectives, structured over a number of visits; the number of visits will be based on personal preference of the children and young people.
- In some cases, researchers will work with children and young people along with family members, including siblings and carers; in some cases, they will work independently; decisions will be based on the personal preference of children and young people.
- A range of creative approaches will be offered, such as crafting, drawing, map making, poetry, and walking interviews, and children's preferred creative approaches will be discussed in the first session.

Analysis

We will co-produce an approach to analysis which reflects the make-up of the partnership, and we will work together iteratively on data to develop inter-case and cross-case comparisons. The creative approaches used in the research are likely to generate data of different sorts. After interviews these will be anonymised, organised, and saved digitally.

All researchers will work together to develop a bespoke approach to panel analysis appropriate for this project. We will meet in teams and work online as panels of four to six people to work on each case in turn. This approach to analysis draws on elements of the narrative interpretive method in which diverse panels are used in order to bring a wider set of life experience and viewpoints to bear on both the data and the research relationship (Wengraf, 2001).

Towards the end of the analysis, we will convene a two-day, in-person team meeting of all peer researchers and academic researchers where all data will be presented for discussion and cross-case comparison. We will use excerpts from the original transcripts to support shared analysis and understanding.

We will continue this iterative process until a shared understanding of the key meanings of the children and young people's experiences of kinship care is reached (Roy et al., 2022).

Limitations

Although this study has been designed to maximise inclusion, cultural safety, and methodological rigour, several limitations must be recognised.

Short timescale

The project is being delivered within a relatively short timeframe, which places limits on the depth and breadth of engagement possible. Building trusting relationships with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities takes time, particularly given experiences of discrimination and research fatigue. A short timescale can constrain the ability to undertake extended pre-recruitment activities, develop rapport with families, and adapt data collection iteratively.

Mitigation: The study incorporates a dedicated pre-recruitment and relationship-building phase, delivered with the support of community-led organisations who already hold trusted relationships. Peer researchers and experts by experience will play a central role in accelerating the process of establishing trust. Regular reflective spaces, strong project management, and ongoing communication across partners will ensure that the study remains responsive and relationship-centred despite temporal constraints.

Limited sample size and challenges of recruitment and retention

As an exploratory qualitative project involving a minoritised group, the sample will necessarily be relatively small, and recruitment depends on the capacity of community organisations and the willingness of families to participate. Practical challenges – including mobility of families, work patterns, mistrust of services, safeguarding processes, or the emotional complexity of discussing care experiences – may affect recruitment and retention. As a result, the final sample may not fully reflect the heterogeneity of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities or the full range of kinship arrangements.

Mitigation: The project uses a purposive convenience sampling approach that is appropriate for this research and is supported by six community-led organisations with strong local networks. Recruitment strategies include multiple routes (community settings, education networks, youth workers, Higher Education Pledge networks) and flexible participation options. Retention will be supported by child-centred engagement, comfortable environments, wrap-around support from partner organisations, reminder contact, and care to avoid overburdening families. Reflexive reporting in the final analysis will attend to the limits of representativeness and avoid overgeneralisation.

Diversity of experiences across the population

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities are internally diverse, with variations in ethnicity, language, gender, age, neurodivergence, disability, communication preferences, literacy levels, and experiences of discrimination. Children and young people’s kinship care experiences are also highly variable and shaped by informal/formal arrangements, safeguarding histories, levels of stability, and community context. This diversity means that no single approach will suit all participants, and there is a risk that some voices (such as children with complex communication needs, non-verbal children, or those with limited English) may be harder to include meaningfully.

Mitigation: The research design embeds flexibility, with activities co-produced with experts by experience and peer researchers to ensure language, cultural and communication needs are met. Peer researchers with insider knowledge of specific communities will support interpretation and cultural translation. Activities and information materials will be adapted for accessibility, including visual, oral and multimodal resources, with interpreters where required. Creative methods offer multiple pathways for expression, supporting participation of children who may not communicate primarily through spoken or written language.

Limitations of creative and child-centred methods

While creative, trauma-informed and child-centred methods can be highly effective for supporting children's agency and comfort, they also have limitations. Creative outputs may vary in depth and clarity, making cross-case comparison more difficult. Creative approaches can also introduce interpretive complexity; researchers risk over-interpreting symbolic material or attributing meaning not intended by the participant. Additionally, child-centred practice may limit the researcher's ability to probe sensitive topics deeply if doing so could undermine a sense of safety.

Mitigation: All creative activities will be co-designed and piloted with community partners and the expert by experience group to ensure they are meaningful, culturally resonant, and age appropriate. Researchers will use a combination of creative and conversational prompts, always led by children's preferences. Joint analysis panels – including peer researchers and academics – will support careful interpretation of creative data, reducing risks of misinterpretation. A narrative-informed, panel-based analysis approach will help ensure that meaning is grounded in participants' own accounts, not researcher assumptions.

Position of researchers and potential influence on the data

Despite extensive safeguards, researcher positionality – including ethnicity, professional background, prior relationships, and insider/outsider status – may shape how children choose to engage and what they feel comfortable sharing. Similarly, peer researchers' insider status may sometimes inhibit disclosure on sensitive topics or create expectations about loyalty or confidentiality.

Mitigation: Researcher reflexivity is embedded throughout the work. Children and young people can choose who they work with (peer researcher, academic, or both). Reflexive practice groups, a co-produced reflexivity statement, and a panel-based analytic method will support critical attention to positionality and power throughout the study.

Outputs

In addition to this protocol, the team's Ways of Working protocol (see Appendix) will provide a short, simple explanation of the protocol which partners can use in discussions with families or other people in their organisation.

A key output will be a final report for Foundations in which we will summarise all findings (February 2027), ensuring all ROs set out in the protocol are addressed.

In addition to the outputs stipulated, we will create accessible summaries for our participants and partners in the consultation to ensure an ethical feedback loop (February 2027). These will be co-designed with the EbE group. Potential methods successfully used in other projects include short booklets, narrated animations, infographics, and podcasts.

We plan to co-produce a best practice guide with children and young people, which would guide practitioners involved in kinship care on what works for the children and young people they work with (February 2027).

These will all be made available prior to a final dissemination event for all partners.

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity (EDIE)

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity (EDIE) is fundamental to our approach to this work, and this is reflected in the partnership, the staff team, the EbE group, and the methodology. Our research team is fully committed to EDIE, and we have specialist expertise in all areas relevant to this research, specifically:

- Hulmes, Lee, Gallagher, and Palmai are of Romani and Traveller ethnicities and have lived experience of Romani and Traveller cultural and linguistic practices and of racism and state interventions in private and family lives
- Larkins has lived experience of kinship care
- Roy, Unwin, Larkins, Hulmes, and Crook all have research experience with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities and with care experienced children and young people
- Unwin has both professional and lived experience of foster care
- Dr John Wainwright from the Global Race Equality Centre (GRACE), University of Lancashire (UoL), will provide additional EDIE scrutiny for the project, to help quality assure our approach and outputs. GRACE is led by academics of colour and has a global track record of race-focused and racially inclusive research. Wainwright leads a UoL team which contributes to the Youth Endowment Fund's Race Equity Data Collection Panel.

As a result, we are confident that we can:

- Involve children, young people, and adults with relevant lived experience as equal partners in the design, conduct, interpretation, and dissemination of the findings
- Operationalise a critical understanding of how identity, heritage, and community shape children's needs and experiences of kinship care, also identifying intersectional issues
- Understand whether and how different age group, care arrangements, and population groups can lead to differential experiences of kinship care as well as different needs for support
- Maximise the positive impact of the research by creating clear and user-friendly messages aimed at relevant audiences through coproduction and critical reflexivity.

A commitment to EDIE will underpin all phases of the work and will be a standing item in team meetings, EbE meetings, and meetings with Foundations.

Commitments

The commitments that will frame this work are as follows.

1. Ensure that advice is taken from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community-led organisations who have coproduced and agreed plans for how we will approach kinship carers, children, and young people, and how to avoid stigma
2. Ensure that Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community-led organisations (and any other trusted individuals who may be able to reach out to kinship carers, including academics who have relevant trusting relationships) have a strong understanding of the research so that they are able to explain what is proposed and answer any questions
3. Ask that these trusted brokers for the research reach out to adults first to secure informed consent before reaching out to children, or reach out to young people (aged 16 and over) directly, if they are already known to the community organisation, using informal conversations as well as information resources in various formats
4. Through adults who know the children and young people, share information so that the children can get support in understanding what might be involved, including pen portraits (cartoons) of who is involved
5. Once consent to meet is in place, we will run taster activities – these might be as simple as a conversation about things you like to do in your spare time – so that comfort can be built in talking together
6. Introduce the activity focus and ways of opting in and out of this at any moment
7. Secure consent from the child to start the research activity, knowing they can press pause at any time and can withdraw at any time
8. Attending to body language as well as what is said, so that a break from the research activity is given at any time needed, making decisions with the participant not for them.

Practices

The practices that will support this work are as follows.

Working with community-led organisations and EbE. We will hold meetings with the experts by experience and community-led partner organisations every six weeks throughout the project. These will be hosted by Allison Hulmes and attended by other members of the research team. The research team is very aware of the hesitancy of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller families when asked to participate in research. Much previous research has been done ‘to’ communities, rather than ‘with’ communities, and community members have rarely been intrinsic to the design, delivery, and dissemination of the research about their lives.

The research team will follow a genuinely participative approach, building on their solid, trusted record in co-production. The team is well-versed in reassuring communities about confidentiality issues and the importance of giving people choice about who they are interviewed by (male/female, community peer researcher/academic, Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller researcher/academic non-Gypsy, Roma, Traveller researcher).

In addition to the reference group made up of academics and members of participating Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller organisations, the team has contacts in Wales (Travelling Ahead) and Ireland

(Exchange House, Dublin) who will be willing to share kinship insights from their own different systems, which may illuminate the issues that arise in our England-based research.

Working with local authorities. Members of the research team have excellent working relationships with the six English local authorities that have expressed interest in supporting the research and are keen to learn more about their local Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities and the need for culturally sensitive practice in kinship work and safeguarding. We also have excellent relationships with more than ten local authorities through our NIHR work on housing for care leavers. The research team will meet with all interested local authorities at three stages in the research – during the set up phase to inform them about the work and gather their perspectives on the presenting issue; at the midway point to update on progress; and in planning dissemination in order to consider, from their perspectives, the ways in which our findings can be implemented in practice. Allison Hulmes will lead this work.

Ethics and participation

Ethics and safeguarding

Ethics approval. This will be sought through the University of Lancashire's internal ethics system and will highlight issues of children and young people's capacity to consent/assent and parent and carer consent, and will outline criteria for any onward safeguarding concerns that need to be addressed. Chair's approval will also be sought from ethics committees at the University of Worcester and Swansea University. The proposed research addresses a highly sensitive issue, and hence great clarity is needed regarding confidentiality and anonymity in all interactions and subsequent reports and publications.

DBS. All researchers working on the project will require a DBS check.

Induction. All research staff, including peer researchers, will undertake a customised induction into their expected roles and responsibilities with participating families, as well as in relation to research aims and objectives, ethics, data protection, and the research methods to be used in the project. This will enable all members of the team to work on a level playing field, and to feel adequately prepared, supported and supervised. The peer researchers have been chosen for their lived experiences of anti-Gypsy and anti-Traveller racism and cultural insider knowledge and will be matched with children who share their ethnic backgrounds.

Reflexivity. We will co-produce a reflexivity statement with all partners in the set-up phase of the project. This will address the potential for different forms of bias and misrecognition within the project. This will be included as a project output.

Trauma-informed approach. We will, at all times, be aware of the potential presence of trauma in any participant's life, and the ways in which this can impact upon their experience of engaging with us, whether engaging as a child, young person, carer, or professional. We will take active steps to attend to participant wellbeing, safety, choice, and control. All research staff working with children and young people, including peer researchers, will receive training from University of Lancashire in trauma-informed research. Our approach to engaging with children will also be grounded in a child rights framework, prioritising children's best interests and recognising the interdependence of their participation and protection rights (Agbontean et al., 2025).

Participant and researcher wellbeing. Attendance to participant wellbeing will be a key concern throughout. We will ensure that people are given control over which lived experiences they feel comfortable sharing and via what means and are provided with information around potential sources of support. All children and young people participating in the research will be accessed through community organisations who can provide pre-, during, and post-engagement support. They will be reimbursed to free up capacity to deliver the degree of support required to safely support engagements in the consultation. All research staff will be supervised by Allison Hulmes and Professor Larkins to ensure concurrent attention to both data and researcher wellbeing.

Voluntary informed consent. Drawing on templates successfully used in other projects, culturally appropriate and accessible information materials will be developed and agreed with the EbE group (introduced under Q2 – see Timeline). These will clearly state the purpose of the research, the nature of participants' potential involvement, the voluntary nature of involvement (with no impact on receipt of support from community partners), the risks and benefits of involvement, (limits to) anonymity and confidentiality, the intended use of their contributions, the right to withdraw and complain, and how to contact the study team with any questions or concerns. These will draw on a combination of written, visual, and video-format materials.

Parent or legal guardian consent is required for participation in the project for children and young people aged up to 16. We will contact birth parents/legal guardians to seek informed consent, unless this is contrary to the best interests of the child or where contact with a birth parent is not feasible. In these instances, we will seek carer consent alongside consent of the child/young person themselves.

Adaptations to standard information materials will be made to support those with particular communication needs. Organisations supporting children and young people and caregiver involvement will have an onboarding session with Dr. Peter Unwin, Dr Allison Hulmes and Josie O'Driscoll where they will also be provided with a written guide to support them in their conversations with potential participants.

Confidentiality and anonymity. Information about anonymity and confidentiality will be clearly set out in information materials and reiterated prior to the commencement of consultations. Great care will be taken with children and young people to ensure they understand any limitations to this, through using examples and encouraging questions. With the exception of disclosures (see Ethics and safeguarding), participants' contributions will only be shared in anonymised form as part of study reporting. Pseudonyms or generic group descriptors will be used, and care will be taken to ensure that other features of participants' accounts that may lead to potential identification are removed. All children, young people, and carers will be given the opportunity to comment on any case studies and quotes before they are included in publications, or other dissemination activities (full details of methodology under Q2).

Safeguarding. All team members who will be involved in the consultations are experienced in working with vulnerable children and young people and receiving and reporting disclosures. We will utilise disclosure protocols that we have devised for other similar work, agreeing clear lines of reporting and accountability with facilitating agencies.

Reciprocity. All children and young people will be given a £27.50 voucher per session, unless this is in conflict with their own wishes or expectations. If this is the case, alternative forms of reciprocity that directly benefit participants will be agreed.

Partnership working

The partners have all worked together previously in the field of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller research and enjoy high levels of trust with those communities and with each other. The University of Worcester has successfully worked in partnership with Allison Hulmes (Swansea University) and with all community-led Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller organisations named in this project in respect of funded projects on mental health and data collection, which were funded respectively by the Race and Health Observatory and Understanding Patient Data. Numerous presentations have taken place at each other's venues, and a number of films and training materials have been co-produced. The University of Lancashire has previously worked closely with the Welsh Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller organisation Travelling Ahead, with whom Allison Hulmes also works closely. The research team is committed to the principles of authentic coproduction and will use their knowledge and skills to blend in with the preferences of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller organisation partners and with the individual preferences of the participating families, children, and young people.

We have developed a formal Ways of Working protocol which documents our agreed strategies and values for partnership working (see Appendix).

Registration

Registration Type: Open Science Framework

https://osf.io

Data protection

The University of Lancashire, which leads this project, processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit".

Further information on the lawful basis for the processing of personal data and how data will be used, processed, and stored can be found in the table below.

What is the lawful basis for processing the personal data?	Processing is necessary for a task carried out in the public interest (Article 6(1)(e) UK GDPR). Only the views and perspectives of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children, young, people and families involved in kinship care can help us to understand their experiences.
Is this project processing special category data?	Yes, we will be processing data about children's ethnicity and care status. We are processing this data in the public interest; nothing is known about Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people's perspectives about kinship care. The lawful basis is Article 9(2)(j) UK GDPR by virtue of section 10 and Schedule 1(4) DPA.
Have you written an appropriate privacy notice to provide to individuals at the point you collect their personal data?	Yes; participant information sheets have been prepared for the different ages/guardians. The University's standard privacy notice link is on these. Together, this information forms the privacy notice. As stated on the ethics application, we are also taking precautions to reassure communities about the use of their data which can be a particularly worrying for this group of people.
Do all individuals who will have access to or be using the personal data understand that it must not be provided to any unauthorised person (which includes disclosing information to family members or other representatives of data subjects, unless the data subject has given consent for us to do this)?	Yes.

Do all individuals who will have access to or be using the personal data understand their responsibilities under data protection legislation and have they received data protection training?	Yes; all the staff on this project are highly experienced researchers due to its sensitivity and have completed data protection training. We will provide clear guidance to all peer researchers which will be delivered as part of co-learning activities and prior to any data collection. There is a joint controller agreement in place between the parties forming the research team which specifies roles and responsibilities. All staff are familiar with the UK GDPR requirements around research data and will be reminded about this as part of the protocol.
How will personal data be collected?	Creative methods: children and young people can talk, draw, or write. This will be recorded directly to the University of Lancashire's computer systems using a mobile phone.
How will data be stored?	Responses will be uploaded directly to the University of Lancashire's secure server. All personal data will be stored in a password-protected folder and available to all University researchers.
How long will personal data be stored for?	The consent sheets will be stored for seven years and then destroyed, as per University policy for confidential waste. Other research data will be retained for seven years following the completion of the project.
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of personal data?	Personal data will be stored on the University's secure server in a OneDrive folder accessible to the University research team only.
Will personal data be anonymised?	We will take care to ensure that individuals cannot be identified from the things that they tell us. Audio will be converted into text and any names or personal information removed. Images will also be checked for any personal information which will be removed.

How will personal data be used?	Personal data will be used to complete the research project. All responses will be used to inform Foundations about children and young people's views and perspectives about family care. This is necessary to ensure that children and young people's voices are heard and to understand how family care experience can continue to be improved in the future.
Who will have access to personal data?	Only the University and peer researchers will have access to data before it is anonymised. Summaries of this anonymised and composite data created by combining extracts of multiple interviews will then be shared with our advisory groups of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller young people and adults, who will help with analysis. Personal data on consent forms will only be accessible to the University of Lancashire researchers (Professor Alastair Roy, Dr Deborah Crook, Professor Cath Larkins).
Will personal data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	Summary tables of the anonymised data for this study will be stored indefinitely in University of Lancashire Data (a research data repository) for future use in accordance with the Research Data Management Policy. This is so researchers in the future can compare this with new data about the experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children.
How will personal data be destroyed?	Personal data will be destroyed seven years after the end of the project in line with the University's policy for destruction of confidential data.

Risks and mitigations

The team's ability to proactively respond to challenges and risks that emerge is based on decades of experience of project management and delivering similar projects. We are experienced in developing, assessing, and maintaining 'live' risk registers, and we are acutely aware of the need to contingency plan not only for large scale challenges but also for small scale issues that may cumulatively derail projects. The size and experience of the cross-University team places us in a strong position to deal with any challenges that may impact upon the study.

Key risks and mitigations that we have identified in the bid development stage are outlined below; these would be revised, refined, and added to during the development phase and revised at project team meetings.

Potential risks related to:	Mitigations include:
Cross-institution working	Formal subcontracting processes; mirroring lead contract with Foundations.
Failure to recruit	The partnership we have built provides an important means of mitigating this risk. We have also developed three distinctive means of recruitment (see Recruitment and retention).
Delivery delays, capacity pressures	Proposed study involvement has taken account of staff capacity. Additional staffing resource from across the partnership has been planned, should unexpected issues, staff absence, etc. arrive. Task progress and completion regularly reviewed at workstream and project leadership meetings.
Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community members feeling exploited and/or different opinions between partners.	Inclusion of the lived experience of respected community advocates within the study, who will constantly refine the team approach. We have embedded principles of equity and dialogue in the design of the study, to increase acceptability and reduce risk of exploitation. Regular meetings with advisors will enable us to quickly address any issues. We will provide an ethical feedback loop supported by the partnership and the Advisory Board.
Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community members feel the research has not delivered anything of value to the communities	Team members will meet monthly with members of the six community organisations throughout the analysis process, to share emerging understandings and check relevance of findings, revising interviews in line with feedback.
Misalignment of expectations and delivery	Project Information Document and review protocol agreed with Foundations. Dedicated internal Quality Assurer role (Professor Cath Larkins and Allison Hulmes). Whole-team responsibility ensured through team meetings to ensure regular cross-checking and quality control functions are working.

Potential risks related to:	Mitigations include:
Data security	Explicitly clear data-sharing and security requirements (within subcontracting paperwork). Development of cross-partner data management plan. Adherence to UoL IT and data security policies. GDPR data compliance assessed as part of UoL Ethics procedures.
Safeguarding and personal safety and wellbeing	Extensive experience of working with vulnerable groups, including children and young people, on sensitive topics. Risks and needs assessments used for all activities. Robust safeguarding policy and procedures, and named safeguarding lead (Professor Ali Roy). Application of trauma-informed approach to data collection and analysis. Training in trauma-informed approach for all researchers provided by UoL. Service level agreements set up with facilitating agencies, to provide support for participants. Proactive researcher wellbeing plan.
Ethical elicitation and use of primary data	Adherence to ethical research protocol, and UoL ethical approval. Application of trauma-informed approach to the study. Clear accessible information to ensure informed consent. Limitations of confidentiality explained in writing and verbally. Right to withdraw explained in writing and verbally. Clear protocols for data collation, storage, anonymisation, use and deletion.

Project team and management

Personnel and positionality

Prof Ali Roy is Professor of Social Research and Co-Director or the Centre for Children and Young People’s Participation at the University of Lancashire. He has a professional qualification in youth and community work and has worked in detached youth work and residential social work, including work with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller families. He is an inter-disciplinary qualitative researcher who has published widely about participatory, ethnographic, mobile, visual, and biographical methods. He has worked on more than 100 research projects and has 20 years of project management experience. He has authored (and co-authored with Cath Larkins) numerous books and papers providing critical insight into participatory and collaborative research with children and young people. He is an expert on creative and mobile methodologies. He is currently Principal Investigator (PI) for an NIHR project exploring innovations in housing solutions for young people leaving care which involves collaboration with seven local authorities across England. With Cath Larkins, he collaborated with a Roma organisation to co-learn about inclusive participation processes, which have improved understanding of the capacity of Roma and other marginalised children. The perspectives on how to implement EU policy 'The Child Guarantee', expressed by children in these projects, were shared through European public decision making channels.

Allison Hulmes is a Welsh Gypsy, a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at Swansea University, Director, co-founder of the Romani & Traveller Social Work Association, and Romani & Traveller Representative at the International Federation of Social Workers. As a Romani Gypsy researcher, Allison Hulmes brings lived experience of minoritisation, racism, and cultural misrecognition that resonates with many of the realities faced by Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people in kinship care. Her positionality means she can approach participants as someone with insider knowledge of community dynamics, cultural values, and the long history of mistrust towards statutory agencies and research. This helps reduce barriers to engagement, enabling young people to see themselves reflected in the research and to feel that their voices will be understood and valued. Allison is an activist for Romani and Traveller rights, including widening participation in education. Allison has worked in both the statutory and voluntary sectors and has particular expertise in children's social care, having worked closely with the Welsh government on advocating for equitable provision for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers. Her main goal is to fundamentally change social work practices with Romani and Traveller communities, aiming to combat anti-gypsyism in all its forms so that Romani and Traveller individuals can flourish while preserving their diverse ethnic and cultural identities. Allison has published a number of peer-reviewed articles, blogs, and practice guides in the field of working with Gypsy, Roma, and Travellers. She is co-editor of a special edition of Critical and Radical Social Work Journal with a special focus on Romani and Traveller people and is currently co-editing a special edition of the Child Abuse review with a focus on indigenous social work. Allison is in the final stages of developing a good practice guidance for social workers supporting Romani and Traveller communities (along with Bangor University) and continues to represent Romani and Traveller families involved in care proceedings in England in Wales, where family preservation has been the outcome. Allison actively works to preserve her Welsh (Kale) Romani language and heritage for future generations, emphasising the fundamental human right to access indigenous languages and stories as a way to sustain ethnic identity, culture, and history.

Dr Peter Unwin is a Principal Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Worcester, where he leads the Health Inequalities and Social Inclusion Research Group. He is a Director of the Romani & Traveller CIC and an ally member of the Romani & Traveller Social Work Association. He has worked across children's and adult social care services for many years in frontline practice, inspection, and senior management. He has also been a local authority foster carer and chaired fostering panels across statutory and independent sectors. Peter is currently a member of the Adoption Central England panel. Peter has been PI in recent research grants from the Community Fund, the Race and Health Observatory and Understanding Patient Data. His particular research interests are in co-production, and he has published widely across his areas of interest.

Prof Cath Larkins is Professor of Childhood Studies at the University of Lancashire, an internationally recognised expert in children and young people's participation, and a respected scholar writing about citizenship, power, participation, and participatory methodologies. Cath co-directs the Centre for Children and Young People's Participation and the NIHR Social Care Rapid Evaluation Team (SOCRATES). Cath has collaborated in participatory research with care-experienced children and young people since 1997, through a wide range of research studies (funded, for example, by DfE, NIHR, Welsh Government, EU, AHRC, and charitable foundations). Cath has more than 20 years of project management experience. Cath has lived experience of kinship care and has collaborated extensively with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller organisations, ensuring that research resources are co-directed by community members to address concerns that are raised by children. Her work in this field has been highlighted in international reviews as an exemplar of good practice, and the models for participatory practice that she has developed have been adopted by the Council of Europe and Eurochild, informing practice by the EU and across at least 14 European states.

Dr Deborah Crook has extensive experience in qualitative research with children and young people and their adult allies. This includes co-creating approaches to research with children and young people to ensure these are inclusive and enable them to bring questions and ideas to research that have not been identified previously by other stakeholders. Deborah draws on a background in creative arts and education, and has experience of working in both primary and secondary schools. She has recently co-produced training with young people about participation aimed at practitioners and professionals. Deborah has co-developed creative approaches for data collection with care-experienced children and implemented these with support from our links in different local authorities. She has worked with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, including interviewing children in their homes. She is a Co-Director of the Centre for Children and Young People's Participation and Board Member of the European Sociological Association Childhood Network.

Ellie Rogers is CEO of Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange and has worked at GATE for the last 11 years. She is also the Safeguarding Lead for the organisation. Leeds GATE work to improve quality of life for Gypsies and Travellers across West Yorkshire through improving health, homes, education, and inclusion. They are a community member organisation which belongs to Gypsy and Traveller people. They offer a wide range of support, services, youth work, and community development work which includes family support work and independent domestic violence advocacy. Ellie has a keen interest in this project as an adoptive parent and having supported many families involved in social care proceedings.

Betty Billington, CEO of Kushti Bok, Dorset, is a Romani Gypsy and dedicated advocate for the Gypsy and Traveller communities in Dorset. Her leadership has been instrumental in providing support services, cultural awareness training, and policy advice. Betty's efforts have been recognised with the British Empire Medal (BEM) for her significant contributions to the community. Her work includes advocating for the rights and wellbeing of the Gypsy and Traveller communities, and she has been instrumental in fostering understanding and collaboration with local authorities and organisations.

Josie O'Driscoll is a care-experienced Irish Traveller who has been CEO of Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment (GATE Herts) since 2010. Josie has extensive experience in community development, policy consultation, and training, and has worked at regional, national, and international levels. She has excellent links with policymakers and works with families and children in the Hertfordshire area on a number of health, education, and social care matters, including involvement in kinship cases. Josie is skilled in tackling discrimination and hate crime, improving access to essential services, and promoting social inclusion and has been the recipient of several awards for her national and international work. Josie has commissioned and carried out research, and has partnered with the University of Worcester in recent research on mental health and data collection. She is a great advocate of Experts by Experience in developing solutions to empowering Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities through youth work and partnerships.

Juice Vamosi and **Maria Palmai** are co-founders of KaskoSan (Northwest England).

Juice Vamosi, a Roma activist, has worked as a Roma language consultant for more than 30 years. He was a personal advisor on Roma engagement to two past presidents of the World Bank and to Neelie Kroes, former Vice President of the European Commission. In 2010, Juice built the KaskoSan social network, the first global Roma brand with half million registered Romani speakers. He is also a film producer. His films for the BBC and Channel 4 earned millions of views. As a Romani dialects expert and as the founder of KaskoSan Roma Charity, he is voluntarily supporting eastern European Roma migrants in the UK.

Maria Palmai is a Romani community researcher and practitioner from the Kalderash Romani community, with more than two decades of experience in participatory, community-led, and practice-based research across central and eastern Europe and the UK. She is a co-founder of KaskoSan and has collaborated with academic and institutional partners including the University of Salford, Edge Hill University, Liverpool Hope University, the University of Sheffield, and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. Her work sits at the intersection of community-based knowledge production, culturally grounded engagement, and applied research for policy and service development. Her research focuses on health inequalities, access to services, domestic abuse, disability, and the lived experiences of Roma women and children. Methodologically, she has extensive experience in qualitative interviewing, focus group facilitation, multilingual fieldwork, participatory action research, and culturally sensitive engagement across several Romani dialects. She contributes to research design, fieldwork delivery, and the co-production and interpretation of evidence with marginalised communities. She is also a co-author of peer-reviewed academic outputs arising from this work.

Lynne Walker, Director of Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative. Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative is a well-established charity which has been serving the Traveller communities of Lincolnshire for 25 years. They have four main strands of work:

- 11–16 year olds education: LTI delivers weekly sessions in family support hubs where the aim of these sessions is to gain qualifications such as functional skills, King's Trust units, first aid, etc. to allow young people to have access to college places or meaningful employment.
- Adult Education: LTI delivers this at a dedicated slot in family support hubs and offer CV writing, help navigating online job marketplaces, facilitating online training such as food handling and hygiene, and delivering other employability skills.

- Health work: LTI facilitates NHS teams such as Healthy Minds, the vaccination team, etc. within family support hubs, but they also offer outreach services. They have three NHS teams that go out to different sites with LTI members of staff and using their mobile classroom, offer health checks, signposting, and advice.
- Advocacy: LTI supports all Travellers in accessing and/or completing documentation, e.g., passports, driving licenses, school applications, and accompanying to appointments.

Lynne has worked for LTI as their teacher and then Lead Teacher for 11 years, and, since the start of 2026, she has held the title of Director. LTI is a hands-on team achieving great things with the families they work with**.**

Crina Mortenau, Manager, and **Paul Sayers**, Education Champion, Luton Roma Trust

Luton Roma Trust supports the Roma communities in Luton and surrounding areas to access accommodation, education, welfare, healthcare, and employment. We raise cultural awareness and advocate for Roma needs, including in public sector and third sector organisations. Luton Roma Trust became an official charity in 2015, although had been active in the community for a number of years before that.

Crina Morteanu, the charity's Manager, has a background in law and human rights, as well as extensive experience collaborating with national and international NGOs advocating for Roma rights. In 2016, Crina held the position of Human Rights Counsellor of the Romanian Minister of Justice; she managed the portfolio of the Romanian penitentiary system as well as contributed, *inter alia*, to the implementation of some of the activities within the Romanian Roma Strategy 2015–2020.

Paul Sayers has been the Education Champion at Luton Roma Trust since 2016. Daily, he helps Roma children in Luton to engage in the schooling process, liaising between families and schools/school admissions where needed, and working closely with the Access to Education team to ensure that children are able to enter school. He also reads in primary schools with Roma children. Before joining the team, Paul and his wife lived in the Romanian capital Bucharest for six years, where he learned the Romanian language and familiarised himself with Roma culture. During this time, they volunteered with a church that was working with Roma families, assisting them to register their children into school, and helping the children with their homework. They acted as intermediaries between families and the school their children attended.

Gentylia Lee, independent peer researcher. Gentylia is an English Romani-Gypsy author of 'The mystery in being a Gypsy'. She has extensive experience in helping to support members of the Romani-Gypsy and Traveller communities in education, accommodation, and health in the South of England. She has experience in working with professional staff in education, the NHS, and with borough and county councils, actively promoting cultural awareness and the importance of adequate site provision. She supports social workers in facilitating kinship care within the Gypsy and Traveller communities and supports social work professionals. She is a Kent Health Champion, and a member of the GRT Advisory Board for Kent County Council. Gentylia's main focus is to see the inclusion of Romani-Gypsy history in England's national curriculum and advocating for adequate site provision to address the national shortage.

Dr Martin Gallagher, independent peer researcher. Martin is an Irish Traveller policy consultant and equality specialist. He has just completed a PhD from Northumbria University, where his doctoral research examined the effectiveness of equality training for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities in the United Kingdom, and one of the first studies to apply critical race theory to this question from an insider community perspective. His research demonstrates how public institutions routinely perform equality compliance rather than achieve it, producing the appearance of change while leaving structural discrimination intact. Martin works with public sector organisations, legal practitioners, and civil society bodies across the UK on equality and human rights policy, institutional compliance, and community engagement. He brings to this project both doctoral expertise and the lived authority of an Irish Traveller navigating the institutions his research examines.

Specific project roles and responsibilities

University of Lancashire

- Assume budgetary management responsibility for the overall project and lead write-up and dissemination activities
- Distribute honorariums to partner organisations and individuals involved in advisory roles
- Engage peer researchers and language support through ad hoc roles and subcontracts as appropriate
- Lead on methodological considerations and capacity building within the research team
- Lead on creating co-learning spaces, co-creating methods for working with children and families
- Lead on creating co-analysis spaces, co-creating methods for co-analysis of data
- Ethics approval: this will be sought through the University of Lancashire's internal ethics system and will highlight issues of children and young people's capacity to consent/assent and parent and carer consent, and will outline criteria for any onward referral
- Lead on coordinating strategies for accessing the support in collaboration with all collaborators, partners, and ad hoc community researchers
- Lead on developing and implementing dissemination strategies in collaboration with all partners.

University of Worcester

- Lead on recruitment of participants through partner organisations and other networks
- Lead on the liaison with the voluntary organisations, local authorities, and national organisations such as BASW and Travellers' Times, alongside Allison Hulmes
- Recruit to and host the reference group, which will meet three to four times during the project providing oversight
- Host six weekly meetings with the EbE group, whose exact configuration is to be agreed with participating organisations, children, and young people.
- Contribute to write-up and dissemination across Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller organisations
- Contribute to developing strategies for accessing the support in collaboration with all collaborators, partners, and ad hoc community researchers

- Chair’s approval for ethics will also be sought from ethics committees at the University of Worcester.

Swansea University

- Support recruitment of peer researchers and participants
- Have a core role in write-up and dissemination
- Contribute to developing strategies for accessing the support in collaboration with all collaborators, partners, and ad hoc community researchers
- Chair’s approval for ethics will also be sought from ethics committees at the University of Worcester and the University of Swansea.

Timeline

Dates	**Activity**	**Staff responsible/ leading**
Phase 1: Onboarding and set-up tasks		
November–December 2025	Due diligence checks	University of Lancashire
November–December 2025	Grant agreement signing	University of Lancashire
January–June 2026	Discuss with EbE	University of Lancashire
January–June 2026	Coproduce framework and research materials	University of Lancashire
January–March 2026	Begin pre-recruitment work	University of Worcester
April 2026	Data protection	University of Lancashire
May 2026	Ethical approval	University of Lancashire
May 2026	Publish protocol	Foundations
Phase 2: Kick-off and recruitment		
March 2026	Kick-off meeting	Foundations
January–March 2026	Regular liaison with community-led partners	University of Worcester
March 2026	EbE establishment and regular meetings	University of Worcester
January–March 2026	Peer researcher onboard	Swansea University
February–May 2026	Co-learning sessions	University of Lancashire
February–May 2026	Finalise methods	University of Lancashire

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible/ leading
February–March 2026	Finalise ethical approval	University of Lancashire
February–March 2026	Co-learning session	University of Lancashire
Phase 3: Data collection		
April–October 2026	Complete all interviews	All partners
Phase 4: Data analysis		
April–December 2026	Concurrent analysis	All partners
Phase 5: Dissemination		
July–December 2026	Co-planning dissemination	All partners
July–December 2026	Prepare all outputs	All partners
February 2027	Dissemination event	All partners

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APPENDIX

Kinship Matters Research Project: Ways of Working protocol

This project involves community organisations and academics working together to try and create spaces in which children can tell us about their experiences of kinship care in ways that they want to.

In partnership with foundations, we want to make sure that the changes children and their communities want to see are heard by the right people who can make this happen.

This document describes how everyone involved in Kinship Matters research project will work together. It covers the following questions:

1. What is this research about?
2. Who will be involved in planning and conducting the research?
3. What are our agreed principles and ways of working together?
4. What are the research activities that we will design and deliver together?
5. What is important in how we work with children and families and mitigate identified risks?

What is this research about?

This research is about listening to **Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller** children and young people (ages 7–25) who are growing up/or have grown up in **kinship care.**

We want to understand their **experiences, needs and ideas** about what good support looks and feels like.

When we say **kinship care** we mean living with relatives or close family friends for periods of time, instead of living with parents.

Why is the research important?

No research has ever asked Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children about their kinship care experiences.

Many Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller families feel misunderstood and discriminated against by services. Sometimes, children are taken into care and placed away from their ethnic identity and culture when they do not need to be.

By hearing these children's voices and better understanding their lived experiences, we hope to help professionals offer **fairer, safer and more culturally respectful support**.

Who will be involved in planning and conducting this research?

The following groups will work together to design the research activities and to carry them out.

Six community-led organisations

These are formal partners in the research, helping to plan all activities, introduce the project to families, build trust, support safe recruitment, offer safe spaces for activities, and provide support to children and families with any issues that come up. They will help make sense of what we find out in the research, providing information about contexts. They will also check that findings are fair and useful, help develop recommendations and help with sharing results back to communities.

Academic researchers

These are people from the Universities of Lancashire, Worcester and Swansea, working together to lead the research, maintain relations with the funder, ensure the research is ethical and high quality. They will facilitate sessions where the academic researchers and peer researchers will learn together, support the collection and analysis of data, write the final reports and coproduce accessible summaries. This group includes people with lived experience.

Peer researchers

These are people from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities who help design and carry out the research. They will work with children and young people in their communities, to do the research by facilitating research conversations and activities with children and families who chose to take part. They will, help interpret findings using their community knowledge to help make the project more trustworthy and relatable.

Experts by Experience (EbE)

These are a group from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities with experience of kinship care who will share their lived knowledge and guide decisions. They will advise on how to approach children and families safely and respectfully and help design materials, e.g. information and research activities that are appropriate for different ages of children, They may meet together as a group, or separately, depending on what the children decide.

Advisory group

This is a group of adult community members who have lived experience and professional experience who will meet every three months to help monitor what we are doing and help troubleshoot any issues that come up.

What are our agreed principles and ways of working together?

What are out principles and values?

We will:

- Communicate clearly and respectfully

- Share decisions and work in partnership
- Protect everyone's data and use it only for the research
- Work without judgement, recognising community strengths
- Respect people's own choices about how they identify, their ethnicity, and their experiences
- Use findings responsibly, in ways that benefit Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities
- Do no harm – ensure the comfort, rights, and safety of all participants.

How will we work together?

- The community organisations, peer researchers, and academic researchers will meet with the EbE, partner, and peer researcher groups every four to six weeks
- Experts by experience will meet with community members supporting them, and academics, every four weeks. Sometimes we may bring all the groups together. The EbE members will decide how to do this
- Academic and peer researchers who need to coordinate and plan activities, may also join a weekly meeting when necessary, to keep track of progress
- Stay in touch between meetings by email or phone
- Work in small groups to design activities, recruit families, and check emerging findings
- Offer support before, during, and after all sessions with children and young people in ways appropriate to the child or young person involved.

Who will facilitate meetings?

- Meetings with community organisations and the advisory group will be facilitated by Allison Hulmes and Peter Unwin from the University of Worcester, with support from other academic team members
- Expert by experience meetings will be facilitated by Dr Deborah Crook with support from peer researchers and community groups
- Weekly drop-in meetings for researchers will usually be coordinated by Ali Roy, or by Cath Larkins when Ali is unavailable.

What are the research activities that we will design and deliver together?

What research activities will be designed?

Through regular meetings, community organisations, peer researchers, academic researchers, and experts by experience will co-design:

- Information for families and children about the research
- Ways of having research conversations and doing creative activities with children and young people
- Ways of having discussions with families
- Ways of supporting children's wellbeing pre and post research conversations?
- Ways of analysing and making sense of the research data
- Ways of writing up and reporting what we find out.

When will each stage happen?

- Phase 1 – Set up and designing activities – November 2025–April 2026
- Phase 2 – Recruitment of children and families – April–September 2026
- Phase 3 – Data collection - April–September 2026
- Phase 4 – Analysing together what we find out – June–December 2026
- Phase 5 – Sharing what we found out – February 2027 onwards

How will research activities support children and young people?

We will make sure that we design sensitive, fun, creative and respectful activities for children and young people of different ages and interests by:

- Creating options for different activities, that enable researchers to be responsive to what children want to do
- Ensuring children and families can choose how much they want to share
- Making sure we only work with children who are settled enough to be able to reflect on their experience, and by ensuring sessions are safe, supportive, and trauma-informed.

Where will research activities take place?

The research will involve children and young people aged 7–25 and their families. It is important that we do the research in places they feel comfortable. It is important that we reach out to children and young people right across England. This will mean working in:

- Community settings, homes, or safe local spaces chosen with families
- At least six local areas in England.

What is important in how we work with children and families and manage risks?

What language and cultural issues will we consider?

- Usie simple, respectful and culturally sensitive language.
- Be aware of the diversity of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups, including differences in language use. In Roma communities, Romani consists of multiple language variants shaped by different historical migration routes and should be used in engagement where it is the home language of the family, particularly by peer researchers working within their own communities. Romani is not formally standardised within statutory systems, and there are currently limited frameworks for training or quality assurance in its professional use. As a result, it is not always well understood by services and external professionals, while within families it often functions as a key space of trust where experiences can be expressed more openly and authentically. To support more reliable data collection, it is important to prioritise the use of home language wherever possible and to ensure that engagement takes place in culturally appropriate and trusted settings, including awareness of frameworks such as Pachiv – the unwritten system of honour and social conduct that shapes communication, relationships, and boundaries within many Romani communities. The use of English or other mainstream languages may, in some cases, reflect adaptation linked to past experiences of discrimination and anti-gypsyism, and may therefore influence how openly participants express themselves.

- Many English Romani and Irish Traveller children and young people speak dialects that are unique to their families and communities. Supporting and validating these linguistic identities is essential for building trust, wellbeing and meaningful engagement.
- Be respectful of everyone's rights, including to be able to self-identify.
- Avoid stigma.
- Respect traditions and family structures.
- Understand past negative experiences with services and research. This includes recognising that silence, withdrawal, or limited verbal engagement may reflect self-protection, fear, or mistrust rather than lack of interest or disengagement.
- Share only the information that children and families agree we can share and for the purposes agreed.

How will we work with children and families?

- Always approach families through trusted community partners
- Give children 'pen portraits' of researchers so they know who we are
- Start with 'taster' activities to build comfort and appropriate relationships
- Be clear of the boundaries of the research and confidentiality
- Use games, play, and craft materials to enable children and young people to express themselves how they want to
- Let children choose who they speak with and how they communicate
- Allow all children and young people to take breaks or stop any of the activities at any time
- Ensure trusted adults they know are always available for support
- Make sure engagement is safe, empowering and enjoyable.

What risks are partners concerned about?

- Families feeling judged or exploited
- Children or young people feeling unsafe or upset
- Mistrust toward researchers
- Low recruitment or people dropping out
- Misunderstanding cultural practices
- Data not being kept safe
- Data being shared in other ways that have not been agreed.

How will we manage risks together?

- Work closely with trusted Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller organisations
- Use trauma-informed approaches
- Provide clear information and choices including about how to withdraw from the research
- Explain how data will be stored and only record if people feel comfortable
- Ensure confidentiality and privacy
- Have safeguarding procedures in place
- Review risks regularly as a team
- Offer vouchers or other forms of thanks for participation
- Respect everyone's rights to stop taking part if they want to.

What are our safeguarding procedures?

- Take a proactive, trauma-informed approach to safeguarding
- Follow the University of Lancashire’s Safeguarding Policy and safeguarding policies of the community partner organisation that has helped connect the child and family to the study
- Recognise that safeguarding is about what happens in the future as well as now
- Recognise the key role partners play in building trust and in supporting families during and following the research
- Peer researchers have DBS and are experienced in working with children
- Safeguarding to be part of all conversations about research approaches
- Recognise the sensitive nature of kinship care and the importance of language
- Find out the name and contact details of a safe person who they can turn to in case of any emotional distress
- Protocol to be developed with peer researchers that builds on their experiences of how we can work with children and families to prevent distress and what to do if this happens
- Each child/young person will have an additional adult ally that they are happy to speak to
- Meet with peer researchers in places familiar to the child/young person
- Ensure an additional trusted adult is close by during peer researcher visits
- Creative research approaches that enable children and young people to express themselves how they want to
- Approaches to continually bring the child / young person back to a comfortable positive space if they talk about difficult points in their lives
- Approaches that also recognise the therapeutic properties of play
- Staged visits allowing time for children and young people to understand what the research is about, to take part as they want to, and to feedback
- Work with organisations and individual children and young people to identify how and where they can access further support
- Peer researchers will check in with children, young people and families following all visits
- If peer researchers have any concerns about significant harm, they will raise these with Allison Hulmes or Cath Larkins. Allison and Peter (who are social workers) and Cath Larkins (who has led postgraduate training on safeguarding) will discuss how to proceed, to ensure the child and family can access any additional support they need. They will ensure that any concerns are recorded and raised through University and Community Partner protocols as appropriate.