

Kids' Own Publishing Partnership offers a space for children and young people to express themselves through professional arts practice. Collaboratively publishing the work they create provides a public platform so that their voices can be heard more widely.

This project was developed in partnership with Cork Traveller Visibility Group and the Cork STAR (Supporting Traveller and Roma) project. The book was created by Roma children and young people in Cork and is a unique and significant publication, exploring their lived experiences through artwork and in their own words.

There is a classroom resource for teachers to accompany this book. The aim of this resource is to help teachers use this publication in conversation and collaboration with their students.

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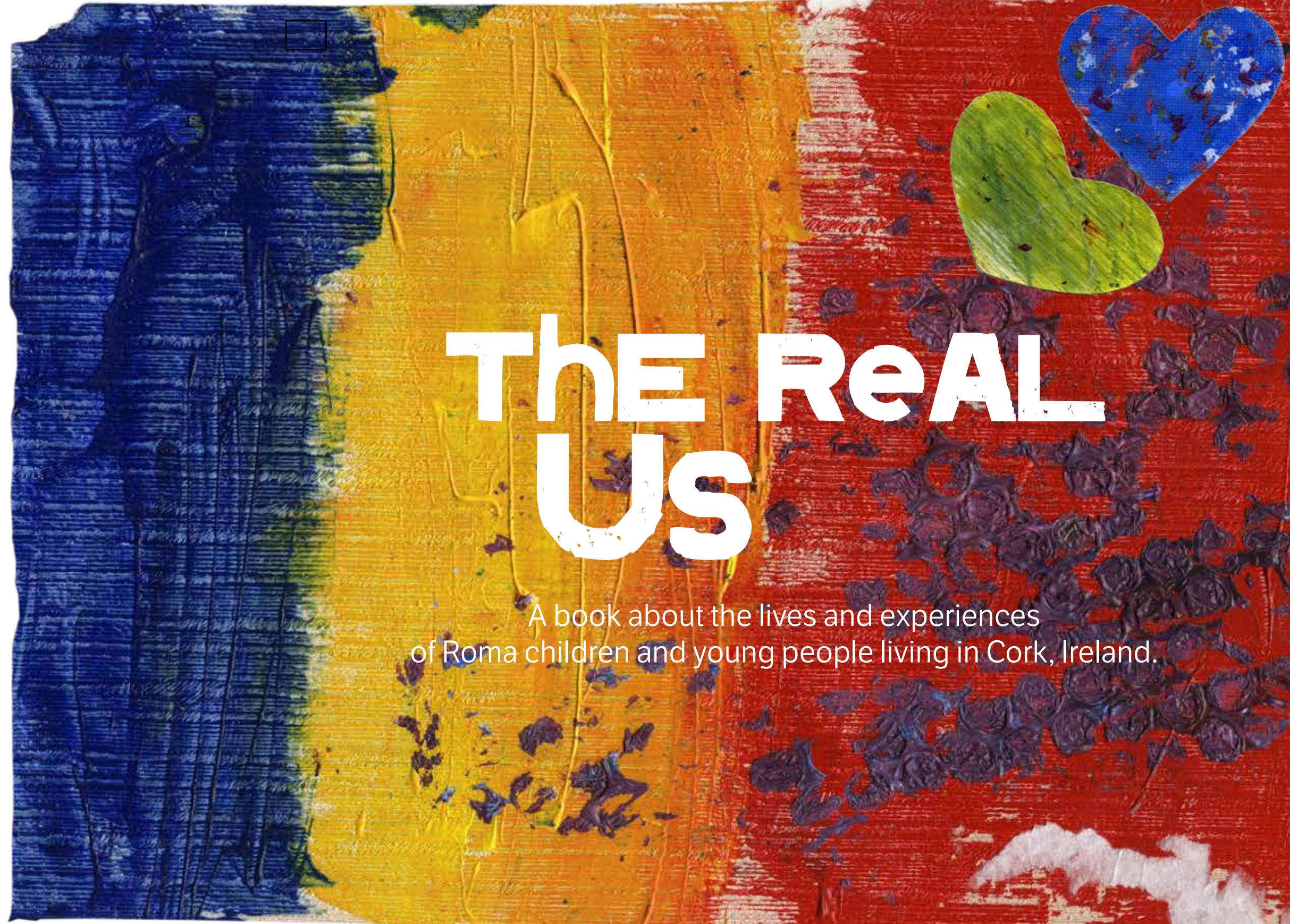


**ThE ReAL
Us**

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A book about the lives and experiences
of Roma children and young people living in Cork, Ireland.





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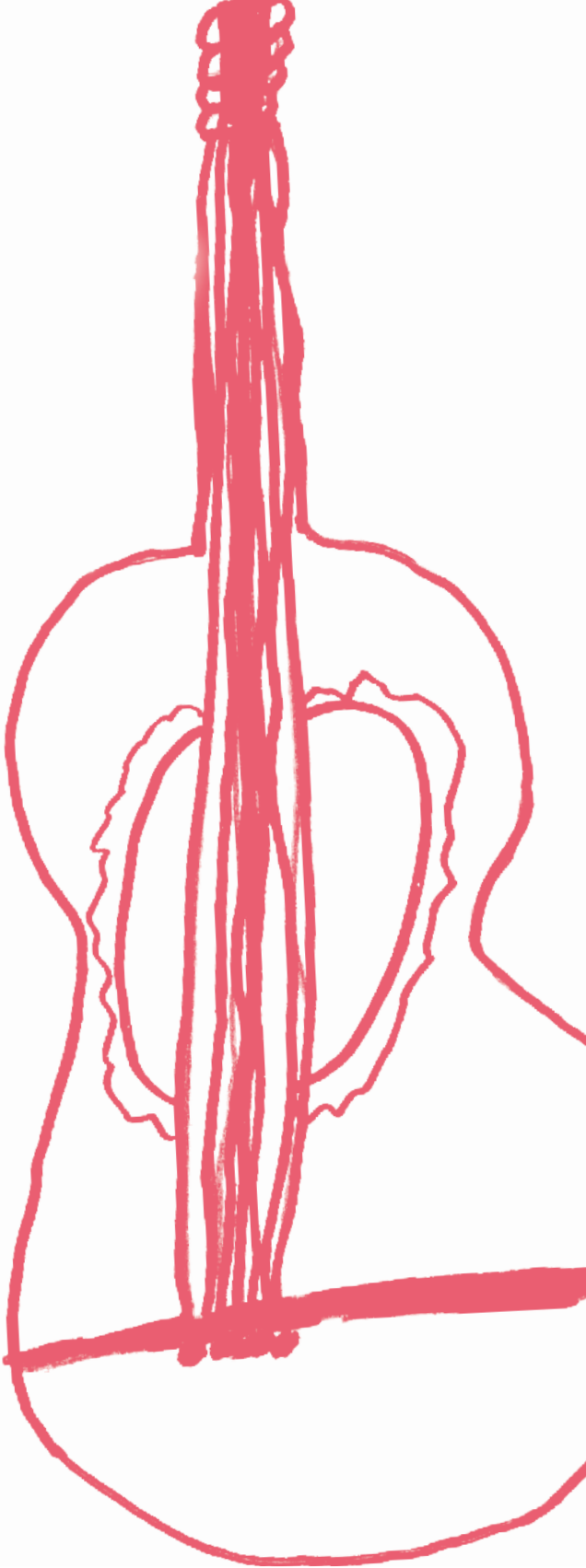
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Medalion Covaciu, Maria Ianko, Denis Munteanu, Aisha Munteanu, Armando Rostas, Beckham Rostas, Contesta Rostas, Denisa Rostas, Denisa Rostas, Irina Rostas, Loventa Rostas, Nicole Rostas, Roxana Rostas, Elisei Schein, Anna Stoica, Estera Stoica, Laura Stoica.



The ReAL US

Foreword



As the Roma Education Worker with STAR (Supporting Traveller and Roma) project, I work to support the younger generations of the Roma community in Cork to find the pleasure and opportunities of life and to help them with their education, which in my opinion is essential.

Over a period of twelve weeks, the kids and I worked on creating this book. Every Saturday, we would meet and create many arts and crafts. Now that I am reflecting on those moments, I remember the joy and laughter the kids and I had.

The time just flew and here I am trying to write this foreword and somehow it feels very strange as I have never imagined the day will come when the children I work with for more than twelve years will write their own book. One may ask themselves why it is strange to do so? Well, I will try to explain. First and foremost, we have a long history of being persecuted, marginalised, excluded and blamed for all the wrongs and wrongdoing in our societies. As Isabel Fonseca argues “The Gypsy is the ‘quintessential stranger,’” and she wonders, “Was there something about the Gypsies themselves that made them so wildly and universally unpopular? Since their culture has been so mute (apart from their violinists), their history so uncharted, their guard so justifiably up against gadje–non–Gypsies–they make an elusive subject to take on.”

As a Roma, we learn from a very young age to get used to being called names, to be pushed to the margins of the society, not to be included in the play areas, birthday parties, youth clubs or other social gatherings in our communities. We also learn not to speak out our concerns and keep our culture and traditions as private as possible as we may easily get misunderstood by the settled community.

For the most part, in primary school Roma children have great experiences and don’t feel bullied, abused or discriminated against. However, when transitioning to secondary school most of them begin to feel isolated and discriminated against in the classroom. Some are asked to leave the school and opt for a learning centre while others are simply leaving school at the age of sixteen because they do not feel welcomed or represented in their schools. Roma children and Roma young men and women will often hide their identity in schools, when looking for jobs, or going to the doctor or hospital appointments. Some young Roma identify as Christians, Indian, Italian or Spanish for fear of being rejected, alienated or discriminated against. One excellent Romanian Roma academic and activist Nicolae Gheorghe echoes such feelings in one of his quotes: “I grew up with the idea I am a Cigan, I wanted to get rid of this identity I was taught to be Romanian... I rediscovered my identity... I want to die as a Human person.”

For such reasons, our young Roma children wanted to write a book where they can talk about their everyday experiences with the idea that the readers can look beyond the cultural differences and be surprised by the similarities in the lived experiences. So, writing this book is a first for us at least here in Ireland. In this book you will be able to see small glimpses of their day-to-day life such as what it means to be the only boy in the house with ten sisters around, or how faith helps to shape their basic human core as young Roma girls. Some children talked about wanting to show the world that they could be smart and how important it is for them to achieve their goals in life.

They aspire to educate themselves on worldly matters but above all they want to become good role models for their siblings and to make their parents proud. The feeling of being rejected/excluded makes them become more empathetic towards others with similar experiences. Some experiences are good while others are bad. But overall, I hope you, the reader, will see the similarities between their lives and experiences and yours.

Writing this book was an interesting and exciting experience for both the children themselves but also for myself. We’ve learned new skills, played with different materials and textures but most of all we enjoyed each other’s company despite the Covid–19 restrictions and lockdown.

The time span of creating this book taught the Roma children to think outside the box and create ideas that could potentially elevate other major ideas/projects for the future. My work here was not only to support these kids in writing the book but also to encourage them to follow their dreams and to break cultural barriers that stop them from experiencing life to the full. To evaluate the experience, I personally loved it because it was so much fun seeing the kids creating many objects, these great experiences, having the time of their life in the company of the most amazing, wonderful people – Mary, Francesca and Danny, will always be cherished by me and the kids; they were so lovely and kind with us and contributed to the enjoyment of this wonderful experience.

Finally, we hope the book and the accompanying classroom resource will become a great addition to your other tools in understanding how to better accommodate culturally different children in your schools. We welcome you to start a new journey with us: one that will break barriers, build solidarity and create better opportunities not only for Roma children but for children from all over the world.

I will end here with one amazing quote by a Roma artist Sandra Jayat, which I hope will inspire us all in creating a new narrative inclusive of all: “We are not savages, but civilized people of another civilization. We are neither superior nor inferior to the rest of humanity. We are different, that’s all!”

Thank you.
Gina Miyagawa



We do not want to be judged

Who we are

We are from the Roma culture, our language originated in India. We live in Wilton and Blackpool in Cork City. Some of us were born here in Ireland, and some of us were born in Romania, Spain, and many other countries. But we all share the Roma culture and traditions.

We hope our book goes worldwide and people open up their eyes to our culture and traditions. We want our culture to be recognised as other Eastern European cultures are. We are stereotyped too often, and people think we don't want education or to do anything with our lives. But the opposite is true, we want opportunities to perform to the best of our abilities and have a well-off life. We do not want to be judged.





How we made this book

We tried really hard and gave it our best shot trying out different things, mixing paint with latex and PVA glue and peeling it off from all kinds of surfaces. We did creative writing and drawing, collage and painting. We told Danny all our stories and made beautiful bracelets and chains with beautiful objects. These bracelets have a special meaning for each one of us. We had a great time here.

We really enjoyed trying new things. We'd never seen latex before.





I want to achieve many goals.



Estera

Hey, my name is Estera. I'm a 15-year-old girl who has many ambitions for the near future. I want to achieve many goals. I want to prove to myself and others around me that we Romas can achieve many things. We can be smart. We can work hard and not be appreciated but we don't let others affect our abilities to work hard. As an ambassador of the STAR project, my job is to represent my community and be a role model for those younger than me.

As I'm growing into this world, I want to educate myself on worldly matters which I try to do on a daily basis. I recently researched cultural appropriation and how to ensure we take into account all opinions and to make people feel included even with a different background.

I myself sometimes feel excluded from people around me and because I know the feeling, I try to be inclusive with all people of all backgrounds and ethnicity. I hope to educate others with the same information and make the world a better place.

I aspire to be a girl with many achievements, to be a girl who is knowledgeable and wise. A girl who holds on to her faith in all her hardships. I also aspire to be a daughter who can make their parents proud, but mostly I aspire to be a sister who is there if you need to talk. My life is a very simple, ordinary, day-to-day life, but I'm grateful for all things that are given to me by God for free and I try to thank him every day. I hope you who's reading receive good luck, happiness and health.

I want to prove to myself and others around me that we Romas can achieve many things.

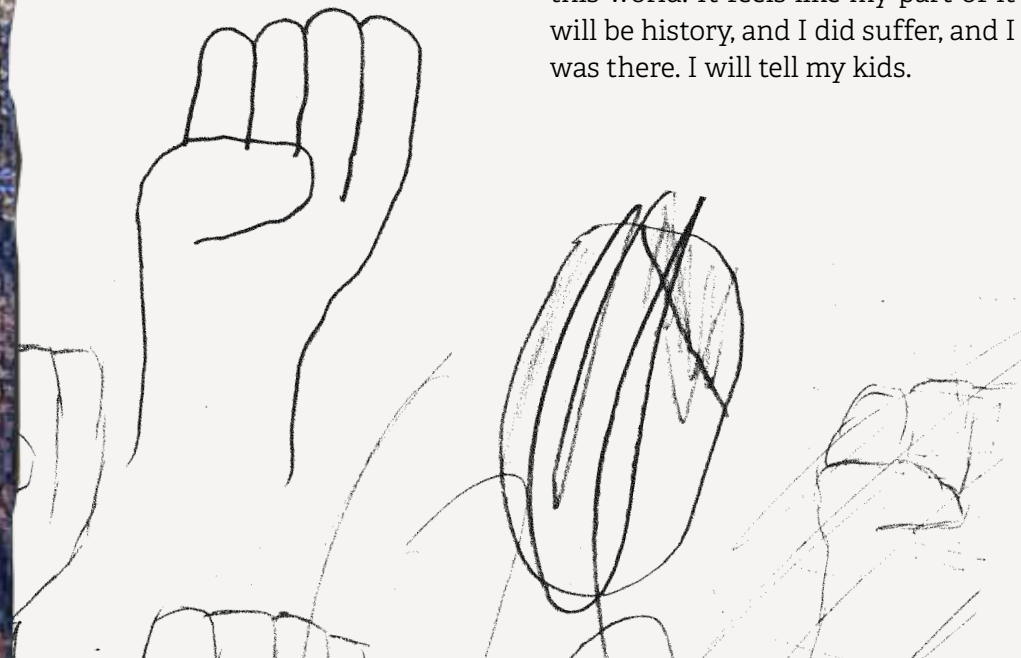


Art is kind of a tradition in Roma.

Ben / Elisei

My great grandma, she used to find bottles that were dirty and she used to wash the bottles and sell them for feathers. The feathers were in a bag or blanket. Other people would make wine. They would boil berries and make wine from berries. My granny also used to make lollipops and sell seeds. You know, sunflower seeds.

I like the guitar very much since I went to school. I first played the ukulele and that is where I fell in love with music. You can make things you want through culture.



My name is not Ben. It's a nickname. Call me Ben cause I really am Ben Ten.

Hopefully, one day I will learn a song like Jealous by Eyedress. And hopefully, one day, I can get good at guitar. My grandma this very weekend told me it's kind of like a family tradition. Art is kind of a tradition in Roma.

I was tiny when Covid started and then we were not allowed in school. I hope we don't have Covid again in this world. It feels like my part of it will be history, and I did suffer, and I was there. I will tell my kids.



Laura

I love beauty. I wear makeup every day. We all love to dress up. We want everything to match and go well together. We don't want to have to wear tons of makeup.

We're just tying up our hair. We do nice makeup. We can't wear what some other girls would wear. I don't mind because I don't like wearing tight clothes. I'm mostly wearing it because it's comfortable and I just like to.

**I love beauty.
I wear makeup
every day. We all
love to dress up.**





There are many different types of Romani

Anna

I do not say I have religion, I have my faith.

Some people are religious and some people are diverse. People don't let the word Roma define who they are and adapt better to western society.

There are many different types of Romani: 63 dialects. Each word has so many different versions. So many ways to say it in both Romanian and Roma languages. We have different styles of architecture and agriculture.



We are defined as Christian rather than Roma. We all have different creativity inside the room. I love using my creativity and focusing on what to do. I enjoy architecture. I want to get a job where I can be financially secure.

I do not say I have religion, I have my faith. It's a whole different level. When we were smaller, we did Sunday school. I know God has plans for me, like a building has a foundation. You need to keep your values but loads of people feel excluded from the church. I forgive them because you have to forgive each other.

**I enjoy architecture.
I want to get a job
where I can be
financially secure.**

Roxie

My mum had a miscarriage before, then a few years later, had my brother. I have a lot of siblings even though one of them died. It's my responsibility to take care of them and make them food. I feel older and I feel mature. I'm proud of being able to take care of a lot of children and know how to change a diaper at six.

My grandpa died when my sister was 2 years old on Novemver 15th. My grandma hasn't liked to sleep alone since my grandad died.



I know a tradition, we put candles out on Easter on the bridge of the rocks on the side of the footpath.



Irina

I pass here every day. In school I'm so shy but then at home, I'm different. I'm different around different people.



I never went to Romania ever



**My family is all sisters.
It is just a drama**



Denis

I go to a lot of festivals. I go to a lot more than I used to. I go to the Leisureplex to have some fun. I visit my cousin in Tipperary and haven't been to see him for while.

My family is all sisters. It is just a drama. They break chargers and blame it on me. We are really lucky. They put more money into the girls but we get the house.

Every Romanian in school always drops out because they want us to make money and take care of our family. I can drop out the summer of first year.

**I go to the leisure-
plex to have some fun.**

Friends

Loventa/ Larisa

We have different types of tastes. We wear different types of things. There's different songs and different dances. I get mixed up when I speak at home. We wear skirts and for the men it's pants. You get a bit older, some people get married by their parents' choice.



Our Christmas is on a different day.

Denisa

I would like to talk about Dracula as my dad has visited Transylvania. My mum has a Romanian bible. It says everything in Romanian and has names of people 1,000 and more years old who have vanished. God took them up.

My mum and dad put stuff in our shoes for Christmas. Our Christmas is on a different day.





Beckham Freestyle

With my crew making tunes
In Opera Studio Making Moves
We do it the best
We never lose
you know you don't have to listen to the music
I'll turn up the beat.
B-E-C-K-H-A-M is my name,
never gonna stop till I'm out of the game
Just tell me what you want
I'm ready to go jump on the bike.
We never heard back but you already know
that it's the Romani crew back in the cabin.
It's been a while.

(This rap was created with GMCBeats — rap, beats & songwriting workshops with Stevie G supported by Music Generation Cork)
Please see link in accompanying teaching and learning resource.

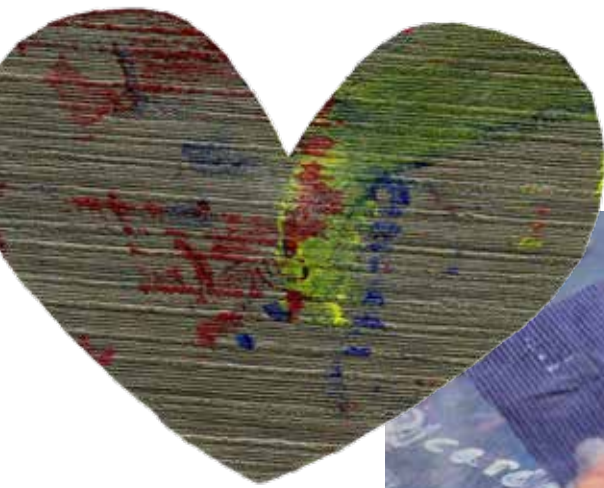
Beckham Freestyle

I started school late when I was 8 because I was on holiday. I was only in first class. My mum asked if I wanted to go to school and I said, yeah sure.

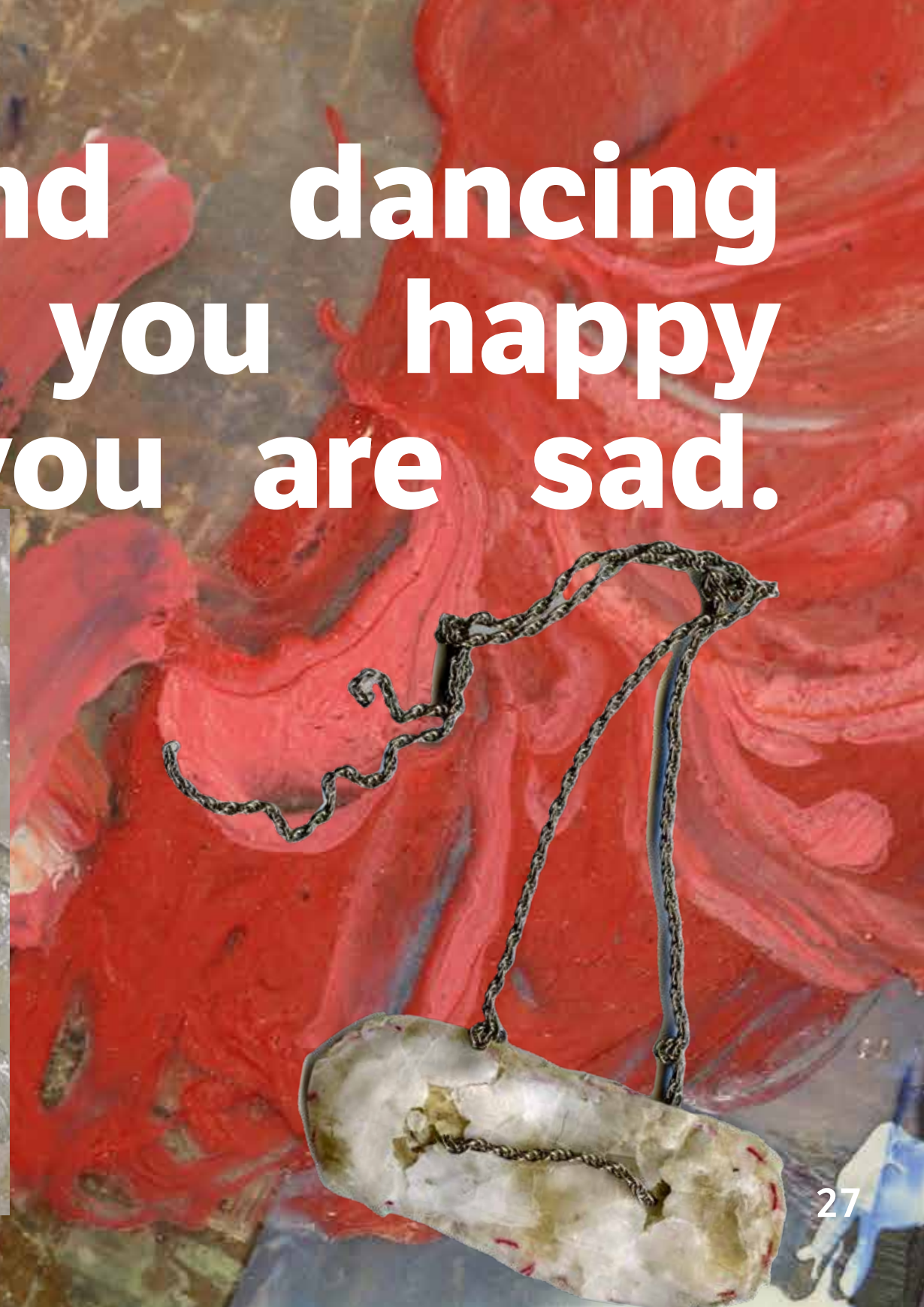
Sometimes
it's hard and
sometimes
it's easy.

Contesta & Denisa

Family is the most important. In our family, so many cousins we can't count them anymore. We get crazy, we fight. If it's a cousin's birthday, Christmas or New Year, we gather all together. A lot of food on the table, songs, dancing. I always dance with people. It's Romanian dancing. I learned from my aunties. My granny always says we two sisters are like my aunties who taught us to dance. Art and dancing makes you happy when you are sad.



Art and dancing makes you happy when you are sad.





**I have two names.
Damaris is my
name in Romania.**

Maria

I have two names. Damaris is my name in Romania.

In Romania, I found a dog that was really small on the road. I am trying to bring it back to Ireland. My auntie is minding it. Now it's been a couple of months, the dog is huge.

My granny used to make lollipops. We put sugar in a pan. And we put in fruits and then let it harden and it was delicious.



Medalion

I play for Castleview. I train Tuesday and Thursday, playing in the national league. I hang out with people from my school at the club. I passed one of my teammates on my way here. I used to play street football because it is mucky in the park.

Blackpool Green, we played football at the top of Orchard Court. There's a secret base. We play against different ages. A load of kids, a load of leaves, a load of nettles and hills where you hide. There is a bridge, a load of drunks go and they make a mess there. There's water beside the park. A lot of bottles go in the water.

My father was coming home late from work. He was moving his bins as they were in his parking spot and a drunk guy attacked him. He ran up and punched my dad.

I got in a fight at school because he was calling me names. There's bad people in that school. My brother came back with black eyes but I'm not scared.



**I used to play
street foot-
ball because
it is mucky in
the park.**

Armando

Everyone lives close to each other here and in Romania. Our house is three stories. The top story is used for storage. The middle story is just the bedrooms. Then a big table at the bottom.

A small house is right next to us and no one goes there because our dead relative lived in that house, so we save it for him. The thing about our culture is we experience a lot of death. For me, it is because of diseases. My cousin and our uncle died. If you were to bring someone back from the dead, my dad said it would be his dad. None of my really close relatives died, just my dad's dad. We stayed in the house with the coffin.

In Romania, the biggest things are weddings and funerals. My parents never let me go to a wedding because I have school. Every Romanian I know in school always drops out because our parents want us to drop out to make money and provide for our families. As Romanians you have to start making money fast to take care of our parents.



I was pretty much raised in Ireland. We have things on our minds, so we don't remember Romania that much.

Mostly it's the second year we drop out. I started school a few months late. Our culture is weird. We don't act Romanian in school.

We get an earlier Christmas. On the 6th December and the 30th December we have Christmas and we have New Year on the 1st of January. On St. Patrick's day we did celebrate. This one time three years ago myself and my dad went to town and got green wigs and saw the parade. My dad took me to the circus and took a snake and put it round his neck. I thought St. Patrick took away all the snakes.

They all gather around in one house. You go to individual houses and go from house to house during Christmas and New Year. We bring fireworks and we celebrate birthdays and New Year that way.

I thought St. Patrick took away all the snakes.



Our language and culture

Roma comes from the word Romm, which means man/people. Gypsy was used as a slur against our people. It is a derogatory word.

Romanes/Romani and Romanian are two different languages. We speak both Romanian and Romanes language.

Misto - Okay that's nice/ really nice.

Socares - How are you? in Romanes language.

Ce faci - How are you doing? in Romanian language.

Jeav mantsa ando parko? Are you coming with me to the park? in Romanes language.

A Romanian song

*Alo viata mea sint eu dragostea ta, iubitul tau,
Nu-mi inchide vreau sa-ti amintesti cind ma alintai
mereu si plingeai la pieptul meu. Deci astazi nu ma
mai iubesti.*

Hello my life, it's me your love. Don't hang up I want to remind you when you were holding me tight. You no longer love me?

Our ancestors are a huge thing in the Roma culture. There's a lot of schools who
They get married very young. don't pay attention to the Roma people.

A Roma Recipe

Sarmale/ Cabbage Rolls

A very popular dish in Romania.

- Put the cabbage in warm water.
- Then salt the cabbage.
- Mincemeat spices added: paprika and black pepper.
- Roll the cabbage roll in mince, then fry them in vegeta!
- Serve with long-grain rice and sour cream.

Our culture

Because we are Christians, we live our religion more than our culture. We think that Romanies can't go to college. I think the culture in Romania is that it is really hard for people. People talk about arranged marriages. They are really quick to judge and they think you are exactly like them. I never wanted to get married at a young age, not everything is as they think.

**This year I was in Transylvania —
I was so inspired by the architecture.**



Participants in this project



Medalion Covaciu

Maria Ianko

Denis Munteanu

Aisha Munteanu

Armando Rostas

Beckham Rostas

Contesta Rostas

Denisa Rostas

Denisa Rostas

Nicole Rostas

Irina Rostas

Loventa Rostas

Roxana Rostas

Elisei Schein

Anna Stoica

Estera Stoica

Laura Stoica