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SUCCESS FOR TRAVELER ADVOCACY IN UK AS EVICTION THREAT LIFTS AT DALE FARM, JULY 9, 2007

July 9, 2007, Dale Farm (UK): Irish Travelers in the UK have achieved a significant breakthrough in their long-running campaign to remain in their homes following an unexpected decision by the Basildon Council not to proceed with the forcible eviction of 14 Traveler families from the controversial Dale Farm site in southeast England.

The decision was announced last week, two days before a July 6 deadline ordering the families to leave. It is seen as a testament to the determined advocacy of the Travelers.

The Council's ruling also lowered tension at Dale Farm, where the Travelers had made preparations to resist any forcible removals. Melissa McCarthy, an 18 year-old Traveler who lost her parents two years ago, was elated to learn that she would not, after all, face the bulldozers. "I was so scared they were going to come in a few days. I was crying and depressed. This gives us more hope," she said.

Dale farm has come to symbolize the tension in England between local governments and Gypsies and Travelers who seek to retain their mobile life-style while building strong communities.

The Dale Farm Travelers paid the equivalent of up to \$14,000 for each plot of land and invested thousands more on water, electricity and other services at the site.

The face-off began in June 2005, when the Basildon Council voted to evict 86 Traveler families who had been denied housing permits. This was put on hold three months later, when all but 14 of the families were granted the right to a judicial review by the British High Court.

But the Council persisted, and on June 5 this year it voted to evict the remaining 14 families if they did not leave by July 6. This sent lawyers for the Travelers scrambling to bring the 14 families under the Court's protection.

Last week, the Council dropped its eviction order even before the Court issued a ruling, prompting speculation that it has decided to conserve resources for when the Court finally rules on its review, most likely next spring. The eviction of the 14 families would have cost more than \$400,000.

In spite of their relief, the Travelers understand that the underlying dispute remains unresolved. The Council has denied them housing permits because Dale Farm is on so-called Green Belt land, which is environmentally protected, and this position has been backed by the British government. But the Travelers and their lawyers respond that this policy is discriminatory, because most applications from non-Travelers to build in the Belt are approved.

At least last week's decision should free advocates for the Travelers to focus on a longer-term solution. Zach Scott, a 2007 Peace Fellow of The Advocacy Project (AP), who is volunteering at Dale Farm this summer, said that Travelers will now press the Council to find alternative land for all 86 families who will be made homeless if the High Court rules against them next spring.

Mr Scott himself collected affidavits from the 14 families during his first week at Dale Farm, for use in the Court submission. Following last week's decision by the Council, he helped to dismantle 60 gas cylinders that had been piled in front of the Dale Farm site by Travelers. Mr Scott will spend the rest of his summer fellowship helping the Travelers to use computers and develop their advocacy.

Mr Scott faced criticism in the local Basildon press after he expressed sympathy for the Travelers. In a recent blog, he wrote about the prejudice of local people toward the Travelers and their use of derogatory terms like "Pikey" to describe Travelers.

- [Read more](#) information about Dale Farm and the Travelers.
- Read [Zach Scott's blogs](#)