

niacro

Issue 41
2018-19

**Working
together:
partnership
in a time of
change**

niacro news



Employability

Securing employment is the most significant contributory factor towards reducing reoffending



Partnerships

Supporting desistance from crime through partnership working



The Golden Thread

Family relationships are the 'golden thread' to reduce reoffending.

Share your views - email pact@niacro.co.uk

Welcome to the latest edition of NIACRO News!

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Welcome to the latest edition of NIACRO News! We publish the journal to share with readers the story of how we work to achieve our aim of supporting adults in the community and in prison, and young people and families in the community.

A wide-ranging mix of NIACRO activities, views and people in this issue of the journal. Many of the articles include reference to people and organisations with whom we work together to achieve our aims, and CEO Olwen Lyner addresses this issue of partnership in her comment piece "Working with Others".

Putting collaboration above competition can only strengthen the third sector, and building mutually respectful relationships and trust between the statutory and third sectors will maximise the effectiveness of what the state provides. Our guest contributor Brendan Mc Guigan from the CJI sums it up – "The

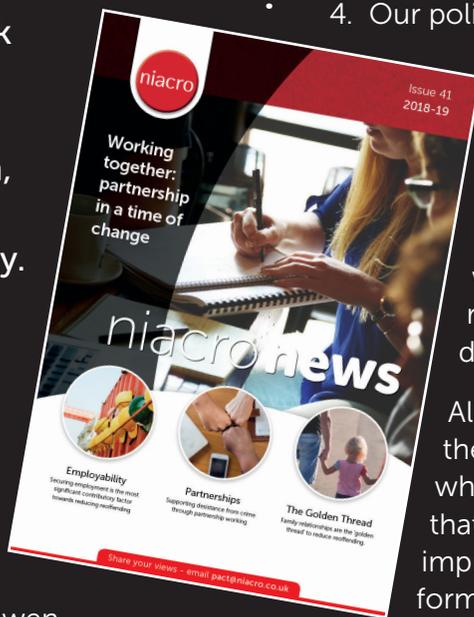
continuing and extensive involvement of the voluntary and community sector organisations together with probation working in support of prison staff will deliver the rehabilitative service we now seek."

Still in the interests of building relationships with everyone who, like us, work to reduce crime and its impact, we held three Showcase events to share information on our services with partners and others – pictures on page 4. Our policy work brings us into contact with decision-makers. Our employability work – you can read about our Working Well programme in this issue – brings us into a world which can be inhospitable for people with a conviction but which is so rewarding in terms of a better life if doors can be opened for them.

All this is of course in the context of the absence of political leadership, which makes it all the more important that those of us with an interest in improving the outcomes for prisoners, former prisoners and communities keep our focus on that task. So NIACRO will continue to reach out and welcome collaborative working in our sector.

The Editor

Thanks for reading,
NIACRO



Feedback

If you have any feedback on any aspect of NIACRO News or would like to contribute to the next issue, please contact our Public Affairs and Communication Team by emailing:



pact@niacro.co.uk



MEET.... **JONNY**

I'm Jonny, I have been working for NIACRO since November 2016 and I am currently the Disclosure Specialist Senior Practitioner and part of the wider Working Well team. I originally joined NIACRO as a prison resettlement mentor on the RESET programme which then became ASPIRE which I really enjoyed and learned so much from.



had also been very nervous that day as attending the interview with me was outside his comfort zone too! I spent seven years managing a work programme for men and women coming out

of the Irish prison system and saw lots of people really turn their whole lives around who are still going strong to this day. I have also worked as a Job Coach, a Youth Worker and an Employment Adviser in previous roles. I have studied Human Resource Management and Event Management and Public Relations as well as Art and Design.

My Background

I have been working in the charity sector for 20 years and I got into working with people with convictions almost by accident. I started working as the HR Manager for a charity in Dublin which was specifically set up to help long term unemployed people and we started a programme called 'Trasna' (the Irish word for 'crossing over') a few months after I joined. Being honest, I had my own initial reservations about working in the prisons etc. which is funny now considering how many years I have been doing it and how much I enjoy it. I was nervous about meeting my first client who had been inside for armed robbery but we got on very well from the minute he came for interview and the rest is history. In fact he

What I do now

My current role has three parts to it. I manage the Disclosure Hub, I oversee the Employer Engagement function of Working Well and support the Employment Officers in disclosure with their clients. I am involved in campaign and policy work to encourage employers to 'ban the box' and end blanket discrimination against people with previous convictions.

The helpline is for anyone who has questions about convictions - this includes people applying for jobs as well as employers, colleges, voluntary and statutory organisations. People normally phone at a point of crisis - they have been turned down for a job or lost a job due to a previous conviction. It is important to be empathetic to the callers as

NIACRO is often the last place they can call. We get many referral calls through from the Equality Commission, Access NI and the Labour Relations Authority. Without a legal way to challenge many decisions, it makes campaign and advocacy work key to changing attitudes and behaviours. So we give a listening ear to people, send them advice and guidance on how to write disclosure statements, coach them through the appeal process where necessary and generally just let them know that there are people who care and are non-judgemental. While employment issues make up the bulk of the calls, we also have people calling about volunteering, insurance, mortgage applications, security and taxi licences and visa travel enquiries.

The Future

We are planning on recruiting a volunteer team to assist with the disclosure helpline as currently it is just me handling the calls at the moment. We can get up to six calls a day which doesn't sound like much, but can all be complicated and require email, letter, phone and occasional face-to-face follow up. We will also be developing 'best practice' resources to support employers who wish to be more positive towards hiring people with convictions, as well as developing campaign materials such as videos and blogs to challenge stigma and preconceptions that lead people to make rash decisions about previous convictions. Watch this space for updates.

There's a full account of Working Well on pages 8 & 9.

This project is part funded through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2014 – 2020 and the Department for the Economy, as well as domestic partners including the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Prison Service.



NIACRO Showcase Events

NIACRO works to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities. We support:

Children and young people who are perceived to be vulnerable to offending, believing that early interventions can support children and young people to make positive life choices and avoid risk-taking behaviours.

Families who are affected by imprisonment, believing that people in prison and their families have the right to maintain (or not) relationships and that helping families access services strengthens their ability to cope.

Adults who have offended or who are perceived to be vulnerable to offending, in the community and in custody, believing that supporting them to make positive choices contributes to desistance from crime.

Our vision is of a society in which the needs and rights of all citizens are equally respected. This includes victims of crime, adults and children who have offended, and those who are at risk of offending and their families.



In our current Corporate Plan 2018-2023, we made a commitment to increasing our external engagement to share the learning and experience acquired through our service delivery.

NIACRO has organised three Showcase events in 2018-2019, providing an opportunity for our members, partners, decision-makers and political representatives to gain an insight into our suite of services, as well as illustrating our commitment to collaboration and partnership working which supports our overall aim to reduce social isolation and maximise outcomes for citizens, and society more generally.

NIACRO was delighted to launch Get Real in 2018 – an EU PEACE IV funded, 3-year project aimed at restoratively challenging hate crime. You will find reference to the project scattered throughout this issue of NIACRO News!

Get Real supports over-18s involved in hate crime, their victims, and those vulnerable to involvement in hate crime, to acknowledge the hurt and damage caused and to move forward with greater understanding and hope.

Hate crime affects many, if not all, of our communities. Get Real helps to restore the relationships that have been broken because of racist, homophobic, religious, transgender, sectarian or disability hate crime.

By holding those responsible to account for their actions and enabling those who have been harmed to express how they have been affected, Get Real identifies positive ways for them to move forward. Get Real gives participants the opportunity to: be heard; ask questions; take responsibility; feel empowered; explore impact; and repair harm.

Welcoming the project, Gina McIntyre, CEO of the Special EU Programmes Body which has funded Get Real under the PEACE IV programme said at its launch: "This project will challenge prejudice and intolerance by identifying the underlying issues which cause people to become intolerant. In doing so it will help to reduce sectarian and racially motivated crime. It also reflects the core ethos of the 'Building

**GETTING
REAL ABOUT**

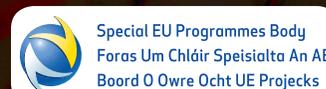
HATE CRIME

Positive Relations' objective of the EU's PEACE IV Programme, which has been designed to help create greater levels of community cohesion."

Get Real works across Northern Ireland and in the border counties in the Republic of Ireland. It is delivered by NIACRO in partnership with Victim Support, South Belfast Roundtable, Probation Board for Northern Ireland, The Probation Service (Ireland) and the PSNI. Match-funding for the project has been provided by the Executive Office in Northern Ireland and the Department of Rural and Community Development in Ireland.



Get Real
Restoratively challenging hate crime



Special EU Programmes Body
Foras Um Chláir Speisialta An AE
Boord O Owre Ocht UE Projects

Assembly UPDATE



Policy Engagement

In 2018-2019, we attended the political party conferences of the main Northern Ireland Assembly parties. As part of our increasing external engagement, we exhibited at all events to date throughout the year to meet with party members, elected representatives and key stakeholders to tell them about the vital work that we are undertaking with children and young people; families affected by imprisonment; and adults in the community and those leaving prison. Moreover, we discussed our key policy priorities with elected representatives at events including:

- **Sinn Féin Ard Fheis**
16th June 2018
- **Ulster Unionist Party Conference**
20th October 2018
- **Democratic Unionist Party Conference**
24th November 2018
- **Alliance Party Conference**
2nd March 2019

At the UUP we took part in the NICVA Conversation Zone and at an earlier conference we discussed Justice, Europe and Brexit with Sinn Féin representatives. At the DUP conference last November we met party representatives to discuss disclosure of youth criminal records, and hate crime.

We will continue these engagements into 2019, working closely at the heart of public policy and providing commentary and expertise in the areas in which we work.

Consultations

In the last year, we have responded to the following consultations:

- Northern Ireland Prison Service: Visitor Experience Consultation
- Northern Ireland Affairs Committee: Brexit and Northern Ireland Inquiry
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive: Supporting People Draft Outcomes Monitoring Proposals
- Department of Justice: Anti-social Behaviour Legislation in Northern Ireland Consultation
- Department of Health and Department of Education: Strategy for Looked After Children: Improving Children's Lives Consultation
- Money Advice Service: Working-Age Money Management Commissioning Plan Call for Evidence
- Northern Ireland Office: Addressing The Legacy Of Northern Ireland's Past
- HM Treasury: Breathing space scheme: consultation on a policy proposal
- Northern Ireland Prison Service: Volunteering Within NI Prison Service



Katherine McCloskey (NIACRO Public Affairs and Policy Co-ordinator) with deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill and Agnieszka Machowiak (NIACRO Aspire) at the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis in June 2018.

We keep a close eye on what goes on at the Northern Ireland Assembly. Here are some recent developments most relevant to our work:

Lisa Wilkinson (NIACRO Get Real) with First Minister Arlene Foster at the DUP Conference in November 2018.



Get Real Political Panel

In autumn 2018, we established the Get Real Political Panel aimed at addressing hate crime across Northern Ireland. It was evident that the issues the project grappled with were also issues for local political parties. The Panel is comprised of six elected representatives from Alliance Party, DUP, Green Party, Sinn Féin, SDLP and UUP. The aims of the Panel are:

1. To hear about the Get Real programme and help identify communities who could engage with the service.
2. To receive updates and progress on the programme.
3. To contribute to the evaluation.
4. To discuss the legal sentencing framework on hate.

You can read more on the Get Real Project on page 5.

Get Real Cllr John Boyle: Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council, Cllr John Boyle (SDLP) addresses attendees at Get Real Celebration in the Guildhall in January 2019.

At NIACRO, we have almost 50 years' experience of delivering support for people with convictions. The insights and expertise gained throughout this work has been incorporated into the design of Working Well, NIACRO's employment support programme for people with convictions, both in the community and prison.

"We are hearing nothing but good reports about S's work with the bricklayers. His attitude is fantastic and we have all been very impressed with his approach to this opportunity. I know he'll keep this up for the next 5 weeks, which will put him in a fantastic position for gaining paid employment as soon as he is released."

Vicki (Graham Farrans JV)



It is funded until 2022 through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2014 - 2020 and the Department for the Economy. Domestic partners also include Probation Board for NI (PBNI) and NI Prison Service (NIPS).

Working Well falls under ESF's Investment Priority 1¹; projects supporting *unemployed* (including long-term unemployed) and *economically inactive* adults to access employment, education and training.

Our experience supports the widely researched premise that securing employment (or progressing towards education and training) is the most significant contributory factor towards reducing reoffending.

Working Well



Working Well is therefore designed to:

- support individuals into employment (leading fulfilling lives away from crime);
- contribute towards NI's economic growth through fuller employment;
- provide employers with access to labour which may be overlooked otherwise;
- help reduce crime.

We know that holding a conviction remains a significant barrier to employment. In addition to providing support in terms of training/education and positive progression, we provide:

- Disclosure advice for participants, to understand how to disclose a conviction and for support when facing discrimination.
- Disclosure advice for employers/other institutions for compliance with legislative requirements, assessment of risks and dispelling myths.

- Bespoke support for women who have offended, who have specific needs.

In 2015, the Department of Justice's DataLab compared a group of participants who completed Jobtrack², with a matched control group. The one-year proven reoffending rate for those who completed Jobtrack was 20%, compared to 32% of those in the matched sample. Department of Justice statisticians concluded this represented a "statistically significant difference".



When we hear the public talk about crime (and how to respond to it), we sometimes wonder what is actually known about the system.

Working Well

¹ Within ESF, unemployed are defined as 'those without a job able to start work in the next 2 weeks and have either looked for work in the 4 weeks prior or were waiting to start a job. i.e those seeking work and not claimant based count. Economically Inactive are those not in employment and not unemployed, i.e. those not seeking work or available to work.

² NIACRO's previous ESF-funded programme which ran from 1994-2015.

Last year for example, just over 28,000 cases went through the Magistrates and High Courts in Northern Ireland. Of these, 83.3% resulted in a conviction and of that group 12.3% received a prison sentence.

That means that most who get a guilty outcome in court stay in the community. NIACRO believes that is as it should be - however, we also believe,

alongside PBNI and NIPS, that individuals need support to make better life choices going forward.

Working Well supports people to overcome barriers and gain a more 'equal footing' in the labour market.

Our staff are embedded in Probation teams and in prison establishments, which helps to maximise PBNI and NIPS referrals, and aids close communication. Referrals also come from our NIACRO suite of services, other agencies, and self-referrals.

*Weeks indicate *average* speed. Some service users move more quickly; others require more time, particularly for one-to-one support. Those most ready to transition are supported onto mainstream training/employment, with mainstream providers receiving the support they need to ensure successful outcomes. For others, a one-to-one mentoring focus on building on small, achievable goals that build confidence within realistic expectations is appropriate.

Working Well is well supported by, and connected to, other third sector organisations. It is critical that a multi-agency approach is taken to ensure that individuals on probation receive the appropriate support and help they want and need.

Stage		*Week
1	Referral prompts initial meeting (including eligibility check) with NIACRO Enrolment Officer (community) and Employment Officer (prisons).	0
2	Assessment with Employment Officer using Outcomes Star Work Star. Creates baseline for comparison at mid points and completion to identify development of 'softer skills'; also reported to Department for Economy.	1
3	Action Planning: agreeing plan to build on strengths, meet needs and identify appropriate interventions. To include employability plan for release as appropriate within prisons.	2-3
4	One-to-one support from Employment Officer, sourcing external expertise where needed to help participants meet needs and commence training (in-house or externally sourced) with initial focus on employability soft skills.	4-12
5	Transition towards sector-specific goals. Job searching, placements, qualifications building towards gaining employment / progressing to training/education.	13-26
6	Follow-up tracking	26 onwards

Artillery Youth Centre are a delivery partner on Working Well - we welcome this new community-based partnership which provides a partnership model we would be keen to develop moving forward.

Working Well is now coming towards the end of its first operational year, and to date we have supported over 800 participants, 20% of whom have progressed into employment and many more into education and training.

Critical to the success of the programme is the development of our work with employers and in this context we will seek to ensure that Government funders maintain a commitment to the insertion of social clauses into contracts. This means that private sector partners engaged in publicly funded developments are required to deliver on social responsibility clauses - such as employing those with convictions.





Working with others

COLLABORATING WITH PURPOSE

In the wish to support those who approach the third sector for service, it is important that we have a solid knowledge of the services and concerns of the many organisations that operate in our area of interest.

It is important that we have constructive relationships with the statutory bodies that fund and support us, and who often work to identify appropriate service users, directing them

impact is currently, as for anyone dealing with policy in the absence of an Assembly, less than they would want it to be.

So how do we keep our sense of purpose in a context where funding is squeezed and the focus remains on inputs and not on the promised outcomes-based accountability?

This only leads to an environment where conversations turn to the

competitive nature of the third sector, as opposed to its necessarily collaborative instincts. In addition, how do we express the fact that the process of procurement is undermining relationships and trust?



Christopher Stacey (Co-director, UNLOCK) with Olwen Lyner (NIACRO CEO) and Working Well partners, at the Working Well Community Launch in November 2018.

towards our available services. Such relationships need to be characterised by a clarity of purpose and a shared value set.

There are local and regional organisations in the third sector with whom we need to connect. The third sector is not one-

dimensional - there are now at least three sub-sectors – namely community, voluntary, and social enterprise. Within this mix are organisations who have services at their core, while others primarily focus on policy and / or sectoral support. A

significant number combine both practice and policy and their

In NIACRO, the Brexit context has challenged us to renew our efforts to engage in relations across the UK and Ireland.

Historically, our engagement in European funding programmes provided us with the opportunity to witness and learn from good practice in other relevant jurisdictions. However, with less focus on transnational learning within the current round of the ESF programme, we have found value in the cross-border engagement of our Peace IV Get Real programme, and its potential to facilitate connections with communities through our relationship with Irish Probation Service.



NIACRO hosting guests from NACRO and SACRO at a roundtable event in Spring 2018.

As for UK relationships, we have developed a range of connections, which have been steadily building since 2010 when we launched the NIACRO Justice Series at Stormont, which aimed to engage MLAs in policy discussions on a wide range of topics with input from external experts from across the UK and Ireland addressing pertinent issues including:

- The natural relationship with NACRO and SACRO – independent but connected in terms of purpose, enabling us collectively to look at issues of similarity and difference, with important discussions in terms of sharing experience and best practice, but also very alert to the different contexts and perspectives of the regions.
- PACT (England and Wales) and Families Outside (Scotland) – organisations we have connected with through our shared membership of Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE), and with whom we now collaborate to provide the UK-wide Offenders’ Families Helpline Service – offering advice to those with a loved one in prison.
- St Giles Trust - an organisation which has been modelling ‘through the gate’ mentoring and which we took learning from when we worked in partnership with PBNi to establish Reset, a programme that provided mentoring support during the critical stage of transition from custody to the community. Future plans to work in greater collaboration appear to be progressing well
- Prison Reform Trust – through their leadership of the UK wide Transforming Lives Programme, focused on reducing women’s imprisonment from which NIACRO hosted a visit of the Advisory Group to showcase the Northern Ireland approach to women who experience the criminal justice system.

Closer to home, we connect with voluntary organisations and often collaborate with them to ensure that service users get an effective onward referral. The recent publication of View Magazine, sponsored by NIACRO, demonstrated a range of the necessary links and demonstrated the connectivity between the many different

organisations which work together to enable positive change within the criminal justice system and beyond.



NIACRO staff with funders, partners and supporters at the Get Real Launch in May 2018.

We maintain positive relationships with a wide range of training organisations to progress individuals into work. Increasingly we have collaborative relationships with community organisations including Space NI; Artillery Youth Centre; Community Restorative Justice Ireland; Northern Ireland Alternatives; and South Belfast Roundtable, all bringing a new and fresh approach to the work that we do.

In the absence of working political structures, the third sector continues to keep our sense of purpose and focus on helping people to change their lives - by connecting well with those who share our concerns, whilst learning from others who are willing to share their practice and experience with us. Despite the barriers, we will continue to seek to influence those that are willing to engage and who share our concerns for the individuals and groups that we continue to support.

Olwen Lyner, Chief Executive



SCOPE/CHIP Spray-painting: Children from NIACRO SCOPE and CHIP projects working with Blaze FX to produce artwork for the visitors reception at Maghaberry - funded by the Ballygrainey Fund and Children in Need

FAMILIES – THE GOLDEN THREAD THAT RUNS THROUGH NIACRO’S SERVICES



“Families are the basic building blocks of our social world and it is within the family environment that an individual’s physical, emotional and mental development occurs, where we learn to love, understand right from wrong, and we acquire fundamental social skills such as, how to share, empathise, communicate and exercise self-control.”

So said Lord Michael Farmer in his address to NIACRO’s AGM in November 2018. (Lord Farmer is the author of the Ministry of Justice’s report *‘The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime 2017’*). He went on to talk about how “*harnessing the resource of good family relationships must be a ‘golden thread’ running through the processes of all prisons*”. This is a theme that resonates with NIACRO as we endeavour to look at all our services through the ‘prism’ of the family. Maintaining positive family relationships, for all the reasons mentioned by Lord Farmer, is at the heart of all we do.

THE CARERS

When an individual goes to prison it is the whole family that is affected. Partners left at home become sole carers, facing increased financial pressures, often isolated or ostracised by other family members or the communities in which they live. Expectations of regular visits and financial support by the loved one in prison, expectations of emotional support and understanding by the children, can take its toll on the wellbeing and resilience of many of these carers. Carers are often overwhelmed and at a loss to know how they can begin to tackle some of these issues. Since 2007, NIACRO’s Family Links service

has been helping families cope in this very difficult situation. Family Links staff offer very practical and emotional support to these families in their homes. They provide reassurance to mothers, fathers, and grandparents that they are not alone and are able to relate how other families have coped in similar circumstances. They can explain the prison processes, the routines and prison visiting, allaying fears and anxieties for those for whom it is their first experience. They ‘pull in’ other NIACRO services such as the subsidised Transport Service to all the prisons in NI or the Family and Money Matters service, which will offer advice on benefits or debt.

THE CHILDREN

“Children’s wellbeing depends on them experiencing safe, stable and nurturing relationships. Young people from fractured families are twice as likely as those from ‘intact’ families to have behavioural problems. They are more liable to suffer depression, turn to drugs and alcohol and perform badly at school”.

Families are fractured in a number of ways including divorce and bereavement and in these cases, children may be offered support by the courts, by schools or other organisations. However when children are separated by parental imprisonment there is no automatic involvement of any agency to offer support – in fact it is almost the contrary. Recent research by Dr Shona Minson, Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford, argues the judiciary have an obligation to consider the potential safeguarding impact on children when imposing custodial sentences on primary carers. To echo Lord Farmer, the impacts of parental imprisonment on children can result in behavioural and emotional responses including fear and anxiety, sadness and physical symptoms including increased health problems and aggression. Children can develop a belief that they did something wrong that caused the parent to leave, and experience feelings of anger, shame and guilt,

isolation, and confusion about their parent’s behaviour. In our CHIP (Children of Imprisoned Parents) and SCOPE (Supporting Children of Prisoners) projects NIACRO works directly with these children. We help them to understand the feelings they have and how to express them in a positive way. We answer their questions about how and where their parent is held in prison? What do they do there? Do they get enough to eat? We bring some of the children together to discuss their concerns, lessen their feelings of isolation and reduce levels of anxiety and we have managed to take some children on a visit to a prison, to see it for themselves.

EARLY INTERVENTION

“Early intervention is indispensable to help families before they get entangled in statutory services”.

We all agree prevention is better than cure. As Lord Farmer says identifying families and children having trouble early on and getting them the support they need is crucial. We know that once families or children become involved in the criminal justice system it can be difficult to disengage.

So early intervention has been part of NIACRO’s menu of services for many years. Our Early Intervention Support Service (EISS) offers support, in their own home, to children 0-18 years, not known to statutory services. Our Children and Parent Support project (CAPS) works with 8-13 year olds and is based mainly in schools. NIACRO also chairs and is a member of the network of Family Support Hubs across NI.



Family Support Hubs are a partnership of community, voluntary and statutory providers taking referrals of families, again ‘pre’ statutory involvement, with a range of issues and ensuring that they are offered the most appropriate support from the most appropriate agency.

Finally, NIACRO considers itself to be a family friendly, family focussed organisation and if families are the building blocks of society then our services, for some families at least, form the cement that holds them together.

2 COPE Conference: Families are the ‘golden thread’ in reducing reoffending. Taken from the COPE Conference, Manchester in June 2018.

3 AGM 2018: Lord Farmer presents Olwen Lyner (NIACRO CEO) with a copy of ‘The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime’ at the NIACRO AGM 2018.

Nothing Stays the Same – Some Things Never Change

Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
a better justice system for all



The Inspectorate, a child of the criminal justice review and Justice NI Act 2002 has been in operation for 14 years and I have been with the organisation all of that time as both Deputy Chief Inspector and for the past six years Chief Inspector. Our initial challenge was to de-mystify the system and discover how the various agencies functioned individually and collectively to deliver criminal justice services.

**Brendan McGuigan,
Chief Inspector of
Criminal Justice for
Northern Ireland**

During the first few years it became clear that there were fundamental problems that were unique to Northern Ireland. Independence was stymying effective partnership working, there was very limited use of modern technology and, critically, unacceptable levels of avoidable delay in the processing of criminal cases had become a common feature.

Thematic inspections of the treatment of victims and witnesses, hate crime, sexual and domestic abuse and violence, mental health and avoidable delay were all highlighting systemic weaknesses and failures. In some instances best practice, in particular from the voluntary and community sector organisations, was reported.

The Inspectorate has maintained a focus on these issues and been able to report significant improvements particularly in relation to the treatment of victims and witnesses.

Some agencies benefitted from generous investment budgets while prisons were largely forgotten in the overall reform programme and the regular prison inspections

were highlighting weaknesses and a widening gap with what a modern prison service was expected to deliver.

The devolution of Justice and Policing was a watershed for both the criminal justice system and the Inspectorate

and the opportunity to lift accountability and performance to a new level and created the opportunity for prison reform and a review of Youth Justice. There were glimpses during the next seven years when there was political cohesion and agreement that the previously impossible and wicked issues came tantalisingly close to making the agenda.





When I took up my role as Chief Inspector in November 2012, prisons were embarking on a three year reform programme with a modest budget, the Youth Justice Review recommendations were being worked through. The inspectorate was commissioned to provide independent verification of progress in both areas.

The political landscape was stable and had proved itself capable of surviving difficult community situations and events that have characterised this place.

Reducing budgets and staffing levels provided both risks and opportunities to do things differently and despite attempts to protect the voluntary and community sector they have equally had to rise to the challenge of fiscal uncertainty.

During my tenure I have sought to support the diversionary initiatives to keep people out of the criminal justice processes and I am pleased with the reduced numbers of children entering the juvenile justice centre and Hydebank Wood Secure College. Case numbers in the Magistrates Court continue to fall and in the Crown Court have remained relatively stable.

Over the years the Inspectorate has sought to promote effective partnership working across the criminal justice agencies and moving from personality driven initiatives to a settled way of working. I am encouraged by the progress that has enabled improved public protection arrangements, offender management in the community and the recent initiatives to support problem solving justice.

There is much still to do to reform our prison service and I welcome the development of Prisons 2020 to build on the reform agenda to make it truly rehabilitative.

There are still too many people with poor mental health, drug and alcohol addiction issues coming through our courts and ending up in prison where staff struggle to meet their needs.

The continuing and extensive involvement of the voluntary and community sector organisations together with probation working in support of prison staff will deliver the rehabilitative service we now seek.

The police and prosecution service have still much to do to improve both the quality and timeliness of case files and how disclosure of relevant material to the defence is managed. Both organisations are impacted by legacy investigations and with many senior investigators and prosecutors involved in these matters, the day to day business suffers and delay endures. Getting the balance right between the past, the present and the future is problematic for them both.

We cannot overestimate the importance of political leadership and the progress that can be made when there is a political will to do so. We must tackle the culture of complacency and acceptance that allows avoidable delay to define victims, witnesses and offenders experience in Northern Ireland. It is not fair to any of them and is the single greatest impediment to improving public confidence.

SURVIVED...BUT AT WHAT COST? A STUDY OF WOMEN IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM WHO EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC ABUSE AND THE POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE.

GERALDINE MCGUIGAN & RUTH WALKER

Background

Geraldine McGuigan and Ruth Walker from NIACRO have completed a research fellowship, awarded by the Griffins Society. The research focuses on the impact of domestic abuse and its implications for women who offend so that more appropriate responses can be identified and introduced across the criminal justice system. In 2016, Women’s Aid Federation held a series of workshops for women in prison in Northern Ireland. 85% of participants had experienced domestic abuse¹. This research provides NIACRO with the opportunity to formalise our understanding of these links for the women we support. Women & Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning (2012-14), a two-year research project to “distil and disseminate learning from the Northern Ireland peace process”² found high levels of domestic violence, concluding that Northern Ireland’s experience fits with a global picture of domestic violence in post-conflict societies. More recent research undertaken by McWilliams & Doyle in 2017 confirmed that violence against women is at its highest levels since data was recorded and highlighted the need for further research.

Research Objectives

Share the stories and experiences of women who experienced domestic abuse and who offended, focusing particularly on their ‘journey into crime’.
Explore whether living in a post-conflict society impacted upon the women’s propensity to report domestic abuse.
Establish whether the Pre-Sentence Reports prepared by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) referenced domestic abuse and assess whether or not domestic abuse was taken into consideration as a mitigating factor at sentencing.
Document the women’s experiences of serving their sentence.
Identify appropriate responses , particularly alternatives to custodial sentences.

Interviews were undertaken with 20 women in custody, on probation and beyond their sentence who had experienced domestic abuse. The research also included interviews with staff working in statutory and voluntary organisations including the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Probation Board of Northern Ireland, Women’s Aid and members of the judiciary.

Thematic Analysis

The six themes that structure the research findings are:

Impact - The length of exposure to domestic abuse, the impact of this and its significance as a contributor to the woman’s journey into offending.
Reporting - The barriers women face in reporting (or choosing not to report) domestic abuse
Journey into Crime - The main pathways into offending identified.
Sentencing - The women’s perceptions about their sentencing.
Serving the Sentence - The women’s accounts of serving their sentence, in custody or community.
Alternatives to Custody - A summary of the women’s suggestions with regard to alternatives to custodial sentences for women in their situation

Conclusions

Four key findings were highlighted:

There is a need for earlier interventions - There was commonplace regret for not speaking up or seeking help earlier. Therefore, persistent offers of help from professionals are critical and services which rely solely on women being ready to disclose domestic abuse will not be effective.
Women lacked understanding about the process by which they were sentenced - Women did not know or understand all that was written in their Pre-Sentence Reports. Nor did they know whether factors (particularly domestic abuse) were taken into account at sentencing.
Custodial Sentences are often not appropriate or proportionate - Professionals and women alike believed that custodial sentences are often not the appropriate or the proportionate response for women when domestic abuse may be seen to contribute to offending. This raises the need for improved access to alternatives to custody, particularly: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Therapeutic interventions. ii. Community-based sentencing that would enable prosecutors to give women time and requisite supports in order to display a commitment to lifestyle changes before sentencing. Two options highlighted were gender-informed Problem Solving Justice Courts and Enhanced Combination Orders (intensive community-based alternatives to prison sentences of 12 months or less).

Specialist support for women in the Criminal Justice System is inadequate - It is evident that PBNI Inspire team members and Prison Service Sentence Managers are mindful of women's complex needs and often prioritise support for domestic abuse. However, specialist domestic abuse counselling and practical support is not resourced by the Criminal Justice System, so the specialist offer is limited. Furthermore, given the strong correlation between domestic abuse and offending, Probation and Prison Service staff could give more attention to structuring opportunities for women to disclose domestic abuse.

Women's understanding about the process by which they were sentenced

- We recommend that PBNI and NIPS review the process by which women are taken through their Pre-Sentence Report and how this was (or was not) reflected in sentences handed down. This may require identifying an appropriate time for a structured conversation, some time after the sentence has commenced, so that women are able to take in all that is explained and have the opportunity to reflect on the trial process and the sentence received.

Recommendations

Recommendations fell under four headings and were developed with reference to three initiatives:

- Recent attempts by the Northern Ireland Prison Service to account for women's backgrounds and needs, particularly the adoption of Pathways 8 & 9³, as recommended by Corston (Home Office, 2007).
- Work currently being undertaken by DoJ(NI) to develop a Women's Strategy.
- Several key priorities within Northern Ireland's Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland: A Seven Year Strategy (2016)⁴.

Earlier interventions

- We recommend the introduction of an inter-agency forum that would place the onus on professionals to identify and discuss cases and make referrals (similar in format to Family Support Hubs or Police Concern Hubs).
- After a woman has presented at A&E or been involved in a police incident, a follow up letter from professionals (copied to the GP) is needed, so that further support can be offered (recognising and taking into account the potential risks and dangers associated).
- Continued focus on training for police officers and GPs in support of victims is required and should be cognisant of all adverse experiences women may have had.
- Police and PBNI should ask all women about domestic abuse during their initial interviews, creating an opportunity for disclosure. Professionals could learn from the experiences of maternity services which asks a question about domestic abuse at appointments for all women.

Custodial Sentences

- Time (and requisite supports) are required for women to display a commitment to lifestyle changes before sentencing in order to divert women from custodial sentences where possible. A timely solution would be to divert women towards gender-informed Problem Solving Justice Courts and Enhanced Combination Orders.
- The judiciary should be properly informed about the influence of domestic abuse on women who offend.
- For women who are in custody, we recommend that the Prison Service include a question about domestic abuse in the Prisoner Needs Profile.

Specialist support for women in the Criminal Justice System

- We recommend that, in the context of the joint DoJ / DoH Domestic Violence Strategy, a specialist domestic abuse support counsellor be resourced, whose time would be split between supporting women on PBNI's Inspire team, women going through court and those in Ash House. This has the potential to be an early intervention – helping to prevent women from returning to abusive partners with implications for their lifestyle.
- PBNI should introduce therapeutic programmes to support women to 'process' their experiences and the links with offending. In the same way that court-mandated programmes are available for perpetrators of domestic abuse, it may be appropriate to consider court-mandated programmes for women whose offences can be linked to domestic abuse.
- We recommend that PBNI ask all women under their supervision about domestic abuse, to aid disclosure and support help-seeking. A card with details of how to access support should be given to all women at this stage.

¹ <https://www.womensaidni.org/assets/uploads/2016/07/WAFNI-response-to-Improving-Health-within-Criminal-Justice.pdf>

² <https://wrda.net/lobbying/women-and-peace-building/>

³ Pathway 8: support for women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence. Pathway 9: support for women who have been involved in prostitution.

⁴ Year 3 Action Plan is being implemented, with the Department of Justice, Department of Health & Department for Communities responsible for leading on relevant actions.



The NIACRO News

PAUL IGANSKI LAUNCHES GET REAL

On Wednesday 16th May 2018, we officially launched our PEACE IV funded Get Real programme in Amelia House. Get Real supports those involved in hate crime aged 18+, their victims and those vulnerable to committing these actions to acknowledge the hurt and damage caused and to move forward with greater understanding and hope.

We were joined on the day by 60 guests who heard poetry and prose from Nandi Jola (Nandi Project) and from Professor Paul Iganski (Lancaster University) who delivered a keynote address the issue of a civil courage approach to challenging hate crime. Huge 'thank you' to the staff involved in ensuring that the day was a success. You can find out more about Get Real on page 5 and on the NIACRO website.



TODD'S LEAP ACTIVITY DAY



During the Easter holidays children from Children with Imprisoned Parents (CHIP) spent the day at Todd's Leap Activity Centre along with NIACRO and NIPS staff. The aim for the day was to provide the children with an opportunity to meet others in a similar situation who also have a parent or sibling in prison.

The young people had the chance to build relations with prison service staff who have responsibility for visits and prisoner development and discuss ideas for art within the visiting areas in Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank Wood College and Women's prisons.

The day proved to be a success with children able to have engaging and honest conversations about what it is like to have a parent in prison. Feedback from prison staff on the day was that they found it to be a sobering and eye opening experience and feel motivated to provide other colleagues with responsibility for visits the opportunity to engage positively with children in the same way. The children appreciated having the opportunity to meet the staff outside of the prison environment and ultimately having fun!

GET REAL CELEBRATION

NIACRO was delighted to organise a celebration event at the Guildhall for participants from HURT and Galliagh Women's Group on 30th January 2019. Sponsored by Councillor John Boyle, Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council, participants received OCN NI certificates for taking part in an 8-week community-based education programme - 'Using Restorative Practice to Challenge Hate Crime'. Participants were supported to explore their own attitudes and behaviours, to deal positively with diversity and difference, and move towards being 'up-standers against hate crime'. Hate crime affects individuals and communities and Get Real helps participants throughout their programme to repair the harm that has been caused as a result of racist, homophobic, religious, transgender, sectarian or disability hate crime.



INVESTING IN CHILDREN

NIACRO Children and Families Services is delighted to have been successful in achieving Investing in Children Membership Award™. Investing in Children (IiC) is a UK initiative that promotes the human rights of children

and young people. Over the last 21 years, IiC has developed a range of different ways in which children and young people are supported to say what they want to say, and help to improve services used by them, by discussing their ideas with the adults who run the services.

The Investing in Children Membership Award™ Scheme recognises and celebrates examples of imaginative and inclusive practice with children and young people. Organisations applying for the award have to demonstrate dialogue with young people, which leads to change in service provision and advocacy. The accolade is unique in that children and young people using the services have provided evidence for the organisation and endorsed the membership report.



VIEW MAGAZINE LAUNCH

NIACRO was delighted to sponsor the 50th Issue of VIEW Magazine, looking at the theme of Crime and Justice.

In sponsoring this edition, NIACRO wanted to shine a light on the need to have ambition in line with the Programme for Government. For this to be achieved, we need all sectors, across all Departments, to embrace the challenge and be willing to play a part; to be encouraged to act cooperatively not forced into unnecessary competitive relationships. Issue 50 features contributions from statutory agencies, third sector partners, those with lived experience of the criminal justice system and academics.

Hard copies are available from NIACRO or alternatively, you can read Issue 50 on the VIEW/digital website.

CHRIS STACEY LAUNCHES WORKING WELL

NIACRO was delighted to officially launch Working Well with a series of events on the 26th and 27th November 2018 with Christopher Stacey.

Christopher is Co-director of Unlock, an independent award-winning charity that provides a voice and support for people with convictions who are facing stigma and obstacles because of their criminal record. He leads the charity's policy and advocacy work, and oversees its activities, projects and communications. He is one of the country's foremost experts on criminal record disclosure and the long-term barriers of criminal convictions.

During his visit, Christopher facilitated a Disclosure Workshop for key stakeholders, as well as addressing both the Prison and Community Working Well launches in Maghaberry and Amelia House.



The logo consists of a red circle with a white border, containing the word "niacro" in white lowercase letters. This circle is centered within a white vertical bar that has a rounded top and bottom, set against a red background.

niacro

If you have any feedback on NIACRO News, would like us to cover a specific issue or want to write a guest column, please contact our Public Affairs and Communications Team:

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