



Service Delivery Stops for Nothing: Sustaining Programmes in the Absence of Assembly

niacro news



Employability

Best Practice in Disclosure
and year one of Working Well



Partnerships

Supporting desistance from crime
through partnership working



Impacts to Wellbeing

How homelessness and poor
access to mental health and
addiction services negatively impact
outcomes

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 prison; children and young people; and families affected by imprisonment.

As we wrap up 2019, we can't help but to reflect on the state of affairs and how the voluntary/community sector have persevered in a time when long term planning and forward thinking for the future of programmes and services continues on without the local assembly.

In this edition we highlight the creative ways in which we have maintained and developed our level of service, and the barriers that exist for our services users that require interventions at a government level, such as addiction support and homelessness prevention.

We take a look at the recent evaluation of the Prison Reform Trust's 'Transforming Lives' programme, including the lessons learned to continue future advocacy for women in the criminal justice system. Our guest contributor Gillian McNaul raises questions about the proportionality and efficacy of the criminal justice system.

Our last article emphasises the importance of relationship building and putting collaboration above competition. You will find in this article examples of how through our partnerships and advocacy, we are working towards our mission - to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities.

All of this is in the absence of political leadership, which makes it all the more important that those of us with an interest in improving outcomes for those in prison, and those in the communities, keep our focus on that task. NIACRO will continue to reach out and welcome collaborative approaches to help sustain vital programmes and projects, no matter what challenges lie ahead.



Thanks for reading,
The Editor

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 department by emailing:

 pact@niacro.co.uk





Northern Ireland has been without a sitting Executive for over 1,000 days.

The impact of this continues, with budgets stretched, an over-dependence on short-term funding and a lack of leadership on much-needed cross-departmental approaches to societal issues. The then newly-appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Julian Smith toured Northern Ireland and border counties in the summer, to quantify the impact of the lack of an assembly and identify particular gaps that have been created. NIACRO hosted the Secretary of State as part of his initiative in August 2019.

This was a valuable opportunity to outline how we continue to manage service delivery despite the challenges, focusing on several key examples of where leadership in government would be beneficial.

- Leadership in Stormont to help allocate funding to public health services that could see increased mental health and addiction services in Northern Ireland and to provide scrutiny to policies and inefficiencies across the board.
- The level of violent attacks is rising, and we are missing commentary and conversations from the local assembly to address violence in neighbourhoods, anti-social behaviour, and drug use/drug distribution.
- Lack of political engagement on proposed changes to funding arrangements, thus stalling future planning/budgeting.
- The absence of local assembly leaves open to question how necessary changes to legislation will be implemented, in particular those relating to the Sentencing Review Framework.



- In March 2020 mitigation payments are scheduled to end in line with the Universal Credit full rollout. We need a local voice to advocate on Northern Ireland's behalf at Westminster to prevent what could be a damaging knock -on effect to families in Northern Ireland.
- Mainstreaming Early Intervention approaches. Significant investment has been made to evidence the outcomes of early interventions, yet there is a danger this evidence of impact will be lost in the absence of political leadership to provide a clear future pathway.

Despite all the challenges, NIACRO, like many service providers, continues to deliver services to over 7,000 people per year who are in need and we continue to adapt our approach to ever-changing circumstances, proving our resilience and commitment to the communities we support. There is a silver lining in everything.

WHY ARE SO MANY WOMEN BEING SENT TO PRISON?



Guest Contributor: Gillian McNaull, Lecturer of Criminology, Queens University and NIACRO Executive Committee member.

Women's imprisonment is a controversial issue that raises many questions about the proportionality and efficacy of the criminal justice system. Removing women from their children and families and dismantling often precariously balanced lives is an act that should, theoretically, only occur when the severity of the crime demands a custodial sentence. In practice, women in prison are predominately non-violent 'offenders', often incarcerated for survival crimes or issues relating to their marginality.

Across the United Kingdom and Ireland, campaigners are calling for the decarceration of women (see Prison Reform Trust, Women in Prison and Irish Penal Reform Trust¹), a campaign based on substantial research into the distinct vulnerability and gender-specific needs of criminalized women². Yet, in Northern Ireland we have seen the level of women imprisoned reach the highest numbers recorded this year, peaking at 84 women in July 2019³. Not only is this level significantly over the capacity of the female estate, it provokes the question, why, against the grain, are levels of incarcerated women rising in Northern Ireland?

To answer this question, we must examine the make-up of the female prison estate. This confirms the low-level offences for which women continue to endure punishment. In 2018/19, 90.3% women were imprisoned for a year or less, while 64% of women imprisoned in Northern Ireland received sentences of six months or less⁴. Meanwhile, remanded women made up 65%

of the annual committals of the female prison estate 2018/2019, with 269 women remanded to custody over the year⁵. This is a significant issue. First, regarding the efficacy of justice imposed in this manner, and second, regarding the proportionality of punishment we are exerting towards often vulnerable and marginalized women.

Short sentence lengths can be ineffectual, damaging the lives of women and their children for very little rehabilitative gain. While Hydebank Wood Secure College employs the rehabilitative model of imprisonment, it is very difficult to implement appropriate gender responsive programmes for women in prison for short periods of time. In fact, former Justice Secretary David Gauke called for sentences below six months to be scrapped in recognition of their ineffectual outcomes. Moreover, as my research explored, many women are remanded due not to the severity of their crime, but instead for issues relating to mental health vulnerability, social care need, homelessness and addiction⁶. This disproportionate

application of criminal justice can see prison used as a 'stopgap' in the face of community deficits, containing women often in need of safety.

While the Department of Justice has voiced their aim to reduce 'offending' among women, projections estimate increases in the number of women being sent to the prison and increases in prison capacity to respond to this fact. To deter this continuing rise of incarcerated women in Northern Ireland, more effort must be made to divert vulnerable women from prison. Considering the high level of remanded women, increased bail support must be devised to increase options for bail to be given. This is a pertinent issue across the whole NI estate, which has seen remand figures rise to 61%, an increase of 18.5% from the previous year⁷. In a sense, this overuse of remand imprisonment, shines a light on the deficits across other departments, as prison is used to respond to issues of homelessness, poverty and mental health crisis. This must be addressed.

¹ <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Projectsresearch/Women/News/vw/1/ItemID/288>

² <https://www.womeninprison.org.uk/news-and-campaigns.php?s=2017-04-06-2020-by-2020>

³ https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6332/iprt_position_paper_on_women_in_the_criminal_justice_system.pdf

⁴ <http://criminaljusticealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Corston-report-2007.pdf>

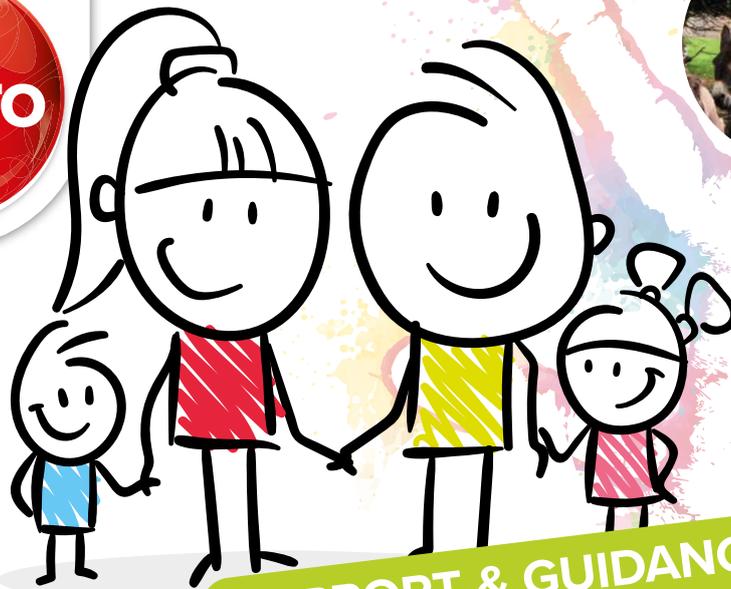
⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-49066952>

⁶ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/ni-prison-population-18-19.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/ni-prison-population-18-19.pdf>

⁸ https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/172196784/Policy_Briefing_2.pdf

⁹ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/ni-prison-population-18-19.pdf>



SUPPORT & GUIDANCE



Change Through Conversation and Engagement

In August, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) hosted a tour of Hydebank and a BBQ in their new community garden centre for children and young people on our Family Links programme.

Children in Family Links have a family member in prison and this visit provided an opportunity for them to see first-hand what that environment looks like, engage in a question and answer time with a Governor and the Director General Ronnie Armour, and have fun in the community garden centre. The day started with a tour of one of the landings and what a typical cell looked like. Some procedures and rules were shared with the children with an explanation of why certain things happen, such as why there is only one phone in each landing and why the

family member might be called away from the conversation early. The Prison Officers also showed the children and young people the communal areas, where food is prepared, and the types of meals their family member would be having.

On the way to the question and answer session, a detour was made to the petting zoo within the prison. They got to say 'hello' to the resident donkeys, goats, and sheep and were entertained to know these friends were sharing space with their family members! The question and answer session was helpful; items raised included: the difficulties visitors face trying to get I.D. for visiting; suggestions for activities during and whilst waiting for visits; whether they could bring in homework during visits; and options for longer visits.

The day was wrapped up in the garden where NIPS barbecued burgers and hotdogs. The children and young people enjoyed putting their hands in the soil and planting their own seeds and flowers and were engaged from start to finish.

NIACRO has been providing feedback and suggesting areas for improvement in the prisons to strengthen family relationships and improve visitor experiences. NIPS have been taking these on board and implementing changes. This is the type of practical problem solving we are implementing to achieve change where it matters.

TRANSFORMING LIVES EVALUATION LESSONS FOR FUTURE

Sarah Sharrock, Ceri Davies and Caroline Turley of the National Centre for Social Research

NIACRO's CEO, Olwen Lyner has served as a member of the Prison Reform Trust Transforming Lives Advisory Group from 2017 to 2019.

The Prison Reform Trust's Transforming Lives programme 2015-2020 has a single aim

- to reduce the unnecessary imprisonment of women UK-wide. This is in light of the compelling evidence that women are disproportionately imprisoned for minor offences, have often been victims of worse crimes than those of which they are accused, and are likely to be primary carers of children whose existence, let alone needs, is commonly overlooked when a parent is in contact with the criminal justice system.

Evaluating a national advocacy programme designed to tackle a long-standing and intransigent problem of social and criminal justice was a complex mission. We have been on an interesting journey with NatCen Social Research and I welcome this briefing which provides a summary of the conclusions they have drawn about the Transforming Lives programme to date. I hope that by publishing this we will provide a resource for other organisations engaged in advocacy, and enrich the conversation about what is most effective in achieving positive

change for marginalised groups. The main lesson I have learnt during my stewardship of this programme is that persistence and partnership are key to all our endeavours. We still have much to do to achieve lasting change and ensure equitable outcomes for women but working together, nationally and locally, I'm sure we'll get there!

Dr Jenny Earle, Programme Director, Transforming Lives, Prison Reform Trust

1. About the Transforming Lives programme

Transforming Lives is an ambitious, innovative advocacy programme led by the Prison Reform Trust (PRT) which aims to reduce the number of women sent to prison in the UK. Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, the programme engages with policy-makers, commentators and influencers, criminal justice agencies and third sector practitioners to raise awareness of the negative impact of women's unnecessary imprisonment, and influence the choices and actions of decision-makers.

Objectives:

- improving the governance of women's justice
- working intensively in selected 'high custody' areas to promote the use of early intervention and community solutions for women.

Aims:

- increase awareness of the links between domestic abuse and offending
- strengthen pathways into mental health and social care services
- reduce the proportions of foreign national and black and minority ethnic women in custody

- promote non-custodial options for mothers.

This is done through:

- Advocacy - promotion to governments and decision makers of effective community responses to women offenders
- Research - to inform policy and practice and sentencing guidelines; thematic briefings produced for those working with women
- Advice and support - provision of practical advice and resources; encourage exchange of good practice; strengthen links between local practice and national policy
- Collaboration - among policy makers, practitioners and those with lived experience to develop more effective early interventions for women

2. Evaluation aims

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) was commissioned to evaluate the Transforming Lives programme 2016 - 2018 to explore progress towards its goal of reducing the number of women sentenced/ remanded to custody and identify key barriers and facilitators to success.

The evaluation aimed to examine how the advocacy and influencing work undertaken with a range of relevant government, criminal justice and third sector organisations may have contributed directly or indirectly to changes in policy, practice or approaches to women's justice.

Challenges in evaluating an advocacy programme

Evaluating an advocacy programme aimed at influencing a significant, national outcome presents several challenges. Standard evaluation approaches

seek to establish a comparison with what would happen in the absence of the programme, but this is not possible when the 'unit of analysis' is the UK. Advocacy evaluation focuses on how organisations deliver against their intentions to influence public policy, rather than how they deliver more immediate or tangible. By mapping and tracking pathways to intended change, advocacy evaluation can assess an organisation's contribution to progress. However, the diffuse and network-based nature of advocacy work makes attributing change, specifically determining the contribution made by one organisation, a challenge. Even where intended outcomes are clearly achieved, tracing influence and apportioning credit will be complex.

3. NatCen approach to Evaluating Transforming Lives

The evaluation:

- **Identified four key pathways** by which progress towards reducing the number of women in custody could be achieved through work with intermediary organisations. These pathways relate to governance; practice; specific groups; and evidence, analysis and knowledge transfer.
- **Developed a comprehensive logic model** detailing the chain of linked outcomes between the programme and its goal. This started with raising knowledge/awareness, moving to generating commitment among key decision-makers and ending in behavioural change. Change relating to points along the 'offender pathway', and the actors that could affect those changes, were also mapped.
- **Tracked the programme's work**, collating internal information on activities, and external evidence of the programme's influence.

External evidence included interviews with individuals involved in programme activities, as well as references to the programme in policy, political and parliamentary discussions and indications of any difference these had made.

4. Policy achievements identified by the evaluation

- **The UK government's Female Offender Strategy** was published in June 2018, closely reflecting the programme's analysis and goals. It committed to reducing the number of women in prison and focussing on prevention, community support and rehabilitation. Plans to build five new women's prisons had been dropped.
- Publication of the Female Offender was the result of a number of factors, including significant contact between the Transforming Lives team and key policy figures in the Ministry of Justice, Home Office and other government departments. While questions remain about the funding to implement the strategy, the Transforming Lives programme realised a major policy goal with its publication.
- **The case for a gendered approach to imprisonment has been kept on the policy agenda** in England, Wales and Scotland. The programme played an important role in this by raising awareness/ understanding within key government departments and among decision-makers by continuously sharing information and evidence and encouraging exchange of good practice across the UK.
- **There is now a national consensus on early intervention and diversion for most women's offending** influenced by the programme.

The Female Offender Strategy commits to divert the most vulnerable women away from custody by providing tailored support. It places an emphasis on early intervention to support women who might otherwise progress along the offender pathway, including funding of community provision and domestic abuse services along with a commitment to diversion schemes and out-of-court disposals. The strategy recognises the impacts of women's imprisonment on children and families and encourages the use of community orders rather than short custodial sentences.

- **It is now widely recognised that women's offending is often driven by abusive relationships alongside factors such as unmet mental health needs.** This is explicitly acknowledged in the government's Female Offender Strategy and in its response to the consultation 'Transforming the response to domestic abuse'. The links between women's victimisation and their offending are also referenced in the government's Victims Strategy.³

The Transforming Lives programme helped to secure this recognition through its key work stream to raise awareness and understanding of abusive and coercive.

5. Conclusions of the evaluation

Effective influencing strategies employed by the programme

The team employed three effective influencing strategies (while it would be impossible to say whether a different approach would have resulted in a different outcome, we have identified evidence of how Transforming Lives' approach can be used to address the goal of reducing women's imprisonment):

- **Research and analysis:** thematic briefings and local data resources have been published, drawing together evidence from a wide range of sources and providing a platform for insights from women with lived experience of the criminal justice system and the services working with them. This has established a solid foundation of evidence in an accessible and policy-relevant format.
- **Being a critical friend:** by approaching governments, decision-makers and statutory agencies as a critical friend, the team have in many instances been able to work 'inside the tent' as members of key advisory groups and decision-making forums rather than trying to exert influence from the side lines. This in some instances enabled closer engagement and allowed evidence-based messages to be delivered directly to stakeholders.
- **Principled opportunism:** the team worked nimbly and responsively to exert influence where opportunities arose, enabling the team to communicate its messages to important stakeholders in a timely and strategic fashion.

6. Lessons for future advocacy

The challenge of achieving behaviour change

The programme appears to have succeeded in achieving important policy commitments to its agenda. However, it is less clear to what

extent this has been translated into behaviour change across the criminal justice systems in the UK and it has been harder for the programme to engage successfully with some target audiences than with others.

Focussing resources and influence on achieving concrete behaviour change is key to increasing the programme's efficacy in future. This will require adopting a more deliberate strategy of activity that seeks to engage with selected stakeholders and decision-makers along the offender pathway.

Double loop learning

Transforming Lives' use of research and analysis to achieve influence has been key to their approach and it is worth reflecting on the way in which this has achieved change. The theory of 'double loop learning' argues that learning requires a questioning of existing assumptions so that 'instrumental learning' (which involves reflection on actions using existing conceptual frameworks or paradigms) is replaced by 'process learning', where underlying assumptions are questioned and the existing paradigm is 'broken'. The second kind of learning can involve not just a cognitive process but an emotional one, as having one's existing assumptions undermined can be experienced as disturbing.

There were hints in this evaluation that some audiences underwent double loop learning in response to Transforming Lives' reports and there is no reason to think that the Transforming Lives team should change its approach to research and analysis.

However, it may be worth considering the process of delivering messages and how to support learning after someone has seen a report or piece of analysis. This should focus on making best use of the window of opportunity when a stakeholder may be questioning their assumptions and may be receptive to further input.

The influencing funnel

The evaluation also found that the Transforming Lives programme's advocacy can be thought about in terms of the 'influencing funnel' concept used in social marketing contexts which indicates that as you move through the different stages of a theory of change, the process of achieving the outcome becomes more difficult and it is increasingly hard to keep a wide range of stakeholders on board.

The funnel would suggest, for example, that while publication of the Female Offender Strategy is a remarkable achievement in terms of government commitment, translating this into the behaviour change that is needed to reduce the number of women in prison on a sustained basis is not straightforward. A range of strategies will be needed at different points along the outcome chain, recognising that the further along you get, the more challenging it is to overcome the barriers to change.

WORKING TOGETHER in Partnerships

It has never been to anyone's advantage to work in silos. Collaboration between voluntary organisations and statutory agencies has been a key element in the delivery of services across Northern Ireland.



Family Support Hubs provide early intervention support to families before the need for statutory involvement. Voluntary, community, and statutory organisations meet monthly to accept referrals and co-ordinate responses. Hub members' shared knowledge of local services combined with each member's own expertise help to ensure families can access services to meet their needs.

The three Family Support Hubs in the Southern Trust Area have together supported 3,262 families over the last six years. NIACRO hosts the Craigavon and Banbridge Family Support Hub and in May we celebrated the partnerships and dedication of all who deliver services in the Southern Trust area. In the same month, another collaborative initiative which NIACRO chairs, Accessing Services for Offenders (ASFO), released an information leaflet outlining the main voluntary services available to people in prison and immediately upon release. The services

were broken down by theme, including: accommodation; family and relationships; education; training and employment; health; and finance. ASFO serves as a shared resource and model of support

to voluntary organisations supporting people in prison and their families. Its members include:

- Extern
- Housing Rights
- SSAFA: The Armed Forces Charity
- Barnardo's
- Nexus NI
- Prison Fellowship
- Quaker Service
- Relate
- Community Support
- Mindwise
- Prison Chaplains
- Cruse
- Princes Trust
- Prison Arts Foundation
- Samaritans
- Start 360
- Society of St Vincent de Paul
- Alcoholics Anonymous

In an environment where budgets are short-term, funding is competitive and procurement demanding, these are two good examples of community and voluntary organisations pooling resources and acting as one voice to serve needs and build evidence in the absence of an Executive.





APAC

Assisting People and Communities

APAC – ASSISTING PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

BY PAUL FLEMING,
SENIOR PRACTITIONER
ADULT SERVICES

The direct link between homelessness and risks of offending or reoffending has been evidenced by national research. People with a conviction who are homeless are twice as likely to be reconvicted as those with stable accommodation, and those released from prison are one fifth less likely to re-offend if they have stable accommodation.⁸

Nationally, 32% of prison committals are homeless and a further 30% lose their accommodation whilst in custody. Across the United Kingdom 40% of people leaving prison have no stable home to return to.⁹

People who receive community based sentences are significantly more likely to complete their programme of supervision if they live in stable accommodation.¹⁰ Therefore, addressing accommodation needs of people under supervision can help to reduce the likelihood of reoffending and increase an individual's capacity to engage with licence requirements and treatment programmes. This also has the potential to enhance public safety by reducing the harm caused to others.

Given the correlation between homelessness and offending, the needs of people who have been or may be made homeless because they've been excluded from their community must be addressed. This is irrespective of whether their exclusion arose out of their lifestyle choices, anti-social behaviour, or violence (proven or alleged). Robust and flexible multi-agency support needs to be put in place from the earliest point and is key to preventing homelessness or repeat homelessness, thereby reducing the risk of offending and increasing community safety.

There is a duty on the Housing Executive to ensure that early intervention services are available to address the problem of anti-social behaviour and prevent homelessness occurring. This duty has also been extended to Housing Associations. APAC (Assisting People and Communities) Floating Support works with people whose tenancy is at risk because of their anti-social behaviour and has been in operation since October 2005. It is a Supporting People Project and has been supported by the NIHE Community Safety/ Cohesion Unit as it supports their approach to dealing with challenging behaviour and preventing homelessness.

Once the tenant has indicated their willingness to be involved in APAC, they have the opportunity to discuss their situation and participate in an assessment of needs. This is a starting point from which participants can begin to make some changes in their lives and get the advice and practical help they might need. In many circumstances, opportunities for this type of support are rare, particularly for those who are socially isolated. APAC offers support for the person and acts as a central point from which other supports can be introduced to sustain them into the future.





APAC liaises directly with landlords dealing with difficult behaviours, in particular the Housing Executive and Housing Associations and where appropriate, private landlords providing social housing.

Experience of the Project:

The experience of APAC work highlights the complexity of issues facing some tenants. Approximately two-thirds of those responsible for causing anti-social behaviour identify mental health problems and half have difficulties coping, experience low self-esteem, and exhibit a range of other vulnerabilities. In addition, many have themselves been targeted by others and are significantly affected by the negative profile they often have in their communities. Frequently we find that APAC service users have disengaged from other services over a period of time. Often, they are living alone and have few people, if any, they can draw on for support. APAC Floating Support works to improve quality of life and help people retain their tenancy in this often challenging context.

The distinction between people causing difficulties for neighbours and those experiencing difficulties cannot always be clearly defined and problems caused by anti-social behaviour can lead to a tenancy breaking down and the person leaving their home. The perpetrator of the difficult behaviour may be offered help and support through APAC Floating Support, as well as those who have been at the receiving end of the behaviour, who have been victimised, and may be struggling to cope. APAC promotes a broad problem-solving approach.

APAC support has been proven to be effective in preventing a breakdown of the tenancy and subsequent homelessness. Of the 104 leavers in 2018-19, only one person lost their right to tenancy and in 84% of cases there were no further reports of anti-social behaviour.

The work of APAC is supported by Base 2; NIACRO's crisis intervention, clarification, and support service for individuals and families who may be at risk of violence or exclusion in the community.



The Service has been operating for over twenty years and offers: verification of the threat; conflict mediation; advice and support; assistance, if necessary, with re-location out of the area of threat; support during the homelessness assessment; and referral to other services where appropriate.

⁸ Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 'Guide to Housing and Housing Support Options for Offenders and People at Risk of Offending' London, 2005

⁹ McIvor, G. & Taylor, 'Accommodation for offenders and ex-offenders: A review of the literature'. Unpublished Report, Department of Applied Social Science, University of Stirling, 2000

¹⁰ Social Exclusion Unit, 2002



A DAY IN MAGHABERRY

A TYPICAL DAY FOR A WORKING WELL
ENROLMENT OFFICER WITH KELLY McGREEVY

Our day starts at 9am when we meet in Probation to plan the day, specifically, what houses (landings) we are going to and if we need support from each other. Our personal safety is paramount as some participants can be difficult and we attend these in pairs, so we always ask for help if needed. Some people may not know this but all the houses in Maghaberry are named after rivers in Northern Ireland (we all have our favourite houses)!

9am-10am:

I check to ensure my scheduled participants are still available as a lot can change in a day; they can move to a new house, transfer to Magilligan, have emergency appointments or be released. It's an ever-changing environment.

10am – 12pm:

I see approx. 4 participants; to enroll onto the programme or follow-up, undertake assessments, or develop action plans. I may visit 4 different houses during this time so trainers are essential; we can clock up around 5 miles a day on average!

12pm-2pm:

Access to landings closes during this time so we catch up on admin. We complete both prison and NIACRO databases; it's so important to record and note our visits as we have a 24 hour window to do this. We don't leave the prison, so we use our lunch time to attend the gym; classes are on most days (spin, Tabata, circuits) and not for the faint hearted! If the gym isn't for you the Riverside Café will provide you with good food at even better prices.

2pm-4pm:

The afternoon is again filled with appointments; we generally see participants in the houses rather than the prison's Personal Development Unit as they tend to be more relaxed.

4pm-5pm:

Admin is completed, appointments fulfilled and the next day's appointments booked. If it is a day I am working in the community with participants who have recently been released, I make contact with them to ensure they know where and when to attend.

5pm:

Our day ends and we all leave together and check and see who has clocked up the most miles!



We have a wonderful team in Magilligan, Maghaberry and Hydebank. It may not suit everyone but it's a great place to work and it helps having great people to work with!

Working Well

IS WORKING WELL

Working Well, our employability support programme for people with convictions, is funded until 2022 through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2014-2020 which is managed by the Department for the Economy.

Since the programme began in April 2018 up to the end of September 2019, we have recruited 2,099 participants onto the programme and have supported 231 people into employment and 383 into education & training; meeting our targets for number of participants recruited and the percentage of those who go on to secure employment and who move into education & training.

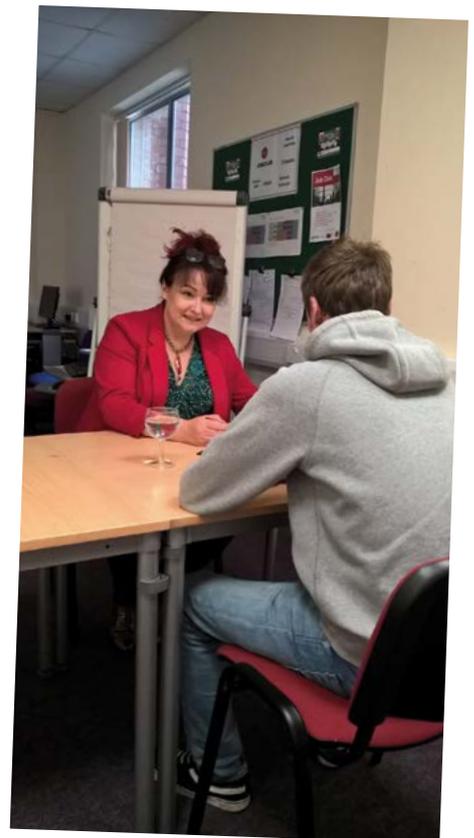
The three main industries in which participants have been securing employment are construction, production, and service sector/hospitality. Working Well Employment Officers work with each participant to develop an action plan which is tailored to their needs, skill set and employment aspirations.

Employment Officers also support participants in their journey into employment by supporting:

- CV writing and drafting a Disclosure Statement
- access to training / qualifications
- securing work experience placements
- job searching and submitting applications
- opportunities to meet employers and to participate in mock interviews.
- referral to Working Well's specialist Disclosure Advice team for disclosing convictions support.

Employment Officers also assess work readiness and will signpost to other services that might be needed, such as mental health or addiction assistance so that the participant is adequately equipped to secure and sustain employment.

A Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Mental Health found that the proportion of offenders assessed by PBNI (using ACE tool) determined to have a mental health issue between May 2014 and April 2018 was 42%. During the same period the proportion of offenders assessed by PBNI (using ACE tool) determined to have an emotional well-being issue was 72%.



ⁱ Adams, E. B., Chen, E. Y., & Chapman, R. (2017). Erasing the mark of a criminal past: Ex-offenders' expectations and experiences with record clearance. *Punishment & Society*, 19(1), 23-52.

ⁱⁱ Fahey, J., Roberts, C., & Engel, L. (2006). *Employment of ex-offenders: Employer perspectives*. Boston, MA: Crime and Justice Institute.



Jonny Pardoe with Mid Ulster Council's HR team.

DISCLOSURE SERVICE - PROMOTING GOOD PRACTICE WHEN EMPLOYING PEOPLE WITH PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS

**By Jonny Pardoe,
Senior Practitioner, Disclosure Services**

When Mid Ulster Council's HR team invited us to work with them to review their policies and procedures this summer, we were very encouraged to find their whole ethos towards working with people is very inclusive, whilst still holding that balance between safety and risk management. Not only are they clear about how they encourage opportunities for people under the nine protected characteristics (race, religion, gender, etc), they are also progressive in recognising that the past does not always determine the future and that people can and do change. It's good to weigh up all the evidence before making important recruitment decisions.

Mid Ulster Council are already following best practice in recruitment by not asking about previous convictions unless the role requires it and not asking until the job offer stage. Having been involved in recruitment and HR advice and guidance for years, NIACRO can confirm from experience that the best and most fair recruitment policies have three important principles:

NIACRO provides customised support and guidance to large, medium, and small businesses each year helping them to align their policies and procedures with

Only ask about convictions at conditional job offer stage

To have clear, written policies and procedures already in place including a statement of fair recruitment or non-discrimination for those with previous convictions

Be transparent about your policy on recruiting people with convictions from the start (if background checks such as Access NI certificates will be required at job offer stage, let potential candidates know at the job advert stage)

best practice through one to one coaching on the Employer Helpline, site visits, consultations, and document reviews.

By following these three principles, businesses and organisations will save time, money and reputation (good v bad publicity) in the long run when hiring and it can give more options for hiring. Let's break that down.

Time

Recruiters waste hundreds of hours a year in engaging with inappropriate candidates, dealing with repetitious enquiries and the fall out of people having an issue with hiring decisions all because they were not clear at the start about what their policies are. Businesses invest precious time dealing with the consequences of the confusion that 'grey' areas of their work flow, eating into productivity and motivation. Professionals in charge of hiring who move to a streamlined approach report that they spend more time on their main task – finding and hiring the best person for the job – and less time answering the same questions repeatedly, having to make decisions that should have already been made and having to make awkward phone calls or

send difficult emails that a simple policy could have prevented. That's not to even mention the time lost when having to start again with a job search because of ineffective screening or not being able to connect with the right person as they never applied in the first place as they were confused about the company's stance on convictions. Many fantastic candidates with old or minor convictions self-exclude themselves from applying for jobs when they are unsure if the conviction issue will be raised and how they will be treatedⁱ.

Money

A smooth hiring process saves money but so does the right hire – finding that person who will work hard and stay longer. A high turnover of staff results in loss of organisational memory – the knowledge in people's heads of how to do the job in the unique culture of that organisation that vanishes when they do. More money then gets invested in recruitment, training and induction, and staff retention.

High staff turnover even has a negative effect on those that stay. It pays to objectively look at streamlining recruitment to include robust policies and procedures that make it clear and fair for people with previous convictions. It's a fact that people with previous convictions tend to stay longer in roles and are more loyal where they feel they have been given a second chanceⁱⁱ.

Reputation

'What the public thinks of your company is critical to your success'. People do not just care about what businesses do, they also care about how they do it. The user experience when it comes to recruitment is a very important part of brand reputation. Fairness matters and if people are being unnecessarily excluded or are treated unfairly then they tell other people. Every week, we get calls on our Disclosure Helpline from people who have been excluded, treated

differently, ignored, spoken down to, and publicly humiliated in workplaces because of their past. It can have a devastating effect on people. Consider this case study from a service user who became suicidal because of their conviction from 27 years ago coming to light during a background check, even though the individual had been doing the actual job for over 7 years. A badly managed transition to background checks and a judgmental manager who made very personal comments left this person in great distress. Thankfully, the Disclosure team were able to provide support to them and eventually through many meetings, phone calls and emails their old conviction filtered off their Access NI certificate.

Legislation Confusion

One of the issues that we come across when we are helping individuals and organisations navigating confusing criminal records and background checks legislation is the fact that Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales all have separate legislation respectively and the Rehabilitation Act times are significantly different. It's not just individuals that are making the mistake and either declaring convictions they don't need to declare or not declaring when they should. A number of cases have emerged not only in employment but also in matters of insurance where the wrong legislation is being supplied and in some unfortunate cases insurance policies have been declared null and void leaving people with significant losses when homes were damaged, but insurance claims were not honoured.

NIACRO Disclosure Services provides the helpline for individuals and employers and as well as the consultancy work (like with Mid Ulster Council) by facilitating training workshops. In 2018-2019 we delivered training to: The Princes Trust, Mindwise, Volunteer NOW, and Ingeus. Our aim is to provide as much up to date, relevant and helpful information about the criminal justice system and how it affects people on a day to day basis. NIACRO is available to give talks and run workshops across Northern Ireland.



Jonny Pardoe providing disclosure training to The Prince's Trust staff.



FAMM
FAMILIES & MONEY MATTERS

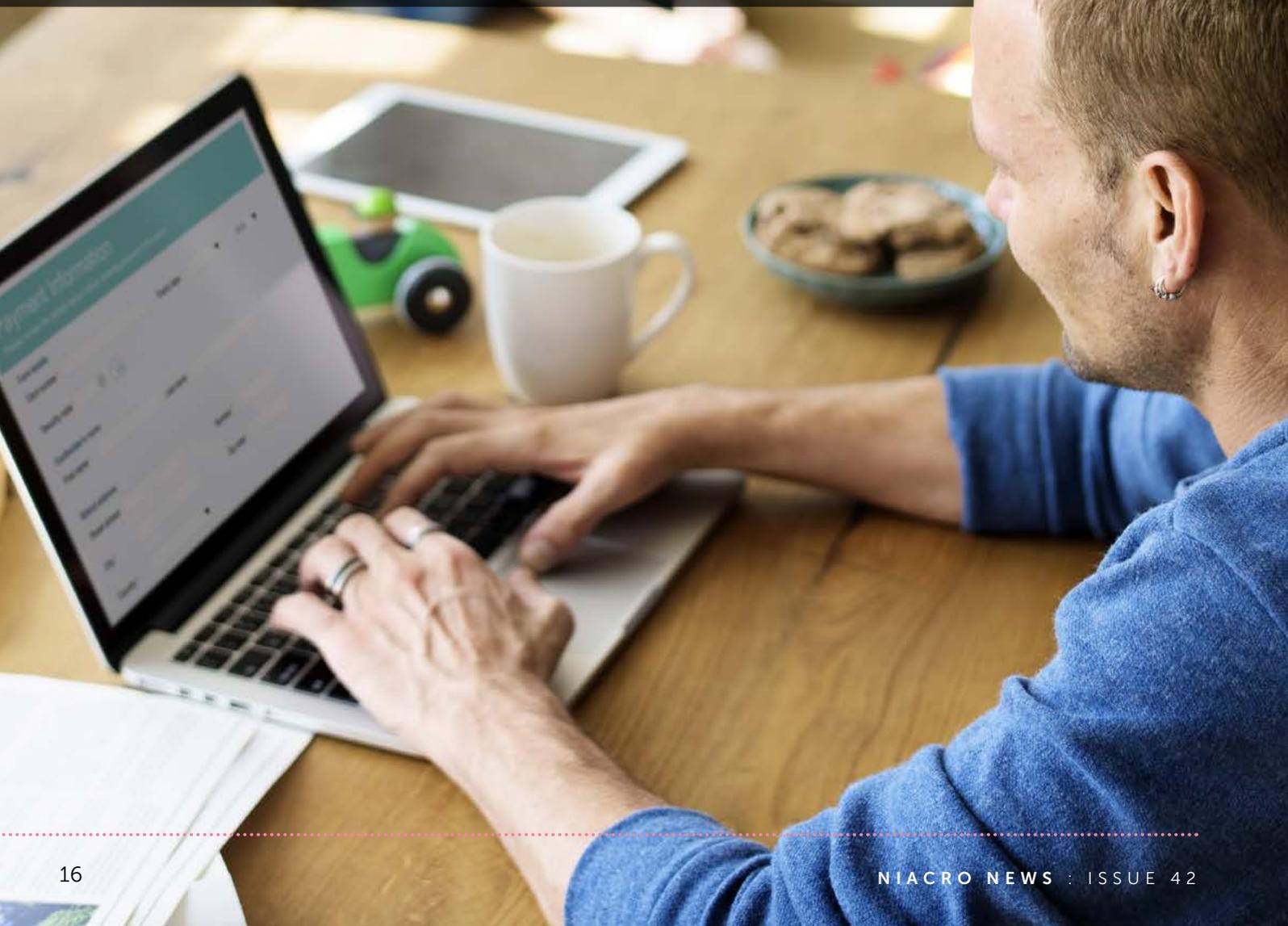
FAMM and Debt Management

By: Barry McMullan,
Senior Practitioner Adult Services

Low incomes, debt, disrupted access to benefits, and insufficient income upon release from custody increase instability in a person's life and can often contribute to offending and re-offending. Financial stability and building individual capacity to manage debt is a recognised resettlement pathway which has a positive influence on resettlement and desistance.

Having supportive families during and after imprisonment is also recognised as critical for resettlement. By supporting families and individuals to achieve greater financial stability, NIACRO's FAMM project is therefore contributing to our objectives of reducing crime and its impact.

FAMM (Families and Money Matters) is a relatively new offering from NIACRO, starting in April 2016. It is an early intervention, diagnostic assessment and referral service connecting indebted low-income people in prison and their families to appropriate debt advice, responsive to the particular needs and circumstances of each case.



It is designed to intervene early to prevent minor financial issues escalating into unmanageable debt through: practical advice and timely interventions; agreeing solutions and payment plans; and increasing participants' financial awareness and capability. Where specialist support is required e.g. in-home repossession or bankruptcy, we refer to specialist providers. Originally funded by the Money Advice Service, FAMM is now funded through the Department for Communities. In its first three years, FAMM received 1,332 referrals with debts of £830,107.00 recorded. This is the level of debt as disclosed to the project by service users and only covers the period between February 2018 and March 2019.

The project employs two full time staff; one in our three prisons and one responding to referrals from the community. Prison referrals come from NIPS, PBNI and other voluntary sector providers operating on site including Housing Rights Service, Extern and Ad:ept. In the community referrals come from PBNI, third sector organisations and other NIACRO projects. We support individuals and family members from across the socio-economic spectrum; many present with mental health difficulties, challenging behaviours, poor social and coping skills, addictions, and poor financial management skills.

In prison, FAMM helps the person in prison to explain their change in circumstances to creditors and to enter 'stay' action until release. Upon release, FAMM supports the person to make affordable repayment offers to creditors.

Throughout this, FAMM connects with the family (where identified) to offer support and refer them to other support services where needed. The FAMM team collaborates with a range of services in prison and in the community. It is also tied into networks in the community e.g. Advice NI, Money Advice Liaison Group, NI Discussion Forum and Ask the Expert. These create opportunities for FAMM staff to meet with peer debt advisers for support and to: learn about the latest policy developments; discuss sectoral issues; meet representatives from the utility and financial sectors; and take advantage of training opportunities.

Helping people to build their capacity to budget and manage debt is becoming ever more critical, particularly for those who are moving from legacy benefits to Universal Credit upon release from prison. The five-week delay before first payments alongside the need to seek an advance payment immediately places new Universal Credit claimants in debt. When deductions are made directly from benefits, this reduces the disposable income available.

The impact of social security reforms has been masked by mitigation payments negotiated in 'The Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group' report 2016 as part of the Fresh Start Agreement. These payments have been cushioning the impact of cuts. However, this cushion will be removed by the end of March 2020 if the welfare package is not renewed. The impact of this loss for people who rely on this protection cannot be understated and so this requires urgent intervention from Stormont or the Secretary of State.





Volunteer Appreciation

When asked what his favourite thing about volunteering is, one of our volunteers, Ryan said, ***"It's taking me down a path of patience, understanding, and compassion...I'm not likely to judge anyone on first impressions or appearance, etc. Everyone has a unique perspective and story."***

Once a year we have the opportunity to thank our dedicated volunteers who spend their free time making a difference in the lives of children and young adults. In June we hosted a volunteer recognition dinner. Sharing and laughing with our volunteers was a pleasure. We currently have 31 matched volunteers with about 10 on our waiting list. Volunteers are matched with young people on our Independent Visitors scheme. They befriend 'cared for' children and young people, becoming a positive influence in the young person's life by promoting their social, emotional, educational, physical, and cultural development. All of our volunteers are certified in 'Safeguarding Children' training and undergo a bespoke training programme to equip them for the task.



Get Real Graduation

Women from the Women's Project participated in Get Real's facilitated training and OCN accreditation addressing Hate Crime and were presented with their certificates during a graduation celebration.

Participants in the training course are offered a safe, judgement-free space to challenge themselves and others to reduce the harm of Hate Crime in their communities and become "upstanders" and not "bystanders" to biased-based incidents.

After the graduation the women enjoyed high tea whilst reflecting on what they learned and how they carry forward the values of the training.

Get Real offers one to one interventions for both perpetrators and victims of hate crimes and hate incidents. You can find more information about Get Real on our website, www.niacro.co.uk.

Advocating beyond Northern Ireland – Visits from Afar

Pilgrim Trust Trustee Visit



Pilgrim Trust trustees toured Northern Ireland to visit the organisations that they fund here. Their flexible approach to funding our Women's Project has been of significant benefit to us in recent years. It was a great opportunity for our staff and a number of the women who participate in the Women's Group to meet the trustees. They were particularly interested to hear from our participants about their shared accomplishments, the work that they do in the programme and the impact it is having on their lives.

Ruth Walker and Geraldine McGuigan shared the findings of their research on the impact of domestic abuse and its implications for women who offend so that more appropriate



responses can be identified across the criminal justice system.

This research was published in 2019 and supported by a Griffins research fellowship¹¹.

The trustees also heard first-hand experience from one member of our Women's Project who is a survivor of domestic abuse and how this served as a pathway into her offending. She gave an honest and moving account of her experiences, and the trustees were keen to maintain a connection to the implementation of Ruth and Geraldine's research recommendations.

Prison Reform Trust Trustee Visit

Prison Reform Trust's national 'Transforming Lives' programme was developed in response to the rising numbers of women being sent to prison across the UK. Its aim was to reduce the number of women sent to prison by tackling particular drivers to imprisonment and seizing opportunities for reform by developing distinct approaches in each of the UK nations. This was to be achieved through engaging with women who had been through the criminal justice system and consulting with other key stakeholders.

In February 2019, Transforming Lives' Advisory Group visited Belfast. The visit was hosted by NIACRO and helped to shed light on the particular challenges, as well as some of the strengths locally and thereby shape the programme's priorities for Northern Ireland. Visits to women's centres in Belfast and Lisburn were an opportunity to appreciate the strength and potential within the community sector to support women who have been through the justice system and particularly those being released from custody.

The Director General of the Prison Service hosted a breakfast in Hydebank Wood College and the group had the opportunity to spend time with some of the women resident in Ash House. The event also incorporated the launch of NIACRO staff members' Ruth Walker and Geraldine McGuigan's research entitled, *Survived... but at What Cost?* A study of women in the criminal justice system who experienced domestic abuse and the potential for change. And Dr Gillian McNaul, NIACRO Executive member, presented an overview of her PhD findings regarding Northern Ireland's female remand prison population.



Colombia Delegation Visit

A delegation of governmental professionals from Colombia paid NIACRO a visit. Two years into their own peace process, they were interested in our work in our own post-conflict situation.

The delegation was interested in our Early Intervention Support Service (EISS) and other work with young people and young adults. They were curious about how our tendering process works, how we receive and attract funding, the semantics of programmes and the challenges and successes that come along with them.

It served as a good reminder that our experiences in Northern Ireland can have something to contribute to others' attempts to move forward from conflict towards peace.



¹¹ <https://www.thegriffinssociety.org/survivedbut-what-cost-study-women-criminal-justice-system-who-experienced-domestic-abuse-and>



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If you have any feedback on NIACRO News, would like us to cover a
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