





NIACRO Corporate Plan 2018-2023

Working to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities





"It has been a joy that we have seen some good come from this situation and that there are people out there like NIACRO who are supporting children going through one of the most difficult circumstances they will face and bringing children together that can help break down the stigma of having a parent in prison and remind the kids they are not alone." **Service User**





Introduction

As NIACRO faces into the new planning period, our long experience assures us of the ongoing need for the services that we and others in the voluntary and community sector provide. It also evidences the resilience of the organisation; its ability to come through difficult times and the support our mission attracts from a wide range of stakeholders.

The organisation registered with the Charity Commission in 2016 and the aims, as agreed to meet the public benefit test, are:

- To alleviate need and disadvantage through the provision of services, assistance, advocacy and representation to care for, resettle and rehabilitate offenders and ex-offenders, alleged offenders, persons who may be at risk of becoming offenders, and to care for the victims of crime and the families of such categories of person.
- To work for the prevention of and reduction of crime for the benefit of the public of Northern Ireland.

These aims locate us within criminal justice, but also give us the opportunity to test work in the area of early intervention and supporting people to desist from crime. Each year the Executive Committee will submit a report to the Charity Commission to confirm that the work of the organisation continues to fit within these two broad aims.

As with all public services, the charitable sector comes under scrutiny and in NIACRO we strive to evidence our provision of quality services through external validation – Investors in People, Investing in Volunteers and more recently Investing in Children. The Criminal Justice Inspectorate has positively referenced us on a number of occasions. We will also continue to seek quality marks for particular services.

In order to deliver the right services in the right way, we depend on the skills and versatility of our staff, volunteers and members whose passion for the work shines through all the time. The asset base of the organisation also means we can face uncertainties with a measured response.

We will continue to trial new approaches; sometimes seeking to mainstream them, and on other occasions letting them go but holding on to the learning. We will continue to identify what policy changes are needed by listening to services users' experiences and focusing on what would make a difference to them. Our policy priorities will inform our engagement with public representatives and policy makers. In preparing for this plan, we met with: criminal justice statutory bodies;



departmental and non-departmental public bodies; politicians; community and voluntary sector bodies with whom we partner or cross refer; members; volunteers; staff; and, of course, those who use our services. We are constantly reminded that resources are scarce. We know that's the reality, and the intention of all our work is to see a reduction in the amount of criminal justice funding that is tied up in preventable service provision.

We support the transformation of justice, embracing early interventions for the benefit of children and families and as an approach to tackling antisocial and other behaviour. By applying a problem solving approach we believe we can do better with less; reducing crime and the number of its victims.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "O. Lyner".

Olwen Lyner CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sid McDowell".

Sid McDowell Chair

OUR VISION

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.

MISSION STATEMENT

Working to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities.

VALUES - You can read more about our values at Appendix 2.



JUSTICE: We believe that everyone in society has the right to be supported and treated fairly.



DIGNITY: We respect and value the worth of every individual and their family



CITIZENSHIP: We recognise that members of society have both rights and responsibilities.



ANTI-VIOLENCE: We recognise and oppose violence and the threat of violence.



ACCOUNTABILITY: We are accountable for all aspects of our work.

Planning Context

The trends in the justice system

The devolution of Justice responsibilities to the Northern Ireland Assembly heralded reviews of its systems and policies. NIACRO welcomes the many resulting innovations; recognising their potential to improve people's experiences of the criminal justice system and, crucially, to enhance rehabilitation, thereby reducing the likelihood of re-offending.

We anticipate that the Sentencing Review currently underway will place an increased emphasis on the appropriate use of community sentences. We expect an increased and sustained investment in Problem Solving Justice, with the community and voluntary sector adding value to the process as key delivery partners. Furthermore, the ambition of the Northern Ireland Prison Service is to drive "*continuous improvement in the Prison Service*"¹. NIACRO welcomes this commitment to partnerships to realise that improvement provides the capacity for engagement from all sectors.

The mantra "Children First, Offenders Second"² puts in context increasing input from the world of social care and provides a clear rationale for a growing emphasis on early intervention on the principles of justice reinvestment³.

Statistics infer that crime is falling, yet evidence suggests it is becoming increasingly complex, particularly with technological advances and global reach. This will require new approaches and better international connections⁴.

Within our communities we see the disturbing effects of hate crime and recognise the ongoing co-ordinated efforts across justice organisations to tackle this. We also recognise the importance of engaging with those attempting to transition from organised crime or negative community influences. Addressing these challenges with individuals will require trauma informed practice (practice which understands, recognises and responds to the effects of trauma).

Trends in the voluntary sector

There are many uncertainties at the time of writing, particularly the as yet unknown full implications of Brexit, domestically and further afield. Whilst we hope to continue benefitting from and bringing benefits to colleagues from across the EU, during the lifetime of this Plan, we will strengthen relationships throughout the UK and Ireland.

Financial challenges are likely to remain a feature of organisational life as Departmental budgets are squeezed and there is an expectation that the Third Sector will step in to compensate. An independent review of NIACRO⁵ highlighted our effectiveness in attracting resources from other Government departments / agencies to be deployed in support of the Department of Justice's priorities. We will continue to work hard to maintain a diverse portfolio of public and private funding sources in support of our organisational aims.

¹ Prisons 2020: Driving continuous improvement in the Prison Service; A Discussion Document. Northern Ireland Prison Service, 2017 ² Children First, Offenders Second Positive Promotion: Reframing the Prevention Debate, Stephen Case & Kevin Haines, Youth Justice 2015, Vol. 15(3) 226–239 ³ The principle that investing in children and young people's lives early has the potential to protect young lives and public finances from the costly impacts of contact with the youth and criminal justice systems ⁴ Hales, G. and Higgins, A. (2016) 'Prioritisation in Changing World: Seven Challenges for Policing', *The Police Foundation*, available at: http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/changing_world_paper_2.pdf ⁵ Fitzpatrick & Walker op. cit.



"Because of you I laugh louder, cry a little less and smile a little more. I just want to say 'thank you' so much for everything you have done for me, you let me vent to you once a week and my mood has improved so much. I listen to every piece of advice you tell me because I know it works. You were a big part of not just making me who I was, but making me a better person." **Service User**

We will maintain our vision to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities and respond flexibly to internal and external changes; continuing to be *“ambitious to innovate, yet retain [our] proximity to Northern Ireland’s criminal justice system and [our] commitment to justice reinvestment principles....”*⁶ We have been demonstrating increasingly flexible models of work in recent years.

Devolution and the Executive’s Programme for Government (PfG)

As this Plan is agreed, the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement will have passed and yet the arrangements for devolution remain unstable. The lack of consistent, stable and inclusive political institutions and associated budgets represents a risk for all, but particularly public servants and those planning, budgeting for and providing publically-funded services.

NIACRO welcomed the PfG with its new approach to cross-departmental planning and delivery. We, amongst others, had long called for such an approach⁷. However, the political decision-making vacuum at the time of writing has meant that plans for the public sector to work alongside the voluntary and community sectors to drive forward front line delivery have not progressed as hoped.

That said, our work over the period of this Plan will connect with several of the Delivery Plans for each of the PfG’s 48 Indicators. Whilst our primary focus will be on Outcome 7, Outcomes 3 and 14 are also relevant to our work:

- *Having a safe community where we respect the law and each other* (PfG Outcome 7): we are committed to contributing to a reduction in reoffending by helping people to desist from crime through creating the environment for change, working with others where appropriate.

- *We have a More Equal Society* (Outcome 3): we contribute to the Outcome’s goals of ensuring “diverse backgrounds, identifies and abilities are not a barrier to playing a full and constructive role in society” by “acknowledging where harmful inequalities exist and supporting people who face serious issues as a result.” We will do so by supporting people with convictions to navigate the disclosure process and advising employers, training organisations and other service providers on fair and legal practice. We also uphold equality of opportunity for all within an increasingly diverse society.
- *Giving our children and young people the best start in life* (PfG Outcome 14): we are committed to supporting models of early intervention, which we know will transform lives, helping to reduce marginalisation, anti-social behaviour and ultimately crime.

⁶ NIACRO: Adding Value to Northern Ireland’s Criminal Justice Sector, Fitzpatrick & Walker, May 2016

⁷ NIACRO Response to Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government Consultation 2016 can be found here: <https://www.niacro.co.uk/consultation-responses>



Evidencing Impact

NIACRO has invested in a bespoke data capture system to record our service users' achievements (outcomes) across a range of themes. Over the lifetime of this plan, we are committed to evidencing our impact; the aggregate change achieved by our service users that is attributable to NIACRO.

It is our intention to use evidence about the impact we are having to help us to:

- develop our services into the future
- advocate for change within statutory, community and voluntary provision
- secure support for our future work.

Our ultimate aim is to help people to desist from crime. Therefore, we will not be content to measure and report on our impact without making some attempt to evidence our effectiveness in helping people to desist from crime.

We achieved this in the lifetime of our previous Corporate Plan (2015-18) through Jobtrack, a European Social Fund employability programme (1994-2015). With data supplied by NIACRO, The Department of Justice's DataLab compared a treatment group of participants who completed Jobtrack (2010-11) 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.

NISRA Statisticians concluded this represented a "statistically significant difference"⁸.

"The staff are so passionate about their work. Coming here to volunteer has been like a breath of fresh air for me."
NIACRO Volunteer

⁸ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doj/northern-ireland-data-lab-bulletin-1-2015.pdf>



Our Practice

NIACRO commits to making service users our first priority by:

- Understanding the challenges people face.
- Supporting people to identify and work towards the change they want to achieve.
- Partnering with specialist providers where this will help to realise change.
- Involving volunteers and peer mentors in our work.
- Communicating what people have achieved with our support.

We will achieve this by:

1. Engaging with service users voluntarily

2. Delivering services that are shaped by:

- a. Listening to people's accounts of the challenges they face and the support they want
- b. Testing models of support based on research or evidence-based practice.

3. Utilising the expertise and commitment of our staff and Board

We will support staff in developing and enhancing their skills as individuals and collectively, and continue to draw on the experience and support of the Executive Committee.

4. Seeking out partnerships that complement our strengths and expertise

We will enter partnerships or collaborations when these have the potential to help service users to achieve their desired change.

5. Collecting and analysing project data

We will draw on our own evidence base and on research and other learning from people and organisations who share our goals to inform our work.

6. External engagement to share the learning and experience acquired through service delivery

7. Valuing the contribution of volunteers and peer mentors to our work

Volunteers are crucial to the delivery of many NIACRO services and we will continue to invest (through training and supervision) in our volunteers and to identify new areas of involvement for volunteers.

Our Services

People affected by, or who are vulnerable to being affected by crime, face considerable challenges. Each person's or family's set of challenges is unique. NIACRO has come to recognise over nearly 50 years of delivering services that similar difficulties arise again and again, and that these transcend age, background or family make-up.

Our services are designed to address these difficulties, inside and outside the criminal justice system, helping people to identify and work towards the positive change they want to achieve. When people achieve change, life becomes more stable for the individual, the family and the community. This is often a necessary first step towards desisting from crime and reducing the number of victims of crime.

Each area of work is summarised below.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Belief

Early interventions can support children and young people to make positive life choices and avoid risk-taking behaviours.

We therefore work alongside families, schools and communities to offer such support.

Priorities


1. To deliver early intervention services that support children, young people and their families when difficulties first arise, based on the principles of 'justice reinvestment'.
2. To support children, young people and their families to work towards the change they want to achieve.

3. To represent and give voice to participating children and young people.
4. To ensure children, young people and their families access the full range of supports (statutory, voluntary and community) that are available to them.

FAMILIES AFFECTED BY IMPRISONMENT

Belief

People in prison and their families have the right to maintain (or not) relationships in prison and in the community. Helping families to access services strengthens their ability to cope, to achieve effective resettlement and to desist from crime. We therefore work to reduce (re)offending, and its impact, by supporting families affected by imprisonment.



"CAPS provides an excellent community based service for families in difficulty. It is a nurturing but empowering service with good theoretical basis. CAPS staff work very well and cooperatively with other professionals. I wish your remit to extend to include younger children also." **(Dr Lisheen Cassidy, CAMHS Consultant)**



Priorities

1. To understand the many challenges associated with imprisonment for families and build services that are responsive to these.
2. To support the maintenance of family relationships during imprisonment.
3. To ensure children, young people and their families access the full range of supports (statutory, voluntary and community) that are available to them.
4. To highlight the particular needs of families affected by imprisonment to family and children's services.

ADULTS IN PRISON AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Belief

Supporting people who have offended or who are at risk of offending to make positive choices contributes to desistance from crime.

We therefore work to contribute to a reduction in offending and re-offending by supporting adults leaving prison and in the community.

Priorities

1. To support people to work towards the change they want to achieve. In particular, those:
 - a. preparing for release from custody and transitioning to community life;
 - b. in need of support to lead settled lives in the community and thereby to help to prevent homelessness; and
 - c. working towards employment or related outcomes.
2. To guide training providers, employers and other institutions towards fair and legal practice for those who have a conviction.

3. To challenge prejudice through community education and support victims of crime and intimidation.
4. To recognise and provide for gender-specific resettlement needs.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

Belief

The knowledge and experience we gain from our work gives us the obligation, the authority and the responsibility to seek to influence decision makers, service providers, community leaders and the wider public.

We will continue to have an impact on policy and practice by communicating our policy asks and engaging relevant publics.

Priorities

1. To influence policy to reflect service users' needs and experiences and involve them in policy-making.



2. To engage with public representatives and statutory organisations to promote our policy messages and advocate for change.
3. To partner with local communities where there is an identified need.
4. To communicate with stakeholders through various media to increase understanding and influence opinion.
5. To coordinate and publish relevant research on the impact of our services.

APPLYING RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY

Belief

We must use our resources efficiently and effectively to bring maximum benefit to our service users.

To realise our outcomes we will support our staff and volunteers, and secure and manage the necessary resources.

Priorities

1. To exercise sound governance.
2. To maximise impact through collaboration and cooperation with partners.
3. To recognise and measure our achievements and those of our service users.
4. To develop and support staff and volunteers.
5. To exercise robust financial management and proportionate control systems.

“Maintains an expert balance between the adult’s need and wider public safety considerations, something very few other voluntary organisations are in a position to be able to take on with the skill and competency of NIACRO” **(Criminal Justice Statutory Agency)**

Our Impact

Our impact is the aggregate change (or outcomes) achieved by our service users that is attributable to NIACRO.

We commit to identifying the positive changes (or outcomes) our service users achieve and will test these against our organisational outcomes framework¹⁰. By helping service users to achieve positive change, NIACRO aspires to support people to lead healthy and constructive lives and to desist from crime. The areas of life in which we will help people to achieve positive outcomes include:

- **Supporting relationships (families and community):** Helping people to access support services and maintain family and community relationships (including those with schools) increases everyone's chances of coping with challenges and making positive choices.
- **Health and well-being:** Helping people to improve their mental and physical health and tackle substance misuse will often involve supporting them into specialist services.

- **Stabilising accommodation and finances:** Access to stable accommodation, and the requisite finances and money management skills, reduces the risk of offending behaviour and contributes to family and personal stability.
- **Progressing in employability, skills and training:** Securing employment remains the single most significant factor in helping people who have offended to desist from crime.
- **Disclosure:** Helping people to disclose their conviction can alleviate barriers towards accessing training, employment and services. Institutions (including employers) also need advice regarding fair and legal practice to guard against discriminatory practices.
- **Desisting from crime:** NIACRO's mission being to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities.

We will continue to:

- Report on progress against targets for each of our services (using numerical data);
- Evidence our impact by using a range of methods to collect, evidence and report on the outcomes our service users achieve with our support¹¹; and
- Seek external evaluation of services as required, sharing results and acting upon the learning.

¹⁰ This outcomes framework represents the significant change(s) people achieve with respect to the challenges they face.

¹¹ We will use 'distance travelled tools' (where these are helpful) to document outcomes. The preferred tool many NIACRO services deploy is Outcomes Star™

NIACRO is governed by a voluntary Executive Committee elected from the organisation's membership. Its role is to oversee and review the organisation's work, ensuring that it meets the highest standards. The Executive Committee sets NIACRO's strategic objectives and policy direction through the corporate planning process and monitors progress of the annual operational plan quarterly. The Committee meets six times a year and is supported by a standing Finance and Audit Committee chaired by the Treasurer. New members are briefed on their roles and responsibilities, their legal obligations under charity and company law, and NIACRO's internal processes. Strategic documents, the work of sub committees and core internal procedures and organisational policies are available in a dedicated intranet space. Members are encouraged to attend regular briefing events on services and key policy events. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO), appointed by the Executive Committee, manages the day-to-day operations of the organisation and has delegated authority on a range of matters.

The Executive Committee conducts regular reviews of its performance.

APPENDIX 1 CORPORATE PLAN REVIEW 2015 – 2018

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Strategic Aim: To reduce anti-social and offending behaviour among those perceived to be vulnerable to offending, through our work with children, young people and their families.

Results and evidence:

- Early intervention services delivered which support children, young people and their families.

CAPS: A total of 411 families engaged with CAPS.

EISS: The early intervention service supported 1065 families.

Family Support Hub: There were 788 referrals to the service and 33 meetings of the voluntary, community and statutory bodies in SHSCT area which make up the Hub, chaired by NIACRO.

- **Views and concerns of children and young people who use our services represented and given voice.**

Independent Representation:

Volunteers made 162 visits to Lakewood Secure Care Centre.

Independent Visitor: Volunteers supported 96 "looked after" young people, giving 4751 hours' worth of events and workshops.

Investing in Children: We achieved membership of Investing in Children to demonstrate our commitment to actively including young people's voices in our services.

- **Children and young people supported to develop their skills and make positive lifestyle choices.**

MOVE: 75 young people aged between 11 and 18 were mentored by volunteers and 154 participated in the Youth Forum Voice Box. An external evaluation found that the project provides useful support which is highly valued by young people and their parents, including young people who are vulnerable and may find it difficult to get and use support.



FAMILIES

Strategic aim: to reduce offending and its impact through services which provide effective support for families and children affected by imprisonment.

Results and evidence:

- **Services delivered which support families and children to cope when a relative is imprisoned.**

CHIP: This new service from autumn 2017 identifies and supports children with a parent in prison to access early intervention services in their communities. It received 215 referrals.

Family Links: There were 3424 referrals to the service; an average of 78% were sent information packs and an average of 83% received a phone call within agreed timescales.

SCOPE: We supported 192 children in Greater Belfast with a family member in prison from the start of this one-to-one service in 2017.

- **Visiting arrangements supported to help maintain family relationships during imprisonment.**

Transport service: We made 460 journeys to prison establishments across Northern Ireland.

- **Families affected by imprisonment supported to access appropriate financial advice and support.**

FAMM: There were 673 referrals to the financial advice service which began in 2016 and we held a number of financial capability sessions for staff and users.

ADULTS

Strategic aim: to contribute to a reduction in offending and re-offending through appropriate and effective support for both adults in the community and those leaving prison.

Results and evidence:

- **Transition from custody to community supported to reduce the risk of re-offending.**

ACCESS: There were 1812 referrals to the employability service; an average of 79% of participants leaving prison were put in touch with training and employment opportunities.

POST: We offered support to 1121 people through 4067 interventions to the service for short-term prisoners which began in 2016.

RESET: There were 644 referrals with 408 participants supported when leaving prison. A NISRA evaluation showed a significant reduction in the percentage of participants recalled to prison compared to recall levels before the project. RESET was reconfigured as a new mentoring programme ASPIRE in mid-2017 (535 people engaged with the project in the second half of the year).

WELFARE RIGHTS: 1895 prisoners received welfare and benefits information and checks.



- **Contributed to resettlement in the community.**

APAC: We supported a total of 710 cases. Of these, 413 cases involved issues around anti-social behaviour with an average of 94% retained their right to tenancy. We supported 297 cases of people who were at risk of having to move because of racial harassment or intimidation. An average of 92% were able to stay in their homes.

BASE 2: We supported 3563 cases involving individuals and families at risk of violence or exclusion in their communities.

GET REAL: A new project from autumn 2017 to engage with those who commit hate crime offences, their victims and those at risk of committing such offences.

WELFARE RIGHTS: 322 people in the community received welfare and benefits information and checks.

WOMEN'S PROJECT: We received 202 referrals.

- **Support and guidance provided for employers, service providers and service users including in relation to criminal records.**

DISCLOSURE HUB: There were 441 disclosure queries and 22 advice and training sessions for employers, other service providers and individuals.

INFLUENCING OTHERS

Strategic aim: to have an impact on policy and practice by communicating our key messages and engaging with relevant publics.

Results and evidence:

- **Public Affairs:**

We produced, revised and promoted key policy asks with elected representatives (individually, via their parties and through Assembly committees and Ministers) and other influencers and stakeholders; and held three Justice Series events at Stormont. Each issue of Niacro News included an Assembly Update.

- **Communications:**

We redesigned the website and significantly expanded our presence on social media; published five issues of Niacro News for external readers and 21 issues of The Niacron for staff.

- **Policy development:**

We submitted 24 consultation responses; and produced nine policy briefings.

- **Reporting and research:**

We launched New Directions research into youth justice and commissioned and published research into NIACRO's approach, impact, image and future. We streamlined and integrated reports to funders.

APPLYING RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY

Strategic aim: to achieve our goals through support for our staff and volunteers, and through securing and managing the necessary resources.



Results and evidence:

- **Good governance exercised:**

The Executive Committee met on 18 occasions. We commissioned an external review of corporate governance and risk management which showed both to be satisfactory with some recommendations which have been implemented. We submitted our first return to the Charity Commission.

- **Staff and volunteers developed:**

A training plan was delivered each year. The Investors in People and Investors in Volunteers were reviewed and maintained. We increased and enhanced internal communications with regular and ad hoc discussions among staff. These included five "values events" in which over 60 staff across the three office locations revisited and enhanced the understanding of our values as part of the corporate planning process.

- **Robust financial management and proportionate control systems exercised:**

We reviewed the Financial Procedures manual; produced all accounts as per business plan; and maintained a positive cash flow.

- **Value of income maximised through collaboration and co-operation with partner organisations.**

We worked closely with colleagues in the public, private and third sectors in the delivery of services and in campaigning.

"Courage to act as "critical friend" to statutory sector; from DOJ through to all criminal justice statutory agencies. Its valued analysis comes with credibility, integrity and mutual respect, informed by close proximity to and expert understanding of clients."
Fitzpatrick and Walker 2016



APPENDIX 2: NIACROs Values

Justice: We believe that everyone in society has the right to be treated fairly, meaning

- A restorative approach is to be promoted when responding to crime.
- A custodial sentence must be the penalty of last resort, be proportionate and be the absolute extent of the punishment.
- Pathways to effective resettlement are critical.
- Criminal justice agencies must adhere to international human rights standards.
- We oppose the death penalty.

Dignity: We respect the value and worth of every individual and their family, meaning

- Those who engage with us do so voluntarily and a non-judgemental approach is applied to all.
- Service users' experiences inform our contribution to public policy and practice improvement.

Citizenship: We recognise that members of society have both rights and responsibilities, meaning

- People are citizens first; they must be allowed to access universal services and realise social inclusion.
- Enabling people to make informed choices is central to how we work.
- Communities have a central role in addressing the fear of crime and crime prevention initiatives.

Anti-violence: We recognise and oppose violence and the threat of violence, meaning

- We support initiatives which work to reduce violence and prejudice.

Accountability: We are responsible for all aspects of our work meaning

- In all that we do we listen to input from our service users.
- Services are monitored and evaluated to evidence impact and outcomes.
- Openness and transparency is evident in all our financial and other dealings with stakeholders.
- Investment in the training and development of staff, volunteers and peer supporters is paramount.



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