

Issue 44
Spring 2021



The Story of NIACRO

1971 - 2021

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Amelia House

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YEARS

reducing crime
and its impact

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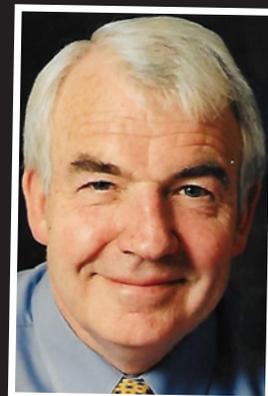
THE STORY OF NIACRO 1971 - 2021

CHAIRMAN SID MCDOWELL INTRODUCES THIS 50TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE OF NIACRO NEWS

This excellent review of the past 50 years is much more than a record of significant events which occurred over that period of time. It is useful and important that we should place on record the events and people who have played a part in shaping the progression and development of the organisation.

In that sense NIACRO has transformed from being perceived as a criminal justice pressure group into a vital part of the overall criminal justice scene with constructive and cordial partnership arrangements with partners across the statutory and voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors (VCSE). We pay tribute to all of our staff and volunteers who have been part of our journey.

In the early years NIACRO had to fight with determination to get a foot in the door because at our inception the statutory sector had yet to learn how to allow other players to influence and play a part in the formulation and delivery of criminal justice policy. We haven't yet quite achieved a satisfactory place at the table and some still seem to believe that the voluntary sector is there to be switched off and on when it suits funders. Along with others in the VCSE sector we aspire to a mutual understanding of precisely what a strategic partnership looks like and how it should perform. Nonetheless this publication reflects the progress which has been made and the fact that we are now in a much better and stronger place. It is entirely appropriate to record our appreciation to all, in the statutory sector and elsewhere, who have had the foresight and commitment to help secure progress. At this stage, 50 years on, we can and do reassert our determination to play a critical and constructive role in the development and delivery of criminal justice policy and related services.



Sid McDowell

At the heart of what NIACRO has been about is that 'golden thread' which recognises the importance and value of individuals and their families. It is evident through our practice that we have been and remain unashamedly passionate advocates of those who deserve a leg up, a helping hand, a second chance. We continue to strive to see the beautiful potential which exists in every individual, irrespective of their circumstances, being fulfilled. That is why we have sought to question and remove obstacles which are placed in the path of those on the rehabilitation journey. That is why we have campaigned and continue to campaign to leave behind past convictions which obstruct the road to, for example, further education, training and employment, financial support and appropriate housing.

Above all else we celebrate 50 years of assisting those with convictions and their families to secure a better and fulfilled life. We look forward to doing so for the next 50 years. I consider myself privileged to have been enabled to build on the efforts of many others and to play a part in the 50-year journey.

Well worth celebrating.

THE STORY OF NIACRO 1971 - 2021

NIACRO began its work in 1971; not the easiest time in Northern Ireland's history to plunge into the world of criminal justice. In the words of a later Chairman, Harold Good, "In the midst of cataclysmic social and political breakdown, NIACRO began its life **championing the vision of justice and resettlement**".

The original impetus for the organisation had been, amongst many things, the establishment of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders in Great Britain in the late sixties. There was growing concern for the rights of offenders in England and Wales, and also concern that the prison population in Northern Ireland was rising as a result of the ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland. However, these concerns were not linked.

This history builds on the one we published in 2006 at the time of our 35th anniversary. It draws on the annual reports and corporate plans, responses to consultations, evaluations of our programmes, NIACRO News, and other records of our work and our opinions over the lifetime of the organisation. It shows how NIACRO has grown in size (albeit with some downturns) and matured in vision over the 50 years.



Some currents have remained constant while new demands and approaches have given rise to new projects and activities.

It can only give a flavour of the dizzying amount of work planned and accomplished by staff and volunteers. If the early reports sometimes strike a tone more of charity and welfare than of rights - well, sensibilities and attitudes change over time. We no longer describe people with convictions as "those whose social inadequacy has resulted in crime"; we don't assume that they are all men; we are perhaps less patient with, or understanding

about, public prejudice against those who find themselves in the criminal justice system. Terminology changes too - we abandon the word "offenders" and use "people with convictions". But the core elements haven't changed. Justice, alternatives to prison, rehabilitation, and specialised - often voluntary - support; they are all mentioned in the first annual report.

The 50 years fall roughly into four blocks -

1. The establishment of the organisation and early trials and successes.
2. A period of development and consolidation.
3. A time of considerable external and internal change and upheaval.
4. The last 21 years of refining the role of a voluntary organisation in a new century with significant changes in the political, social and criminal justice environment.

NIACRO takes a multi-faceted approach - providing practical direct services to individuals; evaluating those services so that we can continually learn from and improve them; building partnerships with other organisations who have similar goals; raising awareness of the issues; lobbying and campaigning for fair treatment and appropriate public policy. We welcome visits from many interested in our work - Justice Ministers, Assembly committees, Secretaries of State, Lord Mayors, statutory and voluntary organisations from across the world. International contacts and joint working increase from the 1990s.

From 1997 to 2017, NIACRO publishes and bases our work on 3-year corporate plans: the latest, current, plan spans the five years 2018 - 2023.

1971
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1979

STARTING UP AND GETTING GOING

In 1971 Bob Byers is appointed Organising Secretary along with one other member of staff - Mrs M J King, Office Secretary. NIACRO's offices are at 41 Donegall Street.

Lord Dunleath becomes President, and the Chairman is Miss Bessie Maconachie until 1975 when she is succeeded by Donald Browne. At the outset it is considered by the Executive Committee that "we need an income of £5,000 annually to fulfil our present commitments".

For the first six months of the following financial year, staff in Donegall Street have to cope with working in "adverse and cramped conditions"; the result of a nearby bomb which caused structural damage.



GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC PROFILE

In 1977 the organisation's Policy Review Committee recommends that the governance of the organisation needs streamlining with a "small committed team" as a management group, and the rather large existing Executive Committee (25 members and three observers from the statutory services) acting as a consultative body. This requires constitutional change, agreed at the May 1978 AGM when Lord Longford is the speaker. He gets a good deal of press coverage, not least because the Government has refused to allow him to visit the Maze Prison.



NIACRO fields an impressive range of speakers in these early years - the first few AGMs include Lord Hailsham, Shirley Williams, William Deedes, John McVicar and Louis Blom-Cooper.

FUNDRAISING

A Ladies' Committee is formed in the second year of NIACRO's existence to raise funds. It holds its first event, a concert directed by the well-known singing teacher Frank Capper, in the following

year. In December 1973, at the invitation of Dean Sammy Crooks, it jointly sponsors a concert in St Anne's Cathedral by the Kings' Singers, then at the height of their popularity - so popular that they are asked to return in June 1974, again sponsored by NIACRO. Our share of the proceeds of the two concerts comes to £800. In 1977 the organisation benefits for the first time from Dean Crooks' "sitout" on the steps of St Anne's Cathedral, the second year of a charitable initiative from which NIACRO still receives support from time to time.



Ruth Walker receiving Black Santa donation from George Jones 2017

SERVICE DELIVERY AND ADVOCACY

The Lodgings Scheme (originally the Landladies Scheme) gets funding in 1972 for three years from the Pilgrim and Mitchell Trusts. The scheme plans to place people with a conviction in private rented accommodation, with NIACRO keeping in touch with both landlord and tenant. Sixteen landladies agree to participate; in several cases someone whose family has refused to have him home when he first leaves prison, has been able to go back to the family after starting out in lodgings.

This has happened in "what originally appeared almost impossible circumstances". Local artist and cartoonist Rowel Friers contributes a poster to support the scheme.

Aside from an accommodation scheme and one-off instances of helping people to find a job, NIACRO's role in these early days is more focused on advocacy than on practical help.

We note that although “by the time most people come to us for help they have exhausted all provision within the statutory field”, NIACRO staff “can elicit a more positive response from a statutory agency than when the request is made directly by the applicant.” In fact, we can say,

“We have not yet met a problem where an organisation or an individual failed to respond, and, in the most humane and practical way, lend assistance.”

This is the early days of advice giving which remains a central thread in our support of individuals and our work to influence criminal justice and workplace practices.

In 1975 NIACRO addresses questions about our core purpose. Whilst an Emergency Fund is used on occasions to pay for travel, clothing or accommodation, the organisation is clear that its role is “on a much broader plane – in education and crime prevention, in involving the community in rehabilitation, in initiating projects, in working for penal reform and assisting in having such reforms implemented.”

VOLUNTEERING

In the first year, six-week introductory courses are held for “voluntary associates” – the first mention of an aspect of our work which is still central. At this stage, volunteers give one-to-one support to individuals under the supervision of Probation Officers. The following year, twenty people undertake the introductory training course in Belfast; a course planned for Derry/Londonderry in April/May is cancelled “due to the circumstances prevailing at that time”. Volunteering expands a year later to include work in both prisons and in youth groups.

I enjoy volunteering because I enjoy making a positive difference in someone's life

I enjoy volunteering because I am defeating stigma and doing some good in the community

A full-time Voluntary Associates Organiser takes up post in April 1976. There are now 40 volunteers, who undertake a 10-week training course at Queen’s University’s Extra-Mural Department. A television and radio recruitment campaign has a good response. NIACRO and the Probation Service organise a workshop, “A professional use of volunteers”, in 1977, with 100 participants. The first Voluntary Associate conference is held in April 1978 in Dungannon. There are now about 75 active “VAs” attached to local probation groups. Increasingly they are involved in group activities – for example with young people in identified neighbourhoods.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment is already an important issue for NIACRO – at this early stage, small scale direct action is reported. “The Organising Secretary has had some success in obtaining employment for those who have requested assistance in this field”.

In 1977 NIACRO gives the proposed Rehabilitation of Offenders Order a cool welcome, believing it to be “extremely restricted and of little practical effect.” A working group is set up with other interested bodies to examine the whole question of the law and the resettlement of people who have had a conviction. The basic premise is that “a person’s convictions should be taken into account by employers and others only in the most exceptional circumstances”. It is suggested that

“discrimination against persons who had paid their debt to society by serving a sentence of a court amounted to a breach of their fundamental civil rights”.

Accordingly, an application for an investigation is made to the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights. In our annual report of 2005/06, we again identify the real obstacle this legislation is to the reintegration process, and the problem remains with us to this day (see *Criminal Records*).

FAMILIES

The “Wives and Families Centre” for the relatives of people in the Crumlin Road Prison opens at 310 Old Lodge Road in January 1972, three afternoons

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STARTING UP AND GETTING GOING

a week. This project is to have a roller-coaster history. It closes after nearby bombs in June 1972 and after many delays, and weary comments in NIACRO's annual reports, a visitors' centre serving the prison opens in May 1978. It is however not ideally situated, and therefore underused, and NIACRO continues to look for better premises. It closes again in 1979 to provide for a secure car park for prison staff and opens once more in 1982.



Crumlin Road families centre

A visitors' centre at Magilligan Prison opens in May 1975. Some 60 volunteers are recruited to staff the centre four days a week, 10.30am - 4.00pm. At the Maze Prison, NIACRO is the NIO conduit of funding for a Save the Children play group organised in the Society of Friends' canteen. In 1977 NIACRO, the Probation Service and the EHSSB set up a steering group to develop and support "Prisoners' Wives' Groups" across Northern Ireland.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY YOUTH WORK

The needs of young people are also recognised at this early stage, with plans to contact them through schools and youth groups

"to discuss with them the often serious effects of anti-social behaviour".

In April 1978 a public meeting is held in Armagh as a result of concerns expressed by NIACRO volunteers and others about the lack of facilities for young people. Plans begin for a drop-in centre for young people "who would normally reject conventional youth clubs and activities".

Olwen Taylor, now Olwen Lyner our Chief Executive, joins the staff in June 1978 as Youth Project Officer. "Since then", the following year's annual report comments, "she has made a distinctive and important contribution to the Association's work in crime prevention amongst the young." This is a significant development. One new project is based in the Suffolk area of Belfast where about 20% of 14- to 16-year-olds have been cautioned. Olwen also takes over a campaign in Enniskillen which is pressing for "social facilities for young people".

RESEARCH THAT INFORMS OUR SERVICES

In 1973, NIACRO reports on its first piece of important research; an investigation into after-care (post custody) facilities provided by voluntary and statutory agencies. The report is presented to the Ministry of Home Affairs, who commissioned the research, and reveals "several disturbing factors". With 56 Probation Officers in service, and 2000 people discharged from custody, the report points out that if they had all asked for "the after-care to which they are entitled" the individual case load, of new and existing clients, would have more than doubled. "The Probation Service therefore is obliged to preserve a fiction", says NIACRO bluntly.

LOBBYING AND CAMPAIGNING

Apart from the obvious and unprecedented criminal justice context created by the conflict, other changes and developments in government policy impact on NIACRO's work and objectives. We welcome the 1973 reorganisation of the health and personal social services into Area Boards. "Up-dated, well-organised and well-integrated community social services cannot but be of immense value to those the Association has been founded to help."

Another important development is the 1977 Black Report. This report of an inter-departmental review group on children and young persons is an early example of the consultative documents with which we have become so familiar. At the suggestion of

NIACRO, two voluntary sector working groups are set up to consider the draft report, and NIACRO chairs the group dealing with young people in the criminal justice system. A detailed initial response is produced, and a further response when Sir Harold Black's committee make their recommendations in 1979.

The prison population peaks at an average of 2,946 in 1978. On the financial side, NIACRO notes in 1974, "The Home Office confirms that it costs over £25 per week to keep a man in prison, which is a sobering thought."



In 1974 NIACRO welcomes proposals for introducing community service and a parole system to Northern Ireland. Almost a third of the annual report is given up to a detailed description of the system as it operates in England. The next year, NIACRO welcomes the Treatment of Offenders (NI) Order 1976, which introduces Community Service Orders. In the next few years' annual reports, we repeatedly call for the new system to be implemented, and for the Probation Service to have resources to do so.

On the other hand, we react strongly to the proposal in September 1975 to build a massive maximum-security prison at Maghaberry, to hold the entire adult prison population, male and female. NIACRO believes the concept to be "fundamentally wrong" and ascribes it to a "Dartmoor mentality". We set up a sub-committee to oppose the proposal and gathers support from like-minded bodies. In the next year, there is evidence that NIACRO's comments and counterproposals

(which include the first recorded call by the organisation for a new, separate, women's prison) are being at least partly taken on board. "We are of the opinion," says the annual report, that

"this episode shows the value that well-coordinated and constructive criticism can have in the penal field".

This lobbying and campaigning work is gathering confidence. In 1978, at NIACRO's request, the NIO provides up-to-date information on its plans for the prison system, some of which the organisation supports. However, NIACRO cannot see "any overall long-term policy" and it seems to the organisation that the conflict is still responsible for "an attitude of reactive improvisation".

References to the conflict are rather oblique in the early reports - words and phrases like "the situation", "recent events", are used. Even in 1972, the year of, inter alia, anti-Internment rioting, Bloody Sunday, Bloody Friday, the introduction of direct rule and 467 deaths, the report talks merely of "a natural prejudice against the ex-offender; a prejudice that has been fortified by the activities of the last three years". A year later, it talks of making "considerable progress and development" in spite of the "heart-rending tragedy" suffered by Northern Ireland which makes NIACRO's work harder. Perhaps the 1975 report gets nearest to a statement of policy on this front -

"At this tragic period in our history...it is difficult to be progressive, adventurous and humane in a situation such as currently attains in Northern Ireland. It is, however, imperative that such a course be followed."

Over and over, NIACRO calls for rational debate, calm judgement, and moderation in a criminal justice system operating in such an extraordinary situation.

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DEVELOPMENT AND CONSOLIDATION

Michael Warden is appointed Director (the post has been renamed as part of the 1977 governance review) in July 1979.

An Extraordinary General Meeting in February 1981 agrees new Articles of Association, under which an elected nine-member Executive Committee takes over the role of the Council. This provides the impetus for the development of a service delivery programme. A series of Chairmen serve two to three years each - Noel Shortt, Dave Wall (who leaves to take up a job with CAB in Great Britain; he is to return in 1987 as Director), Kathleen Kanaan and Margot McAuley. After 11 years in Donegall Street, the organisation moves to larger offices in Adelaide Street in 1982, from which it offers a range of services. In April 1986, annual spending hits the million-pound mark for the first time.

Significant changes are made in 1983 to NIACRO's management structure, staff terms and conditions, and governance.

The growing numbers of projects - now reaching over 3,000 people - are grouped into: Resettlement of Adult Offenders; Care of Prisoners' Families; Youthwork in local Communities and Intermediate Treatment projects; Youth Training. There are around 165 volunteers. The annual report raises the issue of the nature of the projects NIACRO believes it should be undertaking, especially with the potential for funding from the newly created Probation Board (PBNI).

Should our projects be geared to the narrow focus of the prevention of re-offending, or do projects for young people at risk, for example, or in a community development context, equally contribute to a reduction in crime? Questions that still need constant attention (see *Funding*).

THE SERVICES

NIACRO's project development is gathering speed. The 1981/82 annual report records a

| **"radical expansion" of services,**

with planning and fund-raising for new projects and new staff posts. Staff numbers virtually double in one year. This growth comes at a price, however: in 1982/3 policy and research work must be set aside, and the Director describes 1984/5 as a "tough and frustrating year" with many uncertainties over funding and increasing pressure on management.

Jenny's Project, a youth centre in Armagh, opens in September 1979. Its facilities include "a coffee bar, jukebox and pool tables" - which fix it firmly in its period! It proves possible to maintain "a reasonable standard of behaviour" in spite of "some inevitable incidents". By 1981, around 125 young people use Jenny's Project each week, of whom 36% have been excluded from at least one youth group in Armagh, 33% are involved with statutory agencies, and 25% have appeared at court for welfare or criminal justice reasons, or both. In 1984 the project wins a Ewart Biggs award.



Jenny's Project

In 1982 a minibus is bought for use by all, but mainly after school, projects. In 1983, the Creggan after school project makes a trip to London (paying for it themselves through Saturday jobs and sponsored events). They take in an eclectic range of activities - world snooker at Wembley, a football friendly against a NACRO project, a visit to Eton College and a day trip to France.



After School Disco, Armagh

EVIDENCING THE NEED

NIACRO also analyses the difficulties young people face in staying out of the criminal justice system and their experience within it. In 1979 two research projects are carried out – one into a particularly “hot spot” of Derry/Londonderry and one on the links between unemployment and offending in 16- to 18-year-olds.

In the latter, every young person aged between 16 and 18 who received a Probation or Community Service Order, or a custodial sentence, during the last four months of 1980 is interviewed. The report shows that only 10% of the young people interviewed had been in regular employment since leaving school, and only half had any experience at all of work. Most importantly, the research shows “clearly and unequivocally” that having a job keeps people away from offending behaviour.

Following this research, the Department of Manpower Services funds NIACRO to support work experience and training for young people with the Railway Preservation Society’s project to repair and restore old railway carriages. By 1985 there are 50 places available through several youth training schemes. A market garden established in Downpatrick employs six people with convictions. In 1986 NIACRO is given approval to expand its ACE places from six to 100¹. ACE workers are employed in seven dedicated workshops across Northern Ireland.

In 1981 NIACRO prepares a “private report” on intimidation, especially of young offenders, for a group of voluntary organisations trying to help the victims. However, it is not until 1990 that Base2 is established, a project dealing with individuals under threat from paramilitary and community sources. Over the years the humanitarian impulses for this engagement have been questioned but the organisation can trace its concerns back to this time (see *Young People in the Community*).

The Bridge Adult Education Centre for people with a conviction is set up in 1982, taking up about half the office space in the Adelaide Street premises. In the first five years, it is discovered that 95% of students have never taken up any other form of adult education. The core components of the programme are that: attendance is voluntary; learning is student centred; sports and other activities (such as driving lessons) will be integral; and support from other NIACRO services including the advice service and employment work will be offered.

A Bursaries Scheme to help people access education and training is established in 1982 following an Adult Education Project led survey which finds that 45% of PBNI clients are “functionally illiterate” and that people with a conviction are often lacking in self-confidence and have a fear of mixing with other students.

The Wives and Families Centre serving the Crumlin Road prison is renamed the Families Centre. It opens on Mondays and Wednesday to Saturday, with special efforts made at public holidays. Daily attendance averages 120 and there are plans to extend the building to cope with the demand. The Prison Welfare service of PBNI and NIACRO work together to help sort out problems with visits being refused, travel arrangements, welfare rights etc. By 1985, around 25,000 annual adult visits are made to the Crumlin Road Families Centre, and 15,000 to Magilligan. The Crumlin Road centre is described as

“one of the most highly regarded of NIACRO’s services by those who use it”.

¹ ACE was a statutory programme of short-term contracts for people who had been unemployed for more than a year.

1979
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1986

DEVELOPMENT AND CONSOLIDATION

A project to support families of people in prison opens in Derry/Londonderry, supporting 20 families by March 1983. Five other groups are meeting regularly in other areas, holidays are arranged for 60 families, and 360 toy and food parcels are distributed at Christmas and Easter.

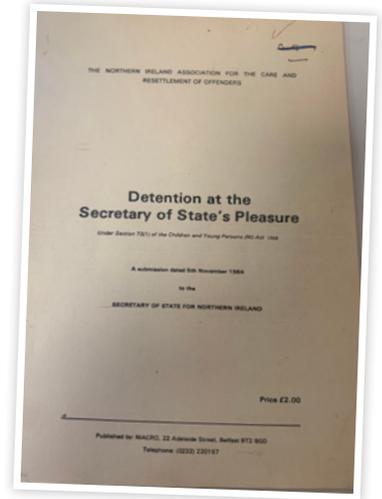
New family groups are started in Lenadoon, Ballymurphy, East Belfast, Portadown and Armagh. During 1980/81, 317 people make 612 applications to NIACRO's Emergency Fund, an increase of 50% over the previous year. Applicants receive 172 food vouchers, 88 meal vouchers, 42 clothing vouchers, 49 overnight accommodation vouchers and 20 travel fares. Staff make 91 phone calls to the DHSS, PBNI, or other voluntary organisations, give advice or counselling on 56 occasions, give out 51 parcels for people in prison, and there are 26 "miscellaneous" interventions.

In 1983, focus moves away from providing meal and food vouchers, which is putting severe pressure on the centre and its resources. We establish an Advice Centre to address welfare rights, housing and accommodation problems through engaging with the relevant statutory agencies and developing relations with PBNI.

LOBBYING AND CAMPAIGNING

Resources have been concentrated on project development, and NIACRO still regards itself as "an organisation which primarily provides practical services to people in trouble". However, in 1985/86, the banner headline "Campaigning for Humanity and Justice" is developed to focus further efforts to "project the fruits of our experience and raise the issues thrown up by our work". This includes comments and approaches to Government on earnings of people in prison, proposed children and young person's legislation, and a draft Criminal Justice Order. The Life Sentence Review Board is established in 1985 and greeted with a degree of scepticism and concern, shared by many other independent observers. We return to this theme in subsequent years.

Against this background, in 1984 NIACRO makes a submission to Government on the situation of 62 people in prison convicted of murder committed when under the age of 18 and detained at the Secretary of State's Pleasure (SOSPs), i.e. on indeterminate sentence. Had these young people been adults at the time of the offence, they might have already been considered for release. Working with the Portadown Families Support Group, made up of families of SOSPs, NIACRO recommends more transparent procedures for review and "more realistic" criteria for release decisions. A year later, the NIACRO submission contributes to a new review procedure and the announcement of over a dozen release dates.



In the following years, NIACRO provides opportunities to people coming out of prison on the "Working out" scheme which was designed to support these releases. The 1984/5 annual report sums up the principle of this work. It is not our business to challenge people's morals or allegiances...

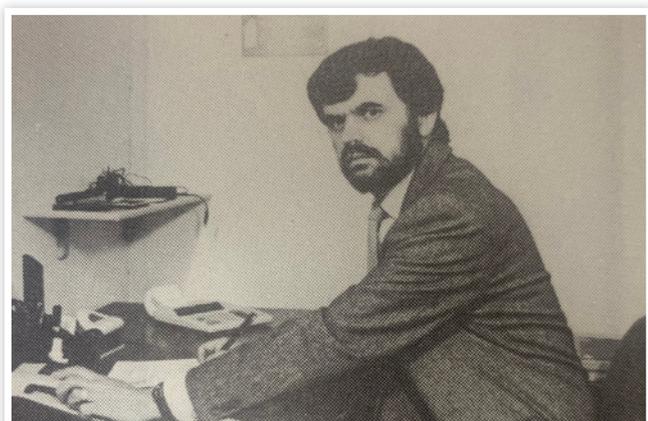
"we take our stand on helping people to manage the transition from involvement with the criminal justice system for whatever reason, and whatever their attitudes towards it, to the outside community."

NIACRO, committed to humanitarian principles, welcomes the House of Commons vote (362-243) against the re-introduction of capital punishment in July 1979.

1987
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A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

In 1986, Michael Warden resigns from the post of Director. Chair Margot McAuley praises his efforts and abilities in a period when NIACRO grew “from the tiny three-person outfit it was when he arrived, to one of Northern Ireland’s largest voluntary organisations.”



Dave Wall

Michael is replaced as Director in January 1987 by Dave Wall (whose job title will change under the 1997-2000 corporate plan to Chief Executive). Dave writes in the annual report of being “excited, encouraged and impressed by the range and quality of services provided by the Association”. The annual reports produced under his leadership will be characterised by in-depth, challenging and wide-ranging analyses of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland.

The Director in his first report notes that “NIACRO has been able to consolidate its services in the past year.” This is put down in large part to “a substantial increase in the financial support to our headquarters costs from the Northern Ireland Office” and the organisation records its gratitude for this. The difficulty of funding the increased administrative, financial and human resource functions of a growing organisation has been a strain for some years.

The 1998/99 annual report tackles the topic of the “professionalising” of the voluntary sector. The new funding available from Europe supports

human resource development for NIACRO staff and trainees. Whilst “voluntary organisations are concerned about being the cheap alternative; a source of flexible, disposable labour with poor conditions of service and hence poor quality of delivery”, there is a value in

“partnerships with statutory agencies based on clear contracts with clear performance expectations”

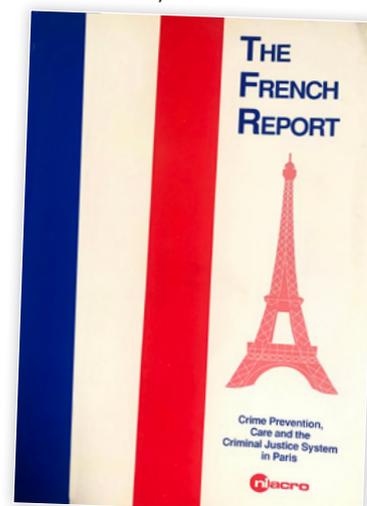
as are beginning to develop with PBNI.

As funding from Europe becomes more accessible, transnational learning begins to develop and we note that Northern Ireland’s rate of imprisonment is almost twice the European Community (European Union from 1993) average, at 125.2 per 100,000 population compared to 72. It’s an argument NIACRO will return to regularly over the years; that custody, especially for young men, is often counter-productive and alternatives should be better designed and better used.

An early example of European funding comes in 1992 under the New Opportunities for Women programme. A training programme for women relatives of people in the criminal justice system operates in Derry/ Londonderry and Belfast.

The NIO and Lankelly Foundation provide the funding which makes possible a move in 1990 from 22 Adelaide Street to 169 Ormeau Road, which is to be NIACRO’s home until 2005.

NIACRO celebrates its 21st anniversary at the AGM on 18 November 1992. The annual report looks back to the early 70s, congratulating the founders for taking the initiative “to help offenders and their families just as the foundations of society as a whole appeared to tremble.”



The Executive Committee begins a review of NIACRO's accountability to the community. The opportunity is taken "to articulate NIACRO's clear view of the proper roles and responsibilities of a voluntary organisation operating in the criminal justice sector in this time and place." The resulting report, published in 1993, covers:

- The role of the voluntary sector in general.
- The need for a "mixed economy" of social service provision.
- NIACRO's aspirations as a voluntary organisation, based on a community development approach, providing training and support for volunteers, with an increased input from clients, and **"an active policy comment role"** based on our experience and research.
- Working with the community and statutory agencies, calling for a clear understanding of the respective roles and mutual respect between them.
- NIACRO's relationship with the criminal justice system, which we challenge "to maintain the highest possible standards of justice, even in a context of social division and politically motivated violence."
- A call for increased levels of public expenditure to tackle poverty and unemployment, and "the bleak and restricted lifestyle" they cause.
- In conclusion, NIACRO commits "with its particular involvement with the 'sharp end' of society...to being part of a process of reconstruction in which the voluntary sector can be a major actor."

The management teams are restructured in 1995 with increased focus on young people in the criminal justice system.

A new post of Regional Development Manager is secured to assess development needs across Northern Ireland and make connections with councils, health trusts and other regional networks.

This results in a quality partnership with the Rural Community Network and a series of local community safety conferences.

FAMILIES

Probably the most significant development in support for families is the 1987 establishment of the Prison Link programme, led by PBNI with input from NIACRO in its design and development. Co-working is seen as an opportunity to provide "a better service, a broader range of skills and more opportunities for developing new ways of meeting families' needs."

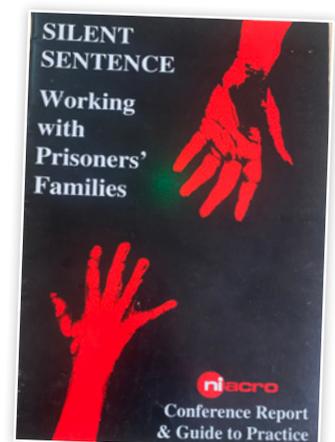
Transport services increase and the information and advice function move up a gear. New posters and leaflets are distributed to every social security office in Northern Ireland; we publish a Rights Guide in 1988. In 1987, NIACRO brings together all the agencies which give information to families of people in prison, to encourage networking.

By the mid-90s the advice/welfare service is giving people in prison the chance of a face-to-face meeting with a welfare rights worker in Crumlin Road and Magilligan prisons, with resources to go into the Maze and Maghaberry as well.

In the early 90s, a survey of families of people in prison, funded by Children in Need, notes that NIACRO and other service providers

"are grossly under resourced given the levels of need we have established by research... [and] should not be seen as optional extras but as a right."

We organise an international conference on families of people in prison - The Silent Sentence - in 1990.



NIACRO helps establish a "Best Quality Visits Forum" made up of the NIO, PBNI, Quakers, Save the Children and NIACRO. We note some improvements, with a children's play area added to the Magilligan Visitors' Centre, and a pilot scheme developed to encourage family visiting at the Maze.

In December 1994, NIACRO publishes "The Outsiders", a guide for families of people in prison. It draws on research carried out in 1992/93, along with input from families, support groups and other criminal justice organisations. Director Dave Wall praises the families and partners with whom NIACRO works and "who have demonstrated remarkable qualities of resilience and selflessness."

YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY

In the late 80s, there is renewed emphasis on working in and with communities to tackle anti-social crime among young people. The idea is to mobilise communities to work with their own youngsters by giving training, funding and professional support. Initially known as Community Voluntary Action (CVA) this programme will form the root of NIACRO's community development crime prevention work. It builds on the 10 after-school projects, initially related to the 1979 Black Report's recommendation on preventative work to keep young people out of custody, which have grown up during the 80s.

In 1990, Base2 is set up to help resolve problems of paramilitary threat in communities, especially against young people. Initially housed within NIACRO but managed by an interagency group, Interact, it is integrated into NIACRO's structure in 1993. In the years that follow NIACRO takes the opportunities afforded us to seek to influence those who have connections with paramilitary organisations. It is from such connections that the Community Restorative Justice groups are formed and initially resourced via NIACRO.

Independent Representation (IR) is introduced in 1990 as a pilot project at Lisnevin Centre, an establishment for young people on Training School Orders. IR offers a young person in custody a volunteer to speak for them if they

have difficulties or concerns. Two years later, the scheme is extended to the Rathgael Centre, and a year later to St Patrick's Training School.

The Children Order comes into effect in 1995, and NIACRO warns of the danger that the balance between care and custody may be tilted towards custody for financial reasons. The NIO consults on changes to the youth justice system, and NIACRO welcomes the apparent intention to reduce the numbers of young people given custodial sentences. However, we point out that this depends on "a substantial increase in community-based provision."

We undertake to monitor the impact of changes to the system through IR, i.e. from the point of view of the young people themselves.

EMPLOYMENT

At the end of the 80s, PBNI sets up an Employment Unit. Senior managers from PBNI, NIACRO and Extern form a tripartite group to co-ordinate employment services for people with a conviction. In 1992, Job Train is established by the group and acts as a managing agent to deliver the Job Training Programme. A little later, NIACRO's Action Plan Training programme is approved to provide training under the new Jobskills programme for under-18s.

By 1995, NIACRO is reviewing how it helps people with a conviction find work. Until now, this has mainly involved one-year training programmes in dedicated workshops. The changing nature of the employment market requires a more individual approach to increasing employability; this change



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A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

will be carried out through the EU funded Jobtrack and Personal Progression System programmes (which commence in the early 2000s).

In 1995 NIACRO and Extern set up the Educational Trust as an independent organisation to support people whose release from prison interrupted their course of study or training. In 1999 it is extended to work in the whole of Ireland with dedicated staff appointed in Belfast and Dublin.

A Coping with Convictions Unit is set up in 1995 to develop links with employers and offer information, advice and training on employing people with convictions. It also advises people who have faced problems in their work or when applying for a job because of their conviction. The Coping with Convictions Guide for Employers is launched the same year. Backed up by a billboard advertising campaign, its message is that "excluding offenders from employment effectively excludes up to one third of the male adult population." NIACRO calls for the NIO and the Training and Employment Agency to design and implement an employment strategy for people with a conviction.

In 1997 NIACRO carries out a review of policy and practice in relation to those convicted of sexual offences. In the years that follow, we intensify our staff training efforts and are more explicit with referring agencies as to our expectations regarding information sharing, confidentiality and child protection. The Voluntary Sector Working Group on Sex Offenders, of which NIACRO is a member, commissions independent research on managing such offenders, and holds a conference to discuss it. NIACRO accepts that, given the development of robust risk assessment practices, there may be merit in some sort of secure unit for some high-risk offenders.

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE CONTEXT

At this stage in its evolution, NIACRO is engaging fully in the public debate about criminal justice. There is only space for a few examples:



In 1986 we are "not convinced" of the success of the policy of integrating people in custody from different paramilitary backgrounds; a theme which recurs in many of the following years' annual reports.

In the following year, NIACRO expresses its concern about aspects of the prison regime - calling for a radical overhaul of the Life Sentence Review Procedure which it describes as "secretive and even if fairly operated... not seen to be so."

We respond to a Government circular on crime prevention by pointing out that it presents an unrealistic picture - on police relations with local communities, on what could be done with no extra resources and on the likelihood of better co-operation between the various agencies.

NIACRO prepares a submission, at the request of the Association of Boards of Visitors, calling for the abolition of prison for fine defaulters. This is part of NIACRO's general belief that "prison should only be used for those who may be a direct danger to the public or whose crimes are so serious that they must be marked by society's gravest punishment." So far as young people are concerned, the policy is fundamentally the same -

"Whatever the reasons for taking children and young people and placing them in institutions, it is likely that such treatment will increase rather than decrease the probability of involvement in criminal acts."

In 1991 we welcome the Prison Service's strategic plan "Serving the Community", especially the increased openness of the service and its expressed wish to bring the prisons and their staff into the community. We also welcome the plan's commitments on liaison with other agencies and voluntary groups on reintegration, on preparation for employment, and on maintaining family bonds.

NIACRO's response

"Justice, Safety and Openness"

to the Prison Service's strategic plan, includes recommendations for substantial reform relating to causes for which NIACRO has been campaigning for years. These include the transfer back to Northern Ireland of people who are in prisons elsewhere in the UK and the maintaining of relationship bonds through increased family visits

and "greatly enhanced access by women in prison to their children." The long-running campaign on prisoner transfer, carried out with partners including the National Association of Probation Officers, bears fruit in 1993. NIACRO is "heartened to note that the process of transfer has now begun".

A major piece of international research, "The release and reintegration of politically-motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland" is completed in 1994. It is a comparative study of release processes in South Africa, Israel and Palestine, Italy, Spain and the Republic of Ireland. The publication of the report, and a linked conference with speakers from all the countries studied, receives wide publicity and interest.

Alongside its consideration of a release process, NIACRO secures funding for politically motivated prisoner groups to research the social and economic needs of those to be or already released. We welcome the IRA and Loyalist ceasefires in 1994 as bringing "renewed hope that as a society we can resolve and accommodate our differences through the political process." NIACRO - and the criminal justice system - prepare to adjust to the new circumstances.

The late 90s are something of a roller-coaster inside and outside NIACRO. 1996 and 1997 bring eventful and tense marching seasons, a new IRA ceasefire, renewed movement in the peace process and the election of a Labour Government. NIACRO welcomes the "new language" of New Labour, its emphasis on communities and partnership.

Commenting on the 1998 Belfast Agreement, Chairman Harold Good writes in the annual report, "In so many ways, it feels as if we are living in a different world from that in which I sat down to write last year's foreword." Chief Executive Dave Wall speaks of "a year that has produced the greatest possibilities for positive change that I have witnessed."

In the next year, NIACRO sees the community's response to the Patten Commission on policing as "a key determinant in achieving the aspirations of the Agreement". And we welcome the Sentence Review Commission which deals with the process of release from prison. In the following years, NIACRO continues to monitor and comment on the work of the two Commissions.

The first of our corporate plans to be published guides our work from 1997 - 2000. The mission statement reads "NIACRO works to achieve a just, humane and effective criminal justice system and an inclusive and peaceful society."

The six strategic areas are: Contributing to building peace; community development; influencing publics; structural integrity [which includes improving evaluation, establishing networks and partnerships, better internal integration]; resourcing; and quality assurance.



Implementing the corporate plan isn't all plain sailing, however. There is a drop in staff numbers of almost 25% in 1998/99. There are changes in funding programmes - especially the running down of the ACE programme and the failure of the New Deal training and employment programme to identify and refer people with a conviction to our programmes. New processes intended to be helpful disturb the flow of direct referrals from PBNI to NIACRO and people get lost somewhere in between. With less funding available from domestic grant in aid and more reliance on European project funding, NIACRO and Extern begin to integrate and redesign their adult employment and training services.

NIACRO completes a management restructuring which better reflects our relationship to the criminal justice system and a unified Management Group is established in early 2000.

Harold Good resigns in 1999 as Chairman after nine years. He describes the experience as "a very great privilege". In the following year the new Chairman, Richard Buchanan, will refer to Harold's "commitment, loyalty and good counsel" and to the significant contribution he has made to the organisation.

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NEW CENTURY, REFOCUSSED NIACRO

In 2000 Chief Executive Dave Wall moves to the Department for Social Development and is replaced by Olwen Lyner who has been Director of Operations.

In 2001 the NIO commissions the Social Services Inspectorate to carry out an evaluation of NIACRO. It applauds "the range of services and projects that [NIACRO] provides, its willingness to provide services across Northern Ireland, its ability to network and work in partnership, and the commitment it shows to the use of volunteers". Another NIO-commissioned evaluation in 2006 describes NIACRO as "very effective".

Facing into the new century the 2003-2006 corporate plan adopts a revised Mission and Vision statement that largely still holds good today. In 2003 it reads -

Vision Statement -

Our vision is of a society in which the needs and rights of all citizens, including victims of crime, and adults and children who offend or who are at risk of offending, are equally respected.

Mission Statement -

We will work to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities.

New offices are opened in Derry/ Londonderry; the search begins for better premises in Belfast, and the money to pay for them! By 2004 NIACRO secures a site in central Belfast and in 2005 all four rented sites in Belfast close. All staff move to the bright, modern offices in 4 Amelia Street. At the opening of the new building, Olwen Lyner acknowledges the support of three key funders - the Northern Ireland Office, the Tudor Trust and the Henry Smith Trust - and speaks of the value of having one location for meetings and events, advice and training as well as easy interaction among staff.

At the time of our 35th anniversary in 2006, two previous Directors/Chief Executives reflect on the organisation's past, present and future. Michael



Olwen Lyner, CEO, and David Hanson, Criminal Justice Minister, at the opening of Amelia House.

Warden (1979 - 1986) remembers offices in "a shabby Belfast warehouse" and "the enthusiasm and effort of staff enabling us to develop steadily". In 2006 he sees "an organisation transformed, rebranded, better resourced, with a sophisticated management". For Dave Wall (1987 - 2000), NIACRO has provided "some of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my career" and he finds it rewarding to see NIACRO's "capacity for change in responding to our changing world [and] essential skills for the voluntary and community sector as a whole".

NIACRO was established as "The Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders": but for everyday purposes we have always been "NIACRO". Legally, though, we have had to keep the full name. Not only is it quite cumbersome, it reflects an earlier way of looking at our work and our client group; and it clashes with the desistance theory we now embrace. So it doesn't make sense to go on using this terminology. NIACRO's members pass a special resolution on the change of name at the 2012 AGM, and we are now NIACRO pure and simple!

Independent research in 2016 examines the contribution NIACRO is making to the criminal justice system. It finds competency and capacity, skilled and experienced staff, resilience, strong relationships with Government departments and other stakeholders, and a willingness to engage in new ways of working.

“NIACRO is ambitious to innovate, yet retain its proximity to Northern Ireland’s criminal justice system and its commitment to justice reinvestment principles, manifest through its early intervention work with families and young people and much of its work with adults.”

DEVOLUTION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The build-up

The 1998 Northern Ireland Act, implementing the Good Friday Agreement, includes provision for the devolution of policing and justice to the Northern Ireland Assembly. From then on, right up to the establishment of the Department of Justice in 2010 and thereafter, NIACRO makes the case for an effective, resettlement-led criminal justice system which will lead to fewer re-convictions, safer and better lives for individuals, and happier and more stable communities.

Milestones along the way include our engagement with the Criminal Justice Review which in 2000 issues a massive report with 294 recommendations. Our detailed response focuses on the need to involve the community in tackling the causes and effects of crime on day to day life. NIACRO’s view is that until the review’s recommendations are implemented “our broader environment remains uneasy”.

Over the next few years and especially in the run-up to the passing of the Criminal Justice Order 2008 and the establishment of the Department of Justice, NIACRO builds contacts with the political parties. Further, to quote the 2007/08 annual report,

“we are consolidating our focus on criminal justice and seeking appropriate ways of influencing the preparation for devolving criminal justice to the local Assembly”.

The NIPS Resettlement Strategy, another outworking of the Criminal Justice Review, is launched in 2004. NIACRO welcomes this initiative but believes the necessary improvements “can only be realised when [the strategy is] properly resourced and the models of engagement are applied consistently throughout

all of Northern Ireland’s prison establishments”. NIACRO’s Personal Progression System is one of the first programmes to engage in this area, and others, from NIACRO and other organisations, follow.

In 2007, NIACRO gives evidence to the Westminster NI Affairs Committee’s Inquiry into the operation of the NIPS. We highlight our observations about: the lack of capital investment; the high cost per prisoner place; and the disproportionate spending on security and containment compared with care and resettlement. The MPs want to hear NIACRO’s views on, among other topics: the use of non-custodial sentences; sentencing policy for women and their accommodation in custody; the location of Magilligan Prison; educational and training opportunities in Maghaberry; and the transfer of health care from NIPS to the DHSSPS. They are also interested in NIACRO’s own services.

Talking politics

A “bumper edition” of NIACRO News reports on discussions carried out in 2007 with local political parties, wide ranging but focusing on how broader social and economic policies impact on crime and anti-social behaviour. Through these stimulating and valuable discussions, we establish a sound platform for building ongoing relations with the local administration.

We also host a cross-departmental seminar to make the point, which we have also made to the political parties, that all departments, not just a Justice department, have the potential to impact for good or ill on resettlement, community safety and the well-being of prisoners’ families.

Along the path to the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland)



Order, NIACRO gives oral evidence to the Ad Hoc Committee set up to consider the legislation and replies in detail to the consultation on the Bill.

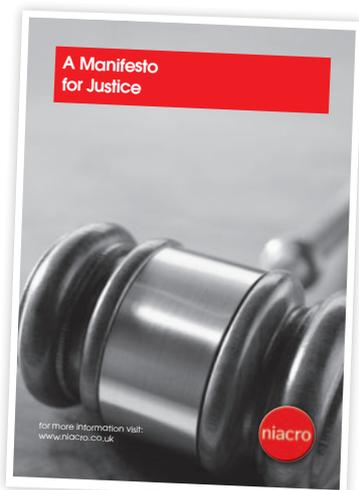
In our 2009 - 2012 corporate plan we nail our colours to the mast. "Probably one of our greatest challenges will be to help pave the way for the devolution of policing and criminal justice. By helping to promote informed debate, we will aim to avoid the promotion of regressive policies which we know from experience can only have the effect of driving up both costs and crime levels."

Devolution highlighted the need within NIACRO for better resourced communications with the Assembly and others, and so we appoint a Communications Manager for the first time in 2009 and establish the Justice Series, a programme of lunchtime seminars at Stormont to give MLAs and others the opportunity to discuss justice-related issues.

Until the collapse of the Assembly in 2017, we organise seminars on, for example, women in the justice system, hate crime, resettlement, and the impact of parental imprisonment on children. We are grateful to the experts who gave their time to these important events and the MLAs who sponsored them.

In spring 2010 we publish our "Manifesto for Justice", a summary of our concerns and aspirations for a devolved criminal justice system. We have five "calls for change":

- Investment in prevention.
- Investment in family support.
- Prison reform.
- More community engagement with criminal justice.
- Government targets for the reduction of crime.



Delivering Justice

The profile of the criminal justice system rises dramatically in the Northern Ireland Assembly after it votes on 9 March 2010 for the devolution of justice powers to a Northern Ireland Executive for the first time since 1972. We describe the period covered by our 2010/11 annual report as "a landmark for all of us who work in the criminal justice field in Northern Ireland".

The 2010 Hillsborough Castle Agreement contains important commitments, including a review of the prison system, the management of offenders and a review of how children and young people are "processed" (the Agreement's unfortunate and dehumanising term). There is only to be "consideration of" a women's prison - still an unmet need.



Justice Minister David Ford, 2nd left, with Olwen Lyner, Dave Weir and Pat Conway outside Amelia House.

The new Justice Minister, David Ford (who visits NIACRO as one of his earliest engagements) announces a Review of Northern Ireland Prison Service in June 2010. NIACRO is somewhat sceptical about the review. It's not the root and branch examination which we believe is needed but focuses on operational matters, rather than the bigger considerations of the role and function of prisons. Members of the Review Team visit NIACRO to discuss our work, and our views on the review. They hold a very powerful, open and mutually respectful meeting with members of our Adult Forum, who are users of our services. We

also reply formally to the consultation on the Review, with a considerable list of changes and issues which need to be tackled if the NIPS is to be effective.

In 2012, NIACRO provides “constructively critical comment” on the implementation of the Review Team’s report, recognising that

“We can’t afford to wait for another generation to create a prison system that works”.

We note that there is a (wrong) feeling that responsibility for implementing the many recommendations falls to the Prison Service; the DoJ and DHSSPS are tasked with a majority of the recommendations. Over the next three years we focus resources on monitoring progress and engaging with the oversight group. In 2013 we host, with other organisations, a series of breakfast events to mark progress.

Another important review is that of the youth justice system announced in November 2010. NIACRO is concerned about the make-up of the review panel. We have written in advance to the Minister stressing the need for the review to be entirely independent and include real expertise in, for example, the international standards on young people’s rights and needs. We make this point to the Assembly’s Justice Committee and welcome some changes to the panel’s make-up.

Our written response to the review agrees with many of the panel’s comments and recommendations. We like the human rights approach, the stress on early intervention and commend the review team for “the enlightened and progressive approach it has taken to this issue”. It reflects the thrust of our work with young people. We also welcome their recommendations on new policing approaches to young people and on raising the age of criminal responsibility. But we point out that treating people as children up to the age of 18 in many areas of their lives, whilst believing they should be punished as adults for crimes committed after the age of 12 or 14, is illogical.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

As the century progresses, we continue to consolidate our established services for children and young people and introduce new ideas and approaches.

The Independent Visitor service for children and young people in the care system, and the Independent Representation service for those in secure care accommodation and custody, have been in operation since the 1990s.

In 2005 a mentoring scheme gains an award from the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation and an external evaluation of the scheme notes “an extraordinary level of support from agencies referring clients to the programme”. Unfortunately, funding for this project comes to an end all too soon (*but in 2012 we introduce MOVE, see below*).

Way2Go befriends and supports young people leaving the care system and Reconnect works with teenagers who are excluded from education and at risk of offending or who have offended.

Youth Employability starts in 2003, drawing on the Jobtrack experience (*see Adult Employability*) and designed for young people in contact with the youth justice system. When it closes in 2011, Choose2Change carries on the work until 2015. It joins up in 2014 with the Bytes Project to provide a one-year pilot project “New Directions”. This includes research on the issues affecting young people in contact with the youth justice system or who are at risk of offending.

An evaluation of Youth Employability in 2011 notes that “no other service is helping this particular group in this way”. In 2010, the DEL Committee which is carrying out an Inquiry into the subject of young people (16-24) who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) visits Amelia House to hear from NIACRO and Include Youth.



In 2012, with Big Lottery funding we set up MOVE, a six-year mentoring and befriending project for young people at risk of offending or with significant difficulties at home, school or in their community. MOVE builds on NIACRO's long experience of helping vulnerable young people build brighter futures. We draw on their lived experience through their forum, "Voice Box" and produce two short films showing the benefits of the project.

Early intervention services

CAPS (Child and Parent Support) opens in 2004 and continues (in the Southern Health & Social Care Trust area) to the present day. Initially supporting families whose 8- to 13- year-olds are "at risk of anti-social and offending behaviour", it now focuses on family support and is termed Early Intervention Family Support. It's a model of working developed and piloted by NIACRO and includes one-to-one work with the children and their families, liaising between families and the agencies they're involved with, and addressing educational needs. A 2006 evaluation describes the programme's effectiveness as perceived by the children ("It's cool"), their families (who "felt their opinions and input were valued and respected"), schools (improvements in self-esteem, social skills, attendance, behaviour and educational performance) and social services (success in supporting and empowering parents).

NIACRO's commitment to this work leads to the securing of the contract to deliver the Early Intervention Support Service (EISS) from 2015. The Executive's Early Intervention Transformation



CAPS staff with Criminal Justice Minister Maria Eagle at CJSNI awards 2007

Programme (EITP) aims to improve the lives of children and young people across Northern Ireland. Within EITP, NIACRO's EISS supports families when problems first emerge - before they become embedded or before statutory services are required. Very much complementary to our long-running CAPS, our EISS service users have no previous contacts with statutory services.

Short term, locally based and delivered promptly, EISS links closely with the Health-led Family Support Hub (FSH) network. NIACRO chairs one FSH and we are members of others across Northern Ireland.

Youth Justice

Significant changes in youth justice in the 1990s and 2000s ensure that many fewer children and young people who offend are dealt with formally by the criminal justice system and fewer of those prosecuted receive custodial sentences (or are detained for much shorter periods). NIACRO welcomes this change in emphasis. We know that children and young people who experience the youth justice system, in particular custody, are often harmed by the experience and have a wide range of unmet needs.

We continue to play our part in trying to bring about a more effective and more humane approach to young people entering the criminal justice system. For example:

- In 2003 we welcome the establishment of the new Youth Justice Agency and work to forge links with it.
- Following a meeting with NIACRO in 2010, the Youth Justice Review Team commissions Kit Chivers (formerly Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice) to investigate the impact of the rehabilitation of offenders legislation on young people. We meet with Kit to set out our concerns.
- Two of our Justice Series seminars address youth justice, emphasising the "children first, offenders second" principle outlined by Dr Stephen Case. We challenge the more negative, punitive and often factually inaccurate views which are still too prevalent in society and in legislation.

- We continue to call for a rise in the age of criminal responsibility.
- We give our views on more than 20 consultations on strategies and services affecting young people within the contexts of health and education as well as criminal justice.
- We participate in statutory planning and strategy structures.

FAMILIES AFFECTED BY IMPRISONMENT

We know from our work with children and families of people in prison that they can be a forgotten group. There is very little support for the partners, children and extended family when someone enters custody, despite a wealth of evidence which shows that effective support at this stage results in better outcomes for the family, the person in prison, and the wider community. Providing support for families affected by imprisonment improves the mental health and financial capability of that family. It can also have a positive impact on the mental health of the person in prison and contributes to effective resettlement when they re-enter the community - thereby greatly reducing the risk of re-offending and helping to create safer communities.

That's why we start supporting families within a year of the start of NIACRO, with an embryonic visitors' centre near the Crumlin Road prison. That aspect of our work has grown steadily, with services in Magilligan from 1975 and Hydebank from 2004.



Liz Weir with her book about having a father in prison

In October 2019, NIACRO assumes responsibility for the NIPS Visitor Centre Services contract which covers all three establishments. The initial months focus on staff development and restructuring exercises which conclude in March 2020.

Family Links

Prison Link, a PBNI initiative with NIACRO supporting, has since 1987 been helping people in prison to keep in touch with their families. It has adapted and developed over the years reflecting changes in prison and in society. A 2006 NIACRO and PBNI review is accompanied by a survey; the service achieves an almost 90% satisfaction rate and participants offer insights into its value as well as suggestions for improvements. As a result of the review a new service, Family Links (the name chosen by service users), builds on and expands Prison Link's work. The review reveals that "Family Links is unique in Europe", offering support to families at the earliest opportunity after committal - normally within 48 hours - and with a particular brief to support the children in these families.

The PACS (Parent and Child Support) project runs from 2004 to 2008, supporting prisoners' families and working with others to tackle the inter-generational effects of imprisonment. PACS is now fully integrated into Family Links. Some years later, SCOPE (see *Children of Prisoners*) is also brought under the umbrella of Family Links as we continue to consolidate all elements of our support for families.

Transport service

If you don't have a car it's not easy to get to our prisons, in locations which are not well served by public transport. NIACRO's transport service makes visiting possible at all three prisons. We carry out a user satisfaction survey in September 2010; more than half the passengers use the service every week and 75% say that without it they wouldn't be able to visit their friend or relative. Passengers value the service highly:

"Very pleased. Thank you. Love the bus and very happy with driver. Very nice people."

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NEW CENTURY, REFOCUSED NIACRO

In 2013 NIACRO facilitates a Families Forum to give families a voice to influence the criminal justice system. A member of the Forum writes a series of articles for NIACRO News setting out the key issue for the group - that if they are consulted by the system, their experience will be of real value in improving it to the benefit of all concerned.

Family days, and longer stays in, for example, Corrymela, give parents and carers a break, some relaxation and the chance to talk over and share their experiences. In February 2020, several NIPS staff and the Director-General join the families for dinner and answer parents' and children's questions.

Advice and information

From the start, NIACRO has been giving information and advice on the sometimes-acute financial problems people with convictions and their families face. Working within the prisons and in the community, a range of advice services have responded to many thousands of queries on debt, the benefits system, job loss, and the impact of a prison sentence on income.

It's not just direct advice to the individual or family - we aim also to increase people's ability to manage their money. For example, in 2013 we deliver 13 money management sessions in community settings across Northern Ireland.

From 2016, this advice-giving is delivered to families through Families and Money Matters (FAMM). As well as direct advice and information, FAMM organises financial capability sessions for staff and service users. The project also has a brief to research and evaluate the reasons why people do not engage with mainstream debt support services. Many of the people we support tell us they would not have accessed mainstream services without FAMM.

In prison and in the community, NIACRO's Welfare Advice service is unique. It is the only service offering advice and support across Northern Ireland to people in prison, their families, people

who have been released from prison, and adults in the community who have a conviction. We provide information, advice and representation on subjects including benefits, housing and debt.

As part of this service, we also offer Managing Money Matters courses to enhance financial capability amongst individuals and families. That includes prison staff, a group of whom earn OCN accreditation after a two-day tax and benefits course in 2010.

Of course, on any programme where we're offering support to individuals and families, we find opportunities to bring people up to date with available voluntary and community supports, as well as other helpful contacts. As a result, in 2006 we establish and support the ASFO (Accessing Services for Offenders) network and on its behalf compile and distribute information on the services willing to help people in custody, about to be released, or just back in the community (*see also "Disclosure Hub" in Employers*).

This section has focussed on money matters, but people in the criminal justice system also have problems with health, housing, and relationships with family and community. NIACRO's project staff have to be, and are, ready to advise and inform people on a whole range of life events when they arise.

CHILDREN OF PEOPLE IN PRISON

In our response to a 2015 DHSSPS consultation on its Service Framework for Children and Young People we state our basic view on this topic. "Worryingly, there is no statutory responsibility for the children of people in prison; [although] they are more susceptible to bullying, isolation, poor mental health and developing anti-social behaviour". Statistically, if you have a parent in prison you are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system yourself; you are also more likely to develop mental health problems and underachieve at school.



At the turn of the century, NIACRO is involved in setting up the Children of Prisoners Interagency Group, and the group organises the Who Cares-Why Care? conference in 2000. We distribute a briefing paper on the subject to relevant agencies.

A video "A Child's Journey" is produced in 2001 to highlight the problems faced by the children of prisoners and this is updated in 2005 with the DVD "A Silent Sentence".



We join Eurochips, now COPE, in 2012; a European rights-based network of agencies working to support children in this situation and exchange best practice ideas.

Family Links and its predecessor Prison Link of course include the whole family in their way of working, but some projects focus on the children. SCOPE and CHIP, starting in the last decade, are slightly differently structured and funded, but both have this focus. The support they offer includes one-to-one emotional support, information on how custody works, liaison with other sources of help and more. SCOPE links to the wider Family Links programme while CHIP originally comes under the Early Intervention Transformation Programme. Some children of people in prison also join the MOVE programme (see *Children and Young People*).

Child-centred visits

It doesn't take much imagination to see how upsetting and strange a visit to a prison could be for a child who may already be badly affected by the upheaval caused to the family by having a parent in prison. As one mother told us: "At the end of the visit [my five-year-old daughter] started crying and asking her daddy to come home with us because she didn't understand that he couldn't. She ran up to the Prison Officers and was crying and begging them to let him come home."

So, the idea is that child-centred visits are opportunities where child/ren and father can

have each other's undivided attention - children can bring a toy and have lunch with Dad (mothers lunch together in the visitors' centre at the same time). We've been calling for child-centred visits since the mid-90s; the first take place in Magilligan in 2001 and are described in the January 2002 newsletter as

"already an enormous success".

A few years later they are made available in Maghaberry and Hydebank. Although there are times when a visit is cancelled at the last moment, devastating for both parent and child, the prison authorities back the idea and we continue to press for it to run smoothly.

ADULT EMPLOYABILITY

Having a job makes it less likely that a person coming out of prison will re-offend; an obvious benefit for the individual, for their family and for society. But how ready is that person to re-enter the job market?

In 2005 we reflect on the meaning of "employability". Many of NIACRO's service users find themselves far from the labour market. Statutory training and back-to-work programmes can feel very alien to their experience and skills. That's even before they face up to the undoubted reluctance of many employers to take them on. What is needed is a high level of support and encouragement, with a strong element of life skills training, personal development, building self-confidence and motivation.

In 2001, the EU's EQUAL programme funds a new employability project, Personal Progression System, for people in custody. Transnational partners and colleagues from GB visit Northern Ireland in 2003. PPS runs until 2005, and in the next round of EQUAL funding we draw on what we've learned to develop ReachOut which continues to 2007 (by which time 59% of participants have got a job and 17% have gone into further education). Both programmes help people who have been in custody to access the labour market, increase links with employers, and encourage statutory services to mainstream what has worked well. The PPS evaluator concludes that

“PPS was an outstanding example of effective partnership in the EQUAL programme”.

Jobtrack

Jobtrack is launched in 1997 to “train, develop and progress into employment those coming into contact with the criminal justice system”.

In 2002/03 Jobtrack exceeds its targets for all aspects of the programme and is extended to include 16- to 18-year-olds with a conviction. The following year it wins a National Training Award for “really effective training with offenders”. Over the next 10 years Jobtrack grows and deepens its work – evidenced by numbers supported and by extremely positive external evaluations in 2006, 2010 and 2015. Operating both in prison and in the community, for most of that time it is our largest single programme of work.

It is therefore shocking to be faced with the loss of Jobtrack funding in 2015 when we have had clear and unambiguous evidence of its effectiveness from an evaluation by NISRA. (see *Funding*)



Council recruitment

Good practice continues

We are glad that, with some hard work, we access funding for a short-term employment programme from late 2015 to plug (at least in part) this gap in provision.

ACCESS runs until 2016 to help people just out of prison and under PBNI supervision. We carefully

analyse how the programme has performed so that we can continue to improve our employability work and be properly funded to do so. The positive aspects of ACCESS are incorporated into the design of its successor programmes and are identified as

- “Quick wins” (CV writing, disclosure statements, job searches etc.); tangible, practical benefits that boost a person’s confidence and help them stick at it.
- Disclosure advice, highlighting gaps and inaccuracies in service users’ assumed knowledge.
- Support for completing job applications.
- Advocacy for accessing employment and/or further education.
- An enhanced and more realistic understanding of the employment market and the process of (re)entering employment.
- Signposting to a wide range of agencies.

Working Well

NIACRO’s newest (and current) employability programme for men and women with convictions, Working Well was launched in 2018 with the aims of: supporting progress towards the labour market; reducing reoffending (given the recognised link between securing employment and desisting from further offending); and tackling discrimination (given all we know about conviction remaining a significant barrier to employment).

By its second year, Working Well community and prisons teams are exceeding annual targets for enrolments and participants entering training/ education and employment. The programme benefits from the ‘Disclosure Hub’ and further specialist support with training and employer links.

“Working Well helped me build my confidence and prepare for employment... gave me routine to my week... improved my computer skills which in turn gave me the confidence to look online for work and submit applications and I am now in employment - Thank you!”

ExOCoP

An important transnational initiative, the ExOCoP European Learning Network, runs from 2009 – 2012. It is centred on good practice in rehabilitation, with more than 40 partners from 14 EU member states.

NIACRO is an active member of ExOCoP, leading or participating in most of the 18 networking events. In June 2012 we lead the NI delegation to the closing event in Berlin, producing the key messages paper which sums up the learning from what has been an ambitious exercise in sharing good practice.

WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS

At the turn of the century a dinner for chief executives is hosted at Hillsborough Castle by NIO Minister Tony Worthington, and 24 large employers endorse a full-page newspaper ad in support of our campaign.

The Employment Equity Awards, for employers who implement good policy and practice in the fair recruitment of people with convictions, are inaugurated in 2001. From then on we absorb our work with employers as an integral part of helping people with convictions find employment.

Virtually every year we record an increase in the numbers of employers coming to our employment advice service – the increase is particularly marked after Access NI and the Security Industry Authority start their work in 2007/08 and 2010/11.

NIACRO doesn't just wait for employers to come to us! We make a DVD for employers and hold training sessions on how to develop fair and safe recruitment and management practices for people with convictions.

The first "Meet the Employer" event takes place in 2008. This brings together Jobtrack participants and some of the employers who support our work. We extend these events to the three prisons from 2010. In 2012 we start employer-led workshops on interview skills. Service users appreciate the approach and attitude of

employers who "treat us as equals". Employers say that meeting people with real potential and commitment challenges their own prejudices and anxieties. Undoubtedly this work does break down barriers.



Meet the Employer

By 2016 we name our advice-giving service to employers and to individuals the "Disclosure Hub" and recruit volunteers to support its help line. In 2018, the Disclosure Hub connects to Working Well, and we produce detailed guides to help explain the issues. That Working Well exceeds its annual targets is thanks, among other efforts, to the relationships we've built with employers over the years.

In 2019, NIACRO surveys 115 employers across a range of sectors to discover what they feel about hiring people with convictions. Happily, 97% of employers believe in the possibility of rehabilitation, 82% distinguish between different types of offence and only 1% would flatly refuse to employ someone with a conviction.

CRIMINAL RECORDS

Over the whole of this period, NIACRO engages with the complex and contentious issue of employment-related legislation as it affects people with convictions. We consider proposed and existing legislation with evidence-led analysis of its impact, intended and unintended, on employers and potential employees. All this we incorporate into our projects and programmes and our dealings with elected representatives, policymakers, employers and our own service users.

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NEW CENTURY, REFOCUSSED NIACRO

We find repeatedly that our service users face fear and prejudice: and at times it seems that the law is erecting ever higher barriers to getting a job as well as accessing training and volunteering opportunities, insurance and financial services and travel visas to name a few. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Order 1978 introduces the concept of “spent” convictions. However, the legislation gives only limited protection to those who have served prison sentences of less than two and a half years and there are many exceptions. Indeed, it has been amended at least seven times since its introduction, each time adding to the list of exceptions and to those who can access criminal records.

In the first decade of the new century we also call for anti-discrimination protection for people with a criminal record. Until there is legislative employment protection for people with a conviction, they will continue to face great difficulties in finding employment. We remain frustrated by the lack of progress in reviewing the legislation which would tackle this discrimination. In 2006, we make this call again in the consultation on a Single Equality Bill, designed to harmonise and extend the anti-discrimination and equality legislation.

Safeguarding

A further barrier to finding a job arrives in 2009 with the introduction of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Regulations, designed to protect children and vulnerable adults. The Independent Safeguarding Authority is set up to deliver a proposed new vetting and barring scheme. In Northern Ireland, Access NI will undertake the work on behalf of ISA.

NIACRO is fully committed to proper protections for children and vulnerable adults, and to the highest levels of professionalism and integrity in people working with them. But we note that: “the net is being cast so wide, and its mesh is so fine, that it will trap people who have a conviction but who pose no threat to society”, and the new regime fails to consider the impact it will have on people with conflict-related convictions.

We welcome the fundamental review of the safeguarding legislation announced by the Home Secretary in 2011. We work hard with others to ensure that the clear flaws in the legislation are reflected in the responses by the DoJ and DHSSPS and are pleased to record that many of our key points are accepted by the review team. We



Advising Mid Ulster Council HR team

welcome proposals which follow the review, but in the following year we express our disappointment at the lack of progress in implementing changes – as “the current system is simply not fit for purpose”.

Yet another barrier arises with a draft Order in Council in 2009 to bring Northern Ireland into line with the Private Security Act covering the regulation of that industry. We have no argument against efforts to achieve high standards in the private security industry. But this has an instant, devastating, impact on many currently employed in the sector and the appeals mechanisms are costly. Essentially, the work carried out from 1971 to 2009, convincing employers and people with convictions that there is a place for the latter in the workplace is made significantly more difficult by the legislation. People are still feeling the impact of their convictions years after the offence. Whilst our actions help some, without a comprehensive review of the original legislation, NIACRO can only chip away at these impacts.

Off the record

In 2013 NIACRO calls for young people to be set free from carrying into adulthood a criminal record stemming from a minor conviction acquired as a child (as recommended in the 2011 Youth Justice Review). We highlight the issue at our AGM, at a Justice Series seminar, and in the media.

The lack of progress on the issue of childhood convictions leads to our award-winning "Off the Record" campaign in the following year which calls for an independent Criminal Records Filtering Review Scheme. This milestone is achieved in 2015, allowing for an independent review of information disclosed on criminal record certificates, with an automatic referral to the Independent Reviewer if the information relates to when the applicant was under 18.

As we reach our 50th year, these issues cannot be said to have been resolved, but we can draw some comfort from our 2019 employer survey (see *Working with Employers*). The survey shows that employers overall have positive attitudes towards people with convictions in Northern Ireland. We will continue to work energetically with them to increase opportunities for people with a criminal conviction in the labour market.

In early 2021, the Department of Justice launched a consultation on proposals to reform rehabilitation periods in Northern Ireland to which we respond in detail. After 43 years, it is time for change.

REFOCUSING COMMUNITY SAFETY

As the century begins, NIACRO determinedly increases its work in prisons but we maintain our many links to communities as well.

A crime prevention unit is set up in 1996. It draws on work with young people over the previous 20 years to partner with local communities on a whole range of projects and activities - diversionary activities for young people; support for developing community organisations; and the "Good Morning" projects, a telephone link with older and other vulnerable people, established in Galliagh, Colin and Ballysillan. This last project in particular is taken up with enthusiasm by other voluntary and community groups, and in January 2006, the NIO's Community Safety Unit commissions NIACRO to conduct research into the future sustainability of the projects.

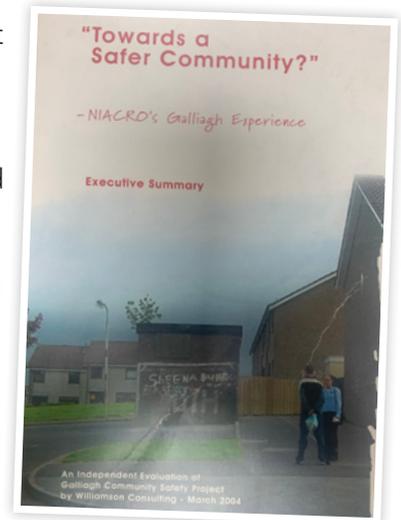
We work with key Community Safety Partnerships and are represented on many of them. Following

the merger of District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships - which we questioned - we find that links with Family Support Hubs and other local structures offer us better connection to the services needed by those who come to us for support.

NIACRO has always recognised the benefit of a restorative approach to breakdown of relationships in communities. Many of our services operate along the restorative continuum - liaison, mediation, advocacy, and working in partnership with community organisations.

The Community Re-Integration Project (CRIP) is established in 2002 to support people who have been alienated from their communities. APAC (Assisting People in Communities) takes over in 2005 with the goal of supporting individuals to retain their tenancies and help resolve difficulties which arise with their neighbours and their communities. From a single strand, it develops into a family of programmes reconfigured from time to time in response to changing needs. For example, in 2008 a staff member begins work with women in the PBNI's Inspire programme, liaising with women's centres in the community. For some years APAC works directly with Banbridge CSP. A mental health project worker joins the team in 2009, and in 2014, we open the STEM project (see *Hate crime*). APAC achieves a high rate of success in helping people to retain their tenancies - 100% in many if not most years.

A pilot project, Reset, runs from 2015 to 2017 offering intensive 16-week mentoring for people leaving prison, helping them tackle all the problems they may face - housing, money, employment, family and other relationships, addictions.



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NEW CENTURY, REFOCUSSED NIACRO

One client tells us: “I won’t be going back to prison and Reset will help me achieve that”.

Reset is followed by Aspire, again offering that intensive support in which a project worker can build real rapport with a client. Service users are aged 16 to 30 and are at risk of becoming (re) involved in paramilitary and/or criminal behaviour. Some are under PBNi supervision (Aspire Mentoring), some not so involved in the criminal justice system (Aspire Community Engagement). Working alongside community restorative justice organisations Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives, NIACRO project workers offer practical and emotional support, often liaising with public services like housing, benefits and health, which the young men often struggle to engage with. A NISRA evaluation of Aspire’s first year describes it as

“a highly worthwhile and effective programme for service users who very much value the support it provides.”

Hate crime

Hate crimes are those which are committed against a person because of their race, religious belief, sexual orientation, political opinion, gender identity or disability. Hate crimes and incidents affect many if not all of our communities, arising from prejudicial attitudes towards and ignorance of difference. Although elements of what Base2 (see below) has dealt with over the years may be categorised as “hate crime”, it isn’t until the introduction of the Criminal Justice (no2) (NI) Order in 2004 that judges may increase the sentence of people convicted of any offence, if their crime was proved to have been “aggravated by hostility” towards the victim.

Between 2009 and 2012, “Challenge Hate Crime” is one of the most innovative and extensive projects we have been involved in. It has two parts: a pilot programme “Challenge to Change” working with people in Magilligan and Hydebank, and research into hate crime in Northern Ireland and further afield. The former produces training material for use in such programmes, and the latter, a wealth of detailed information and analysis on the subject. We present key messages

from the project at an international conference in Belfast in 2012.

In 2014, STEM (Supporting Tenancies for people from Ethnic Minority backgrounds) joins the APAC family. Linking closely with statutory and community and voluntary BAME organisations, we support people who have been, or are at risk of being, victims of a hate crime. In 2016 we hold a Justice Series seminar and a workshop for 20 statutory and voluntary organisations involved in tackling this problem.

Get Real is a three-year programme starting in 2018 and covering Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland. It encourages over-18s involved in hate crime, their victims and people vulnerable to committing these actions, to acknowledge the hurt and damage caused and to move forward with greater understanding and hope. It uses restorative justice methods alongside education projects in communities and diversity training for statutory agencies and front-line workers.



In 2020, NIACRO sums up our thoughts on how hate crime can best be tackled in a detailed response to a review of hate crime legislation commissioned by the DoJ. We particularly stress the positive impact restorative justice can have on this crime. We develop this later in 2020 when we respond to a consultation on adult restorative justice, drawing on our experience with community-based programmes.

Base2

Base2 is our longest-standing project. Quietly and sensitively, its staff have intervened in often controversial and sometimes dangerous crisis situations. They support, clarify and mediate to resolve tensions in communities, often where threats (from paramilitary organisations or

communities) against individuals are alleged. Ideally, individuals can stay in their homes, or we can help them safely relocate. NIACRO gives evidence to a House of Commons Select Committee on paramilitary threats in late 2000.

We do not engage only with individual cases; increasingly over the years statutory and community organisations invite NIACRO to be part of local consultation and reconciliation initiatives where our knowledge and expertise is helpful. The NI Housing Executive makes a positive evaluation in 2005.

By 2006/7 the annual report notes that “the nature of referrals has changed over time and we continue to make the service responsive to emerging needs”; there is less focus on paramilitary activity and more on general community issues.

The CJINI publishes the report of its inspection of Base2 in March 2020. It finds that the project “is operating with integrity to deliver clear humanitarian outcomes” and remarks both that “[Base2 has saved lives](#)” and that “in a normalised society we shouldn’t need Base2 but the reality is we do.”

FUNDING

Voluntary and community organisations spend much time and effort in finding the money to carry out their mission. During NIACRO’s 50 years, public services have been in various states of reorganisation, rationalisation and review.



There has been a corresponding need for both the statutory and the voluntary and community sector to be clear about their roles. This clarity needs careful attention, however. There is an ever-present tension between the voluntary and community agencies’ desire for innovation, flexibility, and speed of reaction to changing circumstances, and the state’s desire for focus on financial accountability rather than outcomes and impacts. At times it has appeared as if the sector exists to fill gaps in statutory provision, and at less cost. However, our more recent experience is of engagement in co-design and an integrated model of delivery that supports costs better, though not wholly. Interestingly the experience of working through the Covid 19 pandemic has strengthened relationships with funders, demonstrating the flexibility and can-do attitude of the sector.

Roller-coaster funding

The scale of NIACRO’s operations has definitely increased over the 50 years - our first estimate in the early 70s was that “we need an income of £5,000 annually to fulfil our present commitments”. Fast forward to 1986, when annual spending hits the million-pound mark for the first time. In the following decade, NIACRO welcomes “a substantial increase in support from the NIO”. But it’s not a smooth upward trajectory; a couple of years later, the Director spells out the new realities: “A larger proportion of funds are coming from short-term project funding than from ongoing grant in aid” which results in a dramatic drop in staff numbers, of almost 25% in 1998/99. The annual report for 2002/3 refers to the resilience of an organisation “constantly battered by the vagaries of funding regimes which increase in complexity and demand, and place ever greater obstacles in our path”. There is further downsizing of staff and services.

There is, however, increasing access to EU funding, available since 1989, and especially in successive PEACE programmes and the European Social Fund. Throughout the earlier years of the century we benefit significantly from both these sources, as an individual organisation and in partnership with other voluntary and statutory agencies.

A shock to the system

But there is a seismic shift in March 2015 when we are told that the ESF will not fund our employment-led resettlement services. Jobtrack, which has led this specialist field for almost 20 years, comes to an abrupt halt. Ironically, in the same month an evaluation carried out by NISRA shows that the one-year reoffending rate for those who completed the project was 20%, compared to 32% of those in the matched sample, "a statistically significant difference" according to NISRA.

The Department of Justice and its agencies also reduce their funding - it all adds up to a drop of 33% of our income in one year. Chief Executive Olwen Lyner describes it as "a devastating blow". The annual report describes the "organisational and personal loss as many of our talented and committed colleagues [over a third of the staff team] left us". Given that statutory funding has been reducing over many years, Olwen notes that "we are now at a stage where a lack of resources is preventing us from delivering much needed services to reduce crime and its impact".

Two years later, Olwen returns to the topic to reflect on how NIACRO has weathered the storm. She acknowledges: the tangible support from other agencies, the media and the public; the support and guidance of the Executive Committee; and the "skills and resilience of the staff team who were up for every challenge posed to them". Characteristically, she ends her analysis with positive key ambitions to build on that support: engagement with all those who had rallied behind NIACRO; new volunteering opportunities; working closely with other organisations who can offer employment and training.

"Our annual turnover matters less than the influence and impact our work can have."

We work hard to replace key aspects of our service and manage to do so within the financial year with ACCESS (see *Adult Employability*) and Reset (see *Refocusing Community Safety*). In 2017 we tender for and secure funding from the Tackling Paramilitarism Task Force for the Aspire programme (see *Refocusing Community Safety*).



In 2019 we tender successfully for the NIPS Visitor Centre services which had been lost to the private sector in 2015.

We also tender for work in the area of early intervention, keen to contribute to the "Delivering Social Change" framework funded by the NI Executive and Atlantic Philanthropies. One example is our involvement from 2016 in EISS, the Early Intervention Support Service for families with children aged 11 to 18 years (see *Children and Young People*). It's part of a larger programme commissioned by the Public Health Agency and delivered by voluntary agencies working in partnership with each of the Health and Social Care Trusts. NIACRO leads EISS in the Southern and Belfast areas.

Funders

In spite of recurrent financial anxieties, we acknowledge that a huge range of funders has believed in our work over the years. We have built strong and mutually respectful working relationships with funders and the statutory agencies who fund our programmes. They are listed in each annual report, and cover Government Departments and agencies, charitable Trusts and Foundations, the European Union and more. We are grateful for that support and pleased that we have been successful in the developing rigour of tendering processes.



EISS Portadown

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OLWEN LYNER REFLECTS ON THE STORY OF NIACRO



NIACRO's story is of all the people – staff, volunteers and Executive Committee and those who we support – who have always worked with the values of the organisation in their hearts.

At this 50-year point, it's a privilege to lead an organisation that reflects on and learns from the past and plans for the future, but lives and works each day making an important contribution to changing policy and changing lives. This survey of our 50 years has told the story of a voluntary organisation working in a contentious, demanding but very rewarding field. We know we have made a difference to the lives of thousands of individuals of all ages and life experiences; contributed to building strong and positive community life in many parts of Northern Ireland; and played our part in shaping public policy.

We haven't succeeded in everything we've tried to do and there have been times when we've felt under siege, but all the time we have been building up experience and learning how to do our work better. This has included seeing when it's right to revisit what we are doing and change tack if that makes it more likely we'll achieve our goals. Reviewing the 50 years points out not only how much NIACRO has grown but also how flexible the organisation has been in adapting to the needs and circumstances of people with convictions, their families and their communities.

Over 50 years the landscape has changed and so have we.

That landscape now includes the Probation Board for NI; the Youth Justice Agency; the Criminal Justice Inspection; the Prisoner Ombudsman; the NI Human Rights Commission; the Commission for Children and Young People; the Police Ombudsman. All of these key agencies have made a contribution to the operation of criminal justice and the development of its policies and practices to provide a more humane and person-centred response to people who have offended.

But more can be done. We in NIACRO need to be able to provide services that are effective

and necessary and at the same time evidence the concerns that emerge from our work. Keen to improve our practice, we routinely evaluate our work and have invested in a bespoke data capture process to demonstrate what and how much we do and its impact. We have also received external accreditation from:

- liP - first gain status in 2001 and Gold standard in 2019.
- Investing in Volunteering accreditation in 2009 and subsequent renewals since.
- Investing in Children member in 2018 and subsequent renewals since.
- Cyber Plus Essentials in 2019 and subsequent renewals since.

Like every organisation, in March 2020 NIACRO had speedily to adjust to the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic. We immediately set up a Helpline for service users, especially families unable to visit relatives in prison. Staff rapidly learned how best to manage working from home and we used new technology to keep in touch with service users.

So our job in the immediate future is to deliver the 2018-23 corporate plan, to sustain and grow responsibly, to continue to develop the skills of our staff team, and to have a clear and influential public voice on criminal justice matters.

After that - well, there'll be another corporate plan, and it like previous plans will be drawn up and carried out with help from our service users, staff, Executive Committee, partners and stakeholders. All of whom, whatever their perspective, share the fundamental belief of the 1971 founders of NIACRO - that the community as well as the state must involve itself in the care of offenders, ex-offenders, potential offenders and victims, along with their families and neighbours.



NIACRO is grateful for all the funding it has received over the years from both public and private organisations.

The logos here represent current funding partners and/or streams.



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