

The niacro logo consists of a red circle with the word "niacro" written in white lowercase letters inside it. This circle is set within a white rounded rectangular shape that is part of a larger white vertical bar on the left side of the page.

niacro

Issue **38**
AUTUMN 2016

Early Intervention Support Service

Expanding the range of services supporting children and families.

A close-up photograph of a young child with brown hair, smiling broadly and showing their teeth. The child is wearing a red jacket and a green beanie. The background is blurred, showing green foliage and a yellow and red object.

niacro news



Early Intervention

We're helping children and families find stability through expert support and encouragement.



Programme for Government

The highest level strategic document of the Executive; what's in it for criminal justice?



STEM

We hear from a woman who was under threat in her own home because of her ethnicity.

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

Welcome to the latest edition of NIACRO News!

NIACRO has addressed the concerns, the needs and the rights of children and young people since very early in its existence.

Not just in direct services, but in campaigning for public services to be geared to support children who are for any reason struggling – in their families, in their communities, at school and college.

In the context of criminal justice, we will continue to press for the age of criminal responsibility to be raised and work to support all moves to divert children from the criminal justice system.

In this issue of NIACRO News (page 3) we highlight our newest service, EISS, engaging with families where no statutory intervention has yet been called for, but where a bit of professional but informal help, advice, support, and information can just make the difference.

As well as the ongoing programmes like Caps and our transport service to prisons, we “join up” our work for young people in other areas – currently we have pointed out in our response to the draft Programme for Government (page 7) ways in which support for children and young people right across public services will ultimately reduce crime overall; we organised a Justice Series seminar focusing directly on ways of improving youth justice; 25 children enjoyed our STEM project weekend in Corrymeela.

The Executive claims that the Programme for Government is the highest level strategic document of the Executive so its first draft clearly needs careful study.

While we welcome the new emphasis on measuring the outcomes of policy, our detailed response has filleted the document not only to check that proper attention has been paid to the key criminal justice issues (it hasn't) but that those issues have been linked to the broader social and economic priorities which impact on our service users (they haven't).

But we will keep campaigning and contributing to the development of policy through this sort of analysis based on the knowledge and experience we gain from our work.

**Thanks for reading,
NIACRO**



Feedback

If you have any feedback on any aspect of NIACRO News or would like to write an article please contact our Public Affairs and Communications Team by emailing:

 pact@niacro.co.uk



EARLY INTERVENTION

“Early intervention” is one of those phrases we use almost without thinking, and often without clarifying what exactly we mean.

In the context of NIACRO’s work, we’re talking about helping children and their carers find stability and ways to deal with the issues - some common to many if not most families, some very difficult and painful - which could lead to anti-social behaviour and involvement with the criminal justice system.

It can be helpful from the youngest age-group right through adolescence and young adulthood. It takes time and patience and imagination and respect. And it is, of course, based on the value of getting into the potentially damaging situation as soon as possible but with as light a touch as possible, keeping to the fore that families are experts in their own lives.

NIACRO has worked with young people since the earliest days - volunteers were supporting young people on “Intermediate Treatment” (diversionary, mostly activity-based) schemes in 1976 - 40 years ago. A range of drop-in centres, work preparation programmes, activities and other diversionary projects in the community followed. For the young people who have a variety of care experiences, we established the Independent Representation and Independent Visitor programmes.

A real step forward came in 2004 with the Caps early intervention programme for 8- 13 year olds at risk of offending, focussing on relationships and behaviours **within the family** and the huge impact this has on children and young people.

EISS

The most recent addition to our family of projects supporting the ideas of early intervention is our involvement in EISS, the Early Intervention Support Service for families with children aged 11 to 18 years. It’s part of a larger programme, rooted in the Executive’s “Delivering Social Change” framework, commissioned by the Public Health Agency and delivered by voluntary agencies working in partnership with relevant statutory authorities in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas across Northern Ireland. NIACRO leads EISS in the Southern and Belfast areas.

The whole point of EISS is that “getting in as soon as possible” angle - before the statutory services (need to) come on the scene at all. The problems that families face may be to do with family relationships, emotional upheavals, education issues, behaviour - where a child or young person understandably reacts badly to painful, frightening, or

bewildering situations around them. To quote the EISS official leaflet, “Preventing issues getting worse is better than dealing with them later”.

NIACRO is committed to the principles which underpin EISS. In our response to a recent Department of Health/Department of Justice consultation on health care within criminal justice, we said that “children who have not offended should not come to the attention of criminal justice agencies but rather should be supported by community-based early intervention projects... The emphasis on this early identification and diversion of young people and children should sit with both Education and Health...as well as with Justice.” And in our response to the Department of Education’s consultation on improving pupil attendance, we note the “long term impacts of educational disengagement on both children and their families, including increased risk of offending” and make recommendations about how best to tackle this particular element of support for families and children.

To bring the EISS story right down to the day-by-day realities, we asked one of our EISS workers, Kris, to describe a typical day in her working life.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...KRIS

AN EISS PROJECT WORKER IN BELFAST



9.15am – First visit of the day is with a new family referred to the EISS service requesting support with their six-year-old son who is being aggressive and non-compliant to his mother. There are concerns that if this is not contained he will begin to behave like this at school and within the community.

On arrival the mum is very welcoming and open to any support. I explain the project in detail and we complete and sign all the paper work. We complete an assessment which shows that mum has limited supports and her mood is low. Given this it's important to try and empower her to manage her son's behaviour appropriately. During this session I use a range of approaches to engage mum and offer reassurance taking the approach that families are the experts in their own lives. I completed a genogram* to explore potential family/friends for support and agree to refer mum to the Bridge of Hope* for alternative therapies. We agree a date and time for a visit the following week where we will begin to explore ways of improving communication and managing behaviour.

11.00am – arrive at second family of the day. Meet with my colleague Adam who takes the child, who is nine, out for individual session. I then focus on the family. Work has been progressing well and both parents are keen to enhance their awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorder and learn more about the diagnostic process as their son is awaiting assessment. Family upset due to the length of time they may have to wait. I agree to contact the community paediatrics service to check where he is on the waiting list. This has been a very stressful time for the family; they have five boys and are struggling to come to terms with a potential diagnosis. My work has been trying to help them look at what this may mean for them and their son, and specific ASD services. For me it is crucial to point out to the family the strengths they own as a family as at times they can be very negative about themselves.

Containment* has been a feature of the sessions and trying to help mum and dad to look at how they communicate with their son and adapting some of this to make this work for them. Session also encourages mum and dad to look at "consequential thinking"* and ensuring that they use sanctions when behaviour is not appropriate and the importance of following through. Family agree they tend not to do this with their son as see him as "different" but after exploration they agree this could make things worse. They will work together this week and see how the child responds to boundaries and manage behaviours in as controlled a manner as possible. We set the date and time for next week's session.

12.30pm

- Took time in the car (not while driving, of course!!) to make a call to local community organisation to make referral for a mum to avail of alternative therapies.
- Made a call to my colleague Adam to update on co-working case and check how the individual session went with the child.
- Contacted community paediatrics – confirmed child on the list but was routine and would be 18 months approximately.
- Spoke to family and explained the waiting list for ASD assessment, they were pretty resigned to the situation.

1.00pm - Coffee and reflect on the morning visits.

1.30pm - Session with a 14-year-old boy in the community. He has disaffected from education [ie is not going to school] and the relationship with his father is at breaking point. Today we explore how he would like things to be with his dad. What would he like the relationship to look like? As a result he has agreed to complete some joint work with his dad with a view to building on the relationship. I use BRIEF solution focus techniques* and also motivational interviewing* to try and encourage and motivate the young person to explore other possibilities.

3.00pm - Drop young person home and speak to dad about his feelings about exploring communication and relationships. He is also keen to do this so session date and time arranged for following week.

3.30pm - Arrive at the last visit for today. This again is a joint visit with my colleague given the complexities of the case and he is working one to one with the 14-year-old. The family composition is mum (learning disability) and two sons age 14 and 9 (severe learning disability).

This is a family with complex needs and I have to adapt my approach when communicating with them. Mum requires support trying to communicate with her 14-year-old as she feels he is disrespectful to her and this results in a lot of shouting in the home which then impacts on the younger child. The 14-year-old has also been bullied within

the local community, resulting in social isolation. Today's session plan is to help mum to tell her son how he makes her feel and vice versa. This needs to be managed appropriately to ensure everyone is heard in a controlled and safe manner. Having some training in systemic family practice*, I use these skills in this session and make a plan for the family for the coming week. Mum agrees I can speak with the disability social worker involved with the family.

4.30pm - Contact the disability social worker and have a conversation re the above family to keep her informed of the work I am completing. I also ask for some support re potential services that she may be aware of that mum could attend. As she is not aware of any, I make contact with the local Hub area* to seek some advice. There are some suggestions that I will discuss with mum at the next session.

Complete a referral to the strengthening families programme* for another family on the project.

5.10pm - All visits completed for now. I allow myself some time to reflect on the sessions before heading home to my own family and have my tea! I complete the notes for the day; check my diary to ensure I have the resources I need for the following day.

7.00/ 8.30pm - Meet with family group conference co-coordinator to explore plan for a family. The end of another busy day on EISS.

** Kris refers to a range of, on the one hand, definitions of the behaviours that can cause problems, like 'consequential thinking' and on the other, therapeutic methods and agencies that she has at her disposal and can use to help children and families, like 'motivational interviewing'. Without explaining each one in detail, the point is that there are tested ways of tackling the problems EISS families face, and tailoring them to the particular family.*

Assembly Update

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



Steve Case addressing the Justice Seminar

Positive Youth Justice

A recent seminar in the Justice Series programme was on Positive Youth Justice. It was sponsored by Alastair Ross MLA, who stressed the importance of early intervention, diversion and restorative justice in breaking the cycle: "We have an opportunity to look at youth justice differently".

The guest speaker at the seminar was Professor Stephen Case of Loughborough University. Professor Case specialises in youth justice issues, particularly the idea of "children first, offenders second" positive approaches which challenge the more negative, punitive views which are still too prevalent in society and in legislation.

"Youth justice needs to be child focused and child friendly", he said. "We have to differentiate between children and adults." Importantly - and this is well reflected in some of our current projects - Professor Case stressed that the relationships between child, family and practitioners is key to success.



Alastair Ross MLA

Following the Stormont seminar, we were glad to welcome a wide range of youth justice practitioners to Amelia House for a workshop with Professor Case.

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT



Northern Ireland
Executive

www.northernireland.gov.uk

The Programme for Government 2016 – 2021 is, we are told, “the highest level strategic document of the Executive”. A draft framework PfG went out to consultation in the summer (a new draft will be published in the autumn, to be consulted on again, with a view to a final Programme being adopted in the New Year).

NIACRO’s response is intentionally very concrete, specific and detailed. In fact, it forms a handy summary of all our key policy priorities (read in conjunction with our Manifesto <http://www.niacro.co.uk/manifesto-2016> published before the last Assembly election in May, designed to inform the PfG and summarised in NIACRO News 37).

Like all our consultation responses, you can find the full document on our website, www.niacro.co.uk

NIACRO welcomed the fact that the PfG is based on the Outcomes Based Accountability model (OBA), an opportunity for creating new forms of social contract between the Executive and the people of Northern Ireland. The commitment to openness and transparency with the public able to be in a position to judge performance and progress is significant.

WORKING TOGETHER

The commitment in the Introduction to everyone working together is an important recognition that the delivery of outcomes will often be undertaken at the ‘front line’, at a distance from government departments, by the community and voluntary sector as well as the private sector. To make this work, NIACRO believes we need a Social Value Act, such as exists in England and Wales, to ensure “high quality public services”. (The Social Value Act describes itself as “An Act to require public authorities to have regard to economic, social and environmental well-being in



*Justice Minister Claire Sugden,
Olwen Lyner (NIACRO) and
Charlie Mack (Extern)*

Meeting with Justice Minister

On Wednesday 24 August Olwen Lyner, NIACRO and Charlie Mack, CEO at Extern, jointly welcomed Justice Minister Claire Sugden to Amelia House.

The meeting was essentially an opportunity to meet and introduce the two organisations who increasingly are working jointly to influence justice funding streams to support desistance and reduce offending.

In the conversation we explained how criminal justice concerns were central to both organisations and restated a commitment to work collaboratively.

The Minister spoke of her belief in the value and contribution of the community and voluntary sector, confirming that work in her local constituency had regularly highlighted the value that it brings.

connection with public services contracts".) In the NIACRO Manifesto we highlighted, in the context of reduced resources, the risk that bureaucratic procurement processes will stifle innovation and devalue the significance of experience and community connectivity.

An over-emphasis on initial low costs offered by loss-leading private companies does not take account of the additional value voluntary and community organisations with more expertise in delivering services may deliver, but with fewer resources to invest in often complex procurement exercises.

NIACRO's history of evidence gathering

The indicators of what change is expected are important but equally so is the data that such a framework requires if it is to be robustly evidenced, and which is not in place at present. We believe that building the data capture and analysis process will not be cost neutral, if we are not merely to use or bend currently available data which has limited applicability or indeed is only a rough measure of an indicator.

The OBA framework already has traction in Northern Ireland, including in services with which NIACRO is involved. For example:

(i) Children's services

The Early Intervention Prevention of Offending Programme commissioned by the Health & Social Care Board (of which NIACRO is one provider) has been evidencing its impact against such a framework since 2008. NIACRO is delivering elements of the Early Intervention Support Service and gathering data and evidencing outcomes within an OBA framework.

(ii) Adult services

NIACRO's Jobtrack programme which ran from 1994 to 2015 tested the premise that access to and engagement with training and employment reduce the likelihood of reoffending. In 2015, the Department of Justice's Data Lab compared a group of participants who completed Jobtrack, 2010-11, with a matched control group of people who did not. The one year reoffending rate for those who completed Jobtrack was 20%, compared to 32% of those in the matched sample of similar offenders. The Department of Justice statisticians concluded this was a "statistically significant difference". The Reset programme also has

robust data collection processes. Our evidence of gathering and reporting against data within an outcomes based approach indicates that collection, collation and reporting of data requires significant resource and planning, with experienced leadership to ensure that the right data is captured and appropriately analysed. Experience also tells that it requires considerable time; the reoffending rates, for example, for Jobtrack, were collected over a period of four years.



The PfG identifies 14 Outcomes supported by 42 Indicators against which measures have been selected to enable tracking against progress.

Primary indicators in the PfG for NIACRO

The PfG indicators that are of particular relevance to NIACRO are:

- Reduce crime (1).
- Increase the effectiveness of the justice system (38).
- Reduce reoffending (39).

Given the complex and varied needs of people who have been in contact with the justice system (or are at risk of doing so), and the associated need for integrated approaches, NIACRO's interests extend beyond these three indicators of particular relevance to, for example: Improve support for looked after children (10); Improve educational outcomes (11); and Reduce educational inequality (12).

Indicator 1. Reduce crime.

Lead measure: Prevalence rate - number of victims of any crime

The measure (the number of victims of any crime) will not of itself demonstrate reduced crime. However, the outcomes which this measure supports: "A more equal society; a shared society that respects diversity; and a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest" are equally applicable to the Indicator "Reduce Reoffending", but are not referenced there.

Something that would certainly help to reduce crime would be to stop criminalising children. We have therefore recommended:

- Raising the age of criminal responsibility.
- Investing in early intervention.
- Diverting minor youth offending out of the criminal justice system.
- Supporting families and children affected by imprisonment.
- Introducing a statutory responsibility for children with a parent in prison.
- Assessing the impact of imprisonment on children at pre-sentence report stage.

Alongside these initiatives, if the DOJ's Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending is to be delivered successfully, it will be important that indicator 39 (Reduce Reoffending, below) is systematically linked to work under the following indicators: Improve support for looked after children (10); Improve educational outcomes (11); Reduce educational inequality (12); Improve child development (15); Reduce economic inactivity (17); Reduce poverty (19); Reduce underemployment (33).

Indicator 38: Increase the effectiveness of the justice system.

Lead Measure: Proportion of criminal cases processed within guideline time-limits

This is the weakest of the justice indicators. Whilst focused on addressing public confidence in the system, it has taken as its measure "statutory time limits". NIACRO and others have accepted the introduction of the model as proposed; however the time limits are not challenging and as such will not impact significantly on the effectiveness of the system.

We believe that it is also necessary to:

- Pursue alternatives to prosecution.
- Invest in sustainable diversion and cost-effective alternatives.
- End the imprisonment of fine defaulters.
- Commit to strategic partnership [with the Third Sector] to reduce offending.
- Implement genuine cross-departmental and cross-sector working.

Indicator 39: Reduce re-offending.

Lead measure: Reoffending rate

This indicator appears to be linked with three of the 14 Outcomes (safer communities; giving children and young people the best start and delivering high quality public services). However, like Indicator 1, Reduce crime, it also impacts, in the same way as reducing crime, on additional Outcomes: A more equal society; A shared society that respects diversity; and A place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest. The development of a methodology to reduce reoffending rates is welcome but not entirely robust. In other jurisdictions evidence of desistance is required over a two year period in order to build public confidence. NIACRO's Manifesto (2016) identified what we believe would impact upon reoffending rates:

- Remove barriers to effective resettlement.
- Promote equality of access to further education.
- Educate employers about fair and safe recruitment.
- Ensure access to 'Through-The-Gate' support services.

This requires the justice-related indicator of reducing reoffending to be linked to the following PfG indicators: Quality of the healthcare experience (5); Improve mental health (6); Improve the supply of suitable housing (8); Improve the skills profile of the population (14); Improve the proportion of people in work (16); Reduce economic inactivity (17); Reduce poverty (19); Increase respect for each other (26); Increase the confidence and capacity of people and communities (28); Increase shared space (31); Increase economic opportunities for our most deprived communities (32); Reduce unemployment (33); Increase reconciliation (35).

ALL I WANT IS TO MAKE A GOOD LIFE FOR MY FAMILY

The STEM project is a strand of the APAC (Assisting People and Communities) programme; it supports people who are being intimidated in the community because of their ethnic background. This is the story of one of the people NIACRO has helped through STEM.

Rachael's story.....

"My name is Rachael. I am a single mum to my two wonderful children. My daughter is 13 years old and my son is 8 years old. I have lived in Northern Ireland for eleven years and all I want is to work hard and make a good life for my family.

In 2010, I moved into a rented house off the Ravenhill Road in Belfast. I got my children settled into a local primary school and started to work towards qualifications to get a job in the care sector. I secured part time employment in a care home and sorted childcare to work around my shifts.

The trouble started at my home when we had our windows broken. They broke my kitchen window and back door. I did not feel safe in my house and worried about my children and the racist names some locals were calling us. I was frightened for the lives of my family.

Meeting with STEM

My Housing Officer made a referral to NIACRO, to the STEM project. A man and woman came out to visit me and explained how they could support me. They helped me talk to my Housing Officer and I made the decision I could not remain in my home. I was placed on the waiting list for social housing.

In April 2015 I got a new support worker from STEM. I was struggling to understand letters I received from NIHE Housing Benefit which said I owed almost £4000. This was very distressing but no matter how hard I tried to sort it, Housing Benefit just kept sending letters. My support worker Jay made numerous phone calls and over the following weeks corresponded with Housing Benefit on my behalf. Eventually we met with the Housing Benefits manager who acknowledged this was an error on their part. I was so relieved with the outcome and know I could not have done this on my own.

The incidents at my home persisted and got worse. Things got so bad we all slept in one bed as we were afraid of further attacks on our house. Jay spoke with my Housing Officer to get me as many points as possible. I was delighted to receive an offer of alternative accommodation in June 2015.

I love my support worker. She is always there for me and my children. She is one in a million. I wish I could see her every minute in my life



We spoke to a local community organisation who felt the proposed area was fairly safe and I prepared to move house.

My support worker contacted a local church and some volunteers came with a van to help me move. We sorted the gas, electricity and decorating and over the following weeks we started to settle in our new home.

In late 2015 I had run into considerable rent arrears as I was not getting enough shifts at work to cover rent and bills etc. I was worried I would lose my home. Jay spoke up for me in a meeting at my work and my employer paid me almost £500 which was outstanding and agreed to ensure I would work my 24 hours per week to enable me to meet my outgoings.

New directions, new hope

With the help of my support worker I successfully applied for a new job in a care home much closer to my house. I have been employed there on a permanent contract for almost six months. My income is steady and I have cleared all my arrears.

APAC

Assisting People and Communities

I have recently applied for citizenship and can now see a long and happy future here for me and my children. My daughter has aspirations to study law at university so she can help people like us.

My son is happy playing football! They both have bright futures ahead and we all have so much to give. I'm so glad of all the help STEM has given me and my children.



STEM at Corrymeela

Forty-three STEM service users from 10 families including 25 children – and including Rachael – spent a weekend at Corrymeela in the summer. People from very different backgrounds – Kuwait Bidoun, Liberian, Polish, Somalian, Sudanese – all of whom had experienced some form of hate violence, enjoyed formal and informal activities including a presentation on the history and culture of Northern Ireland, information on some of the services

potentially available to them, and growing awareness of each other's cultures. They reported that they enjoyed the peace and quiet of Corrymeela, and a walk into Ballycastle, as a welcome contrast to their day-to-day environments which are often very pressurised. We've had two follow-up trips – a tour of Belfast and a visit to Stormont – and two training days on welfare and housing – and people are still talking about the Corrymeela weekend and hoping perhaps to go back again.

Employment and Training News

ACCESS was a six-month programme, running from November 2015 to April 2016 and commissioned by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland to help offenders take up employment and training opportunities within mainstream provision in the community.

It was designed to complement the work of Probation Officers in helping people to desist from offending and resettle into the community. ACCESS targeted medium and high risk adult offenders subject to PBNi supervised community sentences and those who were released from prison subject to post-custody supervision.



Hugh Hamill PBNi at the ACCESS evaluation event

NIACRO has long been in the business of increasing employability progression and encouraging people with convictions to look to training and employment as key factors in staying out of the criminal justice system. We have also recognised just what a challenge this often is; there are many barriers to employment for this group of people, not least discrimination – or at least, careless stereotyping – by some employers and training providers, and the chaotic and disproportionate requirements around disclosure, vetting and safeguarding.

We carried out an assessment of the project in May and this is a summary of our analysis.

Summary of key findings

The aspects of ACCESS which service users particularly benefited from (from the perspective of ACCESS and Probation staff) were:

- **'Quick wins'** (CV writing, disclosure statements, job searches etc.); tangible, practical benefits that boost confidence and help to generate and maintain momentum.
- **Disclosure** advice, highlighting gaps and inaccuracies in service users' assumed knowledge.
- Support for **completing job applications**; particularly for the most 'job ready'.
- **Advocacy**, for accessing employment and for accessing further education.
- **Realistic assessments of employers' requirements** and of individuals' employment prospects.
- An enhanced (and more realistic) **understanding of the employment market** and the process of (re)entering employment.
- **Signposting** for service users (who benefited from NIACRO staff's pre-existing relationships with a wide range of agencies).
- Probation staff found the programme particularly beneficial for particularly **high risk clients**.

Making it even better

We came up with a series of practical, do-able recommendations that would improve the process piloted in ACCESS still further and will work to include this in any further funding applications we can make.

Further Education

With regards to one of these recommendations: NIACRO held a very successful information workshop in June and we were very encouraged that every FE College in Northern Ireland was represented. The workshop explored the two main areas of concern: dealing with the management of disclosure of convictions from applicants fairly and consistently, and managing associated risks to the Colleges (including staff and other students).

We recognise that standardising practices across the Colleges will take time. However, PBNI are introducing a Safeguarding Working Group towards this end. NIACRO is keen to continue to input into this process. Without clear and consistent guidance, Colleges' intake procedures may continue to undermine efforts to promote fair and social inclusion and wider participation.

Employers

Working directly with employers, we have found a real confusion and search for clarity on the legal requirements around recruiting people with convictions. To respond to this need, our Disclosure Advice Hub offers two services.

The Hub is not only designed to guide job applicants through the issue of disclosing a criminal record, it also deals with **enquiries from individual employers** on good practice in fair recruitment.

It offers **training to organisations and businesses on fair recruitment**. The objective of this three-hour training session is to give employers an opportunity to consider the benefits of having fair recruitment practices in relation to people who have criminal records.



Italian Visitors

In May we hosted a group of visitors from Northern Italy as part of an ERASMUS+ project.

The visitors travelled from the Emilia Romagna and Piedmont regions of Northern Italy and were from the statutory and NGO sectors, working on issues of social inclusion. Together we went to the Laganside Courts, Hydebank, the Probation Board offices, Belfast City Hall, Community Service in Action at Crossgar, and met with colleagues from PSNI and Housing Rights. There was also time to fit in some tourism with a sightseeing tour of Belfast and a visit to Crumlin Road Gaol.

We also organised a Market Stall event in Amelia House to introduce all our projects. The group said they were very impressed by the range of work we undertake, and especially by our strong partnerships with funders and stakeholders.

STOP PRESS: NIACRO has recently been awarded a new ACCESS Service Level Agreement for a six-month period from October 2016 to March 2017.



GUEST COLUMN

Working with Women within the Justice system – a personal account

Working for the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), I have been fortunate to have worked on some extremely interesting projects including community development in the North Antrim area, working with those involved in drug use in Liverpool and working with those involved in car crime in Belfast in the 1990's.

In all my roles, I have appreciated the importance of working in partnership with the community, and the importance of having sufficient, appropriate and easily accessible services available in local areas to meet people's needs.

In 2004, I took on a role as manager of the Probation Unit in what was then called Hydebank Young Offenders Centre and Prison. At this time, arrangements were ongoing to transfer the women from Mourne House, HMP Maghaberry, to HMP Hydebank Wood. Prior to then, my understanding of working with women who offend was limited – women only make up

approximately 9% of PBNI caseload and much of my experience to date was working with young male offenders. Much of the literature and certainly the focus of assessment and practice was based on male offending. Little consideration if any was focused on the specific needs of women who offend. My experience in Hydebank was to change that.

I recall going to Mourne House and meeting with the 20 women, listening to their concerns and fears in moving to what they hoped would be a better regime. I recall meeting with women in Hydebank and quickly understanding the impact of poor mental health, the experience of trauma, physical and sexual violence, poverty and family relationships on the lives of women who ended up in custody. I listened to their stories of missing their children and the pain of separation as women tried to manage their families and home lives from the telephone on the landings.

I was struck as to how they continued to try to manage their households and children from prison, trying to deal with family problems whilst living within a prison environment. Women also spoke of how difficult life in custody was – coming to terms with the rules and regulations, living in such a close environment with other women and not knowing what the future held.

Women spoke of the support they received from some prison staff and whilst they appreciated the individual efforts that were made, they also spoke of how difficult it was to live in a prison regime designed for men. It was even more difficult for some women to return to the community – especially when dealing with ongoing mental health problems and addictions. It was no surprise that a small number of women returned to prison again and again, life being too difficult to manage in the community.



Following the women’s move to Hydebank in 2004, the publication of the Human Rights Commission report (2005) and increased media attention, the then Northern Ireland Office were keen to review the management of women in custody. In 2006, an NIO-organised conference brought together policy makers, academics, practitioners and representatives from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, all providing input as to how best to work with women who offend. This conference provided a turning point in terms of PBNI practice and direction for working with women who offend. It became clear to many attending the conference that the focus needed to be placed on supporting women in the community and ensuring that services met the needs of women.

Women’s voices have shaped the development of the INSPIRE model. Women subject to Court Orders have shared their experiences and views of services. The name INSPIRE came from women themselves reflecting their wish to have services in place which would inspire change.

When establishing a PBNI specialist project for women subject to Court Orders, I met with representatives from the voluntary and community sector. I was particularly struck with the knowledge and experience of the Women’s Support Network (WSN) and the work of the women’s centres throughout Northern Ireland. I was also aware of the excellent specialist programmes NIACRO delivered to women in Hydebank and in the community. With the support of NIACRO, WSN and the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the INSPIRE Model was established. It brought together statutory, voluntary and community agencies in the planning, review and delivery of services to women in custody and the community. This model allowed for the planning and securing of resources from various trusts including Lankelly Chase Foundation, the Pilgrim Trust and Lloyds TSB.

Such resources allowed us to carry out many exciting initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of women offenders, delivered by, among others, NIACRO, the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre, WSN and women’s centres, the Prison Arts Foundation, and Quakers. The projects and programmes were aimed both at people working with women, and at the women themselves, increasing self-esteem, opening up new experiences and offering support in returning to the workforce.

Central to the success of INSPIRE are the women themselves. Their voices and stories have defined INSPIRE – they have inspired the women and others to bring about change and continue to do so.

Over the past years, the public, voluntary and community sectors have had to make efficiency savings. Consequently, the INSPIRE model was impacted when different elements of the programme had to be reduced. However, we have weathered the storm and I am delighted to say that today the INSPIRE model continues to offer a gender informed service to women within the justice system throughout NI.

A STRATEGY FOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE

As well as replying in detail to the draft Programme for Government, we continue to make responses to all relevant consultations. Here are three recent consultation responses.

We acknowledge and appreciate the consultation approach that the review of Access to Justice has taken so far. NIACRO has previously provided responses to many of the consultations which have informed the strategy to date, including the first Access to Justice Report in December 2011 and the most recent consultation on the Access to Justice Review (2) in January 2015. We recognise that many of our comments have received due consideration and our proposals have been incorporated into several of this report's recommendations, with more than 30 direct or indirect references to NIACRO throughout it. This commitment to stakeholder engagement and listening to the experiences of those in contact with the criminal justice system is both reassuring and encouraging. In this response, we have commented on some specific findings and recommendations in the report. One general concern, however, is that the report's recommendations are not time bound. Without a clear action plan and a target timescale (specifically, a timescale to redirect resources), there is a risk that the recommendations may not be implemented. We therefore recommend that the recommendations receive realistic and appropriate timescales to ensure progress.



IMPROVING HEALTH WITHIN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

This Department of Health consultation and action plan, produced jointly with the Department of Justice, addresses a topic that has a huge impact on our service users.

In general terms, we make a point that we often have to raise in responding to consultations – action plans are not meaningful if there is no timetable for their implementation. Our comments on seven strategic priority areas are:

Continuity of care: people in prison have a much higher rate of ill health, especially mental health problems, and need to receive the necessary care and medication before, during and after leaving custody. The consultation only aspires to match standards of mental health care with those of the community but because of this much higher level of demand there has to be an extra effort on this.

Workforce development: we stress the need to incorporate the views and experience of people who are or have been in the criminal justice system in training those who work in the system, for example engaging with NIACRO's adult user forum.

Diversion of vulnerable individuals: welcoming the commitment to working across departments, we recommend adding the Department of Education to the debate so that the role of the education system in diverting young people from offending behaviour is recognised. The Department of Health is responsible for supporting young people in care, who are so over-represented in the criminal justice system. The specific needs of children of people in prison, who also have an increased risk of offending behaviour, must also be recognised.

Health promotion and ill health prevention: while agreeing with the emphasis on mental health issues, we recommend that health promotion should also include education on health lifestyle choices.

Social care: it has long been obvious that health and social care should be better integrated and we welcome the inclusion of social care as a strategic area. But the action plan needs to be more ambitious and more concrete.

Accommodation: We are pleased that the strategy and action plan recognise the link between accommodation, healthcare and reoffending and recommend an explicit commitment to supporting appropriate housing for people in the criminal justice system.

STRATEGY FOR CULTURE AND ARTS

We welcome the recognition by the former Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure of culture and the arts as a pathway to equality and social inclusion; our service users, both adults and children, have benefitted from involvement in the arts.

Our experience shows that the arts, in a variety of formats, can promote equality, self-esteem and a sense of community integration in people who have previously offended.

In particular, we have found that the arts can play an important role in encouraging and enabling women who have offended to reintegrate and feel part of a community that they previously thought was for other people, people who they felt were perceived to be "better". Participation in the arts also helps these women to tell their story and manage their emotions in a healthy way, supporting good mental health, as well as promoting engagement with creative classes in their local communities. Such activities support resettlement and improve the reintegration which is critical in reducing the risk of reoffending.

The consultation document notes that an arts strategy can contribute to other Executive undertakings, including Delivering Social Change and Building a United Community - it can also play a part in the Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending and we recommend making this connection in the final strategy.



Families and Money Matters (FAMM)

What is FAMM?

The Families and Money Matters (FAMM) project delivers debt and money management advice to families of people in prison. It supports families who are not engaging with mainstream debt advice services and who have a relative who has either recently entered custody or is nearing their release date. The project also aims to research and evaluate the reasons why people do not engage with mainstream debt support services. It's funded by the Money Advice Service (MAS) until April 2017.

What does FAMM offer?

We work with families to identify any potential debt issues and offer money management advice. After assessing the circumstances of the family and individuals involved, FAMM can offer advice, information and guidance, providing support either over the phone or in person. In addition, the FAMM project worker can also refer the family to other specialist advice services for further support and information.

Families who might benefit from the offer of support come to us from our Family Links project, as well as from the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. We obtain contact details and consent from people in custody in order to make contact with their families in the community; and seek to make contact with that family within 24 hours of our being informed of the consent given.



FOCUS ON VOLUNTEERS

During Volunteers Week in June, volunteers from the Independent Visitor and MOVE projects went out to dinner after a workshop on the process and positives of volunteering.

Our projects naturally revolve around the service users, so this was a chance for NIACRO to focus on our volunteers and thank them for all they achieve in our work. We currently have 32 volunteers contributing to the success of these projects with another 18 ready and willing to start when we have matched them with service users.

One NIACRO volunteer, Anne, through a combination of difficulties in family life, found herself caught in a lifestyle that culminated in a short custodial sentence. Towards the end of the sentence, she came to NIACRO's Women's Group¹ and immediately found at NIACRO an environment in which she felt accepted. *"No-one judged me here; NIACRO was the one place I had no need to hide anything about my life."*

Anne's life had taken a huge and unexpected change in direction, and she faced many struggles in coming to terms with that. However, that change in direction provided her with deeper insights about herself and others, creating character, resolve and a deep-seated regard for the value of each individual which she now puts to valuable use in supporting others she meets through her volunteering at NIACRO.

Aside from the opportunity to pass on what she has learnt through her experiences to others in NIACRO, she has also been proactive in learning new skills to bring back to the Women's Group on a Thursday. These have included: jewellery making; arts & crafts;

sign language; Spanish; cooking for fun; advanced ECDL IT qualification and an OCN qualification in Women & Offending Behaviour.

Having attended the Women's Group herself for some time after her release, Anne wanted to volunteer for NIACRO because *"NIACRO gave me hope. It taught me to take a step back and to think about my direction, it helped me to realise that there are many people who are worse off than me, and in many ways, NIACRO saved my life. The staff here are brilliant; it's so much more than 'just a job' to them. They approach people with a caring attitude. As a volunteer, I care very much about the people who come to NIACRO. If I can help a person to stay out of prison, or help someone to come to terms with having been in custody, I am giving back some of what I learnt through my experiences."*

Over nearly three years, Anne has volunteered on NIACRO's reception, on our Disclosure Advice Line (having received the training required for that), as a Shadow Support Worker and with the Women's Group on a Thursday.

Another of NIACRO's volunteers, Michaela, decided to try out volunteering with NIACRO because it related to a module in her University Criminology degree, Work and Volunteer - Issues in Criminology and a friend's mum had worked in NIACRO's Base2 Project and recommended NIACRO.

"I have found volunteering with NIACRO to be rewarding and challenging, as I face new experiences and meet people who have had a variety of different experiences through life. I have had to push myself to try things that have scared me at times, but I have learnt so much about myself and others through that. It has also been fantastic work experience for me, and to have for my CV."

"I have been matched with a young person on the MOVE Project. We meet together weekly and I have been working with her primarily helping her to build her confidence and self esteem. As well as that, I volunteer with the women on a Thursday morning, and that involves doing all sorts of things I never thought I would try, including cookery, African drums and an amazing course called More than a Label which helped us explore our and others' identities."

"I have learnt loads including how to communicate better with young people and the different types of volunteering opportunities that are available; I've learnt new skills and so much about myself."

¹ NIACRO's Women's Group is an opportunity for women who are in custody in Hydebank Wood and those who have been released into the community to come together to learn new skills and share experiences.

NIACRO's service delivery has been enhanced over many years by numerous volunteers who have been dedicated to our service users and keen to learn and to pass on what they have experienced through life. More recently, volunteers including Michaela have been helping out at various NIACRO events including volunteer recruitment events for Freshers at Queen's and the University of Ulster.

Others, who started off volunteering with NIACRO in roles including administration, youth volunteering and supporting events have moved into positions on our staff team.

If you'd like to volunteer with NIACRO you can contact us at 02890320157 or at volunteering@niacro.co.uk or through the enquiry form, found here

<http://www.niacro.co.uk/volunteering>



STAFF DAY

NIACRO staff came together on 10th June for a Staff Day; an opportunity to reflect on the past year, to consider together and plan for the many challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for NIACRO, and to spend time catching up with those we see less regularly.

Olwen opened the day with reflections on the previous year, particularly highlighting the new contracts we have secured (from varied sources) including, for example, the Public Health Agency-funded EISS, and Probation Northern Ireland's funded Reset and ACCESS programmes.

The new contracts have seen some staff members moving, to settle in new projects or to work between several projects. We heard directly from three such staff about the challenges and the opportunities that this has presented to them, professionally and personally.

Before lunch, we participated in a 'round robin' exercise, during which members of every project team had the opportunity to meet with every other project team, to hear first-hand about the work each is engaged in and

COPE CONFERENCE



NIACRO has been a member of Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) for a good few years now. The organisation works to act as a voice for prisoners' children, boost public awareness, and promote the exchange of ideas and good practice.

Programmes Director Donnie Sweeney attended the latest annual conference in Croatia, which highlighted the need for a tailored approach to children with a parent in prison, as well as discussing the balance between prison security and the best interests of the child.

You can read more about COPE on www.childrenofprisoners.eu

recent developments. With many staff changes and movements between projects in recent months, it was valuable for staff to discover (and meet!) who now works on which projects. Alongside this exercise, work has been completed to update our staff intranet, to include details of each project with photos of project staff members.

In discussion groups, we all had the chance to reflect on what we had heard over the course of the Day, to explore potential future opportunities for NIACRO, and to consider what the organisation needs to do to be ready to take up such opportunities. Feedback from the discussion groups was overwhelmingly positive, with many reflecting on:

- The strength of the connections between NIACRO's policy work and positioning within the public sphere and its service delivery.
- The broad range of new opportunities NIACRO has been successful in securing over the past year to 18 months.
- Evidence of an increasingly robust and resilient organisation emerging.
- The value to NIACRO and others of being able to demonstrate the outcomes our projects generate for service users.

Several helpful options for future development, with respect to our work with adults, families, children and young people and communities will provide a focus for our development work over the coming months.

The logo consists of a red circle with the word "niacro" in white lowercase letters, centered within a white vertical pill-shaped background that is itself centered on a red background.

niacro

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

pact@niacro.co.uk

028 9032 0157

Find out more about NIACRO:



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