

Elections 2016

We present our manifesto of key policy asks for the new Assembly.



niacronews



Justice Awards

The Reset project is recognised at the Justice in the Community Awards.

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Making Diversion Work

The Lord Chief Justice discusses effective diversion at our AGM.

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Legislative Change

We welcome the new Criminal Records Filtering Review scheme.

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Welcome to the latest edition of NIACRO News!

At the time of writing, the Northern Ireland Assembly is soon to be dissolved ahead of local elections in May.

A new Assembly and new Executive also bring new opportunities to introduce policies and legislation to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities.

In this edition of NIACRO News, we focus on some of our key asks of the next Assembly. From resettlement and employment pathways post-custody, to early intervention and diversion of children away from the criminal justice system, and from supporting families and children affected by imprisonment to finding sustainable alternatives to prosecution through problem solving courts: our manifesto highlights a number of key policies that we believe would contribute to developing safer communities and fewer victims.



We also note the need for strategic partnership to reduce offending, both between departments and sectors. Support for a sustainable voluntary and community sector is a policy ask common across the sector, and in our manifesto we highlight how complex procurement processes with an emphasis on initial low costs are undermining both innovation and the value and expertise of voluntary organisations.

One example of effective partnership in justice is the Reset project, delivered by Probation and NIACRO with support from Housing Rights. This intensive mentoring scheme seeks to reduce recall to prison and has been effective by supporting people to resettle in the community after prison. You can read about the NIACRO mentoring team's success at the recent Justice in the Community Awards on page 14, and feedback from the mentees is included on page 17.

As we enter a new financial year, a new Assembly and a new legislative mandate, we are optimistic about the future and look forward to working together with our wide range of stakeholders to develop new services and policies that benefit communities.

**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 Julia in our Public Affairs and Communications Team by emailing:

 pact@niacro.co.uk



ELECTION SPECIAL

With the Northern Ireland Assembly elections due to take place in May, we've spent the last few months developing the NIACRO Policy Manifesto of our key asks of the next Assembly.

Ask #1:

Remove barriers to effective resettlement

Resettlement back into the community after custody is critical to reducing the risk of re-offending. Effective resettlement can include access to meaningful education, employment and training; mental and physical healthcare; and appropriate, sustainable accommodation.

In our manifesto, we highlight two key barriers to resettlement: attitudes to people with criminal records; and a lack of effective communication and process for people leaving custody.

On the first issue, we're calling on the Assembly to pledge to

promote equality of access to Further Education and to educate employers about fair and safe recruitment. Our experience is that there is an inconsistent approach amongst Further Education colleges in requesting and responding to disclosures of criminal convictions, resulting in people being unfairly denied access to education or, in some cases, being removed from a course part-way through due to a belated request for disclosure from the College. This can discourage people from entering or continuing Further Education. However, by implementing clear and consistent disclosure policies across colleges, and by ensuring colleges, students

and applicants have access to accurate disclosure advice, the relevant legislation can be implemented properly and proportionately, meaning Further Education can play its role in reducing offending.

Similarly, we know that many employers are unaware of their

responsibilities when asking for and receiving disclosures. Access to advice and training on safe recruitment, and the enforcement of the Access NI Code of Practice, could help employers to recruit more fairly from a wider pool, whilst also giving people with convictions the opportunity to gain appropriate employment – thereby reducing their risk of reoffending.

Secondly, we believe everyone leaving custody should have access to 'through-the-gate' support services. We know that people are most likely to re-offend in the first few weeks after custody; that risk can be greatly reduced

"That year I spent in prison became all I knew. But once you walk out the gates, everything's strange to you."

NIACRO Service User

"Now, I can honestly say I won't come back to prison."

NIACRO Service User





"My project worker helped me learn how to deal with my anger. I learned how to improve my behaviour at home and school is better now."

Child on NIACRO's Caps Project

by ensuring the appropriate services are in place at the time of their release.

For example, arranging photographic identification, setting up benefits payments, identifying suitable accommodation and registering with health services could all be done before a person leaves prison – this would reduce the stress and uncertainty which accompanies leaving prison and exacerbates the risk of re-offending in those critical early weeks.

Ask #2: Stop criminalising children

Becoming involved in the criminal justice system as a child has a damaging impact

on a young person's educational and life chances, even if the contact is for a relatively minor matter. In fact, any involvement with the justice system can increase the likelihood of the child developing further offending behaviour, potentially leading to more serious crime. We need to put the best interests of the child at the heart of dealing with children who exhibit offending behaviour: we need to stop criminalising children and we need to prevent them from ever entering the criminal justice system.

NIACRO believes there are three elements to achieving this. Our first ask is that the age of criminal responsibility is raised. At just 10 years old, Northern Ireland has one of the lowest ages of criminal responsibility in the world. In 2011, the Youth Justice

Review recommended the age of criminal responsibility be raised to 12, and then 14: this recommendation has not been implemented.

We are concerned that criminalising children at such a young age for what are usually minor offences creates a "criminal identity" for children, increasing the risk of offending behaviour.

Secondly, instead of criminalising children we believe there should be greater investment in early intervention for children likely to offend. Not only is this effective in supporting the child and their family to prevent offending, it is also cost-effective in the longer term.

For those children who do offend, our third point is that minor youth offending is diverted out of the criminal justice system.

Diversion via police discretion or restorative justice improves outcomes and reduces the cost to the justice system. However, for diversion to be effective, it must not attract a criminal record in order to avoid barriers to desistance and the development of a criminal identity.

Ask #3: Support families and children affected by imprisonment

Previous editions of NIACRO News have explored the impact of imprisonment on families and children on the outside. In our manifesto, we have raised this issue again and we call on the next Assembly to ensure families get access to emotional and practical support, such as that provided by our project Family Links, to help families cope with what we call the 'silent sentence'.

"I have to cope with the stress of being mum and dad"

Parent on Family Links

Providing this support improves mental health and financial stability for the family, and also promotes effective resettlement and desistance when the person leaves prison and returns to the community. Children of people in prison are also statistically more likely to develop offending behaviour: providing



this kind of intervention during a period of parental imprisonment can help break this intergenerational cycle of offending. Within this, we are asking the next Assembly to formally recognise the unique situation and needs of children affected by parental imprisonment.

"Contact with the system actually outweighs any deterrent effect it may have."

Review of the Youth Justice System in Northern Ireland (2011)

The Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) network estimates that more than 2,400 children in Northern Ireland have a parent in prison, but currently there is no one agency counting this and so the needs of this group are neither being captured nor met. To do so, there must be effective co-operation between departments to close this gap in provision, with one department – perhaps the new Department of Education – taking a lead on ensuring children in this group receive appropriate support.

In our manifesto, we ask that the potential impact of imprisonment on children is assessed at pre-sentence report stage. If custody is still deemed to be appropriate at this stage, the family could then be signposted to relevant support in the community. By capturing this data, it would also allow for an effective needs assessment of the numbers of children affected by parental imprisonment, enabling the Executive to understand the issue and respond to it accordingly.

Ask #4:

Pursue alternatives to prosecution

There has been much discussion recently about 'smarter justice' and finding more innovative, more effective solutions to offending behaviour. In our manifesto, we ask the next Assembly to pursue alternatives to prosecution: we believe this will reduce both costs and offending, as interventions which address the cause of offending behaviour have more lasting impact. By investing in early intervention, sustainable diversion and cost-effective alternatives to disposals such as fines, cautions, community disposals or

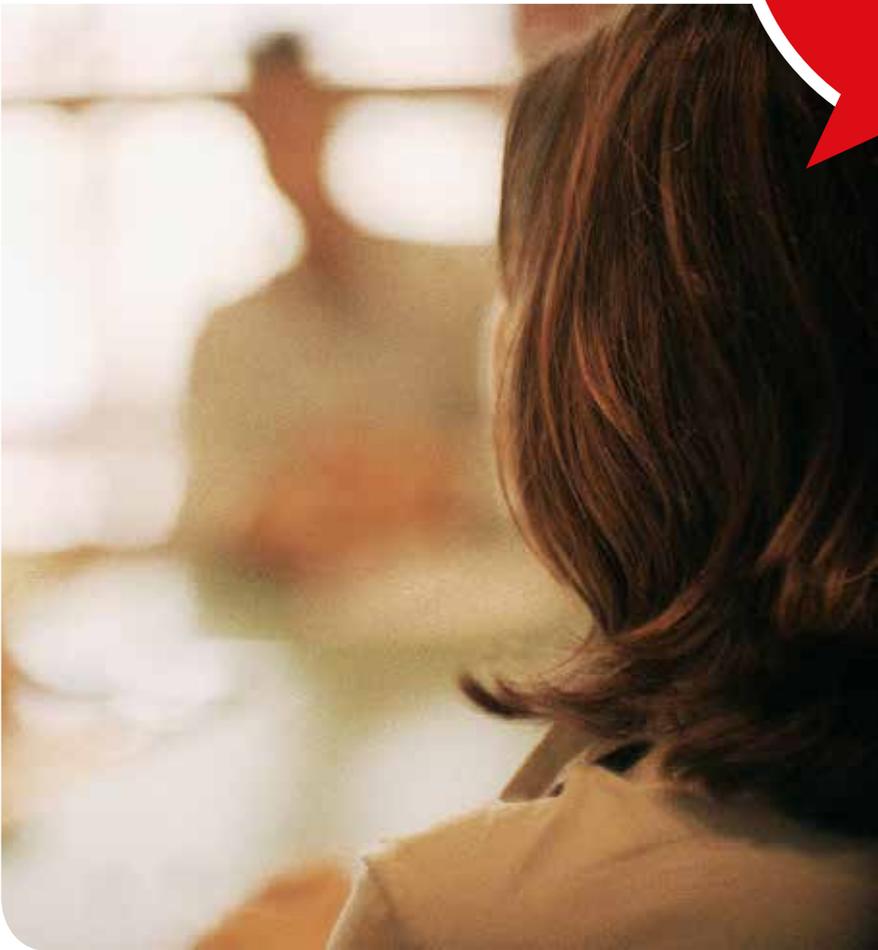
short custodial sentences, the root cause of the offending can be addressed. This prevents the escalation of that behaviour and avoids the potential for more serious offending further down the line.

We believe that through the use of problem solving courts, referrals should instead be made for voluntary engagement on programmes designed to address the need identified; this would equip a person with the necessary tools and stability to change their behaviour and maintain that change, without the damaging impact of a criminal record.



"A prison system geared towards change and desistance needs to be supported by effective partnerships with statutory, voluntary and community agencies and organisations."

Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (2011)



Further, our manifesto reiterates our consistent position that fine default should never result in imprisonment. This disproportionate punishment is expensive, damaging and does not recoup the loss from the unpaid fine.

We call on the Assembly to once and for all end the potential for imprisonment in instances of fine default, and instead implement effective gradual repayment plans or alternative disposals.



Ask #5: Commit to strategic partnership to reduce offending

The last of our five manifesto asks looks at the wider issue of working in partnership to reduce offending. We know that to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities, it is essential that departments across government work together, as required by the 2013 Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending. Whether we're looking at early intervention to divert young people from offending, resettlement after custody, or anything in between, criminal justice

cannot sit in isolation: it requires the co-operation of departments responsible for health, education, employment, housing, welfare and more. We call on all departments to acknowledge and fulfil their obligations under the Strategic Framework.

Our final point in the manifesto asks the new Assembly to show its support for a sustainable and dynamic third sector. We are concerned that bureaucratic procurement processes are not only stifling innovation in the voluntary and community sector, they create an unequal playing field which does not value the experience and local connections of voluntary and community organisations. A Social Value Act could help redress this imbalance.

Crucially, we believe there needs to be genuine partnership between sectors to support the provision of effective, sustainable services. Constant cuts have undermined the worth of the voluntary and community sector and hampered our ability to provide consistent and meaningful interventions.

To ensure a safe and economically stable future, the third sector must be recognised as an equal partner in service delivery, and sustainable investment in our organisations and services must be maintained.

- For more information on each of these five points, read the full manifesto on our website at <http://www.niacro.co.uk/manifesto-2016>.

Assembly Update

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

Changes to Access NI and Criminal Record Disclosure

- Following the enactment of the Justice Act last year, a number of changes have come into force concerning the Access NI Criminal Record Disclosure process. In summary, these changes include:
 - » **Single Issue of Certificates:** AccessNI will no longer provide a copy of certificates for standard and enhanced checks to the employer. Only the applicant will receive a copy. The employer will only be able to see any information disclosed if the applicant wishes to continue with the recruitment process and shows their certificate to the employer.
 - » **Independent Monitor:** where police information, other than criminal record information, is disclosed on the certificate, an individual can appeal to an Independent Monitor to review the information. The applicant may seek a review if they believe the information is not relevant to the job they hope to do, or should not have been disclosed. New guidance for Chief Officers on whether to disclose information has also been published. This guidance requires Chief Officers to give particular consideration to cases involving the release of information in an enhanced AccessNI check about a time when an applicant was under 18 years of age.
 - » **Minimum Age for Applications:** the minimum age for a standard or enhanced check has been raised to 16.

Enhanced checks can still be made on people younger than 16 if regulated activity is taking place in their home.

Independent Review: following our Off The Record campaign last year, a Criminal Records Filtering Review Scheme has been introduced to allow an individual to seek an independent review of the information remaining on their certificate after filtering has been applied. This can happen in defined circumstances, if the person believes the disclosure to be disproportionate. When the offence(s) relate to when the individual was aged under 18, this review will be automatic. See page 10 for more details.

- » **Child Protection Disclosure Arrangements:** new arrangements introduced in March make it easier for anyone who has concerns about someone who may pose a risk to children to find out if that person has a criminal record for sexual or violent offences which could indicate a risk to children. This scheme builds upon the existing processes within the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI). For more information, turn to page 16 for PPANI Co-ordinator Julie Smyth's guest column on this topic.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Consultation Responses

- NIACRO provides policy responses to public consultations frequently. You can view several of our responses on our website, www.niacro.co.uk. Recent policy consultations we have responded to include:
 - » **DCAL:** The Strategy for Culture and Arts 2016-2026
 - » **DHSSPS:** Health and Social Care Reform and Transformation
 - » **DOJ:** A Strategy for Access to Justice
 - » **DSD:** The Review of the Role and Regulation of the Private Rented Sector



OFF THE RECORD

NIACRO WELCOMES CRIMINAL RECORD REVIEW SCHEME FOLLOWING #OFFTHERECORD CAMPAIGN

In March, we welcomed a new criminal record review scheme which will help people to move on from old or minor convictions.

The independent Criminal Records Filtering Review Scheme, which came into effect on the 1st March 2016, allows for an independent review of information disclosed on standard and enhanced criminal record certificates issued by Access NI.

When offending information eligible for review relates to when an applicant was aged under 18, it will automatically be referred to the Independent Reviewer to consider whether disclosure is appropriate and proportionate; those with spent adult convictions will also have the opportunity to apply for a review.

The introduction of this scheme follows NIACRO's successful Off The Record campaign last year, which called for old and minor convictions received under the age of 18 to be removed from criminal records, as recommended in the Youth Justice Review (2011). The campaign received unprecedented public and political support, with endorsements from Falklands War veteran Simon Weston OBE and campaigner Bob Ashford, who have both experienced the lasting impact of childhood convictions. Local actor Dan Gordon also publicly supported the call for change.

Responding to the introduction of the Scheme, NIACRO Chief Executive Olwen Lyner said: "We welcome the Department of Justice's recognition of the lasting and damaging impact of even minor convictions."





It is particularly encouraging that those convictions received under the age of 18 will automatically be considered before disclosure to potential employment, education and training providers: this will support desistance and allow people to move on from previous offending, whilst still providing the necessary protections where appropriate.

“It is important to recognise, however, that the impact of minor convictions goes beyond Access NI and disclosure certificates. Having a criminal record can impact on a person’s ability to travel or purchase essential services like home or car insurance, which can in turn negatively impact that person’s family. We therefore will continue to build on the momentum from our Off The Record campaign and make the case for minor childhood convictions to be permanently expunged from criminal records.

“That said, we acknowledge that this Scheme marks a significant step forward for Northern Ireland’s criminal records regime, and we appreciate that the Minister, the Department and the Committee for Justice responded so positively to the voices of our service users and the public on this issue.

“We wish the appointed Independent Reviewer, Simon Pountain, well in his post and encourage him to listen to service user feedback as this Scheme develops.”

- You can read about the Off The Record campaign on our website, www.niacro.co.uk. Information about the new Review Scheme is available here: <https://www.dojni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-operation-criminal-records-filtering-review-scheme>



Making Diversion Work: Lord Chief Justice Delivers Keynote at NIACRO AGM

We were delighted to have the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Declan Morgan, speak at our 44th AGM last November to a packed room of our members.

In his keynote speech, the Lord Chief Justice told the audience that more should be done to divert people involved in low level offending from court. He also paid tribute to the dedicated work of our organisation, saying NIACRO plays an important role in delivering practical interventions to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities.

The Lord Chief Justice used his address to discuss opportunities for innovation in the justice system, highlighting the need to ensure that disposals for children and young people who offend are proportionate and in the best interests of the child, whilst ensuring public protection.

He also addressed the problem of diversionary disposals for young people – such as youth conferences – unnecessarily attracting criminal

records which undermine effective rehabilitation, noting the work NIACRO did last year as part of our Off The Record campaign, which called for minor childhood offences to be removed from criminal records. He suggested that there could be instances where more innovative thinking could be applied regarding criminal records when the young person takes responsibility.



During his speech, entitled 'Making Diversion Work', the Lord Chief Justice raised the issue of how to deal with low-level adult offending, noting the limited options for diversionary disposals and outlining the balance to be struck between

addressing underlying reasons for offending behaviour and also assuring victims that their needs are respected.

In particular, Sir Declan discussed the need to move more towards community sentences as an alternative to imprisonment, for both social and economic reasons. Given the high number of short prison sentences currently handed down for minor offences, the Lord Chief Justice said that he has been working with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland to introduce an Enhanced Combination Order to provide for more community alternatives.



He explained how this pilot project works:

“The objective of the Enhanced Combination Order is to divert offenders from short-term custodial sentences by offering sentencers an existing community option in a more intensive package with a focus on rehabilitation, reparation, restorative practice and desistance. ... [one of the aims] is to bring together elements of community supervision, such as community service and restorative justice, with a greater emphasis on victim engagement and judicial oversight.”

Thanking Sir Declan for his address, NIACRO Chief Executive Olwen Lyner said:

“Given the economic context Northern Ireland finds itself in today, it is critically important that we identify sustainable alternatives to custody for low level offences. Imprisonment for a minor offence for a short period of time is not only disproportionately costly to the public purse, it also has a lifelong impact on both the person imprisoned and their family.

“I also welcome the Lord Chief Justice’s comments on diverting young people from the criminal justice system. As he pointed out, this is something we have championed for some time and will continue to do so to ensure children are not trapped in the system and thus in a cycle of offending behaviour. It is more effective – and indeed cost-effective – to address problems at an early stage through appropriate interventions than to deal with serious offending later in life.



“The Lord Chief Justice highlighted today that NIACRO is a valued member of the justice family and the debate our organisation promotes helps to improve the collective response to offending. We’re delighted that he was able to join our AGM and I hope that we can work together, alongside other members of that justice family, to formulate innovative and collective responses to the issues he raised.”



RECOGNITION FOR RESET AT JUSTICE IN THE COMMUNITY AWARDS

It's been a busy few months for Reset, the pilot resettlement project NIACRO is delivering in partnership with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) with support from Housing Rights. In a relatively short space of time, the model has proven to be effective and the NIACRO mentoring team was recently highly commended at the prestigious Justice in the Community Awards.

The programme, funded by the Northern Ireland Executive Change Fund, is an intensive support service for people leaving custody and returning to the community. Reset supports people to address a range of issues, including accessing appropriate accommodation, employment or training, managing money, connecting with family, addressing addictions and other factors that affect effective resettlement.

The Justice in the Community Awards recognise individuals and teams, voluntary workers and staff working within community and statutory

organisations across Northern Ireland. Of the 46 people or teams shortlisted, our Reset team was one of only eight winners to be highly commended. An overall 'Justice Champion' award went to Paul McCartney of First Housing Aid and Support.

The awards ceremony was held at Parliament Buildings, Stormont and representatives from the Reset mentoring team were there to collect their prize.

Gareth Eannetta, Reset Co-ordinator, said: "We're delighted to receive this recognition at the Justice in the Community Awards. The whole team has worked really hard to make this pilot project the success that it has been, and the feedback from our service users has shown that the support from the mentors has made a real difference for those returning to the community to resettle effectively and reduce their risk of reoffending. Well done to all the team!"

Interim evaluations carried out in late 2015 sought the views of Reset service users and other stakeholders. As well as a written report analysing the work so far, a number of service users took part in a short film documenting their journey.

One service user, David, also took to the stage at the cross-border Public Protection Advisory Group (PPAG) Seminar in Belfast in

November to talk about his experience. David spoke about how Reset had helped him after prison: *"I wanted to change my life, I was afraid of not getting work, Reset helped me...I won't be going back to prison and Reset will help me achieve that."*



Thank you to all the team, service users and sector colleagues who have worked hard to deliver Reset and make it a success.

• Read more from Reset service users on page 17.

LOSS OF VISITOR CENTRES CONTRACT

Following a competitive procurement process by the Northern Ireland Prison Service late last year, NIACRO regrettably no longer holds the contract to provide the Visitor Centre service at Hydebank Wood and Magilligan prisons.



We provided this service for visitors to both prisons for more than 40 years, alongside the Quaker Service, which managed the Visitor Centre at Maghaberry Prison for a similar amount of time.

As a result of this latest competition, all three Visitor Centres are now delivered by People Plus (Works) NI Ltd.

Responding to the outcome of the tendering process, NIACRO Chief Executive Olwen Lyner said:



"We are obviously saddened that the Visitor Centres will no longer be part of the NIACRO family of services. Further, we have concerns at the speed and management of the transfer arrangements with regard to staff and assets and believe there are lessons to be learned in ensuring the smooth transfer of such contracts for the future.

"Our experience of delivering this service for several decades has proven to us that it is a critical service for the families and friends of people in custody, and that has been highlighted in several prison inspection reports over the years.

"However we are pleased, despite no longer being one of the providers for this service, that the Prison Service will continue to invest in this important resource to support families to visit their loved ones, which in turn promotes good mental health and desistance from offending."

NIACRO would like to thank all the staff, volunteers and service users who have supported the Visitor Centres over the years.



In each edition of NIACRO News, we feature a guest column on a key issue related to our work. In this edition Julie Smyth, the Co-ordinator of the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI), gives an overview of the newly introduced Child Protection Disclosure Arrangements.

Julie Smyth

“These new arrangements build on existing processes to manage sexual and violent offenders”

New disclosure arrangements aimed at making it easier for anyone who has concerns about someone who may pose a risk to children have been launched this month.

The Child Protection Disclosure Arrangements, which launched in Northern Ireland on 14 March 2016, enables anyone with concerns about a person to find out if they have a criminal record for sexual or violent offences which could indicate that they pose a risk to children.

These new arrangements build on existing processes to manage sexual and violent offenders by the agencies involved in the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland. Those agencies, including PSNI, PBNI and Social Services, already disclose information about criminal convictions when it is necessary to protect a child. This new statutory provision adds to these arrangements by offering a direct route for a member of the public to bring any concerns they may have to the police about someone they know who has access to a child.

These provisions are not about supplying the criminal records of individual offenders indiscriminately to the public at

large. There will be no disclosure to those who simply want to find out identities of sex offenders. These provisions are for child protection purposes. Information will only be provided to individuals who have responsibility for the safety of a child and disclosure will only be made if it is in the interests of protecting a child.

The provisions are similar to existing disclosure schemes operating in England and Wales. However, the provisions in Northern Ireland do not just relate to convicted sex offenders. The NI provisions also enable disclosure about violent offenders who pose a risk to children.

Members of the public will be able to download an application form from the PSNI website (www.psnipolice.uk/child-protection-disclosure-arrangements) which they can complete and bring to their local police station. Forms will also be made available at all station enquiry offices.

Anyone making an application under the new arrangements must be able to identify a specific child or children and a named individual about whom they have concerns. However, they will not automatically be the person to whom information is disclosed.

The new provisions are not to be used to report a crime. Additionally, the information to the public makes it clear that where there is any concern that a child may be at immediate risk of harm, then the normal child protection procedures will be adopted and the appropriate agencies will respond accordingly. This disclosure application route is simply not appropriate for cases where a child may be at immediate risk.

If a member of the public considers that a child is at immediate risk then they should call 999 in an emergency to report their concerns, the non-emergency number 101, or contact Crimestoppers confidentially on 0800 555111 and/or your local Social Services Gateway Teams (see <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect>).

If the decision is made to disclose, the relevant Public Protection Trust team will be responsible for doing so. Information will only be provided to those individuals who have responsibility for the safety of the child concerned and disclosure will only be made if it is in the interests of protecting a child.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, offenders will be advised that an application to disclosure information has been made in respect of their case, however they will not be advised of who has made the application.

It is always a concern that sensitive information could be misused. The new provisions will try to guard against the misuse of sensitive information by warning applicants that prosecution is likely if information is disclosed to a person who is not directly involved in the protection of the child.

Under the new arrangements, initial checks should be carried out within 24 hours and the process should be completed within 28 days.

- Further information about the Child Protection Disclosure Arrangements can be found on the PSNI and PPANI websites: www.psnipolice.uk and www.publicprotectionni.com.

SERVICE USER VOICES

The Reset project, a partnership between the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and NIACRO with support from Housing Rights, works to reduce recall to prison by providing an intensive mentoring service to people in their first 12 weeks after release from custody.

The project was recently the subject of an interim evaluation, which captured the experiences of people on the service as well as their mentors and other stakeholders.

The evaluation found the project is an effective model, reflected not only in the team's recognition at the recent Justice in the Community Awards (see page 14), but also in the overwhelmingly positive feedback from the mentees. We've printed some of their comments here:

"My Mentor is great. He's not judgmental in any way. He's really easy going and easy to talk to. He's always there to help. When I had an appointment with my drug addiction counsellor I wasn't sure I'd be able to afford the taxi but my Mentor told me to give him a ring – he's willing to help with anything if it keeps me out of prison."

"It's to try and keep people like me on track. They work with you. At the start I thought it was going to be like Probation and I'd have to do as I was told but when I met my Mentor it was different. He gave me a chance to talk. Staff help you rather than turn their nose up at you."

"I was just willing to take any support. I've got out at previous times and there was no-one to help with benefits and things and I've re-offended. I was willing to take anything."

"My number one priority is to stay clean. Then I can manage on the outside. I'm doing everything I can to stay clean – putting in place my own ways of coping. When I'm feeling low I'll ring my daughter so I can hear her. I'm taking my medications at the proper time. It's all making a big difference."

"Reset is to help people settle into the community. It helps ease the pressure you feel after you get out of prison."

"If I didn't have them (Reset) then I would have no-one."

"My outlook on life is different. I'm more laid back and settled now. All I want in life is peace and quiet."

"Without Reset I'd have stayed in the house. I'd have locked myself away. They help you to get up and go."

"I knew I'd have loads of appointments when I got released with Probation, benefits, drug addiction and social workers. I hadn't a notion who to go and see. My Mentor directed me in the right direction. It really eased the pressure when the appointments built up because I had help."

"If I've had a problem I've called and asked her for advice and she's called or texted me back."

"I have got all that I've needed from Reset but I will miss the contact with my Mentor."

MEET THE EMPLOYER EVENT

After a short break, it was with great to see the return of our 'Meet the Employer' events to our Amelia Street office earlier this year.



These events have in the past proven to be successful in breaking down barriers between service users and employers, and helped to raise awareness of available opportunities amongst service users seeking to engage with the labour market.

The event in January was well attended by adult service users on both our Access and Reset programmes and feedback was extremely positive. It also attracted a wide range of

employers, including Belfast City Council and 3D Personnel who were on hand to offer information on opportunities available within their organisations, as well as advice on entering employment.

A number of training organisations also took part, with People 1st, Network Personnel, Prince's Trust and Gems all offering details about available training and encouraging people to participate on programmes to improve their employability.



We would like to thank the organisations involved for their continued support and time, as well as our service users who took part and engaged with exhibitors.

FROM THE THEATRE TO THE ROPES COURSE: RECENT YOUTH FORUM OUTINGS

We've had a few events for the Voice Box Youth Forum recently, giving young people and volunteers opportunities to take part in group activities as part of their involvement in the Independent Visitor and MOVE projects.

Our annual trip to the pantomime took place in December, with 50 young people and volunteers joining us for a night at the Grand Opera House in Belfast. After an end-of-year party in Amelia Street, we headed out to see the pantomime Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. This yearly event is a great opportunity for the young people and volunteers to get to know each other and is one of the ways we thank volunteers for all their hard work and commitment throughout the year. Feedback from the night showed everyone enjoyed the pantomime, and as usual May McFettridge had everyone laughing – along with “Prince” Chico, who brought loads of energy and had the audience up dancing!

In February, a smaller group of young people and volunteers participated in a Youth Forum held at SkyTrek at Colin Glen Forest Park. The day began with an evaluation session, which was an opportunity for the young people and volunteers to give their feedback on the projects, highlighting their favourite activities and also making suggestions for what we could change. Working with an external evaluator and illustrator, some of the MOVE young people and volunteers also gave an insight into their experiences on the project. After all that, everyone was ready for a bit of an adventure and made their way to the SkyTrek ropes course, scaling impressive heights and showing off their zip-line skills.

Thanks to all the volunteers, staff and young people who made both events happen, and thank you again to all our volunteers for their dedication throughout the year.



NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHED

In March, we launched our new website. Visit www.niacro.co.uk for information on all our services, as well as finding out more about our policies, campaigns, news and publications.

Check out: www.niacro.co.uk

INNER EAST HUB CELEBRATES 1ST BIRTHDAY



Congratulations to the Inner East Belfast Family Support Hub, which recently celebrated its first birthday. NIACRO's Kris Morrison, who works on our Caps Project, is a core member of this Hub, which was set up as a multi-agency network of statutory, community and voluntary organisations in the local area to offer families holistic services and improve outcomes for local children.

The Family Support Hubs model aims to support parents and children at the earliest possible opportunity by ensuring that local family support service providers work together; improve access to services for all parents and children; and help planners know what families need in order to provide better services. NIACRO is represented on all Family Support Hubs in the Belfast and Southern Health and Social Care Trust areas, and we Chair the Craigavon and Banbridge Hub.

The logo consists of a white rounded rectangle containing a red circle with the word "niacro" in white lowercase letters.

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

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Find out more about NIACRO:



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