



Alan Shannon, Permanent Secretary, DSD; Peter Crossan;
Wendy Alexander CEO of Volunteer Development Agency

Being a Mentor (see page 15)

Partnerships; a new and very successful mentoring service for young people; more focussed work with children of prisoners; the Children and Parents service; the renewal of the major Jobtrack programme described on page 7; the Educational Trust work moving up a gear with Peace II funding; new partnerships with the NI Housing Executive, DEL and Business in the Community. And of course we moved into our new offices in Amelia Street.

It has been particularly gratifying to see NIACRO increasingly valued, consulted and engaged by Government and the statutory agencies. An independent, flexible and committed voluntary/ community sector is a key player in any balanced society. As the criminal justice system adapts to a post-conflict, 21st century role, this fact has been recognised by the Justice Oversight Commissioner, who commented in his second report that “[the voluntary bodies’] experience qualifies them to give advice which deserves to be heard. One factor which is to be respected is their independence, which gives added value to their contribution...

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NIACRO CORPORATE PLAN 2006–2009

NIACRO's current corporate plan runs from 2003 – 2006, so we are in the throes of preparing our new plan to come on stream on 1 April 2006. While our core business is not likely to change fundamentally, three years can bring about big developments which need to be taken into account. There have

been significant policy developments like the outworking of the Criminal Justice Review, proposals for new equality legislation, the introduction of ASBOs and many more.

For NIACRO, too, there have been significant developments – links with Community Safety

also in this issue:

niacro and the adult offender

highlighting our work with adults

reachout and jobtrack

niacro's major employability programmes

doing the prep

the work of the educational trust

ni prison service

niacro interviews the head of nips

agm

who use it. Drawing on US and GB public policy, Shadd gave examples of how draconian, negative and short-term policies could be given the same positive-sounding label as

genuinely innovative, supportive and effective interventions.

Moving into more unfamiliar territory, Shadd suggested that we need “restorative re-integration”, which would be community-led; focussed on reparation; with some sort of public, symbolic “re-integration rituals”. The role of the state in this process would be to support, enhance and work with what he described as the community’s “natural” way of working.

Two NIACRO staff members described their work in reintegration – Declan McKee’s case studies of two of his clients is described in the context of Jobtrack, and Denise Mac Dermott described the mentoring service which has been highlighted in the last couple of issues of NIACRO News.

One of the developments announced at the AGM was a streamlined membership system, with a £30 life membership subscription. Why not join? You’ll find a membership form in this issue.

NIACRO’s AGM was held on 24 November, with around 70 members and well-wishers turning up to conduct the necessary formal business of a registered charity, and to hear from staff and Executive about the work of the 2004 – 2005 financial year. We welcome Joanne McKenna to the Executive, and say goodbye with our thanks to Rose Ann McCormick and Gus Campbell.

As is our custom, we rounded off the AGM with a seminar, this year focussing on resettlement and rehabilitation.

The keynote speaker was Dr Shadd Maruna, Reader in Criminology at the School of Law at Queen’s University, speaking on “Restorative re-integration; helping offenders rebuild their lives”. Different people mean different things by “reintegration” “rehabilitation” and the rest of the terminology that is used more or less approximately with more or less understanding by the people

NIACRO President Lord Hylton, Chair Richard Buchanan and Treasurer Patrick Farry at the AGM



Olwyn Lyner and Shadd Maruna at the AGM



→ continued from page 1

Their freedom and ability to respond quickly and efficiently to immediate demands is something to be treasured...”

Over the last few months, we have been discussing the sort of shape the new corporate plan should take. Three internal sessions included a residential for all staff, and the Executive Committee has also considered the new plan in detail. We discussed it with volunteers at the celebration event described in the last NIACRO News (see photo on page 15). On 12 December we met stakeholders from the criminal justice sector, and welcomed their contributions - both thoughtful and thought-provoking. On 12 January we met with other partners and organisations with an interest in our work.

Putting all that together, we will consult formally over the next few weeks, and the Executive Committee will then sign the plan off.

To ensure that you get a copy of the consultation document, contact Jackie Junk at

jackie@niacro.co.uk

NIACRO & THE ADULT OFFENDER

This issue of NIACRO News features our work with adult offenders and ex-offenders. This work links two of our current strategic aims: "Supporting offenders and ex-prisoners in the community" and "Working with prisoners".

So: how many people are we talking about?

The NIO published its latest commentary on NI crime statistics in August 2005. In 2004-2005, the police recorded 118,000 offences, the lowest figure since 1998-1999. There were almost 31,000 court prosecutions, and over 27,500 people received some sort of sentence.

Figures from the prison service show that in 2004-2005, there were an average of 1277 people in prison here, 30 (around 2%) of them women.

In September 2005, 133 people were serving a life sentence, and the largest single group of prisoners - defined by the length of their sentence - was made up of those serving five to ten years (150). The most common offences, measured by the number of prisoners serving sentences for the offence, were violence against the person, robbery, and sexual offences. There were 76 "separated prisoners", that is, loyalist or republican prisoners who have applied to be, and been approved as being, accommodated separately from each other and from the rest of the prison population.

Adult offenders formed the core group whom NIACRO was set up to help, in 1971 (yes, we will indeed be celebrating our 35th anniversary this year). Over all that time, a core element of our work has been around employment and employability. Why is that so important? Employment for an ex-prisoner is not only of value in itself, but is a key factor in helping people stay out of the criminal justice system in the future. This is recognised not least by the ex-prisoners themselves, but also by a wealth of academic research, by the Criminal Justice Review and by the NIPS resettlement strategy.

& employment & employability

It is worth drawing the distinction between "employment" and "employability". Many of NIACRO's clients find themselves far away from the labour market. Statutory training and back-to-work programmes can feel very alien to their experience and capabilities. That's even before they face up to the undoubted reluctance of most employers to take them on. What is needed is a high level of support and encouragement, with a strong element of life skills training, personal development, building self-confidence and motivation. It's about bringing people to the starting line. These are the characteristics of NIACRO's work; you can read about two significant employability/training programmes, Jobtrack and ReachOut, in this issue. While attracting different target groups, the programmes share some practical approaches – the use of a particular assessment tool, for example – and the goal of increasing employability. Some clients do indeed move fairly straight into employment, but being able to access mainstream programmes like New Deal is also a success. There is also a growing interest in measuring "soft outcomes" - things like increased self-confidence - which may reflect a real transformation in a person's life and should be noted and celebrated.

Employers are key to the ultimate success of our work, and we have increased our direct contact with them over the years. You can read later about our services to employers.

In this area as in others, NIACRO is trying to influence public policy on behalf of offenders, ex-offenders and their families. In the context of employability, we have focussed on employment policies, especially recruitment and selection, and routinely respond to consultations from public authorities on these issues.

A consultation which had major implications for the rights of NIACRO's client group was the Single Equality Bill, designed to harmonise and extend the anti-discrimination and equality legislation in the context of employment and training.

There is no existing legislation protecting people with convictions from discrimination – rehabilitation of offenders law only says that people may not have to disclose a conviction after a period of time. To illustrate the point: NIACRO can cite the example of someone having disclosed a conviction (not relevant to the post); being appointed; then being sacked after five weeks by an area manager who said he should never have been appointed as it was "company policy not to employ people with convictions".

Could there be any clearer evidence of discrimination? This is of course the old blanket rejection which underlay all the other grounds now covered by law; can we imagine today a declaration that it was "company policy not to employ women/Catholics/disabled people?" And yet there was a time when some employers would have felt quite comfortable about using such phrases.

And so NIACRO works with adult offenders in the multi-faceted way we approach all our work – giving practical direct services to individuals; evaluating those services so that we can continually learn from and improve them; building partnerships with other organisations who have similar goals; raising awareness of the issues; lobbying and campaigning for fair treatment and appropriate public policy. The following articles highlight those processes in more detail.

EQUALITY IN ACTION



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

EQUAL is a European funding programme designed to promote equality and challenge discrimination.

Not the richest or the biggest of the EU programmes, it nevertheless has the potential to make a real difference to people's access to the labour market, for as the Head of the EQUAL Unit in

resettlement matters and the three organisations share plenty of common ground.

Partnership is becoming increasingly important in UK public policy, and the EQUAL DPs have

the transnational partners from Finland, Greece and the Netherlands, as well as Great Britain, pooled their experience and opinions so they could learn from each other's work.

“I have had regular contact with the project since release and I have passed literacy courses”

Brussels put it, “It's a new way of tackling old problems.” The old problems being the barriers that some groups in society – including ex-prisoners – still face in getting a job.

EQUAL projects are carried out by Development Partnerships, groups of organisations who come together to design and deliver a programme of work which is relevant to their individual goals and objectives. NIACRO led a Development Partnership in the first round of EQUAL, which ran from 2001 to 2005. We called the project Personal Progression System, and it was designed to help ex-prisoners get ready to access the job market.

NIACRO has a long track record of resettlement and rehabilitation work, with training and advice services for offenders and employers. Our partners in PPS were the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. Both these agencies have a keen interest in

learned a lot about how to work effectively in partnership, how to pool skills and knowledge, and how to manage differences of size, wealth and scale among the partners. PPS was no exception. An important part of the external evaluation of the project, just completed, analysed the joint working in some detail. The

“Without the project I wouldn't have bothered because I hate going to job centres.”

evaluator concluded that “PPS was an outstanding example of effective partnership in the EQUAL 1 programme”. We'll be building on this good foundation in our second round project, ReachOut (described below).

As well as the other members of the Development Partnership, NIACRO worked with partners from other EU Member States. Grouped under the name MERIT (Making Employment Realistic in Transition)

The evaluation of PPS showed that a total of 415 people had benefited from its services and support. Some of them shared their views of the experience –

“I have had regular contact with the project since release and I have passed literacy and numeracy courses.”

“Without the project I wouldn't have bothered because I hate going to job centres.”

“This time, I had more opportunities coming out of jail than I did before I went in!”

For NIACRO, the key achievements of PPS were the mainstreaming of standardised assessment and planning for all prisoners; making a significant contribution to the Prison Service's resettlement strategy, launched in June 2003; engaging with the beneficiaries; and creating strategic links with a range of statutory, voluntary and private sector organisations. We're extremely pleased that PPS was one of four EQUAL projects to be presented to senior programme managers and managing authorities from different Member States at a seminar in Brussels in December.

“This time, I had more opportunities coming out of jail than I did before I went in!”

Reaching Out

The second round of the EQUAL programme funded by the EU, the Prison Service and the Probation Service, runs from mid-2005 to mid-2007, and the new project, ReachOut, is well underway. The goal is again to help people with an experience of custody to access the labour market; to encourage the statutory services, with their much greater resources, to build the good practice learned in ReachOut and PPS into mainstream services; to increase and improve links with potential employers.

In moving on from PPS to ReachOut, we can of course draw on all the learning from the former project. In particular, we are working to develop job placements. Part of the learning from PPS was that mainstream employability programmes aren't able to provide the sort of short, flexible, placement that will benefit someone who is very out of touch with the workplace. So the goal is to come up with an effective model for arranging placements. As champions for this and other elements of the project, we welcomed Business in the Community as a new member of the Development Partnership.

“If this had been there years ago I'd never have gone back after my first time in prison.”

Another new element in ReachOut is adult mentoring. Again, this is a case of NIACRO building on current success – the mentoring programme for young people is flourishing and was recently marked by a national award. In the context of ReachOut, the Link-Up adult mentoring project will offer the continuing personal support and encouragement that can make

the difference between someone sticking at the process of building their employability, and giving it up. We are currently recruiting mentors, and particularly look forward to training ex-offenders in the programme.

For the individual, ReachOut works like this. Hearing about NIACRO's services and ReachOut is part of every prisoner's induction process. The resettlement planning can assess how motivated someone is to work towards ultimate employment. We receive referrals from Resettlement Boards as well as Probation or other disciplines.

At a subsequent one-to-one meeting, an agreement is struck about whether and how to go ahead. A detailed assessment questionnaire records the person's educational attainments, training and employment history. Then a resettlement plan, focussing on employability after release, is agreed. The goal might or might not be to get straight into the labour market. It could cover training and education, how to apply for jobs, how to deal with the fact of being an ex-offender. And it might importantly include actions to tackle personal

development, ways of dealing with the offending behaviour, health and addiction problems, family and community support, accommodation and finance/benefits. Under each of these headings, a detailed list of actions – for both the prisoner and the ReachOut worker – is agreed. The participant also agrees to keep in touch after leaving the



programme, so that there is some continuity of support. This also means that we can have a proper evaluation of its impact.

“I'd never have gone back...”

NIACRO News spoke to one ReachOut client. Billy was serving a two-year sentence, after his third conviction, in Magilligan Prison when he made contact with the ReachOut project worker. He took his resettlement planning seriously and has high praise for ReachOut. “My project worker was very good”, he says. “She really helped, and got me on to catering training, NVQ level 1 and level 2 while I was still in prison.” When he left Magilligan, NIACRO also helped Billy find accommodation and further education, bringing his NVQ up to level 3. Now he has his own small business and some determination to achieve a better future.

Coming back into a community has its good and bad points. OK, you're free; Billy experienced little stigma and a general welcome back from the neighbours; there's the hope of a better future. But there is also all the pressure that may have led to the offence in the first place, peer group, paramilitary or whatever. This leads us on to a general discussion on what Billy feels from experience would make the prison regime more effective; greater respect for the individual from staff; more and better-quality contact with your family; better preparation for leaving; more emphasis on re-integration.

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Billy recognises that sometimes it's the bad times that make you want to change things in your life. He claims that this particular sentence, and the opportunity offered by the ReachOut contact, has changed him. "If this had been there years ago", he says, "I'd never have gone back after my first time in prison."

This is practical, concrete help, based on what we know is effective. It has obvious value to the individuals who take part in the project. But we know that it can achieve much more; a labour market which deals more fairly and rationally with people who have been in the criminal justice system, and a reduction in re-offending with all the benefits that has for communities and the wider society.

The Latvian experience

There is a strong transnational element to EQUAL, and one of the ReachOut transnational partners is a Latvian DP led by the State Probation Service. Director of Services Pat Conway visited them at the end of November, along with technical experts Brendan Fulton and Peter Denley. The Probation Board's Jimmy Moore and David Williamson from the Probation & Welfare Service in the Republic of Ireland, who are working on areas of mutual interest, made up the party.



Consultant Brendan Fulton and Jimmy Moore, Protect N&S



Exercise pens in Latvian high-security prison

Over the five-day visit, the group met with our Latvian partners, took part in a conference of all the Latvian EQUAL projects, and visited Social Rehabilitation Centres in Riga and Valmieras, and the Riga City Mission.

These rehabilitation centres are essentially "half way houses" for those released from prison. The prisons themselves are run down and very under-resourced in terms of their physical fabric. There is little attempt to implement overarching resettlement programmes from within the prison system, where the emphasis is on containment. The people we talked to, particularly the Director General of the Latvian prison service and the Deputy State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, were very clear that much more needs to be done to put in place an effective resettlement strategy backed up with programmes that will have a real impact.

This visit was the beginning of what all parties hope will be a fruitful relationship. While the concept of resettlement has only been introduced to the Latvian criminal justice system (the Latvian probation service was only

established two years ago and is growing dramatically – 0 to 500 staff planned in the first three years). Our Latvian hosts showed and articulated evident commitment and energy; they are young, enthusiastic and it's all very fast-moving. There's a danger there too; any resettlement strategy needs basic strategic planning and legislation before it is put into operation. ReachOut is keen to contribute to the development of a model of resettlement which is – unlike in Northern Ireland - starting from a blank sheet. We will share with them our good learning and hopefully help them to avoid some of the problems we have encountered in the past.

North/South

In December, we had our first significant contact with our partners in Cork and Castlereagh. With the criminal justice systems in both Northern Ireland and Latvia in a state of transition, it's an opportunity to develop resettlement strategies in both jurisdictions.

JOBTRACK ON TRACK

“Jobtrack” is the name of one of NIACRO’s biggest programmes of work, aimed at empowering adult offenders to develop skills which will enhance their opportunities to get into appropriate and realistic training, education and employment. Funded under the EU Structural Funds’ Building Sustainable Prosperity measure, Jobtrack is also supported by the Probation Service, who part-fund it; the majority of Jobtrack clients are referred by Probation.

NIACRO compiles detailed statistical returns for Jobtrack. Some key figures from the 2004-2005 annual report show that:

- ✳ There were 611 referrals to the programme, 590 of them from Probation
- ✳ 11% of new referrals were women
- ✳ Of the Probation referrals, 50% were assessed as medium risk, with a further 32% assessed as high risk
- ✳ Only 7% of referrals did not attend for initial assessment
- ✳ Over 18% of leavers went on to positive destinations
- ✳ At the end of the year, there were 565 current clients
- ✳ All of these statistics far exceed the original targets agreed with Probation.

An external evaluation of Jobtrack is underway and will be published in Spring 2006. It will show that almost 80% of Jobtrack clients are long-term unemployed, more than

50% unemployed for more than two years and 46% for over three years. Most have been given a non-custodial sentence, and the great majority (see above) were assessed as at medium or high risk of re-offending. They are likely to be single or separated. The evaluation has already shown that we are working with one of the most socially excluded groups and that outcomes are more than comparable with the mainstream New Deal programme which “works with a client group with considerably fewer difficulties than most Jobtrack clients”.

In short, this is a group of people who are very difficult to reach and who face daunting problems in finding and keeping a job, or entering and completing education or training. They need, and with Jobtrack they get, an individually tailored, dedicated service, going beyond immediate employment issues to personal, human needs and wishes.

The programme is made up of a wide-ranging assessment process, followed by job preparation (which may include benefits advice, essential skills training, personal development etc) and signposting/brokerage (ie, introduction to services outside NIACRO, work placements, education and training, or actual employment). Work to improve employers’ recruitment policies is another key part of the programme and is described elsewhere in this issue of NIACRO News.



Being a Jobtrack client

As always, it’s the individual stories which convey the impact of the programme. At the AGM, members and supporters heard about two people.

Jonathon was a 19-year-old persistent offender when he began the programme, and was assessed as being at high risk of re-offending. He had held two jobs for a short time, but lost them through poor attendance. NIACRO’s Training Officer felt Jonathon was “genuinely on for change”, and started a detailed ground-level process of discussing how you applied for a job, how to make the most of what you had to offer, what you say about your conviction. Jonathon was reluctant to acknowledge that he had literacy problems, but did get to the stage of applying for three jobs (and role-playing the interview situation with his NIACRO contact). The bad news is that the failure to get any of these, along with the major, and common, problem that he was still mixing with people who weren’t helping him stay away from offending, meant that Jonathon breached his probation order, and is back in custody.

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So – a failure? Not necessarily. He has had the experience of having individualised, serious and continuing positive and practical support; he is getting a little older; and he knows that he has not been banished from the programme for ever. He can make another attempt in due course, and hopefully this time, with that bit of extra learning under his belt, he'll make it.

Sheila had spent six years in prison, and with that and her child-rearing responsibilities had been out of the labour market for 15 years. With some secretarial-related qualifications and experience, she was keen not only to get back to work but to rebuild lost relationships with family and the community. NIACRO helped her to contact a local women's group, in which she now has a leadership role, to re-enter education (she is currently studying with the Open University) and to get part-time employment.

Jobtrack has become a well-established and integral part of the service to offenders in Northern Ireland and it's important that it continues to do its work. NIACRO has applied to the current round of Building Sustainable Prosperity so that we can carry on with this important and effective contribution to bringing offenders into the labour market and out of offending. But European funding won't go on for ever. We are already working with the statutory agencies to try to ensure that the good practice we have established is maintained and developed.

The success of Jobtrack led in October 2003 to the piloting of a similar programme for 16 and 17 year olds, now extended to 2006 with funding from the Probation Board and the NIO. There was a summary of the evaluation of the Youth Employability Programme in NIACRO News issue 12.

DOING THE PREP

P.R.E.P. (Pathways to the Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners) is the name of a project of the Educational Trust, a North/South charitable Trust which supports education and training for ex-offenders and ex-prisoners in Ireland. NIACRO was a founder member of the Trust, established in 1995; Trustees now include representatives from ex-prisoner groups, statutory agencies, prison authorities and educational institutions, North and South.

The aim was to support politically motivated prisoners to complete academic qualifications – later extended to cover vocational training as well – when they left prison. The client group now potentially includes all offenders and ex-prisoners and their families, and the coverage includes the Republic of Ireland. Over 800 students have used the service since it started.

PREP was funded under Peace II within the measures managed by Area Development Management and the Combat Poverty Agency. Its goal was to serve 400 clients, to research the barriers to inclusion of the client group, and to develop policies and influence policy-making.

DID IT WORK?

The external evaluation of the project gave details of the people whom the project had helped up to August 2005:

- ◆ 431 (108% of the target) people had contact with the Trust.

They were given advice and signposted to appropriate education and/or training, and

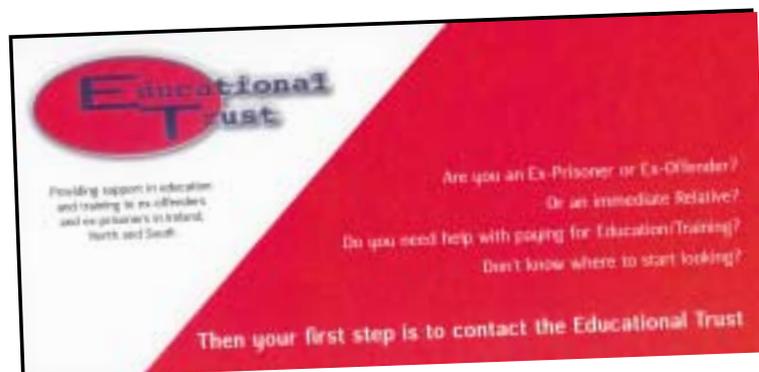
- 220 (65% of them politically motivated ex-prisoners and their family members) were funded so that they could take on the course/s they wanted to do.

- ◆ Twenty-four percent of applications came from women, a marked increase from the 14% applying to the Trust before the PREP project.
- ◆ Seventy applications came from the Loyalist community, and 73% of these were funded.
- ◆ Of the 309 people who left the project by August 2005, the highest percentage (46%) went into further education or training, and 40% into employment.

The other main evaluation findings were that:

- ◆ The project successfully catered for the diverse needs of ex-prisoners and their families.

- ◆ The work “requires a high degree of sensitivity and understanding...a challenging task but there is clear evidence that a satisfactory level of success is being achieved...not merely in levels of participation ...but also in qualitative terms”
- ◆ It is “contributing significantly to a more peaceful and a more equitable society”, not least because of the involvement of ex-prisoner groups.
- ◆ The process of building trust has been slow but the project is “demonstrating its ability to succeed both with the participants and with other stakeholders.”



The evaluators looked to the future as well as the past. Recognising that we want to continue and develop this work, they recommended:

- ◆ Improved co-operation among the agencies, North and South, and an integrated approach to the work.

- ◆ Mainstream providers will have to take on more of the funding of the work as demand continues to increase.
- ◆ Better information for the client group about the support available from statutory agencies and how to access it.

THE JOY OF LEARNING

Those are some of the comments of the external evaluator – but what did the participants think? Some quotes: “The Educational Trust introduced me to formal education after 34 years. I’ve got great joy out of learning.” “It’s good that the Trust is open to family members. People put their lives on hold during the partner’s time in prison – they need to start moving on.” “The support has made all the difference. I couldn’t do this course without your help.” “I can’t tell you how much I appreciate everything. I’m really enjoying the course and being occupied again. It’s been years since I felt this good about myself and positive about things again.”

One feature of PREP was a series of workshops and seminars for potential clients, most of them hosted by the various Trustees. This was a real breakthrough for the project; it revealed clearly the barriers people found – or perceived – in accessing education, and the sort of support they were looking for. We want to develop this way of working.

With a very positive evaluation from all concerned, NIACRO naturally wants to build on the work and we have applied to a range of funders so that we can do so.

You can find out more about the Educational Trust from Fiona McLaughlin, fiona@niacro.co.uk

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“...People put their lives on hold during the partner’s time in prison – they need to start moving on.”

“I’ve got great joy out of learning.”

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Influencing Employers And Policy Makers

Many people with previous convictions experience discrimination when applying for employment, accessing training opportunities, obtaining insurance (car and home), mortgages, holding licences to provide public services.

NIACRO's employment equity work focuses on influencing employer organisations and policy makers to help break down attitudes and barriers faced by many people with past convictions.

Ex-offenders and ex-prisoners face significant legislative, structural and attitudinal barriers. NIACRO works in all these areas to enhance opportunities for individuals by supporting organisations to make safe, fair and objective recruitment decisions.

Influencing Employers

Every employer involved in recruiting and selecting staff wants to find the best person for the job. Employers also need to be mindful that they do not reject applicants who have convictions which would not affect their ability to carry out the duties of the job. People need to be considered in terms of skill and experience; a conviction should not in itself be a barrier or reason to exclude people.

In Northern Ireland more than 30,000 people were convicted through the courts in 2004-05. Many of these convictions are for minor offences and few people with convictions pose a serious risk of harm. Many people with criminal records are already part of a productive workforce. In England and Wales, over a quarter of the

working population has a previous conviction and 40% of men have at least one conviction. So it makes sense for employers not to cut themselves off from this pool of potential employees.

We provide an advice line to job applicants, employers and other organisations looking for information and support about employing people with criminal convictions.

Callers will be advised on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Order and the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) Order and other associated legislation. They are also told about our training workshop "The Fair Recruitment of People with Criminal Convictions". The session covers: concerns/issues about recruiting offenders; the rehabilitation of offenders legislation; how to facilitate disclosure of convictions; dealing with the information; and looking at the risk issues when assessing relevance. We have also included training on new Codes of Practice.

The training is supported by the NIACRO publication "Working with Conviction – A Guide for Employers".

Employers wishing to promote their commitment to good practice can apply for accreditation of NIACRO's Employment Equity Award. It gives recognition to employers' efforts in promoting best practice fair recruitment and selection.

In 2004-2005, we received 288 advice calls, and 277 people from 74 organisations undertook the training. All of the evaluations we received were very positive. Among the comments were:

"Really enjoyed the course, presentation and training: a welcome relief from the sometimes tedious courses I go on."

"I got a lot from the course and it will certainly help my organisation to adopt some best practice ahead of the legislation changes."

As part of our reintegration service, we hope to develop closer links with employers to develop and test a model of supported placement for beneficiaries engaged in NIACRO's employability programmes.

Section 75

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act requires public authorities to promote equality in their policies and services, and to consult with relevant organisations when they are drafting policy. This includes their employment policies, and we take every opportunity to make the point in our responses to consultations that it is a matter of good practice for employment policies not to discriminate against people with criminal convictions.

If you want to know more about our services to employers, contact Anne Reid, anne@niacro.co.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE



NIACRO works in partnership with many of the key criminal justice agencies in Northern Ireland, and we are highlighting some of them in NIACRO News. In this issue, we feature the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service sets itself a challenging task in its “Statement of Purpose” – it “serves the community by keeping in secure, safe and humane custody those committed by the courts; by working with prisoners and with other organisations, seeks to reduce the risk of re-offending; and in so doing aims to protect the public and to contribute to peace and stability in Northern Ireland”. To do all this, the service has operating costs of around £130 million, over 2,000 staff and three core institutions – Maghaberry and Magilligan Prisons, and Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre and Prison, which also houses the women’s unit Ash House. (The Juvenile Justice Centre, which featured in the last issue of NIACRO News, comes under the control of the Youth Justice Agency).

Robin Masefield has been Director General of the Prison Service for just over a year. He had been Director of Finance, Planning and Estate Management between 1997 and 2000, and spent the intervening four years as Head of Policing reforms Division in the NIO. NIACRO News spoke to him in his office in Dundonald House.

The Prison Service is working to a strategic development programme (known within the service as the Blueprint) looking at the next 10 to 15 years – an unusually long timespan for a public service. Robin described it as the opportunity “to stand back and ask the basic questions” – like how many people will be in prison? What types and groups of people will they be? What is the level of risk of their re-offending? What sorts of work can the service do with them?

there is increasing interest in coming up with alternatives to custody

There may be fewer prisoners in Northern Ireland than in Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland, but the average population in 2004 was 10% up on 2003. The NIO recently came up with some projections for future prison population figures, ranging from 2% a year to five percent. Robin Masefield feels that it is likely to be even greater than that. He is, however, committed to working to try to keep the figures – especially for re-conviction - down. He points out that, for example, delays in dealing with remand prisoners are a long-standing problem, and that

there is increasing interest in coming up with alternatives to custody. There is also a current debate on sentencing, and following the NIO’s consultation earlier this year on its review of the sentencing framework, the Criminal Justice Board is due to consider subsequent proposals for a new framework next month.

In answer to NIACRO News’ query about the proposed new third prison, Robin pointed out that a prison probably takes seven to eight years to plan and build. At

this stage, there are no decisions on where it would be sited and indeed what kind of prison it might be, but it is certainly part of the strategic development programme. While applauding Magilligan Prison’s hard work in the area of resettlement, Robin reinforced NIACRO’s experience in working in Magilligan - that its remoteness is a real difficulty. A prison closer to a larger centre of population would offer easier access for families, and better access to employers and employment opportunities.

women in prison



Olwen Lyner, Graham Kelly (Probation Board) and Robin Masefield at the launch of the report on the re-integration needs of women

This seemed an appropriate point to raise the issue of how Northern Ireland caters for its women prisoners. After some bruising publicity, after the controversy about the move from Maghaberry to Hydebank, isn't it essential that there is a separate women's prison in Northern Ireland? It's not the first time Robin Masefield has been asked the question and his answer was that in an ideal world, this might be the solution. Whether it could be justified in Northern Ireland with its very small numbers of women convicted, is, he says, doubtful. What about a unit which would be part of a large prison but managed separately, as the next

best thing to a wholly separate facility? – again the DG demurred. He was firm about the move to Hydebank's Ash House being a change for the better, but acknowledges that is was "a salutary experience for us" and sees it as "a good basis for developing our work with women prisoners". To that end, a series of specific policies is being drawn up on aspects of the regime. Nor does the DG see Ash as "acceptable in the long term" which is good news for those who have been concerned about the whole issue of women prisoners here.

mental health problems

Asked about another group of prisoners who have particular problems, those with mental health problems, Robin was animated in his response to what he described as a "massive issue – prisoners with mental health issues are not served well by the legislation or by the health services". Around 70% of prisoners may have some degree of mental health problems – if they have offended, there is at present

little alternative to his service managing them, mostly in Maghaberry. However, the lead responsibility for prison health care will pass to the health services in 2007, and he is "trying to plan now to build the necessary links". His service has been much involved in the current Bamford review of mental health services through the Forensic Services working group, and is hoping that it will take on board the NIPS recommendations.

Children and young people

Sticking with the theme of particular groups of people affected by the prison service, NIACRO News raised the issue of child-centred visits, the one-to-one visits between a prisoner and his/her child designed to keep the parent-child bond intact. NIACRO staff who help with the transport on these occasions have been worried about the times when a child may arrive at the prison, only to find that for reasons to do with the availability of staff, the visit is off. It's not hard to see how devastating that is for parent and child. Our suggestion is that some staff should be "ring-fenced" for duties like this, as is recommended in the resettlement strategy; Robin was not prepared to guarantee this, but noted that a second family officer was appointed in Maghaberry in December. We do understand that there are issues about rotating staff between different duties, and balancing specialist skills with the need to be able to call on staff for a range of duties. But given that we all acknowledge the value of, and are working to improve, contact between prisoners and their families, this does seem one area where it is particularly important to deliver the service consistently.

On the topic of the 30 or so under-18-year-olds in Hydebank Wood (in principle, 17-year-olds should be in the Juvenile Justice Centre), the Director General can only "try to provide a slightly different regime" for the younger people, though there are not the resources to do all that is needed. He suggested that some of the work being done in carving out a new regime for women could read across to the younger people and their particular needs.

niacro and nips

NIACRO works with the Prison Service in many projects and programmes – the visitors’ centres and the transport to get people there, the Prison Link programme, and the EQUAL projects described elsewhere. Most importantly, perhaps, we are members of the partnership which undertook in June 2004 to work together to implement the NIPS Resettlement Strategy. To turn the strategy into concrete outcomes, an implementation plan was published in summer 2005, with a two-year timeline. Robin described the service as being “at the start of the journey” of

implementing the strategy. It signals a major shift in approach from – to over-simplify it – containment/security to resettlement, though Robin notes that the change had started before the strategy appeared. And the multi-agency approach (there are nine signatories to the resettlement strategy) requires the building up of new partnerships.

Naturally, NIACRO News asked the Director General about the role of the voluntary sector in the prison service, and equally naturally he replied that the service couldn’t do its job without the sector’s contribution. In discussing that in

a bit more detail, we found ourselves debating the balance between valuing and utilising the more informal, more flexible methods of voluntary organisations, and at the same time “systematising” its contribution. “A more mature relationship” was how Robin characterised it, recognising that both parties had obligations to meet. Certainly, it’s good to read in the resettlement strategy a recommendation that the service “takes on board the learning from the EQUAL programme” since that mainstreaming process is a key goal of EQUAL.

You can learn more about the NI Prison Service from its website: www.niprisonservice.gov.uk

UP FROM DOWN UNDER

No stereotyping in NIACRO News, of course, but visitors to Amelia House may have noted a distinctive accent from two new staff members. NIACRO News asked our two Aussies to tell us what brought them to Northern Ireland. They’ve also both moved from the statutory to the voluntary sector, and have interesting points to make about that change as well.

When I made the decision to move to Northern Ireland from Australia, I didn’t expect to get a job in an organisation like NIACRO. Mainly because we do not have the equivalent of NIACRO; there is no one organisation devoted to holistic care and resettlement of offenders, both adults and juveniles.

I was delighted to be offered the post and am looking forward to further developing the Adult Mentoring Project.

In the short time I have worked here, I have learnt so much (thanks to my colleagues) about the Northern Ireland criminal justice system. While it is complex there are so many similarities; issues facing ex-prisoners and ex-offenders are universal and

some element of social exclusion is the experience of all those who pass through the system, regardless of where they are in the world.

Working “inside”

In Australia I worked with adults and young people in the community before taking the post of Youth Officer and then as Unit Co-ordinator in a Juvenile Justice Centre. Adjusting to working in a detention centre was difficult because you are limited in so many ways and your main task is to provide a safe, secure environment and to encourage detainees to make positive use of their time in custody. I was fortunate to work in a programme-centred facility, where we offered a range of

vocational and educational pathways. In custody much of your focus is on security and as soon as the person leaves custody, we depend on post-release support to pick them up and support them. There is only so much you can do in a custodial setting. Basically we met immediate needs and then via a casework framework we worked to address resettlement needs. As a caseworker, you would set up courses and employment in the community but if the support was not there, the young person often ended up back in custody and you felt as though all your resettlement work was lost.

Being discharged from custody can be daunting, and it is during this

continues over →

→ continued

crucial time where people need support and encouragement. So it's a positive move for me to be able to work on this side of the 'system' and develop a mentoring project that aims to support people to resettle in the community following a period in custody.

I am enjoying living and working and living in Belfast. I am originally from here, and moved to Australia in 1993 with my family. It feels great to be back and I have found everyone to be so friendly especially the staff at NIACRO, who have made me feel so welcome and part of the team.

Kelly-Anne Stewart

G'day, I know what you're going to ask me, "Why would you move from Australia to Northern Ireland?" Well I must admit whenever I was asked that question, (it's usually the first thing people say to me); I was stumped for an answer. I had always wanted to visit Ireland, but had never really considered Belfast - but what ever the reasoning, here I am, feeling the cold like I have never felt it before!

Prior to moving to Northern Ireland I was a Constable in the New South Wales Police, stationed in The Rocks area of Sydney. I was a General Duties Officer as well as an Education Officer. The work was very

challenging and enjoyable, however I felt very restricted in the amount of assistance I was able to give to those I was arresting.

In August 2005 I won the position of Job Placement Project Worker here at NIACRO. My role is to develop models of voluntary work placements, seek commitments from Northern Irish Businesses to facilitate those placements, whilst delivering training to employers on the fair recruitment of people with convictions. (Quite a mouthful isn't it!)

Both sides of the coin

At times it seems like I have done a 180 degree turn, from being the uniform that locks people up, to the person that advises on why we must deal fairly with people with convictions. However, being involved in the investigation and prosecution of offenders gave me an insight into how judicial punishments of any kind can affect every aspect of an individual's life.

The Rocks was one of several stations trialling alternative methods to charging. For example in 2002 a scheme was brought in where police were able to issue infringement notices (fines) for offences such as assault, theft, property damage etc. The benefit is that as long as the person pays the fine, they would not

have to attend court and the offence would not be recorded as a conviction.

In addition, Sydney was one of the trialling cities for the Medically Supervised Injecting Facility in Kings Cross. Safer injection rooms are legally sanctioned, supervised facilities designed to reduce the health and public order problems associated with illegal injection drug use. Australia has a great focus on Harm Reduction and has many initiatives centred on community health and safety, and offenders taking ownership of their crimes.

I have found since coming to Northern Ireland that although there are not so many programmes for alternatives to charging, the focus around resettlement is much higher than in Sydney.

The needs and issues of people who have been through the criminal justice system are great and varied. From housing, substance abuse, employment and training, to family, discrimination and social. NIACRO addresses all of these issues when dealing with ex offenders. The delivery is holistic and personal and completed against many odds. I am very excited to have the opportunity to work for such a forward looking organisation.

Michelle Ring

BEING A MENTOR

Mentoring Project volunteer Peter Crossan has recently completed the Certificate in Community Volunteering delivered by the Churches Voluntary Work Bureau on behalf of the Volunteer Development Agency. Peter has been volunteering with NIACRO in the North West project for over two years.

Peter attended the 'Taking it Forward' Conference in Newry on 9 November 2005 to receive his Certificate from DSD Permanent

Secretary, Alan Shannon. He was watched proudly by NIACRO's Denise Mac Dermott, Senior Practitioner for Mentoring, and Vivienne Courtney, Volunteer Coordinator.

The Certificate in Community Volunteering is designed to develop and accredit the skills and knowledge volunteers need to work effectively, a valuable tool in building up the transferable skills and personal development of volunteers. It includes four

modules: Preparing to volunteer; Skills for self-management; Working to good practice standards; Understanding needs, issues and responses.

Each unit has a set of standards which must be achieved by carrying out a set of tasks/activities. A portfolio of evidence is gathered and assessed. The course lasts for 30 hours, delivered over 10 weeks.

Denise Mac Dermott met up with Peter to find out more about his experience of the Certificate in Community Volunteering and - as



Volunteers and staff at the volunteering seminar in October

2005 is The Year of The Volunteer – to ask what impact becoming a volunteer has had in his life.

Why did you decide to volunteer with NIACRO?

“I was at the Tech and there were posters looking for volunteers to act as mentors for children and young people. I thought – maybe I could do that, if I needed a mentor I would want the person to be someone who wasn’t paid to spend time with me. I had free time and wanted to give something back to young people.”

You’re the first volunteer to successfully complete the Certificate in Community Volunteering, how did you find the course? Would you recommend it to other volunteers?

“I would definitely recommend the course to volunteers who want to build their confidence within their roles and contribute to their personal development. It gave me the opportunity to identify links with other volunteering roles, within mental health, care and youth work. The Certificate helped to explore our perspectives on volunteering as well as identifying areas of good practice. The whole experience was a very positive one, I met lots of new people and I developed my confidence at

speaking in groups and developed a stronger sense of the value of the contribution I was making through my volunteering role.”

What impact has becoming a volunteer had on you?

“When I first started as a volunteer mentor I was only 20 and the youngest person at the training. I was eager and keen to get started although I wasn’t very confident. I knew I would be fine once I was matched with my young person, being a mentor is about being a positive role model, having an awareness of who you are, just being yourself. Now two years later I’m a much more confident individual, I’m more outgoing and assertive. I’ve developed my understanding of working with young people and not to personalise things if the relationship breaks down...I attended the volunteer training held in October 2005 to share my experiences of being a mentor with the new volunteers. This was a major achievement for me and my own personal development.”

Have there been any defining moments as a volunteer?

“Yes there have been plenty...although there’s one that really struck home with me...I was out on an activity with my mentee.



Sandra Adair, VDA, presenting the National Mentoring Award to Denise MacDermott

We went to get some pizza he took one slice and closed the box. I asked him, “Do you not like your pizza?” He said “It’s lovely Pete...I just want to take the rest back home to share with my mammy and brothers and sister”. I was choked, here was a young person who was excluded on so many levels, and it just demonstrated to me that so often it’s the little things in life that mean so very much. Giving your time to someone is a very worthwhile and precious gift.

If you’d like to find out more about volunteering with NIACRO contact our Volunteer Co-ordinator: vivienne@niacro.co.uk

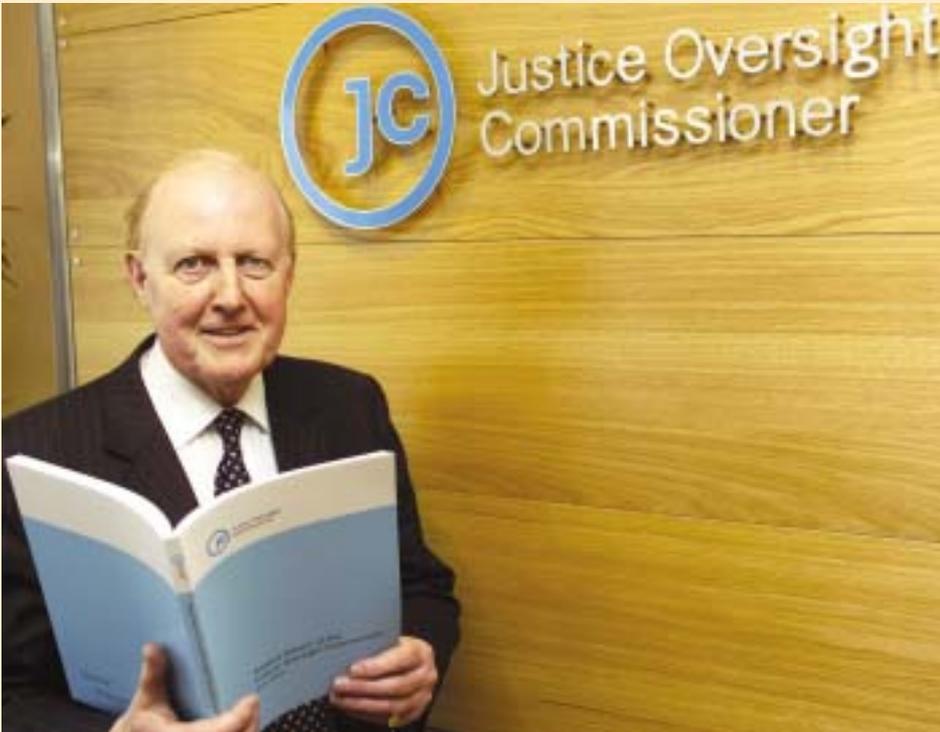
niacro ceo takes chair of acovo

NIACRO's Chief Executive, Olwen Lyner, has been elected Chair of ACOVO, the Association of Chief Officers of Voluntary Organisations. ACOVO has 150 members, all of whom head up voluntary and community sector organisations, and works to build effective leadership in the sector. It was formed in 1988 and is funded by the Department for Social

Development. Speaking of how delighted she is to have the opportunity to lead ACOVO for the next two years, Olwen said, "In the voluntary and community sector we face a challenging future, but I believe that we will continue to be a modern and innovative sector that will impact on all our lives in Northern Ireland."

Olwen brings the skills and experience of her work at NIACRO to other bodies as well as ACOVO. She is a Board member of Proteus, Co-Chair of the Educational Trust described on page 8/9, sits on the Strategic Tier of the Belfast Community Safety Partnership, and is a representative of the voluntary and community sector on the Joint Government Voluntary and Community Sector Forum.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS TO AMELIA HOUSE



Lord Clyde

Since the last issue of NIACRO News, we have welcomed Lord Clyde, the Justice Oversight Commissioner (on 31 October) and the Minister with responsibility for the Department for Employment and Learning, Angela Smith (on 13 December). Both visits gave us the opportunity to bring them up to date with our work, and of course to raise issues which matter to us and which fall into their area of responsibility. With Lord Clyde,

we raised the importance of the implementation of the recommendations within the Criminal Justice Review which refer to the contribution of the voluntary sector. He welcomed our partnership working with criminal justice bodies, and stressed the value of including human rights in our diversity training.

Angela Smith visited NIACRO on 13 December to hear especially about our employment/



DEL Minister Angela Smith and Olwen Lyner

employability work. She met staff from Jobtrack, ReachOut, the Education Trust and the Youth Employability Programme, along with colleagues from the organisations with whom we work in partnership on these initiatives. Welcoming the Minister, Olwen Lyner pointed out that "The projects NIACRO runs can give the Government clear evidence of what works. That good practice needs to be picked up and mainstreamed into the much larger scale of the services run by the Departments which the Minister is responsible for – DEL and the Department of Education."



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