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niacro

news

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Autumn 2006

VOLUNTEERING FOR NIACRO

THIRTY FIVE YEARS AND COUNTING

In this 35th anniversary year, we're looking back at some of the massive internal and external changes and developments that NIACRO has experienced, sometimes endured, often taken a lead in, and always been totally engaged with. One theme that runs right through all the annual reports and newsletters we've produced over the years is the contribution of volunteers to our work.

To start at the very beginning. The people who founded the organisation were volunteers, and several hundred people have given their leadership and their time, experience and skills through

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a group discussion at a recent Volunteer Forum

also in this issue:

mentoring
art and self-
expression

sex
offending
how should
society respond?

probation
board
its role in
criminal justice

AGM
invitation to the
anniversary AGM

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...serving on the various Executive and other committees which have governed NIACRO since 1971.

Other people have chosen to make a more hands-on contribution, at first under the supervision of the Probation Service, one-to-one with people in prison and on release.

As early as February 1972, the first six-week training course was held, with 20 people recruited as NIACRO volunteers. In 1975, with growing numbers of volunteers, a part-time Voluntary Associates Organiser was appointed, and Mary Edmund took up the full-time post from April 1976. By the end of 1976, the figure of 100 volunteers had been reached, partly as a result of a television and radio recruitment campaign.

The 1975 opening of the visitors' centre in Magilligan gave volunteers a new opportunity to help out.

So did another new project in 1980, the Prisoners' Families' Scheme, which grew out of the established groups for wives and mothers.

A good deal of the work of volunteers in the 1980s and 1990s was carried out in and through local communities across Northern Ireland, in community development, community safety and crime prevention projects.

By the second half of the 1990s, volunteers were working with young offenders and young people at risk in the Independent Representation project and the Independent Visitor scheme, and in 1999 the mentoring project began.

Our newest volunteering programme, LinkUp, expands the mentoring approach already well established with young people to adults on the ReachOut programme. In another innovation, we are particularly looking to recruit people who have already been involved with the criminal justice system to join us in this programme.

In NIACRO's first corporate plan, for 1997– 2000, we set ourselves the objective of increasing "the capacity of NIACRO for volunteer involvement at all levels within the Association" and one of the outworkings of this objective was the appointment of our present Volunteer Development Worker, Vivienne Courtney in 2000. In 2002, an evaluation of NIACRO carried out by the Social Services Inspectorate for the NIO found that NIACRO "makes good use of volunteers", with clear aims and objectives, policy guidelines and training. Certainly, the organisation treats the administration and management of the volunteer service very professionally" – to quote the then

Director of Operations Tom McGonigle, writing in the journal *Child Care in Practice* in 2002 (vol 8 no 4), "The organisation has to manage its volunteers in an increasingly sophisticated manner, which to all intents and purposes is tantamount to managing a workforce."

Indeed, it's not unusual for volunteers to turn into employees, as the experience of Sally Cunningham (see [Staff Arrivals and Leavers](#)) shows.

At the last count, we had 157 volunteers, giving over 11,000 hours to support our work. They are an integral part of our organisation, bringing experience, skills and diversity which strengthen and influence our work and the work of the criminal justice system. We will continue to develop the opportunities for volunteering in the future.

NIACRO carries out an evaluation of every project, and the professional staff working with us on these projects are often warm in their appreciation of the volunteer input — "I see the young person when they start the programme, and I see where, by having a mentor, they've moved to at the end of it. The commitment, dedication and sheer hard work of someone who gives up their own time to do this is humbling." "I don't mind admitting I was at a loss to know how to deal with X...I cannot tell you the difference to this child having a positive role model has made."

Finally, we should let the volunteers have their say. In a volunteer satisfaction survey published in March 2006, it was good to read that:

"I have volunteered with other organisations and NIACRO is the one that I can say is best organised, welcoming and supportive";

"My supervisor has always been there for me – supervision sessions and at the end of the phone";

"I feel that I have grown as a person as a result of being part of this organisation".



(We aren't complacent, and we did note in the survey that a few volunteers would have liked more, or quicker, contact with the relevant staff.)

Annual reports too have given volunteers a chance to describe their experiences. In the 1990-91 report, one volunteer based in

Derry/Londonderry said, "Being a volunteer has been very good for me personally. I left school 13 years ago but now I've done a community studies course at Magee College. I've learned how to work properly with kids. I wasn't one for mixing before [but] it has sort of brought me out of

myself meeting all sorts of different people."

If you'd like to be a NIACRO volunteer, contact Vivienne Courtney

vivienne@niacro.co.uk

CEOs LOOK BACK

Michael Warden was Director of NIACRO from 1979 to 1986, and Dave Wall from 1987 to 2000. In this 35th anniversary year, they have been looking back

Michael writes:

It is 20 years since my family and I left Belfast to move to Wales and a new career in business. So when I was asked to write this piece I felt that the main question was to consider how much the organisation has changed over this time.

The little black and white reports from the 1979-85 period bring back many memories – of our old HQ in a shabby Adelaide Street warehouse, of the forty odd other sites across the Province where our projects were located, of friends and colleagues, of the hundreds of meetings – to do with funding, with our performance and professionalism, with our credibility and position in the wider field in which we operated. At this time our work was seriously underfunded, but this was more than compensated for by the enthusiasm and effort of staff, enabling us to develop steadily as a service provider and as a contributor to public debate on social and penal policy.

My main impression of NIACRO 2006 – Amelia House, the glossy

corporate plan, the 16-page full colour editions of NACRO News – is of an organisation transformed, rebranded, better resourced, a sophisticated, confident management and a set of values that would enhance the manifesto of any progressive political party.

But behind the image, the current workload – supporting juveniles, families and adult offenders through mentoring, employment, training and education – clearly shows that clients' needs are still the same as they always were and that NIACRO's role is still to be for them a source of hope.

In the 1980s the voluntary sector was regarded as marginal, subordinate to the statutory agencies. NIACRO's 2006 mission statement – to be "acknowledged" as contributing uniquely to the development of society – suggests that the balance may at last be shifting, that government is prepared to devolve more real responsibility to community based organisations. If that is indeed what is happening, I imagine NIACRO will relish the challenge.

Dave Wall's thoughts on the anniversary:

It is a pleasure to be asked to reflect on my 13 years as Director of NIACRO. They provided some of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my career.

The voluntary sector works to transform society in ways which should ideally result in the need for the services provided to no longer be required. An ideal indeed! But one that we experienced in NIACRO to some extent. Work on punishment beatings, prisoner release, support for prisoners and their families and community based crime prevention all played a significant part in our peace process resulting in less violence, a dramatically reduced prison population and therefore fewer families damaged by the experience of an imprisoned relative.

It is rewarding now to see NIACRO continuing to play a major role in crime prevention and the resettlement of offenders albeit in the changed circumstances of a more peaceful Northern Ireland. Your commitment and skills are needed as much now as ever but with a different focus relevant to our changed circumstances.

And your experiences need to be shared with colleagues across the voluntary and community sector. Your capacity for change in responding to our changing world require essential skills for the sector as a whole.

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You deliver key services alongside statutory providers, and government is committed to enhancing the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to deliver those services. Your experience of working in partnership, of re-targeting your work to suit changed circumstances and of delivering quality services are all key elements of the changing world in which the voluntary sector will work and compete.

A particular area of NIACRO's work I remember with some affection

was the community based crime prevention work that in the early days focussed on youth services in seriously disadvantaged communities. That work developed a fruitful and active partnership between local community groups and NIACRO as a regional body.

NIACRO brought the organisational skills, accessed resources, delivered training and other support. Local community groups understood local needs and circumstances, had a deep commitment to their work and hence had the confidence of their own communities.

It is that kind of partnership we need to see developed if we are to be successful in tackling the problems of our most disadvantaged communities. Local communities cannot do it alone. Regional bodies have a key role to play but it must be on the basis of genuine partnership and collaboration founded on the needs of those communities.

I wish everybody in NIACRO well and congratulate you all on continuing to deliver your work in one of the most challenging areas of policy and service delivery.

MENTORING PROJECT

NEW SUCCESSES



(left to right)
Siobhan O'Dwyer,
NIACRO; Peter
Crossan, Mentor;
David Hanson,
Criminal Justice
Minister; Denise
Mac Dermott,
NIACRO.

NIACRO's Mentoring Project was described in detail in NIACRO News 12

The project pairs 10-17-year-olds who are in touch with the youth justice system, or otherwise at risk, with a volunteer mentor. Each mentor supports an individual young person to develop life skills which will help them build positive attitudes, stay away from anti-social behaviour and take their place in their community.

The Mentoring Project was awarded the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation's Approved Provider Standard in 2005. Now it has won the 2006 Criminal Justice Award's "Outstanding Contribution to Working with Young People in the Criminal Justice System".

The Telling Tales

exhibition



In another example of positive and innovative mentoring, young people from Derry/Londonderry have been developing their artistic skills alongside their volunteer mentors.

An art exhibition which ran during the summer at the Context Gallery in the Playhouse complex and then in the Richmond centre, showed work from the art project "Telling Tales". NIACRO joined forces with the Playhouse to design a project which could help young people involved in the youth justice system express their individual perspectives on life, their sense of themselves, through the medium of art.



The programme has to date been a total success and has provided the young people with the confidence and skills to further their training in the arts

The official opening of the exhibition on 25 July by the Mayor of Derry Helen Quigley was a great success. She took a great deal of time to speak individually with the artists and their families. In her speech the Mayor praised local community and voluntary sector agencies, recognising the role they play in providing services to children and young people in the Derry City Council area and further afield. She praised the achievements of the young people and their mentors, and was keen to learn more about individual pieces of work as well as their views on the mentoring project and what it means to have a mentor or to be a mentor.

The children and young people had excellent support from family and friends and it was pleasing that referral agents to the mentoring project also attended the exhibition and were very favourable in their feedback of the evening. All those who attended are so proud of what the group achieved in a relatively short time. Being involved in an exhibition has broadened the young people's horizons and given them increased confidence and a stronger sense of self belief as well as achieving a recognised accredited

qualification, NIOCN Level II in Visual Arts. They've also had a lot of fun, and the fact they are learning together with the volunteer mentors adds another dimension to the work.

Siobhan McLaughlin from the Playhouse was enthusiastic. "The progress that the young people have shown is remarkable", she said. "They have explored several social themes and researched into the work of relevant artists using the Internet as a research tool, and they've developed individual social skills, creative and decision making abilities. The programme has to date been a total success and has provided the young people with the confidence and skills to further their training in the arts."

The project was funded by the BBC's Children in Need, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Department for Employment and Learning.



SEX OFFENDING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The most recent report of the Northern Ireland Strategic Committee of MASRAM (Multi Agency Sex Offender Risk Assessment/Management) was published in June 06. The report details the work the MASRAM process has undertaken. It notes that there are 690 sex offenders being managed by the process as of 31 March 2006.

However it also identifies that there are 9,036 people in Northern Ireland with convictions for sexual offences, and acknowledges that “all the agencies represented in MASRAM do recognise that substantial evidence exists that suggests sex offending is still under reported by as much as 70%. The number of persons subject to notification requirements and with convictions for sexual offending, represent only a percentage of those who pose a risk to the public”.

We know that sex offenders have home addresses throughout Northern Ireland and that they have no specific social or physical profile. So the concern of professional organisations, parents and community leaders has to be how we reduce the potential risks to our children and other vulnerable adults from those who would target them.

NIACRO contributes to this by giving appropriate sex offenders structured and constructive work and training opportunities in our employability programmes (10% of Jobtrack clients are sex offenders).

This gives shape and purpose to the lives of people who are, and know they are, among the most isolated members of society. Sex offenders attend NIACRO programmes more regularly and stay longer than the average client.

Another value of the programmes is that they contribute to public protection – those who take part in Jobtrack are supervised, and staff have guidelines on how to deal with any behavioural problems that could arise.

RATIONAL DEBATE

In a sense, this is different only in degree, not in kind, from the constant balancing-act of the criminal justice system – rehabilitation and non-offending on one hand, protection of the public on the other; how to recognise and respect the public’s revulsion for the offence while maintaining the human rights of the offender; how to keep the debate rational even when it is conducted at times of high emotion and distress.

The recent coverage of the sentencing of the defendant in the case of the appalling murder of Attracta Harron keeps all the issues in play.

- Is it acceptable that prisoners are allowed to absent themselves from behaviour modification programmes because they are reserving the right to appeal?
- Is the legislation on 50% remission in cases of individuals with “level 3” risk assessments appropriate?
- Can a prisoner be said to be fully cooperative when refusing to engage in relevant programmes?
- The current voluntary arrangements between the agencies need to be formalised but will they get the increased resources that requires?
- Even with statutory authority, will interagency barriers and constant staff movement continue to hinder the consistent information flow required?
- How will third party agencies like NIACRO and others be kept informed of risk issues?

The Criminal Justice Inspectorate is carrying out an independent inspection of the action taken by criminal justice agencies following Trevor Hamilton’s sentencing for Mrs Harron’s murder. They will need to consider these issues in their report to Criminal Justice Minister David Hanson. NIACRO is currently working on its own response to the issues, and if you’d like to share your views with us, please contact Olwen Lyner (olwen@niacro.co.uk)

EMPLOYABILITY

IN EUROPE...



Anne Reid with transnational colleagues at the Managing Diversity conference



L to R: Kelly Anne Stewart, Brian Cunningham, Linda Pizani Williams (University of Kent), Italian colleague Luca, a passer-by and Fiona McLaughlin.

NIACRO staff were invited to take part in two conferences in Sintra in Portugal earlier in the year – the invitations arising from contacts made through our participation in the EQUAL programme. Anne Reid and Clare Humphreys, along with Shauna du Preez, HR Manager with the Patton Group, spoke at a “Managing Diversity” conference, presenting on employer training and employer influencing. They covered both the employer perspective and NIACRO’s experience in encouraging employers to buy into the idea of considering offenders for employment opportunities. This is an area which is very underdeveloped in other EU Member States and there is considerable interest in what NIACRO is doing.

NIACRO’s presentation focused on:

- barriers for offenders in accessing employment;
- acknowledgement of employers’ concerns;
- what employers need to know – relevant legislation;
- good practice guidelines in handling and assessing disclosure information;
- our employer training DVD: “Working with Conviction” which has been translated into Portuguese;
- case studies.

The conference was attended by Portuguese representatives from the prisons, the judiciary, criminal justice agencies and employer organisations and triggered plenty of interest and questions. The Portuguese plan to set up a similar model for employer influencing. The other group, Brian Cunningham, Fiona McLaughlin,

Michelle Ring and Kelly Ann Stewart took part in a conference among the members of a Portuguese-led transnational partnership with representatives from Portugal, Italy, England and Belgium. This also covered our work with employers, the advice line, developing placements and adult mentoring.

ReachOut, NIACRO's EQUAL project, is staying in touch with our colleagues in Portugal, and will be leading workshops on employability as part of prison resettlement strategies, and on working with employers, at an international conference in October 2006.

...AND THE USA!



Jude Doherty began Jobtrack training in December 2004. He enrolled on the computer studies classes in our North West office's IT suite, and his learning accelerated as his confidence and competence developed under the supervision of the class tutors.

Jude successfully achieved his qualification in Comptia A+ and went on to study towards the Network+ qualification.

In May 2006 Jude applied for and was accepted on the Walsh Visa programme. This programme gives young unemployed people the opportunity of an interview potentially leading to employment with a range of American employers.

Jude was successful in securing a full time position with the KCRS IT company based in Pittsburgh and leaves on 22 September for a year,



Jude Doherty

during which he will take advantage of company-sponsored study to enhance his qualifications.

Jude says, "Because of the IT skills I gained at NIACRO I had the

confidence to apply for this job with KCRS. It's been the best opportunity of my life, thanks."

We wish him continued success in the future.

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



Noel Rooney, Chief Executive of PBNI

For the latest of our series of interviews with senior professionals in the criminal justice system, NIACRO News visited Noel Rooney, Chief Executive of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. Many of NIACRO's projects are carried out in partnership with Probation: Youth Employability, Jobtrack, the Advice Service, Protect North and South and Family Links.

WHAT DOES PROBATION MEAN TO AN OFFENDER?

The Board's website includes a link to the following useful list of the types of Order the probation service's clients may be subject to.

A PROBATION ORDER puts the offender under the supervision of a Probation Officer for a period of between six months and three years, during which probation staff will assess and manage the risk in order to assist the offender to avoid re-offending and thus protect the public.

A COMMUNITY SERVICE ORDER requires the offender to do unpaid work in the community. It can be given to someone aged 16 or over convicted of an imprisonable offence if the offender consents and may be between forty and two hundred and forty hours duration.

A COMBINATION ORDER is a sentence that combines a Probation Order and a Community Service Order. The period of Probation supervision can last from 1 to 3 years. The Community Service part of the Order can range from 40 to 100 hours and must be completed as instructed.

A CUSTODY PROBATION ORDER is a sentence of the Court requiring an offender to serve a period of imprisonment (offence must justify 12 months or more) followed by a period of supervision in the community (the period of supervision will be 1 to 3 years commencing on date of release), and is unique to Northern Ireland.

A JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTRE ORDER is a sentence of the Court requiring a young offender (aged between 10 and under 17 years) to spend time, normally three months, in a Juvenile Justice Centre and then be supervised in the community by a probation officer, normally for three months. This sentence may be up to a maximum of two years.

A LIFE SENTENCE LICENCE applies to any person serving a life sentence who will be released from custody on licence. An individual must comply with the conditions of his licence in order to remain in the community and not be returned to custody. Conditions of a licence may include, for example, being placed under the supervision of a nominated Probation Officer, not changing a place of residence or employment without the consent of a Probation Officer, and keeping in contact with a Probation Officer in accordance with instructions.

A SEX OFFENDER LICENCE - Article 26 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 makes provision for all offenders convicted of a sexual offence to be released on licence under the supervision of a Probation Officer.

A GB TRANSFER LICENCE - any individual subject to licence may, given the agreement of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, transfer from another jurisdiction in Great Britain.

The Board was established under the Probation Board (Northern Ireland) Order 1982 and is a Non-Departmental Public Body. It “seeks to work closely with statutory, community and voluntary organisations in order to achieve its purpose which is to protect the public by working with the courts, other agencies and partners to reduce re-offending and integrate offenders successfully back into the community”.

Noel Rooney clarified that the overriding role of the service is public protection – a shift in emphasis from the rehabilitation/befriending/support role which would have been seen as the priority in earlier years. The shift, placed by Noel in the 1990s, reflects both public and political attitudes, and like any other significant change has meant a change in both thinking and practice for probation professionals.

Although Noel demurred at NIACRO News’ suggestion that the Probation Service was the Cinderella service of the criminal justice system, it is not the largest or best-funded of the criminal justice bodies. The Criminal Justice Review – “wholly welcomed” by the Board according to Noel - of course began a process of fundamental and far-reaching change in the criminal justice system. That included major changes to the Probation Board. The Youth Justice Agency took on the responsibility for young people, and a number of probation staff moved across to the new service. Before this, the Board had a very stable workforce. Careful workforce planning became a priority in the 2005-2008 corporate plan. In Noel’s view and in spite of the loss of valuable experience, this has resulted in a flexible, mobile and more IT-skilled workforce.

Today, the PBNl employs around 360 people providing services across Northern Ireland in the assessment and management of risk, the preparation of professional assessment to assist sentencers and the supervision in the community of approximately 3,500 offenders. The total caseload comes to over 6,000 annually.

Changes to legislation – with more due shortly – and in working practices, many of them designed to increase public safety, have brought inevitable pressures on resources. (Nothing new there; in NIACRO’s 1973 annual report, we quoted from a research report showing that if all the ex-offenders who asked for “the after-care to which they are entitled” every probation officer’s workload would double.)

As well as the concrete performance measures which every public body works to, Noel knows there is a communications/public relations issue to address. Having worked in the health sector in the past, he saw the public becoming more likely to challenge and criticise health professionals and systems. Now, he suggests, that process is emerging even in areas which have historically been pretty much immune from it. Noel feels that it’s important therefore that

the criminal justice agencies tackle the issue head on and innovatively. Experience has taught him that “bringing people in and explaining things” makes ill-judged and ill-informed criticisms much less likely.

One of the key demands of the Criminal Justice Review was for more inter-agency working within the system, and it is Noel’s view that this essential step forward needs working at. If things go wrong it is usually “at the interface between agencies”, often about breakdowns in communication. He stresses that there isn’t always an obvious lead partner, and everyone involved has their own concerns, priorities and outside pressures.

Another topic that NIACRO News was bound to raise – and would have done whichever criminal justice agency we were interviewing just now – is the current (second round of) consultation on the guidelines for community restorative justice schemes. Noel pointed out that the principles of this approach are fundamental to probation work and methodology – rehabilitation, reparation, and working with the victim. Citing youth conferencing as a welcome introduction of a restorative justice process, he said that Probation hopes to be involved in similar processes with

there isn’t always an obvious lead partner, and everyone involved has their own concerns, priorities and outside pressures

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adults. He regards the current political debate around the issue as being a “transitional problem” which will be clarified in due course and he believes it will result in a workable system.

Probation in the Community

The Probation Board has recently completed a consultation on its draft good relations strategy, based on the University of Ulster’s Future Ways programme. In practice, the probation service has had fewer problems with sectarianism and community relations issues than other criminal justice organisations. Clients and partners have tended to be comfortable and the service has been credible and acceptable to communities even in tense times. Noel is confident that the probation service is “at the forefront of promoting the equality agenda”.

This may also reflect an aspect that sets PBNI apart from comparable bodies in Great Britain. Its direct funding and other support over many years for community-based activities and community development – including its support for NIACRO - is unique. It has also been unique within the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, though that has changed with the Criminal Justice Review. With new players in the field like the Community Safety Unit, the Youth Justice Agency and the District Policing Partnerships, the PBNI’s work will change and refocus. It will commission services formerly provided by the service itself, and focus more tightly in its own work on the core challenge of preventing re-offending. Noel feels this new funding relationship will be clearer and more effective, for both the Probation Board and the organisations it supports.

You can learn more about the probation service on www.pbni.org.uk.



INDEPENDENT VISITOR SCHEME

Young people from the Independent Visitor Scheme took part in an outdoor pursuits day in Castlewellan Forest Park in July.

On the agenda for the day was outdoor rock climbing using the climbing wall, followed by canoeing.

We had a group of 10 volunteers and young people who were all up for the challenge and what a day it turned out to be!

The young people took on the climbing wall like true champions, followed slowly behind by some of the volunteers! In spite of the rain the true spirit of the group really shone through...various groans were heard through the dull roar of the heavy rain, but this didn’t keep them down!

After a thorough soaking the rain eased off and the crew headed off to hook up their canoes and hit the water. Loud whoops and shrieks were heard off shore as somebody ended up over board, soon they all followed suit and were in for a dip – well they couldn’t really have been any wetter!!

The Independent Visitor Scheme aims at providing a consistent support to young people living in care who have little or no contact with their parents. We work with many types of young people, some introvert some extrovert, and the idea behind these types of activity days is to challenge them to try new activities and see where their strengths lie. Truly this day has achieved this, with some of the more introvert young people really opening up and shining at the activities undertaken, alongside the extroverts in the group – it was a real credit to every one of them for giving themselves the chance, and we were delighted to have been able to provide the opportunity.

Thank you to all who took part; the young people for their energy, the volunteers for their time and commitment, and the staff at Blue Lough for their expert assistance. We look forward to next time!

Lisa Grant and Sinead McKeever

(contact them for more information about the scheme: lisa@niacro.co.uk sineac@niacro.co.uk)



Parent Support Groups

In a move to strengthen the links between parents and the young people in the Juvenile Justice Centre, NIACRO and the JJC Family Worker have been piloting a group for parents. The group draws on the skills and resources of both agencies to support the parents of young people in the centre and when they move into the community.

Offending by young people is closely linked to the family, and how parents act can make it more or less likely that young people will offend. From work in the Centre we have seen how crucial families are in the successful reintegration of children into the community after being in custody.

The need for the group became apparent after parents talked about the difficult and challenging behaviour of their young people, and the belief they have failed as parents. In addition to coping with a young person in custody, many

are also dealing with debt, mental health issues, alcohol and drug misuse, relationship difficulties and worries about other children. And many parents feel isolated in the local community because of the young person's behaviour.

The aims of the group are to:

- offer support to parents;
- enhance parenting skills;
- improve communication between parents and young people;
- raise self-esteem;
- reduce isolation;
- identify other sources of support within the community.

Members of the group come from the greater Belfast area and meet once a week. They have looked at some of the issues that cause them concern - dealing with social workers and attending meetings, their rights as parents, debt, coping with stress, and anger management. They've also looked at ways of managing stress through painting, ceramics, massage and relaxation.

The group continues to attract new members and has become a support in itself, with members asking others for advice and valuing the opportunity to talk about their concerns with people who have had similar experiences.

What the participants have said:

- Camaraderie with other parents; great stress relief and brilliant fun (the most important bit).
- I've realised I'm not the only one with problems.
- I'm more patient with my son.
- I have enjoyed getting out of the house, meeting others in the same position.
- I have enjoyed not being judged as a bad mother because of my son's choices.

CAPS SUPPORT GROUP

This is not the only example of a parents' group among NIACRO projects. Caps (Child and Parent Support) parents in the Southern HSS Board took part in a pilot eight-week programme which looked at the legislation, dealing with challenging behaviour, dealing with stress, self esteem, and information on support networks. It's planned to offer this programme regularly and to expand the topics it covers.

For more information on our work at the JJC, contact Aisling Cartmill

aisling@niacro.co.uk

and for Caps contact
Martina McCooey

martina@niacro.co.uk

AMENDMENTS TO PACE LEGISLATION

The NIO have been consulting on a draft Police and Criminal Evidence (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order and associated codes of practice, and NIACRO responded to the consultation document on this important legislation. You can read the full response on the website, but in summary what we said was:

We were disappointed that the NIO had not carried out an Equality Impact Assessment, the tool which the Northern Ireland Act has laid out to examine new policies and laws. In our view, the PACE legislation does have implications for young people, and there is also a need to examine any possible adverse impact on people from some ethnic minority groups, and people with particular political opinions.

We believe that everyone under 18 years old should be considered as a child for the purposes of having particular protections under the law – this is the internationally agreed definition of a child under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are other aspects of the consultation that are particularly relevant to children:

We welcome the specific safeguards for children in the codes of practice, but recommend that custody officers and police officers in general are given training on children’s rights and their ability to understand and process information.

We recommend that child-friendly information is available to children in all police stations, and that particular attention is paid to explaining to them the value of asking for legal advice.

We support the emphasis of the draft Code of Practice on the need for stop and search powers to be used “fairly, responsibly, with respect for people being searched and without discrimination.” It’s extremely important that the police do use the powers in this way and are seen to do so. We also agree on the importance of

giving clear reasons to the person being searched.

We recommend that more thorough searches should never be carried out in police vans, but only in a police stations or other building. Police vans can be intimidating and cannot facilitate the search being carried out in a respectful and courteous manner.

We are pleased to see that a person must be treated as mentally disordered or vulnerable if a custody officer suspects this is the case or is told this in good faith.

We recommend that people with mental health difficulties or learning difficulties, and people from ethnic minority groups, should be given information in a form which they can readily understand.

If you want to discuss our response, contact Siobhan O’Dwyer (siobhan@niacro.co.uk)

Currynierin Women's Action Committee (CWAC)



The group at a recent training course

NIACRO has always employed a community development approach to its community safety work, and building the capacity and skills of local people has been key to the success of past and present projects. The Currynierin Women's Action Committee is an example of how, given the skills and opportunity, local people can have a real impact on the quality of life in their area.

The group was established earlier this year when a number of active volunteers approached NIACRO's Community Safety Project Worker Catherine Pollock and asked her to help them organise a community clean up and apply for funding for



a community festival in the summer. The Foyle Women's Information Network (FWIN) helped the group become formally constituted.

Working with NIACRO, FWIN and Currynierin Community Association, the group decided their key focus would be reducing crime and anti-social behaviour with a particular focus on interface tensions and the role of women in peace keeping. They undertook training to build their confidence and help them develop the skills required for their new roles.

An initial audit carried out by the group along with NIACRO highlighted the interface as a main concern for residents and created an extensive list of volunteers willing to participate in community projects. The community clean up, in partnership with Derry City Council, involved young people from the area and addressed the litter problem in communal areas of the estate. A petition and awareness campaign to draw

attention to the dangerous bend on the road that leads to the estate has helped influence DRD to plan major works over the next two years. CWAC were instrumental in establishing a young men's and young women's group in the area. Youth organisations have worked with both these groups providing training, diversionary activities and developing and showcasing youth talent in the area. The group have also provided courses and activities for women and co-ordinated the summer festival in August.

The future of CWAC looks very positive and they have secured funding from a number of sources including Derry City Council and The Honourable the Irish Society. The group has always maintained a community development approach that is flexible and experimental and they have embraced the concept of working in partnership with voluntary, statutory and business agencies, all to the benefit of their community. Forthcoming projects include a cross community training scheme with FWIN that will give women the skills to engage with young people and work on the interface, regular coffee mornings for senior citizens, awareness raising in conjunction with Foyle Women's Aid with many more planned. As these active women continue to build their confidence and increase their skills CWAC can only continue to add to the excellent community action taking place in Currynierin and bring about positive change in the area.

If you'd like to learn more about this or other community safety projects, contact Catherine Pollock

catherine@niacro.co.uk



Celebration 35th AGM!!

will be held in
the Europa Hotel

on
Thursday 16
November 2006

2.30 – 4.30 pm

We're delighted that our guest speaker will be Helen Edwards CBE, Director of the Home Office's National Offender Management Service and a former Chief Executive of NACRO, the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders

She will be speaking on the contribution of the voluntary and community sector to the criminal justice system

All welcome – please let Jackie Junk know you are coming,

028 9032 0157 ext 215

jackie@niacro.co.uk

STAFF ARRIVALS AND LEAVERS

NIACRO projects are moving from our premises at 16 Russell Street Armagh after nine years at this location. Our Mentoring and Independent Visitor projects will now be based along with the CAPS project at 1A Russell Street, Armagh. Jobtrack Training Services will move to offices at Railway Street, Armagh.

Thirty years ago Sally Cunningham became a volunteer with the PBNI as a Prison Visitor, and subsequently worked at the Visitors Centre at the Maze Prison where she went on to become Co-ordinator. After six months with the Simon Community, in November 1987 Sally joined NIACRO's Families Services where she worked up to June 2006. During her nineteen years as a Family Worker she gave great support and help to each individual and family she came into contact with.

Margaret Montgomery has retired after 19 years service with NIACRO, Armagh. Margaret started her employment as a part time clerical officer working in the

Jenny's Project where she spent 10 years. When the organisation moved to the Russell Street premises in 1996 Margaret worked as Office Supervisor responsible for the administration of NIACRO and other projects.

Many colleagues attended the two retirement parties, at Amelia Street and in Armagh respectively, to thank Margaret and Sally for their work over the years and to wish them well in the future.

Sally turned to poetry for her farewell – here is one verse from her review of her working day.

*"In my car I travel round
Fermanagh, Tyrone I'm
sometimes bound
Armagh and Down they get
their turn
The car has almost done the ton
Miles and miles I do each week
Up hills, down lanes and every
creek
I've done the bit in every clime
Soon the time will all be mine!"*

New starts

in June, July
and August

Mary Cunningham, Senior Practitioner, Family Links

Lauren O'Malley, Project Worker, Family Links Southern Board Area

Philippa Bole, Supervisor Hydebank Wood Visitors Centre

Anne Williams, Receptionist/Data Processor

Ian Power, Finance Officer

Leavers

Sally Cunningham, Senior Practitioner, Prison Link

Billy Eagleson, Project Worker, Mentoring

Margaret Montgomery, Office Supervisor, Armagh

Phyllis Hunter, Training Officer, Essential Skills

Joanne Elder, Training Officer, Youth Employability

Jonathan Menzies, Sessional IT Tutor