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news

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**THIRTY-FIVE
AND COUNTING**

THIRTY-FIVE AND COUNTING:

The Story of Niacro



NIACRO began its work in 1971; not the easiest time in Northern Ireland's history to plunge into the world of criminal justice.

But, in the words of a later Chairman, Harold Good, "In the midst of cataclysmic social and political breakdown, NIACRO began its life championing the vision of justice and restoration for even the most ostracised members of our society."

The original impetus for the organisation had been the establishment of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders in Great Britain in the late sixties.

There was growing concern for the rights of offenders, and a rising prison population as a result of the civil conflict. However the reality was that the concerns were not linked. The very name that conferred the offender status on the people it was working for created a barrier with politically motivated prisoners which was not acknowledged for many years.

Thirty-five is not perhaps the roundest of numbers, so why undertake the first major

analysis of our work to date just now? Well, we have just moved into new offices in the centre of Belfast; it's a time of major change in political and administrative systems in Northern Ireland; and we may be facing the most significant changes in criminal justice since the organisation was established – the devolution of criminal justice powers to a local Assembly.

This history is drawn from the annual reports and other publications which are the record of our work and our opinions over the lifetime of the organisation. It shows how NIACRO has grown in size (albeit with a few downturns when times were particularly hard) and matured in vision over the 35 years. Some currents have remained constant while new demands and approaches have given rise to new projects and activities. It can only give a flavour of what one Chairman described as "the dizzying

amount of work planned and accomplished by staff and volunteers."

If the early reports sometimes strike a tone more of charity and welfare than of rights - well, sensibilities, attitudes and language change over time. We no longer describe offenders as "those whose social inadequacy has resulted in crime"; we don't assume that every offender is a man nor that every male prisoner is necessarily married to his partner; we are perhaps a little less patient with, or understanding about, public prejudice against offenders. But the core elements haven't changed. Justice, alternatives to prison, rehabilitation, and specialised – often voluntary – support; they are all mentioned in the first annual report.

The 35 years fall roughly into four blocks - the establishment of the organisation and early trials and successes; a period of development and consolidation; a time of considerable external and internal change and upheaval; and the last few years of refining the role of an NGO in a new political, social and criminal justice environment.

STAGE ONE

1971 – 1979

STARTING UP
AND GETTING GOING

In 1971 Bob Byers is appointed Organising Secretary along with one other member of staff - Mrs M J King, Office Secretary. NIACRO's offices are at 41 Donegall Street. Lord Dunleath becomes President, and the Chairman is Miss Bessie Maconachie until 1975, when she is succeeded by Donald Browne. At the outset it is considered by the Executive Committee that "we need an income of £5,000 annually to fulfil our present commitments".

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

GOVERNANCE
AND PUBLIC PROFILE

In 1977 the Policy Review Committee recommends that the governance of the organisation needs streamlining with a "small committed team" as a management group, and the rather large existing Executive Committee (25 members and three observers from the statutory services) acting as a consultative body. This requires constitutional change, agreed at the May 1978 AGM. Lord Longford is the

speaker at this AGM. He gets a good deal of press coverage, not least because the Government has refused to allow him to visit the Maze Prison.

NIACRO has fielded an impressive range of speakers over the years – the first few AGMs included Lord Hailsham, Shirley Williams, William Deedes, John McVicar and Louis Blom-Cooper.



FUNDRAISING

A Ladies' Committee is formed in the second year of NIACRO's existence to raise funds. It holds its first event, a concert directed by the well-known singing teacher Frank Capper, in the following year. In December 1973, at the invitation of Dean Sammy Crooks, it jointly sponsors a concert in St Anne's Cathedral by the Kings' Singers, then at the height of their popularity – so popular that they are asked to return in June 1974, again sponsored by NIACRO. NIACRO's share of the proceeds of the two concerts comes to £800. In 1977 the organisation benefits for the first time from the Dean Crooks' "sitout" on the steps of St Anne's Cathedral,

the second year of a charitable initiative which still continues.

SERVICE DELIVERY
AND ADVOCACY

NIACRO is not resourced or seeking resources to take on individual case work apart from an accommodation scheme and in some cases helping people to find a job, but recognises that it has to respond to individual enquiries and appeals for help. As well as giving limited practical help, NIACRO acts as advocate and notes that although "by the time most people come to us for help they have exhausted all provision within the statutory field", NIACRO staff can "elicit a more positive response from a statutory agency than when the request is made directly by the applicant." In fact, we are able to say, "We have not yet met a problem where an organisation or an individual failed to respond, and, in the most humane and practical way, lend assistance." This is the early days of advice giving, still an important thread in our support for ex-offenders and in our work to influence criminal justice and workplace practices.

In 1975 NIACRO addresses an important policy issue – to what extent are we a "welfare" agency? There is an Emergency

A person's conviction should be taken into account only in exceptional circumstances

Fund, which is used on occasions to pay for travel, clothing or accommodation. But the organisation is clear that its role is "on a much broader plane – in education and crime prevention, in involving the community in rehabilitation, in initiating projects, in working for penal reform and assisting in having such reforms implemented."

The Lodgings Scheme (originally the Landladies Scheme) gets funding in 1972 for three years from the Pilgrim and Mitchell Trusts. The scheme plans to place ex-offenders in private rented accommodation, with NIACRO keeping in touch with both landlord and ex-offender. Sixteen landladies agree to participate in the scheme; in several cases an ex-offender whose family have refused to have him home when he leaves prison, has been able to go back to the family after starting out in lodgings. This has happened in "what originally appeared almost impossible circumstances". Local artist and cartoonist Rowel Friers contributes a poster to support the scheme.

VOLUNTEERING

In the first year, six-week introductory courses are held for "voluntary associates" – the first mention of an aspect of our work which



is still central. At this stage, the volunteers work under the supervision of Probation Officers to give one-to-one support to individual ex-offenders. The following year, twenty people undertake a six-week introductory training course for volunteers in Belfast; a course planned for Derry/Londonderry in April/May is cancelled "due to the circumstances prevailing at that time". Volunteering expands a year later to include work in both penal institutions and in youth groups; it becomes clear that a volunteer organiser is needed.

A full-time Voluntary Associates Organiser takes up post in April 1976. There are now 40 voluntary associates, who undertake a 10-week training course at Queen's University's Extra-Mural Department. A television and radio recruitment campaign has a good response. NIACRO and the Probation Service organise a workshop, "A professional use of volunteers" in 1977 with a hundred participants.

The first Voluntary Associate conference is held in April 1978 in Dungannon. There are now about 75 active "VAs" attached to local probation groups. Increasingly they are involved in group activities – for

example with the young people on Intermediate Treatment schemes. However, it is planned that volunteer work in NIACRO will broaden to include work beyond the scope of the Probation Service.

EMPLOYMENT – EVER A KEY ISSUE!

Employment is already an important issue for NIACRO – at this early stage, small-scale direct action is reported. "The Organising Secretary has had some success in obtaining employment for those who have requested assistance in this field". A 1973 attempt to get funding for a full-time Employment Officer is unsuccessful; the proposed job description covers interviewing in penal institutions "those who are genuinely interested in obtaining employment upon release"; negotiating with sympathetic employers; and liaising with the Department of Manpower Services.

In 1977 NIACRO gives the proposed Rehabilitation of Offenders Order a cool welcome, believing it to be "extremely restricted and of little practical effect." A working group is set up with other interested groups to examine the whole question of the law and the resettlement of ex-offenders. The basic premise is that "a person's convictions should be taken into account by employers and others only in the most exceptional circumstances". It is suggested that discrimination against "persons who had paid their debt to society by serving a sentence of a court amounted to a breach of their fundamental

Crumlin Road Centre



the NIO conduit of funding for a Save the Children play group organiser in the Society of Friends' canteen. In 1977 NIACRO, the Probation Service and the EHSSB set up a steering group to develop and support "Prisoners' Wives' Groups" across Northern Ireland.

civil rights". Accordingly an application for an investigation is made to the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.

It is disheartening to record that this legislation has never been amended and in our annual report of 2005/06 we still identify the real obstacle it is to the reintegration process.

FAMILIES

The "Wives and Families Centre" for the relatives of prisoners in the Crumlin Road Prison opens at 310 Old Lodge Road in January 1972, three afternoons a week. This project is to have a roller-coaster history. It closes after nearby bombs in June 1972 and after many delays, and weary comments in annual reports, a visitors' centre serving the prison opens in May 1978. It is however not ideally situated, and therefore underused, and NIACRO continues to look for better premises. It closes again in 1979 to provide for a secure car park for prison staff, and opens once more in 1982.

A visitors' centre at Magilligan Prison opens in May 1975. Some 60 volunteers are recruited to staff the centre four days a week, 10.30am – 4.00pm. At the Maze Prison, NIACRO is

YOUNG PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY YOUTH WORK

The particular needs of young people are also recognised at this early stage, with plans to contact them through schools and youth groups "to discuss with them the often serious effects of anti-social behaviour (a very early, indeed quite advanced use of the phrase "anti-social behaviour" which didn't appear in the press, or even academic literature, until the 1980s or 90s. The more usual term in those days would have been something like "juvenile delinquency").

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

Olwen Taylor, now Olwen Lyner our Chief Executive, joins the staff in June 1978 as Youth Project Officer. "Since then", the annual report comments,

"she has made a distinctive and important contribution to the Association's work in crime prevention amongst the young." This is a significant development for NIACRO. One new project is based in the Suffolk area of Belfast where about 20% of 14 to 16-year-olds have been cautioned. The Youth Project Officer also takes over a campaign in Enniskillen which was pressing for "social facilities for young people".

RESEARCH THAT INFORMS OUR SERVICES

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

LOBBYING AND CAMPAIGNING

Apart from the obvious and unprecedented criminal justice context created by the conflict, there are other changes and developments in government policy which impact on NIACRO's work and objectives. The 1973 reorganisation of

health and personal social services into Area Boards - in place of the previous County and County Borough Health and Welfare Committees and other bodies - is welcomed. "Up-dated, well-organised and well-integrated community social services cannot but be of immense value to those the Association has been founded to help."

Another important development is the 1977 Black Report. This report of an inter-departmental review group on children and "young persons" is an early example of the consultative documents with which we have become so familiar. At the suggestion of NIACRO, two voluntary sector working groups are set up to consider the draft report, and NIACRO chairs the group dealing with young offenders. A detailed response to the report is produced, and a further response when Sir Harold Black's committee make their recommendations in 1979.

The prison population peaks at an average of 2946 in 1978. On the financial side, NIACRO notes in 1974, "The Home Office confirms that it costs over £25 per week to keep a man in prison, which is a sobering thought."

It's certainly sobering to read this in 2006, when the cost is £1640.

In 1974 NIACRO welcomes proposals for introducing community service and a parole system to Northern Ireland. Almost a third of the annual report is given up to a detailed description of the system as it operates in England. The next year, NIACRO welcomes the Treatment of Offenders (NI)

Order 1976, which introduces the Community Service Orders. The next few years' annual reports will carry repeated calls for the new system to be implemented, and for the Probation Service to have enough resources to do so.

On the other hand, we react strongly to the proposal in September 1975 to build a massive maximum security prison at Maghaberry, to hold the entire adult population of convicted prisoners, male and female. NIACRO believes the concept to be "fundamentally wrong" and ascribes it to a "Dartmoor mentality". It sets up a sub-committee to oppose the proposal, and gathers support from like-minded bodies. In the next year, there is evidence that NIACRO's comments and counter-proposals (which include the first recorded call by the organisation for a new, separate, women's prison) are being at least partly taken on board. "We are of the opinion," says the annual report, "that this episode shows the value that well co-ordinated and constructive criticism can have in the penal field".

This lobbying and campaigning work is gathering confidence. In 1978 at NIACRO's request, the NIO provides up-to-date information on its plans for the prison system, some of which the organisation supports. However,

NIACRO cannot see "any overall long term policy" and it seems to the organisation that the conflict is still responsible for "an attitude of reactive improvisation".

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

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

NIACRO calls for rational debate, calm judgement and moderation

1979 – 1986

DEVELOPMENT AND CONSOLIDATION

Michael Warden is appointed Director (the post has been renamed as part of the 1977 governance review) in July 1979. The election of the Conservative Government with an agenda to “Roll back the frontiers of the state” and an Extraordinary General Meeting in February 1981 which agrees new Articles of Association, under which an elected nine-member Executive Committee takes over the role of the Council, provide the impetus for the development of a service delivery programme.

A series of Chairmen serve two/three years each - Noel Shortt, Dave Wall (who leaves to take up a job with CAB in Great Britain; he is to return in 1987 as Director), Kathleen Kinahan and Margot McAuley.

After 11 years in Donegal Street, the organisation moves to larger offices in Adelaide Street in 1982, from which it offers a range of services. In April 1986, annual spending hits the million pound mark for the first time.

Significant changes are made in 1983 to NIACRO's management structure, staff terms and conditions, and governance. The growing number of projects – they are reaching over 3,000 people - are grouped into Resettlement of Adult Offenders; Care of Prisoners' Families;

Youthwork in local communities and Intermediate Treatment projects; Youth Training. There are around 165 volunteers. The annual report raises the issue of the nature of the projects NIACRO believes it should be undertaking, especially with the potential for funding from the newly-created Probation Board. Should our projects be geared to the narrow focus of the prevention of re-offending, or do projects for young people at risk, for example, or in a community development context, equally contribute to a reduction in crime?

NIACRO has articulate views on the project element of a voluntary agency's work – “we accept that every new project starts as an experiment and a gamble”. However, we call for clarity on the principles of Government funding of voluntary agencies' projects – is it to encourage the statutory sector to accept and adapt innovation? Is it seen as a good (and cheap) way of filling gaps in statutory provision? Or is it a kind of temporary job creation programme?

THE SERVICES

Whatever the context, NIACRO's project development is gathering speed. The 1981/82 annual report records a “radical

expansion” of services, with planning and fund-raising for new projects and new staff posts which will come on stream in 1982/83. This results in a rise in staff numbers from 13 full-time equivalents in 1981/82 to 28 ½ in 1982/83. By 1985, the number of staff goes over 40 for the first time. All this growth comes at a price, however: in 1982/3 policy and research work have to be set aside, and the Director describes 1984/5 as a “tough and frustrating year” with many uncertainties over funding and increasing pressure on management.

For young people, a major project is the opening of the Armagh youth centre, Jenny's Project, in September 1979. Its facilities include “a coffee bar, juke box and pool tables” – which fix it firmly in its period. The report notes that it proves possible to maintain “a reasonable standard of behaviour in spite of some inevitable incidents”.

By 1981, around 125 young people use Jenny's Project each week, of whom 36% have been excluded from at least one youth group in Armagh, 33% are involved with statutory agencies, and 25% have appeared at court for either welfare or criminal justice reasons, or both. In 1984 the project wins a Ewart Biggs award.

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

EVIDENCING THE NEED

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

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

Following this research the Department of Manpower



The after-school minibus

Services provides funding to support work experience and training for young people with the Railway Preservation Society's project to repair and restore old railway carriages. By 1985 there are 50 places available through a number of youth training schemes. A market garden established in Downpatrick employs five ex-offenders and nine people on Community Service Orders. In

1986 NIACRO is given approval to expand its ACE places from six to 100 (Action for Community Employment was a Department of Economic Development programme of short-term contracts for people who had been unemployed for more than one year). ACE workers are employed in seven dedicated workshops across Northern Ireland.



Railway Restoration

In 1981 NIACRO prepares a “private report” on intimidation, especially of young offenders, for a group of voluntary organisations who are trying to help the victims; although it is not until 1990 that Base 2 is established, a project dealing with individuals under threat from paramilitary and community sources. Over the years the humanitarian impulses for this engagement have been questioned but the organisation is proud to trace its concerns back to this time.

The Bridge adult education centre for ex-offenders is set up in 1982, taking up about half the office space in the Adelaide Street premises. In the first five years, it is discovered that 95% of students had never taken up any other form of adult education. The core components of the programme are that attendance is voluntary; that the learning is student-centred; that sports and other activities will be part of the programme (55 ex-offenders take up the offer of 10 driving lessons. One third sit and pass the test, in some cases getting employment as a result); and that students will be offered relevant support from other NIACRO services like the advice service and employment work.

A Bursaries Scheme to help ex-offenders access education and training is established in 1982. The need for such a scheme is confirmed by a survey carried out by the adult education project which finds that 45% of Probation clients are functionally illiterate. The project also finds that ex-offenders are lacking in self-confidence and have a fear of mixing with other students.

The Wives and Families Centre serving the Crumlin Road prison is renamed simply the Families Centre. It opens on Mondays and Wednesday to Saturday, with special efforts made at public holidays. Daily attendance averages 120, up to 170 on occasion. From the start, there are plans to extend the building to cope with the demand. Staff from the Prison Welfare Service, Probation and NIACRO help sort out problems with visits being refused, travel arrangements, welfare rights etc. By 1985, around 25,000 annual adult visits are made to Crumlin Road Families Centre (and 15,000 to Magilligan). The Crumlin Road centre is described as “one of the most highly regarded of NIACRO’s services by those who use it”.

A project to support prisoners’ families opens in 23a Pump

Street Derry/Londonderry; 20 families are using it by March 1985. Five other groups are meeting regularly in other areas, holidays are arranged for 60 families and 360 toy and food parcels are distributed at Christmas and Easter.

New families groups are started, in Lenadoon, Ballymurphy, East Belfast, Portadown and Armagh.

An analysis of the help given by the Emergency Fund during 1980/81 shows that 317 people made 612 applications to the fund, an increase of 50% over the previous year. Applicants receive 172 food vouchers, 88 meal vouchers for use at Extern’s day centre, 42 clothing vouchers, 49 overnight accommodation vouchers and 20 travel fares. Staff make 91 phone calls to the DHSS, Probation, or other voluntary

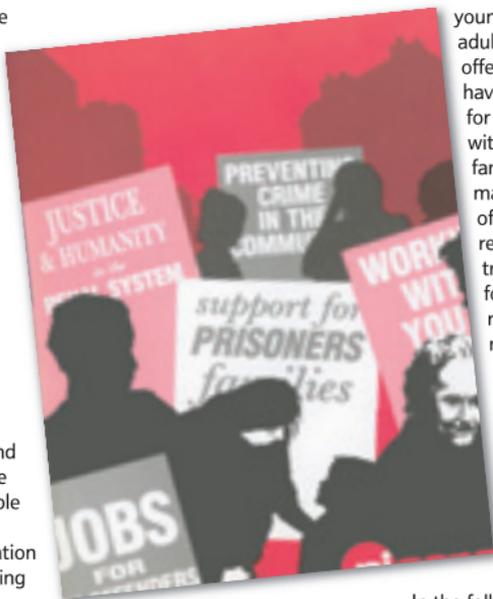
young offenders
adult education
bursaries
prison visits
families groups
emergency fund

organisations, give advice or counselling on 56 occasions, give out 51 parcels for prisoners, and there are 26 “miscellaneous” interventions.

Consideration of this analysis results two years later in a change of focus. In 1983 an Advice Centre proper is established. The decision is made to stop providing meal and food vouchers, since this process is putting severe pressure on the centre and its resources. Rather, the project aims to help people deal with welfare rights, housing and accommodation problems through engaging the relevant statutory agencies and through developing structured relations with Probation.

LOBBYING AND CAMPAIGNING

Resources have been concentrated on project development, and NIACRO still has the ethos that it is “an organisation which primarily provides practical services to people in trouble”. However, there is a sense that we want to rebalance our activities and the banner headline “Campaigning for Humanity and Justice” is used in 1985/86 to describe the efforts to “project the fruits of our experience and raise the issues thrown up by our work”. This includes comments and approaches to Government on prisoners’ earnings, proposed children and young person’s legislation, and a draft Criminal Justice Order. The Life Sentence



young people had been adults at the time of the offence, they might already have been considered for release. Working with the Portadown families support group, made up of families of SOSPs, NIACRO recommends more transparent procedures for review and “more realistic” criteria for release decisions. In the following year, the NIACRO submission bears fruit, contributing to the new review procedure and the announcement of over a dozen release dates.

Review Board is established in 1985 and greeted by NIACRO with a degree of scepticism and concern – shared by many other voluntary and independent observers. The organisation returns to this theme in subsequent years.

Against the background of events like these, in 1984 a submission is made to Government on the situation of 62 prisoners convicted of murder committed when under the age of 18, and detained at the Secretary of State’s Pleasure (SOSPs), ie on indeterminate sentence. This critical intervention deals with the reality that if these

In the following years, NIACRO projects give opportunities to people coming out of prison on the “Working out” scheme. The 1984/5 annual report sums up the principle of this work. “It is not our business to challenge people’s morals or allegiances...we take our stand on helping people to manage the transition from involvement with the criminal justice system for whatever reason, and whatever their attitudes towards it, to the outside community.”

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

campaigning for
humanity and justice

STAGE THREE

1987 – 2000

A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

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

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

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

The 1998/99 annual report tackles the topic of the “professionalising” of the voluntary sector. The new funding available from Europe supports human resource development – both for NIACRO staff and trainees on the various projects. However, “Voluntary organisations are concerned about being the cheap alternative; a source of flexible, disposable labour with poor conditions of service and hence poor quality of delivery.” On the other hand, there is a value in “partnerships with statutory agencies based on clear contracts with clear performance expectations” as is beginning to develop with Probation.

As funding from Europe becomes more accessible, and the transnational learning begins to develop, it is noted that the Northern Ireland rate of imprisonment is almost twice the EC average, at 125.2 per 100,000 population compared to 72. It’s an argument NIACRO will take up regularly over the years – that the use of custody, especially for young male offenders, is counter-productive and that alternatives should be designed and better used.

An early example of European support is funding in 1992 under the New Opportunities for Women programme. A training programme for the women relatives of prisoners and offenders, is based in Derry/Londonderry and Belfast at the Crumlin Road Families centre.

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

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

The Executive Committee begins a review of NIACRO’s accountability to the community. The opportunity is taken “to articulate NIACRO’s clear view of the proper roles and responsibilities of a voluntary organisation operating in the criminal justice sector in this time and place.”

Partnerships with statutory agencies based on clear contracts

The resulting report, published in 1993, covers:

- The role of the voluntary sector in general, welcoming the DHSS's February 1993 strategy for the support of the voluntary sector and community development.
- The need for a "mixed economy" of social service provision.
- NIACRO's aspirations as a voluntary organisation, based on a community development approach, providing training and support for volunteers, with an increased input from clients, and "an active policy comment role" based on our experience and research.
- Working with the community and statutory agencies, calling for a clear understanding of the respective roles and mutual respect between them.
- NIACRO's relationship with the criminal justice system, which in Northern Ireland is challenged "to maintain the highest possible standards of justice, even in a context of social division and politically motivated violence."
- Increased levels of public expenditure to tackle poverty and unemployment, and "the bleak and restricted lifestyle" they cause.
- In conclusion, NIACRO commits "with its particular involvement with the 'sharp end' of society...to being part of a process of reconstruction in which the voluntary sector can be a major actor."



The management teams are restructured in 1995 to streamline operations. The restructuring increases the focus on young offenders, and a new post of Regional Development Manager funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation is designed to assess development needs across Northern Ireland and make connections with councils, health trusts and other regional networks. This results in a quality partnership with the Rural Community Network and a series of local conferences on the topic of community safety.

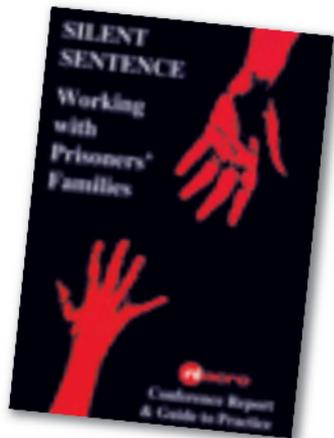
FAMILIES

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

Transport services are increased by the new minibus in Derry/Londonderry. There is now a shuttle service from people's homes to the train station, and from Central Station in Belfast to the Crumlin Road prison and the Young Offenders Centre.

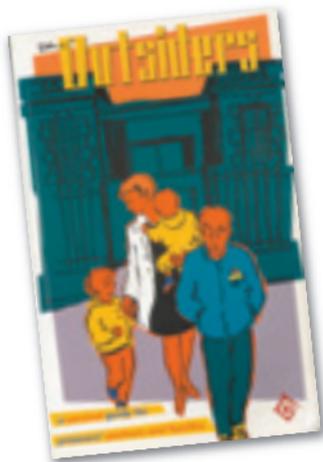
The information and advice function moves up a gear with new posters and leaflets being distributed to every social security office in Northern Ireland; a rights guide is published in 1988. In February 1987, NIACRO holds a seminar bringing together all the agencies which give information to prisoners' families, to encourage networking among them. By the mid-nineties the advice/welfare service covers the Crumlin Road and Magilligan prisons, with resources to go into the Maze and Maghaberry as well, giving prisoners the chance of a face-to-face meeting with a welfare rights worker for the first time.

In the early nineties, a survey of prisoners' families, funded by Children in Need, notes that the support services provided by NIACRO and others "are grossly under resourced given the levels of need we have established by research...[and] should not be seen as optional extras but as a right." An international conference on prisoners' families – The Silent Sentence is held in 1990.



NIACRO is involved in setting up a “Best Quality Visits Forum” made up of the NIO, Probation, Quakers, Save the Children and NIACRO. We note some improvements with a children’s play area added to the Magilligan visitors’ centre, and a pilot scheme developed to encourage family visiting at the Maze. Ultimately our calls for child centered visits are piloted at Magilligan and will in time become available in all prison establishments.

In December 1994, *“The Outsiders”*, a guide for prisoners’ families, is published. It draws on the research carried out in 1992/93, along with input from prisoners’ families, support groups and other prisoner organisations. Director Dave Wall praises the families and partners with whom NIACRO works and “who have demonstrated remarkable qualities of resilience and selflessness.”



YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY

In the late eighties, there is a new emphasis on working in and with communities to tackle anti-social crime among young people. The idea is to mobilise the community to work with its own youngsters by giving training, funding and professional support. Criteria for NIACRO support to a project are that a group: is based in a neighbourhood having real problems with antisocial crime; has community support; has consulted with voluntary and statutory agencies; uses mainly local volunteers; is non party political, non sectarian, and non sexist; does not duplicate the work of other agencies; and is prepared to be accountable to NIACRO. Initially known as Community Voluntary Action (CVA) this programme will form the root of NIACRO’s community development crime prevention work. It builds on the 10 after school projects, initially related to the 1979 Black Report’s recommendation on preventative work to keep young people out of custody, which have grown up during the 80s.

In 1990, the Base 2 project is set up to help resolve problems of paramilitary threat in communities, especially against young people. Initially housed with NIACRO but managed by an interagency group Interact, it was integrated into NIACRO’s structure in 1993. In the years that followed NIACRO took opportunities afforded to it to seek to influence those who had connections with organisation active in such activities. It was from such connections that the Community Restorative Justice



groups were formed and initially resourced via NIACRO.

The Independent Representation scheme is introduced in 1990 as a pilot project at Lisnevin Centre, an establishment for young people on training school orders. The scheme gives any young person in custody a volunteer lay person to speak for them if they have difficulties or concerns. Two years later, the scheme is extended to the Rathgael Centre, and a year later to St Patrick’s Training School.

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

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

EMPLOYMENT

At the end of the eighties, the Probation service sets up an Employment Unit. Senior managers from Probation, NIACRO and Extern form a tripartite group to co-ordinate employment services for ex-offenders. In 1992, Job Train is established through the combined efforts of the group and acts as a Managing Agent to deliver the Job Training Programme for offenders, ex-offenders and those from an offending background. A little later, NIACRO's Action Plan Training programme is approved to provide training under the new Jobskills programme for under-18s.

By 1995, NIACRO is reviewing how it helps ex-offenders find work. Historically, this has mainly involved one-year training programmes in dedicated workshops. The changing nature of the employment market suggests a more individual approach to increase the individual's employability; this change will be carried out through the EU funded Jobtrack and Personal Progression System programmes.

A Coping with Convictions Unit is set up in 1995 to develop links with employers and offer information, advice and training on employing people with convictions. It also advises people who have faced problems in their work or when applying for a job because of their conviction.

The Coping with Convictions guide for employers is launched the same year, backed up by a billboard advertising campaign and targeting of employers to get the message across that "excluding offenders from employment effectively excludes up to one third of the male adult population." NIACRO calls for the NIO and the Training and Employment Agency to work closely to design and implement an effective offender employment strategy.



Following the high profile case of Martin Huston, examined in The Abuse of Trust report, NIACRO carries out a review of its policy and practice in work with sex offenders. In the years that follow, NIACRO intensifies its efforts in relation to staff training and is more explicit with referring agencies as to its expectations as to information sharing, confidentiality and child protection. The Voluntary Sector Working Group on Sex Offenders, of which NIACRO is a member, commissions independent research on managing sex offenders, and holds a conference to discuss it. NIACRO accepts that given the development of robust risk assessment practices there may be merit in some sort of secure unit for high risk sex offenders.

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE CONTEXT

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

In 1986 we are "not convinced" of the success of the policy of integrating prisoners from different paramilitary backgrounds; a theme which



recurs in many of the following years' annual reports.

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

We respond to a Government circular on crime prevention by pointing out that it presents an unrealistic picture

– on police relations with local communities, on what could be done with no extra resources and on the likelihood of better co-operation between the various agencies.

The organisation also prepares a submission, at the request of the Association of Boards of Visitors, calling for the abolition of prison for fine defaulters. This is part of NIACRO's general belief that “prison should only be used for those who may be a direct danger to the public or whose crimes are so serious that they must be marked by society's gravest punishment.” So far as young people are concerned, the policy is fundamentally the same – “Whatever the reasons for taking children and young people and placing them in institutions, it is likely that such treatment will increase rather than decrease the probability of involvement in criminal acts.”

However, NIACRO is happier with the prison service's strategic plan “*Serving the Community*” in June 1991. We welcome the increased openness of



Magilligan Prison

the service and its expressed wish to bring the prisons and their staff into the community.

We also welcome the plan's commitments on liaison with other agencies and voluntary groups on reintegration, on preparation for employment, and on maintaining family bonds.

We also make a statement on our relationship with the service: “NIACRO regards it as one of its most important roles to take a consistently sceptical, if constructive, view of the penal system.” And we call for “mechanisms of consultation”; indeed, we see ourselves as one of those mechanisms, ready to help “create a participative element in the policy-making of statutory bodies.”

NIACRO's formal response, “*Justice, Safety and Openness*” to the Prison Service's strategic plan, includes recommendations for substantial reform of the service. Many are causes for which NIACRO has been campaigning for years, like the transfer back to Northern Ireland of people from here, who are in prisons elsewhere in the

UK. Many are around the maintaining of relationship bonds – private family visits, increased visiting, and “greatly enhanced access by female prisoners to their children.”

The long-running campaign on prisoner transfer, carried out with partners including the National Association of Probation Officers,

bears fruit in 1993. NIACRO is “heartened to note that the process of transfer has now begun”.

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

Alongside this concern to consider a release process the organisation also secures funding to support prisoner groups to research the social and economic needs of those to be or already released.

NIACRO welcomes the IRA and Loyalist ceasefires in 1994 as having brought “renewed hope that as a society we can resolve and accommodate our differences through the political process.” NIACRO – and the criminal justice system – prepares to adjust to the new circumstances.

1996 – 2006

CONTINUING THE MISSION REFRESHING THE PURPOSE

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

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

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

At this time, we are developing the new three year Corporate Plan, to guide our work from 1997 – 2000. It is published, explains Harold Good in the preface, “to enable the broader community to examine and comment on the objectives we have set ourselves for the next three years.”

The mission statement reads – “NIACRO works to achieve a just, humane and effective criminal justice system and an inclusive and peaceful society.”

The six strategic areas are: Contributing to building peace; community development; influencing publics; structural integrity [which includes improving evaluation,

establishing networks and partnerships; better internal integration]; resourcing; quality assurance.

Implementing the corporate plan isn’t all plain sailing, however. There is a drop in staff numbers of almost 25% in 1998/99. There are changes in funding programmes – especially the reduction of the ACE programme and what NIACRO has identified as the failure of New Deal to deliver for ex-offenders, and limiting changes to the Jobskills programme. While NIACRO and Extern begin work to integrate their adult employment and training services, there is a redesign of the training and employment services, with less funding available from the domestic purse and more reliance on specialist European funding. A larger proportion of funds are coming from short-term project funding rather than ongoing grant in aid. A management restructuring, flagged up in the corporate plan, is completed: it reflects a more logical relationship to the criminal justice system. Internal restructuring continues in the following years, with, in effect, one tier of management being removed and a unified Management Group being established in early 2000. Harold Good





Harold Good (left) and Richard Buchanan

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

In late 2000 Chief Executive Dave Wall moves to the Voluntary Activity Unit of DSD, and is replaced by Olwen Lyner who has been Director of Operations.

In 2001 the NIO commissions the Social Services Inspectorate to carry out an evaluation of NIACRO. It applauds “the range of services and projects that [NIACRO] provides, its willingness to provide services across Northern Ireland, its ability to network and work in partnership, and the commitment it shows to the use of volunteers”.

NIACRO achieves IIP status in July 2001. In presenting the award, NIO Minister Des Browne notes that “working within the criminal justice system is not easy...but it is important that the voluntary sector is involved and plays a role in both delivering services and informing government policy.” The

emphasis on staff and volunteer development will continue and increase, and NIACRO commits to the PQASSO system of continuous improvement in 2004.

For all the achievements, the financial pressures continue, and in the 2002/03 annual report the Chairman refers to the resilience of the organisation in the face of being “constantly battered and bruised by the vagaries of funding regimes which increase in complexity and demand, and place ever greater obstacles in our path”. As a result, there is further downsizing of staff numbers and services. The opportunity is taken to re-examine all the work, to look for appropriate partnerships, and to press for some of our work to be mainstreamed within the statutory sector.

New offices are opened in Derry/Londonderry; the search begins for better premises in Belfast, and the money to pay for them! By 2003 a site is secured in central Belfast and in 2005 all four rented sites in Belfast close. All staff move to the purpose-built location at 4 Amelia Street, the new registered office of NIACRO.

A new corporate plan for 2003-2006 is agreed in consultation with partners. The report on the first year is presented so as to make clearer than ever before the extent to which NIACRO has achieved the objectives in the business plan. Of 51 objectives, we complete 46 – over 90%; the following year it will be 95%.

We also receive some very positive reinforcement for our work – the Tullynally/Curryrierin community safety project wins a Peace II award; the mentoring project is awarded a Mentoring and Befriending Foundation award; HM Inspectorate of Prisons refers to our services at Magilligan Prison as “exemplary”; the PPS evaluator concludes that “PPS was an outstanding example of effective partnership in the EQUAL programme”.

EMERGING THEMES: ADULT SERVICES

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

A dinner for chief executives is hosted at Hillsborough Castle by NIO Minister Tony Worthington and 24 large employers endorse a full-page newspaper ad. The Employment Equity Awards,



In the new dispensation, the menu of training services is significantly increased

for employers who implement good policy and practice in the fair recruitment of people with convictions, are inaugurated in 2001.

In the new dispensation, the menu of training services is significantly increased, and employment services are more closely tied in with the process of resettlement. In 2002/03 Jobtrack exceeds its targets for all aspects of the programme and is extended to include 16/18-year-old offenders. The following year it wins a National Training Award for "really effective training with offenders".

High-level IT training is established in the North West, funded by Proteus.

The EU's EQUAL programme funds a new employability project, Personal Progression System for prisoners, and transnational partners from Finland, Greece, and the Netherlands, as well as colleagues from Great Britain, visit Northern Ireland in November 2003 for a study tour.

The Educational Trust set up in Northern Ireland in 1995 by NIACRO and Extern as an independent organisation, initially to support ex-prisoners whose release interrupted their course of study or training is extended to work in the whole of Ireland in 1999. Four years later, it increases its work with dedicated staff appointed in Belfast and Dublin.

EMERGING THEMES: YOUNG PEOPLE

"Safe and Secure?" is the title given to a 1998 conference on the treatment of young people in custody. In the following year another large-scale conference on youth justice issues is organised in partnership with the Children's Law Centre, CAJ and other agencies, as well as young people who later meet with representatives of the Independent Commission on Policing (the Patton Commission) to express their concerns and views.

NIACRO is funded to provide Independent Visitor and befriending services to children in the care system as well as Independent Representation services to those in secure accommodation and custody.

Pilot mentoring schemes, offering young people a trained volunteer befriender, are established in Belfast and Derry, the forerunners of the scheme in place in 2006 across Northern Ireland.



**Where is your
child tonight?**



In 2003 NIACRO welcomes the establishment of the new Youth Justice Agency and rapidly forges links with it, including receiving referrals to the mentoring project.

There is continuous development of services for young people, with, for example, new support services established in the Northern and Southern Health and Social Services Boards areas; a Youth Employability programme established; and NIACRO represented on all the Health and Social Services' Boards' Children Services Planning Groups.

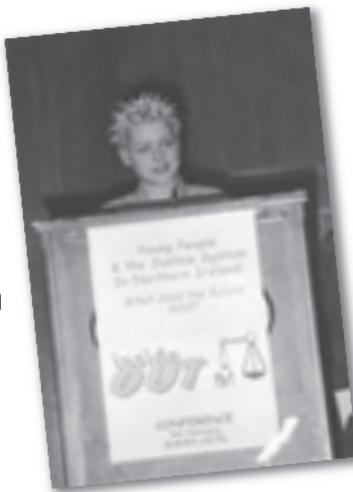
An advocacy service is piloted in 2006 for young people in care, helping them to represent their own needs and wishes.

EMERGING THEMES: FAMILIES

The Prison Link project has been working since 1987 to help prisoners keep in touch with their families. It has adapted and developed over the years as the numbers and categories of prisoners change, as well as the social and political climate. A January 2006 survey of Prison Link clients shows almost 90% satisfaction with the service.

The survey is carried out as part of a review by NIACRO and the Probation Board; as a result of the review a new service, Family Links, is set up which builds on and expands Prison Link's work. The Probation Board continues to be a partner, joined by the Youth Justice Agency and other statutory and voluntary organisations.

NIACRO is involved in setting up the Children of Prisoners



Interagency Group in 1999, and the group organises the *Who Cares- Why Care* conference in 2000. A briefing paper with the same title is subsequently distributed to relevant agencies.

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

In December 2004, a visitors' centre is opened in Hydebank Wood, greatly enhancing the service to visiting families.

EMERGING THEMES: COMMUNITY SAFETY

A crime prevention unit is set up in 1996. It draws on work over the previous 20 years with young people to partner local communities on a whole range of projects and activities – diversionary activities for young people; support for developing community organisations; and the "Good Morning" projects,

a telephone link with older and other vulnerable people, are established in Galliagh, Colin and Ballysillan. This last project in particular is taken up with enthusiasm by other voluntary and community groups, and in January 2006, the NIO's Community Safety Unit commissions NIACRO to conduct research into the future sustainability of the projects.

NIACRO works with key Community Safety Partnerships and is represented on around half of them.

In 2000 and 2001 Base 2 copes with a significant increase in its workload because of the Shankill feud. The Community Re-Integration Project (CRIP) is established in 2002 to support people who have been alienated from their communities. APAC (Assisting People in Communities) is the most recent project to tackle this issue of helping create communities in which people feel safe and at ease with their neighbours.

Limavady Borough Council commission NIACRO to help their Community Safety Partnership undertake community safety audits and action plans. A good practice guide describing community safety actions that have been successful is prepared.

NIACRO gives evidence to a House of Commons Select Committee on paramilitary threats in late 2000.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In 1998 NIACRO looks forward in the light of the Belfast Agreement to the Criminal

Justice Review (“an important and difficult task”); a prison system concentrating on developing improved regimes for ordinary prisoners; working with “people of goodwill” to reduce violence in communities. In 2000 we make a detailed response to the Review, the most important development in criminal justice for many years. We focus on the need at every stage to involve the community in tackling the causes and effects of crime on day to day life. NIACRO’s view is that until the review’s recommendations are implemented, and policing issues, are resolved, “our broader environment remains uneasy”.

In his first report in January 2004, the Justice Oversight Commissioner, Lord Clyde, acknowledges the value of the voluntary sector’s role in the criminal justice system.

Over a period of several years, NIACRO calls for a new justice system to respond to the changing nature of offending and offenders, a system which will “prioritise and focus on the safety of the community, supporting young people seriously at risk and the effective reintegration of offenders”. We also continue to work for better conditions for women prisoners. While we recognise that the conditions for women prisoners in their new location in Hydebank Wood are better than

in Maghaberry, they are still far from ideal.

The political and social context will continue to shift over the next few years, with Northern Ireland moving in fits and starts from conflict to peace, but still feeling the aftershocks of thirty years of violence. The prison population drops to its lowest – an average of 910 in 2001 (rising in each of the following years, to 1490 in July 2006; still well short of the peak of almost 3000 in 1978).

NIACRO’s story is of all the people – staff, volunteers and Executive Committee – who have always worked with the values of the organisation in their hearts. At this 35-year point, it’s a privilege to lead an organisation that reflects on and learns from the past and plans for the future, but lives and works each day making an important contribution to changing policy, and changing lives.

Olwen Lyner, Chief Executive

This survey of our 35 years has told the story of a voluntary organisation working in a contentious, demanding but very rewarding field. We know we have made a difference to the lives of thousands of individuals of all ages and life experiences; contributed to building strong and positive community life in many parts of Northern Ireland; and played our part in shaping public policy.

We haven’t succeeded in everything we’ve tried to do and there have been times when we’ve felt under siege, but all the time we have been building up experience and learning about how to do our work better. This has included seeing when it’s right to revisit what we are doing and change tack if that makes it more likely we’ll achieve our goals. Reviewing the 35 years points up not only how much NIACRO has grown but also how flexible the organisation has been in adapting to the needs and circumstances of offenders and ex-offenders, their families and their communities.

Consultants commissioned in 2006 by the NIO to carry out an evaluation of NIACRO’s work concluded, “Our analysis shows that NIACRO has been very effective in meeting its objectives in recent years. It is clear that NIACRO is an organisation which has undergone a wide range of changes and developments and has been successful in meeting the majority of its objectives with regard to

the development and scope of the services it provides, as well as implementing initiatives aimed at supporting and developing the organisation from a corporate perspective.”

Our job in the immediate future is to implement the 2006-2009 corporate plan, to sustain and grow responsibly, to continue to develop staff’s skills, and to have a clear and influential public voice on criminal justice matters. After that – well, there’ll be another corporate plan, and it like previous plans will be drawn up and carried out with help from our clients, staff, Executive Committee, partners and stakeholders. All of whom, whatever their perspective, share the fundamental belief of the 1971 founders of NIACRO – that the community as well as the state must involve itself in the care of offenders, ex-offenders, potential offenders and victims, along with their families and neighbours.