

niacro

# 17 news

Spring 2007

Alliance



# DEVOLVED CRIMINAL JUSTICE

## *Are We Ready?*

This bumper edition of NIACRO News focuses on the political parties' views on broad criminal justice matters, bearing in mind the potential devolution of these matters. This article, based on interviews with all the political parties, seeks to tease out their attitudes to various aspects of criminal justice.

NIACRO's interest is of course based on the fact that we are located very much within the criminal justice system although we also have connections with other statutory agencies. We provide services and policy comment in an attempt to influence the criminal justice system, specifically with regard to reducing crime and fear of crime, while at the same time respecting the rights of the individual.

also in this issue:

devolution of  
criminal justice  
what the parties  
think

35th anniversary  
round-up  
a year to remember

Family Links  
support for families

employment  
after conviction  
working for jobs  
and training

When we first decided to publish this edition an election was not on the horizon. However, the devolution of criminal justice was being discussed. With that in mind, we thought NIACRO News readers would be interested in parties' views on a range of criminal justice matters.

Accordingly we put questions on criminal justice matters to representatives from the parties who had seats in the previous Assembly. The object was not to surprise or entrap them but to generate considered responses. All the parties responded and each interview took approximately two hours. Notes of the meetings were written up and sent to the interviewees for comment prior to this publication. The article also draws on party manifestos for the 7 March election.

These discussions should be seen in the context of the Criminal Justice Review, published as a consequence of the Good Friday Agreement. The review commented on practically all aspects of the criminal justice system and made 267 recommendations.

From November 2006 to January 2007 a Committee on the Programme for Government met and debated the devolution of policing and justice (their report was published January 2007). Although at the time of writing ministerial arrangements, appointments proce-

## the parties will have to engage in a steep learning curve once criminal justice matters are devolved

dures and timing of devolution were not agreed, the parties have broadly agreed on what should be devolved. This includes the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Public Prosecution Service, Northern Ireland Prison Service, Probation Board for Northern Ireland, Youth Justice Agency, Compensation Agency, Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice NI, Northern Ireland Policing Board, District Policing Partnerships, Court Service and Northern Ireland Law Commission.

The range of criminal justice matters is therefore considerable, yet most of the attention has been focused on policing. NIACRO felt that the debate around the rest of the criminal justice system and its devolution was not in the public domain to the same degree. This was an opportunity to contribute to and develop this wider debate.

Both "traditional" and "liberal" views of crime and punishment were reflected in our discussions with the parties. It was striking that practically all of them brought their direct experiences of the conflict to the subject of dealing with "ordinary" crime.

Most parties acknowledge that they will have to engage in a steep learning curve once criminal justice matters are devolved. At the moment they are, to varying degrees, developing expertise in discussing these issues.

The criminal justice system historically has not been good at communicating its functions, particularly to those directly affected by it. In NIACRO's view there is still much work to be done on this, but what clearly emerged from discussions with parties was the issue of public confidence in what the system actually achieved. For example, decisions to prosecute or not are not explained, sentencing is perceived as being ineffective, the prison and probation services are criticised for rates of recidivism and re-offending respectively. And critical questions are asked of those (including NIACRO) who promote diversion and resettlement strategies.

Political parties are not particularly interested in operational issues – this is for members of the system to sort out. However they are interested in "what works". So from NIACRO's point of view we

need to be able to demonstrate that what we are doing actually makes an impact in terms of reducing crime and fear of crime – this to be carried out within NIACRO's stated values.

## critical questions are asked of those (including NIACRO) who promote diversion and resettlement strategies

**The prison population is currently approximately 1,470, of whom 550 are on remand. This represents a 9.4% growth over the last five years. Taking into account an assumed growth of 6% and the proposals outlined in the Sentencing Framework, it could rise to 1,700 in 2010. Northern Ireland’s prisons can hold just over 1,500 people. Some people are sharing cells designed for single occupancy.**

**At the height of the conflict, the prison population peaked at an average of 2,946 in 1978; it dropped to a low of 910 in 2001.**

**It costs £87,000 a year to keep someone in prison, compared to £37,000 in Great Britain. There are several likely reasons**

**for the difference. In Northern Ireland the conflict demanded higher levels of security; a disproportionate number of prisoners are defined as high risk; prison education and health care are taken from the prison budget; and there can be economies of scale in GB (there are 77,000 people in prison in England and Wales) which are impossible in NI.**

**A study of people discharged from prison or beginning a community sentence in 2002 showed that the two-year reconviction rate for adults given a non-custodial sentence was 18%; for those discharged from prison it was 47%. The highest reconviction rates are for theft (71%) and the lowest are for sex offences (13%).**

SOURCE: NIPS and NIO

It is worth commenting on the reality of “joined up thinking”, noticeable in our experience by its absence from the lives of offenders and ex-offenders, prisoners and ex-prisoners, as well as their families. Some parties noted that in the ‘old’ Assembly joint working between departments rarely happened because the department who led invariably found it difficult to operate beyond their own interests.

We would like to thank all the parties, who contributed in a very constructive and thoughtful manner. David Ervine, the then PUP leader, was one of the first to respond positively to our invitation and we regret that his untimely death made it impossible for that meeting to take place.

It has also to be said that there was remarkably little point scoring with respect to other parties – we got the impression that each party’s response was, and indeed will continue to be, a work in progress.

## QUESTION 1

### *Party preparation for a possible future devolved criminal justice system*

The Northern Ireland Act includes provision for the devolution of policing and justice, and there is currently going through Parliament a Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Bill, which includes provision for a “NI Department with Policing and Justice functions”. It has not completed its passage through the Lords, which is followed by a period of coming and going between the Lords and the House of Commons. The timing of devolving these powers, and the shape of an Assembly Department, continue to be a matter of debate and controversy.

This question exposed some of the starkest differences between the parties. At one end, the UKUP, opposed to the re-establishment of the Assembly as presently envisaged, therefore logically sees no need to prepare. The DUP, which though in principle supporting the devolution of policing and justice functions does not foresee early devolution of these matters, similarly claims to see little point in preparation. Neither did the PUP foresee early devolution of these issues; it needs to come because

“it is crucial to have local politicians involved”, compared to being led by “a Home Office geared to the problems of England and Wales... but we [ie the people of Northern Ireland] are not yet ready for it”.

Alliance also, while supporting the devolution of these duties, given that criminal justice “is at the heart of people’s sense of safety and security”, foresaw problems if they were devolved to an “unstable” Executive, which an Executive based on the current political situation

might well be. Its manifesto is a little more optimistic, suggesting that after 18 months there could be an Executive which would be “operating in a collective and responsible manner” and could take on devolution of these matters with appropriate accountability.

The SDLP anticipates a similar period of preparation for a Justice and Policing Department with its manifesto (like Sinn Féin’s) looking to the May 2008 deadline of the St Andrews Agreement. The SDLP agreed with NIACRO that there is less discussion on criminal justice at present than on the higher-profile policing issues, but pointed out, as did Alliance, that since policing would be dealt with primarily by the Policing Board, the courts by the Court Service, and judicial appointments by the Judicial Appointments Commission, the Department would in effect be a Department for criminal justice – ie, that broad policy issues and legislation would be a major part of any new Minister’s role. For the UUP, whose manifesto looks to devolution of these powers “when community confidence exists” the party debate had been informed by the experience of its members on the Policing Board. They had led the party to widen its views on criminal justice from “law and order” to a broader community safety approach.

Sinn Féin believed that the process of negotiation around policing and justice had effectively been its

preparation; it feels it has gone into these matters in more detail than a political party might normally have been expected to do. The party sees itself as challenging “a political justice system which knows

nothing about ordinary people” and is non-representative. Its goal is now to “translate the legislation into practice” with an emphasis on accountability and human rights in the implementation process. ■

## QUESTION 2

*There is much debate around criminal justice – a debate which sometimes descends into black-and-white arguments between punishment and rehabilitation. Where does the party stand on this argument?*

This question drew thoughtful responses, with all the interviewees taking some time to outline the party’s approach. However, it was also clear that they were anxious to present their party as taking a balanced approach, so that whatever end of the spectrum people started from, they all nodded in the direction of the other end at some point in the discussion.

Parties also acknowledged that there might be a gap - of varying widths - between the considered views of opinion-formers and policy-developers in the party, and grass roots membership. Again, this was considered carefully and an attempt made to analyse the extent to which a party’s leadership has to follow members’ views and wishes (“We would fail in our duty if we didn’t reflect what our electorate wants, ie punishment”: DUP), and the extent to which it should take a broader, more nuanced and perhaps more forward-looking stance. “On the

ground” as Alliance put it, “there is a demand for stiffer sentencing on a range of issues; a feeling that people are treated too lightly”. Sinn Féin observes a “ingrained punitive/coercive approach”; the UUP membership, though its views are modifying, still feels some “queasiness” about the language of rehabilitation. The SDLP set this in the context of a devolved Department: a Justice Minister would have to “safeguard the public interest and resist localised pressures, popular outcries, and the tabloid press, and would have to say ‘You can’t have criminal justice policy decided by vox pop’”.

## SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

Both Sinn Féin and the PUP had a particular take on this, with their memberships including influential policy-makers and opinion leaders who had been in prison, sometimes many times and for long periods, and who had strong views on

**whatever end of the spectrum people started from, they all nodded in the direction of the other end at some point in the discussion**

## If someone has done wrong they should pay a penalty

custody and the prison system. For them, “Imprisonment (or community sentence) is the punishment and doesn’t need added to” (Sinn Féin). Although ex-paramilitary prisoners may have felt no particular need to reintegrate into their communities, there is “an ethos of rehabilitation” (PUP). The PUP struck a similar note in the context of how to create safer neighbourhoods, stating in the manifesto that “Exclusion is not the answer, empowerment and education is how we address this. We need to examine the causes...” Sinn Féin’s manifesto also raised the matter of the causes of crime, “We will also pursue economic policies that reduce the deprivation and hopelessness that are the root causes of much crime and other anti-social activity.”

Both Sinn Féin and the PUP also raised the subject of community restorative justice schemes at this point; it is dealt with in more detail under Question 5 below.

The position that society required offenders to “do the time” was expressed as the starting-point by the DUP and UUP and to a more qualified extent by UKUP. For the DUP “If someone has done wrong they should pay a penalty...Some people have no moral compass and need to see there is a line beyond which there will be punishment...” Their manifesto reinforces this approach: “A tough message must be sent out... stiff minimum sentences... sentences which reflect the very serious consequences of... crimes.”

### VIEWS ON REHABILITATION

In discussion, all parties had something to say about rehabilitation –

- Prison should involve “not only an element of punishment and the protection of society, but also an opportunity to try to turn people round”. To focus on rehabilitation is the most rational approach in terms of reducing re-offending. (Alliance)
  - It is in the interests of society not to have constant re-offending, so sanctions should also be an attempt to rehabilitate, but there must be proof that using resources differently [ie rebalancing the spending from containment towards resettlement] would in practice reduce re-offending. (DUP)
  - Diversionary work with young people is part of the rehabilitation process. (PUP)
  - The rehabilitation approach should be given the main
- The party believes in rehabilitation, “we have a duty to try to do something, especially with recidivists”. Prison staff need to be properly trained to carry out meaningful resettlement work; a culture change is needed. (Sinn Féin)
  - “Prevention is far cheaper than punishment... there should be programmes which redirect offenders into a new life”. (UKUP)
  - The party is in a state of change, with more emphasis on how to stop re-offending; the manifesto pledges “support for robust rehabilitation programs [sic] which effectively address re-offending rates”. (UUP) This was the most concrete mention of rehabilitation in any manifesto. ■

---

### QUESTION 3

#### *Why is the prison population rising?*

In answering this question, most people acknowledged that their reply was based largely on anecdote and grass roots feeling rather than research or concrete analysis; the UKUP noting that a detailed breakdown of the figures would be necessary for meaningful comment to be given. All however gave the changes in Northern Ireland society – and in criminal justice - post-

emphasis, for both young people and adults, and should include diversionary actions especially for young people. The party’s manifesto pledged to “seek greater use of post release supervision and intermittent sentences to reduce re-offending”. (SDLP)

- conflict as a likely reason, though their views on the impact and nature of those changes varied.
- Sinn Féin and the PUP both made the point that poorer and more disadvantaged communities are increasingly alienated and are more likely to be the victims of, as well as carrying out, criminal activity. These two parties also shared the view that in their communities

there was an “authority gap”, characterised by Sinn Féin as a loss of the “focus” on the conflict, and by PUP as a loss of the community’s turning to paramilitaries for “quick justice”. As a result younger people especially were increasingly “anti-authority – any authority, if all that authority does is punish” (Sinn Féin). The PUP also forecast that “it will continue to rise – we haven’t got to grips with normality yet”, a point that may be similar to that of the DUP who noted an increase in “nightlife”, some aspects of which could contribute to rising crime.

The DUP and UUP identified a lower security presence than during the conflict as one of the causes of a rising prison population. The UKUP characterised this as meaning that the PSNI are under-staffed. The SDLP reflected that the police may be more effective in detection now than when they were less focussed on “ordinary criminality”, a point also made by the DUP. The UUP and UKUP both felt that “ordinary” crime was more likely to be reported now.

Sinn Féin made the point that a disproportionate number of prisoners have mental health problems which are not properly managed in prison, and that the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, if properly implemented, will help. While the DUP felt that “the courts don’t send anyone

to prison lightly, they err on the side of caution”, the PUP felt that the criminal justice system is “too quick to jump to custodial sentences” and should look more at the alternatives. Alliance noted, referring back to the debate between punishment and resettlement, that many people in the community would see the increase as a good thing and reflecting their wishes.

Alliance and the SDLP mentioned processes as part of the reason, Alliance noting the continuing slowness of the courts system as resulting in more people on remand, and the SDLP pointing out the rapid advances in technology like DNA and the use of CCTV as leading to higher conviction rates. ■

---

#### QUESTION 4

##### *Where should the new prison be located?*

**Prisons Minister Paul Goggins announced on 21 February 2007 that he will make a decision before the end of this year as to where the “second adult male” prison will be located.**

Some people queried the need for a new prison at all – the PUP and UUP categorically and Sinn Féin by agreeing that a new prison was needed but only because the current prison estate is outdated and not fit for purpose. Sinn Féin also stressed that the views of prisoners and staff must be part of the design of the new prison.

None of the parties had strong views on precisely where the prison should be built, but all agreed that it should be accessible – more accessible than at present, where Magilligan, for example, was described by the SDLP as “having a gulag feel about it”. All the parties had experience of families having the greatest difficulty in visiting;

just one element, as the PUP and UKUP pointed out, in the whole package of problems which prisoners’ families face.

On the NIMBY issue, the DUP pointed out that people have lived next to prisons without any practical problems in the past.

The SDLP considered that the opening of a new prison was an opportunity to look at the efficiency of the Prison Service and how prisons are staffed, not least because a Department of Justice will be limited by its resources, and Government is not likely to be particularly generous on prison costs. ■

**poorer and more disadvantaged communities are increasingly alienated and are more likely to be the victims of, as well as carrying out, criminal activity**

---

## QUESTION 5

### *Custodial –v– community sentencing*

This question drew some of the most detailed answers in our discussions. “Criminality tends to be lumped together, but there are shades of it so we have got to look at it in different segments”. (SDLP) The party’s manifesto has some specific pledges for alternative approaches, including “avoiding clogging prisons with fine defaulters” through supervised attendance orders.

Persistent offending is one of the biggest bugbears for parties’ members, and most would crack down hardest on people who seem to get away with committing the same offence over and over again.

### COMMUNITY RESTORATIVE JUSTICE SCHEMES

Although NIACRO had not put a question on community restorative justice schemes, they inevitably arose in answer to this question. The views of some parties are generally well known – Sinn Féin and the PUP are strongly in favour of the existing schemes, though differing in their views on the recent government protocol which is to govern the schemes. Their manifestos include the issue. Sinn Féin “support[s] non-violent, community-based approaches... such as Community Restorative Justice...These are complementary to accountable civic and community policing” while the PUP states, “We support Community Based Restorative Justice schemes which work in partnership with PSNI and other statutory agencies.”

Alliance distinguished between the restorative justice approach in general, which it strongly supports,

and community restorative justice schemes which operate in Northern Ireland now, consideration of which skewed the debate. The manifesto deals with how they should be used and managed: “...properly regulated and deal only with low-level crime and anti-social behaviour...only accept referrals from the police, criminal justice or other statutory agencies.” The UUP manifesto also limited the party’s support to “...schemes that work fully with the PSNI in addressing anti-social behaviour”.

## most would crack down hardest on people who seem to get away with committing the same offence over and over again

The SDLP also referred to youth conferencing as “one of the more creative ways” of dealing with younger people. Its manifesto supports “properly regulated human rights compliant restorative justice working with the criminal justice system...oppose partial or rough justice through poorly regulated restorative justice schemes.” The DUP felt that “Where it’s deemed that facing the victim is appropriate, if the victim is happy enough and the crime not so serious as to go to court”, a restorative justice approach could be acceptable. It should not however be used for repeated offences, and it should not be used as a means of reducing prison costs or addressing the pressure on prison places.

## ARGUMENTS AGAINST PRISON

There was a fairly strong view across the parties that prison is not the best answer to criminality. It was expressed more cautiously, and with more qualification, by some parties than by others:

- “We want to avoid [most] people going to prison” as it is disproportionately expensive, destructive of people’s human development, and not a good setting for rehabilitation work, or for young people to grow out of their phase of “natural rebellion”. But recognises the public’s frustration at – especially – repeat offenders

who get repeat non-custodial sentences. And there is a real need to prove that non-custodial approaches work. (Alliance)

- A prison sentence brings real difficulties on release, “A mistake can taint people for the rest of their lives” – though it’s not clear that legislation or politicians can solve this problem. However, “Suspended sentences don’t satisfy the victim and don’t mean that much to the convicted person.” (DUP)
- A community-based approach is the best answer and new initiatives along these lines are to be welcomed. (PUP)

- “Jail really doesn’t work” especially for young people, though it may have to be used for persistent offenders and for violent offences. However, the case has to be argued with the public. (SDLP)
- We need a criminal justice system which tries to have “the least possible number of people entering the system”; and the system should be part of crime prevention. (Sinn Féin)
- Imprisonment for non-payment of fines or lesser car-related offences is a waste of expensive resources. Community sentencing should be appropriate and utilise offenders existing skills, and must still be careful - “society expects protection”. (UKUP)
- “A lot of crimes shouldn’t lead to prison”, and prison may even be the last place to send, for

example, first-time offenders committing low level crimes. Like Alliance above, the party would need to have evidence that community sentencing reduces re-offending. (UUP)

NIACRO spelled out some of the cost differential. The UUP felt that its party members would be most likely to be swayed by positive community safety arguments, ie that there were cost benefits in a rehabilitation/resettlement/community-based approach. Alliance recognised that “short-term investment in resources for rehabilitation is a long-term gain” but that if devolution puts pressure on resources, it could become more difficult to re-balance the spending. The UKUP raised the issue of public procurement, which seem expensive and do not seem to offer value for money. ■

an anti-discrimination element though with “major caveats”.

Sinn Féin, the PUP and UKUP drew a distinction between the community’s acceptance of paramilitary prisoners (“Republican prisoners were never disconnected from the community”: Sinn Féin) and its response to other ex-prisoners. The UKUP felt that the community had long memories about offences and offenders and remain suspicious, while the SDLP also recognised difficulties in explaining the concept of remission (even after automatic 50% remission is ended) to a public who tend not to understand the notion that it can and must be earned.

The SDLP and Sinn Féin noted that the issue to some extent depended on the nature of the offence and length of the sentence, that it is inevitably harder after a longer sentence and that resettlement “must be a part of the whole process, from the start of the sentence” (Sinn Féin). The PUP stressed that the key to successful resettlement is that support will be available very quickly after release.

Parties agreed that employment was particularly valuable (“helping people into work is part of giving them a stake in society”: UUP), but there was some hesitation about how far support should go. Alliance looked to more support and explanation being available to employers as well as to ex-offenders, and would support funding employability schemes. The DUP was concerned that employers be left with the freedom to employ or not employ someone. ■

## QUESTION 6

### *How can ex-prisoners be [re]settled in the community?*

**It is difficult to distinguish between what is spent on containment, care and resettlement in prisons. In NIACRO’s view, there should be more human and financial resources for resettlement and they should be ring-fenced.**

On the whole, parties’ answers to this question were on the vague side although some referred to their thoughts on other topics like crj schemes, management of sex offenders, and custodial compared to community sentencing. Most were not familiar with the NIPS resettlement strategy or with resettlement activities in the community.

However, most were supportive of giving ex-prisoners a helping hand of one sort or another. The

DUP, who had commented in the context of Question 5 that “It is not in society’s interests to criminalise anyone for all time”, suggested that help with housing, information on benefits, and opportunities to return to education would be appropriate though without “special preference”. The PUP came up with a similar list and added the idea of individual mentoring. Alliance raised the subject of the proposed Single Equality Bill, and supported

## QUESTION 7

### *Supervision of sex offenders in the community*

**This is an issue that raises particular anxiety in the public and is given much attention, often unhelpfully, by the media.**

Virtually everyone we spoke to responded to this question with a more or less resigned acknowledgement of its sensitivity. Initial responses included: “This is a difficult one”... “Incredibly difficult for all parties.”... “A very emotional difficult thing for anybody to deal with”... “Highly charged”... “One of the most emotive areas...”

## they found it difficult to be categoric about what should be done

It is one of the areas above all where politicians are called upon to juggle their responsibilities. They have to try to represent the views of their party members, reflect their local communities, and keep in mind the rights of all individuals in society including sex offenders. They want to support the statutory services and also to challenge them when appropriate. They have to respond to media enquiries, and they have to deal with their own personal responses to this emotive issue. The discussion reflected this struggle, with interviewees frankly acknowledging that they found it difficult to be categoric about what should be done.

### THE PUBLIC’S VIEW

Most parties recognised that the public generally has a “real lack of understanding about [different] levels of risk... what type of crime they have committed” (PUP) and

several pointed out that very often the public also has an exaggerated view of the risk posed. The SDLP, while acknowledging that the public often over-reacted, nevertheless recognised that there is real concern as well: “You can’t just say the public are ignorant, you’ve got to take their concerns seriously”. The UUP expressed a similar view: “Poli-

icians have to take public opinion seriously even if it is in conflict with the specialist view.” The UKUP was frank enough to point out that “the public” were also voters and potential voters, and that if a party went out on a [liberal] limb, all that would happen would be that it would lose support. Sinn Féin had “no great faith” that people could be brought round to a “more sophisticated” approach.

There was some sympathy for the statutory services which have the duty to manage sex offenders in the community. Several parties commented on the lack of resources these services have, certainly to provide the sort of 24-hour supervision that the public (and some of our interviewees) would like to see, though they recognised that it was probably impossible. The SDLP called it “a very difficult resourcing problem; if there are not enough people there cannot be enough

cover”. While this is recognised, nevertheless Alliance, the DUP, Sinn Féin and the UUP all saw the supervision process as being the main, or maybe even the only, guarantee of community safety and community confidence. The UUP goes so far in its manifesto to support “electronic tagging and polygraph testing of high-risk sex offenders” in order to build public confidence in their management, and the SDLP also supports tagging of “dangerous offenders”.

### NOTIFICATION

NIACRO asked for parties’ opinions on notifying neighbours of the presence of a sex offender. Again, parties hesitated to be prescriptive. Alliance was “wary” about notification since it “invites an inevitable populist reaction”: the best counter-argument is a higher level of tight supervision. “Telling all and sundry is a bad idea” was also the view of the UUP, who also set the question for the services as being, “Is the offender managed and are children safe?” The PUP noted little contact between the community and the statutory services; “it needs more trust and better relationships”. While understanding the reluctance to reveal a sex offender’s presence in an area, the DUP also understood why communities then feel badly done by when the fact emerges; and “would tend to worry less about their [the sex offenders’] rights than [their] security.”

Parties also stressed that it was valuable for a politician to liaise with statutory and voluntary services when a situation arose. Sinn Féin recognised that “A politician doesn’t have all the information” and the UUP had an example of a situation in which a proper briefing

for the politician from the professionals had given the former the information and understanding which helped calm things down. The UKUP called for better liaison between the agencies involved.

There was agreement among the parties that media coverage of the subject was almost always unhelpful, and that politicians should be very careful in speaking about particular local situations. The DUP's experience was that "Politicians are usually more balanced than the media, but media hysteria reflects the public view better...Reason goes out the door". Most parties gave examples of trying to "avoid the populist view" (Alliance) "argue with local press

over sensationalising the issue" (Sinn Féin) "express public concern without feeding it" (UUP).

Three manifestos address the cross-border implications of this issue. The UUP wants "to protect children and communities on both sides of the border" by working to ensure that "the Republic of Ireland signs up to the UK's...database" and the DUP states that it is "imperative that the Irish Republic has a framework as equally robust as Northern Ireland to ensure the border does not permit sex offenders to escape easily from one jurisdiction to another." The SDLP's approach is to "work for an all-Ireland sex offenders register". ■

The UUP had initially been strongly in support of ASBOs but there was growing disillusion, reflecting a similar change of view in the Conservative Party.

Alliance had noted that ASBOs were being used less than had been expected, and accepts them "in the most extreme cases [defined in the manifesto as "persistent and serious loutish behaviour]...not a solution in themselves but part of the answer"; the party is keen that Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) be developed. Alliance also raised the issue of the victims of anti-social behaviour, suggesting that ASBOs may give some relief to them.

The SDLP, while not opposed to ASBOs, also thought they should be brought in only "when other methods had failed". The manifesto pledges to review the legislation to ensure this, to make the orders "subject to proper safeguards, and following proper consultation with education and social services".

Those in favour of ASBOs made the point that they are (just) outside the criminal justice system. One or two interviewees pointed out that not all young people are anti-social – "not even a large section" according to the DUP. The UKUP and PUP also pointed out that even young people who are not behaving badly can be seen as a threat.

## QUESTION 8

*How to deal with anti-social behaviour, especially by young people, and encourage responsible citizenship.*

**Anti-Social Behaviour Orders were brought in under the Anti-Social Behaviour (Northern Ireland) Order 2004. Eight were imposed in Northern Ireland in 2005 and 21 in 2006. The police, a local Council or the NIHE can apply to a magistrate for an ASBO to be imposed on anyone over the age of 10. NIACRO opposes ASBOs on human rights grounds, and questions their effectiveness.**

Most people understandably went straight to the issue of ASBOs in reply to this question. There was no completely unqualified support for ASBOs. Sinn Féin and the UKUP expressed the most outright opposition to ASBOs – "ASBOs don't work, and they are very complicated" (Sinn Féin); "too expensive and of no value" (UKUP, who felt there was little to be learned from the English experience). The strongest support came from the DUP, who had concluded from a study of the English experience that "there is some evidence that

it works in some places" but that this depends on how well the orders were managed and supervised, and how breaches are dealt with. The party's manifesto is categorical, stating that ASBOs "should be strengthened and enforced more rigorously".

**not all young people are anti-social – not even a large section**

## NIACRO shared with interviewees our concern that policing issues could dominate a merged body, given that the DPPs have an accountability element missing from the CSPs

### CITIZENSHIP

There were not a great many concrete suggestions for encouraging responsible citizenship. Alliance, the DUP, the PUP and UKUP stressed the need for support for diversionary activities, UUP felt that schools have a role to play but are sceptical about the impact of existing schools programmes;

DUP and UKUP wanted support for parents and inter-generational communications. Alliance in its manifesto calls on “schools and civic organisations to work together to promote a culture of lawfulness”. The PUP, who (like Sinn Féin) felt that the community is “still in the punishment mentality”, put a lot of weight on the role of schools as the key place to work on citizenship. ■

managed: Alliance noted that other public bodies like councils combine accountability and service provision. “The police accountability role would have to stay but could be structured so as not to dominate the work” (PUP).

Looking positively at merger, the SDLP – for whom merger is a manifesto pledge - felt that “If you bring the wider perspective into the policing scenario, you get the best of both worlds” and suggested that consideration should be given to making them Council bodies. The DUP also saw it as “better to look at how our area can become a better place to live in” – of which process policing is one aspect along with the council, education, etc.

There was some scepticism about both bodies, with almost everyone deploring the DPPs’ focus on statistics “to justify their existence...talking shops” (Alliance); “too focused on the minutiae” (DUP); “a limited success – a good experience in public participation”, but with the danger that bodies like these can “become formulaic” (SDLP). Alliance also felt that in spite of the perception that DPPs were the “senior agency they in fact have less ability to influence events” and CSPs are making a more significant contribution. ■

### QUESTION 9

#### *Role and future of Community Safety Partnerships*

**Community Safety Partnerships were established following the Criminal Justice Review 2000 and the launch of the NI Community Safety Strategy in 2003. There are 26, one for each Council area, and each has a local action plan. Membership includes statutory, voluntary and community bodies, working to reduce crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. NIACRO has a long history of working in communities, and is represented on around half of the CSPs. NIACRO shared with interviewees our concern that policing issues could dominate a merged body, given that the DPPs have an accountability element missing from the CSPs.**

All parties see some merit in merging the CSPs and DPPs. “The membership largely overlaps anyhow and there would be benefits in cost and efficiency” (Alliance); “Why keep them separate?” (DUP); “It is a bit of a waste of resources to have two bodies” (SDLP). The PUP sees a lot of confusion in people’s minds about their separate roles

at present, and therefore a merger might help. However, the merger would have to be carefully managed and the function of a merged body agreed. Sinn Féin, who have not been engaged with either body up to now, saw a merger possibly bringing greater efficiency.

Most felt the issue of policing dominating a merged body could be

## QUESTION 10

### *Involvement of other government departments*

**People who come in contact with the criminal justice system more often than not have a whole range of problems before, during and after that contact. If they are not to re-offend, they and their families need support in housing, financial advice, health including drugs, education, training and employment. Many statutory bodies therefore have a role to play.**

All the parties agreed that this was an important issue – “Crime is part and parcel of society” (UKUP), but there was surprising consistency about how unlikely it was to happen. The new Executive is likely “to be the opposite of joined up” according to Alliance; the SDLP was not sure that “workable machinery” to work across Department committees could be found (not least because there are so many themes which should be treated in this way); Sinn Féin thought it “very difficult” to set up across-the-board coverage of criminal justice issues in the Assembly. “Cross-cutting themes are much talked about and rarely delivered” (UUP); statutory agencies are “not very innovative”

and slow to take up new ideas, in the view of the DUP.

There were however a few suggestions on how to take this forward. In discussion, the UUP, Alliance and the SDLP tried to think through how a future Justice Minister in an Executive could champion the idea in practice, but reached no very positive conclusion. The PUP advocated the Scottish “community planning model” which brings together agencies such as health, housing and the police on a local authority basis. The DUP had specific examples of, for example, school facilities being used for diversionary activities, and suggested that these could be developed more widely. ■

saw the contribution of NIACRO and other agencies.

The parties were encouragingly positive about the contribution of the voluntary and community sector. “It is an absolute must” in the view of the PUP; “Of great value” (SDLP); “The voluntary sector can do things the statutory agencies can’t” (UUP); “There is a lot of good work around criminal justice issues” (DUP); “More important now than ever” (UKUP).

A warning note was struck by the DUP who felt that some bodies were “very zealous and driven by ideology” especially in pursuing policy issues and that politicians had to tease out what was “feasible, practical and politically possible” from what the NGOs were looking for.

Alliance expressed sympathy with the sector’s problems, particularly its continuing funding problems. Both they and the PUP warned that under devolution this may take some time to settle down and be resolved. Sinn Féin also foresaw tension between elected and participative organisations when the new Assembly starts work. Alliance further recognised the difficulties the sector has in getting its message across to government under Direct Rule, noting that a dedicated Justice Committee in the Assembly would give important opportunities in this area. ■

## QUESTION 11

### **Contribution of the voluntary and community sector to the criminal justice system**

In November 2006, Criminal Justice Inspection NI published a review of the sector’s contribution, which concluded that it was important and significant, and that the sector “does extremely good work”.

NIACRO is very familiar with the role of the NGO sector in the criminal justice system, how it has changed over time and both the problems and the successes. We wanted to know how the parties

**Again, we would like to thank the politicians and party workers who met with us at a busy time for them. NIACRO looks forward to building on the relationships we have made. We want to work with parties for a criminal justice system which is based on values such as justice, dignity, citizenship, non-violence and accountability. We believe a system based on those values, and supported by elected representatives, will contribute to a reduction in crime, fewer victims of crime and fewer people going through the Courts and custody system.**



(left) l to r Management Group members Heather Reid, Sile McClean, Pat Conway, with DEL Permanent Secretary Aideen McGinley, CEO Olwen Lyner and NIACRO Chair Richard Buchanan.

(below) Derry Mayor Helen Quigley at the “Telling Tales” art exhibition.



# THIRTY-FIVE AND COUNTING: A YEAR TO REMEMBER

Our 35th anniversary year has come to an end, and we’ve enjoyed it.

We kicked off in April with a celebratory event at Queen’s University which, importantly, was organised around a group of our service users being presented with a whole range of educational awards by DEL Permanent Secretary Aideen McGinley. Next up was “Telling Tales”, the art exhibition staged at the Playhouse in Derry/Londonderry in July. It showcased work produced by young people on our mentoring programme, and their mentors.

The European connection was the inspiration for a seminar on hate crime held in Amelia House on 7 September.

September was a busy month, in fact - the Volunteer Forum on 23rd also highlighted the anniversary, and one of the most significant developments in our work for some years, the establishment of Family Links, was launched on 27th.

Bringing in another important element of our work, we held a lunch for employers on 27 October. This was to recognise and applaud the foresighted workplaces which are reviewing their response to applications from people with a conviction.

Finally, in November we rounded off the celebrations at the AGM on

16th. There’s more about these last three events elsewhere in NIACRO News.

To coincide with the AGM, we published a short history of NIACRO to date (which took the form of a special edition, number 16, of NIACRO News)\*. Summing up her feelings about the anniversary, CEO Olwen Lyner writes, **“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.”**

\* If you’re on the NIACRO News mailing list, you’ll already have received this – if not, download it from the web ([www.niacro.co.uk](http://www.niacro.co.uk)) or email us for a copy at [niacro@niacro.co.uk](mailto:niacro@niacro.co.uk)

# nacro

We'd like to exchange warm birthday wishes with Nacro, the London-based National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. Nacro gave NIACRO a great deal of help and support in our earliest years. Its 40-year review, along the lines of our own anniversary issue of NIACRO News has a lot of similarities – an emphasis on rehabilitation, advice and information, crime prevention; piloting new services; recognition of the importance of employability; a watching brief on the quality of care in prisons and prisoners' rights. Baroness Vivien Stern, a former Director of Nacro, spoke trenchantly at their annual conference last November. She described the values of the 19th century reformers – “a belief in the value of all individual human beings and their right to be



treated with respect whatever they have done; their right to measures of social reintegration; the importance of the effort society must make to remove the stigmas and open the doors again to let the convicted person back in.”

“We are punishing more and more of our social casualties”, she said, “people for whom the help was not there, the services were not there, but when the time comes, the punishment is there...We are wrong to think we shall be able to deter with punishment those whom a dismal life has made undeterrable...none of this does any good. It brings no long-term solutions. It weakens rather than strengthens communities. It does not make people feel safer. It increases the size of the excluded population for whom punishment holds no terrors and deterrence does not deter.”

We are punishing more and more of our social casualties

We are wrong to think we shall be able to deter with punishment those whom a dismal life has made undeterrable

It increases the size of the excluded population for whom punishment holds no terrors and deterrence does not deter

## THE VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The key speaker at our AGM in November 2006, Helen Edwards, is well placed to comment on the contribution voluntary and community organisations can make to the criminal justice system. Helen is Chief Executive of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), having previously been Director-General of the Home Office's Communities Group, responsible for work on volunteering, the third sector, and race equality. Before that again, she was Chief Executive of our sister organisation Nacro.

Helen highlighted the growing appreciation of the role the sector could play:

- A role in promoting a healthy democracy, ensuring that people's voices are heard, and challenging the powerful, including Government.
- A role in strengthening communities and building civil society.
- The ability to tackle social exclusion through reaching out to the most marginalised.
- Being seen as other than the state, by people who are suspicious of the statutory sector.

- Bringing innovation and enthusiasm, finding new ways of solving problems.
- Being especially customer-focussed.

She saw both Government (“interested in reforming public services, tackling social exclusion and building stronger communities and civil society”) and the sector (“wanting to do more and to play a central role”) having much to gain. But there are also problems. The statutory side is not aware of the potential of the third sector (not least because there are around 1500 organisations involved in working with offenders), the funding relationship is unhelpful, and there is a lack of capacity in the sector. As a result, the strong political commitment is not so easy to turn into practical action, though that might change with the appointment last year of Ed Milliband as “Third Sector Minister” in the Cabinet Office.

It was Helen’s view that the probation service, in particular, was tapping into the services of the voluntary sector much less in England and Wales than in Northern Ireland, and indeed the sector’s contribution was actually decreasing. However, as part of a much larger package of reform, designed to reduce re-offending, she foresaw more subcontracting, partnership working, support for building capacity of the voluntary and community sector – all as part of delivering a

better service, and “not a gravy train!”

(John Reid introduced the Offender Management Bill into the House of Commons in November and it is currently working its way through the legislative process. While dealing mainly with changes to the probation service in England and Wales, these changes widen the Secretary of State’s powers to commission services from the private or voluntary sectors to carry out services around designed to reduce re-offending.)

As well as attending the AGM, Helen Edwards met senior figures from the criminal justice system at a lunch in Amelia House – Stephen Leach, NIO; Ronnie Spence, Chair of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, Robin Masefield, Director General of the Prison Service; Brendan McGuigan, Criminal Justice Inspectorate.

### CJINI REVIEW

Also in November, Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland published a review of the sector’s contribution, which concluded that it was “important” and “significant” and that the sector “does extremely good work” in pioneering new approaches and helping official agencies relate to all parts of Northern Ireland’s community. Launching the report, Chief Inspector Kit Chivers acknowledged the “increasingly arduous” funding context in which NGOs operate. CJ

has urged funding bodies to enter into longer-term agreements to give the security needed to allow voluntary and community organisations to plan ahead.

Olwen Lyner welcomed the report. “NIACRO is keen to learn from this report’s recommendations”, she said. “We know that the future will bring challenges as well as opportunities, but CJJ’s recognition of the added value the NGO sector brings to criminal justice makes a huge difference to our ability to plan and sustain our projects.”

In her presentation to the AGM, Olwen had reflected on the history of the organisation. “In looking back”, she said, “I feel that it demonstrates the stability of the Third Sector, always faced with concerns around sustainability – hindsight confirms it! – but always keeping going and always moving forward.”

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

There were some changes to the membership of the Executive Committee at the AGM. Peter Denley had been on the committee for seven years. He brought valuable skills and experience from his work with the Probation Board, the Social Security Agency, and Lisnevin Juvenile Justice Centre.

We welcome two new Executive members. Donna Moore brings experience with the MASRAM process and other work with sex offenders, and now in her work with the Simon Community. Brigdhe Vallely will bring new links with the Prison Chaplaincy service. She has also worked at critical interfaces in North Belfast and as we reshape our community safety work this will be a real resource for us to call on.

**We know that the future will bring challenges as well as opportunities**

# MAGILLIGAN'S CRYSTAL HEART

“Crystal Hearts” are the awards given by the Partners of Prisoners & Families Support Group to recognise outstanding work to help offenders and their families. We’re delighted that the NIACRO team who run the Magilligan Visitor Centre have won the “Family Ties” award this year; congratulations to Anne McNicholl and colleagues Anne Donaghy, Bernadette McGuigan, Maureen Mullan, and Samantha Williams.

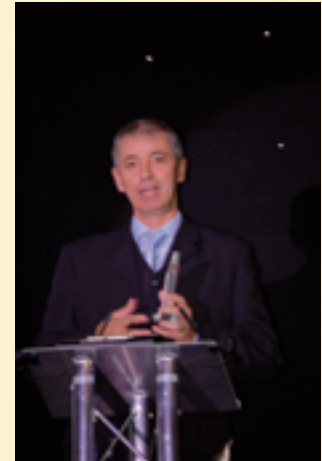
Magilligan, with around 420 prisoners at any time, is the remotest of Northern Ireland’s three prisons, some two hours from Belfast by bus (one of the reasons why it is in line for closure in the coming years).

NIACRO has managed the visitors’ centre at Magilligan since 1975. There were almost 10,000 adult visits through the centre in 2005-06, and nearly 2,500 visits by children. We provide refreshments, childcare (the crèche was used on around 4,000 occasions last year), games for teenage visitors and, crucially, a sympathetic ear and support to individuals and families who may find visiting a difficult and upsetting experience. The team also supports child centred visits (which a father spends one-to-one with his child) by providing lunch for mothers and by being around to help fathers make the best use of their time together with their child.

These services have been established over the years and have in large part happened as a result of the team’s tenacity, determination, patience, commitment and diplomacy. These qualities have earned the respect of prison staff and the team now enjoys a professional working relationship with the prison. A prisoner nearing the end of his sentence helps in the Centre café. The Centre was recently commended for its services and its contribution to quality visiting by the NI Criminal Justice Inspectorate.

But it is from the descriptions and comments from the families and prisoners that one gets a sense of how the team are seen. Thank you cards and letters using words like “dignity”, “respect”, and “concerned” sum up how our families feel about them. The team recognise the importance of visiting to both the family and the prisoner and will do whatever it takes to ensure a quality visit for all concerned.

The POPs award recognises just one element of the package of support NIACRO offers the families of prisoners; now read on to learn more about the September 06 launch of Family Links.



Donnie Sweeney at the awards ceremony

... a sympathetic ear and support to individuals and families who may find visiting a difficult and upsetting experience...

These qualities have earned the respect of prison staff...

# FAMILY LINKS LAUNCH

Family Links is the new NIACRO-led support service for families of people in custody. It was launched on 27 September in Amelia House, with representatives from all the partner organisations – our funders the Probation Board, the Prison Service and the Youth Justice Agency, and service providers Barnardo's, Ulster Quaker Service Committee, Prison Fellowship and other voluntary and community sector partners. The programme will also benefit from an award from the Nationwide Foundation under its Investor Programme which supports 18 UK charities under the themes of domestic violence, young offenders, and prisoners' families.

NIACRO News readers know that families, especially children, can experience real trauma when a family member is in prison or a young offenders' institution. We are delighted to be taking a lead in these essential support services, and we're looking forward to working with our partners to reduce the harmful impact of imprisonment.

Family Links staff contact each family within 48 hours of committal to prison, with practical information on visits to prisons, transport, welfare and benefits advice, and support for children at school. For the three months October to December 2006, there were 478 referrals to the programme, from right across Northern Ireland and further afield.



l to r Robin Scott, Prison Fellowship; Brian Ingram, NIPS; Helen Dunne, Barnardo's; Artie O'Neill, Youth Justice Agency; Brian McCaughey, Probation Board



## CEO AND DIRECTOR OF SERVICES AT NI AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

On 22 November, Chief Executive Olwen Lyner and Director of Services Pat Conway were invited to give evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's inquiry into the draft Protocol for community-based restorative justice schemes. (The draft Protocol was out for consultation between September and December 2006.) The Committee is a select committee of the House of Commons, established "to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the NIO and associated public bodies". It also heard evidence from Criminal Justice Minister David Hanson, PSNI, Probation Board, Criminal Justice Inspection NI, Community Relations Council, NI Alternatives, and CRJ Ireland. The Committee's report and the protocol have now been published and we will comment on them in the next issue of NIACRO News.

NIACRO welcomed the opportunity to share our views – which are based on many years of experience in working in communities with a turbulent history of informal, often brutal and summary, justice. This experience includes our involvement in supporting early efforts to establish community restorative justice schemes, as

→ continued from page 17

well as our on-going Base 2 crisis intervention project and CRIP (Community Reintegration Programme), now APAC (Assisting People in Communities) which helps with problems in neighbourhoods.

We tried to get some fundamentally important points across to the Committee: essentially those we put forward in our initial response to the first round of consultation early last year. There's a detailed outline of our position in NIACRO News 14, and on the website; in very brief summary, we believe that community-based restorative justice schemes:

- Make a valuable contribution to the criminal justice system
- Are an imaginative and creative way of dealing with crime – and there needs to be more debate and discussion about what constitutes “low level” crime.
- Benefit from the fact that people engage with them voluntarily
- Can respond more quickly (without compromising individual human rights) than the notoriously tardy formal process
- Must be based on principles of non-violence and human rights
- Must have public funding
- Must be free to appoint the most appropriate people for the job without outside involvement in the recruitment process
- Should come under the Criminal Justice Inspectorate
- Should be subject to the Prison Ombudsman if complaints arise.

The discussion at the House of Commons ranged across many of the key issues. It is our experience that politicians can sometimes have difficulty in seeing the value in the schemes because of their focus on specific elements of the debate – the background of people involved in schemes, and the relationship with the police service, being the most high-profile issues. This may be almost inevitable given our history, but NIACRO is urging the policy-makers to seize the opportunity to support and develop a movement that is genuinely trying to engage with disadvantaged communities to provide a service that will be trusted and constructive.

## EMPLOYMENT AFTER CONVICTION

People who have been convicted of a crime face huge barriers when they look for a job. Many people in this situation have skills, qualifications and experience to bring to the labour market, and are anxious to do so. And having a job is a key factor in keeping people out of the criminal justice system. It's not just about having a job and an income; it's about re-integrating into the community and putting the criminal justice system behind you. And for employers, it's about having access to the widest possible pool of potential employees. Yet most employers hesitate before taking on an ex-offender.

NIACRO's work with employers began in a very informal way. At the start, there were no resources for individual case work, but the first annual report refers to the Organising Secretary having “had some success in obtaining employment for those who have requested assistance in this field.” There was an (unsuccessful) attempt in 1973 to get funding for a full-time Employment Officer. NIACRO's pressure to have the Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation amended began in 1977, when we noted that the draft legislation was “extremely restricted and of little practical effect” and 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 civil rights.”

Over the years, NIACRO has carried out a very wide range of employability work, and our clients have built boats, refurbished railway carriages, painted and decorated, learned to drive, to read and write, and to cook, to list but a few. (There's another more current list elsewhere in NIACRO News in the article on Jobtrack training). But it's fair to say that direct engagement with employers was and is an uphill struggle. A Coping with Convictions unit was set up in 1995 to develop links with employers and offer information, advice and training on employing people with convictions. The Employment Equity Awards were established in 1997.

# Celebration Event

As part of the 35th birthday celebrations, we invited some of the employers who have undertaken NIACRO training to lunch at Amelia House. In 2005 – 06 we held 52 training sessions for 467 people from 188 organisations, and the advice line dealt with 300 calls from individual employers. Just two of the feedback comments: “Really enjoyed the course, presentation and training: a welcome relief from the sometimes tedious courses I go on.” and “I got a lot from the course and it will certainly help my organisation to adopt some best practice.” We made 13 brief presentations on our employer work to 59 member organisations of Business in the Community.

HR professionals Jill Currie from the Lurgan-based egg packaging manufacturers Huhtamaki, and Harry O’Neill from Belfast City Council spoke about their belief that it’s both right and practical to take a safe and fair approach to job applicants with a conviction. Jill, whose interest had been sparked by a presentation from NIACRO at a Business in the Community meeting, described how the company had looked again at how, and at what stage, information about previous convictions might be relevant to the recruitment process. That resulted in the dropping of a standard question from the application form; it is only put once an applicant is being offered a job. “At that stage”, says Jill, “We would be prepared to sit down and discuss the past with them, to see if it has any relevance to the job.”

Harry O’Neill said that Belfast City Council – which is in process of being accredited with the Employment Equity Award - prides itself on its fair and impartial recruitment practices including the employing of ex-offenders. “NIACRO’s advice and guidance has been invaluable when assessing the merits of each case”, he said.

If you’d like more information about our work for and with employers, contact Anne Reid ([anne@niacro.co.uk](mailto:anne@niacro.co.uk)).



Audience participation at the employers’ lunch

## INTERNATIONAL WORK ON EMPLOYMENT

Twenty people from our Latvian partners in the EQUAL programme, which supports the ReachOut project, spent a week with us in October 2006. Their project is called Jauni risinājumi bijuso ieslodzīto nodarbinātības veicināšanai (apologies to any Latvian reader for the lack of the appropriate accents) which means “New solutions in promoting the employment of ex-prisoners”. The partner organisations, led by the State Probation Service, are essentially trying to establish rehabilitation policies and practices in a criminal justice system where resettlement is a very new concept indeed. They have set up social rehabilitation centres, half-way houses for prisoners on release, and are working to develop resettlement, training and education programmes both within and outside prison.



Director of Services Pat Conway with Margita Bilsena, Latvian project coordinator

In a fairly packed schedule the visitors, who included probation and prison staff, psychologists and social workers were shown all the relevant NIACRO projects. They also visited each of the prison establishments and met senior staff in the probation and prison services.



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINING

NIACRO has a well equipped and modern training facility on the first floor of Amelia House. It's used by offenders and ex-prisoners engaged in our employability programmes, or who require particular assistance to access the labour market.

Jobtrack offers a range of opportunities including accredited courses which carry industry recognised certification. We also recognise that individual participants will have different needs, and take a flexible approach to improve employability opportunities.

Courses are arranged to meet demand - below is a list of the most popular courses currently on offer within Amelia House.

- ECDL
- A+ certification
- Creative Media
- Digital Photography
- Essential skills
- Construction Skills Register
- Range of NVQ's
- Jobclub
- Driving Theory
- Basic Food Hygiene
- First Aid

Staff also facilitate courses delivered by external agencies, including:

- Forklift: Counterbalance, Reach and Telescopic
- Dump Truck
- Reach
- 360 degree Excavator

The people who complete the courses gain real and useful skills that they can use not just in looking for work, but in other aspects of their lives. For example, participants develop more confident communication skills, manage money and independent living better, and find the confidence to move beyond their own communities or localities. One former participant is now a volunteer trainer on the programme.

Undoubtedly the training suite at Amelia House has been an extremely beneficial resource particularly for people who cannot, or choose not to, avail of mainstream /community provision. However we are still developing it and look forward to increased use by offenders in the community and prisoners released from custody. For example, in 2007 we plan to develop current Jobclub facilities for prisoners on parole or home leave, and those just released, to continue the process of actively seeking employment which they started in prison. We are also consulting with participants to identify new relevant courses which we could deliver.

If you'd like to know more about our training programmes, contact Brian Cunningham ([brianc@niacro.co.uk](mailto:brianc@niacro.co.uk))



David Scott currently studying ECDL and Creative Media with NIACRO



# “RECONNECT” EVALUATION

Reconnect is a two-year pilot programme for young people (initially 15- to 16-year-olds, later extended to include 17-year-olds) who were excluded from mainstream education or in danger of being so, who were involved with the youth justice system, and who lived in three areas of multiple deprivation in Northern Ireland. Just under 60 young people completed the three programmes, in North and West Belfast and in Antrim/Ballymena. The project was funded by the Probation Board, the Youth Justice Agency and the NIO.

Reconnect’s aim, drawing on our previous Youth Employability programme and our work with young people generally, was to help the young people tackle the undoubted problems they faced in completing their education, taking up training, or getting ready to join the labour market. Their experience of education so far had been a negative one; some had little or no family support; surrounded by media and advertising which showcases conspicuous wealth and consumption they had unrealistic expectations and wants; they had few skills in managing relationships or being independent; and their peer group was not likely to have a positive impact on any of this. This depressing list was compiled by the referral agents (from Probation, the Youth Justice Agency and the Education Welfare Service) who were interviewed for the evaluation, and who are best placed to recognise the realities of life for the participants.

Participants undertook basic IT skills – the most popular element of the training, these are after all children of the electronic age – and also literacy, numeracy and preparation for employment. They also took part in a citizenship programme, which included recreational and team-building activities, and group discussions between the three locations. These tackled serious issues of the impact of the conflict and of politics in Northern Ireland, and the 2005 loyalist feuds which were going on in the areas some of the young people came from. They visited Stormont and the Maze Prison, and toured Belfast’s murals.

So that participants weren’t put at a financial disadvantage, they were paid a weekly allowance if they attended on the days agreed. Lunch was provided – given our experience on similar programmes it’s likely to be the only proper meal some of them will have - and the experience of going to a restaurant was new and positive.

## EVALUATION

The programme was evaluated by Jan Wright Consulting. The professionals who referred young people to it all felt that it had been of value to a target population other agencies found difficult or impossible to engage. Many said that Reconnect had been the only intervention that had worked for their clients; “Reconnect was a lifeline for my clients...Reconnect were prepared to try [to work with them] and as far as my clients went they succeeded when no other agency, including my own, could.”

The participants themselves stressed the importance of the relationship with the Reconnect project worker and external tutors. The preferred compliment was “sound”, which means “not talking down to you or letting on they know what things are like for you when you know it’s never been like that for them.” “At the start I just mucked about but Paul kept at me and helped me realise I’m not stupid...I think Reconnect is well sound.”

Some of the other aspects which made Reconnect successful were:

- Understanding personal circumstances.
- Pitching training at the right level and in the right way.
- Quick wins: young people themselves said that they were boosted by being awarded in-house certificates for their achievements, while they waited for the formal certificates which came later from the external accreditors.
- The use of local venues: young people can be very reluctant to go outside their (very) local area.
- Group work which was sensitive to group dynamics especially with young people who are medium to high risk of offending or re-offending.
- Connecting with participants through finding out their own interests.

All the agencies involved agree that this intensive approach really does work for young people. The Youth Justice Agency is committed to expanding a youth employability model of work with its young people, and NIACRO is hopeful that we can continue to develop this model across Northern Ireland.



Denise with Eddie Ford,  
Restorative Justice  
Services Trust

# RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN NEW ZEALAND

Denise Mac Dermott, Senior Practitioner for Mentoring, spent a week in New Zealand last October, studying the restorative justice programmes for which the country is well known, and in which it has been a trail-blazer. She was also able to share something of our own well-regarded and well-tested mentoring programme with the people she met in New Zealand. Here Denise describes her experiences.

At the Youth Justice Agency's 2006 conference on restorative conferencing, I had the chance to meet Dr Gabrielle Maxwell, from the Institute of Policy Studies at the University of Victoria in Wellington, New Zealand. Gabrielle is an expert in restorative justice, especially in using it with young people and in its relationship to Maori tradition. She has given policy advice to the UN and to government and non-government organisations in New Zealand and internationally.

I felt inspired by Gabrielle's presentation, and the work in New Zealand seemed progressive and innovative. I applied to Concordia, the social partnership which brings together the local business, agricultural, trade union and voluntary sectors in Northern Ireland. I was delighted when they accepted my application for funding for my visit under their Individual Study Tour programme.

My tour itinerary was designed to help me explore the diversity of

partners and partnerships which deliver restorative justice within youth justice and the wider criminal justice system. I visited a youth court, and met with Youth Advocates, (lawyers appointed to act for all young people appearing in the Youth Court), with researchers, police liaison officers, government policy-makers, NGOs working in prisons, social workers, the Commissioner for Children's Office, and many more. I'd like to thank a very long list of individuals and organisations for their welcome and willingness to share their experience with me.

I also had the opportunity to make a presentation on NIACRO's mentoring work, to people working in all aspects of youth restorative justice. They were very interested in our programme, and particularly in the extent to which we use volunteer mentors. I've made particular links in this context with PARS, the NZ Prisoners' Aid and Rehabilitation Society, established in 1877 and with aims, policies and services very similar to NIACRO's.

New Zealand has 17 years of experience of working with the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act, 1989, which enshrined the restorative justice approach in legislation. Essentially, the Act says (Section 4F) that when children and young persons commit offences:

- i) they are held accountable, and encouraged to accept responsibility, for their behaviour.
- ii) they are dealt with in a way that acknowledges their needs and will give them the opportunity to develop in responsible, beneficial and socially acceptable ways.

The conferencing approach, bringing everyone involved together, is linked to the relationships between Maori and Pakeha (whites), and to an extent it draws on Maori custom, where the extended family, whanua, meets together to discuss how best to resolve conflict. It draws too on family group therapy. There is a clear process which maps out, step-by-step, the responsibilities of the various players.

There is also growing experience in using restorative conferencing in schools helping young people build life skills, manage their anger, and – this was seen as crucial to the work and certainly resonated with me, coming from Northern Ireland – develop an awareness of their own culture and identity. As with NIACRO’s mentoring project, the Community Liaison Officers working in the school I visited, had started to involve the families as well as the individual young person.

It’s not a perfect picture – colleagues described some familiar problems like limited resources and overworked staff. But I have come home with a great deal of new information and ideas, and impressed with the NZ approach to working effectively and respectfully with children and young people who offend or are risk of offending.

I’d like to thank Gabrielle and her colleagues for their time and kindness, NIACRO for giving me leave of absence to go to New Zealand, and Concordia for funding the tour.

If you’d like to know more about Denise’s study tour, contact her on [denise@niacro.org.uk](mailto:denise@niacro.org.uk);

the full report of her trip is on the Concordia website [www.concordiapartnership.org](http://www.concordiapartnership.org)

# NEW ADVOCACY PROJECT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

NIACRO works with some of the most disadvantaged and socially excluded children and young people in society. They often feel that they have no say in what happens to them, and no control over their future choices. The role of an advocate is to help empower a young person to express their views by encouraging them to speak for themselves or by speaking on their behalf. An advocate can also help access other services, offer advice on children’s rights and provide support in informal and formal complaint procedures, case conferences etc.

What makes advocacy different from the usual practice of working with young people is that the advocate does not work to what he or she might think of as the “best interests” of the young person but to the wishes and feelings of the young person. The advocate’s feelings or judgements on a particular situation have no bearing on the process.

An advocacy process is about more than the wishes of the young person

being fulfilled. The process itself is important. It is vital that the young person feels that their views have been heard exactly as they wished and, that, if the end result is not what they wanted, that they understand why the decision was made.

NIACRO has received funding from the Juvenile Justice Centre and the EHSSB to carry out a six month advocacy project. The service is offered to young people in Woodlands (the Juvenile Justice Centre),

→ continued from page 23

Lakewood (the Secure Care Unit) and young people who have been recommended for consideration by the secure care panel. An advocate can provide support in case conferences, LAC [Looked After Children] reviews, case planning meetings and reintegration planning meetings, to name a few.

To date we have trained 20 people to become advocates, 10 NIACRO staff and 10 who were previously volunteers on our Independent Representation project. These volunteers were well placed to take on the advocacy role as it was an extension of their present role within the juvenile justice and secure care systems.

We have worked with one young person so far, representing her at a meeting with social services about where she would live when she left the Juvenile Justice Centre, and the process worked well. We're looking forward to build this important service during the life of the pilot project.

If you'd like to know more about the advocacy project, contact Aisling Cartmill ([aisling@niacro.co.uk](mailto:aisling@niacro.co.uk)) or call her on 07930 831259



Heather Reid with Professor Paul Palmer, City University London. Service Manager Heather recently completed the MSc in Voluntary Sector Management from the Cass Business School, studying alongside colleagues from across the UK.

## NEW STAFF WELCOMED TO NIACRO

Family Links welcomes Naomi Davis and (on secondment from NIPS) Glen Hutton;

Jennifer Agnew has taken up post as Project Worker on the new advocacy project within the Independent Representation programme;

Rachel Long will provide maternity cover on the Independent Visitor scheme;

Emerald Neville is our new Receptionist/Administrator in Armagh;

Gareth Eannetta is part of the Jobtrack team as Training Officer, Job Placement.

**Do you or does your organisation have an interest in Criminal Justice, Youth Justice, Community Safety etc?**

**If so, why not join NIACRO?**

**Contact Jackie Junk, [jackie@niacro.co.uk](mailto:jackie@niacro.co.uk) or call her on 028 9032 0157 for more information on membership.**



Amelia House, 4 Amelia Street, Belfast BT2 7GS Tel: 028 9032 0157 email: [niacro@niacro.co.uk](mailto:niacro@niacro.co.uk)  
The Old City Factory, 19c Queen Street, Derry/Londonderry BT48 7EF Tel: 028 7126 4555 email: [nw@niacro.co.uk](mailto:nw@niacro.co.uk)  
1a Russell Street, Armagh BT61 9AA Tel: 028 3751 5910 email: [sw@niacro.co.uk](mailto:sw@niacro.co.uk)

[www.niacro.co.uk](http://www.niacro.co.uk)