



# 25 news

SPRING 2010

# DEVOLUTION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE



**Well, it's happened. On 9 March, the Assembly voted for the devolution of justice powers to a Northern Ireland Executive for the first time since 1972. A Justice Department will be set up, and a Minister for Justice appointed, by mid-April.**

As local accountability for criminal justice becomes, finally, a reality, NIACRO is looking to the future with some hope, some anxiety, and some clear ideas on how the new system should look.

NIACRO has been clear about the priorities we believe a new Justice Minister should set, and we have taken every opportunity to share our views with all parties. Indeed, we set about this task in January 2007. We met then with the parties to quiz them about their views on broad criminal justice matters – the committee on the Programme for Government had just published its report on devolution. In NIACRO News 17, when we reported back on these meetings, we said, “At the time of writing, ministerial arrangements, appointments

procedures and timing of devolution were not agreed.” We apparently felt the details might be agreed in the couple of weeks between our meetings and the publication of NIACRO News in March of that year! We also warned that “the parties will have to engage in a steep learning curve once criminal justice matters are devolved”.

## NIACRO AND THE POLITICIANS

Since then, we've attended party conferences, welcomed Direct Rule ministers, Opposition spokespersons, MPs and peers, MLAs and Assembly officials to Amelia House, and given evidence to Assembly committees. We've briefed politicians on particular issues such as the needs of children. We've enquired into the experience of devolution in Scotland. (Clear



also in this issue:

devolution  
what next?

hate crime  
pilot project

bill of rights  
making it happen

ex-ocop  
a euro partnership

warnings emerged from there – new, increasingly bureaucratic and punitive institutions and procedures, a rising moral panic fuelled by politicians and the media, and an emerging battle for the heart and soul of criminal justice policy between practitioners and politicians.)

We've called for a root and branch review of the prison service along the lines of the excellent Commissions set up in England and Scotland. We are working with partners to highlight areas of common interest – for example, Director of Services Dave Weir met at the end of February with other NGOs with a concern for young people to begin to put together a “manifesto” for the incoming Minister.

One key initiative in this line is the Justice Series, a planned sequence of events at Stormont where we will discuss important criminal justice matters with MLAs, their staff and other organisations which share our interests and concerns. The first took place on 2 February. Professor Bill Whyte led a discussion on early intervention. Who has the responsibility for preventing young people from entering the youth justice system and who should have it? We were delighted at the response to this first event and look forward to continuing the series after the general election.

The signs are, frankly, not all positive. To take one example: some local journalists have taken the hardest of lines on the story of Jon Venables, one of the 10-year-olds who killed Jamie Bolger 17 years ago. It bodes ill for the pressures that will be put on the

new Minister locally. S/he will likely be faced with all sorts of demands to act “firmly”, “robustly” and all the other ways of saying, “Be more punitive”. Many, not least the media, will be ready to criticise any attempt to pay as much attention to “the causes of crime”, and how to divert people from it, as on retribution and containment.

### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

So, what is NIACRO calling for? Our priorities are based on NIACRO's long experience (for going on 40 years now) of working with offenders and their families. We have seen over and over again “what works” – and what doesn't. We know that what works is sometimes slow, complex and not crowd-pleasing. We've been frustrated at the failure of policy-makers to recognise and support the programmes – not just ours! – that make a real contribution to reducing offending and its impact on society. Here is a list of what we believe would work; it formed part of a presentation made by CEO Olwen Lyner at one of the party conferences. She described three main priorities:

- A collaborative criminal justice system. Can we find consensus about the purpose of the system? Can we direct resources to resettlement where they will actually make a difference? We're at present only spending about 10% of the budget on this.
- An Executive working together to reduce crime – with other departments recognising that they have a huge part to play.

- A good public standing. Working patiently with the media and other people who influence public attitudes to ensure they present an accurate picture of the criminal justice system based on the facts and good solid research.

Although we feel it's important to spell out the dangers facing criminal justice under a new regime, NIACRO is also very conscious of the real opportunities that devolution offers. Local accountability is clearly important. So is the possibility of designing a system which faces up to the sectarianism which still has such a harmful impact on society here. We don't have slavishly to follow legislation and policies designed



Olwen Lyner Chief Executive and Stephen Farry MLA at fringe meeting held at Alliance Party Conference

in and for England and Wales. We can look forward to building a true partnership between statutory agencies and the NGOs which provide so many of the effective projects and programmes that make a real difference.

NIACRO is looking forward to meeting with the new Minister and their staff, and continuing to develop our links with all parties. We want to work with all of them to build a criminal justice system that is positive and effective and has the support of everyone who is affected by it, and that's everyone who lives in Northern Ireland.

# LAST PIECE OF THE JIGSAW?

## – THE BILL OF RIGHTS DEBATE

The debate around a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland has been active for many years. The Belfast Agreement, which established the NI Human Rights Commission, also undertook to invite the NIHRC to consult and advise on rights “to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland”. These proposed rights, taken along with the European Convention on Human Rights, would constitute a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The NIHRC duly carried out this exercise and presented the government with its advice in December 2008. The NIO’s consultation document was published in November 2009 and the consultation period ended on 31 March 2010.

NIACRO has made a response to the consultation. It is, however, based on the fact that we are very disappointed in the document. We believe it has seriously undermined the possibility of producing an effective instrument which would tackle the legacy of the conflict and make real changes for the better in Northern Ireland.

Essentially, the government has taken a minimalist approach, asserting that many of the rights called for by the Human Rights Commission affect people across the UK and therefore do not need to be addressed in a NI-centred Bill of Rights. They talk of a proposed UK Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. However, NIACRO (and many other organisations, not least the NIHRC itself) challenge this assertion; it’s just too simplistic and ignores the depth and breadth of the impact the conflict had on us all.

The government has also said – specifically in the sections dealing with reintegration of people in detention, ie NIACRO’s client group – that many of the proposals are already covered by “policy and operational measures”. It doesn’t take much experience of trying to get public authorities to honour their obligations and put good practice into operation to know that things tend to change substantively only when they are legally enforced.

### KEY PROBLEMS

As always when we respond to a government consultation, we have drawn on our almost 40 years of experience of working with and for offenders and their families. We have pointed out problems with:

- The rights of both young people and adults in custody to have legitimate complaints handled fairly and effectively.
- Fair access to employment.
- Adequate health care for prisoners.
- Consistent access to the education provided in prison.
- Social security benefits.
- Prison visits that are all too often affected by operational failings.
- The continuing impact of poor community relations brought about by the conflict.

A strong Bill of Rights would, through improving public services across the board, contribute to a reduction in crime and hence the numbers of victims of crime. A Bill of Rights limited to the proposals in the NIO’s consultation document won’t achieve this goal, nor do much to build the better society which we all want.

# UPDATES UPDATES

## REHABILITATION AND EMPLOYMENT

In the last issue of NIACRO News, we described in detail some of the problems which two recent pieces of legislation have thrown up – the extension of the work of the Security Industry Authority to Northern Ireland, and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Order. We made the point that legislation claiming to increase public protection could very well have the opposite effect, by increasing the barriers faced by ex-offenders looking for employment. We reminded readers that “people with convictions who get into – and stay in – jobs are significantly less likely to engage in criminal behaviour than those who don’t”. And we called for a review of the legislation which is called “rehabilitation of offenders” but which has over time made rehabilitation harder, not easier.

Since then, NIACRO has continued to campaign, explain, and press for change. We have insisted in keeping these issues on the agendas of policy-makers and the institutions which oversee the law.

Specifically, we have met with the Independent Safeguarding Authority’s Chief Executive Adrian

McAllister and locally-based Board member Richard Black, to share our concerns. The Authority – and the DHSSPS with whom we have also been in contact – recognises the need to ensure that their guidance and information materials are clear and reader-friendly.

We have also met with the Security Industry Authority, and the Authority now recognises our key role in supporting individuals affected by the legislation. We have given them examples of the impact the new system has had on individuals. This will help them clarify the issues that should be taken into account when making decisions on whether or not someone should be barred.

Other employers are belatedly recognising the complexity of their new responsibilities – especially in managing and supporting existing staff who now come under the legislative requirements. NIACRO is receiving ever more calls from employers in this situation.

## SERVING THE SILENT SENTENCE

Following on from the last edition of NIACRO News, two new films have been released by Action for Prisoners’ Families to further highlight the issues that are unique to prisoners’ families. Entitled “Missing Out” and “Family Business”, the films study the impact that prison and crime has on families and are suitable for training, awareness raising, mentoring, parenting, drug rehabilitation, probation or any other profession which comes into contact with the families of prisoners and offenders.

The films can be seen at -

Missing out - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7p9rG45AMB8>

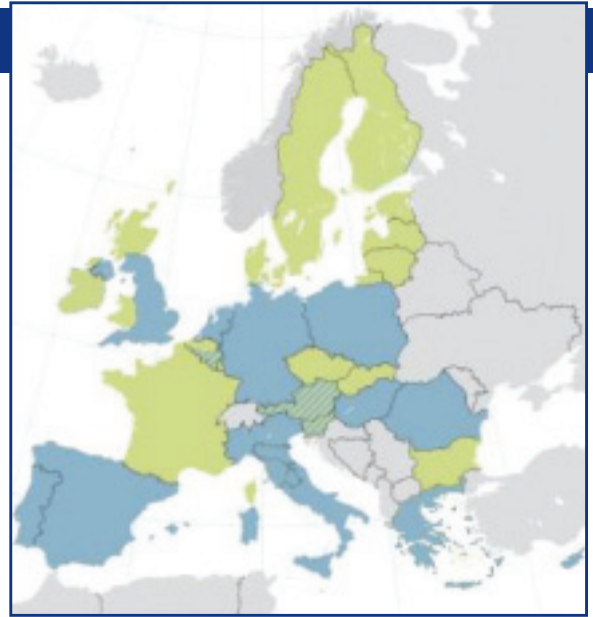
Family Business - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCKU3gvQ5Us>

As part of our work to raise awareness of the problems facing the families of prisoners, Donnie Sweeney and Mary Cunningham along with two families were also invited to meet Basil McCrea (UUP MLA) at Stormont. Speaking after the meeting, Donnie Sweeney said: “Basil was very interested in the stories of those families who find our services vital. He is keen to hear more from NIACRO and is happy to work with us in the future.”

## EUROPEAN LINKS

# Ex-OCop

Last autumn, NIACRO became part of the Ex-OCop “community of practice” in Brussels. This network has emerged from the learning of the European wide EQUAL programme - a programme in which NIACRO participated through the very successful ReachOut project. Olwen Lyner describes what it plans to do.



Ex-OCop member locations

The EU is funding Ex-OCop (Ex-offenders Community of Practice) to undertake a three-year programme. It aims to enhance our understanding of “what works” to help people resettle into their communities, with an emphasis on increasing skills and employability – so, very close indeed to one of NIACRO’s main goals.

The network will hold workshops and seminars across Europe. It will come up with recommendations that should be useful to both criminal justice and employment departments in the Member States when they are required to respond to requests for information about what they are doing to prepare prisoners for release, and how they connect on into employment. At this stage, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and

Spain as well as both the UK and NI are engaged, and it is hoped that several other countries will also join the network.

### Sharing the expertise

The programme involves running up to 18 small workshops covering:

- assessment/sentence planning,
- training in prisons,
- art in prisons,
- aftercare and resettlement,
- family relationships and resettlement,
- preparation for release,
- community links,
- women prisoners,
- foreign national prisoners,
- working with employers,
- cross departmental co-operation.

These workshops will involve up to 10 experts from Member States. The NIO and the European Unit of DEL have asked NIACRO to act as a link to the network and we are currently working to identify which of the areas we would want to identify experts for.

Following the workshops there will be a series of seminars to share the papers that have been generated. We expect to be in a position to encourage appropriate staff from a wide range of criminal justice and employment contacts to participate in the seminars which they identify as being relevant to their work. The culmination of all this work will be a policy forum in Berlin in late 2011, attended by senior regional, national and European officials. The aim is to give them practical, effective and tested ideas which will deepen and embed good policy and practice in Europe.

**give them practical, effective and tested ideas which will deepen and embed good policy**

# Youth Employability Seminar

One of the seminars in the Ex-OCop programme took place in Milan in February, hosted by the Regione Lombardia and the Italian Ministry of Justice. Services Director Dave Weir attended, along with colleagues from Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain and the Netherlands. Participants shared experiences and models of practice to improve employment opportunities for young people.

People from each country presented a model of practice – in NIACRO's case, Dave described our Youth Employability programme. This seeks to secure education, training or employment opportunities for young people aged 16 – 18 leaving custody or coming under the supervision of the Probation Service or Youth Justice Agency.

It was in some ways reassuring that the issues across the jurisdictions were not dissimilar. Participants explored assessment tools to match young people to appropriate placements, methods of engagement, mentoring and tutoring, and building networks in local communities.

However, there were some significant differences. NIACRO has for some time been raising concerns that the erosion of rehabilitation legislation is making it more difficult for young people to get into employment. Colleagues from Greece, however, were able to report that there it is an offence to use a child's criminal record as a bar to employment.

## KEY THEMES

Some key themes emerged which were relevant for everyone.

**Continuity:** - a programme that can span community and custody to ensure that progress is maintained.

**Networking:** - the need for employability workers to have a connections in both the criminal justice and employment worlds.

**Accreditation:** - to ensure that training which people undertake in custody has currency and relevance for their future employment opportunities.

**Intensive support:** - to provide mentoring support to young people placed in employment, to ensure that positive outcomes are maintained over the long term.



Hard at work at the Milan conference

# Pathways to Inclusion Conference

This conference in Budapest, held under the banner of the Grundtvig Lifelong Learning programme, carried the sub-title of “Strengthening European Cooperation in Prison Education and Training”.

The EU-funded Grundtvig programme aims to develop adult and informal education.

Over 200 people, from across the EU and candidate countries, heard about what’s going on in prison education and plans for the future. There were workshops on basic education, the arts, vocation training, e-learning, the learning environment in prison and reintegration (the last of these conducted by NIACRO).

Drawing on the experience of the EQUAL programme, which funded ReachOut, the organisers invited NIACRO to make a presentation on our employability work under the title “Release-Transition-Reintegration”. Service Manager Heather Reid traced the developmental path NIACRO has trodden – from the prison-based ReachOut which overlapped with the community-based Jobtrack (2002 – 2007), to the current Jobtrack programme which started in 2007 and which works both inside and outside prison. Through all these projects – among the largest initiatives NIACRO has ever undertaken - we have learned “what works” and Heather outlined the key elements of the process:

- Intensive pre-release preparation.
- Intensive and immediate support through the gate.
- Specialist support with benefits and disclosure.
- Flexible job sampling.
- Connection with real employers.
- Ongoing support from mentors and buddies.



## Lifelong Learning Programme

She also described our efforts to encourage employers to use fair recruitment practices. We are active in engaging with employers, we put forward a realistic business case, and we provide comprehensive advice, training and information services.

Our model of engaging employers is recognised as unique and valuable across participating countries. Many in the workshop requested copies of our “Working with Conviction” booklet and the employer DVD to take back to their own work and develop accordingly.

*“For me”, says Heather, “the most notable comment was that our presentation was the only one to show that we had tracked programme participants and demonstrated that we had an impact on offending behaviour. We in Northern Ireland can learn from others, but the reality is that we are leaders in many aspects of our work.”*

# Celebrating Leadership in the third sector

CEO Olwen Lyner recently spoke at the CO3 conference, which celebrated 25 years of leadership in the sector with a particular focus on its “magic people” through the Voyager Awards. The contribution of the sector to life in NI was exemplified in the eleven awards to key individuals. Those participating in the conference found the awards ceremony a very positive and uplifting event in the current climate.

The programme embraced the sense of economic crisis that we are facing and looked at the potential opportunities for the sector to be seen as a critical part of the overall solution. This is not just in the delivery of public services but also the contribution we can make to developing imaginative policy solutions, while encouraging greater civic engagement.

CO3’s role in this is to provide safe places for conversations, space for reflection and to be a focus for creative disturbance. The conference closed with the question “Why can’t this be a significant moment for



the sector in all its various shapes and what do we have to fear?”

Speaking after the event, Olwen said: “The third sector faces a number of interesting challenges in the future. For me, conferences such as this offer an opportunity to engage with leaders across a variety of areas and consider how we can succeed, as individuals, organisations and as a sector”.

## neets

“Not in education, employment or training”, or NEET – a snappy acronym for a bad place to be if you are a young person aged 16-24. It’s been around for about 10 years, long enough for strategies to tackle the problem to be in place in England, Wales and Scotland. But not yet in Northern Ireland where there are around 52,000 young people in this situation. The Department of Employment and Learning undertook a scoping study of the issue, to which NIACRO contributed. The Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning organised a discussion

forum on the subject in Lisburn, which NIACRO attended, and has now set up an Inquiry into young people who are NEET.

Some of NIACRO’s service users fall under this definition, especially in our Youth Employability programme, and the 18-to-24 year olds in Jobtrack. So we are keen that there should be an effective strategy to reduce the numbers of unengaged young people.

We have worked with almost 1000 young people in this programme and can say with certainty that the overwhelming majority want to be in employment or training. However, young people involved in the youth justice system face consistent

barriers to achieving this goal. This can include employers’ attitudes, but these young people are also disproportionately disadvantaged by their lack of social skills and educational attainment.

Often they have been involved in criminal activities due to boredom, peer pressure and lack of positive role models. We work to help young people overcome these difficulties. Over 60% of participants move into employment, training and education. Given a choice, our young people would rather be in work than become a NEET statistic.

We have been invited to comment on the Inquiry’s terms of reference and make a submission to it in May.

# PROJECT NEWS

# CHALLENGE HATE CRIME PROJECT



Special EU Programmes Body  
Foras Um Chláir Speisialta An Ae  
Boord O Qwre Ocht UE Projects



Hate crime legislation became law in Northern Ireland in September 2004, through the Criminal Justice (No 2) (NI) Order. It meant that the courts are obliged to take into account, when sentencing, the fact that an offence is aggravated by hostility based on religion, race, sexual orientation or disability.

NIACRO has engaged directly with this subject for several years. Between 2004 and 2006 we took part in a European project working to reduce hate crime, cooperating with colleagues in London, Germany, Bulgaria and Malta (NIACRO News 14). This work resulted in the 2006 report “Hate crime and adjudicated offenders – challenging the perpetrators: models of practice.” Later, we hosted a seminar building on these relationships and comparing the situation in Northern Ireland with the effects on Muslim communities in Great Britain of the “war on terror” (NIACRO News 19).

However, given Northern Ireland’s history, NIACRO recognised the problem long before this. Our Base 2 programme has worked with thousands of people under threat since it was established in 1990; these threats included examples of “hate crime”.

PSNI statistics for 2008-2009 recorded 1017 hate crimes with a motivation of hostility on the grounds of sectarianism, the biggest group. They were followed by race (771) and homophobia (134). It is generally accepted that hate crime is under-recorded and the PSNI have run a number of advertising campaigns to encourage reporting.

## CHALLENGING

Now NIACRO has joined with the NI Prison Service to carry out a new three-year project, Challenge Hate Crime, with the goal of reducing hate crime through intensive support for people who have committed this sort of offence. Working to achieve this goal will include:

- Improving the level of debate and understanding around hate crime (especially when motivated by sectarianism).
- Developing a definition of sectarian hate crime, which at present doesn't exist (and which may explain why incidents are currently under-recorded).
- Extending the debate beyond the criminal justice system.
- Designing and piloting a workable, effective model of helping offenders – in custody and in the community - tackle their offending.
- Increasing the skills of those working with offenders.
- Sharing the learning through seminars and publications.

Finally, we hope the project will contribute to what NIACRO has been insisting on for many years, and is gradually becoming accepted. That is, effective joint working among all the organisations which have a contribution to make, both inside and outside the criminal justice system. The project itself is absolutely dependent on partnership working, and NIACRO is especially pleased to be involved in such a large-scale and significant initiative with the Prison Service.

Welcoming the new project Paul Bullick, Resettlement Manager for the Northern Ireland Prison Service, said: "The resettlement of prisoners is a high priority for the Prison Service and this Challenge Hate Crime project aims to help reduce re-offending and provide a further platform of support. All initiatives which serve to contribute

to reducing re-offending must be embraced.

This project will also complement the work ongoing to develop a multi agency resettlement strategy where the focus of all organisations is to tackle re-offending using a holistic prisoner/offender based approach."

Challenge Hate Crime, funded under Peace III, has two phases, the first of which is underway. We have been joined in NIACRO by Monica Fitzpatrick, former Equality Advisor with NIPS, who will be the project's Research Manager. We have established two linked advisory groups to work with NIPS and NIACRO, the Research Advisory Group (RAG) and the Practice Advisory Group. "RAG" includes the Community Relations Council, Community Safety Unit, Probation Board, PSNI and Youth Justice Agency, along with the Institute for Conflict Research. Many of these bodies were involved in developing the original application for funding for the project.

The Practice Advisory Group's current members are the NI Council for Ethnic Minorities, Probation Board and Youth Justice Agency though more will join the group as it develops. It will, as phase two, develop and oversee the actual programme to be used with offenders to help them change their behaviour. We aim to make this a model of good practice.

Summing up why Challenge Hate Crime is so important, Pat Conway, Director of Services at NIACRO said: "Being a victim of hate crime is a particularly painful experience: it feels very personal. Incidents of hate crime also hurt communities, arousing suspicion and alienation. We need to understand where its roots are, and how communities can make it clear that they don't accept it. The Prison Service and NIACRO believe that this project can make a real contribution to reducing hate crime for the sake of us all."

This is a rather brief summary of what is a major and complex project: we'll be returning to it in later issues of NIACRO News with updates of how it's developing.

# INSPIRE PROJECT

The Inspire women's project is an important new initiative aimed at improving the way the criminal justice treats women offenders. NIACRO is closely involved and NIACRO News called in at the project's Belfast base to hear all about the work being undertaken there.

The Inspire project is an outworking of the women offenders' strategy for Northern Ireland – a draft strategy went out to consultation in February 2009, and a report of the consultation responses was published in October. An action plan, based on the draft strategy and reaction to it, is currently being worked on.

The project is led by the Probation Service, and offers women subject to community supervision orders or who are shortly to leave custody, access to a whole range of mainstream services in the community. They also receive more targeted, one-to-one services to help with specific problems and challenges and it with this aspect that NIACRO is most engaged. The geographic reach is Greater Belfast which extends, for these purposes, as far afield as Bangor, Downpatrick

and Newcastle! - and Carrickfergus and Larne will be included soon.

At the project launch in January, Criminal Justice Minister Paul Goggins was genuinely supportive and enthusiastic and spent some time hearing from the women who use the project. He acknowledged that "women offend in different ways and for different reasons to men". This point was taken up when we spoke to Probation's Jean O'Neill who manages the project.

## WOMEN IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

For a start, she pointed out, a lot fewer women come into the criminal justice system than men – they make up 13% of those going through the courts, 3% of people in prison, and 9% of the Probation Service's clientele. Many women offenders have experienced physical and sexual abuse. Many continue to be involved in destructive relationships with men and Inspire works alongside organisations such as Women's Aid and within the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing) arrangements to address these issues.

Many women offenders have had to give up their children to foster or other care. Many have mental health problems and/or have turned



(L-R) Jen White, Denise Hall (NIACRO), Briege McKee, Frances Weller, Jean O'Neill, Angela Burke, Christine Murphy, Nuala Mullan, Anne Costello celebrate the official launch of the Inspire Centre

to drink and drugs. These latter problems are of course found among men offenders as well, but there is an element of fear and shame which women are more likely to feel than many male offenders.

Virtually all are considered as low to medium risk of re-offending and are aged between 30 and 50 years. Their offences are typically shoplifting, benefit fraud and forgery. The reconviction rates are lower. Of those offenders who received a PBNI disposal, 18% of women reconvicted within two years, compared to 38% of men (2005, NISRA).

The Inspire building is light and airy, comfortable and welcoming – all aspects designed to reduce the anxiety which contact with the criminal justice system can arouse.

## PARTNERSHIP

One important element of the project is the number and range of partners with whom it works and the resulting range of options open to the women who attend. Across Belfast, the long-established women's centres are welcoming Inspire users to the courses and services they offer in the community. This is a two-way process; it's not just about supporting women offenders and ex-offenders. An initiative called the "Women's Community Support Project" is contributing to Inspire's work. It helps the women's centres and other women's groups understand and make reciprocal links with the criminal justice system, and appreciate how women get involved with it. There is also help with parenting (through Barnardo's), contact with the restorative justice

organisations, motivational courses, art and creativity, and help with the management of finance, anger and stress.

Denise Hall from NIACRO's APAC project is based in the new Inspire building along with four Probation staff and two volunteers. Denise works one-to-one with some of the women whom Probation staff believe would benefit from more intensive support than the statutory services can give. She sees her key goal as helping them gain the confidence to make decisions and choices – and changes – which will move them away from the criminal justice system and into a more stable life. So part of her support is practical, things for which Denise can call on other NIACRO services such as Jobtrack and the benefit and debt advice service – staff from both these services visit Inspire each week – Family Links and the visitors' centres. Some women attend the

Thursday morning women-only sessions in Amelia Street.

But a lot is emotional. It's a big ask to get people to change a mindset which may have held them back for years.

Some women have undertaken the Duke of Edinburgh "Endeavour" award, which includes learning delivered by NIACRO, and Attorney General Baroness Scotland presented five awards when she visited Inspire in February. Like Minister Goggins, she spent a considerable time talking with and encouraging the women, declaring "You are an example for others coming behind you". Denise described how her clients in turn were keen to meet Baroness Scotland, saying they wanted to get across how helpful they were finding the project.

In the next issue of NIACRO News, we'll hear from some of the women

## News from Caps

Some of the mothers from Caps Belfast went to the Centre for Health and Wellbeing on 16 March for the first of what's planned to be monthly sessions where they can try out complementary therapies like relaxation and massage, and generally relax and feel a bit pampered. Not only does this give mothers a break, but it means they can meet and share their experiences with others in the same situation.

Caps Armagh is looking for donations of unwanted or unused toys for their therapeutic work with children. Most welcome would be dolls' houses, puppets, beanbags, small figurines (cars, farm animals, people, Disney figures etc), fairy tales, and musical instruments. If you'd like to donate, contact Sinead at the Caps office on 028 3751 1433 to organise collection.



# celebrating our volunteers

Pictured above, left to right back row; Josie McAnena, Rebecca Tracey, Ross Crawford, Sophy Bryson, Amanda McFaul, Trevor Gilliland. Front row: Christina Vint, Olwen Lyner (Chief Executive), Jenni Rice, Betty Flanagan, George Elwood

The Christmas Volunteer Forum featured a thought-provoking awareness session on mental health issues, delivered by Naomi Kirk from Mindwise. Denise Hayward of the Volunteer Development Agency also attended and presented us with our recently achieved Investing in Volunteers award.

## Long Serving Volunteers

We also held an awards ceremony to show our appreciation and recognise the achievements of volunteers who have been involved with NIACRO for a number of years.

People who had actively volunteered for over three years, over five years and over 10 years were given awards for their time, energy and commitment in the

following roles:

- Independent Visitors befriending young people in the care system.
- Independent Representatives representing the views of young people in secure care.
- Youth Mentors supporting young people at risk of offending or re-offending.
- APAC Mentors supporting people involved in anti-social behaviour to integrate into their communities.
- Transport assistance for children and families making prison visits.
- Welfare advice for ex-prisoners and families of prisoners.

DSD Minister Margaret Ritchie presents the Investing in Volunteers award to Vivienne Courtney, volunteer development worker

14 volunteers were recognised for their commitment to volunteering with NIACRO for three years and over. They were Donna McVeigh, Ross Crawford, Rebecca Tracey, Fiona Kelly, Christina Vint, Tony Morrison, Rebecca Byrne, Philip Devlin, Philip Kelly, Leontia McGarry, Angela McKeown, Louise McSherry, Dymrna Devlin and Rebecca Reid.

A further five volunteers were awarded for their commitment of over five years to NIACRO. They were Jenni Rice, Amanda McFaul, Trevor Gilliland, George Elwood and Betty Flanagan.

Finally our longest serving volunteers Josie McAnena and Sophy Bryson were recognised for their outstanding commitment to volunteering with NIACRO. Josie has volunteered for over 10 years, initially with Prison Link (a joint project between NIACRO and PBNI) and more recently with Family



Links, transporting children and families to prison visits throughout NI.

Sophy has volunteered with NIACRO for over 14 years as an advice volunteer giving welfare advice to ex-prisoners and families of prisoners, initially with Prison Link and more recently the Family Links project. Sophy has also more recently been involved as an Independent Representative,

representing the views of young people in the secure care centre in Bangor.

Staff, management and the Executive Committee of NIACRO would like to thank each of our long serving volunteers for the support they have given to the children, young people, offenders and families who use NIACRO's services and for their participation and invaluable contribution to our work.

**We are always keen to hear from anyone interested in volunteering, so if you have 2-3 hours free each week or fortnight and would be interested to find out more about opportunities available, contact our Volunteer Co-ordinator [vivienne@niacro.co.uk](mailto:vivienne@niacro.co.uk)**

# Time For Change



NIACRO volunteer Marty Adams works with us on the APAC programme, going out to visit people who are facing problems in their communities. He kindly agreed to tell NIACRO News something about his experiences and where his life is taking him at present.

I was a young person growing up in a tightly-knit community in West Belfast in the 70s and 80s, and with the Troubles, as we called them, at their peak. People were getting killed daily on the streets where we lived, by the Bad Men as we saw them. We had no sense of the whole political scene in this country and why it was the reason people were dying - family, friends, brothers and sisters. No-one was exempt from this nightmare that could come to their door at any time. That's just the way it was.

## One of the boys

So for my peers and myself growing up, we all had to follow suit and be "one of them". I used to enjoy getting into the older lads' company and saying to myself, "I am going to be like him one day". Mind, I also used to watch TV and say to myself, "I am going to be like him one day"

– George Best or maybe Rambo. As I grew older in my teenage years it didn't take much to see that I was not going to be like Rambo nor was I going to be a George Best. But if not, then who was I?

I have often heard the words "you are who you are" which is quite true but to what extent is a person "who he is"? Can he search deep inside himself to find who he is, can he look in the mirror and see who he is, or is he who other people tell him who he is? Or could it be that you are who you are because you don't know who you are: really are, that is.

What I was going to be at that time was one of the boys, and if you come from this wee land you know who the "BOYS" are. I was doing all the things that the boys did and going to prison where some of the boys were – and that meant staying

for years in prison with the boys, 'cos that's what I aspired to be.

## Losing everything

But then I found that some of the boys were no longer there, and some had gone on to be different boys. And I started thinking to myself, "Hey wait a minute, my life is in a mess", and a very big mess it was. I had lost everything, my home, my family, my friends: and most of all, I had lost me. What was I to do, a broken man standing in the middle of Belfast on a cold winter's day with 18p in my pocket watching the traffic going up and down and wishing I was one of those people driving by in their nice warm cars going to their nice warm homes. But I wasn't. I was sleeping in different houses, eating when and where people decided to have me – gone were the days of all the joys of being one of the boys.

Then one day I was having a chat with a guy in a city-centre coffee shop and he said to me, “Marty, why don’t you go round to NIACRO and speak to someone.” I said, “Those people won’t want to know me” – as I believed that I was the sort of person that maybe made them set up the organisation in the first place. But he insisted, so off round to NIACRO it was, asking for Jeff. I always remember that meeting with Jeff because of the warm cuppa tea he gave me. He was interested in what I was saying, and was interested in me as a person. He introduced me to Geraldine, whom he said would maybe help me decide what I would like to do in the future. “God help her”, I said to myself. So the meeting with Geraldine took place and then it was a long-drawn-out, hard process working with me. I’m sure she could add to the story as she helped me change my thinking into something positive that would help me find the REAL ME. To aspire not to be like anyone else, but aspire to be me, and the real me.

### The real me

Years of work and lots of guidance have well paid off. Finding the real me was a blessing. I am now married to my beautiful wife Sarah, and have three wonderful kids and another on the way in a few weeks. I have a certificate in counselling and am heading for my diploma in counselling and psychology as well as continuing my education in social care with the goal of becoming a Probation Officer. I work in

the criminal justice system and volunteer with NIACRO in the APAC programme.

So my message here is to aspire to be yourself and search for the real you, forget about being “one of the boys” as the boys won’t always be there. It will be a hard process with daily learning. Even when you mess up along the way as I have done, and still do, remember it’s not the messing up that beats you, it’s the

not getting up and moving on that keeps you down. I owe a great lot to the work and dedication of the staff at NIACRO and to Geraldine and Jeff. They are willing to give their time to helping people and they can see that people don’t have to stay stuck in their current situation. Again, I’d like to give my sincere thanks to the people who have helped me along the way and especially to the staff of NIACRO.

**“Marty has come such a long way and has worked very hard at turning his life round. He deserves to be where he is now, and I wish him all the best in the future.”** Geraldine

## Staffing Matters

The great majority of staff were able to take part in two days of business planning at the end of February. They considered presentations on work with children and young people, offenders and ex-offenders, families, and NIACRO’s communications strategy.

### WELCOME:

#### **Ronan Garvey**

who has joined Caps Armagh as an Education Worker

#### **Dermot Quigley**

Employment Officer in the L’Derry office

#### **Jeanine Beck**

Caps Project Worker in Amelia Street

## Investors in People

NIACRO has achieved the Investors in People Silver award, for which we needed to make the grade in 138 different areas of evidence! The assessors from IiP interviewed 30% of our staff and volunteers. They found staff to be strongly committed to the values and work of NIACRO, with a keen sense that they are making a real difference to the lives of clients and their families. They also found good leadership and a commitment to valuing and developing staff, a “strong organisational identity” and an ethos of measuring the impact of the work.

