

JUSTICE MINISTER VISITS NIACRO

We were delighted to welcome David Ford to Amelia House on 3 June. We had written to him immediately after his historic election by the Executive, with NIACRO's views on the current criminal justice situation. We were glad therefore to have the opportunity to have a face-to-face discussion on these important topics.

Speaking after his visit, the Minister said: "I greatly value the work of NIACRO, which is one of our key partners in the criminal justice system. Providing early intervention programmes for young people, helping those leaving prison gain employment, and providing help and support to prisoners' families are just some of the important services which NIACRO provides.

"It is through such services that people's lives are turned away from crime and they start to make a positive contribution to their communities."



Justice Minister David Ford, 2nd left, with Olwen Lyner, Dave Weir and Pat Conway outside Amelia House.

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It was a compliment to NIACRO that the Minister met with us so early in his tenure, that he warmly recognised the value of our services and indeed that he agreed to speak on our new organisational DVD. We were also gratified that he mentioned our work, in the context of the partnership working which he advocates, when he attended the Justice Committee for the first time.

Prisons review

The section of the Hillsborough Agreement which dealt with policing and justice included a list of “necessary actions” which “could usefully include...a review of the conditions of detention, management and oversight of all prisons” – something NIACRO has repeatedly called for in the past.

In April, David Ford announced that such a review would be carried out and in June he announced the team which will do so. They have been asked to make a first report – on the regime at Maghaberry Prison - in autumn this year. A second stage, with a wider remit, is to report in early 2011. The Minister has said that he trusts their work will “enable us to achieve a new consensus on the role of custody and its management” which is certainly a good goal to aim for. The consensus, once reached, needs to be turned into new systems and activities to bring about real change. We are looking forward to following the work of the review team and sharing our long experience, and our ideas for improving the situation, with them.

A MANIFESTO FOR JUSTICE

NIACRO has produced a four-page summary of our key concerns and aspirations for a devolved criminal justice system. It was distributed at the third of our Justice Seminars (see below).

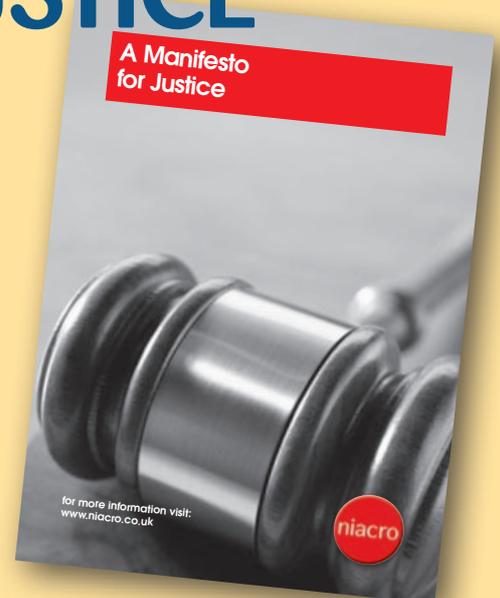
The manifesto lists our values, activities, key campaigns and partners, and it describes the actions we will prioritise in 2010/2011. It also summarises – and it’s quite a good exercise for an organisation to try to get this on one side of A4! – five calls for change, which we believe would transform criminal justice. They won’t come as any surprise to NIACRO News readers, but we reproduce them here for the record.

NIACRO calls for investment in prevention. Investing in the prevention of offending and diversion from criminal behaviour reduces crime.

NIACRO calls for investment in family support. Helping prisoners and their families keep in touch diverts children from offending and aids the successful resettlement of adults.

NIACRO calls for prison reform. The prison system should increase its efforts to deliver rehabilitation and resettlement. This will effectively contribute to the reduction of re-offending.

NIACRO calls for more community engagement with criminal justice. Support for offenders and ex-prisoners in the community helps prevent offending and anti-social behaviour.



NIACRO calls for Government targets for the reduction of crime. A Northern Ireland strategy for the reduction of crime, led by the Department of Justice, should include measurable targets for every Government Department.

If you'd like a copy of the manifesto contact Corrina Langelaan, corrina@niacro.co.uk

The Justice Series

WHAT IS PRISON FOR?

We completed the first round of our Justice Series of political seminars at Stormont in June. We'd like to thank all the speakers who have taken part. We've been pleased at the level of interest shown by MLAs, their advisers and other party staff, senior representatives of criminal justice organisations and Government departments, and partner NGOs. We will be organising a second series in the next Assembly session and would be happy to hear from any reader who has suggestions for topics they think the Assembly and the political parties should be tackling.



What is Prison For?

For the second seminar we welcomed Frances Cook, Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform. The Howard League is the oldest penal reform charity in the UK, established in 1866. Frances has been Director for over 20 years, leading campaigns against suicide in prison and the over-use of custody. She tackled the subject "What is prison for?". Her conclusion: "We want to see a very small prison estate for the very violent and very dangerous prisoners...the overwhelming majority of people who experience prison every year...should not be there." In coming to Northern Ireland Frances (like journalist and ex-offender Eric Allison when he spoke at our AGM two years ago) wanted to encourage local politicians to "think differently" and not "keep repeating the mistakes [made in England] and harming our communities."

Frances fielded questions including:

Work in prison – "work is a duty and the provision of work is also a duty".

The role and culture of prison staff – "value the skills, value the people, and invest in the workforce."

Private prisons – "driven by profit"...one indicator which Frances pointed out is that there are no fewer suicides or deaths in private prisons. (We plan to return to the topic of private prisons in a

future issue of NIACRO News.)

Mental health and prisoners – we need constantly to monitor the [lack of] coherence between mental health services and penal policy.

Building the case for resettlement

The third justice seminar on 29 June took the theme of "The business case for resettlement".

Paul McDowell is CEO of NACRO, the National Association for



Frances Cook Director Howard League, outside Stormont



Paul McDowell CEO NACRO

the Care and Resettlement of Offenders. He has 20 years of experience in the prison service including being a prison governor, and has extensive experience working with offenders and on resettlement and rehabilitation work.

Paul had two main points to make – get your evidence together, and “Be brave!”. For the former, he stressed the need, in the face of scepticism and misinformation, to have hard facts and strong evidence. Which does exist – for example, in a recent National Audit Office report which showed that prisoners serving a sentence of less

than twelve months are more likely to re-offend (60% do so) than any other group. Important evidence

“We can go on being angry, or we can concentrate on reducing crime.”

for NIACRO’s belief that these sentences do more harm than good: they are in Paul’s words “entirely ineffective”.

Paul also called for courage in putting the case for resettlement. “The real challenge is for us to be brave”, he said. “We can go on

being angry, it might make us feel better to punish those who have done wrong, or we can concentrate

on reducing crime.” The courage consists not only in putting the case in the face of a populist and simplistic line on punishment, but in changing policy and how we spend the available resources. This, he said, will take “a huge chunk of political will”.

SAFEGUARDING SYSTEMS TO BE REVIEWED

NIACRO has consistently flagged up the problems which have been raised by two recent pieces of legislation, the extension of the work of the Security Industry Authority (the SIA) to Northern Ireland, and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Order. The implementation of the latter is overseen by the Independent Safeguarding Authority (the ISA).

Both pieces of legislation are designed to increase public protection, but it is not clear that they have done so. Nor does the process include any attempt to measure whether they have or not. They affect some 600,000 working people in Northern Ireland, and they have certainly made life more difficult for many of our clients.

Not only is it harder to get a job, as employers try – or fail to try – to assess the risk posed by someone with a conviction. Worse, people with blameless employment records are being sacked as past convictions, even those which were originally disclosed, are uncovered through mandatory background checks.

Increasing numbers of employees and applicants are coming to NIACRO with stories of the inflexibility and irrationality of the implementation of the laws. There are indeed some elements that are positively Kafkaesque:

- In some cases applicants may be asked to provide information to mitigate the SIA’s initial decision to bar them. This information is assessed “with respect to the implications for public protection from crime and the fear of crime”. A fear which we know is wildly exaggerated among the public and the media and often bears little relationship to actual levels of crime.
- A standard disclosure will reveal spent convictions – so can they be considered to be what is normally understood by “spent”?
- There is no appeal against an SIA rejection. You can re-apply, at a charge of £245 each time.

HOW LONG BEFORE I'M REHABILITATED?

A security guard was employed by a private company on a public authority's site for over 15 years. He was convicted of robbery in the mid-seventies, and served 18 months of a three-year sentence. He applied for a Door Supervision licence from the SIA, as he is obliged to do under the legislation. He was turned down, because of this conviction, on the basis that the SIA needed to "Consider Additional Factors". He was invited to "submit mitigation" in the form of character references and evidence of rehabilitation. He provided the SIA with references from the public authority, fully supporting his good character and evidence of rehabilitation. (35 years without committing any other offence might seem evidence enough to most of us). The SIA again rejected his application on the grounds that the references were from persons with a "vested interest". It drew his attention to the fact that he could appeal to the local Magistrate's Court within three weeks but also made the point that if the appeal was unsuccessful the SIA would make an application for costs against him.

The appeal was heard in April 2010, with an official from the SIA in court to give evidence on the Authority's behalf. It was clear that the SIA's understanding of "rehabilitation" was narrow and ill-informed, and that its rejection of the public authority's references as having a vested interest could be seen as impugning that organisation's objectivity and fairness. District Judge Nixon at this point indicated

that he had reached his decision, which was to grant the appeal, and that there was no need to call witnesses in support of X.

This was the first case in Northern Ireland in which the SIA's decision not to grant a licence was successfully appealed. Happily, the applicant was indeed granted his licence and is back at work. "If it hadn't been for NIACRO, I don't think I'd be working now", he says. "I just can't believe the SIA didn't think I was rehabilitated after not being in any trouble for 35 years."

TRYING TO STEM THE TIDE

NIACRO is at present challenging several public bodies who withdrew conditional offers of employment once a conviction was revealed. The applicants involved may have had minor driving offences; they may have long unblemished work records with – for example - special needs children. We start with a direct approach to the body to try to resolve the problem, but in the end it may become necessary to take judicial review proceedings.

However, these unhappy stories are coming from all sectors; private, public and – increasingly and particularly disappointingly – the voluntary and community sector. NIACRO is sympathetic to the confusion felt by employers, and continues to advise them. We greatly value the employers who do work with us. They have fair, rational processes for dealing with the issue, they come to the employment information events we hold several times a year to advise our service users, and they speak out in support of our work.

The task now is to help all employers carry out a proper risk assessment of applicants and employees with a conviction. What is the nature of the offence? How relevant is it to the work this person is doing for me? Why did they not disclose the information earlier? Have they been working effectively up to now?

However, our main concern has to be for our service users who are on the receiving end of the new procedures.

LATEST NEWS:

The new Coalition Government published its programme for government on 20 May. Its Families and Children section includes the following undertaking:

- "We will review the criminal records and vetting and barring regime and scale it back to common sense levels."

The immediate impact of this is that voluntary registration with the Independent Safeguarding Authority has been halted. It therefore will not begin in July as planned and will not be taken forward while the review is being carried out. NIACRO has already written to the Secretary of State with detailed recommendations on the topics we believe the review should consider. We will continue to monitor the situation and keep pressing for a clearer and fairer system.

Meanwhile, other existing regulations remain in force.

COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE

There have been suggestions for some time that two organisations designed to improve community safety, the Community Safety Partnerships and the District Policing Partnerships, should be merged. They were set up under the Criminal Justice review and the Patten report, both are funded by the NIO and both are based in local councils. So it might seem that they overlap and potentially duplicate each other's role.

However, NIACRO has consistently been of the view that the merger of the two partnerships would lead to the DPP agenda sidelining community safety issues. Sadly, there is nothing in a recent consultation from the NIO to convince us otherwise.

We fully accept the argument that the restructuring of public administration – though that is hardly going forward smoothly - provides a reason and an opportunity for change. We also believe that the two partnerships have complementary agendas. They should have good lines of communication and work together when that is appropriate. However, the fact is that the DPP agenda is essentially about police accountability and monitoring while the CSPs, on eight of which NIACRO staff members serve, have a far wider remit. Ideally, they can be a vehicle for imaginative and open debate about what kind of society people in each local authority want, and for promoting partnership between the relevant agencies.

The consultation invites us to comment on the relative merits of the three models it proposes. In our view none of these models meets the test of its Key Principle of “facilitating meaningful public engagement”. The consultation promotes one of the models and acknowledges that it has “scope for greater emphasis to be given to police monitoring”. NIACRO suggests

that although this may be desirable, it is likely to happen at the expense of the community working which is at the heart of the CSP.

This probability is enforced by the proposed make-up of the “Crime Reduction Partnership”. There is, we would suggest, little prospect of community engagement where the Partnership has a built-in majority of elected representatives and public appointees who will make up the policing monitoring group. This is almost

“Continue with the current two partnerships until local government is restructured.”

certain to lead to this group dominating the partnership with issues of police accountability driving out wider community safety issues.

NIACRO suggests that an appropriate alternative model might be to continue with the current two-partnership model until local government is finally restructured. At that point the Community Safety Partnership could be absorbed into the new local authority community planning structures and allow the District Policing Partnership to continue in its police accountability function.

Shaping the Justice System

CEO Olwen Lyner was invited to speak to agendaNi's Policy and Justice conference "Shaping the justice system of the future" held on 10 June.

Olwen looked at both the need for and the benefits of a partnership approach to crime reduction. She began by reflecting on the unique perspective of third sector organisations. They can be a valuable partner in delivering services, with the ability to operate independently and be less constrained than their statutory partners. They can act as a repository for cross-departmental resources and represent a voice that government needs and wants to hear. They bring a wealth of social capital in terms of community and voluntary engagement as well as connections to European and international work.

as Extern. As to work with adults, Olwen outlined our services and our links with organisations such as Business in the Community, Advice NI and the Women's Support Network (WSN).

She presented two case studies - one relating to work with Belfast Community Safety Partnership where NIACRO has been the lead NGO representative at the strategic level, working on community engagement. The second was the Inspire project - one of whose service users tells her story to NIACRO News elsewhere in this issue. She stressed that in this PBNI-led pilot NIACRO, WSN and Lankelly Chase (the professional,

"think ahead, work on prevention and apply resources appropriately."

Explaining the work of NIACRO, Olwen described the services that we provide for children and families and the partnership working that we undertake with other NGOs such

independent funder) all played their unique role in building a model that supports women in their own local areas as they resettle in the community.

Now the money has run out

Returning to the quip, "Now the money has run out, we have to think", Olwen reflected that although resources were generally tight in the third sector, those currently available to the criminal justice system are substantial. Rather than focusing on money and cuts, therefore, what we need is to think ahead, work on prevention strategies and apply our resources more appropriately. A key question for NIACRO has been how much of the funding is focused on detecting and prosecuting offences and how little appears to be spent on resettlement issues that can change behaviour and reduce offending.

Critically for the future the different elements of the criminal justice system need to work more closely together. Can we agree on the purpose of the system? Is it just about detecting and processing offenders or do we want a system that rehabilitates them? We need those people who are convicted of less serious offences to be engaged in constructive activity and supervised in the community. We need to encourage spending downstream of criminal justice and that means working with other departments so that spending is directed to actions which will result in less crime and less cost to society overall. Thus we need a wider civic partnership involving communities, the third sector, the public and private sectors to realise the potential that devolution can offer.

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE VISITS NIACRO

The DEL Committee is carrying out an Inquiry into the subject of young people (16-24) who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Led by Committee Chair Dolores Kelly, six members of the committee came to Amelia House to hear from NIACRO and Include Youth.



Dolores Kelly MLA, Olwen Lyner NIACRO, Koulla Yiasouma Include Youth, Pat Ramsey MLA

The two organisations produced a briefing for the MLAs describing NIACRO's Youth Employability programme and Include Youth's Give and Take scheme. We made the point that the young people we work with are:

- At higher risk of social exclusion.
- More likely to be in the care system.
- More likely to be involved in criminal activities (due mostly to boredom, peer pressure and a lack of positive role models).
- More likely to have poor educational experiences.
- More likely to be in unstable living situations.
- More likely to be misusing drugs and/or alcohol and undertaking harmful activities.

The Youth Employability programme and the Give and Take scheme have different aims, objectives and forms of delivery. However, they both succeed because they work on the following basis:

- The programmes are tailored to meet the needs of each participant.
- They are delivered at a pace that suits the participant.
- Staff are sensitive to participants' needs and are trained to engage effectively with them.
- Both organisations are able to link into other services, internal and external. A young person on our programmes often requires support in a number of areas in order to make positive change in their lives.
- Both organisations have developed trusted relationships with some further education providers and employers. We effectively broker opportunities and offer intensive support to both the young person and providers in order to sustain the training, placement or employment.

Strategy needed

Include Youth and NIACRO support the need for a NEET strategy for Northern Ireland. The two organisations took the opportunity of the Committee's visit to press members to do all that they can to make that strategy work. For example, we have found that young people in rural areas face delays in payment of allowances.

We also urged the Committee to use its influence with the Department of Employment and Learning. Demand for mainstream training and education programmes has increased and training providers tend to see our service users as "high maintenance". The situation is similar with employers. We want DEL to do more to encourage employers and further education/training providers to support these potential trainees and students.

Training and further education providers are generally not aware of their obligations to give young people with a criminal conviction information and advice on the difficulties which they may face under the vetting and barring scheme. We recommend DEL work to increase their awareness of this requirement.

Into employment

Two young people with experience of being in this situation spoke to the Committee members. Nineteen-year-old David, who's used the Youth Employability service (and also has a starring role in our new corporate DVD!), has since the DEL meeting started a full-time permanent job with a local call centre. He's been determined and persistent in his wish to break away from the lifestyle that's caused him problems in the past. With his permission, we're printing the email he sent to Youth Employability's Billy Clarke attached to the email offering him the job:

Looks like i got there in the end Billy !!! thanks ever sooo much for your help and the rest of the teams work for getting me so far in life iv got the experience/skills now to use them with employers without ya's i wouldnt be anyone today,
Thanks Again Niacro.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESETTLEMENT

In May, Services Director Pat Conway took part in the launch of an Irish Penal Reform Trust report "It's like stepping on a landmine: reintegration of prisoners in Ireland". The report assesses the current provision of reintegration services, and support for prisoners before and after release, in the Republic of Ireland – not too different from the situation in Northern Ireland with rising prisoner numbers and shortage of funding.

Pat's presentation dealt with the human rights approach to reintegration. He pointed out the emphasis in Northern Ireland's prisons on security and containment at the expense of care and resettlement, and the difficulty of changing this culture. He described some serious recent criticism from the Prisoner Ombudsman, the Criminal Justice Inspectorate and the Independent Monitoring Boards. If the culture is to change – and it must if re-offending rates are to drop – then it needs, both within and beyond prison, to be based on human rights and respect for the individual.

"Culture" isn't just a vague sense of values and behaviour – it can be affected by very practical decisions too. Re-balancing the resources from security to resettlement would be a good start. Encouraging prisoners to see themselves as active citizens, strengthening their links with family and community,



Caption: Liam Herrick, IPRT; Lisa Cuthbert, PACE; Pat Conway; Agnieszka Martynowicz, IPRT

and setting up prisoners' councils would all help.

Other speakers at the launch reinforced the need to put real effort and funding into reintegration instead of accepting the apparently inexorable rise in the numbers of people going to prison. It's particularly frustrating when there is so much serious and accepted knowledge about "what works" and what doesn't. One ex-offender expressed it pretty neatly – "Prison is a place that can destroy your confidence and your self-esteem: it's also a place that can build your confidence."

The IPRT website is at www.iprt.ie

YOUTH JUSTICE CONFERENCE IN DUBLIN

The seventh biannual 5 Nations Youth Justice Conference was held in Dublin in June 2010. This is a unique conference bringing together academics, policymakers and practitioners from the five home nations to explore aspects of youth justice. This year the focus was on prevention, early intervention and diversion, with keynote speeches from Prof Rod Morgan, former chair of the Youth Justice Board in England and Wales, Professor Barry Goldson of Liverpool University, Dr Stephen Case, Swansea University and, an old friend of NIACRO, Professor Bill Whyte from the University of Edinburgh.

Among a range of workshops Tony Martin from NIACRO and Angela Devlin from Extern gave a joint presentation on the history, aims, development and outcomes of the Caps and Strength 2 Strength projects.

Stephen Case presented a critique of the risk factor approach to youth justice and argued for a greater emphasis on 'enabling factors' – rather than focus on 'risks', focus on 'needs' thus promoting positive behaviours and positive outcomes. This chimed with the presentation from Professor Whyte arguing that family support and social inclusion are key to the prevention of offending, and Professor Goldson's view that early intervention by criminal justice services is likely to be counter productive.

Dave Weir, NIACRO's Director of Services and a member of the Conference Committee, was the closing speaker. He commented on the risks inherent in early intervention of bringing young people into the criminal justice system, the value of diverting them from criminal justice processes and the responsibility on all public

services to contribute to the prevention of offending.

There was, Dave thought, a paradox in that the economic recession might lead to services focussing on core functions and investing less in prevention, contributing to a need for more expensive intervention later on. While Professor Morgan argued that the recession has the capacity to create a crisis that might ultimately lead to positive change, there was little optimism among other speakers for this view.

Seven young people from Dublin contributed to a sequence of presentations illustrating what made a difference for them. A key element, and one particularly affirming for the practitioners present, was that regardless of where their worker came from, it was the quality of the relationship that, for them, made the difference.

**“ all public services
can contribute to
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new debt advice service

Advice giving, often on financial matters, has been an important part of NIACRO's services since the very beginning. Both inside and outside the prisons, people's plans for resettlement can depend on having a secure financial basis. But offending, conviction and custody can bring unemployment, throw benefits into confusion, and risk a build-up of debt.

NIACRO works closely with Advice NI and sits on its management committee. We're pleased the organisation has recently been successful in securing funding to provide a free, confidential and impartial debt advice service known as Debt Action NI. The service is funded by DETI and the Ulster Bank and it currently delivers 600 hours of debt advice in 13 different council areas across NI. However, the service is not limited to people living in these areas. It is open to everyone who needs face-to-face help and advice on their debt and money issues regardless of their postcode.

The advisers are supported in this project by Housing Rights Service and Consumer Credit Counselling Service. They assess the person's situation and advise them on the best options available. They will also negotiate with the client's creditors on their behalf to relieve them of this stress. The advisers offer face-to-face appointments and home visits to those who are most vulnerable. They also work hard to protect people's homes. They assist with any pending court action and, where appropriate, they will represent clients at Court, or before the Bankruptcy Master in the

course of helping with bankruptcy applications.

In the first couple of months, advisers have helped clients deal with over nine million pounds' worth of debt. Anyone who could use this service can contact the Debt Action advisers directly or contact Gemma Willis at Advice NI, email gemma@adviceni.net, who can make the appropriate referral to an adviser.

Advice NI has also developed a website to give further information about the project - www.debtaction-ni.net. People can fill in a request for debt help, which will be emailed directly to Advice NI.

If you would like further information about the project, please contact Sinead Campbell, Advice NI's Money Advice Project Manager, on 028 9064 5919 or email sinead@adviceni.net.

Debt Action NI
Free Debt Help You Can Trust

INDEPENDENT VISITOR SCHEME

This is the tenth year of the Independent Visitor scheme bringing with it tales of friendships which have seen young people through many changes, good and bad.

The scheme offers befriending support to young people in the care system who have little or no contact with a parent. A volunteer Independent Visitor spends time with such a young person each fortnight and they do different activities together. The role of the volunteer is to provide befriending, continuity and support to the young person, and be a positive adult role model who is 'independent' of social services. The young people truly value the long-term contact with and consistency shown by the Independent Visitors. Many of them have experienced many changes in placements or social workers.

Aaron is a young man who has been involved with the Independent Visitor scheme in the Southern Trust for eight years. Over that time we have had the pleasure of getting to know Aaron and watching him grow into a confident young adult, who has held down a job in a local store for five years now and is also a regular member of his local gateway club. Aaron has always welcomed the one-to-one support that the scheme has offered (as something different from his other supports), as well as the craic and challenges on the group activity days with other young people and volunteers. He wants to say a BIG THANK YOU to all his volunteers.

As part of the annual evaluation, we gathered some of the young people together for a group activity and took the opportunity to get their views on the scheme and their volunteers. Of those who attended, 74 % rated the scheme 10 out of 10 and the remaining 26 % rated it at 9/10. Words used to describe their experience included "awesome", "fun", "cool", "friendly" and "life changing".

Some of the quotes from the feedback session:

"They have helped me take my mind off other problems in my life and also help me deal with these issues"; "They help build your confidence and self esteem"; "Gets you off the streets"; "I think I might have went down another path if I didn't have my IV in my life"

As part of NIACRO's commitment to monitoring and evaluation of its work, staff on the IV Scheme have undertaken to meet and share experiences and ideas with other providers of the scheme across other Trust areas. This is to look at standards of practice and consistency of service provision and to draw on the experiences of those staff and volunteers.

We hope during the year to have a celebration of the 10th anniversary of the NIACRO schemes to include staff, volunteers, young people, social workers and foster carers.



Aaron at a recent IV event with volunteers and Lisa Grant.

VOLUNTEER SATISFACTION SURVEY

NIACRO has a long history of involving volunteers in a variety of roles, such as the IV scheme described in the previous article. Volunteers' experience and commitment complements the work of staff. Involving lay people also gives us the opportunity to increase the community's understanding of crime and its impact.

We value our volunteers. We work to make it a mutually beneficial experience whereby volunteers are given every opportunity to actively participate and develop through their volunteering experience. We also aim to provide appropriate support and training to prepare and help volunteers deliver a high quality service to our service users.

NIACRO is continually striving to improve and update the way in which we recruit, train, support and manage our volunteers. One important way to help us do this is by asking the volunteers how they feel about the experience of working with us and with our service users. The latest survey was carried out in the spring of this year, at which time we had 115 volunteers. They work with many of our programmes – APAC, the Advice Service, Caps, Family Links, Independent Representation, Independent Visitor and Jobtrack.

THE FACTS AND FIGURES

- Most volunteers are under 50.
- Most (85%) are women.
- A majority (54%) have been with us for more than a year, with 30% engaged for three or more years.
- Virtually all (99%) are either “very satisfied” (81%) or “satisfied” with the recruitment and selection process.
- 90% are satisfied that they receive sufficient support and supervision.

- 91% feel they get the right level of induction.
- 95% are aware of NIACRO's policies and procedures on volunteering.
- 93% feel valued for their contribution.
- 95% would recommend volunteering with NIACRO to a friend.

WHAT VOLUNTEERS SAY

We had a lot of very positive comments:

“It is a great experience that has strengthened me as an individual.”

“I have always felt valued and that my volunteering has always been appreciated, that means a lot.”

“I have thoroughly enjoyed it and the activities with my young person have encouraged me to try new things I wouldn't have done before.”

“[Staff member] was amazing, she didn't talk down to me. We were both on the same level.”

“I really enjoy being a volunteer at NIACRO and I feel I have really made a difference with my young person.”

“Something that I had initially thought would be a bit scary has been good, because I know my co-ordinator is always there to help.”

Volunteers raised some issues which we are considering so that we can make the experience even better. Understandably, they're highly motivated to get started, and we need to explain why the recruitment process may take some time. So may the process of matching a volunteer with a service user. This depends on many factors, some of them outside our control. We recognise this can be frustrating. We plan to increase and vary our means of communication with volunteers, including those who are waiting to be matched with a client, through text and email. We know that tailored and flexible support and supervision works best, reinforced by peer support meetings, volunteer forums and activity days.

The summer Volunteer Forum was held on Saturday 19th June 2010 at Amelia House and was well attended by volunteers from projects throughout Northern Ireland. In response to requests made by many volunteers, the forum focussed on awareness training on bereavement and loss facilitated by Suzanne Quinn from Cruse Bereavement Care. The event also gave volunteers and staff the opportunity to meet up and to mark Volunteers Week by showing our appreciation of the volunteers' support and commitment to our work.

If you'd like to volunteer to support NIACRO's service users, contact Vivienne Courtney, vivienne@niacro.co.uk

INSPIRING SUCCESS

In the last issue of NIACRO News we described the Inspire project, the Probation-led programme which supports women offenders in the community. One service user, Christine, came along to Amelia House with NIACRO's Denise Hall to talk about her experience before and since she joined the programme.

Christine's childhood wasn't an easy one, and although clearly a bright and talented girl (among other things, she achieved grade 5 French horn in two years!) she left formal education early and without much in the way of qualifications. Christine began working in the fast food sector. Suffering from ulcerative colitis, she was prescribed painkillers, to which she became addicted. Not that it felt like addiction – "I didn't feel they were affecting me", she says. But she found she couldn't make any social contact, without the tablets.

At first she bought the painkillers from other people, and took a great range of prescribed and over-the-counter drugs – Christine can recall all the names. She then began to shoplift. She describes the experience of shoplifting as

"almost an adrenaline rush" and hardly thought or cared about being arrested. Indeed with a part of her mind, she feels she might even have welcomed it to get her out of her situation.

After a long period of this, Christine was arrested in 2009 and put on probation. To sum up her situation at this time – here is a single parent with a 10-year-old son who has his own difficulties; addicted to painkillers; on probation; unemployed; with mental health problems; and in a shaky relationship which was coming to an end.

Towards the end of 2009, NIACRO's Denise Hall became particularly concerned. She and Christine's probation officer suggested to Christine that she get in touch with social services.

At first reluctant and feeling they were "interfering", Christine did come round to the idea and the social services became involved just before Christmas. Facing the risk of losing her child acted as a wake-up call and she is no longer in contact with social services.

Since then Christine has taken herself off virtually all painkillers. She had been diagnosed with depression, but kept a detailed log of her moods, and she and Denise went together to her GP. Referred for a proper psychiatric assessment, she is now being treated for bi-polar disorder.

And she's also keeping busy! To begin with, this was largely about keeping in touch with Denise at weekly meetings and through a lot of texts – the two of them laugh when this is referred to. But then Christine joined a local women's centre (the link with Belfast's women centres is an important part of the project). She did the "Women moving on" course which covers things like assertiveness, communication skills and managing change. She's also done a creative writing course and a computer course, and was among the Inspire clients who met Baroness Scotland in February and Minister for Justice David Ford in April.

More importantly still, Christine made lots of new friends and “got a social life”. This was something that had been lacking in her life, as she was very isolated and part of the “pyjama brigade...staying in jammies all day and not going out at all.”

Things are continuing to happen for Christine, who sees the past year positively. “I haven’t seen probation as a punishment – it has actually saved my life”, she says. In the autumn, Christine will attend another women’s centre to do a two-day-a week, two-year course which she is determined will lead to employment. And “determined” is what she is. Though very reluctant to describe her achievements (the story about the musical talent only emerged when we noticed a small treble clef tattooed on her arm) and shy about admitting what strength she has shown in coming this far. We congratulate her on all she’s achieved and wish her all the best for the future.

Here is one of the poems Christine contributed to “Inspirations 2009-2010”, a collection of work produced by members of the Women’s Creative Writing Group.

Faces



How many faces do you think there could be?

How many faces do you think you could see?

“Happy face” for my son

“Everything is fine” face for my family

“I am really happy” face for my friends

“I didn’t do anything wrong” face for my probation officer

“I am a good parent” face for my son’s father

“I really do care about the neighbourhood” face for my neighbour

“Everything is OK” face for my doctor

“I really am listening” face for the checkout girl

“I really do understand” face for my tutor

123435678 and 9, would you believe there could be that many?

How rich I could be if they all gave me a penny

But that’s not how life would unfold

We just give the face that we’re told!



APAC SELF CARE DAY

The APAC team hosted a self-care morning for service users as part of Depression Aware Week. It began with a healthy breakfast, followed with short sessions on stress, self-esteem and positive wellbeing. Anne Castell led a relaxation session, and there was useful information available for people suffering from depression and NIACRO staff who may be supporting them.

The event was enjoyed by users and staff alike.



AWARDS CEREMONY

Over 80 Jobtrack graduates received certificates at the Millennium Forum in L'Derry. Service users successfully undertook courses in forklift driving, essential skills, telescopic handling, civil engineering and even a Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award.

The graduates will have been inspired by Brian McMullan, who was on the Jobtrack programme last year and who now runs his own training company. Brian describes his experience:

"I first came into contact with NIACRO in Magilligan in September 2007, and when I left prison I was determined to turn my life around. I'd always worked with machines, but never had a qualification so with NIACRO's help I started on

my way to a better future. I did three courses, all needed for work in the building trade. During this time one of the instructors said to NIACRO that he reckoned I'd be a good instructor – he'd said the same to me but I thought he was joking. However Oonagh from NIACRO and my probation officer Paddy believed in me and were able to fund my training.

I am now an instructor/examiner and have opened my own training company which is now an accredited training organisation – I can train on-site or at my own premises. I'm currently appearing on the new NIACRO DVD and if this could help inspire or change just one person's life I will finally have made a difference. I hope to go on working with NIACRO to help other people."

EMPLOYER INFORMATION EVENTS

The "Meet the Employer" events continue to roll out across Northern Ireland. Employers who attend offer one-to-one consultations with service users on job searching. They cover matters like application forms, how to behave at interview, the skills that employers are looking for – and the training that could lead to getting these - and, of course, how and when to disclose convictions.

Women's employment day: we ran the first women-only event in Amelia Street in April. Employers from the private and public sectors took part along with women's centres from across Northern Ireland. They were particularly impressed with the level of participation and motivation these services users showed.

Maghaberry: We hosted our second employer event in Maghaberry Prison in June. Twenty-four life sentence prisoners attended, most of them in their last few



Left: Successful candidates at the awards ceremony : Right: Assistant Chief Probation Officer Terry Doherty presents Gerard Mullan with his certificate. As well as undertaking the Jobtrack programme, Gerard has recently completed a sponsored climb of Mount Errigal in aid of "Hurt", a local charity offering drop-in counselling to people with drug problems

years of sentence – ranging from one year to four years from their date of release. They were all making plans for their release and interested in meeting up with employers and training providers including DEL.

We ran other employer information events over the last couple of

months in the North West, Ballymena, Newry/Portadown and Magilligan Prison.

We are really grateful to all the employers who support this initiative and we know that the events offer real opportunities and a valuable service to our service users. They appreciate the approach and

attitude of employers who “treat them as equals” and explain their own non-discriminatory recruitment policies. Service users feel this is a useful way of finding out what employers were looking for and are encouraged that employers are interested in people in prison and ex-offenders in the community, and giving them a chance.

UPDATE

Challenge Hate Crime

The Challenge Hate Crime project has engaged new partners from NI and Europe. Neil Jarman, Director of the Institute for Conflict Research, will be local expert to the project. Neil has many years experience in the field and will advise and act in a consultative capacity to the research arm of the project. Violence Prevention Network (VPN), an NGO from Germany with a good track record of working with young offenders, will act as international advisors.



Members of the project team recently visited Berlin to attend the European transnational conference “Towards preventing violent radicalisation”: this was hosted in part by VPN. Team members also got an opportunity to attend the German Congress of Crime Prevention. This gave an insight from across Europe to the very real and often common issues that affect the criminal justice systems and communities across Europe.

HATE CRIME AND THE CJS

The project is hosting a series of seminars entitled ‘Hate Crime and The Criminal Justice System’. These seminars will explore, inform and develop policy and practice. Each strand of hate crime will be included and the attendees will be senior representatives from criminal justice organisations,

relevant voluntary and community groups, and statutory bodies who engage with hate crime issues. This should be useful in developing the discourse around hate crime and lead to closer connections across the sectors and across all of the six strands of hate crime (race, faith/religion, sectarian, disability, transphobic and homophobic).

The first event, on race hate crime, was held at NIACRO on 7 July. The speakers included Helena Macormac from NICEM and the Deputy Chief Inspector from the Criminal Justice Inspectorate, Brendan McGuigan.

Research Manager Monica Fitzpatrick has been exploring some existing programmes/interventions with hate crime offenders across the UK. She recently visited Liverpool and Bristol to observe programmes

in custody and in the community. Monica comments, “It is clear that different approaches have been taken in different regions and by various partners across the criminal justice system. All of this learning will inform the NI model – it is clear, for example, how important the skill of the facilitators working with participants in enabling them to learn is to the success of such interventions. It has been a valuable experience to see the programmes in action and to listen to the views and experiences of offenders.”



Special EU Programmes Body
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ExOCOP UPDATE

As part of the current series of ExOCOP themed workshops across Europe NIACRO hosted an expert workshop on behalf of DEL (the ESF Managing Authority in Northern Ireland) in Belfast on 18 May entitled “Working with Conviction – Engaging Employers”.



Amelia House board room goes European at ExOCOP event

The workshop focussed on the importance of employers in ensuring relevant, appropriate and safe employment opportunities for people with convictions. This role becomes even more significant in an increasingly competitive labour market. Helping prisoners and offenders increase their employability can succeed only if there are similar levels of engagement with, and support for, employers.

The workshop provided a unique opportunity to identify and explore effective methods of engaging employers in the recruitment of individuals with convictions. Despite travel disruption due to the volcanic ash cloud, delegates attended representing UK, Netherlands and Romania and each of them made presentations on work in their own countries.

Frances O’Hare, head of the European Branch of DEL, welcomed guests and congratulated NIACRO on successful work in this area and on the work we undertake within ExOCOP on their behalf. We were also joined by representatives from NIPS, PBNI, DEL Policy Branch and Business in the Community.

Given the focus of the workshop it was important to have input from an employer. We heard from Belfast City Council who have not only

undertaken the NIACRO employer training but have recruited people with convictions and are now supporting placements for PBNI and the Youth Justice Agency. This practical experience gave a very powerful message and enhanced the workshop discussion.

The report from this event was presented by Heather Reid at a further expert workshop in Bologna in June. Some initial outcomes of the discussion were:

Shared practice and similar experiences:

- Focus on pre-release skills development and certification (employment skills).
- Strong focus on prison and community linkages and partnerships.
- Need for strategic partnerships with employers and employers’ organisations.
- Promoting waged employment for prisoners – bringing “real” employment into the prison setting.
- Self-employment as a valuable alternative for many.
- Attitudinal and structural barriers exist and need to be

challenged.

Differences of experience or opinion:

- Engaging employers – social responsibility vs. business case.
- Links between justice and labour ministries.
- Extent to which legislation is a barrier.

Speaking of the event, Heather said: “In light of the air traffic disruption across Europe, we’re delighted with the number of colleagues who came to the workshop. The information they provided was very useful and I am now working to collate the findings, particularly with regard to the level of cooperation, or otherwise, that government departments across Europe make to employment-led resettlement.”

Pat Conway deep in discussion with Chandry Minstry – NOMS



THE RIO PROJECT

Reintegration of Offenders (RIO) is a new two-year project just coming on stream. It's designed to help young people aged 17 to 21, coming out of Hydebank Young Offenders Centre after a sentence of less than a year. With these shorter sentences, young people face returning to an unsettled lifestyle, with little help from statutory services and an often hostile reception from their communities. So the project begins inside Hydebank and moves outside with the individual client, preparing the way with advice on accommodation, benefits and the other issues that they will face.

The programme doesn't just aim to help individual young offenders. As Pat Conway, Director of Services, explained in a presentation to the stakeholders in May, the key and innovatory aspect is that the service providers will benefit as much as the service users. So RIO includes training for staff inside Hydebank and work with key players outside, both statutory and voluntary/community. That is, it's an example of the joining up of different elements of the criminal justice system and beyond - they can all help to support a young person to reintegrate into the community.

Both of these elements – the help given to individual young offenders, and improvements in partnership working across sectors – will be measured when the project is being evaluated.

The failure of all parts of the system to work together is something NIACRO has been pointing out for many years (a topic also covered in the article on devolution of criminal justice) and we're always happy to play our part in initiatives which pull several strands together. In this project, we'll be co-ordinating the work – of over 20 organisations and rising! - as well as directly supporting the young people who come on the programme, and their families.

LISTENING TO THE PRISONER

At an early meeting in Hydebank, two young offenders talked with the working group about their own experiences and what sort of support they felt would help them resettle. Some of the points they raised were:

- Long-term inmates get more help within prisons than short-term offenders.
- Peer pressure plays a big part in getting young people involved in offending behaviour.
- Mental health and drug problems still aren't getting enough attention.
- Access to training and education, including basic skills, is key.
- External qualifications [ie those that are valued outside] bring hope.
- Accommodation on release is a major worry.
- There's a need to work with communities to help them accept the returning ex-offender.
- Parents play an important role whether the ex-offender is living with them or not.
- The restorative justice approach can help in some cases.

The working group found the prisoners' contribution insightful and helpful, providing much food for thought.

The project is funded by the Council of Europe, via the European Forum for Urban Safety, a network of 300 local authorities across Europe. EFUS aims to strengthen crime reduction policies and to promote the role of local authorities. Frank Mulhern from the Housing Executive and Belfast City Council's Richard McLernon, along with Mark Burton Page from EFUS, gave a very well-received presentation on the RIO Project at the National Community Safety Network Conference in Belfast in June.

STAFF NEWS

NVQ RECOGNITION

The Regional Assessment Centre for Justice Sector Awards supports organisations like NIACRO achieve NVQs for successful work in the criminal justice sector. In May, the Centre's Dr Mary Magee and Ann Quinn, along with external evaluator Alan Plumb, visited NIACRO and met some of our NVQ candidates. We discussed the NVQ process and some of the work staff have submitted to the Centre. We also congratulate the Centre which has been awarded a gold medal by City and Guilds for its outstanding performance in the criminal justice sector.

22 NIACRO staff have achieved criminal justice NVQs level 3 or 4, or the assessor award, over the last three years.



NEW FINANCE MANAGER

Mary Stewart has joined NIACRO as Finance Manager. She is a member of the Chartered Management Accountants and worked for Habitat for Humanity for the last two years. Previously she worked for 20 years as Finance Manager with InBev (Bass Ireland). She is a graduate of Common Purpose 1998.



Mary is married and has two teenage sons. Her hobbies include walking, socialising and transporting/encouraging/shouting for the boys at football.

We said goodbye to Jim Bamford, NIACRO's Finance Manager for 16 years, in June. CEO Olwen Lyner, Executive Committee member Paddy Farry and Accounts team's Ian Power all paid tribute to Jim's contribution to the organisation at a farewell party. We wish him all the best for the future.

Staff day

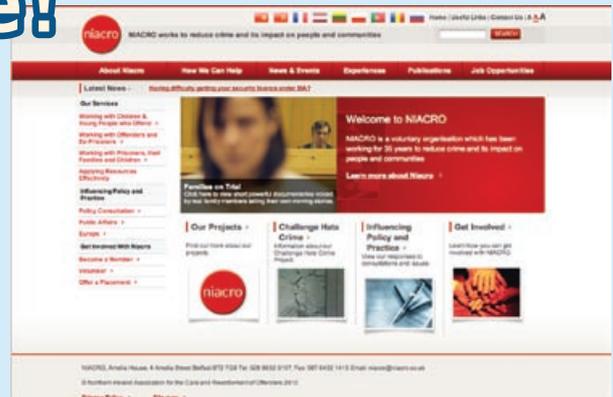
The annual staff planning day took place in June, with a focus on health and well-being.

technology update!

We hope that many NIACRO News readers will already have noticed and be using our new website. We've tried to make it easier to navigate and easier on the eye as well, and we'll be updating it often. Please let us know what you think.

We are also just finalising a new corporate DVD, with many staff and service users – not to mention the new Minister for Justice – speaking about our work.

We were delighted to hear that "Families on Trial", the DVD which included some Family Links families – it was described in NIACRO News 24 – won the best



documentary award in the Babelgum Online Film Festival. It was screened in New York in April as part of the 2010 Tribeca Film Festival.

