



news

issue 30



(left to right): Pauline McCabe, Prisoner Ombudsman, Olwen Lyner, Michelle Gildernew MLA, Dr Graham Durcan.



NIACRO's Justice Series is continuing to draw interest from politicians, policy makers and practitioners alike. The last two events have provided for lively discussions on mental health and youth justice, and certainly challenged the audience to think differently about some of these issues.

Also in this issue

Youth Justice at Stormont

New NIACRO Chair

Criminal records update

Prison Review recommendations

Launching the 2011-12 Series for us on 22 November, Chair of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Michelle Gildernew MLA, welcomed the opportunity we had provided for the links between mental health and criminal justice to be explored in more detail. We were delighted that Ms Gildernew not only agreed to sponsor the event, but in her opening remarks gave us strong assurances that the Committee recognise the overlap that exists between mental health and justice, and are committed to working constructively to improve engagement and co-operation wherever possible.

Our visiting speaker was Dr Graham Durcan, from the Centre for Mental Health, an independent charity which aims to help create a society in which people with mental health problems enjoy equal chances in life to those without. One of its major objectives is to improve the lives, mental health and wellbeing of offenders. Dr Durcan, who also spoke at our AGM, explored the prevalence of mental health problems in society; options for diversion from criminal justice and into support services; the complexities of multiple needs as against the silo working of many statutory bodies; and the case for reform.

Following the presentations, Olwen Lyner facilitated a great discussion around the forthcoming Mental Health (Capacity, Welfare and Finance) Bill in particular. It will, among other things, broaden the definition of “mental disorder” to include “personality disorder”, and provide protections and safeguards for the most vulnerable people who lack decision making capacity.

Youth Justice

Our next event, on 24 January, centred on youth justice issues, and was sponsored by the Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning, Basil McCrea MLA. For the second time we were able to demonstrate that our focus on criminal justice issues does not preclude, and in fact requires, collaboration and co-operation with the full range of Executive departments and agencies. The guest speaker, Professor Barry Goldson, shared his insights into the Youth Justice Review and we are printing in full his analysis of the review team’s report as an insert to NIACRO News.

If you’d like to know more about future Justice Series events, contact Mairaid McMahon, mairaid@niacro.co.uk



Donnie Sweeney

Director of Services Dave Weir and Services Manager Donnie Sweeney were invited to take part in a conference on the rights of children of people in prison, organised by the UNU (the United Nations University research and training institute) in Maastricht. The conference celebrated the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child through the particular lens of the rights of children of prisoners, whether convicted for politically motivated offences or not. Speakers brought experience from England, Iran, Northern Ireland, Syria and the USA. The event was inspired by Nasrin Sotoudeh, a lawyer at present in prison in Iran for her work on human rights.

Donnie presented the words of children of people who had been in prison because of the

“JUST COPING” with a parent in prison

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Maastricht University

J-MERIT

conflict in Northern Ireland over 30 years. He grouped them under various crisis points – arrest, visiting, home-coming, money, loss (“Where’s my dad?”), stigma, and politics – the extent to which children, in retrospect, agreed with their parent’s actions at the time.

We were only children

All of the comments which Donnie shared with the conference were illuminating, some of them heartbreaking.

“I was told he was in hospital. I hadn’t been to a hospital before, so I didn’t know what one looked like, so I believed it. I believed that for two or three years, even the bars and the wardens and their uniforms. I didn’t even think about it.”

“At the end of the visit [my five-year-old daughter] started crying and asking her daddy to come home with us because she didn’t understand that he couldn’t. She ran up to the prison officers and was crying and begging them to let him come home.”

“We weren’t allowed to kiss or touch him. We all tried to tell him everything at once, we were all shouting “daddy, daddy!” and he needed to talk to mummy as well. But we were only children trying to get attention from our daddy.”

“The community thought that you should just cope with things. If some of us even hinted that we’d have preferred to have our da’s at home with us rather than out fighting the war, it was a case of “How dare you say that!”

As another participant in the conference who was particularly inspired by the presentation said,

“There’s a fine line between pride, despair and anger in these situations...we need to be sensitive to [the children’s] feelings in everything we do.”

Donnie thanked the two organisations which had facilitated gathering the comments, Tar Anall and the Ex-prisoners Interpretative Centre. He also described our visitors’ centres and other support we offer children of prisoners.



Dave Weir

Executive



Sid McDowell

Prisoners Need Families

Dave took as his theme the belief that there is no tension between good and effective prison practice and the rights and well-being of children. He posed the ever-relevant question - What is prison for? - and stressed the need for emphasis to be placed not only on security but on preparing prisoners for reintegration into society. If these aren't balanced, "prison is a very expensive way of making a bad situation worse."

It's clear that keeping up family links is essential for resettlement; yet in our experience the security element routinely takes precedence over helping prisoners maintain a relationship with their child.

There are good things going on which help family relationships - the restorative approach to justice; projects like Inspire; child-centred visits; it being possible for children sometimes to stay with mothers. But against these are the delays in the justice process; putting risk management ahead of reintegration; family visits seen not as a critical part of resettlement (and a right for the child) but as a privilege which can be withdrawn; cancellations due to staff shortages or actions.

Dave described the situation in Northern Ireland as one of opportunity, with a prison review, a review of youth justice and new Strategic Partnerships of agencies concerned with children and young people.

You can see Donnie's and Dave's presentations on YouTube, possibly a first for NIACRO staff!

NIACRO has a new Chair. Sid McDowell, CBE has a most distinguished record in the field of employment and in public life in general. We are delighted that he has agreed to lead the Executive Committee and look forward to benefitting from his experience and commitment.

Here are Sid's thoughts about joining NIACRO.

"It would be relatively easy to assume that I was offered the opportunity to become Chair of NIACRO because I had fairly recently completed seven plus years as a Non-Executive Director in the Northern Ireland Prison Service; there was presumably an expectation, soundly based, that I had developed an awareness of

Committee



Richard Buchanan

Richard Buchanan

the criminal justice system and many of the really difficult issues involved in that territory. I was certainly pleased to have the opportunity to become closely involved with NIACRO because as an organisation it has a solid record of achievement behind it (which is a tribute to the staff) and is well respected across the criminal justice system and in the voluntary sector.

Much of my working life has been about protecting and promoting individual rights, about opposing social injustice and disadvantage and providing an effective advocacy service for those who find themselves facing the sharp end of the 'system'. I learned a very long time ago of the capacity of bureaucracies, large and small, to close ranks when challenged by individuals and of the need to offer good quality representation and advocacy to those who feel isolated in such circumstances.

My earlier work as a trade union official, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Chairman of the Educational Guidance Service for Adults, and my

continuing involvement with the Council for the Homeless, the Housing Rights Service, the NI Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the disability sector, has enabled me to further my interest in protecting those who are vulnerable and also in enabling individuals to develop their full potential.

There is then a happy and convenient convergence in my journey across a number of organisations and my new involvement in NIACRO. My hope is that as Chairman I can, over the next few years, support and complement the work of all those involved in NIACRO (and those with whom we partner) in preventing offending and reducing re-offending. Apart from the intrinsic merit in this, there is also a hugely powerful business case for doing so and we need to continue to ensure that is recognised."

With Richard Buchanan having stepped down from the role of Chair, we've said goodbye to someone who brought energy and professionalism to the organisation over a testing 10 years. During that time, he oversaw the move to our present offices in Amelia Street, and the setting in place of quality governance arrangements and two corporate plans. We benefitted greatly from his contribution to NIACRO and we thank him for it.

We also say goodbye and a big thank you to long-serving Trustees Alan Caskey, who also served as Vice Chair, Thomas McLoughlin and Jill Quinn.

And we welcome Sara McKinty, Managing Director of McKinty Associates Ltd, a leading executive recruitment company in NI. Alongside her successful career in recruitment, Sara sits on a number of committees including the Institute of Directors' Corporate Committee and the Simon Community Fundraising Committee. With many years working in the professional services sector she is keen to bring her employment and business contacts to the assistance of NIACRO's service users.



Corporate Plan 2012-2015

Work is well advanced on our new corporate plan. Since last autumn, we've been talking with service users (for example in our adult forum and advice advisory group), staff, Trustees, volunteers and our key stakeholders, funders and partners. All had views to put forward and priorities which they thought the organisation should be setting itself.

We have reviewed both the broad objectives and the specific tasks we set ourselves three years ago, and the extent to which we've achieved them. And we've analysed the context in which we work at present and how that is likely to change in the period of this plan - politically, economically and socially. There won't be a development as important

as the devolution of criminal justice to the NI Assembly. However, there are very significant outworkings of that change - for example, the Prison Review and the Youth Justice Review - which will have a big impact on our work (and carry great opportunities for improving the treatment of offenders).

Continuing difficulties in the economy will also affect us and the criminal justice system - it will be more and more important to spend what funding there is in the system effectively. The discrimination against ex-offenders looking for jobs because of the over-zealous safeguarding legislation is still an issue. And - a common thread though every corporate and every

other plan! - we and others will continue to press for statutory services to work together more effectively. The phrase "joined-up government" was coined quite a few years ago now; the practice hasn't happened to any great extent, and yet it is absolutely necessary.

The process of producing the plan has been stimulating and energising and we hope and think that in NIACRO's fifth decade we have come up with a three-year programme which will help us carry out our (unchanged) mission statement:

NIACRO works to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities.

Youth Services on the 'MOVE'



LOTTERY FUNDED

A major new project, 'MOVE', will build on NIACRO's long experience of helping vulnerable young people make better lives for themselves.

A grant of nearly £500,000 from the Big Lottery Fund's "Reaching Out: Empowering Young People" programme has made it possible for us to set up a five-year mentoring and befriending programme for young people aged 13 to 18 in Belfast, Armagh and Down.

Like many of our programmes, this one will rely on the commitment and skills of our volunteers. A volunteer will work one-to-one with a young person who has offended or is at risk of offending, or who's been excluded from education.

Together, they will develop a support plan to help the young person improve their opportunities and move away from anti-social behaviour, alcohol and drugs.

The next step will be to get involved in a positive

community activity like a sports team or youth club, or get back into education or into employment. Volunteers will provide particular support for young people leaving prison, contributing to their overall resettlement package.

Someone to trust

Potential service users include some from families where a parent is in prison and there's a real danger that they will follow the parent's behaviour. The project will give them a positive role model who is supportive and encouraging and whom they can trust.

For those who have already offended, there is an appallingly high rate of re-offending (60 - 80%) in Northern Ireland. We have to help these young people turn their lives around, stay away from anti-social behaviour, alcohol or drug dependency, and move into happier, healthier lives.

The project will establish a Youth Forum. Over the last few years we have benefitted more and more from the opinions and advice of service users through our Adult Forum and we're delighted now to have the same sort of input from the younger generation.

George, 17, from Belfast, is currently on a Probation Order after leaving the Juvenile Justice Centre in Bangor, having served a three month sentence. "When I was in there, I felt I had let people down, I was just really depressed and lonely," he said. When I came out I was at a complete loss. Then I was referred to NIACRO and they helped me turn my life around."

"I'm now on a work placement in a restaurant in Belfast, the organisation gives me counselling, I can open up and talk about my problems and they've even helped me buy clothes and found me accommodation in a hostel. I'm feeling much more positive about the future and want to make something of myself."

Volunteers

We are at present training the first group of volunteers for the MOVE project, but we need more; especially men and older volunteers.

If you feel you could contribute in this way, please contact Vivienne Courtney Vivienne@nicaro.co.uk or if you'd like general information about MOVE, contact Lisa Grant lisa@niacro.co.uk

Programme for Government

The First Minister and deputy First Minister issued a draft five-year Programme for Government for consultation last November, just two months before the previous PfG came to an end. NIACRO has responded fully to this most important document. Here are some of the points we raised.

Putting it all together

The consultation asked if the PfG was “designed and balanced in a way that is appropriate in enabling the delivery of its priorities.” Leaving aside the almost incomprehensible language of the question, it seems to us pretty clear that the document fails to highlight, or even to explain, the inter-connectedness of many aspects of its proposals. It doesn't seem to recognise that almost all of the priorities require an input from more than one Department, or describe how different Departments and departmental strategies will work together. We recommended, therefore, that the final version of the Programme makes clear:

- which Department will take the lead on each priority;
- which other Departments will be involved, and;
- how their work will dovetail.

On how the PfG “links key commitments to plans for delivery”, we note that as individual Department business plans are not yet available, it's difficult to see how to make the links.

The “key commitments” in the PfG apply to the work of Departments only. To leave out the large contribution made to public services by the voluntary and community sector means that the planning is only partial; Departments seem to see the sector as a consumer of resources rather than a provider of essential services. There are two general comments on working in partnership with the sector, and the Department for Social Development, given its responsibility for voluntary and community work, understandably refers to it in more detail. But there is little indication of how that

partnership might be worked out in the “Key Commitments” section. We recommend that the Executive complete the PfG by clarifying this element in the final document.

The consultation asked about the degree to which the PfG is “appropriately balanced” in terms of “sub-regional recognition”. However, only a few individual and particular local developments are mentioned, so it's hard to see how strategically the Executive sees the role of local authorities.

In answer to a question about missing “major sectoral issues”, NIACRO listed mental health services, family support, and early intervention. We also felt that the Programme should be clear about services for young people if there is to be a transfer of responsibility, currently with DEL, for those not in education, employment or training.

Next steps for the PfG

Finally, NIACRO listed several important points on the PfG itself and where it goes from here.

- The inter-departmental issue; some good work is in fact going on and it needs to be highlighted and reproduced in other contexts.



ExOCOP Seminar in Italy

- Some key commitments refer to reducing crime or increasing community safety, but do not give any baselines against which to measure progress.
- We feel it's odd that the PFG undertakes to implement 90% of the recommendations contained in the Prison Review Action Plan within the agreed timescales when there is as yet no Action Plan and no agreed timescale. There is a similar problem with the "agreed Youth Justice Review recommendations" when it is not clear which of the recommendations are "agreed".

The Programme for Government should be the most important document the Executive produce - at least until the document which evaluates how successfully they have implemented it. We know that every interest group and maybe every individual citizen will have their own priorities and want to see particular subjects covered. NIACRO is no different, but we believe that the comments we've made have wider significance than just our own concerns and hope that they will contribute to an improved final version of the Programme.

Jobtrack Senior Practitioners Gareth Eannetta and William Armstrong were invited to make a presentation at an ExOCOP transnational network seminar in Bologna at the end of last year and they have written about the seminar for NIACRO News.

"ExOCOP is the three-year programme examining all aspects of good resettlement practice across the EU. NIACRO has played a very active part in the programme, not only hosting a seminar here in Belfast last year, but contributing to seminars and workshops in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain. We've been joined in these by colleagues from the Prison Service, the Probation Service, the Department of Justice and the Department of Employment and Learning. ExOCOP will culminate in a conference in Berlin later in the year. The combined learning of 18 workshops and five seminars will be brought together to produce practical and workable recommendations for all the participating Member States.

The Bologna seminar was organised by ISFOL, the Italian Institute for the Development of Vocational Training, along with the regional government of Emilia Romagna. Its aim was to highlight and share successful models of good practice across organisations who work with offenders and prisoners on employment-led resettlement.

The Jobtrack presentation focused on our work with employers - sharing our experience on how we do this and why, including the difficulties and challenges as well as the success stories. Our presentation was very well received and stimulated a lot of discussion and a lively exchange of views.

The seminar gave us a very useful opportunity to learn about the experiences of Italian and other European organisations working in a similar field. It also served to highlight our own unique work and the value that is placed on our work with employers by our European colleagues."

Criminal Records - again

It looks as though the subject of criminal records - what they include, how public they are, how employers access and use them - is going to feature in NIACRO News for a long time to come.

AccessNI was established in 2008, and in 2009 the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups regulations were introduced and the Independent Safeguarding Authority set up. Since then NIACRO has tried to get across the disproportionate nature of the legislation, and influence the way in which it is implemented.

Ex-offenders trying to get back into the labour market have faced increasing barriers. There has been no counterbalancing evidence that children and vulnerable adults are in fact better protected. Many of the barriers quite obviously spring from employers' unthinking stereotyping of applicants and employees and the sometimes unlawful, frequently unnecessary, checking of their past history.

Unreasonable and unfair

In the last issue of NIACRO News we described one case, in which an FE student was refused a

work placement after the PSNI sent an unlawful disclosure of a minor six-year-old incident to the college. Even though the PSNI corrected their mistake, the college went ahead and used the unlawful disclosure to deny her the work placement. Although the student won her case in the High Court, the waste of time and energy on everyone's part and the stress under which she was placed were well recognised by the judge when he described the way in which she'd been treated as "disproportionate, unreasonable and unfair".

We have referred six more cases for legal advice. More public bodies may be taken to judicial review because of their "disproportionate, unreasonable and unfair" treatment of applicants or indeed of existing employees. But that's only a tiny element of the ever-increasing numbers of people phoning our advice line about this issue - 60% of calls in the last three months.

Mason Review

Following the review of the criminal records regime by Mrs Sunita Mason, the Department of Justice is carrying out a consultation on some aspects of her report.

Broadly speaking, NIACRO welcomed the Review as it will provide:

- Greater accountability by employers and registered bodies through the introduction of sanctions for blatant breaches of data protection legislation and discriminatory practices.
- Greater accountability of AccessNI to ensure compliance with their Code of Practice and of the PSNI regarding their disclosure and information sharing.
- Removal of the requirement to carry out criminal record checks on under 16s (except in home based settings).
- Portability of disclosures and the issuing of a single disclosure certificate.

Review Recommendation

1

Government should assess how many people working or volunteering with children or vulnerable adults have not yet been subject to a criminal records check. Once established, such checks should be undertaken as soon as is practically possible.

Mason Review

NIACRO Response 1

The Minister of Justice has chosen not to consult on this recommendation and has referred it to the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, whose Department oversees child protection and safeguarding vulnerable adults, for his consideration.

However, we believe that a more effective approach would be for the Departments of Health and Justice to work together to establish the current extent of record checking. We agree that public protection is paramount, but anticipate that vetting people currently in employment will mean that more employees lose their jobs and fewer jobs will be open to applicants with convictions.

Review Recommendation 2

To impose penalties and sanctions on employers who unlawfully obtain criminal record checks.

NIACRO Response 2

We support this recommendation and will provide evidence of

widespread unlawful practice in this area. The Information Commissioner's Office and AccessNI should be given greater powers to monitor and sanction such employer practices.

Review Recommendation 3

To better resource AccessNI to: screen Enhanced Disclosure applications before processing; to provide clearer guidance for employers and to act as a one stop shop for employers and individuals by increasing its helpline resources.

NIACRO Response 3

We agree with this recommendation but also call for AccessNI to be more accountable. We question the need for additional resources for AccessNI's helpline. NIACRO and OFMDFM already offer clear and comprehensive guidance to employers who are referred to us by AccessNI and other sources (eg the Labour Relations Agency and the Equality Commission).

The reason for the need for "clearer guidance for employers" is that many are unclear as to whether or not a particular job is a "regulated

activity" (and so requiring disclosure of previous convictions). So they simply claim that the job does indeed come under this heading. It is up to them to make this decision and they tend to be over-cautious, without exploring the real needs of the job or the implications of demanding disclosure.

Review Recommendation 4

Children under 16 should not be subject to criminal record checks except in relation to home-based occupations (for example fostering and adoption).

NIACRO Response 4

We endorse this recommendation.

Review Recommendation 5

Government should commence Section 56 of the Data Protection Act in Northern Ireland as soon as possible. (This relates to "Subject Access" requests, the situation in which employers demand that an applicant or employee get a disclosure certificate from the PSNI.)

Criminal Records - Episode 8 : Mason Review

NIACRO Response 5

We regret that the Minister of Justice has chosen not to consult on this recommendation, stating that it is a matter for the Ministry of Justice in Great Britain.

We call for urgent legislation to prevent the unlawful acquisition of personal data through Subject Access requests. At present, employers can access full criminal record information they are actually not entitled to have. Employers should go through a controlled AccessNI procedure, and be refused information if it is not their right to have it.

Review Recommendation 6

To introduce portability of AccessNI checks.

NIACRO Response 6

The Minister of Justice has accepted this recommendation and is only consulting on the issue of portability within and not across workforce sectors, ie within either the children's or vulnerable adults' sector. We welcome this recommendation and believe that portability of records should be sector specific.

Review Recommendation 7

To replace the issuing of dual certificates to both employer and applicant and to issue only one AccessNI certificate to the applicant only.

NIACRO Response 7

The Minister of Justice has accepted this recommendation and has instructed work to begin in this area. We support this as it will allow individuals to have greater control over their personal information and to challenge discrepancies before employers see the information.

Review Recommendation 8

This contains sub-recommendations relating to:

- The disclosure of police information on Enhanced Disclosures;
- a proposed statutory Code of Practice to assist police to decide what information should be released; and
- a requirement for AccessNI to establish an independent representations process regarding disputes.

NIACRO Response 8

It may be necessary to release police intelligence information when there is a direct risk of harm. However, we can provide examples of current inconsistent PSNI practice regarding the disclosure of soft intelligence, ie information which has not led to a conviction.

We therefore recommend that there should be a panel within PSNI, including external representatives, to make decisions about the relevance of disclosure.

While we welcome the development of a statutory Code of Practice, we believe that it merits further detailed exploration, and should include an option for individuals to appeal against decisions to disclose information.

Given its role, we question whether AccessNI could operate and promote an "independent representations" process.

"Greater control over personal information"



Working with DEL

Although our service users do face huge barriers to employment, of which the criminal records system is one of the highest, we can see progress too in some areas.

The Department for Employment and Learning held

a joint information sharing and exchange day for staff in February. Jobtrack staff have been working closely with DEL and the LEMIS (Local Employment Intermediary Service) programme since Christmas, piloting a 15-week work placement with people who had been in prison and are now engaged with Jobtrack in the community. The event gave us the opportunity to promote our work and success in Jobtrack, and to network with staff from LEMIS, PSNI and NIPS working across Northern Ireland. It marks a unique commitment by DEL and DOJ to work more collaboratively on the offender agenda.

This was highlighted by DEL Minister Stephen Farry MLA, in his opening remarks:

"I am committed to supporting and strengthening cross departmental and agency work on education and skills for offenders and ex-offenders alike, and to promoting an integrated approach to raising the skills base and the employability of offenders."

We look forward to an increased demand for our "Working with Conviction" training and, more importantly, increased opportunities for our service users.

Challenge Hate Crime



Monica Fitzpatrick (left) and Mairaid McMahon with Minister David Ford

The Department of Justice hosted an event, "Equality and Good Relations: celebration of difference and the things that unite us", at Stormont just before Christmas. It was organised to promote the DOJ's diversity networks and highlight the work of third sector organisations and partnerships to civil servants in the Departments of Justice and Health. David Ford visited the Challenge Hate Crime (CHC) stand to enquire about the project's progress. He showed great interest in the work currently being undertaken in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre. The pilot programme 'Challenge to

Challenge Hate Crime continued..

Change' began last autumn and a number of young offenders are engaging with the programme facilitators to explore the behaviours and attitudes that lead to their 'hostility based' offences.

CHC Research Manager, Monica Fitzpatrick was delighted that the project was invited to attend this event and showcase the work currently being undertaken to explore the extent and nature of hate crime in N Ireland. People seemed genuinely interested and had an opinion on the subject. It was also heartening to hear that people understood and indeed supported the need to work with individuals who commit such offences and to challenge and change this very harmful behaviour.

NIACRO's Public Affairs and Communications Manager, Mairaid McMahon, also attended and updated staff on the influencing aspect of the project and the work to engage with politicians and community groups on this subject. Mairaid also used her own influencing skills and in the spirit of Christmas persuaded the Minister to stay chatting a little longer by plying him with coffee and a mince pie!

INSPIRE'S Success Recognised - Twice!

The Inspire project, led by the Probation Service, has been supporting women under community supervision orders since January 2010 (see NIACRO News 25 and 26). NIACRO's involvement focuses on one-to-one support for individuals, and work with the Women's Support Network which brings together women's centres across Belfast.

The Probation Board, NIACRO and the Women's Support Network are working together to address the needs of women who offend and are vulnerable to offending behaviour, including those leaving prison. This "Women's Community Support Project" (WCSP)

provides an inclusive approach to women at any stage of the criminal justice process.

The project makes a real difference to the lives of the women involved in it, and that has been recognised by two recent awards.

The Department of Justice acknowledged the positive work being done by the partnership by giving it a Highly Commended rating in the 2011 Justice Champions awards. Now the Butler Trust, an NGO which "promotes excellence in prisons, probation and youth justice" has given the Inspire project a Commendation in the Trust's 2011/12 awards,



APAC Women goes rural

drawn from entrants across the UK. The Trust praised Inspire's "outstanding work" and described it as "a superb example of partnership working".

The Trust granted only 23 Commendations this year (along with 9 Awards) from a total of almost 250 nominations received from across the UK, so this represents a significant achievement by Inspire. Director of Probation, Brian McCaughey described the Commendation as a "fitting and deserved tribute" to Inspire's Manager Jean O'Neill and others working in the project.



Line McCord and Eileen Weir, WSN; Nuala Mullan, PBNL

We are delighted that a new NIACRO APAC women post has been agreed with the Probation Board NI, covering mid-Ulster and North-West. Like the model trialled in Greater Belfast, where the APAC women project worker is located in the Inspire project, this post will work alongside Probation in mid-Ulster/North-West helping women in these areas connect with relevant services. In preparation for this, NIACRO has delivered OCN accredited training ("Women and Offending Behaviour") to nine people from the women's sector.

Discussions have already taken place in mid-Ulster between the three sectors involved, Probation Board, NIACRO and the women's sector. Our common aim is to adapt the WCSP model of cooperative work to this rural area.

There are real challenges ahead in working across such a wide geographical area. Unlike the Greater Belfast model, there will not be a specific probation office/staff team dealing only with women offenders. The APAC worker will be seeking to develop relationships across a number of probation staff teams and at the same

time making connections with services in the various communities.

Poor transport and rural isolation as well as lack of service provision are all likely to feature among the challenges facing women who offend or who are vulnerable to offending behaviour. The APAC women worker will be liaising closely with women's centres and with community groups to try to ensure that women get the kind of help they need. NIACRO is hopeful that the APAC women role can be replicated elsewhere as the model of work develops APAC.

Lifestyles Training

NIACRO staff working on the APAC project have put together a "Lifestyles Training Manual". It consists of a series of easy-to-use exercises to help service users, many of whom are unsure about what they can and should do to move on from their present situation, engage with services and set themselves goals.



Year End Festivities

It may be spring, but we're still enjoying the memories of some of the Christmas activities we took part in.

Caps at the Panto

Caps had a family day out at the Grand Opera House pantomime in December. Fifteen families thoroughly enjoyed Jack and the Beanstalk with its great 3D special effects, the enchanted forest and a journey through the giant's castle.

Ballymena Christmas Lunch

Ballymena Methodist Church hosted a Christmas lunch for our support group for families of prisoners in the area. The families themselves joined prison staff and NIACRO staff for a great afternoon.



Enjoying Christmas lunch



Naomi Davis, NIACRO; Robin Spence NIPS;
June Todd, Prison Fellowship at
the families' Christmas Lunch

Volunteer Forum

The Christmas Volunteer Forum was attended by volunteers from projects throughout Northern Ireland. Sue Macleod, Training Manager with Autism NI, led an interesting and informative awareness session on 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' - a subject which the volunteers had asked to learn more about.

The forum also gave staff and volunteers the opportunity to meet, share information and to mark the achievements of some of our longer serving volunteers. Olwen Lyner made a presentation to Sophy Bryson, one of our longest serving volunteers, who has shown an outstanding commitment to NIACRO for over 15 years as a Welfare Advice

volunteer. Sophy has also volunteered more recently as an Independent Representative. You can read her thoughts on her work with NIACRO later in the newsletter.

Other volunteers who were recognised for their long term commitment to NIACRO, included Brendan Girvan, Trevor Gill, Sinead Patterson and Shona Coulson, who have volunteered with NIACRO for over three years. A further four volunteers, Angie Armstrong, Donna McVeigh, Tony Morrison and Louise McSherry were also recognised for their commitment of over five years to NIACRO.

We'd like to thank each of our long serving volunteers for

the support they have given to the children, young people, offenders and families engaged with NIACRO and for their participation and invaluable contribution to our work.

The event was rounded off with a seasonal lunch to thank all of our volunteers for their support and commitment during the European Year of Volunteering 2011.

We are always keen to hear from anyone interested in volunteering, so if you have two or three hours free each week or fortnight and would be interested to find out more about opportunities available, contact our HR Officer vivienne@niacro.co.uk.

Sophy's Story



CEO Olwen Lyner thanks Sophy

I got involved with NIACRO in the 1990s. I had trained as a volunteer at the Citizens Advice Bureau in the 1980s, and then I began work under the ACE scheme with Prison Link – a joint initiative between NIACRO and PBNI.

When the ACE post came to an end I thought I would stay on for a few months helping families of prisoners with their social security and housing problems. They get tangled up in the system and need help to sort it out. After 16 years I am still here as a volunteer with

NIACRO Family Links. The family workers contact relatives of prisoners who are concerned about how their family is coping outside. If they have problems with benefits and housing it often lands on my desk.

I sometimes go out to visit people at home, but much of my work is on the phone talking to people about all sorts of problems. Some people think everyone is talking about them and do not want to go out when a family member has been sentenced, others have difficulty with filling in forms and writing letters and end up hanging on to the phone for ages. I can fill in forms, phone and write on their behalf and make a difference by helping someone who is in a fix.

When someone is sent to prison the family is under so much stress. Sometimes you wonder how you would cope if you had their problems. Some people are so strong, other families grow apart under the strain. Very often mental and physical health suffer. Some mothers may say when a young person is sent to Hydebank "At least I know where he is for a few weeks". Other families are in a state of shock and need someone to talk to who is non-judgmental.

I enjoy being a volunteer with NIACRO. I am quite inquisitive by nature and want to know about other people; it gives me satisfaction if I can help them with the complexities of the benefits system.

Prison Review Update



As you know, we have taken a keen interest in the prison reform agenda over the last number of years, and as promised in the last edition of NIACRO News, we thought we would share some of our thoughts on the implementation of the report of the Prison Review Team.

As David Ford MLA, the Minister of Justice, suggested when he published the report last October, **this is a once in a generation opportunity to fundamentally reform the structure and role of prisons in our society.** We are, therefore, keen to ensure that it is not missed. To that end, we are providing constructively critical comment on the implementation project to date, offering solutions in some areas, and pressing for improvements or changes in others. We undertake such work in the hope that we will be recognised as potential partners in delivering reform, and are keen to maintain and develop such a relationship.

The context - in numbers

Following the introduction of the Exit and Entry Packages, we know that there is significant

interest in joining the new NIPS, and that 90% of the original NIPS staff, and 88% of prison officers, will be staying on for the foreseeable future. We believe that it is absolutely essential that the focus of training and the introduction of a new culture is not restricted to the 200 new custody officers, but that old behaviours and attitudes are addressed amongst the majority of staff who are actually remaining in their posts.

Implementation - who is responsible?

We have a fundamental concern about the lack of clarity over who exactly is responsible for implementing the recommendations of the Review. A simple analysis would suggest that, while almost every recommendation involves multiple partners if it is to be implemented effectively, lead responsibility can be divided as follows:

- a NIPS: 19 recommendations;
- b DOJ: 11 recommendations;
- and
- c DHSSPS: 10 recommendations.

It may surprise some people to realise, therefore, that the majority of recommendations

are not for the NIPS to take a lead on. Given the title of the Review, and the tone of the media coverage so far, this simple point may well have escaped many people commenting on or observing the progress of implementation.

This analysis is of critical importance: we do not have any sense that any of these bodies have clearly delineated their specific responsibilities. Nor is there evidence that the Ministerial Oversight Group and the Justice Committee have a clear sense of who is in the lead on any given recommendation. Without such clarity, resources cannot be targeted appropriately, nor scrutiny applied effectively.

Implementation - NIACRO's recommendations

We believe that the following steps should now be taken to avoid further delay to the implementation programme, and deliver more effective results.

a. The publication of clear, costed action plans by the NIPS, DOJ and DHSSPS. This should include indicators of which recommendations will be dealt with as a matter of

priority, and which will be scheduled for progress at a later date.

b. The publication of clear statements of responsibility for those recommendations that require joint leads. This includes recommendations to establish a Joint Healthcare Board and Strategy, to increase partnership working and integrated care with other prison services and to find funding for halfway houses and step down accommodation in partnership with Probation and the voluntary and community sector.

c. The provision of clarity in particular from the DOJ and NIPS on their priorities for reform. This includes deciding whether the DOJ's draft Reducing Offending Framework or the NIPS' draft Pathways document is the map for resettlement services; where the NIPS' Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme ends and the overall Prison Reform programme begins; and what the links are between the draft Reducing Offending Framework and the future Community Safety Strategy.

d. Better communications and engagement, both within prisons and beyond. We know that staff are confused and concerned about their futures and about the impact of new operating arrangements on their work. This uncertainty inevitably has an impact on people in prison, on their families, and on staff from other organisations working within prison establishments. Much of this is caused by poor communication within and beyond the prisons. We know anecdotally that progress is being made in some areas of reform, but NIPS and DOJ need to highlight it as a step towards the implementation of the Review.

e. Assurances provided that regimes will not be unduly impacted during the change progress. While we understand that every change has an impact, and will on occasion result in a temporary reduction in the quality of services, we are particularly concerned that NIPS do not appear to have a clear plan to mitigate these risks. There seems to be an acceptance that "bare minimum" standards will

become the norm for a time. We are vehemently opposed not only to this as an outcome, but also to the suggestion that such an attitude could ever be acceptable.

Conclusion

We fully agree with the Minister about the importance of the review; rebalancing security, care and resettlement priorities will bring about a more effective prison system and hence a safer community. We can't afford to wait for another generation to create a prison system that works.

Staff Movements

Our thanks to recent leavers: Eileen Havern, Employment Officer and Paul McGee, Project Worker with Family Links. Farewell and thank you also to Jackie Junk, Administration Supervisor, after more than 20 years' service with NIACRO.

And we welcome Kerry Maria in the post of Project Worker with Base 2.



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