

Take Childhood Mistakes Off The Record

We call for a change in legislation to take old and minor offences off criminal records for good: a criminal record shouldn't be a life sentence.



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SPRING 2015



Volunteering with young people

Help young people achieve their goals by becoming a trained volunteer mentor with MOVE.

Page 14



Early Intervention Partnerships

Our work with the multi-agency Family Support Hubs to meet the needs of families.

Page 11



Children Affected by Imprisonment

An update on what we are doing to help stop the Silent Sentence for families in the community.

Page 18

Welcome to the latest edition of NIACRO News.

It's been a busy few months for us. In the recent period, we have made significant progress on a policy issue that we have raised several times in the past: the impact of old and minor convictions.

The launch of our Off The Record programme in January highlighted the impact childhood offences have on people's life chances, and we've been encouraged by the level of support from all corners for a change in criminal records legislation.

This edition of NIACRO News features an article on Off The Record, outlining the policy rationale and our campaign progress to date. It also reports on our evidence on the Justice Bill to the Committee for Justice, our continued work to support the families of people in prison and contribute to the resettlement of those leaving custody, and our early intervention work with children and young people – including the critical role of our volunteers.

Feedback

We've had some great feedback on the new design and format of NIACRO News, including this note from our Chair, Sid McDowell. Turn to page 25 to read about the magazine's relaunch and our recognition at the CIPR Awards in November 2014.

If you have any feedback on any aspect of NIACRO News, or would like to write an article, please contact Julia in our Public Affairs and Communications Team by emailing pact@niacro.co.uk



However, in the midst of this activity - and like many other voluntary and community sector organisations - NIACRO has been affected by the current economic climate and we are adjusting to a situation where our resources are being reduced. At the time of writing, we are concerned that we may not have the available resources to sustain our current staffing levels.

For us – and for many others in the sector – this period of uncertainty stems from the combination of departments seeking to reduce their own costs and the timings of various funding applications. Some of the areas where departmental cuts are being made with most immediate effect impact on the voluntary and community sector. In addition, sources of European funding that support the work of several organisations are nearing the end of their lifespan and though we have bid for new funding, it is pertinent for organisations to be cautious and adjust their own future spending plans in these uncertain times. NIACRO is not unique in this respect, and we continue to work to mitigate the impact of any further loss of resources and continue the work of the organisation.

NIACRO's mission is to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities. We are determined to continue our work in the face of adversity, and appreciate the support we have received from members, volunteers, staff, service users and other friends of the organisation.

**Thanks for reading,
NIACRO**

"from a typographical point of view it is a really impressive publication which catches and holds the attention of the reader but, most importantly, with content which is interesting and relevant it seems to me to be an all round success and I hope it is widely read. Well done to all concerned with the production."

It's Time to Take Childhood Convictions Off The Record

A criminal record should not be a life sentence. Yet for the thousands of young people caught up in our youth justice system every year, minor offences committed in childhood will continue to blight their lives for decades to come. We don't think that's right.

In January, we launched our **Off The Record** campaign to call for change. We believe that people of any age should have the opportunity to apply to a multi-agency panel to have old and minor convictions received under the age of 18 removed from their criminal records to allow them to build better lives for themselves. Given that a new Justice Bill is currently being developed by the Department of Justice, we think now is the time to act to make this reality.

Campaigning For Change

We've raised the impact of old and minor convictions frequently in the past, including in the evidence we gave to the Committee for Justice in November 2014 (see page 8) and at a fringe event we hosted at the Alliance Party Conference in March 2014. Our Director of Services Pat Conway also spoke at the Never Ending Sentences seminar at Queen's University in May 2014 on this topic, alongside Include Youth and Chris Lyttle MLA.

In addition, Bob Ashford, founder of the WipeTheSlateClean campaign in England and Wales, previously spoke at our AGM (see NIACRO News 34) and Justice Series event about his experience of having to stand down as a candidate for a Police and Crime Commissioner role because of a minor childhood conviction. In June 2014, Bob spoke at a seminar we hosted at the Xchange Summer School in Enniskillen,



Bob Ashford speaking at the Off The Record launch

and on that occasion he was joined by Simon Weston OBE. Simon is well known for his charity work following serious injuries he sustained in the Falklands War, but he too found himself barred from standing as a Police and Crime Commissioner candidate due to a conviction he received when he was just 14 years old.

These events highlighted an unprecedented level of support for change in the laws relating to childhood criminal records in Northern Ireland, leading to the birth of the Off The Record campaign. Bob and Simon both agreed to appear in a short film to promote the campaign, alongside local actor and playwright Dan Gordon and Professor Shadd Maruna: you can watch the film on [youtube.com/NiacroVideos](https://www.youtube.com/NiacroVideos).

In January 2015, we built a programme of influence around the film's key messages, meeting with a range of political parties, key Departmental officials and the Minister for Justice on the impact of old and minor convictions. Both Bob and Simon joined us for these meetings, and we were encouraged by the interest shown by



OFF THE RECORD: AT A GLANCE

1. People should have the opportunity to apply for old and minor convictions received under the age of 18 to be removed from criminal records, as recommended in the Youth Justice Review (2011).
2. These applications should be considered on a case-by-case basis, perhaps by a panel, to ensure fairness, transparency, proportionality and public safety. There is also scope for Magistrates to be involved at an earlier stage of this process, by stating in court that an offence will be removed from the record after a period of time if specific, relevant conditions are met.
3. Trapping young people in the criminal justice system is not a deterrent and can actually increase crime.
4. Rehabilitation, not revenge: criminal and police records damage young people's chances of accessing sustainable education, training and employment opportunities, therefore increasing their risk of reoffending. Allowing people to fully re-integrate into society reduces crime and makes communities safer.
5. The impact of childhood convictions goes beyond employment. A youth criminal record can affect a person's ability to travel or purchase insurance, and if they live with their parents, they too may be denied access to goods and services.

the representatives, including party spokespeople for justice, children and young people, and employment and learning.

Following this series of meetings, we premiered the film at an event on Wednesday 14th January in The MAC in Belfast city centre, attracting an audience of more than 50 people. Bob and Simon shared their moving stories of lasting punishment for childhood offences, and this time they were also joined by David – a young man who was engaged with NIACRO's youth employability scheme as a teenager due to his offending behaviour and who still feels the impact of those convictions when applying for jobs today.

Off The Record attracted a huge amount of positive attention: in the space of just a few days, the story was covered by more than 20 media outlets, and the support shown on social media demonstrated there is a real recognition of the need for change. In fact, just two weeks after the launch of Off The Record, the Minister for Justice David Ford MLA announced proposed changes to the filtering process, including an appeals mechanism and an automatic referral for under 18s. This is a significant step in the right direction – but there's more to do.

Why Off The Record?

Keeping childhood convictions on criminal records contravenes children's rights, increases their risk of reoffending and damages their life chances (see Key Facts table page 7).

In 2011, the Youth Justice Review highlighted the "perverse" nature of the criminal records regime for young people in Northern Ireland. While all the evidence shows that accessing sustainable education, employment or training is critical to the effective resettlement of people who have offended and greatly reduces the risk of reoffending, the Review said "the current system of informing potential employers of an offender's criminal history acts as the most potent barrier to accessing such employment". In fact, at one of our Justice Series seminars last year, guest speaker Professor Robin Simmons outlined how a lack of sustainable, appropriate employment can increase the likelihood of a young person developing offending behaviour, or indeed reoffending.



Dan Gordon joins Bob, Simon, Olwen and NIACRO Chair Sid McDowell to launch Off The Record

In NIACRO, we're all about reducing crime and its impact on people and communities. To reduce crime, we need to reduce the barriers to stable lifestyles and desistance: we have to stop trapping people in a cycle of offending behaviour.

The Review recommended that young people who have offended should be allowed to apply for "a clean slate" (Recommendation 21). We want to see this recommendation implemented and expanded to allow people of all ages to apply to have their criminal record reviewed and, if appropriate in the context, for minor offences from their childhood to be taken Off The Record completely.

New filtering arrangements were introduced in April 2014, changing the period of time until a conviction becomes 'spent', i.e. is no longer disclosed on basic employment checks. More recently, following our engagements on this issue the Minister indicated that further changes would be introduced, including the proposal to establish an automatic referral to the review process for cases where offences were committed under the age of 18. We welcome the Minister's recognition of the impact of childhood convictions: this is an encouraging sign that the Minister and his Department have listened not only to us, but also to the support expressed by the sector and the general public.

However, it's important to recognise that the impact of minor convictions goes beyond disclosing criminal record information to employers: it can impact on a person's ability to travel or even get home or car insurance. Filtering will only make a conviction 'spent': it will not take it Off The Record entirely and it may still be disclosed on enhanced employment checks, as well as visa and insurance applications. The list of 1,190 specified offences which filtering does not apply to also prohibits many of the thousands of young people with convictions or cautions from benefiting from this process – including those whose offences could be considered 'minor'. It may also preclude those with more than one childhood conviction.

The Youth Justice Review recognised that the "vast majority" of children and young people who offend do not pose a real danger to others. It's therefore of no benefit to society to deny these people opportunities throughout life, often at great cost to the public purse. To continually punish people for the minor mistakes they made as children is not rehabilitation: it's revenge.

Our Proposal

NIACRO believes that now is the time to implement and extend the scope of Recommendation 21 of the Youth Justice Review.



Simon Weston shares his story at the Off The Record launch

We believe there is an opportunity to include this amendment to the criminal records regime within the Justice Bill currently being considered.

We propose that young people and adults should have the opportunity to have old and minor offences committed when they were under the age of 18 removed from their criminal record.



Our CEO Olwen Lyner launches Off The Record

Similarly, they should be able to apply to have non-conviction information relating to when they were aged under 18 removed from their police records.

While there is still work to be done in determining the definition of a 'minor' offence and how applicants would be assessed, we strongly believe that there is an opportunity now for the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Department of Justice to introduce a system that would reduce reoffending and allow people to move on from childhood mistakes.

We Need Your Help

It's important that the Minister, Department and Committee for Justice understand why the current system doesn't work, and that they recognise the opportunity of the Justice Bill to change people's lives and make communities safer.

To help make it happen, we need you to:

1. Write to your MLA to ask them to support Off The Record;
 2. Show your support on Twitter and Facebook using #OffTheRecord; and
 3. Share the campaign film and keep the conversation going.
- In addition, if you have a childhood conviction which could be considered as minor and would be willing to share your story with NIACRO to help promote this message, please contact Julia on julia@niacro.co.uk



Discussing Off The Record on
BBC Radio Ulster

KEY FACTS

- Between January 2005 and June 2009, **more than 7,800 cautions** were given to children and young people by the PSNI, with some children as young as 10 years old.
- In April-June 2014, the rate of young people in Northern Ireland who were 'NEET' was **14.8%** - higher than the UK average of 12.8%. Several of the barriers to education, employment and training outlined in the Executive's Pathways to Success (2012) strategy are pertinent to young people who have criminal records. Youth criminal records therefore compound our 'NEET' situation.
- The age of criminal responsibility in Northern Ireland is just **10 years old**: this was deemed to be internationally unacceptable by the Youth Justice Review.
- The current regime for youth criminal records is in contrast to several **human and children's rights**, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (The Havana Rules), the UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (The Riyadh Guidelines), and Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- In June 2014, the report of the inquiry into the effectiveness of the youth court in England and Wales, chaired by **Lord Carlile**, said children who committed non-serious offences should have their record expunged when they turn 18.
- The Republic of Ireland has a **Spent Convictions Scheme** for young people who offend before they turn 18; if specific criteria are met, the conviction is automatically spent when they are 18. In other jurisdictions, rules are in place to ensure total separation between youth and adult courts and criminal histories.

Assembly Update

We keep a close eye on what goes on at the Northern Ireland Assembly. Here are some recent policy developments most relevant to our work:

Justice Bill

- The Justice Bill was introduced to the Assembly on the 16th June 2014. The Bill aims to improve services for victims and witnesses, to speed up the justice system, and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of key aspects of the system.
- As part of the Committee for Justice consultation on the Bill, we submitted a written response to the proposals in September. Based on this, the Committee invited us to provide oral evidence on the Bill in November. Our Chief Executive Olwen, Jobtrack Senior Practitioner Anne and Policy Co-ordinator Julia provided comments and answered questions on areas of concern to NIACRO, including: prosecutorial fines, victims and families of defendants as victims, criminal records, and avoidable delay in the justice system. The Children's Law Centre and the Human Rights Commission also gave evidence during the same session. We were pleased that the Committee showed interest in what we were saying and were receptive to several of the points we made. The Committee will hear evidence from other organisations until March, when it will consider its findings. Our written evidence is available on our [website](#), and our oral evidence is available to watch on [YouTube](#).
- After the Committee Stage, the Bill will move to the Consideration Stage. We will continue to engage with the Committee and Department to advocate for our service users in the development of this Bill, including promoting our Off The Record messages in relation to the criminal records section of the Bill (see page 3).

Review of the Criminal Records Regime

- In April 2014, a new filtering scheme for Access NI was introduced which filters out old and minor convictions, and disposals such as cautions from Standard and Enhanced disclosure certificates, except for so-called 'specified' offences. To introduce the scheme, changes were made to the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) legislation. These changes mean that employers can no longer legally ask for details of all convictions and/or other disposals, and may now legally only ask for details of those convictions and/or other disposals that are not subject to filtering. Any convictions that are subject to filtering will be known as 'protected' convictions. A review of this filtering scheme, and an appeals process, are currently being considered as part of the wider Justice Bill.

Custodial Arrangements for Children

- The Youth Justice Review (2011) made a series of recommendations concerning custodial arrangements for children in Northern Ireland, including the recommendation that imprisoning under 18s in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders' Centre should end.
- In light of this, administrative arrangements were put in place and children have not been held in the young adult custodial centre since 2012. However, following consultation on proposals, in November 2014 the Minister for Justice opted to delay the introduction of this proposed legislation, citing the need to further examine some of the issues.



Victim Charter

- The Department of Justice (DOJ) has recently published a Victim Charter. The Charter sets out the entitlements and services that victims of crime in Northern Ireland can expect to receive from a range of service providers. It is expected to be placed on a statutory footing in late 2015.

Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

- The DOJ has consulted on placing the Northern Ireland Prisoner Ombudsman Office on a statutory footing. Following the consultation, the Department has proposed that the office is placed on a statutory footing; the name of the office should be changed to Prison Ombudsman; and that the Minister can request the Ombudsman to investigate and report on other prison related matters. The proposals will be taken forward in the Fines and Enforcement Bill.

Consultations

NIACRO provides policy responses to public consultations frequently. Recent submissions include responses to: the draft Justice Bill; the draft Victims Charter; Access to Justice Review 2; and the draft Budget.

All our consultation responses can be viewed on our website
www.niacro.co.uk

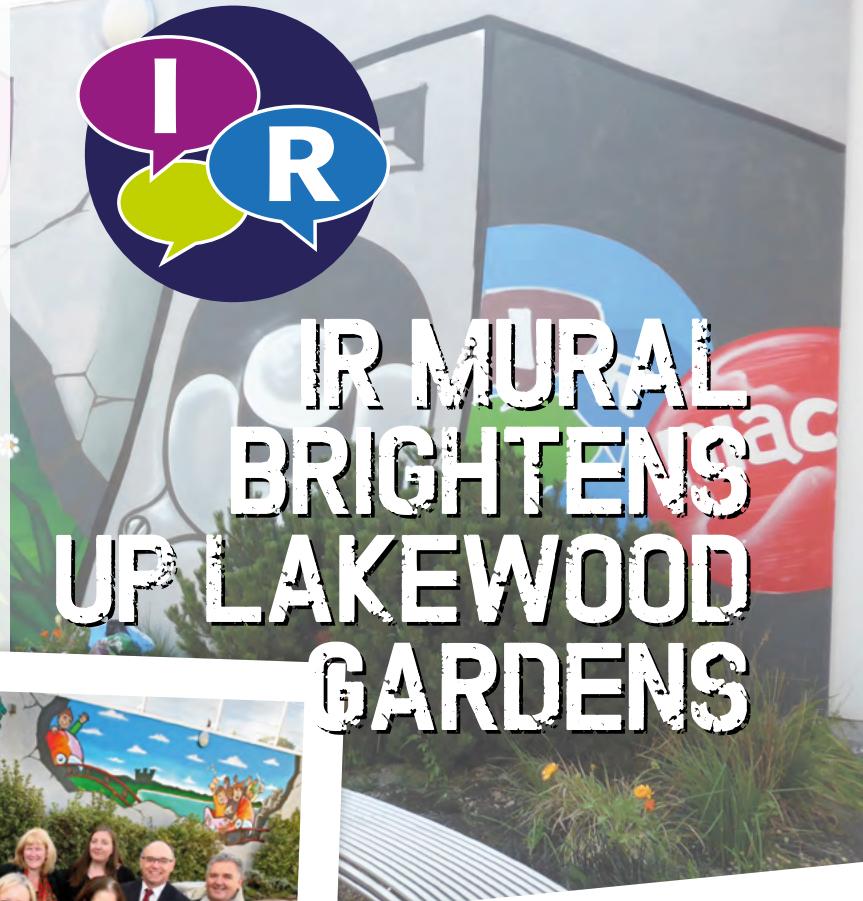


The Independent Representation (IR) scheme, which works with young people staying at the Lakewood Secure Care Centre, was involved in a large scale mural design and painting project last year which has brightened up the centre and created a real buzz amongst staff and residents.

Each unit in Lakewood has a garden area leading out from the living room with a large arched boundary wall. Following feedback from the young people living in the centre and the centre staff, the Scheme felt that these walls would provide the perfect canvas for a series of colourful murals for the young people to develop and express their ideas on, whilst also adding some colour to the individual units.

The children's home, which is based in Bangor, accommodates up to 16 young people from across Northern Ireland. The young people were central to each stage of both the design and creation of the murals, with the facilitation of design workshops to promote engagement and help get ideas flowing. The mural designs created were based on discussions with young people around their interests, hopes, aspirations, dreams and personal journeys.

The designs portray important key messages that the young people in Lakewood wanted to share with other young people who would be staying there in the future. The majority of young people



resident at the time were able to get involved, and they took ownership and a real pride in seeing their ideas materialise on the wall - and the end result looks great.

Lakewood and the IR Scheme held a celebration event towards the end of the year to recognise the hard work that all the young people in the centre put into the project. The event was attended by the then Children's Commissioner Patricia Lewsley-Mooney, employees from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and NIACRO staff, including our Chief Executive Olwen Lyner.

- The Independent Representation scheme represents the views and concerns of young people who are placed at Lakewood Secure Care Centre through a NIACRO project worker and a trained volunteer Independent Representative. For more information about the IR Scheme and opportunities to volunteer as an Independent Representative, contact Lisa on lisag@niacro.co.uk

CAPS Plays Leading Role in Supporting Families

Back in January 2014, NIACRO was officially awarded the contract to host the Craigavon and Banbridge Family Support Hub in our Portadown office. This followed a period of the organisation – and specifically our Child and Parent Support project (CAPS) – successfully acting as interim host of the Hub, playing a pivotal role in co-ordinating family support services in the southern area.

Family Support Hubs are multi-agency networks of organisations which offer family support intervention services at the earliest opportunity to help prevent the need for referral to statutory social work services.

These Hubs are a part of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP), a Health and Social Care Board-led multi-agency partnership representing key agencies that have a responsibility for improving the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

The Craigavon and Banbridge Hub meets on a monthly basis in NIACRO's Portadown office. A typical Hub meeting consists of a broad range of both statutory and voluntary partner organisations across the community that are based in the locality and have a stake in the provision of early intervention and preventative family support services. Members discuss the needs of families who are referred to them from a range of sources, with an emphasis on improving outcomes for families and negating the risk of future - or further – referral to social services, and by extension reduces the risk of later possible involvement in the criminal justice system.

The purpose of this process is to provide early intervention to families in need of a more co-ordinated and responsive approach and is an opportunity for relevant agencies to meet to discuss the support needs of a family and to propose a comprehensive support package. This cross-sectoral partnership is critical in ensuring that the needs of families and children are met effectively.

CAPS Senior Practitioner Rachel Long hosts the monthly meetings in Portadown. Rachel is a member of the CYPSP Southern Outcomes Group and as a team CAPS has membership on each of the seven Southern Area Locality Planning Groups.

This means that NIACRO's early intervention and youth offending work is well represented at every level of the CYPSP structure, with Rachel delivering presentations on our work with children and young people and, most importantly, ensuring the voice of our youngest service users are represented at a strategic level in the Children and Young People Plan.



- For more information about the Craigavon and Banbridge Hub, contact Rachel on rachel@niacro.co.uk

Meet The Employer:

information and advice sessions continue

For several years, NIACRO has been hosting regular Meet The Employer events across Northern Ireland, providing an invaluable opportunity for connection between our service users and employers in the community.

Meet The Employer events are an integral part of the Jobtrack Employer Engagement programme. The lunchtime sessions are pivotal in breaking down attitudinal barriers and can help establish meaningful contact between our service users and local businesses.

Training and education providers also often exhibit at the events to offer advice on opportunities and realistic pathways for our service users with criminal records.

Employers consistently tell us they are impressed with our service users' willingness to take on advice and with their motivation to work. They are often particularly interested in the fair recruitment training we offer and keen to implement best practice in recruiting people with convictions.

In the last few months, we've been delighted to host several successful Meet The Employer events, including in Derry/Londonderry, Armagh, Enniskillen, Belfast and Portadown, as well in Hydebank and Maghaberry prisons.

At each of these events, we were encouraged by the support shown by local employers and we appreciate the guidance they are able to offer.

In addition, the events have also received positive support from local representatives, with the Mayor of Craigavon Cllr Colin McCusker attending the event at our Portadown office in November, and Mayor of Derry Cllr Brenda Stevenson showing her support at the Derry event in the same month. Both Mayors were keen to learn more about our work and the barriers to employment faced by people with criminal records, with Mayor Stevenson inviting a small group to meet with her in the Mayor's Parlour more recently to hear more about their experience.

Thank you to all the employers, education and training providers, service users and staff – and Mayors! – who make these events possible and so successful. We look forward to continuing them in the future.



- For more information about Jobtrack and Meet The Employer events, contact Employment Services Manager Gareth Eannetta on gareth@niacro.co.uk



New Project Launched to Support Tenancies for People from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds

NIACRO officially launched the STEM project, the newest strand of our Assisting People and Communities (APAC) programme of work, with a recent event in our Amelia House office in Belfast.

STEM initially started work in June 2014. The project provides floating support for people being intimidated in the community because of their ethnic backgrounds.

At the launch event, staff presented information about the work of the project to date. They explained that referrals are initiated due to concerns about potential problems when considering moving into a community and fears arising from ongoing issues within an area.

Some of the difficulties faced by service users include isolation, with friends reluctant to visit; restriction of movements and only going out at certain times; and feelings of being confined. People have needed help to deal with problems such as repairs, sourcing household items, and accessing benefits.

Most significant, perhaps, is the impact on children, as families report not being able to let their children out to play because of fears for their safety.

At the time of the event in December, contact had already been made with 33 tenants, 18 of which have involved families with a total of 38 children affected.

As well as hearing from staff working on the project, NIACRO invited Extern's Floating Support project for Asylum seekers and NI Alternatives to present their work as part of the launch.

Attendees were also treated to African music from drummer Donna and some wonderful Sudanese food prepared by Degesh of Global Cuisine. The Housing Executive also interviewed key personnel to raise the profile of the project on the Community TV network Northern Visions as part of Homelessness Week.

- For more information about STEM, contact Sile McLean, Resettlement Services Manager, on sile@niacro.co.uk



APAC
Assisting People and Communities





MOVE in Makin'g

Last year, the NIACRO MOVE project joined forces with the Communications team (PACT) to produce not just one but two short films showcasing the benefits of the MOVE project.

The MOVE project, funded by the BIG Lottery, aims to provide enhanced opportunities for young people at risk of offending through a one-to-one mentoring and befriending service. A MOVE Mentor is a trained volunteer who meets regularly with the young person for up to one year. Their role is to support the young person to achieve their goals in a number of areas, including: personal and social development; numeracy and literacy skills; education, training or employment; and community participation.

Working with a local creative agency, we developed a character based animation to promote MOVE to young people who are considering getting involved in the scheme. Young people currently on the MOVE project got involved in the production, giving us lots of

great ideas for the script – and Daniel, Aimee and Naomi got to be the stars of the show by recording the voiceover for the characters in a local recording studio.

The second film, made by the same company, evaluated the impact that the MOVE project has had on young people, volunteers and families over the past two years. Huge thanks go to Tiffany, her mum and sister who all took part in the filming and shared their experience of being involved in the project. MOVE volunteers Rachael and Neidin also spoke about their involvement, as did Ruth from the National Children's Bureau. You can read about Tiffany's story on page 17.

After lots of hard work and commitment from staff, volunteers and MOVE young people, we were delighted to launch the films at a premiere at the Strand Cinema – complete with red carpet and 'paparazzi'!

The event was well attended and the audience loved both films, which really capture the good work which MOVE does. Both our Chief Executive Olwen and MOVE Project Worker Fiona spoke at the screening and paid tribute to all those who took part. You can view the animation and the live action evaluation piece on our Youtube channel [youtube.com/NiacroVideos](https://www.youtube.com/NiacroVideos)

The filming process was a fantastic learning experience for all those involved and gave the young people on MOVE the opportunity to learn about film production, camera work and recording. They were particularly impressive in the way they confidently handled the cameras and came across in the voiceover recordings.

Thanks to all the NIACRO staff and volunteers who gave up their time to make the filming project possible. We're so grateful to everyone who helped make the films a success and to all those who came along to the premiere.

- You can read more about MOVE in 'A Day in the Life of Fiona' on page 16. To find out more about MOVE and opportunities to volunteer with the project, contact lisag@niacro.co.uk



Celebrating Our Volunteers



In December, as part of our Volunteer and Youth Christmas Event, we celebrated the achievements of a number of our volunteers who have given their support to NIACRO for several years.

These volunteers have all shown exceptional commitment to the young people, adults and families they have supported through the IV, APAC, MOVE, IR and Family Links projects.

Ten volunteers were recognised for their commitment to volunteering with NIACRO for more than three years: Orla McLoughlin; Linzie McNarry; Hannah Scott; Cathy Irisarri; Kersty Martin; Lynn Shields; Judith McAteer; Brenda Skillen; Gerard Brammell; and John McAleese.

We also celebrated the outstanding achievements of our longest serving volunteers, George Elwood, Trevor Gilliland and Amanda Bell, who have been Independent Visitors for more than ten years. During this time each has been involved in a number of matches in different areas, providing support to individual young people, many of whom are now adults and have moved beyond the scheme.

In all, these 13 long serving volunteers have notched up an astounding combined 60 years of voluntary activity between them- an incredible amount of time! We would like to commend and thank them for their energy, dedication and support.

Get Involved

We currently need volunteers in areas across Northern Ireland. We're looking for men and women aged 20 and

over who can give a couple of hours a week to befriend and support young people aged up to 18 who are involved in either our Independent Visitor Scheme or MOVE Project.

The Independent Visitor Scheme supports young people in the care system, while our MOVE Project supports young people who are at risk of offending to re-engage with their community. We offer training, guidance and out-of-pocket expenses to support all volunteers in their role.

- If you are interested in finding out more about volunteering with NIACRO, please contact us on niacro@niacro.co.uk**

A Day in The life of....**FIONA**



Fiona is the Project Worker for MOVE. The MOVE project aims to provide enhanced opportunities for young people at risk of offending through a volunteer one-to-one mentoring and befriending service. It is funded by The BIG Lottery.

9.00am Received a call from a Children's Disability social worker who would like to refer a young male experiencing significant difficulties at home and school and is known to have misused cannabis and alcohol. Gathered enquiry information and agreed to discuss the enquiry with MOVE's senior practitioner, Lisa, before proceeding to referral stage. Called Lisa and she agreed that he fits the project's criteria. Emailed referral form to social worker to be completed with young person.

10.00am Meeting with Family Planning Association to discuss the session they'll be delivering in our upcoming Summer Group. This 5 day group will focus on getting young people on MOVE and NIACRO's Independent Visitor Scheme to consider choices they're making in relation to their health - and of course for them to just enjoy each others company and have fun!

11.30am Meeting with our HR and Volunteer Officer Vivienne to complete quarterly volunteer monitoring. Updated our record of new volunteers, calculated volunteer hours and handed over files for those volunteers who are leaving. 16 volunteers

were recruited in our last phase of training. Discussed plans for upcoming Volunteer training.

12.30pm Received a call from the mum of a MOVE young person. She and her family have been persistently intimidated in their community over the past year. She phoned to check if we've heard back from the Housing Executive regarding her application to be rehoused. Talked to colleagues who have been liaising with Housing Executive. Phoned the mum back and updated her about her application, she's delighted that it looks like good news for her and her family!

2.00pm Pre-match meeting with new volunteer Jane at the office. Before matching her up this afternoon I explain our volunteer agreement and share necessary information about the young person, Louise. Louise was referred by an education welfare officer, who was concerned that Louise is at risk of offending. Louise's family have a history of criminal justice involvement and Louise is experiencing significant difficulties at school. A volunteer mentor at this point could make a huge difference to Louise's life outcomes.

3.00pm Match meeting at Louise's house in Belfast. Introduced Jane to Louise and her mum. Clarified the boundaries of the match and what Louise can expect from her mentor Jane. They arranged their first visit for next week. I explained to Louise and her mum that I would see them again in four weeks for their first review. Informed them that in the meantime if they've any issues to get in touch.

5.00pm Supervision in Lurgan with MOVE volunteer. Caught up on his view of how the match has progressed over past four months and identified any training needs. No safeguarding concerns but the volunteer will be away for a few weeks so will need to inform young person and discuss covering the match.



6.00pm Review with young person at their home in Portadown. Asked how they feel in regards to achieving their goals and how they feel the relationship is going with their volunteer. Used MOVE's self assessment tool to identify areas they may want to develop and in conjunction with their volunteer set goals for them to focus on for the next 8-10 weeks.



Tiffany's Story

Tiffany is one of the many fantastic young people the MOVE project supports. The project, which is funded by The Big Lottery, matches volunteers to young people who are experiencing difficulties and helps young people achieve their goals. Here, Tiffany shares her story:

"It was just a normal day when the bullying started and very soon it became routine...get up go to school, get beaten, come home, cry, cover up my bruises. It never stopped, it just got worse.

Then they took it too far and I became suicidal. I believed it was the only way I could end the bullying, as crying and self harming didn't seem to help.

I began to worry about the person who meant the most to me, my mum. Things got really bad and my mum couldn't leave me on my own for two minutes. She followed me everywhere when she realised what was happening. She started things changing for the better. I began counselling: I never knew just talking to someone could make things so much better.

Then I was introduced to the MOVE project. They set me up with a mentor; she was like an older sister to me. She made me laugh again and showed me how to be a teenager.

Through MOVE I made new friends and felt like I really fitted in and no one judged me. We had days out and group meetings and I even appeared in the MOVE movie project.

I now feel that my life has changed and I can see a positive future for me. I can't thank the MOVE project enough because now I can say I made it through the tough times and became a better person for it."

Supporting the Families of People in Prison

In the last edition of NIACRO News, we focused on the impact of imprisonment on the families and children of people in prison.

In particular, we highlighted how supporting families to maintain contact with their loved one during imprisonment

Edinburgh, and at an academic conference at University College Cork. We've also recently held a Justice Series seminar on the importance of listening to the voice of children affected by imprisonment.

and Policy and Research Co-ordinator Julia attended the event, which heard from international speakers on a wide range of topics, including what policies Scotland is introducing to support children affected by imprisonment and international best practice. The



Andy Keen-Downs and Sammy Douglas MLA with NIACRO CEO Olwen Lyner at the Justice Series seminar.



can benefit the whole family, improving mental health and educational outcomes as well as significantly reducing the risk of reoffending. It can also help break the cycle of intergenerational offending and divert the children of people in prison away from developing offending behaviour.

Since then, we've been busy promoting our messages at both local and European levels, communicating our policy in our evidence to the Committee for Justice (see page 8), at a European conference in

No-one's Ever Asked Me

Last year, we were involved in organising and co-hosting the annual Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE, formerly Eurochips) conference with Families Outside in Edinburgh. The conference was entitled "No-one's ever asked me": Hearing the voices of children affected by parental incarceration and was chaired by our Chief Executive, Olwen Lyner.

Olwen, along with our acting Director of Services Bonnie

conference also heard from a young woman called Aime, who's brother was imprisoned when she was 13; she shared her story with delegates and spoke about how schools need to improve how they support students affected by imprisonment.

Changing Mindsets, Changing Minds

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children have the right not to be discriminated against because of the status



Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) conference in Edinburgh

of their parents, and they have the right to maintain contact with both parents. However, these rights are often sacrificed in order to punish the person in prison.

The December 2014 conference Changing Mindsets, Changing Minds: The Rights of Children Affected by Parental Imprisonment at University College Cork brought together the voices of academics, practitioners, and children affected by imprisonment to focus on the rights of these children and what can be done to meet their needs.

We were delighted to be asked to share our policy and service delivery experience at the conference alongside leading voices in this area - including keynote speaker Justice Albie Sachs, the former Judge of the South African Constitutional Court, human rights champion and anti-apartheid activist who delivered a ground-breaking ruling on the imprisonment of parents with dependent children in South Africa. Our Policy and Research Co-ordinator Julia spoke at the conference, outlining the current context in Northern

Ireland, the services we deliver and our key policy asks of the Northern Ireland Executive. There was a lot of interest in the support we currently provide, particularly regarding our latest initiative 'Inside Education', which aims to educate school teachers about the impact of imprisonment on their pupils.

Our Voice: Children's Charter

Most recently, our Justice Series seminars continued with a focus on the voice of children affected by imprisonment. Sammy Douglas MLA sponsored the event, and spoke about the importance of recognising and providing for the needs of children and families who are impacted by the criminal justice system. Following opening comments from both Sammy and Olwen, Andy Keen-Downs, Chief Executive of Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact) in England and Wales, delivered a passionate talk which encouraged audience members to see what parental imprisonment is like through a child's eyes.

Andy spoke about the introduction of the 'Our Voice'

children's charter, which calls for children to be considered in the arrest and trial of a parent, and also Pact's 'Left Behind' campaign to remind justice and legal professionals to ensure any dependent children are not forgotten by the criminal justice system. This Justice Series seminar followed on from the guest talk delivered last year by Lucy Gampell OBE, president of Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE), which we reported on in the last edition of NIACRO News. A guest paper by Lucy, based on her seminar, is included as an insert in this magazine and is also available on our website.

Threats to Services

In the context of cuts, there is a serious threat to the already limited support provided to families in Northern Ireland.

While NIACRO provides transport to prisons and emotional and practical support through our Visitor Centres and Family Links project, we are concerned that without a statutory responsibility for this group they will be unfairly hurt by public spending cuts.

We intend to continue to raise this important issue with policy makers to ensure no more children or families are left to serve a silent sentence in the community, and hope to learn more from our European colleagues who are striving for the same.

- **For more information about our work to support families affected by imprisonment, contact Donnie Sweeney on donnie@niacro.co.uk**

GUEST COLUMNS



Tom Halpin

"Sacro is now established as a major provider of intensive support services, particularly where public safety is paramount"

Justice is a fully devolved matter in Scotland and "Living our lives free from crime, disorder and danger" is one of the Scottish Government's 16 National Outcomes identified as receiving priority attention. As part of this strategic approach, the government established a Reducing Reoffending Programme in which the third sector has a key role and representation on the Programme Board. To date the programme has delivered initiatives such as the Community Payback Order and Whole Systems Approach for young people, which brings a number of related agencies together to focus interventions on improving the lives of young people involved in offending. This whole system approach is now also being adapted to better address the needs of women involved in the justice system.

A second phase of the Reducing Reoffending

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Programme brought about a wide-ranging and in-depth engagement exercise to join up all those involved in Scotland's justice system and inform the next stage. A Reducing Reoffending Change Fund provided resources for mentoring services to be set up all across Scotland. These services were established as Public Social Partnerships (PSPs); a model which brings statutory and voluntary organisations together to organise and deliver services to the best effect. Sacro leads seven other voluntary organisations in the delivery of one of these PSPs, a national Women's Mentoring service called "Shine" and we work with other partner agencies in PSPs delivering mentoring services for young men and throughcare.

Following a successful pilot project in Fife, Sacro has expanded the reach of its Circles of Support and Accountability service to make it available across Scotland. This service complements existing statutory measures for those convicted of a sexual offence by creating a "circle" of volunteers from within the community to support and monitor individuals on release. The concept of circles has been used extensively in other parts of the world and has gained some traction in England where it has been used widely for a few years now. Given the sensitivity surrounding this

In each edition of NIACRO News, we feature guest columns on key issues related to our work. In this edition, the Chief Executives of Sacro and Nacro, Tom Halpin and Jacob Tas, respectively, outline the reducing offending context in Scotland, England and Wales, while communications expert Nick Garbutt explains how organisations like our own can campaign on difficult issues.

cohort of offenders, the high risk of reoffending and the number of partner agencies involved, robust processes and collection and sharing of outcome data are essential. Delivering this service within such a demanding framework has been a very valuable exercise and has established Sacro as a major provider of intensive support services, particularly where public safety is paramount.

As with every other third sector organisation, resources available to Sacro are under significant pressure. Our support for NACRO and NIACRO is well established and we welcome any interest in hearing more about what we are doing. Likewise we wish you success and welcome any suggestions for areas where we can collaborate.

- Tom Halpin is Chief Executive of Sacro, the organisation which helps create safer and more cohesive communities across Scotland. NIACRO has recently been engaging with Sacro and Nacro to share expertise, discuss policy and exchange best practice in service delivery and data collection.

For more information about Sacro, visit www.sacro.org.uk



Jacob Tas

"Good partnership work has played an important part in Nacro's success"

Nacro has been delivering community based services to offenders, ex-offenders and those at risk of offending for five decades. The government's recent announcement of the preferred bidders under the Ministry of Justice's Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) programme offers an opportunity for Nacro to break new ground and deliver collaborative change. Nacro (in partnership with Sodexo) has been announced as a preferred bidder to take over six of the community rehabilitation companies (CRCs) – each of them covering a different region of England and Wales, replacing the probation trusts. TR aims to tackle stubborn reoffending rates through a different approach to probation: low-to-medium risk offenders will be supervised by the 21 CRCs, whilst high risk offenders will be allocated to a single National Probation Service.

The government's 2013 White Paper 'Transforming the CJS', which originally outlined the proposals for TR, also set out

Transforming Youth Custody (TYC) which will create secure colleges to provide a new form of youth custody focused on education. Nacro sees education as a key mechanism for tackling the cycle of offending and is feeding into the government's consultation on secure colleges to shape the curriculum and provide a better learning experience for young people who have for so long been let down by the system.

In the area of mental health and the CJS, Nacro leads on the Offender Health Collaborative which developed the national operating model for Liaison and Diversion (L&D) services in England and is currently supporting the national rollout. L&D operates to identify, assess and refer to appropriate services those adults and young offenders appearing in police stations and courts with mental health, learning disabilities, substance misuse or other vulnerabilities. Nacro's services also include housing, education and training, substance misuse, and a national resettlement helpline and advice service which also advises employers on how to recruit fairly and safely. In 2012-13 our housing services helped 2,200 people into housing and provided a further 2,000 people with housing related support.

Nacro's education and work-based learning programmes for vulnerable young people (run across more than 30 education centres in England) were awarded a 'good' (grade 2) by Ofsted earlier this year: inspectors praised the quality of teaching, support and care; behaviour management; and the culture of respect forged

in the centres. In 2012-13, we enabled 4,800 people to gain new skills and qualifications through our education and training programmes.

Nacro's Resettlement Advice Service is the UK's only national helpline providing advice and support on resettlement matters to offenders, their families and practitioners. We also support organisations when they recruit or admit applicants with criminal records. In 2012-13, our helpline provided advice to over 15,000 individuals and employers. Among our recent campaigns, Nacro fought hard to reform the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. As a result, the period for which a conviction can be spent has reduced for certain types of sentences – although there still remain several inconsistencies with regard to certain convictions.

Good partnership work has played an important part in Nacro's success, allowing us to develop and deliver integrated services that are innovative, streamlined and cost-effective. In this changing commissioning landscape, Nacro is always open to new partnerships to help expand our outreach so that we can equip more people with the skills, advice, attitude and support they need to move their lives on and move away from crime.

- Jacob Tas is Chief Executive of Nacro, the crime reduction charity which works to reduce crime and reoffending in communities across England and Wales. For more information about NACRO, visit www.nacro.org.uk

Nick Garbutt

"If you "stick to the knitting" and don't engage nothing will change."

Doing good work is not always the same as doing work that has widespread popular support.

Not all charities support popular causes. Some do work that others regard as being not for the public benefit and are, from time to time subjected to attack by the media.

So what should be the response? To avoid the headlines and "stick to the knitting" doing good work, but not speaking up for their beneficiaries?

Or to speak out against injustice and unfairness and campaign for change?

It is a real dilemma for many organisations especially for those that deal with offenders, ex-offenders and their families.

There is a widely held perception that prisoners and their families are treated too softly – that sentences are neither long enough or harsh enough and that those who commit crimes are not deserving of sympathy or support in any circumstances.

Over and above this we have the bizarre phenomenon of policy often running counter to the science. Criminologists' findings are so often discarded and ignored. So that you have an area where what is actually happening on the ground, in prisons and in the community sometimes runs counter to what should be happening if



we were to rehabilitate more offenders and reduce crime.

It is because of this that many academics are now talking about the idea of public criminology the idea of getting involved more in public debate and engaging with campaigners to try to influence policy.

Despite the pessimism in the sector there is strong evidence that this approach has worked in the past: public opinion towards offenders and offending has always been the same, and yet there has been progress in penal reform over the long term.

My recent analysis of the ultimately successful campaign to abolish capital punishment reveals the following success factors for campaigning on difficult issues:

- To change public policy having a strong, coherent evidence based argument is a good start but it is not enough.
- To have any real chance you need to combine quiet lobbying with high profile campaigns
- There was not and never will be any public sympathy for de-humanised offenders, especially murderers.

- However, by humanising the issue opinions on specific cases can start to shift the debate and open the window for change.

- For campaigns to be successful it is imperative to concentrate on those cases which will elicit public support and sympathy.
- For all this to happen you have to engage with the press and media, taking the rough with the smooth.

If you "stick to the knitting" and don't engage nothing will change.

- Nick Garbutt is a communications expert and one of the most respected PR practitioners and media commentators in Northern Ireland. As well as running his own PR business, Nick is the editor of Scope, the online policy magazine for the voluntary and community sector. For more information about Nick's communications consultancy, visit www.nick-garbutt.com

niacro News



Lord Mayor Launches New Look NIACRO News

Following the redesign of this magazine last year, then-Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, visited the Belfast NIACRO office to launch the new look NIACRO News and also learn more about our work.

Representatives from across the organisation met with him to show the different areas of work we engage in, and the Lord Mayor took the time to speak to each project individually, as well as some service users who explained how NIACRO has helped them. He paid tribute to the work we do and noted the enthusiasm evident across all projects.

During the visit, Cllr Ó Muilleoir officially launched the new design of NIACRO News. While this magazine has been reporting on NIACRO's activities for well over a decade, this latest incarnation has a new design and layout, and sees a renewed focus on the organisation's policy campaigns, service user experiences and guest columns.

The event was a real success and attracted lots of positive attention on social media - including plenty of retweets of the selfie the Lord Mayor took of the whole team!



A huge thank you goes to everyone who helped make the event go so well.



NIACRO'S 43rd AGM

Our most recent AGM took place at our Belfast office in November 2014. The event demonstrated the scope of our work across the last year, with Chair Sid McDowell and CEO Olwen Lyner highlighting key developments and presenting the 2013-14 annual report.

After the official business was completed, communications specialist and former newspaper editor Nick Garbutt delivered a very interesting seminar on 'Reporting Crime: Engaging the Media in Effective Resettlement'. Nick looked at how people throughout history have successfully campaigned on difficult issues, particularly in relation to prisons and capital punishment. You can read Nick's guest column on this topic on page 22.

The event concluded with a lively Q&A session which highlighted that many in our sector recognise there is an opportunity for us to work together to tackle stereotypes and unfair reporting, and to drive changes in attitudes and policy.



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Women's Celebration of Achievement

APAC Women recently held a Celebration of Achievement in our Belfast office. The event recognised the achievement of women we work with, with Janette McKnight from Quaker Service presenting the awards. A range of certificates were presented to women who had participated in Jobtrack training; one group had also completed 'Journeys with Conviction', a group work programme delivered in partnership with Belfast Unemployment Resource Centre (BURC).

NIACRO offers training to staff in other organisations to support their involvement with the collaborative INSPIRE approach. 'Women and Offending Behaviour' is accredited by the Open College Network at Level 3, and staff from various Women's Centres as well as prison staff from Hydebank Wood were given their Certificates for completing the Award successfully.

The contribution by volunteers was also recognised, with a focus on the tutors in Jobtrack, the group facilitator from BURC and the Shadow Support worker in APAC women - without whom this range of intervention could not have been offered.



As part of the event, Rory Doherty, also from Quaker Service, explained the 'Back to the Future' programme which he is currently delivering in Amelia House, supported by the Prison Arts Foundation, which supports women to explore and confront issues from their past.

The event was a real success and amidst the uncertainty of future funding, perhaps a timely reminder of what can actually be achieved through strong partnership working between NIACRO, PBNI, NIPS, Quaker Service, BURC and Women's Centres. It is this partnership that makes it possible to meet the needs of women and offer such a wide range of courses and programmes.



PARTNERSHIP WORKING CONTINUES

As an organisation, NIACRO has a long history of working collaboratively with sector colleagues to maximise resources, influence and service delivery. In the current financial context, this has been even more important and we've been developing these valuable relationships as we all work towards common goals in criminal justice and the reduction of offending, whilst also highlighting how each organisation's work is different.

Recent examples of this partnership working include:

- teaming up with Extern to communicate the importance of employment pathway services in the midst of funding cuts;
- supporting Include Youth's call for a raise in the age of criminal responsibility, speaking at their February 2015 alongside other sector representatives and advocates;
- working in collaboration with Start 360, the Prince's Trust and Extern in preparation for our ESF funding bid; and
- rallying support from sector colleagues in support of our Off The Record message.

We will continue to develop these partnerships and demonstrate how the work of all these organisations complements the others, illustrating the different benefits we provide to service users and to society.



New NIACRO News Recognised at Industry Awards

We're delighted to report that NIACRO News was recently named as a finalist at the Northern Ireland Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) PRide Awards. We fought off tough competition from the other entries to be named as one of the top four finalists in the Best External Publication category, losing out to Ulster Rugby at the awards ceremony in October.



Being named as a finalist shows that NIACRO News is a well received and respected publication, and the recent review is regarded as demonstrating innovation and best practice in communicating with our audience and stakeholders. Well done and thanks to all the readers who send in great ideas, stories and pictures! Please keep sending your feedback and suggestions to julia@niacro.co.uk



COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE MEET IN AMELIA HOUSE

When NIACRO gave oral evidence to the Committee for Justice on the Justice Bill in November (see page 8), we invited the Committee to visit our Belfast office and hold its official meeting at our premises to really see the work that we do every day.

The Committee responded positively and on Wednesday 25th February the vast majority of its members – including Chair Alastair Ross MLA and Deputy Chair Raymond McCartney MLA – visited Amelia House, along with Assembly officials. Staff from various projects met with the Committee in a market stall-style event, providing the opportunity for members to hear more about our employment-led resettlement work, early intervention projects, housing work and homelessness prevention programmes, and the emotional and practical support we provide to families affected by imprisonment.

After this, the Committee had lunch with NIACRO senior management, Chair and Deputy Chair over a



meeting to discuss the variety of work we do and its impact, outlining our role in the sector and the return on investment we offer through our work to reduce crime and its impact. We were delighted that members were very engaged throughout the meeting, demonstrating their interest by asking lots of questions and later sharing their impressions on social media.

The official Committee meeting took place later that afternoon, with items on the agenda including a briefing from the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and informal consideration of the Justice Bill.

The whole event ran smoothly and we received good feedback from both the Committee and the officials. In particular, it was great to see such interest in – and enthusiasm for – our work from the Committee members.

LORD MAYOR VISITS NIACRO

Following in the footsteps of her predecessor (see page 23), the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Cllr Nichola Mallon, visited our Belfast office in March to meet with staff and service users involved in our employment-led resettlement work.

The Lord Mayor met briefly with Jobtrack manager Gareth Eannetta to hear about the services we deliver to adults both in prison and in the community to increase their employability, in the context of reducing the risk of reoffending. She then spoke with service users and listened to their experiences of trying to access education, employment and training with criminal records.

This visit came on the same week that filming began for a short film showcasing some of the employers we work with who demonstrate best practice in fair recruitment policies for people with criminal records; watch out for the upcoming finished film on our social media channels!



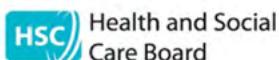


SOMETIMES IT FEELS LIKE NO ONE LISTENS TO ME. WILL YOU?

We're looking for volunteers who can give a couple of hours a week to befriend and support young people aged up to 18.

Our Independent Visitor Scheme supports young people in the care system and our MOVE Project supports young people who are at risk of offending.

For information on how to become a volunteer, please visit our website, call 028 9032 0157 or email niacro@niacro.co.uk



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If you have any feedback on NIACRO News, would like us to cover a specific issue or want to write a guest column, please contact our Public Affairs and Communications Team:

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