

Innovation in Youth Justice

Exploring new ideas in reducing reoffending and establishing employment pathways.

niacronews



Celebrating Jobtrack

Event marks achievements of service users, while statistics show former project reduced offending significantly.



New Thinking

Karyn McCluskey talks early intervention at the Justice Series, and Alastair Ross MLA explores "innovative solutions to traditional problems".



What Next for NIACRO?

We launch our Corporate Plan 2015-18 and reflect on the funding context for the voluntary and community sector.

Welcome to the latest edition of NIACRO News!

In our last edition earlier this year, we noted the challenging financial environment and our concerns about funding.

In the days that followed its publication, we were hit by the full force of the cuts, particularly the withdrawal of European funding which had provided for our long running employment-led resettlement work, Jobtrack.

The past few months have, therefore, been difficult – and emotional at times – as we learn to adapt to our ever-changing situation with fewer resources while having to say goodbye to many friends, colleagues and service users. Some reflections from our Chief Executive on this time, our current circumstances and the future are on page 8.

Despite this blow to the organisation, we have remained committed to delivering services to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities, and to developing research and innovative policy to support that aim.



As this edition reports, we commissioned and published a series of research papers exploring employment pathways for young people in the Youth Justice System (page 3), and we worked with NISRA to facilitate the first ever Northern Ireland Data Lab study which showed how our work significantly contributed to a reduction in reoffending. We've also continued to engage with our statutory partners and have launched some exciting new pilot projects for young people and also adults leaving custody.

We continued to communicate the Off The Record campaign messages to allow people to have childhood convictions removed from their criminal records: see page 6 for details on recent policy developments in that area. We were delighted that our work on this campaign was recognised at the recent CIPR awards, where we won the Gold award in the Best Public Affairs Campaign category – turn to page 13 for more on this achievement!

This year has not been an easy one for NIACRO, but the support we have received from all corners has been both humbling and encouraging. Funding issues remain a concern as we enter the second half of this financial year, but our commitment to reducing crime and its impact has not faltered.

**Thanks for reading,
NIACRO**



Feedback

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

NEW DIRECTIONS

Understanding and Improving Employment Pathways in Youth Justice

Last year, NIACRO teamed up with The Bytes Project to deliver New Directions, a two-strand programme of service delivery and research funded by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) through the Collaboration and Innovation Fund.

New Directions aimed to enhance the education, training and employment opportunities of young people aged 16-18 years old who were in contact with the youth justice system.

Working with young people both in the community and in the Juvenile Justice Centre (JJC), the pilot project supported young people to address their offending behaviour and overcome barriers to effective resettlement by implementing individual pathway plans.

In addition to delivering this service directly to young people, New Directions also sought to develop awareness of the complex barriers faced by young people who offend and identify areas for attention.

For that reason, we commissioned five research papers to improve the overall understanding of the short and long-term issues affecting the thousands of young people in contact with the youth justice system.

These papers have since been published in a comprehensive research book, which was officially launched at an event in Amelia House in June.

Ruth Walker



Edgar Jardine

FIVE PAPERS

Each of the five papers looked at a particular issue relating to employment pathways for young people in the criminal justice system, with topics including criminal records, ICT skills, motivation, and desistance.

The first paper, Young People, Criminal Records and Employment Barriers (Carr, Dwyer & Larrauri) had resonance with our **Off The Record** campaign to allow old and minor convictions to be removed from criminal records, which we reported on in the last edition of **NIACRO News**. It echoed some of the concerns of the 2011 Youth Justice Review, particularly in relation to the disclosure of youth convictions, the lasting impact of criminal records, and the low age of criminal responsibility in Northern Ireland, which at just 10 is the lowest in Europe.

Noting European models of disclosure and expunging records, the authors recommended workable systems to address the range of barriers to employment experienced by young people who have offended, most particularly the barrier that having a criminal record itself creates. Focus groups with young people involved in the youth justice system uncovered a worrying lack of understanding amongst young people about the impact of youth convictions, with many participants assuming that youth offences were wiped at the age of 18.

Papers 2 and 3, both by Walker & Fitzpatrick in partnership with Springvale Learning, had an emphasis on the role of ICT in employment pathways in youth justice. Paper 2 explored best practice and potential ICT employment pathway models for young people who have offended,

in recognition of the growing number of opportunities in that sector.

It highlighted the need for ICT to be considered as an essential skill, and given the appropriate level of attention by those delivering essential skills, to ensure young people have the skills needed for the modern labour market.



Pat Conway

Related to this, the third paper looked at the practicalities of delivering ICT programmes in the JJC, given the Centre is a secure institution, and how such programmes can have a connection to the community post-release.

This paper outlines how introducing ICT into education provision need not compromise security in the Centre and recommends that supervised internet access will support young people acquiring the skills needed for today's jobs; however, the authors also note that achievements were made by the New Directions

team in delivering an innovative OCN ICT Level 1 programme using tablet devices without internet access. Recognising that, this paper also highlights the important role of the community and voluntary sector, particularly in supporting young people to transition from custody to the community.

Sustaining and developing motivation in young people was the focus of Paper 4 (Walker & Fitzpatrick). A key principle emerging from the findings of this paper is that young people who offend are not a homogenous group, and so their needs, preparedness and aspirations must be considered on an individual basis.

Another key message is the importance of a significant adult in the young person's life – be it a family member, professional or a mentor – to offer care and a sense of continuity.

Closing the collection of research papers, Paper 5 by Edgar Jardine explores how desistance theory – often used to describe how adults eventually stop offending – could be applied to young people. It examines the relationships between education, employment and desistance, as well as individual, family and neighbourhood risk factors. It proposes a theory to illustrate how interventions focused on motivation and opportunities could encourage desistance in young people; however, it notes social and structural challenges to attempts at youth desistance – including the lasting impact of youth criminal records.



Dr. Nicola Carr



Finbarr Fitzpatrick

INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY

Each of the five papers offers an insightful and analytical study into specific areas of youth justice and employment pathways in Northern Ireland. Together, the papers form a robust publication which represents innovation and opportunity to improve outcomes for young people who offend.

In June, the authors of the papers delivered presentations to a packed room of voluntary, community and statutory sector representatives. Following the presentations, there was an interesting discussion about the theory and the practical implementation of the recommendations, demonstrating a broad engagement and a genuine interest to develop understanding and opportunities for employment pathways in youth justice.

The event marked the end of the New Directions programme, following the closure of the service delivery strand at the end of March 2015. Along with The Bytes Project, we look forward to exploring the themes and issues uncovered in both the direct project work and the research findings with stakeholders to help facilitate effective opportunities for young people to engage with employment pathways and desistance.

The research publication can be read on our website www.niacro.co.uk
It is also available in hard copy from our Amelia House office.



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 Act and the Criminal Records Review Mechanism

- The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 received royal assent in July. This Act provides for a single jurisdiction for county courts and magistrates' courts; amends the law on committal for trial; introduces prosecutorial fines; makes provision in relation to victims and witnesses in criminal proceedings and investigations; amends the law on criminal records and live links; provides for violent offences prevention orders; and makes other amendments relating to the administration of civil and criminal justice. NIACRO gave written and oral evidence on several components of this Act in autumn 2014.
- One of the provisions this Act introduces is a Criminal Records Review Mechanism. Our Off The Record campaign at the beginning of the year called for people to have the opportunity to apply for old and minor convictions to be removed from their criminal record. This mechanism will provide for an Independent Reviewer to review a person's standard or enhanced disclosure certificate if convictions or disposals are not removed at the filtering stage. If the offences in question relate to when a person was aged under 18, the disclosure certificate will automatically be referred to the Independent Reviewer; if the offences took place when the person was aged over 18, that person can still apply for a review.
- The DOJ consulted on the proposals for the statutory guidance on the operation of the criminal records filtering review mechanism at the end of summer. You can view NIACRO's response on our website. The mechanism is expected to be in place in early 2016.

Justice (No. 2) Bill

- This Bill was introduced to the Assembly in June. It focuses primarily on fine collection and the Prison Ombudsman. It is designed to: make provision for the enforcement of the payment of fines and other penalties; provide for the appointment and functions of the Prison Ombudsman; and amend the laws relating to lay visitors for police stations, possession of extreme pornographic images, and the early removal from prison of those liable to removal from the UK. We submitted a response to some elements of this Bill in September and provided further oral evidence to the Committee for Justice in November 2015.

Prison Reform

- Four years after the publication of the Prison Review, the formal prison reform programme comes to a close in late 2015. In October, the Northern Ireland Prison Service gave oral evidence to the Justice Committee. During this evidence session, representatives said that 33 of the 40 recommendations are complete, with several others currently under consideration. However, two recommendations which relate to community sentences and a joint health and justice strategy will not be completed within the next few months. While significant progress has been made in some areas, it was apparent from the evidence that issues relating to healthcare in prisons remain a concern.



New Further Education Strategy

- The Department for Employment and Learning recently consulted on a New Further Education Strategy to seek the views of stakeholders on a series of policy commitments that will establish the future direction of further education in Northern Ireland. The Strategy covers a wide range of areas; in our response, we focused primarily on issues relating to social inclusion. In particular, we highlighted how people with convictions can face barriers to accessing further education and how enabling this access can reduce the risk of offending. We also called for guidance on criminal records disclosure requirements for applicants and consistent risk assessment-based policies for course admissions.



NIACRO provides policy responses to public consultations frequently. You can view several of our responses on our website:
www.niacro.co.uk



An Update on **FUNDING ISSUES**

Just as the last edition of NIACRO News went to print in March, we received news that we had been unsuccessful in our bid for European Social Fund resources, after almost three decades of receiving that award to deliver employment-led resettlement services. The months that followed have been further challenging for NIACRO, as we adapt to a context of significantly fewer resources in light of reduced funding from the Justice family. Here, **NIACRO Chief Executive Olwen Lyner** explains what is happening to third sector funding, how it has impacted our organisation, the wider implications for the sector, and her thoughts for the future.

After 28 years of receiving European Social Fund (ESF) money, I received a letter on the afternoon of 26th March 2015 stating that NIACRO's latest bid had been unsuccessful.

We knew this was a risk – as funding competitions always are – but the reality of having to close down or scale back many of our long-running services just three working days before the end of the financial year was a devastating blow to me personally, our staff and our service users.

ESF was the backbone of several of our projects, most notably the employment pathway service Jobtrack. Without this funding, our ability to deliver services that provide employability support and advice to young people and adults who offend, our specialist support for women, and our work to promote fair recruitment amongst employers has been significantly reduced – despite so much evidence demonstrating how these services have positively contributed to a reduction in reoffending in Northern Ireland, whilst delivering an impressive social return on investment of £13.60 for every £1 spent.

“Reduce to zero”

The loss of ESF is, however, exacerbated by the fact that financial support from all sides is steadily reducing. NIACRO has been experiencing increasing levels of cuts from statutory funders for the past few years, and we are now at a stage where a lack of resources is preventing us from delivering much needed services to reduce crime and its impact. After ESF, our most significant cut stems from a reduction in core funding from the Department of Justice (DOJ), which plans to

reduce its monetary support to the organisation to zero through annual 25% cuts beginning this year, resulting in a total withdrawal of funding in the fourth year. This core funding is instrumental to the actual running of the organisation, including supporting volunteers, undertaking advocacy and policy work which gives voice to our service users, and developing new services and innovation.

The cuts we have experienced so far this year represent a 33% reduction in income compared to 2014/15 and have resulted in a loss of more than a third of our team. On a personal level, that has been difficult for everyone across the organisation.

However, ours is not the only organisation in the voluntary and community sector to be impacted by this adverse funding climate. Like NIACRO, many organisations in this sector receive what is termed ‘discretionary’ spending from various Executive departments and agencies. In the current climate where departments are under pressure to reduce expenditure, it appears this ‘discretion’ can be stopped most easily – resulting in a disproportionate cut to the voluntary sector.



Olwen Lyner

“There is more need than ever for strategic partnership”

We in the voluntary sector therefore need to ensure that our worth and contribution is appreciated by those in the statutory and private sectors. The services and tangible results we deliver are not ‘discretionary’, nor are they ‘optional’. The short-sighted and impulsive decision making we are witnessing as statutory partners are pressured to reduce spending is ultimately failing to identify smarter and more cost-effective ways of working for the future. Evidence shows that Jobtrack alone delivered an impressive return on investment and was successful in reducing the rate of reoffending by up to 24%.

Given the pressures on the public purse, it does not make sense to cut cost-effective services just because it is easier to cut the funding stream to them; instead, departments must examine their expenditure and identify what fits with strategic priorities and long term plans, as we have done in designing and developing our services in line with DOJ business plans and Programme for Government commitments over the past number of years.

In this economic climate, there is more need than ever for strategic partnership between sectors and departments. While the Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending (2013) was designed to co-ordinate a range of Executive policies to support a reduction in offending, this duty for departments to work towards this common goal has been compromised by the cuts imposed on NIACRO and others focused on this area of work. Though this may initially look like a short-term gain for funding bodies, it does not represent a strategic or considered use of public resources.

So, what next for NIACRO? Regarding ESF, we are involved in a process looking at the decisions that were made. We continue to develop our existing services to maintain other funding agreements. We also continue to seek out other opportunities to attract new resources and are pleased to continue our partnership working with organisations including the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Public Health Agency to deliver new services.

However, there is a fundamental issue here that is bigger than NIACRO which concerns how the third sector is funded and valued. The voluntary and community sector has a vital role in our society and delivers critical cost-effective services that improve lives and communities. However, constant cuts undermine our worth and our ability to deliver services that government cannot.

To ensure a safe and economically stable future, the third sector must be recognised as an equal partner in service delivery, and sustainable investment must be maintained.

NISRA STUDY SHOWS JOBTRACK SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED REOFFENDING

Jobtrack

WE WERE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE EARLIER THIS YEAR THAT GOVERNMENT RESEARCH SHOWED THAT OUR PROJECT JOBTRACK REDUCED REOFFENDING BY UP TO 24%.

Jobtrack ran for more than two decades and worked to increase the employability of people who had offended and had been in contact with the Prison Service and the Probation Board. It aimed to reduce the risk of reoffending, based on evidence that links unemployment to offending behaviour. Its funding was not renewed in March, as discussed on page 8.

We worked with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to support the pilot study of its new Northern Ireland Data Lab, which conducted a reoffending analysis for a sample of people who completed Jobtrack during 2010/2011. The results of the study were published in May.

The study showed that, when compared to people who were not engaged with the NIACRO project, Jobtrack reduced the one year reoffending rate of an individual by between <1 and 24%.

The one year reoffending rate for those who completed the project was 20%, compared to 32% of those in the matched sample, representing a statistically significant difference.

Indications also show that even partially completing the project reduced the one year reoffending rate by between 2 and 18%.

This is the first time this kind of analysis has been carried out in Northern Ireland. Adapted from the methods used by the Ministry of Justice Data Lab in England and Wales, the Northern Ireland Data Lab is a pilot which seeks to evaluate the impact of services delivered by organisations on reoffending rates. The introduction of this measurement provides an exciting opportunity to identify both effective interventions and efficient partnerships.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

NIACRO Chief Executive, Olwen Lyner, welcomed the findings: "This pilot study shows just how effective partnership working can be. The various projects NIACRO delivers all have the aim of reducing crime and its impact on people and communities. As a voluntary organisation, we are ideally placed to deliver this intervention service to people returning to the community during the critical first year of resettlement after prison.

"These statistics prove what we knew: NIACRO works."

We believe that in the current context of reduced spending, it is more important than ever that the voluntary, statutory and private sectors work together to reduce crime and increase public safety. Though this particular programme has not received funding for the future, we will continue to explore opportunities to work with statutory agencies to deliver effective services that represent smart expenditure.

Crime places a huge cost on the public purse in terms of policing and justice. It therefore pays for sectors to co-operate to deliver preventative support to reduce offending.

This research highlights how well that can be done.

The statistical bulletin and information about the Northern Ireland Data Lab is available on the DOJ website:

<https://www.dojni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-data-lab-bulletin-12015>



NIACRO Transport Service

DID YOU KNOW...

NIACRO provides affordable and accessible transport to all three prisons in Northern Ireland to support family contact during a period of imprisonment.

If you know someone with a friend or relative in prison, please let them know that they can use the NIACRO Transport Service to get to visits.

From 5th October 2015 until further notice, the following bus journeys will be offered by the NIACRO Transport Service:

DAY	ROUTE
Wednesday	Belfast – Magilligan
Thursday	Belfast – Magilligan
Friday	Belfast – Magilligan Derry – Maghaberry
Saturday	Derry – Hydebank Wood – Maghaberry

The bus leaves in the morning and makes a return journey at lunchtime. There are a number of pick-up points along the way.

For more information, to find a pick-up point near you or to book your place on the bus, please call the NIACRO Transport Service on **Freephone 0800 169 2207** on Monday or Thursday between 10am – 1pm.

We ask that passengers make a contribution of £7 for adults and £3.50 for children aged over 5.

www.niacro.co.uk

028 9032 0157

Working to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities

CELEBRATING Jobtrack



Olwen with employers who received awards

Bringing decades of service delivery to a close, the last Jobtrack Celebration of Achievement event in March symbolised the end of an era and an opportunity to recognise the outstanding efforts of all our participants.

Service users from Jobtrack, as well as young people involved with Choose2Change and New Directions, gathered in the packed Central Hall at Belfast Met's Titanic Campus, along with other stakeholders, partners and employers who have supported the three projects.

The event was hosted by NIACRO Chief Executive Olwen Lyner and featured a range of speakers, including Damian Duffy from Belfast Met who welcomed us to the venue, and local actor and **'Off The Record'** campaign supporter Dan Gordon.

Four of our service users shared their experiences and the benefits of their engagement with NIACRO. One of our peer mentors, Martin, spoke about his experience of working with NIACRO and his decision to support others after prison; you can read his speech on page 17.

Another contributor was local restaurateur Andy Rae from the Mourne Seafood Group, who spoke about his positive experience of working with us to offer work experience and employment placements. A short film on this topic was also premiered at the event, with a range of local employers who have engaged with NIACRO explaining how their adoption of fair recruitment practices had benefited their businesses.

Terry Doherty from the Probation Board for Northern Ireland presented certificates to more than 70 service users for their achievements in a wide range of training and education. Twelve service users were also recognised for the peer support they have offered in areas across the organisation.

In addition, Brian McCaughey from the Northern Ireland Prison Service presented certificates to 25 organisations from across the public and private sectors in recognition of their support for the programme and commitment to fair recruitment.

The event received excellent feedback from the audience and participants and was a great way to end such an effective programme of work. A big thank you goes to everyone involved in making the event a success.



Damian Duffy



The packed room at Belfast Met



Dan Gordon

In August, the Child and Parent Support (Caps) Belfast team completed a fun-filled summer programme for young people and their families with a special awards event. Certificates were presented to both children and their parents for completing their Caps work, recognising the fantastic efforts made in education, family and group work, as well as participation in the summer programme.

RECOGNISING ACHIEVEMENTS IN CAPS



The Caps Team with Alastair Seeley

Presenting the awards was none other than Alastair Seeley, the Carrickfergus-born motorcycle road racer who has won the North West 200 race a record 15 times. All the young people and their parents (as well as the Caps team!) were delighted to meet Alastair and everyone enjoyed the event.

Well done to all those who received their well-deserved awards!



NIACRO WINS GOLD FOR CRIMINAL RECORDS CAMPAIGN

NIACRO was recently recognised for its high standard of public affairs campaigning, winning a top award at the Northern Ireland-wide public relations awards.

We received the Gold award in the Best Public Affairs Campaign category for our campaign on youth criminal records, 'Off The Record', at the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) PRide Awards, held at the Culloden Estate and Spa in October. The successful campaign aimed to gain political and public support for people to have the opportunity to apply to have old and minor offences from childhood removed from their criminal records. As well as attracting substantial media coverage and positive feedback from the public, it significantly influenced the introduction of a criminal records review mechanism, due to take effect next year (see page 6).

The CIPR PRide Awards are the most credible UK-wide awards in the public relations industry. They recognise and celebrate outstanding campaigns, PR professionals and teams across nine UK nations and regions. NIACRO was also recognised at the 2014 awards, when we were named as a finalist in the Best External Publication category for NIACRO News.

Olwen Lyner, Chief Executive of NIACRO, said:

"We're delighted to win this award for the Best Public Affairs Campaign in Northern Ireland. A lot of hard work went into formulating a robust policy proposal that we know will benefit so many people and support them to move on from old and minor convictions received in childhood. Having a criminal record, even if it relates to childhood offending, can be a real barrier to accessing education, employment and training throughout life and can actually increase the risk of reoffending; this campaign sent the message that a criminal record shouldn't be a life sentence."

A huge thank you goes to everyone who supported the campaign, including Bob Ashford, Simon Weston OBE and Dan Gordon who gave their time and voices to help us promote the messages. Thanks also to the Henderson Group, which provided sponsorship to enable a group of staff from NIACRO to attend the awards ceremony.

If you haven't seen it yet, check out the campaign film at www.youtube.com/NIACROvideos.



Our series of seminars exploring key issues in justice continued with a guest talk from Karyn McCluskey in May this year.

Karyn is the Director of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in Scotland and has worked in the police for the last 20 years in Sussex, Lancashire, West Mercia, Strathclyde and now Police Scotland.

NIACRO invited Karyn to be the guest speaker at our latest Justice Series seminar to share her experience and thoughts on innovative ways to address offending behaviour. In 2004, the VRU proposed a different way of addressing violence in Scotland; the Unit developed injury surveillance, introduced a gang intervention based on Boston Ceasefire, and was instrumental in achieving changes in law and custody. Karyn also helped set up the Medics Against Violence charity in Scotland.

Speaking to a packed room of stakeholders including politicians, statutory partners and colleagues across the voluntary and community sector, Karyn discussed topics including resilience, changing social

norms, leadership, and of course violence, which she referred to as a public health issue and a "contagious disease":

"Violence makes you ill. We need to treat it like a health epidemic. It's killing us."

In particular, she spoke of the importance of early intervention and a holistic approach to violence, noting the need for government to work together to address issues across parenting, early years, health and education.

In relation to parenting, she stressed the impact that domestic violence can have on a child's development and called for greater investment in early years and parenting, as well as the need to eradicate domestic violence and develop strong male role models to help reduce violent behaviours developing:

"If you bring a child up in a warzone, you create a warrior"

Karyn's talk attracted the biggest audience for a Justice Series seminar so far and resulted in a lively and engaged discussion following her presentation.

Interesting questions were posed by several audience members, including representatives from the Probation Board, Start360 and the Committee for Justice. The Committee Chair Alastair Ross MLA asked Karyn what she believes is the most effective method of diverting young people from offending behaviour; as well as reiterating the importance of role models, examples of effective parenting and alternative pathways, Karyn noted mentoring as a particularly good way of preventing offending or violent behaviour developing.

Thanks go to Karyn for speaking at the seminar and provoking such a thoughtful and innovative discussion. We also appreciate the support and participation of the audience, with a special note of thanks to Alban Maginness MLA who kindly sponsored the event and paid tribute to the work of NIACRO in his opening address.

NIACRO Launches Plan for Next Three Years

After much planning and discussion, we were delighted to launch the NIACRO Corporate Plan for 2015-18 at an event for our members in August. The Plan outlines what we intend to achieve in the next three years, with a focus on delivering effective services to children and young people, families and adults to reduce the risk of offending, as well as influencing others in relation to practice and policy.

Corporate PLAN 2015-2018

The Plan for the incoming period reflects the particularly volatile funding environment our sector is experiencing, but it also recognises a heightened need to continue and develop a range of services to support individuals and families most at risk of offending or becoming victims.

The Corporate Plan lists our strategic aims for service delivery. These aims are based on the following priorities:

- Providing early intervention to prevent offending behaviour;
- Supporting access to stable accommodation to reduce the risk of reoffending;
- Developing financial management skills to ensure stability for individuals and families;
- Supporting access to the labour market to reduce crime; and
- Supporting families to maintain positive relationships with imprisoned relatives to ameliorate the impact of offending on families, and to promote effective resettlement after release from custody.

Presenting the plan to members, Chief Executive Olwen Lyner said: "This is without doubt one of the most turbulent times the voluntary and community sector has ever experienced. However, despite the financial pressures that we have felt recently, NIACRO will continue to advocate on behalf of those affected by the criminal justice system.

"In the last few months, we have worked hard, alongside our partners, to establish new services to ensure there is some continuation of the effective support we have been providing for many years. We have seen areas of our service provision grow, particularly in relation to early intervention with young people and intensive support for those leaving prison.

"As the grip of austerity tightens, there is a real risk that the marginalisation of those already affected by the criminal



justice system, or who are likely to offend, will intensify. Our role as advocates and policy influencers has therefore never been more important.

"We have demonstrated the quantifiable contribution we make to reducing crime and we will continue to do so.

"We look forward to the challenges the next three years may bring and believe this Corporate Plan will help us achieve our goals."

A Day in The life of... William

William is a Mentor with the Reset Programme, an intensive support service for people transitioning from custody to the community whilst supervised on licence by the Probation Board for NI (PBNI). Reset supports people to address a range of issues, including accommodation, employment/training, money management, family issues, addictions and other factors affecting effective resettlement. It is delivered through a new partnership between PBNI and NIACRO and is funded by The Northern Ireland Executive Change Fund.

MONDAY 9.00am Check diary for today's schedule. Have a number of appointments starting in Portadown. My first appointment is a tripartite with John and his Probation Officer at the hostel in Portadown. I first met John in Maghaberry a month ago when he was referred to the Reset programme by his prison based Probation Officer. I discussed the support that the programme could offer and he agreed to engage. At that time I referred John for benefits advice and an appointment had subsequently been made with the local Jobs and Benefits office later that day. I had collected John from Maghaberry on Saturday and transported him to the hostel. On the day I found that although happy to be out of prison, he was quite anxious about what lay ahead, especially how he might get access to the medication that he was taking for anxiety as he was only discharged with a week's supply.

9.30am John's tripartite: met the Probation Officer and John together and discussed what we were planning to do. John's Probation Officer made sure that he was aware of his licence conditions and the curfew times with the hostel. I advised that we had an appointment with the Jobs and Benefits Office (JBO) at 10.30 to claim for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and after that we would be going to register with a GP. Agreement was made to keep the Probation Officer informed of our progress.

10.30am I accompanied John to the JBO to make a claim for JSA. As John did not have photographic ID or an account, this prevented his claim from being processed immediately. This perceived knock back made John quite anxious and we made arrangements to get his ID and took steps to re-opening an old Post Office account that he had prior to being in prison.

11.30pm I took John to a local GP to get registered and to get a prescription for his medication. After doing this, I found that John was a lot less anxious and after taking him back to the hostel we parted company, though I agreed to check back in with him later that day.

1.00pm My next appointment is with Joe in Armagh. Joe was released from Magilligan six weeks ago and has been resettling well with the support of Reset, albeit in a new area to him where he is feeling quite socially isolated. He is having issues around seeing his children, one of whom he hasn't seen in a number of years. Having just met up with Barnardo's the week before, I call my contact there and we have now organised for my client to meet both Barnardo's and his Probation Officer, and we will begin a process which will help him with meeting this particular child and overcome the time gap and rebuild relationships. Having updated Joe, I grab a bit of lunch and move on to my next appointment in Dungannon.

2.30pm Meet with Michael at a coffee shop in Dungannon. Michael was released from Hydebank 4 weeks ago and had been living with his mum until last week, when he moved into his own private rented accommodation. I had helped Michael move in and source some furniture and essential items. Michael's next goal is to try and find employment. We agree a number of short term actions including preparing a CV and a statement of disclosure, and we will discuss training/education opportunities when we meet next.



4.00pm I have now made my way back to the office in Portadown and have a meeting with George, who wants some support with completing a job application. George has been out of prison almost 3 months now and his support from Reset is nearing an end. In this space of time George has had a few ups and downs and at one stage came close to being recalled to prison. Currently he is doing well and his Probation Officer recently commented that she thought that he would not have coped without my support as his Reset Mentor and may well have ended up back in prison. George has also been very grateful for the support and hopes to find suitable employment soon to help with his positive progress.

4.30pm I take some time to email Probation Officers to update them on their client's progress. I make a call to John in the hostel and he informs me that he has developed a toothache and would be keen to see a dentist. I take a look at my diary for tomorrow and agree to meet him first thing.



Martin's Story

Back in March, several of our current and former service users spoke about their experience of working with NIACRO at the Jobtrack Celebration of Success (see page 12). Martin, who has provided peer mentoring in NIACRO for the past couple of years, spoke about his reflections on engaging with Jobtrack and supporting others in the criminal justice system. He has kindly agreed for us to publish his speech from that day below:

"My name is Martin and I have worked as a peer-educator in NIACRO for the last two years. I have been through the system like so many others here and I know the effect it can have on you. I came here as a "rabbit in the headlights", afraid of my own shadow and slowly after being treated like a valuable member of the human race by the NIACRO staff, I came to want to give something back to the people who helped me. I am well-educated but arrived where I am now because of a bad life choice.

I realised while going through the system that many of those around me were, educationally and personally, consigned to the dustbin of our society. NIACRO is trying to turn lives around just like they helped turn mine around. I figured that I should be helping in my own simple way by using the skills I have.

Education helps individuals improve themselves... and it also gives those family/support networks a tangible proof that the person is making an effort to build a better life. Being a peer-educator lets me build trust with the person and this builds their own sense of self-worth. Doing this work in NIACRO is essential for confidence building and restoring damaged self-esteem in lives where it was low, for both the peer-educator and the person learning.

Peer-mentoring is something I came to as a bit of an unknown. I already had the knowledge to share but doing it on a one-to-one basis was new to me. Everyone who comes in is different and you have to adapt your approach every time to get the best of them. This helped me to open up and let go of any anxieties I was carrying by replacing them with a smile and a large slice of empathy. It takes courage to admit you need help. I admire each and every one of the people I work with because of this. It makes my day seeing them smile at the end of a session even if sometimes it can be challenging. I know then that it's working.

Helping people realise that they can get very useful qualifications when they always felt it was beyond them is absolutely brilliant.

Today is a celebration. I would like to thank everyone here today for coming and sharing their achievements. You should be very proud of yourselves."

In each edition of NIACRO News, we feature a guest column on a key issue related to our work. In this edition, Chair of the Justice Committee Alastair Ross shares his views on innovation in the justice system.



Alastair Ross MLA

“we are small enough and flexible enough to explore innovative solutions to traditional problems”

“Too often in justice debates are framed around who is seen to be soft on crime or tough on crime, rather than on what works and what doesn’t work.

I have been keen to change that and tried to promote the concept of a smarter justice system; one that is evidence based and outcome driven. A system that reduces the cost to the taxpayer and improves the experience of the citizen. A system that seeks to not only punish wrongdoing but fundamentally one that also recognises the importance of rehabilitating and reforming offenders so that they don’t offend again.

Over the past year I have held monthly ‘Justice Innovation Seminars’ aimed at bringing together politicians, the legal community, judiciary and voluntary sector to discuss new approaches in justice and innovative ways in which we can make the community in Northern Ireland safer.

We have hosted seminars on youth justice, alternative dispute resolution, online dispute resolution, social media and cybercrime and most recently examined how reforming our courts can lead to quicker, fairer and better outcomes for those who come in contact with them.

This concept of problem solving courts is of particular interest.

It is almost universally recognised that some of the most challenging cases in the criminal justice system are where legal and social issues merge. Problem solving justice models see contact with the criminal justice system as an opportunity to combine punishment and help, in order to reduce crime and strengthen the legitimacy of justice institutions.

Whilst there are ‘Mental Health Courts’ and ‘Domestic Violence Courts’, ‘Drugs Courts’ are perhaps the most well-known, and work on the basis that a drug addict who is committing crime in order to feed their addiction will not be reformed by simply serving a short prison sentence. The reality is that they will more than likely find substances to abuse within the prison and return immediately to a life of crime when released as the underlining problem has not been addressed.

Therefore drugs courts would bring together specialised judges, treatment workers and probation officers to ensure that there is a coordinated approach in not only punishing the offender, but also ensuring that ending their drug addiction, and ongoing monitoring, is also part of the sentencing.

In Northern Ireland we are small enough and flexible enough to explore innovative solutions to traditional problems. Where we see successful approaches elsewhere in the world we shouldn’t be afraid to adapt and replicate for the criminal justice system here.”

- Alastair Ross MLA is the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Assembly Justice Committee.

VISITORS FROM LITHUANIA



NIACRO hosted a group of visitors from Lithuania earlier this year who were keen to learn more about our experience of delivering employment-led pathway services.

The group travelled from 'Mano Guru', a salad bar in Vilnius which is a Social Enterprise supporting people with addictions by training them for employment in the catering industry. The visit had been requested by a member of the team who had learned about our employment focused work at an Active Inclusion conference in Germany, and they were keen to find out more about our organisation.

During their visit, the group had opportunities to meet with NIACRO staff and learn about the work of the organisation. There were also visits to Hydebank Wood College, Burren House and Antrim Road Probation office, where the group gained an insight of the work of the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland.

The group had a great time in Belfast and are interested in future engagement with us, so we may meet again!

NIACRO REGISTERS WITH NI CHARITY COMMISSION

In October 2015, NIACRO received official confirmation from the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland that we are now officially a registered charity in Northern Ireland. The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is the independent regulator of charities in Northern Ireland, responsible for ensuring Northern Ireland has a well governed charities sector in which the public can have confidence. The

Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 states that the Commission must keep a publicly accessible register of all charities in Northern Ireland. The Commission commenced charity registration in Northern Ireland for the first time in December 2013. As there are an estimated 7,000 – 12,000 charities in Northern Ireland, this process is expected to take some time.

NIACRO was called forward to begin the registration process in 2014. This provided us with an opportunity to review and revise our objectives, which were

originally drafted in the 1970s and 80s. Following a vote by our members on the revised wording of our governing document in August, we lodged our submission with the Charity Commission and are now listed on the official register of charities.

You can view the full register, including NIACRO's entry, on the Charity Commission website: www.charitycommissionni.org.uk.

Transport to Prisons

For many years, NIACRO has provided a transport service to all three prisons in Northern Ireland for relatives wishing to visit their loved ones in prison. This service attracted some media attention earlier this year, as there were concerns about its future. Following discussions with the Northern Ireland Prison Service and a review of how the service is used, we can confirm that the service will continue, albeit with some changes to the schedule. From October 2015, a bus will be offered between Belfast and Magilligan on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, and there will be bus from Derry to Maghaberry on Fridays and Saturdays. The Saturday bus will also stop at Hydebank Wood Prison. We know that it is vitally important for people in prison to maintain good links with their families: evidence shows that not only is this good for the person's mental health while they are in prison, it also makes resettlement more effective and significantly reduces the risk of reoffending after release. There are also a number of benefits for the families and children to maintain that relationship during imprisonment.

If you or someone you know has a loved one in prison, please contact NIACRO to find out more about the Transport Service. You can also access practical and emotional support to cope with the imprisonment of a family member by contacting our Family Links project. Call 028 9032 0157 for more information.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT FILMS

"Denying people employment on the basis of their conviction is denying your business the opportunity to choose from a huge pool of talent out there." – Precision Group

NIACRO has a long history of working with local employers to encourage fair recruitment of people with convictions. We were pleased to capture some of this best practice work recently in a series of short films we made to promote safe and equal recruitment, and highlight the business benefits of recruiting from a wider pool of applicants.

More than 30,000 people are convicted through the courts in Northern Ireland each year, with thousands more given out-of-court disposals. This series of five short films – plus one summary film



– highlights five local employers who have engaged with NIACRO to implement fair recruitment processes, thereby supporting resettlement and reducing the risk of reoffending.

Representatives from Carillion, Oxfam, Belfast City Council, Four Star Pizza and Precision Group shared their experience of working with both NIACRO and people with convictions, and also highlights how a fair recruitment process is good for both society and for business.

Please visit our YouTube channel www.youtube.com/NiacroVideos to view the films.

The logo consists of a red circle with the word "niacro" in white lowercase letters, centered within a white rounded rectangular shape.

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:

pact@niacro.co.uk

028 9032 0157

Find out more about NIACRO:



028 9032 0157



www.niacro.co.uk



[@niacro_](https://twitter.com/niacro_)



[facebook.com/
NiacroNews](https://facebook.com/NiacroNews)



[youtube.com/
NiacroVideos](https://youtube.com/NiacroVideos)