

SPRING 2011

EXECUTIVE BUDGET:

all together now

There was a fair bit of commentary on the former Executive's much delayed Draft Budget for 2011 to 2015, published in January. Now the new ministers have started work on delivering the public services which will affect all our lives.

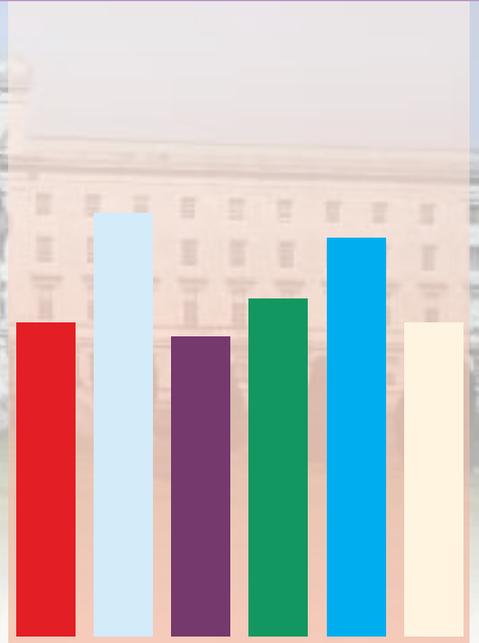
NIACRO's response to the draft budget made the point that effective financial planning needs to take a broad view. We are constantly trying to get the message across that one Department's actions affect, for good or ill, many others. In our response to the draft budget, we were concerned that the level of detail available at that stage – it hasn't been made much clearer since then - makes it very difficult to understand what is actually going to happen in terms of different programmes.

In response to previous Programmes for Government and budgets, NIACRO has been concerned that the local administration takes account of all the services that affect people who are in, or who have been processed through, the criminal justice system. We are particularly concerned that cuts to the criminal justice budget may reinforce the huge imbalance between what it spends on security and what funding goes to more constructive and effective resettlement programmes. However, the

Department of Justice alone cannot reduce crime: other Departments have a huge part to play.

THE IMPACT OF HARD TIMES

This is a desperately difficult time for public services, with effective and well-established programmes threatened with closure. It is so short-sighted. Bluntly, if you cut public services too deeply, you will see an increase in crime. People without proper accommodation or an adequate income, with few or no educational or training opportunities, and unable to keep



also in this issue:

executive budget
joining it up

justice anniversary
first year reviewed

criminal records
still not resolved

apac
mental health project

their families together, are not always going to be able to stay out of the criminal justice system, either as victims or offenders.

Offenders and people with a criminal record are citizens first. They need to have access to all the appropriate services both in the community and in custody if Northern Ireland is to prosper. An effective criminal justice system is one which can reduce its costs over time. Departments need to build into their spending plans joint working with colleagues in other Departments, and activities that will lead to a reduction in crime. This will not only improve the quality of citizens' lives but will also help to attract the inward investment that the Executive is so keen to realise.

WHAT WORKS?

Examples of programmes that will contribute to this outcome include:

- Creating safer communities through neighbourhood renewal and a strong community and voluntary sector.
- Dealing with the threat/reality of homelessness, which requires access to social housing throughout Northern Ireland.
- Poverty and social exclusion being addressed by quicker access to benefits and direct links to education, training and job opportunities.
- Families in distress, particularly where a parent is offending or has been imprisoned, being supported to ensure that patterns of offending don't pass down the generations and that the children of prisoners/offenders have better

life chances. This will reduce the subsequent need for state intervention.

- Public health and wellbeing realised through mental health support services that reduce dependency on institutional care.

THE COST OF CRIME

In 2010 the Department of Justice published "The Cost of Crime in Northern Ireland" with an annex which outlined the role of other Departments. While the responses from Departments varied, and some didn't respond at all, it is clear that there is a greater cost of crime to Departments than they are currently identifying. To put it another way, they have many opportunities to help reduce crime which they don't always recognise. To give a few examples of services which *are* currently supported by Departments, the article on APAC Mental Health elsewhere in NIACRO News shows how great a difficulty mental health problems present to the prison service and other parts of the criminal justice system. Our Caps programme shows that intensive support for young children can steer them away from offending; Jobtrack demonstrates the value of targeted education and training.

We in NIACRO can see these opportunities very clearly from our own experience. We'll continue to use this experience to demonstrate that using public services effectively to help offenders and potential offenders stay out of the criminal justice system is a sensible and practical use of even limited resources.

JUSTICE

It's just over a year since criminal justice was devolved to the NI Executive, and a new Department of Justice was set up with its own Minister. In the last issue of NIACRO News we listed some of the developments so far – the introduction of a Justice Bill, the setting up of the prisons and youth justice reviews, meetings of the Justice Committee. There has also been the new experience of questions to the Justice Minister, which have been encouragingly wide-ranging. In one week in March, there were written questions on:

- the cost of the new prison at Magilligan,
- the costs of keeping someone in prison,
- the rate of suicide and attempted suicide in prison,
- how much is spent on televisions and game consoles in prisons,
- convictions for knife crime,
- the number of foreign national prisoners,
- visiting rights for remand prisoners compared to those of sentenced prisoners,
- the gender and community background of Probation Board staff.

The following week, oral questions covered parades, a report from the Police Ombudsman, drugs in prison, long-term policing objectives, and the DoJ budget.

ANNIVERSARY

There was also a question of particular interest to NIACRO, when Martina Anderson MLA asked the Minister of Justice “what steps he intends to take to ensure that the objectives of community safety partnerships will be taken into consideration if the amalgamation of district policing partnerships and community safety partnerships become the new policing and community safety partnerships.” (AQO 1240/11) NIACRO has been open about our worries on this score (NIACRO News 26).

MLAs raised several issues in the debate - the need to bring the objectives of the CSPs fully into the new bodies on the one hand, and to “localise” policing accountability on the other; to ensure value for money, and not to burden the PSNI with so many meetings that it interferes with officers’ time to “be out fighting crime”. It is in the nature of Oral Questions that Ministers are as reassuring as possible to all comers and so it was in this case. We await the establishment of the PCSPs with interest, still with some concern, and ready to do what we can to keep the community aspect active and effective.

JUSTICE BILL GOES THROUGH

The Justice Bill, greeted as historic when introduced to the Assembly in October 2010, again made history as the final piece of executive legislation presented to

the Assembly during its last plenary session on 22 March. David Ford, describing it as “a key goal” for the new Department, noted another element which made it special – the complexity which led to ten groups of amendments needing to be discussed at various stages. The Minister, the Chairperson of the Justice Committee and its Deputy Chairperson all commented warmly on the constructive way in which the Committee and the Department had worked together and on the generally mature approach taken by the Assembly to the process.

Reviews update

YOUTH JUSTICE

The Youth Justice Review team is due to report in June. Following a meeting with NIACRO, the Team commissioned Kit Chivers (formerly Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice) to investigate the impact of the rehabilitation of offenders legislation on young people. We met with Kit to set out our concerns in greater detail.

Young people are, by definition, more likely to receive an “informed warning”, a caution, or be referred to the youth conferencing service if they offend. This is the rational response – their offence is likely to be a lesser one, and to some extent at least it is understood that it’s important to keep young people out of the system if possible. They are far more likely to re-offend once sucked in.

Warnings, cautions or youth conference orders aren’t convictions, but they will appear on an AccessNI Enhanced Disclosure check. Many employers and training organisations such as FE colleges are not considering the level or seriousness of the offending behaviour or its outcome. They are withdrawing offers straightaway, sometimes without any exploration of the circumstances at all.

Most unpleasantly of all, some are hiding their true motivation. In one case, a 17-year-old:

- disclosed his offending behaviour when he applied, and was told he met the entry criteria for a course.
- He was called for an interview in which the main topic was his offence, following which he was told he did not meet the criteria.
- The college then told NIACRO that the course was oversubscribed,
- but friends of the young man informed our Youth Employability staff that they had been able to join it at a later date.

PRISONS REVIEW

The Justice Minister published the interim report of the prison review team led by Dame Anne Owers at the end of February. The Prison Service, CJINI, and Prisoner Ombudsman all put out news releases in response, so it was disappointing that the political parties weren’t interested enough to make any comment. NIACRO awaits the final report with interest, and we’ll comment on it then.

NEGATIVE YOUTH JUSTICE

We held the last of our Justice Series seminars in the outgoing Assembly in partnership with the All-Party Group on Children and Young People. Professor Barry Goldson of Liverpool University shared his wide experience in youth criminology and youth justice with MLAs, policy staff from the parties, and NGO and public service stakeholders.

Barry examined the widely-expressed notion that human rights standards may work against dealing properly with youth offending – that taking these standards as a starting point is somehow “woolly-headed” and underplays the importance of offenders taking responsibility for their offences.

His principal proposition is that “there is no intrinsic tension” between:

- genuine evidence-based policy;
- best practice; and
- international human rights obligations.

If we set human rights standards against what robust research tells us is best practice in youth justice, we find that they are “strikingly congruent”. They only become incongruent, ie in opposition or in tension, if the evidence is compromised or ignored.

However, policy is not necessarily driven by evidence, or by evidence alone. Other factors include cultural pressures, habits of thought and practice, the impact of pressure groups, electoral pressures, political pragmatism and high-profile events such as the James Bulger case.

INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE

Barry warned that some of these findings are counter-intuitive, but that is the value of drawing on actual evidence of the impact of various approaches.

- Youth offending is relatively normal – we can draw on 60 years’ worth of research to show this.
- The amount and seriousness of youth crime is relatively stable. There is no great recent surge of youth crime.
- There is “a diverse and formidable body of evidence” to show that the key approaches to youth offending should be diversion and the minimum necessary intervention. “Over-zealous methods of criminalising make it worse.”
- Universal services such as education, approaches not limited to the youth justice system and “decriminalising” responses are the most effective and least damaging forms of intervention.
- Countries with a higher age of criminal responsibility do not have higher levels of youth crime. In Northern Ireland it is 10, compared to a Council of Europe average of fourteen.
- Research consistently shows that custodial sanctions are the least effective and most damaging forms of intervention. They bring enormous human and financial costs, and result in a 70% re-offending rate.



THE CORE INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

- United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the “Beijing Rules”) (1985).
- UN Guidelines on the prevention of Delinquency (the “Riyadh Guidelines”) (1990).
- UN rules for the protection of Juveniles deprived of their Liberty (the JDL Rules” or the “Havana Rules”) (1990).
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989/1990) – effectively a consolidating of the three instruments above.
- European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1953).

HOW TO COMPLY WITH INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND DELIVER BEST PRACTICE

- Diversion – noting that this means diversion from the criminal justice system rather than, as it is often interpreted, diversion from crime.
- Social policy and universal services – the whole spectrum of services needs to be engaged.
- Minimum necessary intervention – even “early intervention”, however well-intentioned, may be harmful, if it sweeps the

young person into the criminal justice system. It is effective if it means that all service providers – education, health, housing – are alert to recognise that some of their young service users may be facing particular difficulties.

- Child-appropriate justice that responds to the needs of the child and is not punitive, shaming or harming.
- Supervision in the community – it is virtually impossible to find any evidence of incarceration bringing about a positive outcome.
- Secure children’s homes – if detention is absolutely necessary, then these should be used rather than penal institutions.

QUESTION TIME

Barry was asked to develop what he had said about the potential dangers of diversion and early intervention. He said that this approach appeals to a “benign discourse of social welfare”, where professionals such as teachers and youth workers see children and young people in difficulties and want to help. However, it also appeals to the hard-line “toughness discourse”, which can tolerate no level of offending, and has no anxieties about involving the criminal justice system at an early stage. The evidence is that this compounds the difficulties, often very quickly and with lasting negative impact. Effective and legitimate early intervention therefore needs to be based in an awareness of children being in need.

One questioner pointed out that some existing services, albeit within the criminal justice system, were designed to “bounce” young people out of the system as quickly as possible. Barry repeated that once inside the system, young people are more likely to stay in it. They should instead be managed through the education and welfare systems, even before a process like youth conferencing. Challenged that he was describing “an ideal world”, Barry was firm that he was instead describing “a rational, possible, world”.

Finally, Barry stressed that he understands the pressures on policy-makers and politicians, but that they have a responsibility to lead, not just to react.

Independent Visitors

The Independent Visitor (IV) programme is celebrating its tenth year. It offers an independent befriending service to young people who are "looked after" by the Health and Social Care Trusts and have little or no contact with a parent or parental figure.

An independent visitor is a trained volunteer who meets regularly with the child or young person. Their role is to act as a positive influence in the young person’s life, building a trusting and supportive relationship.

Our service users are a vulnerable group of young people, who are often in unstable lifestyles. NIACRO believes the programme works because the IV scheme offers them contact with someone who is unbiased, non-judgemental and prepared to listen to them, their problems and their views.

We recently undertook a survey of the volunteers and young people. One young person said, “I have had nine social workers in less than a year, but I have had the

same independent visitor and I don’t know what I would do without her.” This is why we run the project and why we believe it makes a difference.

THE VOLUNTEER’S STORY

“I became involved in the IV scheme as I always had an interest in helping young people. I have been an independent visitor for six and a half years. I offer guidance, friendship and advice, especially through difficult times. I share the young person’s interests and activities and encourage her to reach her full educational potential. I let her have a voice and be heard.

“My visitor is very supportive and easy to get on with”

“Over the years, I have built up a trusting and supporting relationship with the young person. I visit her regularly and arrange activities she would like to do. I also support her at the review meetings which she attends with the professionals involved in her life.

“I have watched her grow into adulthood and am now in the process of helping her move from residential to independent living.

“I believe this scheme contributes to the community. It not only provides options for a vulnerable group of young people, but helps the community understand the work of legal professionals and social services.

“I would encourage anyone who has the time to join the scheme. It is truly rewarding. I still enjoy every moment with my young person. Time with her is valuable to me.”

HOW THE YOUNG PERSON SEES IT

“I got involved in the scheme because my social worker at the time thought it would be a good idea and a positive opportunity.

“I have got an awful lot from it. My visitor is very supportive and easy to get on with. I enjoy the time I spend with her and she has become a very important person in my life and I wouldn't be without her. Over the last six and a half years, she has stuck by me through thick and thin.

“I think this is a good community project, because it gives young people the opportunity to get out and about and receive extra support. I would encourage young people and possible volunteers to look into the scheme, as it is highly rewarding and beneficial.

“I don't regret one moment of joining the scheme. I love spending time with my independent visitor and I am very grateful to the IV scheme for bringing her into my life.”

CRIMINAL

This is the sixth issue of NIACRO News in which we have covered recent changes to the legislation on public protection - safeguarding, vetting and barring, disclosure of criminal records etc. We've tried to convey just how damaging most of these changes have been to ex-offenders trying to get back into the labour market, with no evidence that the protection of children and vulnerable adults has in fact increased.

The latest development is a review of the criminal records regime being carried out by Sunita Mason, the Government's Independent Advisor on Criminality Information. Originally considering England & Wales, Mrs Mason has also been asked by the Department of Justice to review the regime here, effectively the work of AccessNI. Olwen Lyner and Pat Conway met Mrs Mason and after the meeting, we sent her more detailed comments. We stressed:

- the need for a review of the rehabilitation of offenders legislation, not in isolation but alongside the current developments;
- the need for a rational assessment of the actual risk posed by any individual ex-offender; and
- our experience over the years, but especially since the introduction of the Vetting and Barring Scheme and the Security Industry Authority, that most employers will go for the easy option of simply rejecting any applicant with any criminal record.

So far as the work of AccessNI is concerned, we believe it should have – and use – greater powers and more resources. It needs to be able to monitor and control Registered Bodies (the employers who seek Enhanced or Standard Disclosure of information about job applicants) and the employers known as Responsible Bodies who are not Registered Bodies but who nevertheless can use the Basic Disclosure service. It should also improve its complaints and disputes procedures.

We welcomed many of the recommendations Sunita Mason made in her preliminary report to Government – for example on scaling back the need for a criminal records search, on removing old and minor conviction information from the records, and making criminal

RECORDS REVIEW

records transferable from one job or activity to another. We also strongly support the recommendation that there should be “comprehensive and easily understood guidance” on the criminal records and employment checking regime.

You can see our full submission to Sunita Mason, including many examples of the problems the legislation has thrown up, on the website.

PROTECTION OF FREEDOMS BILL

This is such an important issue, that it was disappointing to follow the Assembly’s reaction to the “Legislative Consent Motion” debated on 21 March. A Legislative Consent Motion allows for the provisions of a piece of legislation going through Parliament to

be replicated in Northern Ireland. This process was invoked for the Protection of Freedoms Bill which will bring into law some of the changes to the safeguarding legislation. Neither in the Health Committee (it was the DHSSPS which made the proposal to follow this procedure), nor in the plenary session, did any MLA query the assumption that legislation will indeed add to public protection, and that it is appropriate to replicate legislation affecting England and Wales without its being fully debated in the Assembly. It is unclear how much flexibility there will be to adapt the new legislation to local circumstances and opinions. We urge MLAs in the new Assembly to keep an eye on this development and for there to be close co-operation between the Justice and Health Ministers to ensure an effective system which protects the public and doesn’t discriminate unfairly against ex-offenders.

WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS



Fergal Doyle, Delta Packaging; Pat Conway; Dominic McGeown, Botanic Inns; Claire McAteer, BiTC; Catherine Christy, Belfast City Council.

NIACRO has worked for some years with Business in the Community (BiTC) as part of our goal of helping employers treat employees and job applicants with a conviction fairly. We held a joint event recently to – in the words of the BiTC news release – “highlight the real business and community benefits of employing ex-offenders”. Guest speakers from Belfast City Council and Delta Print and Packaging gave their peers clear evidence of the value of using fair recruitment procedures, and how to find support and advice on doing so. Claire McAteer, BiTC Community Programme Manager, said at the event, “There is a strong business case for adopting a responsible and fair approach to recruitment. Not discounting people on the basis of a conviction can help to ensure the best person for the job is recruited.

We are impressed by our member companies who are committed to making a difference by getting involved in this sensitive area and are happy to help others work through the reservations they may have.”

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE

After one of our regular “Meet the Employer” sessions in Magilligan Prison last summer, Andrew Cahalan, H.R. consultant with DuPont, showed great interest in the work of Jobtrack. We discussed ways in which we could develop this, and agreed with Andrew that the most helpful practical support he could offer would be in giving our service users some “real” experience of interviews. Andrew then agreed to hold an initial interview skills workshop in the community for those Jobtrack participants actively

seeking work, with the first pilot held in April.

Local Jobtrack staff invited service users to participate. All varied in capabilities and personalities but all had one shared goal – getting a job! Andrew outlined the interview process, what to expect from the panel or people interviewing; the type of questions to expect; how to act and use body language appropriately. He then gave each person a simple questionnaire and interviewed them individually, giving them valuable feedback afterwards.

Service users found the session helpful and worthwhile, especially the “real” interview. Andrew makes the point that one of the greatest barriers to a good interview is fear. “If you can break these barriers down by good preparation, this

will allow the candidate to sell themselves and have true belief in their abilities and experience”, he says. “I personally found the exercise very rewarding and was amazed at the level of experience the participants had. One of the key messages of the exercise was to emphasise the importance of 'selling yourself' as you can't buy experience or motivation!”

We really appreciate Andrew’s very practical support and are delighted that he has made a commitment to deliver further workshops both in the community and in Magilligan. Jobtrack intends to roll out this initiative hoping that the success in the North West can be replicated with other service users, employers and staff in all of the locations in which we are working.

youth employability

The Youth Employability programme helps young people aged between 16 and 18, and involved with the criminal justice system, to get into training and education, or to find a job. Most are not in education, employment or training; 72% have no or very few qualifications; and they are all assessed as at medium to high risk of re-offending. They can be referred to the programme by the Youth Justice Agency or Probation Service, who fund Youth Employability along with the Department of Justice.

Young people meet with a member of NIACRO staff to talk about their interests and capacities, and what sort of education or training might help. Staff will make contact with the careers service, training providers and employers, give the young person information and guidance on what training or employment they may be able to take up, and help them prepare for it. They will also advise service users on how to tell employers

about their conviction. In return, we ask young people to commit to making a real effort to carry out their agreed action plan, including such basic commitments as turning up for appointments.

Independent evaluators looked at the work of the programme between its starting point in April 2008 and December 2010. They found that the programme was unique – there is no other service

helping this particular client group in this way – and that the young people who take up the offer of help “needed support of this nature if they were to have any chance of achieving positive outcomes”. They also found that the particular way in which staff deliver the programme is its strength; tailoring the work to the individual needs

of the service user and sticking with them through thick and thin. The evaluators describe the “experience, dedication and attributes” of staff as key to the success of the programme, along with “positive links and good working relationships” with other service providers.

You can access the full evaluation report on the website, www.niacro.co.uk



footballing success

A Youth Employability service user undertook a week-long programme run by the Prince's Trust alongside Southern Regional College, “Get Started with Football and Gaelic Football”. The programme aims to increase young people's confidence, motivation and skills through sports. Eighteen-year-old Daniel McCann received his award for completing the course from Prince's Trust NI Director Ian Jeffers and Newry's Deputy Lord Mayor Karen McKeivitt.



The criminal justice system is not equipped to deal with prisoners who have mental health problems.

And yet a snapshot of the prison population taken in 2010 showed that around 65% of sentenced prisoners and 75% of those on remand in Northern Ireland had a personality disorder. Some form of neurosis (such as anxiety or depression) accounted for 42% of sentenced, and 63% of remand, prisoners. Nearly 10% of remand prisoners and 8% of those serving a sentence had a psychotic illness (these are the most serious of mental health disorders like schizophrenia). Some of these men and women, and other prisoners without diagnosed mental health

problems, will have attempted suicide or have suicidal thoughts, or will have self-harmed. These awful statistics have to be seen in the context of a system which can't respond properly to them.

APAC'S CONTRIBUTION

NIACRO is making a contribution to tackling the problem through "APAC Mental Health" a pilot project funded by the Department of Health "to provide a reintegration service for young adult offenders in the community who have mental health problems." We

held a seminar to present a report on the first year of the project and we'd like to thank Donal Kearney who carried out the interviews and drafted the report while on placement with us last autumn.

The clients who join the programme present a high level of risk to themselves or others and are at medium to high risk of offending. Among the first 25 clients referred to the programme, 55% had suicidal feelings – as well as or part of their diagnosed condition – 25% were self-harming, and over half abused alcohol or drugs. Many had the problems associated with both offending and mental disorder – problems with accommodation, unemployment, social exclusion, lack of education, family breakdown and low self-esteem.

HOW IT WORKS

At the start of the process, potential clients meet with the NIACRO support worker and their referral agent – this could be in prison pre-release, or in the community. They undertake a self-assessment questionnaire to find out which problems are causing the most difficulty, and this information is the basis for a support plan which clarifies what needs to be achieved, what actions should be taken and who needs to be involved. A key element of this programme is to work together with

to provide a reintegration service for young adult offenders in the community who have mental health problems

other appropriate services, with support worker Paul Fleming acting as broker and advocate. All of these 25 clients were put in touch with at least four services – in his presentation to the seminar, Paul was able to list over 40 voluntary/ community organisations with which he had linked clients!

In compiling the interim report on the project we asked clients for their opinions. As so often in evaluations of NIACRO projects, people particularly valued the relationship with staff (“you can talk to them, they’re down to earth”) and many mentioned very concrete practical help (“He’s helped me a lot, like. He’s done all my housing, my hostel”). Almost all felt their situation had improved (“Changed completely. More confidence. Seem to be able to go out more.”)

Other key findings from the report were:

- 83% of clients who participated in the project for longer than nine months saw a reduction in their assessed risk of re-offending;
- Probation staff who made referrals to the project found that it facilitated and supported their work with the clients;
- Offender Management staff in prison felt the project answered the resettlement needs identified on release; and
- family members as well as clients were able to get emotional and practical support from the project worker and in some cases referral to other relevant services.

ONE MAN’S STORY

One 24-year-old has been in touch with APAC for some months. He has a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, and sees his consultant monthly and his community psychiatric nurse every fortnight. When he joined the programme, he was on a Combination Order (community service combined with Probation supervision) and had cases pending for theft and motoring offences. He was clear about what he wanted to do – to move right out of the criminal justice system, to set up home outside Belfast with his very supportive partner and their children, to sort out his finances, manage his illness and get a job. These are pretty normal aspirations, but really challenging in the context of a serious psychiatric illness combined with a criminal record.

sorted out – bank account, tax credits, coming off benefits. All of these were positive developments, but they also demanded a lot of determination and courage from our client. Not everything went smoothly. An unsatisfactory housing situation couldn’t be resolved immediately. And hanging over him was a pending court case which with its threat of a possible return to custody brought huge stress, not only to him but to his family.

Fortunately, he received suspended sentences and fines for the outstanding offences; we are pleased that his involvement with APAC and commitment to tackling his problems were stated in court as the reasons for the decision not to send him back to prison.

It still wasn’t all plain sailing and there was a dip in his mental

with our encouragement to get back in touch with the community psychiatric services things picked up

Over the first few weeks we met with the client and his family, and made sure he was contacting all his existing services and using them to get the help he needed. He let us know he wanted something to keep him occupied and we were able to help him to do so. He started with a further education short course (helpful in getting used to being in a group) and, with help from Ulster Supported Employment, moved on to the Progress to Work programme, as part of which he undertook a full time placement with a car mechanics business. A lot of other practicalities were also

health, his spirits and his ability to cope with setbacks. However, with our encouragement to get back in touch with the community psychiatric services things picked up, and he is now in touch with our Jobtrack team and on a Steps to Work programme. His risk of re-offending has gone from high to low, and he is taking his medication and keeping his medical and other appointments. We congratulate him on how much progress he has made in tackling big problems and challenges and are pleased that APAC, and other NIACRO services, have been able to help.

FAMILY

The “Families and Children of Prisoners” interagency group held a seminar in March to share their experiences of meeting the needs of prisoners’ families.



Robin Scott, Prison Fellowship; Deborah Cowley, Action for Prisoners’ Families; Nancy Loucks, Families Outside and Donnie Sweeney at the seminar.

The group consists of NIACRO, the Youth Justice Agency, Quaker Service, the Prison Service, Action for Children, the Prison Fellowship, Barnardo’s, the Probation Board and the Health and Social Care Board. It aims to promote services for children and families, and to raise awareness of their needs.

At the seminar, Dr Linda Moore of the University of Ulster described an important European research project which is benefitting from the contribution of Family Links

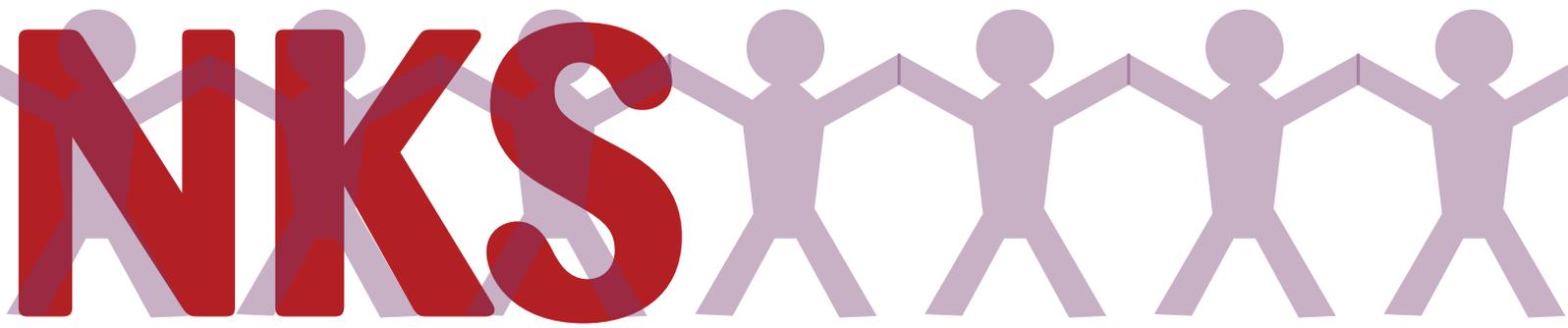
service users. This is a summary of her presentation.

“CHILDREN OF IMPRISONED PARENTS” RESEARCH

An estimated 800,000 children across the European Union are separated from a parent by imprisonment at any time. Although precise figures are not available for Northern Ireland, the Prison Service estimates that on any given day around 1,500 children are

affected by parental imprisonment. Many more are affected by having a grandparent, brother, sister, aunt or uncle in prison. Parental imprisonment affects children in profound ways. Although children often show tremendous resilience and develop coping strategies, they may also be distressed and anxious and are more likely than their peers to experience mental health problems, educational disadvantage and poverty, problems which are added to by the stigma felt by children and families.

A team based in the University of Ulster and at Queen’s University Belfast are participating in a European comparative project researching how the rights of children with imprisoned parents are met, or not, throughout the EU. The aim of the project is to produce guidelines for meeting the rights of children with an imprisoned parent, which the organisers hope will be adopted throughout Europe. The research is coordinated by the Danish Institute for Human Rights, supported by EUROCHIPS (a European umbrella group for prisoners’ children), and involves case studies in Denmark, Poland, Italy and Northern Ireland. Dr Una Convery and Dr Linda Moore (UU) and Professor Phil Scraton (QUB) are conducting the Northern Ireland research. The team were pleased to offer support to the Family and



Children of Prisoners Interagency Group by co-hosting two meetings of the group.

NORTHERN IRELAND FAMILIES

The Northern Ireland case study is based on a review of literature, policy and practice and involved interviews and focus group discussions with children, families, prisoners, and professionals working with prisoners' families. The Northern Ireland Prison Service facilitated access to each prison. Organisations including NIACRO were invaluable in helping the team make contact with families. Interviews focussed on issues facing families in the community, relationships with the person in prison and the response of the prison service to families. It was apparent from the research that prisoners' families, including children, still experience prejudice and stigma in local communities:

He [brother] was being tortured at school as well. You know, teachers harassing him I think because, like big brother, like little brother and that's the attitude ... I think the school did not help the situation at all... and [my son] has kind of left school ... (Mother, Ballymena)

The report focuses on positive initiatives such as child-centred

visits and the extended visits facility in Hydebank. Families and prisoners expressed huge appreciation for these initiatives: *On a normal visit, right? We can't leave the table so for most of that visit, the child's over in the crèche or running about playing. You don't see him on the visit. So when you get the child-centred visit it means we can walk about freely and go into the crèche and all with the child, and play the way he wants to play. (Prisoner, Magilligan)*

Family Support Officers (prison officers) provide assistance for families within each prison and families valued their support:

If I could take my shirt off, I'd give it to him. He's made me a stronger person ... He's there to help me genuinely. He's given me the information I needed. Sat there and talked to me. (Parent, focus group)

A key finding from the research, which was not unexpected, is that families greatly value the independent role and support from non-governmental organisations including NIACRO. Mothers at a focus group in Newry expressed their appreciation of NIACRO's work:

NIACRO's a good system, you know they're very good at explaining even your benefits and all; they're very good with that.

It was [NIACRO worker] showed me everything. I got a wee pack. Somebody spoke to him [the prisoner] in jail and he was able to tell them my partner and children are at home and I got this big information pack.

A central concern is that although positive initiatives are taking place, through the enthusiasm of individual prison staff and the involvement of dedicated professionals from other organisations, children's needs are still not prioritised within the prison system and family work is not considered as a core function. This results in cancelled parties and child-centred visits and family officers being 'stood down' to other duties. Overall, families have suffered from the overly security-oriented focus of prison regimes, an issue currently being addressed by the independent Prison Review Team.

Reports on the full European research are being launched soon in Barcelona and Brussels and copies of the main and summary reports will be available online and in printed form. The Northern Ireland research is continuing and a separate report on the situation here will be published in autumn 2011.

ExOCOP *focuses on* Families

NIACRO's participation in the ExOCOP project, which is looking at resettlement practices and services across Europe, continued with Donnie Sweeney and Mary Cunningham from Family Links and Susan McAuley from the Prison Service attending the most recent workshop in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The workshop 'Family Relationships and Resettlement' sought to identify good practice in helping prisoners keep contact with their families and to agree recommendations which will go forward to the final report of the whole project.



Representatives from Slovenia, Romania, Hungary and England gave presentations on the prison regimes and family services available in their respective countries. Donnie gave an overview of the Northern Ireland situation and NIACRO's services to families including Family Links, transport and visitors' services.

Recommendations are being finalised among the participants, but three which have been drafted, along with the argument in favour of each, are:

- 1 Prisons should reach out and engage with organisations in the community (statutory and NGOs) which assist families maintain contact with a family member in prison.

Rule 6(c) of the Council of Europe's European Prison Rules states: "Prisons should be managed so as to sustain and strengthen those links with relatives and the outside community that will promote the best interests of prisoners and their families."

- 2 All prison officers should, as an integral part of their basic training, receive training on the needs of prisoners' families. They should be actively encouraged (through reward/recognition) to create family friendly environments for those visiting prisons.

For many families and friends of prisoners, the visit to a prison is a lesson in humiliation, intimidation and frustration and a highly charged and anxiety producing event. It is not unusual for visitors, the majority of whom are women and children, to endure many indignities. Children often find the security-conscious visiting environment in prisons overwhelming and frightening and too often visits by families and children are considered privileges and not basic rights.

- 3 The involvement of family and friends in developing a prisoner's sentence plan should be encouraged. Families can act as a motivational force encouraging the prisoner to address their issues and supporting them to achieve their goals.

Sentence planning is the process designed to help prisoners prepare for a safer release and make the best use of their time in custody. Plans are drawn up between the prisoner and, for example, probation staff and psychologist. As yet there is little good practice in this area.

VOLUNTEER FORUM

We held our regular half-yearly Volunteer Forum in April.

Volunteers considered 'Hidden Harm Awareness' to increase awareness of the harm that living with substance misuse has on families, children and young people. This was presented by Ed Sipler from the "Taking the Lid Off" partnership. The forum also gave staff and volunteers the chance to meet, share information and mark the achievements of some of our longer serving volunteers. We rounded the Forum off with a celebration lunch to thank all of our volunteers for their support and commitment in this European Year of Volunteering 2011.



The European Year of Volunteering 2011

STAFF COMINGS AND GOINGS

We said goodbye, with many thanks for all her energy and commitment, and the boost she gave to our public relations work, to Corrina Langelaan who has returned to Australia. We welcome Mairaid McMahon as our new Public Affairs and Communications Manager. We have also said goodbye in the last couple of months to Mary Mulcahy, Sylvia Watt and Liz Smyth from Jobtrack, Angie Mogey from Admin and Bonnie Soroke from Caps. Many thanks to all of them for their work for NIACRO.



Membership

***Do you, or does your organisation, have an interest in
Criminal Justice/Youth Justice/Community Safety etc?
WHY NOT JOIN NIACRO?***

As a member you will:

- Contribute to the creation of a safer society.
- Receive our newsletter, NIACRO News, with information on criminal justice issues and the work of NIACRO and other agencies.
- Receive all our publications free of charge.
- Have priority booking for NIACRO events.
- Have the right to influence NIACRO's policies and work by nominating members of the Executive Committee, voting for your choice on the Executive, and taking part in working parties and consultations.

Vision Statement

NIACRO's vision is to be acknowledged as making a unique contribution to the development of a society in which the rights and needs of everyone, including offenders, are equally respected.

Mission Statement

Working to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities.

Our Structure

NIACRO is a voluntary organisation governed by an Executive Committee which sets policy and employs staff. It is independent and non-profit-making.

Membership of NIACRO costs:

- £10 Individual Annual Membership**
- £30 Individual Life Membership**
- £25 Corporate Annual Membership**
- £50 Corporate Life Membership**

If you'd like further information or to register as a member, please fill in this membership form and return to:

Jackie Junk
NIACRO,
Amelia House,
4 Amelia Street,
BELFAST BT2 7GS
Tel: 028 9032 0157
Email: jackie@niacro.co.uk

Name:.....

Address:.....
.....

Organisation:

Tel:

Email:.....

Type of Membership:

Individual Annual **Life**

Corporate Annual **Life**

Cheque Enclosed

Invoice Me

