



news

**CHALLENGE
HATE CRIME**

DEAL WITH IT

issue 32

Spring 2013

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NORTHERN IRELAND

PRISON  SERVICE

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Specific hate crime legislation became law in Northern Ireland in September 2004. Since then, sentencing has to take into account the fact that an offence is aggravated by hostility based on religion, race, sexual orientation or disability.

Being a victim of hate crime is a particularly painful experience; it feels very personal. It also hurts families, communities and wider society.

The Challenge Hate Crime project (CHC) was a partnership between the Northern Ireland Prison Service and NIACRO, and was funded under the European Union's Peace III programme, managed by SEUPB.

One of the most innovative projects we have been involved in, CHC ran from 2009 – 2012 and comprised two elements: developing an effective model of working with perpetrators of hate crime to reduce the likelihood of their re-offending; and research into hate crime in Northern Ireland and further afield.

Challenge To Change

The pilot programme working with offenders, "Challenge To Change", was designed by Mediation Northern Ireland and Carecall and delivered in two of Northern Ireland's prisons. Two training manuals were produced based on the pilot; one on training facilitators of

such a programme and one on delivering the programme itself. The "train the trainers" manual covers the preparation of programme facilitators, with information on hate crime and the criminal justice system, and challenges them to address their own experience, views and opinions.

The group facilitation manual, for use with people who have carried out hate-aggravated crimes, draws on established therapies and mediation practice. It sets up a group dynamic in which offenders can consider and reconsider their crime, the context in which they carried it out, and how they might avoid doing so in future. It emphasises that participants must be undertaking the programme voluntarily.

The manual contains detailed plans for up to 12 sessions with games, exercises and discussion topics along with guidance on how facilitators can make the best use of the material, prepare for each session but be flexible within the session, and be ready for difficulties that may arise.

Research

The research included:

- Close analysis of hate crime data in Northern Ireland (an analysis which at present is largely complex, inconsistent and unclear).
- Definitions of sectarianism (or lack of, not least from the NI Assembly).

- The stated views of political parties in manifestos and other documentation (varying from a small number of concrete proposals to tackle hate crime through pious hopes to a virtual ignoring of the problem).
- A survey of good practice programmes and projects designed to tackle the problem, from GB and Germany.
- Key statistics from the PSNI on hate crime in Northern Ireland.
- Surveys of the situation in Germany, where there is established research and practice in tackling hate crime. These are rooted in post-war attempts to develop a functioning democracy where hate crime could not flourish and be acceptable.

Seminars were held to explore the different strands of hate crime, based on sectarianism, race, disability, and sexual orientation.

Closing conference

A conference in autumn 2012, "Challenge Hate Crime: Deal With It", brought together politicians, policy-makers, and representatives of the statutory criminal justice system and of NGOs with a concern for the issue, to discuss the key messages from the project.

Over two days in Belfast, 100 participants heard from and questioned over 20 speakers



I to r, Tara Mills, conference Chair; Olwen Lyner, NIACRO; Harald Weilnbock, VPN; Justice Minister David Ford MLA; Sue McAllister, NIPS Director General

and panellists, including the Minister of Justice, senior officials from criminal justice agencies, representatives of political parties, and NGOs, academics and practitioners from Northern Ireland, Great Britain and Germany. On screen at intervals during the conference, they also heard from prisoners who had taken part in the pilot CTC programme.

Resistors and solutions

Shortly after the conference, Director of Services Pat Conway was invited to take part in the annual ANZSOC (Australia and New Zealand

Society of Criminology) conference in New Zealand and to visit the University of Sydney Law School.

At the Sydney University event, Pat briefed the Law School and made a presentation to prosecutors from Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone – part of an AUSAID programme.

The ANZSOC conference included a huge range of topics under the heading “Public Criminologies: crime, power and marginalisation”. In describing CHC, Pat presented

an audit of “resistors and solutions” – the groups with an involvement in hate crime, the barriers they put up, consciously or unconsciously, to solving the problem, and ways of reducing those barriers. He stressed in particular that the three “resistors” shown by the perpetrators of hate crime – denial, ambivalence and fear – are shared by all the other groups to some extent; are shared, in short, by us all. Pat made very useful contacts in Australia and New Zealand, and it’s clear that those contacts want to build on the relationship.

The EU and hate crime

Hate crime is a matter of growing concern within the EU - there was an article in NIACRO News 31 on the establishment of the European Commission's "Radicalisation Awareness Network" (RAN). The subject was discussed at a meeting of Justice Ministers, including David Ford, who met in Dublin in January under the Irish Presidency of the EU. The issue was not on the original agenda for the meeting, nor is it a justice priority of this Presidency;

so the fact that it was nevertheless discussed on the day demonstrates the seriousness with which it is taken at EC level.

This was also demonstrated at RAN's meeting in Brussels in January. Government ministers, very senior officials from the European Commission, the Council of Europe and international think tanks and NGOs joined with members of RAN to consider how best to challenge hate crime and violent extremism.

Pat was able to make the point he stressed in his ANZSOC presentation, that policy- and law-making bodies - local and national - also contain ambivalence and prejudice and that policy and law need to be scrutinised with this in mind.

And so it goes on. Much of the European discourse focuses on jihadist and anti-Semitic activity; however, our work in Northern Ireland on hate crime, especially sectarian hate crime, has points of similarity. We have seen, only recently, the speed with which young people can be radicalised into violence.

The local scene

The Equality Commission, in a speech by Chief Commissioner Michael Wardlow to NIC-ICTU, and the NI Human Rights Commission in its investigation into the state's response to racially motivated hate crimes, have addressed the problem recently. There is a move to reinstate the Unite Against Hate campaign which we support. So we recognise that Challenge Hate Crime is part of a wider movement to which we can contribute valuable experience and learning.

NIACRO is already contributing to the development of local, national and European thinking, and we are determined that Challenge Hate Crime will be a starting point for effective work involving many agencies and individuals.

The published information generated by Challenge Hate Crime will shortly be available on the NIACRO website.



Hate Crime – Audit of Resistors and Solutions (Legislative, Structural and Attitudinal)

	Resistors	Solution
Lack of Definition	No agreed definition of sectarianism	Develop working definition Incorporate into legislation or at least define operationally
Legislation	No reference to sectarianism/ transgender Aggravated hostility a two edged sword	Review Consider whether aggravated hostility is a barrier
Government / Politicians	Lack of agreement re sectarian hate crime Ambivalence/ ambiguity towards certain groups	Develop position with parties internally Achieve consensus Visible leadership Set up all party working group – develop Executive strategy
Society / Community	Denial / ambiguity / fear Tolerance of types of hate crime Lack of public outcry	Drive collective efforts to 'deal with it' – eg reinstate and develop Unite Against Hate



	Resistors	Solution
Victim	Perception ignored	Perception accepted Increased level (amount) / depth (type) of self reporting Contribute to development of practice and involvement
Perpetrator	Denial / ambiguity / fear	Engage in programme – Opportunity to acknowledge and address acts of hate crime
Intermediaries	Lack of experience dealing directly with topic of hate crime combined with working in criminal justice environment	Build on pilot and develop robust practice based on experience and drawing on practice/ resources of others
Depts / Agencies beyond Criminal Justice System	No focus on early intervention Denial / downplaying e.g. bullying in schools	Acknowledge behaviours at early stage and act
Criminal Justice System	Issues re communication / understanding/denial /silos	Ministerial commitment to action plan leading to enhanced communication and reduction of hate crime



Working with Young People

the issues that they would like us to tackle. They aren't too surprising; two of the main ones are "to have something to do" and "to be listened to". The young people's ideas and comments were fantastic and everyone was able to share their views on what they wanted the NIACRO youth forum to do for them.

After lunch, we enjoyed more games led by the BAC staff before getting kitted up for our afternoon of caving. There were mixed feelings about the caving activity with some young people, volunteers and staff feeling anxious at the thought of the dark, narrow tunnels. However, with everyone pulling together as a team and encouraging each other everyone successfully



navigated their way around the cave system! It was thrilling to see the young people's communication skills and confidence grow over the afternoon and we're all looking forward to the next Voice Box day in the spring. We would like to give a special thank you to all the young people who were involved in the day. We would also like to thank the NIACRO volunteers, the staff at BAC and Tayto who all contributed to the success of the day!

Voice Box Youth Forum

NIACRO is pleased to announce that we have set up a youth forum, Voice Box. Four projects are involved:

MOVE: a project that provides enhanced opportunities for young people at risk of offending through a one to one mentoring and befriending service.

Independent Representation: representing the views and concerns of young people in Lakewood Secure Care Centre in Bangor.

Independent Visitor: offering a befriending and independent support service to young people who are "looked after" by the Trusts.

Caps (Child and Parent Support): supports families whose eight to thirteen year olds are at risk of anti-social and offending behaviour.

Activity day

Staff from the projects have told NIACRO News about an important day for young service users. Young people, NIACRO volunteers and staff from the projects enjoyed a fun filled day of activities at Belfast Activity Centre in November. The aim of the activity day was to introduce young people to Voice Box.

Six young people attended along with three volunteers and three members of NIACRO staff. After sweets, juice and many packets of crisps (kindly donated by Tayto Armagh), the young people settled

down to a quick warm-up game and some hard work. They and the volunteers shared their opinions on what should be included in the Voice Box mission statement, the best way for us to promote Voice Box to other young people and highlighted





l to r, Rachel Long, NIACRO; Paul Sweeney, Extern; Pamela Sweeney, Action for Children

IMPROVING CHILDREN'S LIVES

Caps project staff have been taking the opportunity to spread the word about our early intervention work.

"Improving Children's Lives" is a research initiative in Queen's University which "seeks to achieve... lasting improvements in the lives of disadvantaged children and young people in Northern Ireland". The group has held training seminars on the six high level outcomes of OFMDFM's ten year strategy for children and young people (2006 - 2016). One of these, "Contributing positively to community and society" took place last autumn, and Rachel Long from the Caps project made a presentation along with Extern and Action for Children. They described the programmes which we deliver, to demonstrate the value of early intervention in preventing children from offending.

WORKING TOGETHER

Caps Southern recently hosted a networking event entitled "Improving outcomes for vulnerable and at risk children and young people".

Held in St Patrick's Trian, Armagh, the event was co-hosted by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT) and NIACRO to explore opportunities for cooperative working between statutory, voluntary and community agencies, in the delivery of services to vulnerable and at risk children and young people aged 8-18 years in the SHSCT area.

A range of stakeholders displayed their current activities on display boards for others to view. Among the agencies represented were SELB, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Family Support Database, Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP), Children in Northern Ireland and the

Young People's Partnership. There were presentations from the Childhood, Transition and Social Justice initiative at Queens' University (which has links to the "Improving Children's Lives" initiative) and from the CYPSP on the role of Family Support Hubs.

Speaking at the event, Chief Executive Olwen Lyner said, "In all that we do we are about reducing crime and its impact on people and communities and therefore a significant percentage of our time is directed to exactly that work. However, Caps, a model NIACRO developed and piloted, is about a new way forward. So many of those that we engage with in our adult services did not have the right support in childhood which would have helped them access services which would in turn have helped them build their personal resources."

She continued, "NIACRO is an organisation that delivers services based on its values of justice, dignity, citizenship, anti-violence and accountability. Nowhere do those values shine through more than in our work with young people."

Concluding, Olwen told the hundred-strong audience, "In all that we do we want to work with others not only because in these difficult economic times it makes sense but because working together allows us to plan better, work better and get better results."

AGM

At 2012's AGM, Olwen Lyner outlined the situation for NIACRO at the end of a three-year planning cycle. She noted some important current policy drivers arising from the two major criminal justice reviews - the Prison Review and the Youth Justice Review - which followed the devolution of justice and policing matters to the NI Assembly, and the appointment of a Justice Minister. These include the age of criminal responsibility, issues of diversion, alternatives to custody, dealing with fine default and delays in the criminal justice process.

NIACRO is able to welcome some developments - for example a start to developing the Reducing Offending strategy, and finance to roll out the APAC Supporting People programme across Northern Ireland. But Olwen made the point that all the work we do, which can make an important contribution to delivering on better criminal justice policies, is undermined by the fact of too many people in custody, and a failure to implement alternatives to custody.

Guest speaker

Our guest speaker was Georgina Naylor, Director of The Pilgrim Trust, an independent charitable grant-making trust which supports, among other things, projects in prisons and projects that provide alternatives to custody.

It is part of the Women's Diversionary Fund, chaired by Ms Naylor, a partnership between the [Westminster] Justice Ministry and other independent funders. The WDF recently funded the New Economics Foundation to produce a report "Women's Community Services: a wise commission" demonstrating the value of women's community services in supporting women in contact with the criminal justice system.

Georgina made the point that these and other community services for women are under increasing pressure to search for new sources of funding as statutory and independent trust sources decrease.

You can read more about NIACRO's work with women elsewhere in this newsletter.



"Change" of name

NIACRO was established in 1971 as the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders: but for all everyday purposes we have always been "NIACRO". Legally, though, we still bore the full name. So under the Companies Act it had to appear on all our letterheads and emails.

Not only is the full name quite cumbersome, it reflects an earlier way of looking at our work and our client group. We are moving away from emphasising the terms "offender" and "prisoner". People are much more than those two descriptors. So it doesn't make sense to go on using this terminology every time we correspond with our service users and the agencies we may approach on their behalf.

NIACRO's members passed a special resolution on the change of name at the AGM, and we are now NIACRO pure and simple!



Prison Review

One of the first actions of the Minister of Justice, David Ford MLA, was to establish a review of Northern Ireland's prisons. This was an outworking of the Agreement at Hillsborough Castle, which had set out that amongst the conditions that would facilitate the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly, there should be a "review of the conditions of detention, management and oversight of all prisons".

Led by Dame Anne Owers, the Prison Review Team produced their final report in October 2011, "not holding back", as a local newspaper put it, "on their criticism". The report included 40 recommendations and was referred to by the Review Team as a "once in a generation opportunity" to fundamentally reform the structure and role of prisons in our society. The "once in a generation" phrase struck a chord and has been used by

many of the stakeholders in the debate on prison reform since then.

SEE Programme

At the same time as the fundamental review of prisons was being conducted, NIPS and the DOJ also launched the Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme - known as the SEE Programme. That programme focussed on management, staffing and deployment, and aimed, in the



words of the Minister at its launch, to “wholly transform the culture within the Service”.

In a most ambitious set of principles, he said this would happen through: putting the offender at the centre of the focus; embedding new thinking, values, attitudes and behaviours; redefining and professionally developing the role of the prison officer, including providing staff with the necessary training, skills and support to allow them to take forward this role, and instilling a new culture of personal accountability for performance and delivery.

No wonder Mr Ford added, **“There is a great distance to travel in order to get to that point.”**

NIACRO's role

So far as NIACRO's contribution to all this is concerned, we have been, and are, pursuing discussions

with all the parties who have responsibilities under the recommendations. And we hope for, and are seeking, the closest possible, meaningful, engagement with the process of change.

There have been some important and welcome developments in which we've been very actively involved and we are encouraged by the statutory services' responsiveness when we contact them. We're attending all of the “Stakeholder themed sessions” organised by the Prison Service, which aim to develop action plans to implement the Review Team's recommendations. This is a welcome initiative. We have met senior governors in all three prisons, and have been invited to attend the Operational Board.

NIACRO, Barnardo's, the Prison Fellowship and Quaker Service have begun delivering joint training sessions titled “Think Family” to the new Prison

Custody Officer recruits. With very positive feedback from the new recruits, and from prison governors, we hope to extend the training to night custody officers and the new Family Officers in Magilligan prison.

We have also been exploring with our NGO partners, through meetings in each of the prisons, how we can best contribute to the change of culture which we want to see as well as ensuring that by working with others we make the best use of all our services.

Changing culture and practice

When senior officials from NIPS, including Director General Sue McAllister, met with the Justice Committee in October 2012, they were questioned about the incorporation of new custody officers into the existing workforce. When asked whether NIPS could ensure that “the new recruits retain the ethos that they have been given in their training while interfacing with the existing staff”, the Director General acknowledged that this “is a really big issue for us...there is a risk that we train people at the college and they go back and staff say “Forget what you have learned at college, we will show you how it is really done.” However, she insisted that this danger has been pointed out to the new recruits and that they will be fully supported in their posts to resist any such pressure.

We have concerns. One of the strands of the SEE programme is to develop a “core day” for prisoners which gives them “maximum opportunity to engage in activity aimed at reducing the risk of re-offending”. This is crucial, and we would be happy to see evidence of its being implemented.

There are opportunities, for example, to integrate the contribution of independent and statutory training services in the way that healthcare is now delivered by the health service.

We welcomed the transfer of healthcare to the Trust in April 2012. It introduced a new management structure for health care workers and this has thrown up some issues around changes to the way medication is given; these will only work if this core day of meaningful activity is in place. This subject was also raised by the Justice Committee. That said, we do recognise the complex human resource management issues that the Trust currently face, and acknowledge that until they are resolved, changes to culture and practice will be more difficult to achieve. And a key concern is the lack of progress in simply keeping people out of prison if prison is not the right place for them, like the all too many prisoners incarcerated for the non-payment of sometimes very small fines. This has been recognised to some extent by the DOJ in piloting Supervised Activity Orders as an alternative to custody.

Ministerial statement

Justice Minister David Ford made a statement to the NI Assembly on 19 March. This important announcement, to which we will return in the next issue of NIACRO News, included:

- enhanced/new facilities at Magilligan prison;
- extra and reconfigured provision in Maghaberry;
- new facilities for women who offend; and
- the transformation of Hydebank into a “Secure College”.

NIACRO welcomed the Minister’s commitment to reducing offending and re-offending behaviour through these developments. In particular, we believe that the proposed reconfiguration at Maghaberry will achieve a better balance between security and resettlement, and that the retention of services at Magilligan will ensure a continuation of the positive resettlement work there. However, we do need reassurance that it will be made easier for families to maintain links with prisoners given that it is virtually impossible to reach Magilligan by public transport.

Next steps

In terms of monitoring the progress on the reform of the prison service, the Minister (in February) drew attention to the three update

reports produced for the Justice Committee by the Ministerial Oversight Group which scrutinise progress on the Review team’s recommendations. Those reports, and the forthcoming annual report, are available to MLAs in the Assembly library. We hope this information will be placed in full on the DOJ website, so that it can be accessed easily by the many people who are following the reform process. This could form one part of an overall communications plan keeping informed the very large range of organisations with an interest in the process.

The final piece in the jigsaw would be a concrete action plan which includes all the improvements announced by the Minister and all those proposed by the Prison Review Team, and involving all the stakeholders who can make them happen, effectively and efficiently.

No-one ever said reform would be easy. NIACRO will continue to engage with the process in every way we can and we have currently in place several meetings and other opportunities to advise and inform. We’ll also be monitoring progress in the context of how the prison service can best improve public safety and reduce re-offending, with a particular focus on helping people in prison make the life changes that will lead to that goal being achieved.

Criminal Justice Consultative Forum

In a report of 2009, on the impact of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act on the criminal justice system, the Criminal Justice Inspection NI recommended the establishment of a consultative forum, linked to the Criminal Justice Board (which is made up of senior officials from the main statutory agencies in the criminal justice system). This recommendation stemmed from the CJINI's finding that the NGOs who make up the Equality Coalition felt that criminal justice bodies were not consulting effectively enough.

The consultative forum has now been set up with a membership drawn from the voluntary and community sector and we are delighted that CEO Olwen Lyner is one of its 10 members. Olwen was selected following a competition managed by NICVA in 2012.

Olwen's letter of invitation from the DOJ speaks of the principal role of the forum being "to consider strategic matters relating to consultation and equality" and to review "how we [the Criminal Justice Board] engage with the public".

Certainly NIACRO has been invited to respond to very many consultations over the years, with a sudden increase when the NI Act in 1998 obliged public authorities to take equality of opportunity into account when making or changing policy. We have to be selective in order not to be overwhelmed by these, a process most voluntary and community sector bodies have developed. Obviously, we choose the consultations where we believe we have most to contribute. So, although in our last annual report we list 50 responses to consultations from 26 different sources, the majority come from the DOJ and individual agencies in the criminal justice system. We're happy to be part of a process of ensuring that consultation has a real impact on law and policy making.

Reducing Offending

In June 2012 the Department of Justice published a consultation document on a strategy "aimed at bringing about fewer victims of crime" according to the heading of the Department's news release. It is perhaps more bluntly referred to thereafter as the Reducing Offending Strategic Framework.

NIACRO's response to the original consultation broadly supported the principles on which the draft strategy was based. However, we made

suggestions for tightening up some of the language (not to confuse "prevention" and "diversion", for example; and define what "partnership" would mean in practice). And we called for what respondees to government consultation so often have to call for – some hard facts by way of baseline information and measureable targets for improvement. As with our response to the Prison Review, we also want clear lines of responsibility – what lies within the duties of the DOJ, and what is the role of other Departments?

The Framework has been revised since that first consultation, and we have recently sent the DOJ our views on the preparation of the latest drafts. This follows some useful and open discussions, and we are happy that some of our ideas are now incorporated into the strategy.

Desisting from offending

We welcome in particular the spelling out of methods of supporting people to desist from offending:

"During the consultation, it was widely commented that there should be an emphasis on supporting the effective rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders, to reduce the risk of reoffending and to ensure that more people do not needlessly become victims.

“Such support needs to focus on addressing the issues that can contribute to offending behaviour and those which pose a potential obstacle to an individual desisting from offending. Examples of practical support include:

- sustaining and developing positive family or other relationships; providing training and sustainable employment;
- ensuring access to appropriate accommodation;

- helping in dealing with practical financial issues, for example welfare, money management skills, access to financial services;
- maintaining a continuity of care for mental health and other health problems, and addressing addictions issues; and
- assisting offenders in overcoming the perceived or actual barriers and stigma associated with being labelled an ‘offender’ or having a ‘criminal record’.”

We would still, however, like to see more detail on who is to do what; and some suggestions for how policies from other Departments (see for example the article on welfare reform elsewhere in this newsletter) may be mitigated so that they do not make desistance from offending even more difficult than it is at present.

Lord Mayor's Support For Jobtrack

Belfast's Lord Mayor, Alderman Gavin Robinson, came to Amelia Street to our latest employer event on 12 March. He met employers, from Belfast and beyond, and Jobtrack service users who come to these events to

seek work placements and employment opportunities.

Alderman Robinson said: “It was great to meet such a range of employers who are seeking to provide opportunities for some of the people who find it hardest to access employment in the current economic climate. It's so important that we all recognise the contribution that schemes like Jobtrack make to improving public safety as well as supporting the economy.”

NIACRO has worked closely with Belfast City Council over many years through various projects. We were glad to deepen those connections through welcoming the Lord Mayor, and glad too for the Council's commitment to continued partnership working in the future.

Alderman Robinson with Gail Wright of Belfast City Council and NIACRO Service Manager Heather Reid.





Niacro Women

Practising IT skills

New women's group at Queen Street

Jobtrack service users, women with alcohol related problems, and relatives of prisoners have come together to form the Queen Street Women's Group.

The group was very active in the run-up to Christmas. Looking at ways of making Christmas a more enjoyable and less expensive event, the women made and designed their own Christmas cards, Christmas displays, centre pieces and Christmas cakes.

Everyone enjoyed the programme and Maria, one of the regular members, has been teaching knitting and crochet, and has even persuaded NIACRO's Catherine Ward-Gallagher to learn the skill!

One of the great things the women looked at was the

option of pre-pay debit cards. Connected with how to shop online, they were very pleased at having the opportunity to make savings this way. Recently the group was given the task of browsing the internet for specific items and to see who could "buy" them at the cheapest price. This proved great fun and brought out a great deal of friendly competitiveness. The main focus of this task was to understand the need for budgeting, how putting money aside into a pre-paid debit card could help make savings and allow them to buy online.

Members of the group also have the opportunity to take part in Food Safety and Hygiene, Retail Customer Services, Manual Handling, Starting a Business training, the ECDL qualification, and to learn computer basics online.

The programme is open to everyone and all are welcome to come along.

For further information about the group contact Catherine Ward-Gallagher on catherine@niacro.co.uk

Making Christmas cards



Celebration of success

Award winners with Monica McWilliams, third from right



Before Christmas, NIACRO hosted a 'Celebration of success' event, to bring together some of the women who had achieved success in OCN Level 2 and 3 and in the the Duke of Edninburgh's Endeavour Awards which are operated by the Probation Service in partnership with the Prison Service. The Endeavour Awards are exactly the same programme as the DofE and are operated with the approval of DofE for people over the age of 25.

Women working in the First Steps Women's Centre in Dungannon and Women's Support Network, and training with Community Focus Learning in Ballymena achieved OCN Level 3 in 'Women and Offending Behaviour'. This programme, funded by the Pilgrim Trust, is awareness training of the issues faced by women who have come into contact with the criminal justice system and includes two site visits,

one to the local Court and another to ASH House.

Seven women completed the OCN level 2 programme in Money Management which looks at budgeting/ benefits and debt awareness, and five received section certificates of their Bronze Endeavour Awards. Some certificates were awarded for volunteering – at the Drop Inn Centre in South Belfast, First Steps Café in North Belfast and East Belfast Mission. Skills certificates were awarded to women for completing programmes through NIACRO at Footprints, Falls and Greenway women's centres.

Guest speaker was Monica McWilliams who talked about the growth of the women's sector in Northern Ireland over the years and her current involvement with women's groups internationally, particularly in conflict stricken areas.

Jean O'Neill, who leads the PBNI's Inspire Women's Project Team, and Valerie Pitman, OBE, PBNI Duke of Edinburgh Awards Officer, also praised the women for their commitment and determination and expressed how positive it was to have an awards ceremony which reflected the partnership approach adopted by the Inspire model of working.

It was great to see some of the women who are no longer involved with Inspire come back and share their success with others still on Probation. We hope that this event is the first of many in which NIACRO, the PBNI and WSN can involve all women from all backgrounds in recognising their achievements. The three organisations are continuing to work together to extend the Inspire model further across Northern Ireland.

Jobtrack Trainee Named Justice Champion



The Criminal Justice Awards recently recognised the outstanding and remarkable achievements of former NIACRO Jobtrack trainee, Joanne Farrell.

Joanne, who attended NIACRO for over a year and a half, and completed numerous projects in that time including the ECDL qualification, was named a Justice Champion by Justice Minister David Ford, at the ceremony in Parliament Buildings.

The annual Justice in the Community awards received over forty nominations which were considered by an independent judging panel.

Speaking at the awards, David Ford said, "The Justice in the Community Awards are about celebrating the personal efforts of some of the most remarkable people

in our communities who share the vision to make Northern Ireland a more fair, just and safer society to live in."

"These people, many of whom are volunteers, work tirelessly, often going the extra mile to help others because they care about their communities and want to make things better."

Inspiration

Of Joanne's outstanding dedication he said, "Joanne Farrell is an inspiration to women offenders who want to turn their life around. Four years ago her life was on a downward spiral and she ended up in the criminal justice system. Now Joanne is voluntarily involved in providing support services to other female offenders, both inside and outside of prison, mentoring and encouraging those women to make new life choices.

Joanne, who sadly couldn't attend the event, humbly says that she didn't give her absence a second thought because "I didn't think I'd win." Instead she received her prizes (a crystal trophy and £500 for equipment or services to benefit the community) later, from the Women's Support Network.

As well as her achievements in NIACRO, Joanne has undertaken GCSE psychology

and sociology and is currently studying Women in Leadership at the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre where she volunteers. "I plan to get more qualifications," she says, adding that "to keep doing this you need passion."

Joanne certainly has passion because as well as her work in BURC, she has also been involved in the making of a DVD for women in prison. "That shows the girls there is hope for them and that there are a multitude of services to be used.

"I was scared to come out of the house when I came out of prison because I was self conscious about going there, but the likes of NIACRO, BURC, the Shankill Women's Centre and the WSN helped my confidence and I don't feel as if I won this on my own. Other people's faith in me helped me achieve."

She also recently went back to Hydebank Wood to speak to the women prisoners still there, "That was nerve-racking, I thought they would just laugh at me," she recalls, "but if I can help or motivate just one person to change their life then I've made a difference."

David Ford certainly thinks Joanne has made a difference as he has invited her for a cup of coffee and a chat in his offices in the near future.

The Impact of Welfare “Reform”



Paying “the right benefit, to the right person, at the right time” has long been taken to be the measure of an effective and efficient welfare system; the idea being that people in need are given adequate support, and fraud and errors within the system tackled swiftly and appropriately. Very few of us could disagree with those aims. And we believe very few of those aims will be achieved under the current welfare reform proposals.

Let’s first of all get real about people who are in receipt of benefits. We’re talking about parents, children, older people and those among us who can no longer earn an income due to redundancy, sickness, disability, or retirement. And we’re talking about a huge proportion of working people who need that additional safety net of certain welfare payments to help pay mortgages, buy fuel or feed their children. These are the “right people” who deserve society’s support.

So will they be getting the “right benefits”? The UK government has stated its case for the need to pare

back the social welfare system, citing complexity and inefficiency among its arguments. It has openly pledged to streamline the social security system and achieve administrative savings through its programme of welfare reform. We can all agree with that, as long as those in need aren’t put at any disadvantage.

A single monthly allowance

But the government’s proposals included incorporating all elements of welfare support into a single allowance, as well as

potentially reducing that payment through changes to eligibility criteria. This is a radical change in delivery and in the culture of welfare, and will require many costly technological and logistical adjustments. Chief among these is a preference for on-line applications; and the government wants to make payments monthly rather than weekly or fortnightly as at present. Another major change is that claimants would assume responsibility for paying their housing costs instead of the state paying landlords directly. That might be okay in a world where we are all computer literate, have access to a computer, are

Art and Ambition



Mark with Gary McCausland

Downpatrick man Mark Knox made local news last autumn when he exhibited some of his amazing art work in the Down Arts Centre. Speaking just before the opening, Jobtrack service user Mark found the whole thing surreal and hard to take in. It wouldn't be the sort of building he would normally be in, he said, never mind have an exhibition in one.

The art work on exhibition consisted of ten acrylic paintings and varied in topic from his children to motorcycles to rappers. Mark explained, "I'm a big fan of 2Pac and 50Cent, I drew them and then people asked me to do paintings for them. It was just a hobby that got me out of the house."

Mark's five children, Jamie, Rebecca, Marshall, Rayanna and Allanna, make frequent appearances in his work. "I didn't make them try to sit still," he laughed. "I drew them from photographs."

Like many of NIACRO's clients, Mark had a disruptive childhood and very little schooling, which make his achievements all the more remarkable.

"I remember trying to draw comics in school during art," he said. "The teacher said, 'That's very good, but you're meant to be drawing an apple.'"

Drifting

However, Mark drifted from school work and art and his teenage years were mainly spent drinking and getting into fights. Estranged from his family, he led a nomadic existence, moving from sofa to sofa, leading a life few would envy.

Some of what Mark experienced in his life is difficult for him to talk about, but he never blames anyone for his disorder related offending.

"Basically I was getting into fights a lot and I was getting jumped all the time. I regret what happened. I want this to be a new phase in my life."

Stepping forward

Helping Mark take the tentative steps into this new chapter in his life is Jobtrack's Geraldine Kelly. She takes no credit for Mark's success (though Mark says simply. "I have not had anyone being that nice to me before") but says that the role of Jobtrack staff is to, "Find out the good things people are good at and focus on that rather than focus on the bad things they're good at."

Since the exhibition Mark has gone from strength to strength. "Knoxy" as he is affectionately known, has become a Christian, been awarded a certificate for the Skills Section of the Bronze Endeavour Award (see p 14), and is working on an oil painting for Down Council. Geraldine also hopes that Mark will be embarking on an art degree in college in September.

Looking slightly perplexed at the thought of going to college, Mark said, "I felt

worried about it at the start, I did not feel used to it. It might work in a way, though. I am wasting my life away if not."

Gary McCausland, CEO and founder of the Richland Group property development and investment company, lent his support to NIACRO during Adult Learners' Week last year and spoke at a Jobtrack Celebration of Achievement event. He has since been advising and mentoring Mark, whose plans for the future include trying landscape painting, building on his motorbike interests and interior art work.

"I would like to project images on to kitchen and bedroom walls and use templates," he said.

Having reunited with his family at a recent funeral, the future looks bright for Knoxy as he continues his work with his very proud mentor.

This article is based on one by Joanne Fleming which appeared in the Down Recorder in October 2012. Thank you to the paper for providing photographs.



Mark with Jobtrack's Geraldine Kelly and his artwork

New NIACRO Offices in Portadown

We're delighted that we have just moved into new independent premises in Portadown. This development consolidates our base in the Southern region and will serve our needs well into the future. Staff from the Caps Southern, Independent Visitor, Independent Representation, APAC and Jobtrack programmes will operate out of the new offices.



Comings and Goings

Welcome to Valerie Gardner who is joining the Independent Visitor team, and Claire Trolan Watts, joining Caps.

Goodbye and our thanks to Anne McNicholl who has been with NIACRO for 24 years, latterly as Supervisor at Magilligan Visitors' Centre; Ruth Stephens who worked with Independent Representation; and Kerry McMullan from the Communications and Research Unit.

Margaret McTeggart

Margaret McTeggart joined NIACRO in 1981 working with our earliest after-schools volunteer/mentoring projects as Project Co-ordinator. She became Assistant Director (Community Services) in May 1987.

Margaret had connections in the world of volunteering and youth work and was actively engaged in many imaginative and important initiatives that contributed to the Peace process.

Margaret left Niacro in 2000 but remained in contact with staff and friends until her death in December 2012. We remember her fondly.

Thanks to Jobtrack volunteer John Kerr for his help in preparing this issue of NIACRO News



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