IRISH PROBATION JOURNAL Volume 8, October 2011

Narrating Desistance: Identity Change and the 12-Step Script

Brendan Marsh*

Abstract: Desistance from crime has been identified as a process that often entails the development of a new life 'script'. This script facilitates an internal change through a narrative-building process that supports a non-offending identity. This paper investigates the intersection between these scripts as described in the criminological literature and the well-known script at the heart of the 12-step recovery literatures. This exploration is based on the findings of qualitative research into the long-term desistance experience of five former persistent and drug-addicted offenders based in Dublin involved in the 12-step Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous groups. Results indicate that narrative development through the 12-step programme parallels many of the features of narrative detailed in the desistance literature.

Keywords: Desistance, addiction recovery, life scripts, 12-step recovery, Dublin.