

**PROBATION & WELFARE SERVICE**

**AND**

**HOMELESS PERSONS UNIT (ERHA)**

**JOINT REPORT**

**ON THE HOMELESS PERSONS UNIT**

**PILOT INREACH SERVICE**

**TO MOUNTJOY PRISON 2003**

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## **1. REPORT SUMMARY**

This report details a joint initiative involving the Probation & Welfare Service, Mountjoy Prison and the Homeless Persons Unit of the Eastern Regional Health Authority.

It evaluates a twelve month inreach pilot project, whereby the Homeless Persons Unit began working in partnership with the Probation & Welfare Service within Mountjoy Prison. A total of 257 prisoners have benefited to date.

An initial initiative targeted at prisoners granted Christmas Temporary Release in December 2002, assisted 51 prisoners in their transition from custody into the community. A broader service developed during 2003, which benefited an additional 120 prisoners. The Homeless Persons Unit also provided information services to 30 prisoners who attended Probation & Welfare Service group programmes. The Christmas Temporary Release initiative was repeated in December 2003, assisting a further 56 prisoners.

Key services provided through this pilot programme included:

- Provision of information, to offenders presenting as homeless, concerning accommodation options and broader entitlements.
- Direct provision of various accommodation types to homeless prisoners based on cross agency assessment.
- Provision of information regarding relevant local Community Welfare Officer's details (clinic times, address, name of relevant Community Welfare Officer etc) to non-homeless prisoners.
- Provision of general information on the Social Welfare system to prisoners.

The key benefit of this pilot programme was the delivery of an enhanced reintegration service for prisoners. This can be identified via the provision of:-

- Direct access to the statutory service responsible for emergency accommodation for homeless people.
- A more streamlined service whereby the Community Welfare Officer can process relevant prisoner details prior to release thereby providing a seamless, more efficient and less bureaucratic, service to prisoners.
- Improved communication between the two agencies resulting in a more responsive service delivery and more efficient use of resources.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

This report is written based on records held by the Probation and Welfare Service, Homeless Persons Unit and the Irish Prison Service regarding prisoners who took part in the pilot scheme.

Statistical information detailed in both the 'Prisoner Profile' and 'Uptake of Services' sections is based on a sample of 50 prisoners, who were the first 50 dealt with through the pilot, following the Christmas 2002 initiative. Nine of these remain in custody and four, who were released, have since been recommitted to prison.

Qualitative statements made to personnel interviewing prisoners are also referred to in the evaluation.

### **3 INTRODUCTION**

#### **Probation & Welfare Service**

The Probation & Welfare Service provides a service to all prisons in the State, focusing on three main areas.

- i) challenging offending behaviour.
- ii) assisting prisoners to cope with the impact of imprisonment
- iii) assisting in planning for prisoner release

It is in relation to the latter of these functions which the pilot project, herein discussed, relates. The need to, and benefit of, structured reintegration planning, throughcare and resettlement has long been regarded as a priority

- Whitaker Report 1985.
- Department of Justice Management of Offenders 5 Year Plan, 1994.
- NESF Report No. 22 Reintegration of Prisoners,
- National Crime Forum Report 1998.

This objective has been and remains a core target for the Probation & Welfare Service, who work in partnership with the Irish Prison Service and statutory/voluntary and community groups.

#### **Homeless Persons Unit**

A service central to the reintegration of many prisoners is the Homeless Persons Unit.

The Homeless Persons Unit operates a placement service for persons requiring emergency accommodation in the greater Dublin area. The Unit is constituted under the aegis of the Northern Area Health Board, but provides services to Homeless persons for the three Health Boards in the E.R.H.A. region.

The placement service is operated on an agency basis on behalf of the four local authorities, being Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, South Dublin County Council, and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown.

The main services provided by the Homeless Persons Unit are:

- (i) Assessment and placement of Homeless persons in emergency accommodation.
- (ii) Income Maintenance visa the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme.

- (iii) Practical Assistance including advice and advocacy on behalf of clients, with particular emphasis on helping our clients access stable accommodation.

This report sets out to review the development of the links made between the Probation & Welfare Service and Homeless Persons Unit in 2002 and 2003. It will describe the process and rationale for this development and will provide details regarding the structure of the service delivered, profile of prisoners availing of the service and detail of the type of services availed of by prisoners. It will also provide output data, where possible, for the short to medium term.

#### **4. BACKGROUND TO PILOT**

Within Mountjoy Prison, in mid 2002, a Probation & Welfare Officer was assigned to focus on developing current pre release systems and in particular to prioritise developing responses for prisoners who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. This led to discussions with the Homeless Persons Unit and consideration of a pilot project targeting prisoners being granted short periods of Temporary Release over the Christmas/New Year 2002.

In November 2002 the pilot was discussed by Probation & Welfare Service Mountjoy, the Homeless Persons Unit and the Irish Prison Service. It was agreed that the project would enhance service delivery to prisoners and assist Community Welfare Officers administer payments due to those being released. The aim of this initiative was to provide income and accommodation services to prisoners who qualified for Temporary Release over the Christmas period. The initiative involving Probation & Welfare Service Mountjoy, the Homeless Persons Unit and the Irish Prison Service was developed and the resulting pilot programme operated over the Christmas period. The Christmas Temporary Release initiative involved the presentation of information and advice to prisoners regarding welfare allowances, accommodation and entitlements. The added benefit of improved interagency co-operation was also identified.

Prisoners released on the 22nd and 23rd of December were interviewed and directed to their local Community Welfare Officer for payments, while prisoners due for release on the 24th were interviewed and assessed by Community Welfare Officers within Mountjoy Prison prior to the period of Temporary Release. Payment was then organised for the morning of the 24th and prisoners collected their cheque from the Homeless Persons Unit James Street.

The improved co-ordination of payment and information improved the transition of prisoners from prison back to the community and reduced tension and confusion. Feedback from participants was very positive.

Fifty one prisoners were involved in the Christmas Temporary Release initiative in 2002. This pilot was repeated successfully in 2003 when 56 prisoners benefited.

### **January 2003**

In January 2003 following the successful Christmas initiative, discussions took place between Probation & Welfare Service Mountjoy Prison, the Homeless Persons Unit and HOST (Homeless Offenders Strategy Team) to examine how to further develop the services provided to prisoners who were due for release from Mountjoy.

It was agreed that a Community Welfare Officer would hold regular one to one clinics with prisoners within Mountjoy Prison. Clinics were initially scheduled on an “as needed basis”. This was initially the most resource efficient system and allowed the demand for the service to be monitored.

It was also decided, that because of time constraints and limited resources, services would be targeted at “most in need” prisoners, and to expand the services as resources and capacity increased. Criteria for such a target group included prisoners presenting as

homeless or with a history of homelessness, including those with more complex reintegration needs such as health issues, social isolation/vulnerability, mental health issues or age.

Prisoners were initially identified by Probation & Welfare Officers, Governors and Chief Officers. Prisoners were interviewed by a Probation & Welfare Officer and a need assessment completed before referral was made to the Homeless Persons Unit.

As referral and demand for the inreach service developed the frequency of the service provided increased from a monthly to a fortnightly clinic by the Community Welfare Officer. This service was again increased in June 2003 and the Community Welfare Officer currently attends on a weekly basis, seeing referred prisoners on a Thursday morning clinic. In addition to this the Community Welfare Officer presents information sessions to the various Probation & Welfare Service led groups including a Lifers Group, Methadone Support Groups and the Drug Treatment Programme.

Prisoners were advised on a range of resettlement issues including entitlement to rent supplement, flat finding services, deposits, employment and income schemes. This is the first stage of what it is hoped will develop as a one stop shop information service and adds to the range of services currently operating through the Probation & Welfare Service in Mountjoy Prison.

In total, 257 prisoners have benefited to date.

## **5. PRISONER PROFILE**

Based on a sample of 50 prisoners the following prison profile data was available:

a) **Age Profile**

<b>AGE</b>	<b>%</b>	
20-25	38	
26-30	22	
31-35	16	
36-40	10	
41-45	10	
46-50	2	
<b>50 plus</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Table 1 - Age Profile**

As can be seen 38% of the sample were aged under 25 years and 60% aged under 30 years. The age profile broadly matches the prison age profile (IPS Annual Report 2001)

b) **Geographical**

96% of participants were from the greater Dublin area with a dispersal across 15 Dublin area address codes. The table below provides a breakdown of this information. The address provided by participants are those given at the time of assessment and may refer to previous now unavailable, addresses or family homes.

<b>Dublin Area Address code</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	
1	14	
2	6	
3	2	
4	4	
5	8	
7	4	
8	4	
9	6	
10	4	
11	10	
12	14	
17	8	
22	6	
24	2	
Co Dublin	4	
Outside Dublin	4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Table 2 -Geographical Distribution**

c) **Sentence/offence details**

Examination of the offences for which the prisoners had been imprisoned revealed that almost half were serving sentences of 1 year or less. Many offences in this category were public order related or of a relatively minor nature. Almost a quarter of participants

in the initiative were serving sentences of 13 to 24 months, with a high level of offences in this category described as possession of drugs and almost a third of the participants were serving sentences of more than two years for a range of offences including robbery, assault and possession of drugs for supply..

The following table provides detail in this regard:-

<b>Sentence Duration</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	
<b>0-12 months</b>	<b>48%</b>	
<b>13-24 months</b>	<b>22%</b>	
<b>25-36 months</b>	<b>18%</b>	
<b>37-48 months</b>	<b>8%</b>	
<b>Over 4 years</b>	<b>4%</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	

**Table 3 - Sentence Details**

It was also noted that except for one offender all had served previous prison sentences.

**d) Marital Status/Relationships**

All 50 participants who were interviewed said that they did not currently have a partner. 16% had previously been married but were now divorced or separated from their spouse. 84% had not been married. A total of 60% of participants reportedly had children although in the majority of cases contact with children had not been maintained.

- 70% of participants reported as having problems with either alcohol or drug addiction.
- 20% of participants reported as having mental health issues.
- 48% of participants reported ill health/medical problems..

**5. SERVICES AVAILED OF**

The following list provides an insight into the range of, and uptake of the services provided by the Homeless Persons Unit. Nine of the 50 participants sampled, referred to in the data below, remain in custody at the time of writing.

**a) Accommodation**

All 50 participants in the sample were interviewed by a Probation & Welfare Officer and a Community Welfare Officer. They were then made aware of the most appropriate accommodation option available through the Homeless Persons Unit. The following figures present a snapshot of accommodation outcomes, but does not include nine prisoners (18%) who had not been released.

- Sixteen participants (32% of sample) took up offers of emergency hostel accommodation.
- Four participants (8% of sample) took up offers of transitional hostel accommodation.
- Eight participants (16% of sample) took up offers of B&B accommodation.
- Two participants (4% of sample) received assistance in securing private rented accommodation.
- Three prisoners (6% of sample) did not take up accommodation offered.

Eight participants (16% of sample) did not require accommodation to be organised and returned to their family home.

**b) Weekly payment**

Thirty seven participants (74% of sample) were issued with a weekly payment. The remaining 26% percentage were either still in custody or did not follow up contact with the Homeless Persons Unit after release from prison.

**c) Clothing Allowance**

Twenty six participants (52% of sample) were issued with clothing allowance and as in Section (b) the remaining percentage were either still in custody, did not follow up contact or were ineligible.

**d) Medical Card Application**

Twenty one participants (42% of sample) received assistance with their application for a medical card. Fifteen applicants were issued with a medical card with the remaining 6 prisoners applications classified as 'pending' or their forms had not been returned.

**e) Disability Allowance**

Five participants (10% of sample) received assistance with application for disability allowance.

**f) Registered with Dublin City Council as homeless**

Twenty participants (40% of sample) were registered with Dublin City Council. as homeless. In a small percentage of cases application forms had been completed but had not been processed.

**g) Registered with City Clinic for Methadone Maintenance**

24% of participants were registered with City Clinic for methadone maintenance.

**h) Application for Birth Certificate**

26% of participants made application for Birth Certificates.

**i) Application for Travel Supplement**

Ten participants (20% of sample) made application for travel supplements (payments to assist with the cost of public transport).

**Non-Contact**

Three participants (6% of sample) did not follow up contact with the Homeless Persons Unit after release from prison.

## **6. EVALUATION**

In evaluating this scheme the various perspectives considered includes that of the prisoner, Probation & Welfare Service and the Homeless Persons Unit. Each of these perspectives will be considered separately.

### **Prisoner**

Feedback from a number of prisoners interviewed indicated high satisfaction ratings with the service provided. Word of mouth between prisoners positively impacted on the uptake of the service and can be seen as a clear indicator of the prisoner's perceived value of the scheme. This applies to both the Christmas Temporary Release initiative and equally to the ongoing service provided. The prisoners express appreciation for the added attention given to resolving their personal and practical difficulties, particularly given the high levels of anxiety frequently present when homelessness is being faced.

A number of other advantages were identified.

- A) Participants were positive about having direct access to the statutory service provider for homelessness.
- B) Participants in the initiative reported that meeting the Community Welfare Officer prior to release personalised the service and as a result levels of anxiety were reduced.
- C) The initiative clarified for participants the reality of resettlement options.
- D) The initiative provided participants with direct access to up to date information and led to an improved understanding of entitlements - reducing unrealistic expectations and misinformation.
- E) The above led to a more comprehensive pre-release scheme.

### **Probation & Welfare Service**

The pilot has been beneficial to the service in a number of ways. Each of these needs to be considered in how they impact on our overall objective of reducing the risk of an individual prisoner reoffending.

The Probation & Welfare Service in Mountjoy Prison believe the pilot programme implemented, adds value to the existing comprehensive prerelease programme offered to prisoners. In particular it aids the relationship between the prisoner and the Probation & Welfare Officer, as the prisoner sees a direct, timely response to their request for help, particularly when facing homelessness. The pilot has reduced the level of uncertainty and accompanying anxiety for the prisoner which facilitates Probation & Welfare Officer's focus on other reintegration issues needing to be addressed. This undoubtedly impacts on the likelihood of reoffending as shown in international research evidence.

The reintegration process is improved particularly by the fact that the prison has had contact with the Homeless Persons Unit prior to their release, and usually the individual Community Welfare Officer with whom they would be dealing in a post release period.

The joint assessment process utilised in the pre release stage also allows for a more suitable post release accommodation option to be accessed. This is of great benefit to the prisoner, although the progression route from such accommodation remains a target needing development.

The reintegration of prisoners with more complex resettlement needs, with an associated higher risk of reoffending, requires a multi-agency response. The Pilot has added significant value to this process.

### **The Homeless Persons Unit (HPU)**

The Pilot In reach Service has proved to be an important stepping stone which allows Community Welfare Services and the Services of the Homeless Persons Unit to be delivered in a planned manner to meet the needs of prisoners upon their release. The Pilot has allowed the Homeless Persons Unit introduce a structured Case Management approach relevant to this particular client group. The Pilot is in keeping with the Homeless Preventative Strategy, which seeks interagency co-operation and early intervention in situations where persons may be at risk of becoming homeless.

The Christmas Temporary Release element has enabled the Homeless Persons Unit to plan effectively in order to meet the needs of these clients, particularly at a time when maximum demand is placed on the services of the Homeless Persons Unit. It facilitates structured access to the Income Maintenance scheme and to Emergency Accommodation when required. The first Christmas Temporary Release program in December 2002 catered for persons appropriate to the Homeless Persons Unit only. The service in December 2003 was expanded so that clients appropriate to the local Community Welfare Offices due to be released from prison were also given information and guidance. This development of the Pilot has received positive feedback from the wider Community Welfare Service.

The weekly clinic held at Mountjoy prison targets the needs of prisoners who are at risk of becoming homeless or prior to their incarceration had a history of being homeless. This service has introduced an accurate and realistic expectation of the various services post release, and the appropriateness of each service to the individual. It has also facilitated the individual to develop their own plans for the future given the statutory services and entitlements available. The Pilot has reduced the incidences of clients presenting to the Homeless Persons Unit in crisis, and increased general awareness of longer term accommodation options, Social Welfare entitlements and the general health services.

## **8. TARGETS FOR 2004**

Alongside the ongoing refinement of the current initiative a number of developments for 2004 are planned.

1. Demand for the Homeless Persons Unit service within Mountjoy Prison now exceeds the capacity of current resource allocation. Whilst looking to expand this service it is subject to resource constraints and the already high workloads experienced by the Homeless Persons Unit. .
2. The current system in place to facilitate the Homeless Persons Unit accessing prisoners requires review as it can result in time delays.
3. A clearly identifiable target in 2004 is the distribution of information to prisoners. Improvements in this regard have been made and are being planned, including the production of a Prisoner Information Booklet for Mountjoy Prison (Irish Prison Service November, 2003, Department of Social and Family Affairs booklet for prisoners (currently being drafted), Probation & Welfare Service, Mountjoy Prison leaflets for prisoners, families and visiting agencies (currently being drafted).

As part of the Probation & Welfare Service, Homeless Persons Unit, pilot development preliminary discussions have taken place with the Educational Unit, Mountjoy Prison with a view to holding monthly open information sessions with input from the Homeless Persons Unit, Probation & Welfare Service and the Education Unit. These sessions would target all pre-release prisoners, complementing the existing Education Unit Pre Release course, and cover a range of relevant topics. Sessions would not be restricted to prisoners with issues relating to homelessness.

It is envisaged that open information sessions would improve the channelling of prisoners to the appropriate local Community Welfare Office on release. This is seen as an important development that will improve service delivery as currently there would appear to be some displacement of non homeless prisoners presenting to the Homeless Persons Unit on release having known of their inreach service to Mountjoy..

### 4. **Accommodation**

As is currently the practice, every effort will be made to identify 'significant others' (such as family and friends) in the prisoner's life who could provide suitable accommodation.

In the absence of this, the current responses being utilised could be enhanced by developing the use of accommodation options so that participants can be successfully linked with move-on facilities. This is crucial in order to maximise the turnover in emergency accommodation options.

The positive relationship developed between the Probation & Welfare Service and the Homeless Persons Unit has led to more effective communication between the services. Each has a clearer understanding of the objectives and demands faced by the other which allows for a clearer understanding and implementation of realistic options available in individual cases. Both services are committed to the ongoing development of this pilot and to sustaining our partnership approach.

The success of this initiative is due to the close co-operation between the Probation & Welfare Service, the Homeless Persons Unit and the Irish Prison Service. We look forward to continuing the development of the Pilot program in the coming year.