

Problem-Solving Justice and Problem-Solving Courts: What Northern Ireland Can Learn from the US Experience of Mental Health Courts

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Summary: The research and evidence from problem-solving courts in the USA consistently supports the notion that this model is effective, works in reducing reoffending and enhances treatment engagement. The approach draws on desistance theories and models to assist offenders to stop committing crime by supporting them in addressing their core needs and risks as well as encouraging treatment and an offence free life. A problem-solving approach to justice was included in the Northern Ireland draft Programme for Government (PfG) (2016). As Probation interventions have a key role in delivering problem-solving justice, the author applied for and received a Winston Churchill Fellowship¹ in 2017. The fellowship provided an opportunity to engage directly with the staff and structures of problem-solving courts in New York that were providing an alternative to custody for complex and vulnerable offenders. This paper describes the current developments in problem-solving justice in Northern Ireland, outlines the approaches taken in the American context, reviews the learning from the study visit, and discusses how the experience and learning gained from the Winston Churchill Fellowship Project can serve to inform further developments.