

Good Relations and Probation: An Outline of a Developmental Initiative by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland

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Summary: Work on equality and diversity is essential in societies emerging from conflict, however, it is insufficient to work on these areas alone. The need to secure an agreed law and order system and the experience of being equal and different citizens under that system are also fundamental and deeply intertwined requirements (Wright 1996). It is therefore imperative that criminal justice agencies see the goal of wider 'good relations' as central to their practice. In July 2002 the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and the Future Ways Programme, University of Ulster entered into a joint developmental action research programme entitled 'An Equity, Diversity and Interdependence Approach to Good Relations'. This article charts the key steps taken by the PBNI/Future Ways partnership to establish a framework for action on good relations. Good relations practice requires staff to work to a mental model in which people are viewed as equal and different citizens rather than as members of opposed and partisan traditions. Such a demanding shift presents personal and professional challenges that must be supported by organisational leadership and commitment. This process initially required external support, however once the organisation as a whole committed to the good relations agenda then the PBNI's learning and training arm assumed responsibility for leading the programme.