

THE PROBATION PRESS

Newsletter of The Probation Service

NOVEMBER 2008

A very special year

The Director of the Probation Service welcomed all to the official opening of the Haymarket Building and the Launch of the 2007 Annual Report - marking 100 years of the Probation Order.

Celebrating a century of change

In 2007 we celebrated a hundred years of the Probation Order which allowed us to look back and pay tribute to those who brought us to this point, acknowledging their work and their vision while also looking forward to the next 100 years.

Marking a very special year in the life of the Probation Service.

2007 was all about change.

But it has not been change for the sake of change. It was change to modernise. Change to improve our Service. Change to be more skilful and demanding in our work.

And ultimately it was change to ensure that we could help others to change. To change their behaviour. To break their pattern of offending. To seize a secure foothold back in society.

And change to play our important part with the larger Justice family in public protection and public safety.

What we achieved in 2007:

- Audited our services.
- Redistributed our resources.
- Provided additional resources with the support of the Government and our Department -
 - To create county boundary team structure
 - To set up assessment teams in Dublin, Cork, Limerick
 - To establish new dedicated teams in



Michael Donnellan, Director, presenting the Probation Service 2007 Annual Report to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr. Dermot Ahern, T. D. at the official opening of the new Probation Service Dublin Office in Haymarket, Smithfield.

- Counties Kildare, Cavan and Wicklow.
- To double our Probation resources in Limerick
- To create a National Young Persons Probation Division to drive out the community sanctions of the Children Act in conjunction with the Irish Youth Justice Service. Setting up of a high-risk team to take the lead in this important priority area.

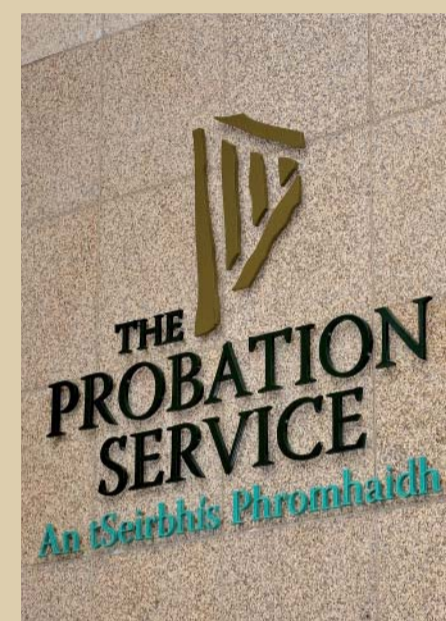
A new home in Haymarket

It was timely that the purpose-built Haymarket building was delivered to us by

the O.P.W. at this special anniversary. A building to make us proud, as a delivery point of service to the public in Dublin.

We also acknowledge the drive and foresight of the Assistant Secretary, Mr. Jimmy Martin supported by Ms. Mary Burke, Principal Officer in the Probation & Prison Policy Division. His management team and indeed all the staff in Probation have embraced the changes, the challenges and the many developments of this special year.

Michael Donnellan, Director



The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Mr. Dermot Ahern, T.D., officially opened the Dublin Offices of the Probation Service in Haymarket, Smithfield, on Wednesday 17th September 2008 and launched the 2007 Annual Report - a report marking a century of probation in Ireland.

Commenting on the Report, the Minister said: "This Annual Report marks a century of probation service in Ireland. The Service has gone from strength to strength in an everchanging Ireland. This report gives a good overview of the core work of the Service, namely the assessment and supervision of offenders. In 2007 alone, close to 9,000 assessment reports were prepared by Service personnel and about 8,000 cases were referred to the Service for supervision."

Tidy Towns Award for Canal House, Ballinasloe

The Board of Management at Canal House, Ballinasloe Training Workshop is very proud that the Centre recently received a prize, a first in the Tidy Towns competition for its wonderful garden which was designed by the trainees through the FETAC horticulture module. The Board are also pleased to welcome Mr. Padraig Lyons, who has recently been appointed co-ordinator of the newly refurbished centre. The Centre enjoys a close working relationship with the Probation Service and are planning the development of several new service initiatives in the year ahead.



Re-valued and re-cycled

Following the recent move from our Smithfield Chambers offices to the new Dublin Haymarket office, the Service had a large quantity of surplus office furniture on hand - 1,080 items in all. After communicating with all our regional offices and funded projects, over 880 items were either re-directed or recycled with a small amount stored for upcoming projects. The significance of this enterprise can be gleaned from the fact that one Project supplied with 66 items was estimated to have had a saving of €5,000 on projected expenditure.

Family Law

Many staff will remember that the Probation Service has a long history of involvement with the Family Law Courts. In general our reports to the courts dealt with the complex issues of custody and access arrangements for children whose parents were separating or divorcing. These reports, called Section 47 Reports, are requested under the Family Law Act 1995 which specifically mentions probation officers as nominated professionals to prepare these reports. Our most recent involvement dates back to 2003 when a successful twelve month Pilot Project was established at the request of the President of the Circuit Court.

During the intervening period the Judiciary have continued to press for a return of this service and a key recommendation of Carol Coulter's report on "Family Law Matters" included the recommendation that the role of the Probation Service should be expanded to provide a service which could provide expert and impartial advice to the courts on both the views and welfare of children in family law disputes.

In response to these requests the Probation Service, in partnership with the Courts Service, have initiated a Family Law Courts reports service which in the first instance will provide Section 47 Reports at the request of the Circuit Courts in Dublin, Cork and Limerick.

The Probation Service has a key coordinating role in this initiative and the assessments, in the main, are completed by contracted retired or ex-probation officers, most of whom have considerable experience in this field.

This service has become available and operational since the Trinity Court Sitting of this year. There have been 11 referrals nationally to date.

New Community Office in Kilcarn, Navan

The official opening of the new Probation Service office for County Meath took place in Navan on Tuesday, 30th September. Michael Donnellan, Director, speaking at the opening, thanked all concerned, particularly the Office of Public Works and our County Meath based staff, for their contribution to the development of this new location for the team, which re-establishes our presence in Navan at the new Government Offices in Kilcarn.



From left: Anna Connolly Regional Manager, Mette Roche Probation Officer (recently retired) and Mary Moore Regional Manager (YPP) beside Mette's painting "The Wheel of Change" in the reception area of the new Kilcarn Office.

INDUCTION FOR EO'S: All Executive Officers have just completed a 2 day induction programme. The core aspects of this important administrative role were covered and the group had the opportunity to reflect on their ongoing training needs. Presentations from colleagues within the Service were much appreciated.

COACHING PROGRAMME FOR PROBATION MANAGERS:

A coaching programme, designed and customised for Probation needs, has been put in place for the purpose of further developing the skills and capabilities of Probation Managers. Fourteen managers, from across all regions, will participate in the programme. The one to one coaching sessions will commence in late November and will be provided over a twelve month period. "Coaching is a collaborative, solution focused, results oriented, systematic process in which a Coach facilitates the enhancement of performance, self directed learning and personal growth of another person" (Tony Grant, University of Sydney).

CRACK COCAINE WORKSHOPS: Over the summer "Janus Solutions" provided two very successful training events to a large number of staff in Dublin and Cork. This invitational process oriented training helped staff to critically reflect on their current practice. The hands on approach of trainers gave participants the chance to practice more creative ways of intervening in the cycle of addiction.

MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING: The Staff Training and Development team were pleased to collaborate with the Forensic Social Work team, in the Central Mental Hospital, in the provision of mental health training to Probation Officers. Participation levels for both training days was very high. The content, which drew from the fields of psychiatry, psychology and social and community work, was very relevant to Probation staff. The ongoing provision of training in relation to interventions with this important and often complex Service User group is under review.

SEX OFFENDER MANUAL: During the course of this year, over 150 staff have been trained in the application of the Sex Offender Manual. The commissioning of this Manual was one of the initiatives taken by the Service as part of its commitment to effective practice in working with sex offenders. The training team are currently liaising with Dr. Sean Hammond from the Department of Applied Psychology in University College Cork in order to review the impact of training to date and to inform further planning.

L.S.I.R. SUPERUSERS: There was a very enthusiastic response from staff to the call for new recruits to join the existing core group of Superusers. A key priority was to ensure that there was an even spread of available Superusers across regions and catering for different work placements e.g. Prisons and Y.P.P. etc.

'Probation meets Prevention' Conference in Leipzig



CEP organised a conference on the theme "Probation meets Prevention", to coincide with the German Congress on Crime Prevention and the International Forum of the 13th German Prevention Day in Leipzig on 1-3 June 2008. Gerry McNally, Assistant Director of Operations in the Probation Service in Ireland and workshop leader of the conference, reports.

The involvement of probation services in crime prevention measures has been given special attention in the description of the aims of some national probation organisations. The CEP conference proposed to consider the engagement of Probation with Prevention through a series of presentations and group discussion sessions.

My colleague, Suzanne Vella, CEP Board member, and I led a group discussion on effective community engagement based on the experience of the Probation Service in Ireland.

Participation in community partnerships, funding and support of community based projects working to reduce offending, and the provision of Community Service work for the benefit of neighbourhoods and communities have been identified as positive and valued Probation Service actions in engaging with communities and enhancing the work of the Service in Ireland.

The Probation Service has a tradition of working in

partnership and engaging with communities. The Government prioritisation of 'joined up government' includes the close and co-operative working of statutory, community and voluntary bodies.

With a staff of 500 and offices in over 40 locations across Ireland, the Probation Service works in communities and seeks to involve them in the work of the Service to reduce re-offending and to enhance community safety.

Participation by The Service in local and regional community partnerships and initiatives contributes knowledge and expertise, enhances good relations, improves access to support and resources and reduces marginalisation of offenders.

Through financial and resource support for voluntary, community and neighbourhood projects and initiatives working with offenders, the Probation Service has developed valuable and important local links and resources.

In 2007 the Probation Service invested almost 40% of its budget in funding to community and voluntary projects providing education and training, employment placement, accommodation, restorative justice interventions and other services for offenders, adding value to the work of the Service and benefit to their communities.

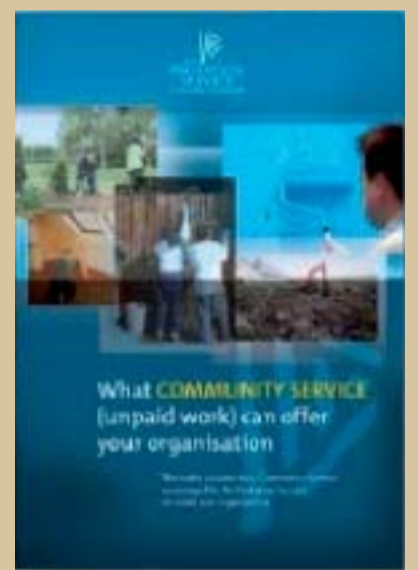
The group discussed examples of good practice and effectiveness in working with non-government organisations, local community groups and single task community based initiatives. There was also discussion of challenges, including governance in the non-profit sector, measurement of outputs and outcomes and coping with mission drift, informality and diverging interests.

Community Service is an important and increasing resource providing unpaid work on local projects by offenders, work which would not otherwise be done, for the benefit of the community. In 2007 Community Service provided more than 180,000 hours of unpaid work to communities.

The Probation Service consults with local communities to identify projects and tasks. Community Service projects include maintenance of community centres and facilities, graffiti removal and site rehabilitation, development of facilities for communities such as school gardens, community landscaping, environmental initiatives etc.

Communities are valued and important partners in the work of the Probation Service to the benefit of each. It is a relationship built on co-operation, trust and respect.

Gerry McNally



Survey of Community Service participants

A recent survey of forty offenders, working on eight community service work sites in the Dublin North and North East Region:

- identified community service as "paying back" for their crimes,
- viewed community service as a good thing in itself, and providing useful work in the community, as well as being a welcome alternative to custody,
- experienced community service as a positive deterrent and a demanding sanction,
- have generally very positive relations with their community service supervisors and host agencies for whom work is carried out
- welcomed learning new skills

The offenders surveyed also valued being treated respectfully and being praised for a job well done, although some had not had this feedback from their host agencies in the community. Their responses pointed to the critical importance of having a positive working relationship with their community service supervisor, as well as their probation officer.

The research report summarised that: when offenders see themselves as paying back and are at the same time offered an opportunity to make a real difference in the community...community service is offering a powerful personal experience and an opportunity for restoration to the community. The research also draws lessons for the future from the offenders' experiences and proposed a number of potential areas for improvement, particularly to build on the positive potential of the offenders' experience, create more 'positive' and meaningful work programmes and exploit the positive restorative potential of community service.