

# THE PROBATION PRESS

Newsletter of The Probation Service

JANUARY 2008

## Centenary of the Probation Order

The Probation Service celebrated the centenary of the Probation Order to commemorate the work of the Service. We wanted to mark the year in a way that would be memorable, reflect our history and promote our future, particularly in the light of the change process underway in the Service.

-1907



2007-

COMMEMORATING 100 YEARS OF PROBATION

The Service with the support of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform commissioned Michael Kennedy, a leading ceramic artist to produce a gift to mark the centenary. We were keen that the gift should either represent or be linked to the essence of Probation. We believe that Michael Kennedy's commission represents a Probation Service that is positive, inclusive and transforming.

The Service also produced a DVD which will be used as a vehicle to capture the history of the Service while also focusing on the progress made and the future developments planned.

An article written by our Assistant Director, Gerry McNally on the history of the Service has been included in the Probation Journal – volume 4.

The Director of the Probation Service, Mr Michael Donnellan hosted the first of three celebratory events at the Citywest Hotel, Dublin on 23rd November 2007. Brian Lenihan T.D., Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Honorable Mr Justice John Murray, Chief Justice of Ireland were in attendance. The event was attended by invited guests and also current and retired members of staff.

Two further events were held in Athlone and Cork on November 28th and December 5th respectively. Members of the Judiciary, representatives

from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, invited guests, current and retired members of staff were in attendance.

The DVD was shown at the events and the gift was presented to dignitaries, retired and a small representative group of current staff members at all three events.

The contributions made by former and current serving staff was noted. David O'Donovan, Deputy Director of the Probation Service in his speech at the three events summed up the Service's development to date:

"The Service has now come of age as a criminal justice agency. Whatever the future brings, we can face it with confidence. With a well trained, motivated staff, back up systems within the agency and leadership from management, plus wide recognition of what we bring to the table, we can make a real contribution to a safer if changing Ireland. In colloquial terms, we are raring to go, and you ain't seen nothing yet".

### Minister's Speech

The Minister in his speech said "I want to particularly acknowledge the pivotal role the Probation Service plays within the



Hedvig Coughlan and Kevin Dowling at the Cork Centenary Event

criminal justice system. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank you for the contribution which all of you are making to the fight against crime. You do make a difference and the high esteem in which the Service is held by the Judiciary, the community and the other arms of the 'justice system' is testament to the dedication and commitment of the staff of the Service. As with any organisation, the tasks and role of the Probation Service have evolved and developed beyond the role "to advise, assist and befriend". There is now much more emphasis on public protection and public safety; on reducing re-offending and offering offenders the opportunity to change through addressing their behaviour and the factors contributing to their criminality. Victim issues are –quite rightly - to the forefront of all your work with offenders be they in custody or under supervision in the community.

The Probation Service as we know it today has evolved and developed through the hard work of many. It would be remiss of me to let the evening pass without paying tribute to deceased staff, including Martin Tansey, who headed the Service for close to 30 years, all of whom helped to grow and develop the Service over the years."

The Director of the Probation Service, Michael Donnellan welcomed all to the special dinner to mark this important milestone, 100 years of the Probation Order. He particularly welcomed our retired members and stated that the event allows us to:

- Look back but face forward
- To recognise and praise the people who pioneered for us
- To acknowledge our current staff's work, the support of our Department, key partner agencies, the voluntary sector, all of whom work with us dealing with people in trouble on the ground.

But importantly, this event is also about our future.

The Director also acknowledged the help of the Art Management Department of the OPW and the Design Yard, in the commissioning of Michael Kennedy to produce our gift. Michael is one of Ireland's leading ceramic artists. His work is unique, he hails from the West of Ireland and his signature is the individuality of each piece of his work. The Director presented a number of these centenary pieces to our retired members of staff and then one to a current member of staff. Finally the Director launched the Probation Journal, a joint venture with the PBNI.



Kay Kinsella at the Dublin Centenary Event

## STAFF INTERVIEWS

### A 100 year history

Probation Officers have worked in the Dublin Courts since the enactment of the Probation of Offenders Act 1907. In the early years, there was only a single paid Officer working in the Dublin Metropolitan Court. He/she worked with the assistance of church agencies already active in missionary work in the courts.

In 1963-4 Probation Officers were assigned as Welfare Officers to Mountjoy Prison and the Service was, in due course renamed as the Welfare Service of the Department of Justice. The Service remained small in numbers and confined to the Dublin area with a total of 8 Probation Officers in the Service in 1970.

Following a report commissioned in 1970 and received by Desmond O'Malley as Minister for Justice the Service expanded nationwide. By 1973, Service numbers had reached 47, almost six times the total four years previously. Posts were established in Athlone, Cork, Dundalk, Kilkenny, Limerick, Sligo and Waterford and additional officers were assigned to prisons and detention centres.

Today we have a Service with almost 500 staff nationwide.



## CONTRIBUTE

If you would like to contribute to future issues of **The Probation Press** please notify Bill Sweeney, (Information Manager), by email [wjsweeney@probation.ie](mailto:wjsweeney@probation.ie).



### Maura O'Looney

Maura O'Looney joined the Service in 1966 and worked in a series of assignments in Dublin Courts and in the Female Prison until her retirement in 1992.

The Service Maura joined comprised 6 Officers operating from one room in Dublin Castle. The Officers at Dublin Castle shared a single telephone extension, had no secretarial or administrative support and all conducted their office interviews in the same room. Women Officers supervised boys under 14 years and female offenders only.

Officers were afforded one week by the Courts to complete reports. Maura recalls very large caseloads comprising mostly juvenile first-time offenders with charges arising from minor property crime, truancy from school and prostitution. Maura also worked with girls discharged from Industrial Schools and the Laundry in Gloucester Street which accommodated many orphans and 'lost' girls.

Dublin in the 1960's still had many impoverished families, neglected children and problems arising from alcohol abuse and unemployment. The growth of Dublin and replacement of slums with new estates caused major social problems when vulnerable families were moved away from their traditional support networks.

Maura placed great importance on the fact that a Probation Order did not burden the Probationer with a criminal record and provided a 'second chance' to the benefit of many individuals and to the community.

By her retirement in 1992 Maura was impressed by the recruitment of many new and committed Probation Officers and the expansion of the Service to cover all Court areas in the country. Towards the end of her career with the Service she noted new challenges with the impact of the hard drug culture in Dublin and related crime.

Maura O'Looney welcomes the new reinvigorated Probation Service and, in particular, the reinstatement of the original title, the Probation Service. She believes this brings clarity and focus to the task, recognition to the core values and purpose of the Service and acknowledgement of the Service's origin.



### Lena Timoney

Lena Timoney joined the Probation Service in 2001 and has worked in St Patrick's Institution and, more recently, on the Young Person's Probation South Dublin team.

Lena joined the Service with a large group of new Probation Officers. She recalls a great sense of energy, enthusiasm and commitment among that group of new officers. All had come from diverse backgrounds with different experiences.

They could tell that the Service was on the move and changing with the introduction of risk assessment instruments and further expansion of PMDS.

Lena Timoney's first assignment was in St Patrick's Institution where male offenders between the ages of 16 and 21 years are detained. The work of the Service in St Patrick's included working with young offenders to address their offending behaviour, delivering alcohol and drug awareness groupwork programmes, dealing with resettlement issues and working with families.

Probation officers in St Patrick's Institution were involved in multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working with other services including Irish Prison Service, the Psychology Service, the Chaplaincy, Healthcare providers and the myriad of community and voluntary organisations providing in-reach services to those in custody. For Lena this was a challenging and enriching assignment which contributed significantly to her experience and knowledge.

Appointment to the Young Person's Probation South Dublin Court team allowed Lena to build on skills developed in St Patrick's Institution. She has found it an exciting opportunity to contribute to innovative Service work with young offenders under the Children Act 2001.

Lena Timoney believes the Service is increasingly being recognised for its achievements. She sees the Probation Service is continuing to progress with ongoing commitment and energy in providing a valuable service to clients, stakeholders and the wider community.



### Dermot O'Connell

Dermot O'Connell joined the Probation Service in 1971 having previously worked in the Prison Service as a Prison Officer. Dermot was the first Probation Officer appointed in Cork and has worked his entire

career in the Probation Service in Cork Courts and Prisons. Dermot plans to retire at the end of December 2007.

The Service Dermot joined in 1971 was confined to Dublin City Courts, Mountjoy Prison and St Patrick's Institution. There had been no Service outside the Dublin area. The group of new officers of which he was part were the first tranche of a rapid expansion by the Minister for Justice, Desmond O'Malley, to bring the Service to the major centres across the country.

In the Welfare Service, as it was then known, there was, Dermot recalls, a strong emphasis on "assist, advise and befriend" offenders as the key task outlined in the Probation of Offenders Act 1907. There was a strong social work ethos among officers underpinning their supervision of offenders. Probation Officers worked with individuals and their families. A primary objective was getting offenders into training or jobs.

In establishing the Service in Cork Dermot, and colleagues who followed, worked to create good relations with the Judiciary, Garda Síochána, the legal professions and the Prison Service as well as statutory, voluntary and community services in the Cork area. This pioneering partnership and co-operative approach served to integrate the Service in the Criminal Justice and Social Services networks and to enhance the work of the Service with offenders, their families and communities. Over the years Dermot O'Connell has been instrumental in developing voluntary and community organisations working with offenders in their communities across Cork.

In the earlier years of Dermot's time in the Probation Service young people were in trouble as result of poverty, alcohol abuse and family breakdown. In more recent times the arrival of serious drug misuse with the related escalation in crime, violence and social breakdown has even more seriously damaged many communities and scarred the lives of individuals and families. The impact of drug misuse has made the work of the Probation officer more difficult and challenging. He also notes the increasing level of aggression and violence in offending, the increasing identification and incidence of mental health issues and behavioural problems among offenders supervised by the Service.

In Dermot O'Connell's view, the Probation Service is now more clearly and firmly established in its role in the Criminal Justice System and in Courts and prisons. The task of public protection is more clearly understood and integrated. Dermot O'Connell says he has seen more change and development in the Probation Service in the past two years than he believes happened in the previous 98 years since the enactment of the Probation of Offenders Act 1907.



Mildred Gilmore at the Athlone Centenary Event