

# PROBATION News

Magazine of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland • Issue 4 May 2016

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## #ProbationWorks

In March PBNI launched a social media campaign called '#ProbationWorks'.

The concept behind the campaign was to showcase in visual and creative ways how and why probation in NI works.

Probation tends to be less well known and understood than other parts of the criminal justice system. Therefore this campaign was an opportunity to show probation makes a difference in reducing crime and preventing re-offending.

We have used infographics, case studies, pictures and videos to tell the story of probation.

One of the most retweeted videos was of Nicola Carr from Queens University Belfast who explained why social work was an essential part of a probation officer's training. Case studies and videos from people under PBNI supervision showed how they had been able to turn their lives around as a result of probation's supervision and interventions.

PBNI has a rich mix of staff from a range of backgrounds all of whom work together to change lives for safer communities. More information on our campaign can be found at [www.pbni.org.uk](http://www.pbni.org.uk)

Deputy Director Paul  
Doran, Chairman Vilma  
Patterson, (Acting)  
Director Cheryl Lamont  
and (Acting) Deputy  
Director Hugh Hamill

**WELCOME** to the fourth edition of the Probation News Magazine. This magazine provides a twice yearly opportunity to engage through sharing of news, best practice and information to stakeholders, staff and the public. We hope you enjoy reading this edition.



**PBNI**  
Probation Board  
for Northern Ireland



## Introduction from the (Acting) Director

**This is the fourth edition of the Probation News Magazine. I hope you enjoy reading this latest update on probations' work.**

I would like to draw attention to some significant developments for PBNI which are detailed for you in the magazine. We have embraced social media this year, the PBNI twitter campaign #ProbationWorks at [www.twitter.com/PBNINews](http://www.twitter.com/PBNINews) started in early March 2016 and has showcased our work through the use of videos, 'day in the life' stories of our staff, case studies of offenders and victims, and infographics. The tweet of the video of Probation Officer Lesley Bell talking about her work has already gained 6,000 impressions, and I would encourage all of our stakeholders to take a look.

The Probation Board has always been progressive in looking for innovative opportunities to improve practice and 2016 is no different. In this magazine you will read articles about research we are undertaking through a Winston Churchill Fellowship in relation to mental health courts in the USA, our work with female offenders, and service user case studies. You will also read about our hugely successful placement programme for social work degree students which, has been recognised with an 'Ulster University Placement Employer of the Year Award'.

PBNI is committed to working to changing lives for safer communities. Our priority is protecting victims and preventing reoffending. I hope you find this edition of the magazine informative and that it helps explain some of what we do. Please feel free to contact us or receive further information through our website [www.pbni.org.uk](http://www.pbni.org.uk).

**Cheryl Lamont**  
(Acting) Director of Probation



## Welcome from the Chairman

**Welcome to this edition of the external magazine of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI).**

The aim of this publication is to engage with stakeholders, and to inform and raise awareness of the work of PBNI. I hope you find the articles informative.

You will see from the front page that PBNI is currently running a social media campaign called #ProbationWorks. In my view there are a number of reasons why probation works. Firstly the independent Board introduces a level of accountability, flexibility, oversight and strategic thinking which is to the benefit of probation practice and delivery. Secondly we have experienced and professional staff delivering our services. Thirdly probation has a long history in NI of working in all communities. That reach into local communities has enabled us to be responsive and to address local issues when they arise. Fourthly probation works because of the partnerships and collaboration we have developed across criminal justice.

Throughout this magazine you will see some examples of our partnership work and how probation in NI currently delivers rehabilitation to people who have offended and the importance of resettlement in communities to prevent reoffending and reduce the number of victims of crime.

Of course we continue to want to develop our services. This year we are embarking on the consultation process for our Corporate Plan 2017-20 and we are keen to hear from service users, partner organisations and the public about how we are doing and what we could achieve in future. Therefore I would encourage all of you to respond to our consultation and engage with us over the coming months.

**Vilma Patterson MBE**  
Chairman



Pictured at the 'Probation in Focus' seminar on 11 March are L-R; Deputy Chief Constable Drew Harris, PBNI (Acting) Director Cheryl Lamont, Chairman Vilma Patterson, and MP for Holborn & St Pancras Keir Starmer.

## Consultation on Corporate Plan Kicks Off

**PBNI is keen to hear from stakeholders as it embarks on the consultation process for its Corporate Plan 2017-20. On 11 March the Board held a seminar 'Probation in Focus' which marked the launch of the consultation process. The seminar, which was a first for PBNI, brought together a range of stakeholders from criminal justice, government, the voluntary and community sector and the business community.**

Opening the seminar Chairman Vilma Patterson outlined that while we know that probation is successful in reducing reoffending there remains a need to raise the profile of the debate about how best to deal with those who offend and how best to prevent people becoming victims of crime. The Chair pointed out that the cost associated with sending someone to prison is significant and in a time of reduced budgets and diminishing resources prison should be a place of last resort. Community sentences, on the other hand, supervised professionally can help make a person take responsibility and live a law-abiding life in the community.

A range of excellent speakers expanded on the theme of how and why probation works. Justice Minister David Ford paid tribute to probation staff and said that probation was delivering innovative solutions. Les Allamby, Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, talked about the fact that time served during

short prison sentences doesn't provide opportunities to address offending behavior.

Dr John Devaney, Senior Lecturer in Social Work at QUB, took us through the research that clearly shows probation works and highlighted the importance of probation staff's skills in relationship building and problem solving.

The keynote speaker for the day was Keir Starmer – MP for Holborn & St. Pancras, who provided an inspiring speech focusing on the importance of independence, and highlighting that probation is a front line service dealing on an individual basis with offenders and victims alike. He outlined the importance of community confidence and praised the work of probation saying he had never seen a report as positive as the criminal justice inspection report of PBNI.

Those who attended including Permanent Secretary Nick Perry, Deputy Chief Constable Drew Harris and Justice Committee Chair Alastair Ross all of whom paid tribute to the quality of conversations and engagement during the day.

In the coming weeks PBNI will be contacting key stakeholders to ask them some specific questions around the priorities for probation in the future. Together we can work to ensure safer communities throughout Northern Ireland.

# Problem Solving Courts

In March 2016 the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Justice published a report entitled "Report on Justice in the 21st Century: Innovative Approaches for the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland". In the document, it states: "The Committee is of the view that the underlying problems and root causes of offending behaviour in a range of areas such as alcohol and drug addiction must be tackled if reoffending rates are to be addressed; and believes that there is merit in exploring the introduction of Problem Solving Justice in Northern Ireland as an innovative and effective approach to the Criminal Justice System, particularly against a backdrop of increased budgetary pressures in the Public Sector."

PBNI believes Problem Solving Courts present a unique opportunity for probation to work with sentencers and others to assist in the desistance journey for offenders. PBNI welcomes the principle of greater judicial involvement in the oversight of offenders and based on the evidence and experience from other jurisdictions, including the United States and Scotland, strongly support the recommendations from the Justice Committee.

In January 2016, the Justice Minister contacted the Director of PBNI with a request to consider proposals for a new project in the Foyle area in relation to perpetrators of domestic violence. PBNI submitted proposals which were positively received by both the DoJ and the Lord Chief Justice's office. At an event to launch enhancements to the specialist domestic violence court in the city of Derry, both the Minister and the Lord



Chief Justice paid tribute to the speedy response from PBNI and indicated that PBNI would be the preferred organisation to provide such a programme for perpetrators.

PBNI is also working closely with our colleagues in Dublin to review the operation of a Drugs Court established in 2001.

Drug Courts, Domestic Violence Courts, and indeed Mental Health Courts are dedicated to improving public safety, and the evidence to date suggests they have an important role to play in reducing reoffending. In the coming month PBNI staff will be working to see how they can assist in the development of these initiatives.

## WINSTON CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP

Dr Geraldine O'Hare, PBNI Head of Programmes and Interventions, has been awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship for 2016/17 under the category of Mental Health.

The focus of Geraldine's project is on Mental Health Courts and the diversion of mentally disordered offenders within the Criminal Justice System.

Geraldine will travel to both the east and west coast of America to observe Mental Health Courts and meet with judiciary and practitioners who have implemented Mental Health Courts in a number of States across the U.S.

Geraldine will also visit secure forensic correctional units who manage mentally disordered offenders and who have developed new initiatives for integrated pathways for this complex client group within the justice system.

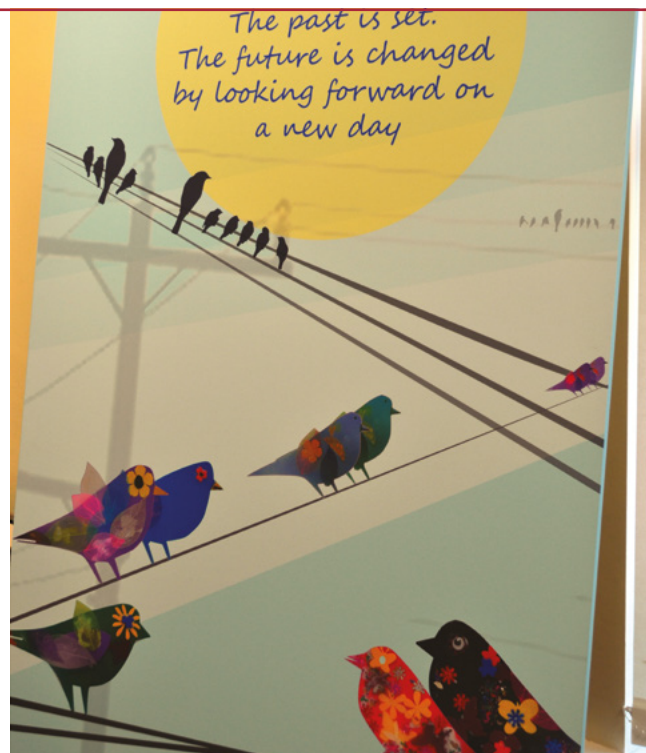
# Research study 'Time After Time - A Study of Women's Experiences of Transitions from Custody'

In 2014 Jean O'Neill, Probation Area Manager for the Inspire Womens Project, was awarded a Griffins Society Research Fellowship to carry out further research on women who have offended. She completed her study - *Time After Time - A Study of Women's Experiences of Transitions from Custody* - this year.

Using a 'life-history' approach and based on multiple interviews with women over a nine-month period her report describes their experiences of imprisonment, their release from custody and their transition back into the community. In doing so it recounts the challenges and problems they faced on this journey. The study is unique in that it not only aimed to explore women's experiences of custody, but also their transition back to the community - their plans, hopes and concerns. Importantly it documents their journeys over time - how they cope with adapting back into their families and the community, the difficulties they have to face and the extent to which their reintegration is helped, or otherwise, by agencies, whether official or voluntary.

Research on women's pathways into crime indicates that gender matters significantly in shaping involvement in the criminal justice system. More recent studies have focused on the problems women face in custody and the impact of custody on families and community at the time of release. This research reveals that on leaving custody, women face lives which are often more difficult and stressful than they experienced prior to imprisonment, especially with regards to accommodation, employment, substance misuse, partner violence, ill-health and trauma.

Prison was particularly difficult for women who were the primary carers for their children and many respondents spoke of the pains of separation. The consequences of imprisoning women with children, particularly where she is the sole carer can be devastating and the experience of separation was



described by the women as the most difficult aspects of imprisonment.

Most women did adjust and reconcile themselves to prison life by developing a variety of coping mechanisms such as immersing themselves in prison culture and availing of programmes, classes and activities and building up friendships along the way.

Nicola Carr, lecturer from the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work at QUB:

***"Jean's report provides a powerful account of the pains of imprisonment for many women and the challenges faced on return to the community. Her research is grounded in her extensive practice experience and in an approach which foregrounds women's voices. Based on the research she has formulated a range of proposals that are intended to have an impact on policy and practice in this area."***

Jean will present findings from her research on Monday, June 6, 2016 10:00am - 12:00pm at School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work - 6 College Park, Belfast, BT7 1PS

**For more details and how to register:**

<http://registertimeaftertime.eventbrite.com/>

The full Research Report is now available online here [www.thegriffinsociety.org/time-after-time-study-womens-transitions-custody](http://www.thegriffinsociety.org/time-after-time-study-womens-transitions-custody).

**inspire**   
WOMEN'S PROJECT

# Ulster University Placement Employer Awards 2016

In December 2015 Ulster University launched their 8th Annual Placement Employer of the Year Awards 2016 to celebrate the invaluable contribution placement employers make to the employability of Ulster University students.

PBNI submitted an application under the Public Sector Placement Provider category and were shortlisted alongside Belfast Health & Social Care Trust and Northern Health & Social Care Trust (Holywell Hospital). On 5th May 2016 PBNI attended the Awards ceremony at Jordanstown and were delighted to win the Award for Public Sector Placement Provider 2016.

The awards are designed to acknowledge the valuable partnership between Ulster University and local industry, which is producing highly skilled graduates who are driving indigenous business growth and attracting inward investment to the region.

Seamus McConomy, Work Experience Development Manager at Ulster University said: "These awards recognise the role played by industry in providing work-based training for our students, which bolsters the knowledge they gain in the classroom. This year's shortlist includes leading employers of all sizes across a wide range of sectors including everything from IT and construction to retail and healthcare.

"Work placements allow students to get first-hand experience of industry, while giving employers an opportunity to play an active



PBNI's Learning & Development team members Pauline McMillan, Probation Officer, Lesley McAllister, L&D Manager and Noreen O'Neill, Probation Officer receiving the Ulster University Award for Public Sector Placement Provider 2016.

role in shaping the skills of the future workforce. With over 2,000 Ulster University students undertaking placements every year, the University continues to produce a pipeline of industry ready graduates who are driving economic growth of globally focused businesses."

Gillian Robinson, Head of Human Resources outlines what we believe set the PBNI nomination above the competition: "A PBNI placement allows students to experience what it's like to work as a Probation Officer. Whereas with many placements, students gain an understanding of their post through experience of 'student friendly' tasks, in PBNI students are trained from the beginning to practice as a Probation Officer: students have a caseload they are expected to manage within agreed standards; they carry out risk assessments and prepare court reports. Within clear structures and standards to guide their work, students are also given freedom within this to demonstrate creative and innovative practice with service users."

## PBNI And Partners Embark On New Research Project

**PBNI are partners in a new international research and training programme that aims to better understand the consequences of trauma-related psychological distress. Funded under the European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme, the project known as CONTEXT brings together nine organisations across the academic, non-governmental, voluntary, and public sectors to provide a unique training experience for 12 doctoral researchers.**

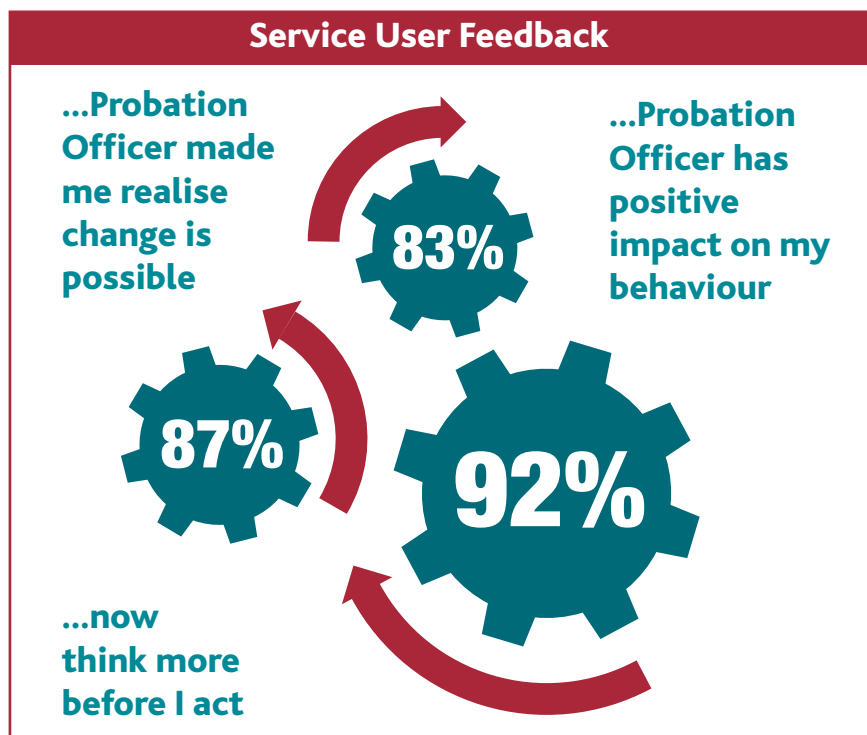
Research will focus on distinct trauma-exposed populations in Europe including victims and perpetrators of childhood and gender-based violence.

Through this programme researchers will gain an unprecedented breadth of knowledge and the CONTEXT team will have the ability to substantially contribute research to the traumatic stress field and thus have the power to influence policy and practice as it impacts on the way in which trauma victims are cared for across Europe.



# Service User Survey

A survey of PBNI service users was conducted over a two week period in October 2015. The objective of the survey was to develop and implement a strategic approach to service user engagement that better informs probation practice. A total of 666 surveys were completed, a healthy response rate of 40% of the eligible caseload at the time. Service users were asked to respond to a range of questions gauging their experience of PBNI, specifically the relationship with their Probation Officer, and whether probation had made a difference in their lives. Findings from the survey were extremely positive, with some of the headline results summarised as follows;



- The vast majority of respondents (87%) were satisfied with the service they have received from PBNI.
- In terms of the impact that the relationship with their supervising Probation Officer has made on respondents,
  - 83% agreed that it had a positive impact on their behaviour,
  - 87% agreed that their Probation Officer had made them realise that change was possible, and
  - 92% agreed that they now think more before acting
- More than three quarters of respondents (78%) indicated that they found it easy to get to their Probation Office.
- A similar proportion (75%) felt that the frequency with which they met their Probation Officer was about right.

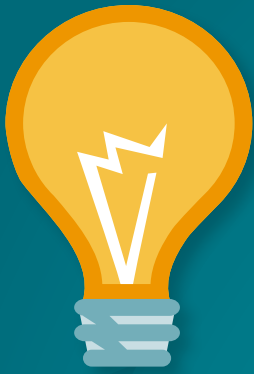
To read the full report go to the PBNI website [www.pbni.org.uk](http://www.pbni.org.uk) and visit **About Us/Statistics and Research**.

## Case study – Probation Order

Sam\* started his Probation Order as high likelihood of reoffending with some difficulties due to past relationships and alcohol abuse. He showed willingness to change and completed an Alcohol Management programme, reporting a substantial reduction in alcohol consumption with the goal of abstaining completely. Despite a few missed appointments at the beginning of the order, Sam began work with NIACRO, attending consistently, and his likelihood of reoffending reduced to medium. Sam successfully completed his order and did not go on to reoffend within one year.

\*not his real name

# PBNI Probation Story



## Innovation and efficiency

new projects on rehabilitation, restorative practices, and communication



## Collaborative working with partners

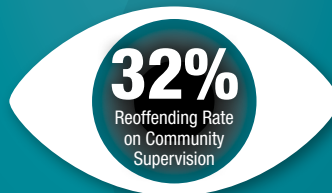


## Ensuring Offenders Comply with Court Orders

## PBNI Probation works



of those supervised by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland in the community through a **community disposal** did not go on to reoffend within one year.



In Northern Ireland, the one year proven **reoffending rate** for adults who were released from custody on **community supervision** was **32%**



Overall, the one year proven **reoffending rate** for adults who were released from custody was **46%**

