

# Social inclusion of ex-prisoners and their families: The role of Partnerships

Report on seminars organised by NEVA and Pobal in 2007

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SEMINAR 1

“Supporting Partnerships to engage with prisoners/ex-prisoners & their families in a new programme.”

SEMINAR 2

“Co-ordinating practice between Partnerships and statutory, community and voluntary service providers in relation to the integration of prisoners.”



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## Acknowledgements



Pobal would like to thank NEVA for collaborating on this initiative to build and strengthen Partnership work with prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families in a new social inclusion programme. The involvement of NEVA members in the design and delivery of the seminars was of enormous value, drawing as it did on a breadth of experience and insight to complement the work of Partnership staff with this target group.

Special thanks are due to the statutory sector speakers from Prison Regimes Directorate, Prison Education Service and the Probation Service, from the voluntary sector (Bedford Row Family Project, Peter McVerry Trust), from the Linkage Programme and You're Equal project and from the Partnerships (Blanchardstown, Cavan, Northside) who contributed to the seminars and explored the value of collaborations to date.

Needless to say, the participation of Partnership staff in the seminars was key to the success of both days. Key learning points offer a range of interventions that can be factored into future Partnership work and Pobal supports. Identified next steps provide an agenda for on-going dialogue between Partnerships, NEVA, Pobal, statutory bodies and other relevant players to ensure more effective planning and co-ordination of pre and post release services for prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families.

In particular, Pobal thanks NEVA members Tommy McKearney (Expac), Pat Doyle (Peter McVerry Trust) and Linda Sice (Roscommon Partnership) who helped to develop and organise the seminars and commented on various drafts of the report.

Finally, Pobal and NEVA wish to acknowledge the contribution of Paddy Austen, conference rapporteur, who prepared the initial draft report.

Design by Gráinne Murray

# Introduction



This report summarises two seminars organised by NEVA in conjunction with Pobal for staff of Partnerships<sup>1</sup> in 2007. The overall aim of these seminars was to build and strengthen work with prisoners and ex-prisoners and their families by Partnerships in a new social inclusion programme.

Ex-prisoners are an identified 'target group' within the current Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and are likely to remain so in a follow-on programme. However, it was recognised at the outset that individual Partnerships' projects vary considerably depending on local circumstances and needs.

Specific aims of the seminars were:

- To assist Partnership staff to consider prisoners and ex-prisoners when developing their next Strategic Plan
- To assist Partnerships to engage with prisoners / ex-prisoners and their families
- To facilitate the exchange of experience and learning between Partnerships and NEVA members
- To facilitate the exchange of experience and learning between Partnerships and statutory providers
- To identify mechanisms for enhanced cooperation at national, regional and local level between Partnerships and the statutory sector.

This report contains summaries from all the speakers at the two seminars<sup>2</sup> as well as summaries of the workshop discussions and plenary sessions. It also includes a set of key learning points for Partnerships wishing to engage with this target group, and a series of next steps to be considered by Pobal and NEVA.

**NEVA** is a network of ex-prisoner voluntary agencies which work with prisoners and ex-prisoners. The network members<sup>3</sup>, some of whom are Partnerships, have significant experience in the implementation of projects across the sector and, collectively, NEVA brings together valuable expertise, learning and experience which can facilitate Partnerships in their work with prisoners / ex-prisoners and their families.

**Pobal's** mission is to promote social inclusion, reconciliation and equality through integrated social and economic development within communities. Pobal is a not-for-profit company with charitable status that manages programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the European Union.

The **Local Development Social Inclusion Programme** is a series of measures that are designed to counter disadvantage and to promote equality and social and economic inclusion through integrated local plans. The LDSIP is managed by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Partnerships' is a term used to describe the 67 Area and Community Partnership companies that receive funding from the LDSIP

<sup>2</sup> Full speaker presentations can be found on both Pobal and NEVA websites: [www.pobal.ie/live/LDSIP/673.html](http://www.pobal.ie/live/LDSIP/673.html) or [www.neva.ie/Events.htm](http://www.neva.ie/Events.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Please see Appendix 2 for NEVA membership listing

# Summary



The two seminars explored work to address gaps in service delivery for prisoners and ex-prisoners nationally. They highlighted a range of potential interventions that could be factored into Partnerships' future plans.

The seminars identified significant expertise across a range of projects in the NEVA network and also among a number of Partnerships. They focused on successful interventions in areas such as inter-agency networking, family support, one-to-one mentoring, and lifelong learning. All offer insights into potential actions that Partnerships could initiate.

The seminars highlighted the complex nature of this work and the demands it places on organisations in terms of staff time and resources. Networking, planning and liaison with the prison-related services are all critical components of good strategy in this area. The seminars also highlighted the need for support from Pobal if effective strategies are to be developed.

## 1. Engaging with prisoners and ex-prisoners

The first seminar provided an opportunity for Partnerships to hear about the experiences of NEVA members and their work, to network with NEVA members and other Partnerships, and to explore how individual Partnerships could initiate or strengthen projects for prisoners / ex-prisoners or their families.

It focused particularly on the specific experiences of prisoner / ex-prisoner projects dealing with employment, accommodation, mental health, addiction, family support, education, training and general community support.

Out of these presentations and associated workshops, issues were identified which Partnerships need to address in the initial planning and development of projects and research programmes.

Part of this report therefore provides an introductory reference for Partnerships beginning the process of engaging with this target group. It identifies key issues to be addressed and highlights actions that have proved successful.



## 2. Coordinating practice

The second seminar took the learning a step further and looked at cooperation with statutory providers - the Irish Prison Service (IPS), the Probation Service and the Linkage Programme - as they relate to pre and post release services.

Speakers identified the scope and nature of the work of statutory agencies both within prisons and in the wider community and made clear that these services cannot and do not work in isolation. On the contrary, these services recognise the value of joined-up working both to the target group and in improving the management of service delivery.

Collaborative approaches such as in the You're Equal and BOND projects show that real successes are possible in both the pre and post release contexts when the statutory and community / voluntary sectors develop shared programmes.

The second seminar was a milestone in the developing dialogue between the statutory and the community / voluntary sectors, including Partnerships. It encouraged all agencies to join up the patchwork of interventions nationally, regionally and locally into a cohesive programme of coordinated supports for prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families.





# Speaker Reports



Full speaker presentations are found in electronic file format on both Pobal and NEVA websites. The following section summarises the salient points from the various presentations made at the two seminars.

## **Pobal and the LDSIP Framework**

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**Marion Byrne, Programme Manager, LDSIP, Pobal, Nuala Kelly & Pdraig De Burca, Liaison Officers, LDSIP, Pobal.**

*These contributions outline the context in which work with prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families is based entering the planning phase for a new social inclusion programme.*

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The re-integration of prisoners as a strategic aim of Partnership work is derived from the LDSIP strategy of focusing on the most disadvantaged<sup>4</sup>. Prisoners & ex-prisoners were recognised as a specific target group within the 2000 - 2006 LDSIP and are likely to continue to be so in a new programme. As a target group they have diverse needs across all sectors and they typically experience multiple disadvantage and exclusion. Under the LDSIP, thirty Partnerships identified ex-prisoners in SCOPE<sup>5</sup> and eighteen Partnerships had specific projects working with prisoners / ex-prisoners.

Pobal encourages Partnerships to initiate projects or strategically develop current practice with this target group in a new programme. Work will have to develop within the context of the emerging social inclusion framework, particularly in terms of new structures as a result of cohesion, the extension of social inclusion coverage and developments in national policy frameworks.

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<sup>4</sup> Nuala Kelly, Introductory Address, Seminar 1

<sup>5</sup> SCOPE - Systems for Co-ordinated Programme Evaluation



Partnerships will need to take into account the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007 - 2013 and a range of other relevant documents<sup>6</sup> that set an overall context for the development of their strategic plans. In addition, consultations with local stakeholders and analysis of GAMMA<sup>7</sup> data will feed relevant information to the planning process.

There has been significant learning as a result of the LDSIP over the years particularly in terms of the methods of working: the need, for example, for a holistic person-centred approach to involve and empower the target group, involving inter-agency cooperation at local level and recognition that employment and training need to be understood in the context of the wider issues affecting a person's life.

Pobal has identified the following key points from the NDP 2007 - 2013, which Partnership projects will have to incorporate in their strategy<sup>8</sup>:

- The NDP is explicit in requiring Partnerships to incorporate the real involvement of target groups in developing plans
- Projects should be innovative, capture learning and add value to existing interventions by statutory and local development agencies

- Key actions should include support for progression towards and within the labour market
- Other actions identified within the NDP include education and training supports for individuals at different stages of the life cycle.

While guidelines for the successor to the LDSIP are not yet available, Partnerships will nevertheless need to:

- Review and evaluate existing activities
- Consult with the target group
- Profile the target group in terms of numbers, age, etc.

Pobal is committed to assisting Partnerships in developing projects for prisoners / ex-prisoners within this context and have worked with NEVA to ensure that Partnerships are facilitated in the strategic planning process. Partnerships are therefore encouraged to “engage with the target group, link with statutory provision leading to real strategic change<sup>9</sup>”.

<sup>6</sup> National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 - 16; NESF report The Developmental Welfare State, National Action Plan against Racism; NESF Reports 'Creating a more Inclusive Labour Market' and 'Improving the Quality of Public Services'; Task Force On Active Citizenship Report

<sup>7</sup> GAMMA, an independent company, provide geographical analysis services

<sup>8</sup> Padraig De Burca's comments, Seminar 2

<sup>9</sup> Marion Byrne, Introductory Address, Seminar 2



## Network of Ex-Prisoner Voluntary Agencies (NEVA) & Future Programmes

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**Pat Doyle<sup>10</sup>, Chairperson, NEVA**

*The following is based on comments made by Pat Doyle as Chairperson of both seminars, in which he linked NEVA's work to the seminar themes.*

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NEVA's aim is to work exclusively with prisoners and ex-prisoners and its main long-term goal is to 'join up and expand the current patchwork of supports and services for prisoners and ex-prisoners across the country.' NEVA hopes to achieve this through highlighting the common concerns of agencies working in the field and identifying what agencies need to better engage with the target group. These two seminars represent a very important step towards achieving this aim.

NEVA as an organisation has a diverse membership; many current members are Partnerships and NEVA has had a long association with partnership approaches to work. NEVA would encourage all Partnerships engaging with the target group to take on membership with NEVA, thereby expanding the voice of the community / voluntary sector.

NEVA can act as a support to Partnerships wishing to develop or expand work with prisoners / ex-prisoners and as a resource for developing and exchanging ideas around project development. Given NEVA members successes on the ground and their significant experience in collaborative actions with the statutory sector, NEVA members can highlight areas of best practice within the field.

In the Irish context this target group "are the poorest of the poor"<sup>11</sup> and they experience the most acute form of exclusion across all sectors.

The Pobal / NEVA seminars fit well with the development of NEVA's work during the same period. Over 2007 - 2009, NEVA hopes to build its internal resources and collaborate with initiatives that will increase supports for more effective re-integration of prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families.

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<sup>10</sup> Pat Doyle is also CEO of Peter McVerry Trust

<sup>11</sup> Pat Doyle, NEVA Address, Seminar 2



## SEMINAR 1: Engaging with prisoners and ex-prisoners

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**Peter McVerry, Peter McVerry Trust**

*There are very real challenges and barriers for ex-prisoners returning to society. This presentation focuses on these challenges.*

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Gaps in supports for prisoners during the release process are extensively evident. Typically prisoners experience huge euphoria and anticipation one week before release followed by acute depression a week after, as the release process fails to adequately support the individual at this critical time.

Accommodation is a key barrier with many leaving with nowhere to go and others having only the option of returning to a previous, unsupportive environment which makes re-offending more likely.

Bureaucracy is a further barrier. Accommodation, social welfare, community welfare, medical and other services are all of vital importance to individuals on release. However there are often long distances between these services, the application processes are often daunting and there are inevitable delays and complexities in securing entitlements and benefits, acquiring a medical card is one such example.

There is a need for joined up working and a 'one-stop shop' approach to service access.

Lack of activity is a huge challenge on release. There is a real contrast between the highly structured daily regime within the prison environment and the individual realities of life on release. It is difficult to secure employment of any kind and training is problematic to access.

Labelling is a reality for all ex-offenders. There are negative associations throughout society for ex-offenders which have immediate effects on the individual both psychologically and socially in terms of re-integration into society.

Ex-prisoners therefore need huge levels of support and assistance throughout the various stages of the release process across all areas of their individual lives. State services have been unable to deliver this support and this is a clear gap where real work is needed.

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**Jerry Williams, Mentor, You're Equal**

*This presentation concentrates on how mentors can bridge a fundamental gap for prisoners and ex-prisoners.*

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Prisoners are unable to cope with the differences between the 'regimented fantasy world of prison and the chaos that is an ex-prisoner's life on release'.

Most individuals on release cannot see beyond the immediate issues and have little in terms of a strategy or real plan for moving on. There are few opportunities for them to secure support in this process prior to release.

There are also huge issues for many regarding literacy, addiction to drugs and/or alcohol, mental health issues and abuse, etc.

Mentoring is one method of tackling the high levels of support needed for prisoners during the release process. Mentoring under the You're Equal Programme provides individual, tailored support which begins well before release and continues during and after this critical period. It deals with the individual holistically, looking at a range of supports focusing on progression to employment while taking into account the various barriers and challenges individuals experience.

Mentoring is primarily a combination of link work and referral to ensure adequate access to services and realistic life planning for individuals before during and after release.

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**Colm O'Herlihy, Cork Prison Education Unit**

*This presentation concentrates on the need for integrated interventions for this target group if a change in behaviour is to occur.*

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There are fourteen prisons in Ireland with over 3,000 prisoners at any one time. Prison life is characterised by strict regimes, lack of individual control over daily routines and extended periods of inactivity.

The majority of prisoners will be released to a Partnership area at some stage.

There is scope for initiating post release work across the country through Partnerships in conjunction with Regional Drugs Task Forces and other existing services. Currently there is a change in direction within the Irish Prison Service towards 'Positive Sentence Management' which attempts to develop an 'integrated programme approach' to individual sentences. This will inevitably lead to better services for prisoners and ex-prisoners. However, there is a real deficit in terms of availability of supports across Ireland for prisoners and ex-prisoners. Probation services are really stretched and there is a lack of joined up thinking in terms of service delivery before, during and after the release of prisoners.

In terms of potential interventions a whole range of initiatives have been put in place; information services, information booklets, prison visitor centres, family support programmes, pre and post release mentoring, pre-release training and referral, etc.

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**Peggy Collins, Project Leader,  
Bedford Row Family Project**

*This presentation looks at the vital role of family support in the re-integration of prisoners into society.*

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Bedford Row Project is primarily a family support project. The project started in 2000 with hospitality “loitering with intent” at visiting time in Limerick Prison. Word of mouth has been vital in promoting the service. Family members are central in recidivism / effective integration of ex-offenders and the project therefore seeks to 'develop enabling behaviour to instigate changes within the family to help the prisoner.'

The project tried various mechanisms for intervention but has found that each individual is different and that investments need to be made primarily in the individual, on a one to one basis. Group based actions and supports have had limited success.

Since the start of the project a range of activities have been developed:

- Convening an Inter-agency Group including the target group and family members
- Individual linking of ex-prisoners with agencies
- Developing a Directory of Services
- Awareness raising programmes through Expac<sup>12</sup>
- Outreach work for ex-prisoners
- Counselling, support groups and referrals

- Personal development, behavioural, life and coping skills training.

Most work is referral based on a one-stop shop basis facilitating access to medical cards, social welfare and other services.

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**Alex Scannell, Co-ordinator,  
Northside Partnership's LESN**

*This presentation provides an example of employment focused work by a Partnership project in an urban context.*

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It was natural to include work with ex-prisoners within the Partnership's Area Action Plan due to the high numbers of ex-prisoners within the Partnership area.

The experience of the Northside Partnership in this work has been:

- Ex-prisoners have multiple needs
- Additional staff training is essential
- Pre release work is vital for longer term success for individuals post release
- One to one work has the highest levels of success
- Training and career path planning have to be linked to more general holistic support
- Developing and supporting referral paths and channels for example, agreeing referral protocols between agencies, is very important.

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<sup>12</sup> Ex-Prisoners Assistance Committee



## SEMINAR 2: Coordinating Practice

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**Tommy Brogan, Coordinator, You're Equal Ltd.**

*This presentation looked at lessons from 'You're Equal': EU EQUAL Project and focused in particular on the value of partnership approaches.*

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The You're Equal project is a development partnership providing pre and post release mentoring, awareness raising and self-employment training. It is a collaboration between voluntary groups, local development organisations such as Partnerships, statutory agencies such as the Irish Prison Service, Probation, FÁS and Social Welfare. “Without this partnership in action there would be no project”. The project is based in the two committal areas of Castlerea and Cork where local networks are well established. These networks are mirrored at national level through the You're Equal Mainstreaming Group. Coordination, liaison, effective flows of information and constructive dialogue are fundamental to the project.

### **Principles of the partnership approach**

The whole project has relied on a partnership approach at all levels within the project. The principles of this partnership approach are; hard work, patience, seeing beyond individual comfort zones, taking on board other agencies agendas, recognising that no single agency has the remit, resources or know-how to tackle the problems alone and, finally acceptance that each agency has its own expertise, parameters, networks, experience and positive parochialism.

### **Key lessons of the partnership approach**

The experience of the You're Equal project over the last three years has been that a partnership approach; aids the target group immensely, cuts down on duplication and adds complementarity. It resolves blockages and brings a broader network of agencies into play on every issue. It speeds up the process and promotes inherent accountability. Finally it influences the outlook and understanding of agencies involved.

The You're Equal project is moving into a new phase, beyond the initial pilot into a period of consolidation and mainstreaming. The project has succeeded because of the partnership approach between the statutory and community sector.

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### **Una Traynor, Community Development Coordinator, Cavan Partnership**

*This presentation looked at the Cavan Partnership Ex-offenders Initiative, a small scale focused collaborative pilot in a rural Partnership.*

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### **“Peer mentoring really works”**

Work with ex-prisoners has developed incrementally within the Cavan Partnership. In 2003, ADM (now Pobal) held a seminar with Partnerships and statutory providers around the issue of ex-offenders. Following on from this in 2005, a discussion forum with Partnership staff provided further opportunities to share and discuss their work and experience with ex-offenders. These



events, combined with the realities of individuals presenting themselves to the Partnership following pre-release training, led to the establishment of the County Cavan Working Group to develop an inter-agency approach and raise awareness of the target group. This group included FÁS, Department of Social Welfare and the Citizens Information Centre (CIC), etc.

A further initiative involved research to establish the scale of the problem and to capture the views of ex-offenders and their families. This latter initiative was essential as there was a lack of knowledge regarding the actual numbers of ex-offenders and the belief that numbers were insufficient to warrant the establishment of such a project.

The research demonstrated the need for forms of intervention and identified addiction issues, mental health issues, poor educational attainment, accommodation and family breakdown as key barriers in the re-integration of ex-offenders. As a consequence Cavan Partnership established a Peer Mentoring Programme in conjunction with Expac. This programme is a small pilot programme involving nine ex-offenders and four related families. It provides a potential model for other rural Partnerships. The programme provides one to one mentoring for identified individuals in addition to family support where necessary. The mentor is a peer, making access and support to the clients much easier.

As a rural Partnership working with relatively small numbers, the pilot has shown that there is a real need for mentoring support and inter-agency cooperation. Cavan Partnership therefore will continue to run with the pilot through 2008 and continue to raise awareness of the target group within the county.

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**Catherine Durkin, Education Coordinator,  
Blanchardstown Partnership**

*BOND an urban project<sup>13</sup>, supports the re-integration of young people leaving prison or places of detention, through referral to appropriate education, training or employment and accommodation.*

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“The development of the BOND project has demonstrated the importance of coordination across all statutory and community / voluntary agencies and the importance of involving the target group meaningfully in project structures.”

For every forty 16 - 21 year olds in Blanchardstown, one has been committed to prison. A local committee was established in the area consisting of Partnership representatives, a chaplain, probation officers and concerned parents. It works with between 60 and 70 young people annually. Since 2000, over 250 young people have registered with BOND.

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<sup>13</sup> BOND's aim is to promote the inclusion of ex-prisoners into the community





The BOND Project has four strands:

**1 'Getting Out' Prison Community Links**

A dedicated Links Worker assists prisoners to manage their sentence and plan for eventual release

**2 'Just Out' Linking In**

One to one support to clients in accessing services: health, social welfare, accommodation, family support and addiction, etc.

**3 'Just Out' BOND Residential**

Transitional accommodation for up to 18 months for young people with a housing need resulting from offending behaviour

**4 'Staying Out' Moving On**

A structured education programme run over 32 weeks to prepare participants for further education or employment.

These four strands make up an integrated 'package' of supports for prisoners and ex-prisoners. All four elements are developed through collaboration and coordination between BOND and a whole range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations active in the area. This approach underpins all aspects of the programme.

It is evident that “Partnerships have unrivalled local knowledge, access and influence” which should be used to “ensure that ex-offenders are included rather than excluded.” Some of this work can be done through for example, Local Employment Services (LES) but BOND suggests that a dedicated project is required to focus on the specialist needs of ex-prisoners with the involvement of mainstream players.

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**Seamus Sisk, Irish Prison Service**

*Seamus Sisk is Deputy Director of Regimes within the Regimes Directorate of the Irish Prison Service. This presentation looked at “Effective Coordination with the Irish Prison Service”.*

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The Regimes Directorate was established in 2002 in the context of a new policy focus on integration. It aims to achieve a balance between custody and rehabilitative / care functions and can be seen as “the social inclusion division of the Irish Prison Service.” As such, the Directorate is responsible for a range of services and activities within the fourteen institutions of the Irish Prison Service. These are briefly described below:

**Education**

In conjunction with the Department of Education and Science and the Vocational Education Committee (VEC), there are 220 full time teachers within the Irish Prison Education Units providing a wide range of educational programmes and courses. In terms of access, over 50% of the prison population are engaged in some form of education with almost 30% engaged in more than ten hours per week.

**Work & Training**

There are over 250 trained instructors within the Irish Prison Service responsible for the provision of work training to the prison population across



areas such as catering, laundries, environmental waste management, welding, horticulture, general maintenance and trades, etc. Over 26% of the prison population are actively engaged in work within the prisons.

### **Psychology**

There are 16 psychology professionals employed within prisons providing a range of counselling and mental health interventions as well as group programmes addressing offending behaviour including the Intensive Sex Offenders Treatment Programme which runs over 10 months each year in Arbour Hill.

### **Chaplaincy Services**

At present 21 full-time and 2 part-time chaplains provide pastoral services for the prison population. Other denominations are catered for on a part-time or visiting basis.

### **Probation**

There are over 45 Probation Officer posts providing a range of programmes and services to prisoners. The Probation Service is undergoing a strategic restructuring at present which may lead to changes in the range of services provided within the prison context over time.

### **In-reach services**

The Regimes Directorate has and will continue to adopt an increasingly flexible approach to in-reach services offered by the community and voluntary sector. A range of agencies have worked within the prisons delivering a range of programmes, in terms of pre release training, information and advice services, addiction counselling and support, etc.

Current successful inter-agency collaboration includes the You're Equal project in Castlerea and Cork committal areas, the Linkage in-reach placement of two Training and Employment Officers in Mountjoy and the Midlands campuses and the Homeless Persons' Unit (HPU) in-reach initiative in all of the Dublin's prisons as well as the Midlands prison.

The Regimes Directorate is at the forefront in the conceptualisation and implementation of Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) which is a multi-disciplinary planning tool being developed and implemented by the Regimes Directorate within the Irish Prison system. ISM is based firstly on the assessment on a collaborative basis, of the risks and needs associated with each individual following committal to prison and secondly the ongoing positive sentence management of prisoners. It is hoped that ISM “will lead to improved processes of transition” for prisoners as they move through the system towards and beyond release.



The Regimes Directorate further believes that ISM will be enhanced by the formation of strategic and tactical partnerships with community based agencies to integrate and coordinate the delivery of services to prisoners. From the outset it is important to be clear that such new relationships need to be based on full consultation with the Irish Prison Service. Partnerships should therefore approach the Regimes Directorate as the first point of contact.

In relation to demographic profiles and statistical data related to specific committal areas, counties and locations, again contact should be made with the Regimes Directorate.

Initial contact can be made through:

Alice Baxter  
Regimes Directorate  
Irish Prison Service HQ  
IDA Business Park  
Longford.  
Email: ambaxter@irishprisons.ie  
Tel: 043-35138

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**Paddy Richardson, Manager,  
Linkage Programme**

*This presentation concentrated on  
“Identifying Areas for further collaboration  
with the Linkage programme”.*


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Established in 2000, the Linkage Programme is a joint national project between Business in the Community Ireland (BITC) and the Probation Service. Subsequently in 2006, a new partnership was developed with the Prison Service through the Regimes Directorate. It represents one of three employability strands run by BITC with the specific aim of providing “ex-offenders and ex-prisoners with career path planning and support to access further education and training and full time employment”.

The programme is implemented at present through 22 Training and Employment Officers (TEO's).

Between 2000 - 2007, 5816 clients have been referred to Linkage of which 4260 have secured 'progression placements', i.e. they have moved on. There is a continuing demand from prisoners who wish to be referred to the pilot project highlighted by the fact that 75% of the annual target was reached within the first three months of operation.

In terms of collaboration, the Linkage programme has recognised that inter-agency work and coordination are vital components of the Linkage Programme. “No single agency can work with this group in isolation.”



There is a very high degree of collaboration at present in terms of for example, work with the Probation Service and the IPS, but there is also significant scope for further expansion of this collaboration with other agencies in a number of key areas: sharing and developing best practice, sharing information and feedback on clients, joint strategies for engaging employers, avoiding duplication, marketing social inclusion and finally referral of clients to and from projects.

However for joined up working to be successful in the future, it is essential that “a consistent practice of inter-agency work is developed.” One possible mechanism for this could be through the development of a *Memorandum of Understanding* between Linkage, Partnerships, statutory sector services and other concerned agencies. A joint working group could be established to draw together the relevant issues from the two conferences and develop a formal mechanism for “engaging with each other in the future.”

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### **Anne Reade, Probation Service**

*Anne Reade is Senior Probation Officer at Wheatfield & Shelton Abbey Prison. Anne focused on the role of Probation Services.*

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“In-reach services are essential in the prisoner's transition back to society”


### **How the Probation Service Works**

The Probation Service operates on a county basis and has over 500 staff managing three strands of work; work for the Courts, work with offenders in the community and work with offenders in custody.

In the context of work in prison, the Probation Service assesses both risks and needs as they relate to individual offenders. The Probation Service develops collaborative relationships with other services to assist prisoners / ex-prisoners in the transition to and from prison and during the sentence. This collaboration has proved vital particularly in the transitional period.

### **Barriers and Supports**

The role of the Probation Service is to provide high quality professional assessments of both risks and needs, and is integral to the adequate provision of individual supports. Similarly, the effective transfer of information from the community into the prison will assist the prisoner in dealing with his/her prison sentence. The appropriate sharing of information within the prison is also crucial in ensuring effective sentence management.



Collaboration in terms of facilitating in-reach services is very important as it provides a bridge between prison and the wider community. It is important that these services do not duplicate the work being carried out by prison-based services. Moreover, strong communication between these services is vital.

The area of mental health is extremely important in the planning of pre and post release work. Referrals and associated protocols between agencies and health services need to be appropriately managed. Additional linkages also have to be developed between projects, general practitioners, community mental health organisations and other relevant services.

Planning for prison release is crucial if all of the above work is to be effective. The lack of successful prison release planning has negative consequences at all levels; at the level of the client in terms of inter-agency coordination and in the continuity and integrity of services.

### **Models of Collaboration**

The Bridge Project, the BOND project and the Community Prison Links Workers are “excellent examples of collaboration and cooperation”. Future collaboration might draw lessons from these models.

### **Key lessons**

Collaboration to date has resulted in enhanced supports and services and significant programme learning in the context of:

- recognising that community protection will be enhanced through the reduction of re-offending as a result of the positive change in individual offenders' behaviour
- recognising and promoting restorative justice processes such as community service
- valuing risk assessment and risk management to identify the level and type of needs and supports a prisoner may need
- planning the individual offender's sentence management and particularly release planning is important in terms of successful re-integration
- developing protocols in regard to information sharing between services, the prison and community are essential
- valuing local community support.

Finally, it is essential to plan service delivery “at local, regional and national level” if the correct services are to be in place to address the needs of prisoners due to leave the prison system for years to come.”

# Workshop Reports

Each seminar included workshop sessions at which all participants could engage in discussion on the themes arising. The following is a summary of the main issues that arose in the workshops over the two seminars<sup>14</sup>.

- THEME 1:** Issues and difficulties for Partnerships in terms of accessing prisoners / ex-prisoners and their families
- THEME 2:** Challenges facing Partnerships in initiating this work
- THEME 3:** Supports required to engage with prisoners / ex-prisoners and their families
- THEME 4:** Lessons for enhancing and challenges in encouraging coordination between stakeholders in practice
- THEME 5:** Barriers to be addressed in order to enhance and encourage coordination and collaboration between stakeholders

## **THEME 1: Issues and difficulties for Partnerships in terms of accessing prisoners / ex-prisoners and their families**

### **Recognising the disparities and differences in different Partnership areas**

There are clear differences between urban and rural areas and between those areas where there is a prison, such as Castlerea in Roscommon, and those areas without a prison, in terms of accessing information, accessing the target group and coordinating activities.

There is also a need for detailed research in this field in a number of Partnership areas, building on the expertise that already exists, but specific to each Partnership area or committal area.

### **Levels of coordination**

In a number of areas there is a lack of agency coordination to support people coming out of prison resulting in gaps between services in prisons and those outside, to promote and support integration on release.

### **Engaging with clients**

It is vital to work with clients pre release and to look at accommodation, mental health and addiction issues, areas of work which many Partnerships do not have direct experience with. Partnerships should as a first step, link in to or develop networks of agencies that would have these skills and remits. There is a need for more preparation and joined up work between services in the prison and outside well in advance of a prisoner's release.

<sup>14</sup> Full workshop reports are available from [www.pobal.ie/live/LDSIP/673.html](http://www.pobal.ie/live/LDSIP/673.html) and [www.neva.ie/Events.htm](http://www.neva.ie/Events.htm)

## **THEME 2: Challenges facing Partnerships**

### **Research, consultation and establishing links and relationships**

Partnerships need to gather baseline information for their particular area and develop a strong understanding of the key issues relating to ex-prisoners.

Partnerships need to develop links with the prisons but this needs to be done carefully and in a coordinated manner with the Irish Prison Service. It is essential that Partnerships develop good relationships with prison authorities and agencies involved in work with prisons.

Partnerships need to engage in consultation processes with the target group. This can be difficult as ex-prisoners may be reluctant to identify or engage but it is important to use creative methodologies to encourage their involvement and participation.

### **Networking and inter-agency forums**

Partnerships should develop inter-agency forums and networks, memoranda of understanding and protocols to develop or improve referral systems.

Partnerships need also to network with each other to share information and strategies. It would be particularly important to network on a committal area basis for each prison, for example Castlereagh prisons committal area includes Sligo, Donegal, Mayo, Roscommon and Galway, and the Partnerships in this region could meet for coordination purposes.



Partnerships would benefit from more information and awareness of good practice. There is significant experience, which Partnerships may not be aware of, both within the NEVA network, in Pobal and among Partnerships already active in the field. There is equally a lack of information among organisations that work with prisoners and ex-prisoners regarding what the Partnerships can do in terms of the types of intervention that can be made.

### **Resources & staff support**

Ex-prisoners have high support needs and require intensive one to one assistance. This requires greater resources than for example LES type job coaching in terms of staffing, staff support, staff training and staff time. Partnerships will need to develop new procedures for staff in terms of health and safety, confidentiality, staff support, staff development and staff training in order to address the support needs of ex-prisoners.

### **Awareness & engaging with employers**

Employer awareness is a vital issue as it is the determinant of whether ex-prisoners can access employment opportunities. This awareness type work cuts across all Partnership areas and should be included in Partnership plans even if direct casework with the target group is not appropriate due to lack of numbers. With regard to employer awareness, strategies and programmes that have succeeded should be made available to Partnerships. Finally there is a need to deliver outcomes for ex-prisoners and their families.

### **THEME 3: Supports required to engage with prisoners / ex-prisoners and their families**

#### **Partnership Boards & competition for limited resources**

Most boards would not have the necessary understanding to see the full implications of working with this target group in terms of issues, staffing or resources. Also many boards may not see this group as a priority in a competing environment with other 'more mainstream' target groups and may not be keen to support actions in this field. Therefore board training would be an important element of future activities. Pobal should consider developing such training in conjunction with other organisations including NEVA.

#### **Training, Pobal support, resourcing and networking**

Given the specific additional training needs for this type of work there should be information regarding the availability of training programmes. In particular, the FETAC accredited course<sup>15</sup> that is being developed through NEVA should be circulated to all Partnerships.



Pobal needs to encourage more Partnerships to engage in this sector, for example by profiling and documenting good practice on strategies for working with prisoners and ex-prisoners. Further networking opportunities should be organised for Partnerships with each other and with the Irish Prison Service, other statutory services and NEVA nationally.

Pobal should prioritise stronger communication with Partnerships about prisoner / ex-prisoner issues and be cognisant of the greater resource issues for ex-prisoner work.



## **THEME 4: Lessons for enhancing and challenges in encouraging coordination between stakeholders in practice.**

### **Co-ordination and complementarity**

Enhanced coordination and collaboration will allow for a more comprehensive and holistic approach. It will minimise duplication and ensure the best use of limited resources. It creates a constituency of support for work that brings collective wisdom and experiences to bear and reduces professional isolation. Finally, collaboration and coordination necessitate a spirit of openness, self-criticism and a willingness to move away from 'turf war' attitudes.

### **Statistics & research**

It is vital to have accurate data about the situation on the ground in relation to numbers involved, where they are from, types of offences and the availability of services in order to plan effectively. This is a prerequisite for enhanced cooperation.

There is moreover a need for further detailed research on relevant local or thematic issues, building on the expertise that is already there, for example within NEVA member organisations and Partnerships, but specific to Partnership and committal areas.

### **Political & community awareness / stigmatisation**

Assisting resettlement of prisoners and ex-prisoners is not a popular political issue and therefore it can be hard to raise sufficient interest or awareness at local level. This



can make coordination at local level very difficult, particularly in the context of the role the media has in perpetuating commonly held negative stereotypes.

There is a role therefore for Pobal in engaging with agencies at national level in relation to raising the profile of this target group and gain the participation of key personnel and resources.

Local Partnerships need to 'de-bunk the myths' regarding prisoners and ex-prisoners, the fact that over 80% of prisoners are convicted of non violent crime is unknown in the public domain. Awareness raising is particularly important in relation to Partnership Boards of Management, County Development Boards, employer organisations and agency representatives.

Efforts should also be made to use equality legislation to enhance / safeguard the rights of prisoners and ex-prisoners.

### **Regional planning / service coverage**

There is a need to look at the issue on a committal area basis so that there is no duplication or gaps both of which are possibilities if planning is undertaken in isolation. Regional planning is particularly important where for example, a collection of counties may not have a prison in their region but nevertheless, there is a high number of ex-offenders living there.

Regional planning may also ensure that the representatives in a network have the necessary authority and responsibility to sanction new working practices and inter-agency arrangements.

### **Agency remits / networks for co-ordination**

Individual agency remits have to be respected before coordination can truly begin, particularly where agencies have statutory responsibility and / or may have a long track record of work in a given sector. Partnerships need to be sensitive to the established structures and processes and seek to build upon them.

Inter-agency and coordination challenges can be frustrating for all concerned. One way of addressing this might be to develop protocols that focus on throughput and individual care. Examples of good practice in other committal areas could also be useful.

Pobal could facilitate central coordination and collaboration as a way of encouraging agencies at local level. Central support can greatly improve opportunities for coordination at local level. Local networks where they develop need to have links to both national level networks and also to the prisons concerned.

The possibility of instituting Memoranda of Understanding to provide a framework for local network activities should be considered particularly as a way of avoiding 'personality driven' approaches, which rely on individuals.

### **Planning, service delivery and collaboration pre and post release**

There is often a lack of joined up thinking not least in terms of prisoner release planning. Experience



has shown that the timing of release is often unplanned due to factors such as availability of prison spaces being completely arbitrary and negates much positive pre release work that has been undertaken with a particular client. Similarly the link between pre and post release is often not made, leading to major difficulties in accessing services. There is also a need to recognise the lack of post release services in many rural areas, so it may be difficult to coordinate when there are gaps in available services.

It is vital to work with clients pre release and also to look at accommodation, mental health and addiction issues, areas of work that many Partnerships do not necessarily have direct experience in. But Partnerships should as a first step, link in to or develop a network of agencies that would have these skills and remits.

There remains a sizeable population within prisons who have not engaged with statutory services across education, Probation, etc. This is both an opportunity and a challenge for all services.

### **Funding**

There is often difficulty in securing funding streams for this work for a whole range of reasons; competing target groups, lack of local will and lack of distinct funding sources, etc.

There is also an issue around accessing long term funding as opposed to funding of pilots. Work with ex-offenders is long term and funding therefore needs to be long term.

## **THEME 5: Barriers to be addressed in order to enhance and encourage coordination and collaboration between stakeholders**

### **Barriers**

Central direction and coordination has been lacking making the development of local coordination sporadic and sometimes lacking in focus. One aspect of this is the piecemeal nature or absence of information regarding the target group to date, making planning new programmes for this target group problematic.

Many Partnerships may lack the necessary expertise or resources to deliver on programmes for prisoners and ex-prisoners given the nature of the work and the expertise required.

Poor resource availability is a major barrier. Competing demands on limited resources inevitably results in decreased ability to work with a given group. Where there is lack of political will, poor public awareness and evident stigmatisation, resources are more likely to be directed away from ex-prisoners.

The availability of employment or work placements is a barrier in itself in a number of ways: getting work placements is proving extremely difficult; there is often 'competing contact' with prospective employers; low-skill jobs and manufacturing jobs are disappearing. Eligibility requirements governing schemes such as the Back To Education Initiative, Back to Work Allowance and others can sometimes prevent a seamless transition from prison based study or training to further study or enterprise development on release. The current decline in construction all make access to



employment for the target group difficult. These workplace barriers therefore make it easy for employers to say no. Coordination with the business sector is made difficult, as often employers cannot 'see what is in it for them.'

The lack of a Local Employment Service in many areas makes coordination difficult in relation to education, training and employment supports for ex-prisoners.

### **Encouraging coordination and collaboration**

Pobal needs to take on a central role in terms of coordinating and influencing policy among the various providers and stakeholders.

Partnerships can help by highlighting at different levels and in local representative structures that prisoners and ex-prisoners represent the most socially excluded and cumulatively disadvantaged group in Irish society today. From this exercise will flow a systematic rethinking of attitudes and approaches.

Good quality data on a localised basis needs to be developed so that accurate needs analyses can be completed. This data needs to be complemented by the 'mapping' of available services and supports and the identification of gaps in service delivery.

Partnerships could encourage a community development approach within the coordinating mechanisms as they develop. This will ensure that



the target group itself is fully involved in terms of project planning and development.

Pre development work in terms of further workshops and specific training programmes will allow for greater engagement with the target group as the knowledge, skills and expertise of staff within Partnerships is increased.

An ethos of institutional learning needs to develop whereby respective agencies across all sectors recognise that solutions to problems within the sector cannot be found by one organisation alone.

# Key Learning Points for Partnerships



These learning points reflect the general experiences of NEVA members and Partnerships. They are aimed at providing a simple reference checklist for Partnerships in the initial stages of project planning and development. These issues were looked at extensively in the seminar workshops and in the plenary sessions.

## 1. Project Planning

- Start small, build up projects carefully and ensure that there is a strong pre release dimension to activities
- Use the knowledge and learning that is there within NEVA, other Partnerships already active in the area, the statutory services, Pobal and other forums
- Ensure that projects are planned sensitively within the context of the Irish Prison Service's custodial and sentence management remits and sensitivities in relation to statistical information and client confidentiality
- Recognise the impact of a jail sentence on an individual and allow for this in project planning
- Identify actions to combat prevailing negative attitudes towards ex-prisoners within society and the media in particular.



## 2. Work in collaboration

- Recognise the value of coordination and collaboration supports for the target group and institute a community development approach across all work
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of respective agencies from the outset and in particular the role of the lead agency in order to avoid confusion, and / or conflicts of interest. Clear role and task definition can make positive impacts on the quality of the work in terms of results and outcomes. Respect and seek to understand the approach of the 'other' and play to the strengths of respective agencies or groups
- Seek to build on existing relationships within the sector particularly in terms of developing positive relationships with the Regimes Directorate, Probation, Education, Linkage, Chaplaincy services and other services in prison
- Work with existing projects and other Partnerships within each prison committal area wherever possible, or on a regional basis
- Facilitate link work and networking activities as a way of 'joining up' services where possible. In particular, enhance or create links and bridges between pre and post release services. Develop effective referral mechanisms to avoid duplication

- Use Prison Regimes contact first as point of contact for all prisons:  
Alice Baxter  
Regimes Directorate  
Irish Prison Service HQ  
IDA Business Park  
Longford  
Email: [ambaxter@irishprisons.ie](mailto:ambaxter@irishprisons.ie)  
Tel: 043-35138.

## 3. Quality Service Delivery

- Focus on one to one work and support plans as central to pre and post release activities for individuals
- Group work as a tool can be used in the context of building community development approaches and with families in particular
- Ensure that the issues of poor accommodation, high bureaucracy and gaps in services are addressed for individuals in one to one work and deal with the practicalities for each individual
- Deal with individual client needs holistically and specifically provide for addiction, mental health, counselling and literacy supports
- Recognise the importance of the role of the family in the process of release and integration.



#### **4. Manage expectations**

- Expect projects to be slow due to the high support needs of ex-prisoners and their families, security clearance issues, and prison access issues, etc.
- Expect high drop out rates and be realistic in setting specific targets for the project and for individuals within projects
- Recognise that the majority of prisoners have been marginalised and excluded prior to their imprisonment; it may not be a question of 're-integration' into society, but rather a question of trying to enter, for example the labour market, for the first time.

#### **5. Staff Supports**

- Plan for increased staff support needs within projects and staff training that is specific to the target group
- Develop and implement appropriate staff security and support policies.

# Next Steps



These recommendations are representative of issues and suggestions raised during the plenary sessions. Some issues, particularly those raised in the first seminar were addressed in the second seminar. They are included as they were relevant for a large number of seminar participants.

1. Pobal could assist by exploring the possibility of getting statistical information regarding prison population by committal area, county, region or by prison to ensure coherent data is available for all Partnerships in the strategic planning process for a new programme<sup>16</sup>
2. Pobal and NEVA should identify and update materials describing models of best practice for engaging with this target group. Experiences within NEVA and Partnership projects could be documented for use by all Partnerships
3. Pobal and NEVA in the preparation for the second seminar included the following specific elements which were raised in the first seminar<sup>17</sup>:
  - Input from the Irish Prison Service
  - Input from the Probation and Welfare Service
  - Specific statistical information on committal areas and prison populations
- Input from both urban and rural projects with a specific focus on intervention in terms of:
  - Pre release work
  - One to one client mentoring
  - Inter-agency networks and referral protocols
  - Awareness raising programmes for employers
4. Efforts could be made to identify training needs and opportunities for Partnership staff who work with prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families, for example the FETAC Level Five *Understanding Imprisonment* course being developed by NEVA<sup>18</sup> and You're Equal project
5. A joint working group could be established to draw together relevant issues from the two seminars and develop mechanisms for engaging between Partnerships and the statutory sector using for example protocols and/or memoranda of understanding
6. Ongoing exploration and use of channels identified by the Irish Prison Service should facilitate dialogue with Partnerships for example, in relation to specific issues regarding security clearance and access to prisons.

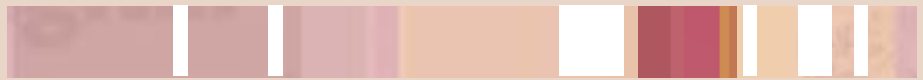
<sup>16</sup> The Deputy Director of the Regimes Directorate (IPS) at the second seminar presented statistical data. Further data can be secured by Partnerships through direct contact with the Directorate through Alice Baxter, Regimes Directorate, Irish Prison Service HQ, IDA Business Park, Longford. Email: ambaxter@irishprisons.ie, Tel: 043-35138

<sup>17</sup> All these issues were addressed in the second seminar

<sup>18</sup> Contact NEVA for full details



# Appendix 1



Papers are available electronically from the NEVA and Pobal websites. Papers include:

- Speaker Presentations Seminar 1
- Speaker Presentations Seminar 2
- Full Workshop Reports Seminar 1
- Full Workshop Reports Seminar 2

[www.pobal.ie](http://www.pobal.ie) <http://www.pobal.ie/live/LDSIP/673.html>

[www.neva.ie](http://www.neva.ie) <http://www.neva.ie/Events.htm>



# Appendix 2



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