



Annual Report 2016



"The task of transformation, is a task that is one that involves more than those in prison"ⁱ

President Michael D. Higgins, (2016).
*Formal Address to Cork Alliance Centre Conference -
"Narrowing the Disconnect - The ethics of supporting
desistance from crime".*



Introduction

The Cork Alliance Centre was established in 2003 with the support of the Probation Service. The Centre works with both men and women on release from prison. It seeks to facilitate the process of personal recovery and empowerment with the overarching view of desistance from crime. as people seek to become better equipped to manage their lives more positively. Our service is based in the community with in-reach work in the prisons. In 2016, the Centre's core funding is from the Department of Justice and Equality through the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service.

The Work

The choice for change and the associated choice for desistance is not a once off decision, but rather a complex process of continuous choices to desist from crime. Together with a support mechanism to sustain the life changing choices and the motivation and belief in oneself and society that such change is achievable, valuable and tangible, are inherent for desistance from crime to be sustained. Intrinsic in this is the need for inclusion and acceptance within society.

The work of the Cork Alliance Centre relates to activities directed towards facilitating service users to become generally better equipped to manage their lives positively. *“To desist from crime, ex-offenders need to develop a coherent, pro-social identity for themselves”ⁱⁱ*, therein importance of self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-respect and self-determination cannot be underestimated. *“Very often people are encountering problems that have been neglected at a deeper level”ⁱ* and it is in this context and with this knowledge that the Cork Alliance Centre works. Facilitating service users as they restore their positive ‘connections’ with their family, friends, community, society and most importantly with themselves is fundamental to the work of the Cork Alliance Centre.

The People

Since 2003, in excess of 1,800 people have chosen to seek support from the Cork Alliance Centre on their release from prison. On average 100 service users at any time access the supports of the service. Some service users have been through university, and many more are at, or have been to college. Many have found recovery from

addictions, and while others are struggling with their recovery, they are seeking support to change. Those who access the service of the Cork Alliance Centre choose to do so voluntarily.

The Conference

In 2016, past and present service users joined the staff and board of the Cork Alliance Centre for the second conference hosted by the Centre '**Narrowing the Disconnect – the Ethics of Supporting Desistance from Crime**'. Over 250 guests attended the two day conference at which President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins made the conference keynote address. Central to the conference was the lived experience of past and present Cork Alliance Centre service users. The personal stories presented in such an open and honest way was very powerful and



insightful for the conference participants, giving people an understanding of the complexities of the desistance journey and the profundity of living it. They clearly conveyed that *“the process of identity formation that is going on in the person is an extraordinarily important one.”*¹ Together with the premier showing of a new



documentary made with our service users, five people who have accessed the Cork Alliance Centre services presented at the conference.

The challenge for the Cork Alliance Centre is how to honour the learnings from the conference and move forward in the work of “narrowing the disconnect” and *“to celebrate the good things that have happened”* (Higgins MD, 2016) both in the lives of the people we work with and in the organisations who touch their lives. Our international speakers namely, Dr Deirdre Healy, Prof. Shadd Maruna,

Prof. Joanna Shapland completed the programme and all strongly valued the opportunity to present alongside our past and present service users. Also joining the Cork Alliance Centre, to present at the conference were Vivian Geiran of the Probation Service and Michael Donnellan of the Irish Prison Service. The opening address was made by David Stanton, TD Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality. The conference was funded by the Solidarity Trust.



The Programmes

The Cork Alliance Centre manages two programmes with both the Probation Service and the Prison Service, and hosts a PhD researcher.

1. The **Desistance and Integration Support Programme**
2. The **Community Support Scheme (CSS)**
3. **PhD Research**

The Desistance and Integration Support Programme is open to all people from Cork who have been in prison. Together with supporting people to address their offending behaviour, the team work to support people as they seek to build a constructive and connected life. The support is offered on a one to one basis, as personal plans are developed, realised and built upon. As the Centre works with a service user on all aspects of their life, a better 'wrap around' service is provided, linking in where appropriate with other agencies and departments in a more joined up service. The services offered include

- Support and motivation work where among other areas offending behaviours, thinking skills, coping mechanisms, socialisation skills etc. can be addressed
- Linking and supporting access to voluntary and state organisation as assistance to source and secure accommodation
- Linking and supporting access to secure financial supports
- Linking and supporting access to source, secure and sustain trainings, education and literacy supports
- Linking and supporting access to source, secure and sustain employment schemes and employers

- Linking and supporting access to addiction treatment programmes and services
- Supporting access to professional counselling and acupuncture
- Linking and supporting access to parenting and family programmes
- Highlighting emerging trends and developments among our service users and wider community

The foundations of the Cork Alliance Centre are based in a shared-caring approach, where with the agreement of the service users, support and assistance is garnered from state, semi-state and voluntary organisations and their representatives.

In 2016 the programme worked with 146 people of whom, 77 were engaged with the centre at year end. 92% of the clients were men and 8% women. Together with offending behaviours the primary presenting need for 65% of service users was addiction, with a further 16% presenting with addiction and mental health concerns and 5% with mental health concerns. Over 77% of our service users were in the 26-45 age bracket, with 20% imprisoned for drug related offences, 42% for burglary and theft, 19% for assaults, 7% road traffic, and 12% public order offences.

The Community Support Scheme (CSS) is run in conjunction with the Irish Prison Service, and offers prisoners serving sentences between 3-12 months the opportunity to serve part of their sentence in the community rather than in the prison. This constructive community based alternative to imprisonment is a means of positive sentence management offering a chance for change for the prisoner in an effort to break the cycle of repeated short-term imprisonments. The opportunity to serve a sentence in the community rather than in prison is a short-term practical intervention linking those availing of this early (temporary) release programme to services and service providers within their home locality, as a means to improve the individual's chances of sustaining life outside of prison. The Cork Alliance Centre operates the programme in Cork since 2013 and in 2016 we expanded to cover the Portlaoise and the Midlands prison and employed a second team member to undertake this work and provide additional service in Cork Prison.

In 2016, 165 people were released under the CSS of which 75% completed or are currently on the programme. Of a total of 286 referrals in the year 19% declined or were unsuitable for the programme. 98% of those referred were men and 2% women. 81% of the referrals were from Cork Prison, 14% from the Portlaoise Prison Complex, 3% Limerick and 2% Dublin Prisons.

PhD Research, in partnership with the Probation Service and University College Cork, is being facilitated since October 2015. The research co-funded the Irish Research Council and the Probation Service was initially titled “Post-release supervision: practices, actions and resources in the community that enhance prospects for successful re-integration of long sentence male offenders upon release” and has been renamed “Connected Corrections and Corrected Connections: Post-Release Supervision of long sentence male offenders”.

Conclusion

2016 was a challenging year for the Cork Alliance Centre, to sustain and maintain our



work with service users, together with organising a conference, demonstrates the commitment and dedication of the staff and board to the desistance process and the service users. In the words of President Michael D Higgins *“this work is critical, and the benefit of your work cannot be overestimated, and it will not just last for a day, it is something that will endure and it is a crucial contribution, a building block, towards building the ethical society in which we all want to share, in all our imperfections and the versions of our wounded selves.”*ⁱ

ⁱ President Michael D. Higgins, (2016). *Formal Address to Cork Alliance Centre Conference “Narrowing the Disconnect - The ethics of supporting desistance from crime”*.

ⁱⁱ Maruna S (2001) *Making good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives*, American Psychological Association Books: Washington DC, p7

