

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN FOCHOISTE UM ATHCHÓIRIÚ AR AN GCÓRAS PIONÓS

SUB-COMMITTEE ON PENAL REFORM

Dé Céadaoin, 19 Nollaig 2012

Wednesday, 19 December 2012

The Joint Committee met at 13.45 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Sandra McLellan,*	Senator Ivana Bacik,
	Senator Martin Conway.

* In the absence of Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

In attendance: Deputy Sean Fleming..

DEPUTY DAVID STANTON IN THE CHAIR.

The joint sub-committee met in private session until 1.55 p.m.

Penal Reform: Discussion

Chairman: The purpose of today's meeting is to have discussions with those who made recent submissions on penal reform, including information on international best practice. I thank those attending today for giving of their valuable time and expertise, which is very much appreciated, and for the submissions they supplied to the committee. I will invite each organisation to make brief opening remarks followed by a question and answer session with members. This is a sub-committee of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality and it has five members.

I welcome from the Cornmarket Project in Wexford Mr. Paul Delaney and Mr. Paul O'Brien; from Focus Ireland Ms Joyce Loughnan, chief executive, and Ms Catherine Maher, national director of services; and from Care after Prison Ms Bernie Grogan, liaison officer. Members have received submissions and any opening statements received have also been circulated. We will begin with the Cornmarket Project after which we will hear from Focus Ireland and then from Care after Prison.

I wish to advise the witnesses that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they are to give to this sub-committee. If they are directed by it to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter to only qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against a person or persons or an entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Members are reminded of the long-standing ruling of the Chair to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. I invite Mr. Paul Delaney to begin.

Mr. Paul Delaney: I thank the Chairman and members of the committee for this opportunity to further expand on our written submission. The Cornmarket Project was established in 1999 as a multi-agency response to criminality and substance misuse issues in County Wexford. Each year, the project deals with approximately 250 individual clients with criminality and substance misuse issues, 170 of whom on average are direct referrals from the Probation Service. The Cornmarket Project receives core funding from the Department of Justice and Equality through the Probation Service, and is under the umbrella of Wexford Local Development, the local development company in County Wexford mandated to deliver rural development, social inclusion and community development programmes on behalf of the Government.

The project has an outcome-focused, community-facing and client-centred approach. The Cornmarket Project's primary goal is to work in collaboration with the Probation Service and other partners to ensure positive behavioural change in medium to high-risk offenders with a concurrent reduction in recidivism. To this end, the Cornmarket Project adds value to the work of the Probation Service by addressing issues of motivation, problem solving and skill building in offenders to diminish criminal behaviour and enhance resistance to substance misuse. The methodologies used by the project are underpinned by evidence-based behavioural interven-

tions delivered by trained staff concentrating on enhancing client motivation for successful participation in the rehabilitation and reintegration programmes delivered by the project and for moving offenders towards other suitable external progression routes.

Enhancing offender motivation to make positive behavioural change lies at the heart of the work of the Cornmarket Project. I hope that at the conclusion of this session the committee will be better informed about our change outcome and impact measurement, COAIM, system, which is based on evidence-based intervention techniques for offender programmes which have shown demonstrable effects in other jurisdictions. The COAIM system uses unique evidence-based algorithms and metrics and was primarily developed to measure, and ultimately enhance, the determination to change in offenders who can very often be low in motivation when first referred. Research on effective offender rehabilitation interventions suggests many existing programmes target offenders who are already motivated to make positive change. However, a significant cohort of offenders needs a very structured motivational enhancement programme to enable them to get to this stage.

In this regard we know from previous submissions to the committee by the Irish Prison Service that young short-term prisoners have the highest rate of re-offending, and this has also been our experience over the past 14 years. In accepting this we can also point to a sub-category among this cohort of offenders with little or no motivation to change. We also suspect that this category of recidivist offender places a significant burden on the State in terms of costs associated with Garda, court, probation and prison services.

Tremendous work is being done by organisations working with offenders who are already motivated to make progress but if we do not also concentrate our efforts on those offenders who are harder to work with as they initially lack the motivation to make positive change we are likely to have a mismatch of resources in this area. This can lead to missed opportunities, particularly with regard to enhancing and maintaining motivation for positive change with this significant cohort of offenders with low motivation to do so.

As the committee is aware, an important new Irish research study undertaken jointly by the Probation Service and the CSO was published recently, and was the subject of an article in *The Irish Times* last Monday by Mr. Vivian Geiran, the director of the Probation Service. In this article, Mr. Geiran stated:

Clearly, custodial sentences are warranted for those who commit very serious crimes and who represent an ongoing danger to the public. However, it is extremely difficult to rehabilitate offenders through imprisonment alone. While prisoners deserve rehabilitative opportunities as well, offender rehabilitation programmes are most effective in reducing risk of reoffending when they are delivered in the community and target key risk factors.

The Cornmarket Project seeks to target this offender group through the provision of a community-based rehabilitation and reintegration programme which, through the use of the COAIM system, targets the main criminogenic antecedents in a very planned manner which in turn, encourages desistance from crime. At this stage I am talking not only about offenders who have been before the courts and who are on probation but also low-motivated ex-prisoners returning to the community and those who have found themselves in trouble again with the criminal justice system and who may well be on the road back to prison.

A strong driver for reliable assessment, monitoring and outcome measurement systems has been to satisfy funders and other decision makers. However, the COAIM system also recog-

nises the importance of the offender's perspective and involvement in the measurement of their participation in rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, particularly as a motivational enhancement strategy. It is hard to ignore the issue of system integrity if offender input to the measurement of programme efficacy is excluded. Therefore, the COAIM system challenges conventional methods of measuring programme outcomes where the offender is the passive recipient of programmes and services and the deliverer of those services decides how beneficial they are or were for the offender.

The tools of the COAIM system are predicated on assessing, targeting and measuring factors that can be changed in the lives of offenders, known as dynamic factors. Those that cannot be changed are static factors and include prior record or family criminality. There is general agreement throughout the international research literature concerning the ten main dynamic or criminogenic target areas that need to be worked on with offenders in order to reduce recidivism. Committee members will already have these ten areas outlined in some sample documentation and tables that were supplied prior to today's meeting. Studies have shown that programmes that target four to six of these criminogenic risk factors more than non-criminogenic risk factors can have a 30% or more effect on recidivism while programmes that target more non-criminogenic risk factors have virtually no effect. This research also suggests that community based-programmes that demonstrate good evidence of effectiveness include evidence-based behavioural therapies, intensive case management, a multi-systemic approach and interpersonal skills training.

Historically the development of services for offenders in Ireland has not always been marked by adherence to best practice based on empirical evidence. Expediency, personal conviction and a sincere desire to do something to respond to anti-social behaviour and criminality in our communities have been more common drivers. However, policy development in Ireland in recent times concerning offender reintegration strategies seeks an increasing use of community options including non-custodial alternatives to prison and in suitable cases, the use of back-door strategies involving some form of early release while also seeking a reduction in expenditure. We suggest that the COAIM system that is at work in the Cornmarket Project, together with its range of tools, can assist in meeting these requirements and thus support the overall penal reform agenda.

We are now in a new era that presents both challenges and opportunities. We must develop new approaches and ways of working to meet the needs of today for the users of the services, the funders and the communities in which we all live. Those charged with effecting positive change regarding offender reintegration and rehabilitation are asked to demonstrate programme efficacy, value for money and evidence on client outcomes. Departments, funders and other stakeholders, including this committee, are increasingly seeking that credible and validated outcome-measuring systems are in place in State-funded organisations. We believe the system at work in the Cornmarket Project can help to fulfil these requirements. We hope our submission will make a positive contribution to the work of the Sub-Committee on Penal Reform and to the wider discussion on evidence-based best-practice rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for offenders.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Delaney for a very impressive presentation. If it is agreed, we will hear from all the witnesses before have questions and answers in case any more divisions are called in the Seanad.

Ms Joyce Loughnan: I thank the Chairman for the opportunity to allow us to air what we have learned from the services we deliver. Focus Ireland has been working very closely with

Seamus Sisk on the implementation of the integrated services management system. Through that engagement, we were able to form partnerships with the Prison Service, the Probation Service, the HSE and other NGOs with which we work closely. Initially from 2007 we worked in the Dublin prisons and then had the opportunity to expand to Limerick in 2009 and Cork in 2010. We are in the process of negotiating starting in the Dóchas Centre prison in 2013. In the Waterford area we have commenced a project around community service.

We are engaging within the prison and outside the prison, which has been a key aspect of our learning and success. We develop those relationships, develop the trust and continue working with people when they are discharged to help settle them back to have a place they can call home, living independently in the community. We are dealing with people with high levels of mental health problems and many of them have addiction issues. There is a cohort of young people who have been in care and have come through the prison system. Other aspects of our work manifest themselves in what we see in the prison area. We have worked with several hundred people during the years we have been operating and have learned a great deal.

I would like the committee to focus on four things. The first is the assessment of housing need of people who are admitted into the prison system. The earlier that assessment can be done the more opportunity it will give us to help preserve any home situation somebody may have so that he or she does not lose that home, especially in the case of those who are in the prison system for a very short period of time. Focus Ireland is trying to shift much of its emphasis to preventing people from becoming homeless. Our work in the prisons is very much geared around that and all the outcomes we measure focus on how we prevent people from becoming homeless.

In doing that assessment an holistic care plan is prepared by our project worker engaging all the relevant services needed to ensure success upon discharge. We need more tightening of the planned discharge so that we can manage the release of people back into the community. It would be very beneficial for us to have more units of supported temporary accommodation. We have been able to provide some of Focus Ireland's stock of housing in the Dublin and Limerick areas. Unfortunately we have not yet been able to secure any accommodation in Cork. We would certainly need more units of supported temporary accommodation where we can manage the release of people from prison so that they do not fall into the homeless system and do not fall back into their old ways. We can actually start them on a better life for the future.

The final thing on which the committee should focus is how these services get funded. We have been very fortunate to receive some contribution from Pobal's dormant accounts fund over the years. However, that has all dried up and the ongoing continuation of our work is purely funded by public donations to our organisation. Having said that, when we measure the outcomes for the people with whom we have worked the number who have remained settled in the community and not re-engaged in the prison system is extremely positive. Many people, including the prison governors and those in the probation services, have said that the people with whom we are working are of the highest level of need and yet we have had a great success rate in reducing the levels of recidivism. While what we are doing is not the whole story, it is a contribution to reducing recidivism. We would be happy to take questions at the appropriate time.

Chairman: I thank Ms Loughnan for that interesting presentation.

Ms Bernie Grogan: It is an absolute honour to be here with such established organisations as the Cornmarket Project and Focus Ireland. I am here representing Care After Prison, which is really just a baby compared with the other groups represented here, as we have been in opera-

tion for just over a year. Members will excuse me because I am smothering with the flu.

Chairman: We will stay well away.

Ms Bernie Grogan: I am a full-time liaison officer with the City of Dublin YMCA and I work part time on the Care After Prison project, which is a partnership project between the YMCA and the Carmelite community centre. We are based in the south inner city. We found that there is a need presenting itself through our support of temporary accommodation in the local community for community-based information and support services for ex-offenders and their families. The project was originally set up as a six month pilot project in October 2011 but the need was so great that it was extended and we are hopeful it will run on. We had plans to work with 30 ex-prisoners in a six month period. We were delighted the Chairman, Deputy Stanton, launched our impact report in October. We worked with 280% more people than originally planned. This includes the family members as well as ex-offenders. Primarily, we are an information, support and referral service. We do not want to duplicate the work already in place for service users. Ours is a place of contact, where people can come in for a cup of tea and a chat about where to go next. Housing and social welfare benefit are high on the list of priorities.

It is heartening to see that we are following in the footsteps of what others are doing. At the beginning, we decided to measure impact and examine outcomes. We looked at numbers and the soft and hard outcomes of working with people. These are early days and it is hard to tell what will happen down the line. At the moment we have a 0% reconviction rate for everyone who has interacted with the service in just over a year. Hopefully, with the work we are doing, that success rate will be maintained.

We have a free counselling service and our written submission on international best practice refers to family support as a hugely important part of our service. International research shows that when a family is supporting someone coming out of prison and where there is a family mediation network, the person is more likely to reintegrate into the community and less likely to reoffend. We get many calls from mothers, wives and girlfriends and we arrange free counselling for children when people are taken into custody. There is a major emphasis on family support. Instead of just working with ex-offenders, there is an emphasis on people affected by imprisonment.

Another reason for success, which is in line with international best practice, is that we are piloting a peer support model. We do not have direct State funding or constant streams of funding, although we received some funding from the St. Stephen's Green Trust and the American Ireland Fund and we are lucky enough to have two community employment placements through the Carmelite Community Centre. We are also working with volunteers. The group of people working and volunteering with us includes two ex-prisoners. Their in-depth knowledge of the regime and the system is of huge importance to us. The written submission refers to the peer support model being piloted in Scotland.

It has been a positive start although it depends what way one looks at it because the need for our service exists. Until the end of September, we had worked with over 133 service users. The current figure is over 150. We receive some 20 inquiries every week. We also have active key caseworkers working on care plans, such as the client centred approach. We meet with them and every so often there are phone calls, e-mails and people dropping in for information. There has been a major demand for our free counselling service. We are learning as we go along and we are trying to put these things in place, hoping that the impact report and the work we do will allow us to continue next year. We have been lucky with the local community in that people

have referred family members to us. We have worked with the prisons and we have also been invited to speak to prisoners in the pre-release period. Although we have spoken to men so far, we have also been invited to the Dóchas Centre. We tell them about the service and many of them contact their family members who contact us before their release.

With regard to pre-prison preparation, we have been flexible in the pilot phase in seeing where the need exists. Parents and mothers of people awaiting sentences contacted us and we linked up with them and created a support group for those getting ready for prison. We explained the importance of linking in with the integrated sentence management, ISM, system when in prison, taking advantage of educational opportunities and making the most of the sentence. We were lucky enough to be brought into Mountjoy Prison on a tour with two ISM officers showing us the process. It is all about multiagency working, collaborative work and seeing where we can fit in to support ex-offenders reintegrating into the community and their family members.

Chairman: I thank Ms Grogan and I congratulate her on the work her group, Care After Prison, is doing along with the Cornmarket Project and Focus Ireland. It is good to hear positive stories and reports.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I echo the Chairman's words in thanking the witnesses for coming in and sharing their expertise and experience with us. We have had an interesting and informative set of hearings over the past year in which the sub-committee has been in place. This is our last public hearing before we produce a report at the end of January. As rapporteur, I am taking careful notes as we go along. A range of different groups have been before us. Our terms of reference consider the backdoor strategies to see what is best practice, nationally and internationally, to ensure higher use of non-custodial alternatives to try to reduce recidivism. We are grateful to the witnesses.

My first question is for the Cornmarket group. The reliance on empirical studies and outcome measurement is impressive. The group has been in place for a long time. I am very familiar with Ms Grogan and Care After Prison, which has been very impressive in a short space of time. The two groups present two different experiences. In respect of the Cornmarket group, organisations such as this work in specific areas and carry out important and useful work that has tangible outcomes. Is there any intention to expand the programme beyond Wexford? Is there a system in place to roll out the best practice that is occurring in pockets throughout the country? Has an attempt been made to do so at a national level?

Mr. Paul Delaney: Through the good offices of the committee Chairman, Deputy Stanton, we visited Cork a couple of months ago and met a group representing the local police fora, the drugs task force and others, the probation service and the Garda Síochána. They are interested in replicating the system on a pilot basis. We are in discussions with the group at the moment and we hope to be able to support it to develop a pilot project in the new year. Our system has been piloted in a project in Ballyfermot. It is much smaller than the Cornmarket Project but has the same type of clients as its primary group. These include medium to high risk offenders who are also, in the main, substance misusers. We have spent the past few years refining the system, developing it, testing it and making sure it delivers in respect of the outcomes. We are at the stage where we would like to be of assistance in rolling it out further.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I have a similar question for all three groups in respect of trying to ensure a national strategy on reducing recidivism and offering people structured release programmes, which seems to be the key. Focus Ireland emphasised housing as a key issue, which

is also emphasised in the research and by the other groups that have appeared. The difficulty in accessing accommodation is a key factor in increasing the risk of recidivism on release. What is the best way to try to roll out a system to ensure a national strategy on this?

We have heard from the State authorities about the community return programme that is being piloted by the Probation Service and Prison Service. Would anyone like to comment on it or on the recommendation that Care After Prison made to us before, that there be a structured release and community return programme? A structured, national community return programme for medium and high risk offenders would reduce the incidence referred to by Focus Ireland of unplanned early release leading to people falling into homelessness.

Care After Prison also made the point that people sentenced for non-violent offences to terms of less than six months should really be diverted from the system entirely, given the high rates of recidivism, particularly with young people who have been given short sentences. There is a difficulty with having any structured programme in prison and post-release where the person is sentenced to six months but is out after two months. Should we look at structured community return for longer term sentences and diversion programmes instead of shorter sentences?

Ms Catherine Maher: It is important there is a structure in place to enable people to avoid prison while serving their sentences in managed way. We are currently finishing an evaluation of our three services and we will have good recommendations stemming from those in line with identifying other avenues for alternatives to prison sentences. The reason for focusing on that is the overcrowding that is happening in the prisons. We must address that because overcrowding is the cause of unplanned early release. If we can address that we can have a way to manage the situation.

Currently we operate two programmes, one in Dublin and one in Waterford, in partnership with the Probation Services. These are community service projects, where people finish off their probation, serve time in the community and are linked in with supervisors from the Probation Services. It operates on a three to five day programme, where they come in two or three days a week and serve a number of hours, doing work such as gardening and painting and decorating. That is all managed and supervised by a maintenance team in cooperation with the Probation Service and it is working well. It has been so successful in Waterford that we have been asked to extend it into another project we have in Ferrybank. We have a report on that coming out soon and we will pass that to the committee so it can see how successful it has been.

Ms Joyce Loughnan: Trust is key. It is very important that a project worker can work in the prison, because it takes time to build up trust with those who are most marginalised and who have had all relationships with family, friends and community break down. It is very difficult to get them accommodation on discharge because of their past histories. The more trust we can build while they are in prison, the better. They can then start preparing for their discharge in a managed way, so there is a full care plan where we can link in all the appropriate services in the community. It is not just about having a house but having the support that allows someone to then live independently in the community where they know we will continue to provide the service for as long as they need it, most intensively upon discharge, but it could go on for years as they address the issues they have in their lives.

Ms Bernie Grogan: We mentioned integrated sentence management in our written submission for sentences of more than 12 months. If there could be a system where as soon as someone entered the prison system, they could make contact with us, through prison officers or teachers, so we can start the support and the planning for release from the very first day. No

one would be released then with nowhere to go and unaware of the services available. In some cases, we work with someone with a release date but something might happen and that person is released a couple of weeks early. The preparations are in place but the person was released early and the release that was being anticipated does not happen. It is best if the relationship starts as early as possible in the sentence.

We have been invited to meetings where the teachers have a festival of services, with people attending from the colleges and community services, so prisoners can meet them before release. The prison officers could also be informed of the services available so in their daily interactions with prisoners, they can pass on leaflets or put up posters around the telephones so they are not going out and not knowing where to go. That is where the highest risk exists, during the first couple of weeks after release, particularly if addiction is an issue.

Senator Ivana Bacik: In its submission, Focus Ireland made the point of women prisoners being a special case, with about 50 women in a cycle of homelessness and prison. What is the best way to approach that? That is a different issue where there is a very small cohort that can be identified. What is the best way to support those women to reduce recidivism? How could they be targeted?

Ms Joyce Loughnan: We are working in partnership with St. Vincent de Paul and PACE to plan a strategy for a pilot for a small cohort of those 50 women, to look at how we can best integrate a service for them that will enable them when leaving prison to link into the right services, such as housing and family services, and that identify their individual needs. The best way to do it is on a case by case basis, where the needs and wants of each person for her life are identified and that is followed through with an implementation plan that will bring the woman to where she wants to be so she does not fall into homeless services without thinking about is happening next. There would be a plan for each individual but it must be done on a case by case basis that must recognise that not everyone will take the same route. The big issue is having the right accommodation, if that is a requirement, or if that support is available to the family and the individual. We must look at how we can prevent this churning of people coming into prison and then coming into homeless services, offending and re-entering prison.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I was interested in the remarks about pre-prison preparation, speaking to people who are still awaiting sentencing post-conviction. Has that been done anywhere else and what have the outcomes been? It is obviously still early days.

Ms Bernie Grogan: We have kept up links with the guys who have been convicted. We have done the pre-prison support and then offered outreach key working with them and family support. At present our work concentrates on supporting the family. That can be as simple as talking to them about what will happen during a visit. Like everything, things are less daunting when a person is informed and knows what to expect. One person we are working with is doing well in his sentence and has looked into educational opportunities. Straight away he was linked with the ISM and he knew the group would come to see him. The initial upset about entering prison was helped by providing information. We are still offering support to his mother.

Mr. Paul Delaney: We work closely with the Probation Service in Wexford and we have a constant flow of information back and forward through the service and the probation officers in the prison itself. Let me emphasise, and it goes back to the Senator Bacik's previous question, in order for the judicial system to have confidence in alternatives to custody, we need to change. We must adopt best practice and a uniformity in targeting the key risk factor areas. I do not discern an unwillingness by the judicial system to use backdoor strategies. The chal-

lenge lies in convincing the judicial system that there are alternative measures that will reduce recidivism. It is not a soft option. The day has gone when we can rely on outputs alone to make that arguments. It is not enough to simply say to the judge that the Cornmarket Projects works with 300 people a year, he or she might want to know the impact of the behavioural changes that have come about as a result of that work. I think the issues are interlinked and we need to move toward the argument by giving valid and reliable evidence that backdoor strategies are a real and alternative way of working.

Chairman: I wish to acknowledge the presence in the Visitors' Gallery of people from the Probation Service and from the Irish Association for the Social Integration of Offenders, IASIO. We hear nothing but praise for their work and I thank both groups for attending this meeting and for their input earlier to the work of the sub-committee.

Mr. Delaney mentioned COAIM or change outcome and impact measurement system and its ten target areas. Could he give a brief overview of the ten criminogenic target areas and how they impact on the life of the offender?

I know that others might also wish to comment on this matter.

Mr. Paul Delaney: This will not be a new concept to members of the sub-committee. They are based on best international practice. The concept is that if we do not address the ten key risk factor areas with offenders, the chances of reducing recidivism are appreciably lower. One of the target areas we address is attitudes and cognitive style. We work with offenders who have serious issues about how they interpret their impact on society. Many are at the stage in which they do not look at the long-term impact of their behaviours. We use a model called motivational interviewing, which is again highly respected as an intervention methodology in other jurisdictions. We bring about a shift in negative attitudes and cognitive style as a precursor to working with people towards making positive change. Another target areas is offending behaviour. The majority of people we work with, some 82%, have already been before the courts. We work in a targeted way to enhance motivation to change what we call "created discrepancy" to build self-efficacy, not self esteem which is another dimension. Many of the young offenders with whom we deal would not regard themselves of being capable of changing their behaviour. That might sound strange but that is the reality. We work to address that. We also have them engage in pro-social activities. Many of the clients we work with only become involved with other pro-social groups when they come into the project. Many have been living and operating in a very narrow band of people who are also offenders. Anger and emotion management is another area that is addressed.

Anger and emotion dysfunction can stem from a variety of complex issues but if it is not addressed it tends to pollute the progress that can be made in other areas. Drug and alcohol misuse is another target area. We work very intensively with people who have both drug and alcohol issues. A key hallmark of our project is that we work with people with where they are on a continuum of services so we do not demand that they be drug or alcohol free in order for us to engage with them. We have a continuum of services that are suitable for people on the dysfunctional end of the continuum and those who want to become completely drug and alcohol free. Lifestyle and associates is tied in with the idea of pro-social activities and we link people in with other groups. We link people into non-offending activities. Another factor is training and employability. We have a very good track record in moving people on, but only when they are ready. This is at the heart of our programme. At our team meetings we would be very careful not to set somebody up for failure. If we feel somebody is not yet ready to take a work placement or a particular training course, we do not push them into it just because it is there. If

one does that, relapse rates increase. We take a much more pragmatic look at it. We also target accommodation, to which my colleagues from the other two services have just referred.

The interesting fact about the COAIM system is that it gave us the statistics we needed to sit down with the housing authority in Wexford and set out the facts. We used to have anecdotal evidence but we now have very clear evidence that accommodation is a serious issue for offenders. That has changed the dynamic completely. We have been able to have a businesslike conversation with the council and the borough council.

Another key area is financial issue and debts. I do not think I have come across a drug user who does not have substantial debts as a consequence of his or her drug use either for general services such as the ESB, gas, rent and so on or owing money to other detailers. We constantly link in people with the MABS, which is a fantastic resource to us in Wexford.

As my colleague from Care After Prison said, relationships and family issues are a significant part of the dynamic. We have built into our system a family support group, where we support the family members. These are the ten criminogenic target areas. It is not to say that other activities such as sport activities, adventure sports, art and so are not of good in and of themselves. We run a number of other vocational skills programmes. We do it as well as and not instead of the COAIM system. We do it alongside it, so that every single client who comes into the project gets a change plan base. They work up their change plan with our staff based on these ten criminogenic areas.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Delaney. Does Senator Conway wish to put a question?

Senator Martin Conway: I had questions initially but it has been clarified in the latter contributions. The standard of the contributions and submissions are very high. I would have been familiar with the work of Focus Ireland but to a lesser extent with the Cornmarket Project and Care After Prison. Both these groups have had remarkable success in a year.

How has Ms Grogan found her interaction with the probation services? Is there any area in which it could be improved? Is there room for improvement in the interaction of personnel from Care After Prison with the Irish Prison Service?

Ms Bernie Grogan: We have been building relations with the Irish Prison Service and have received referrals from the Probation Service. My colleague and I had a meeting with the assistant director of the Probation Service to discuss the project. We launched the impact report in October and that gave us a vehicle to communicate better with people but throughout the year we have been making contact with all agencies working with ex-offenders and their families. We have been invited to prisons. We were brought on a tour of Mountjoy and talked through the ISM project. We have been in St. Patrick's Institution. A number of our staff and volunteers have prison clearance and can meet the governors and the staff. We have been building up these contacts and relationships. They have welcomed us and they recognise the need for the work we are doing and the services we are providing.

We will apply for funding next year. We attended the NEVA meetings, the national ex-voluntary agency meetings in Portlaoise. We have met with the Bedford Row family project and prison support groups from Cork and Cavan. These meetings take place every couple of months and provide a national view of developments. Beladd House is open to us attending meetings held on the premises and meeting other agencies working in this area. While our experience thus far has been good, we need to build on it.

Deputy Sandra McLellan: I thank the witnesses for their informative presentations. I am not a member of the sub-committee but I have made some notes for Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn for whom I am deputising. I acknowledge the value of the work the groups before us are doing. It is important to roll out a national strategy or programme. I deal with a small number of prisoners who visit my constituency office and the main issues they face are access to housing, social welfare benefits and medical cards. I presumed a programme was in place to address these issues for prisoners prior to release and I am surprised to learn this is not the case.

Chairman: I welcome Deputy Sean Fleming.

Deputy Sean Fleming: I apologise for arriving late to the meeting. I, too, am not a member of the sub-committee. As a Deputy from the Portlaoise area, I am familiar with the prisons in the town. The issue of care after prison is my main concern and I apologise if the witnesses have addressed the issue. Many prisoners receive early release, while others will complete a full sentence. Do prisoners receive a discharge letter when they complete their sentence? I have encountered cases where persons who are discharged on completion of their sentences have been told by the local community welfare officer or an official in the local social welfare office that their application for jobseeker's payments will not be processed without a discharge letter. It may be a new development that the Department of Social Protection is specifically advising that persons who are on temporary release are not eligible for jobseeker's allowance because they are not available for work. Community welfare officers are taking a similar approach and are requiring a letter of discharge. These letters have become an issue recently.

On the linkage into State agencies, some local authorities take a sympathetic approach to people who have completed a prison sentence, while others are unduly unsympathetic towards them. The latter do not want to know about the circumstances of former prisoners and will try to move them elsewhere. What are the witnesses' views on the different approaches taken by local authorities to former prisoners? It can boil down to the attitude of an individual director of service.

Ms Bernie Grogan: While levels of discrimination and inequality experienced by ex-offenders and their family members differ, they are a significant problem. The types of offences for which a person has been convicted may limit his or her options for social housing, particularly if the conviction is for anti-social behaviour or sexual offences. While I do not have full information on discharge letters, I am aware that persons on temporary release are registered in the system as being on temporary release and should liaise with the prison in question. Again, however, the circumstances vary. Some prisoners may be released during the day and return to prison at night, as in the case of the training unit in Mountjoy Prison, while others are released from Monday to Friday and return to prison at weekends. The time a person on release will be available to work depends on the circumstances of his or her release.

We work closely with Beatrix Sheehan, the community welfare officer in the homeless persons unit. She is an amazing lady who is overworked and under-resourced. Long queues form when she visits Mountjoy Prison to meet prisoners prior to their release. Her work includes sorting out social welfare entitlements for prisoners by ensuring they do not leave prison without information, identification or letters. This allows community welfare officers to deal with their cases immediately.

The unfortunate reality is that a former prisoner's experience with local authorities will depend on the person he or she meets on the day. We try to provide non-judgmental support. We fill in forms with prisoners, direct them to the appropriate agencies and so forth. Sometimes

this involves making a telephone call in their presence to ensure they know where they should go and avoid scenarios where they knock on doors and are turned away. This is a horrible but common experience. When a person is motivated to make changes it can be difficult when doors are repeatedly closed in his or her face and obstacles are continually placed in his or her way.

Ms Catherine Maher: I agree with Ms Grogan that prisoners are dealt with on a case-by-case basis and their experience will depend on individual circumstances. Discharges are both planned and unplanned. Where a discharge is planned, the former prisoner will have a better chance of having discharge letters and so forth arranged and it is more likely the community welfare officer will be on board. Where a discharge is unplanned, the position is much more chaotic as it requires a crisis response from us as we try to make arrangements with the community welfare officer. In our experience, our relationships with community welfare officers who know we work with prisoners and services becomes a factor. They will work with us by recognising we are supporting somebody. This is the reason we are able to advocate successfully on behalf of people and enable them to obtain rent supplement.

In the majority of cases, the former prisoners in question will seek to access private rented accommodation or accommodation provided by housing associations such as Focus Ireland because local authorities do not have one bedroom properties for single males.

Where appropriate supports are made available, individuals may be able to reintegrate in their families. Again, this depends to a great extent on whether the prisoner's release is planned or unplanned. In the case of the former, we can engage with the family and support reintegration, whereas in the latter case, the position can be more chaotic and emergency accommodation must be found on a short-term basis to address the issue.

Deputy Sean Fleming: None of the local authorities has housing available for anyone who shows up seeking accommodation because all of them have long waiting lists for housing. The issue is whether they will accept an application for rent supplement. In most areas, people must be on the housing list to receive rent supplement. The issue is not one of councils providing accommodation but one of councils making life difficult for former prisoners by refusing to process an application form. The prison system is a structured environment where prisoners know at what time they will get up, go to bed and have breakfast, dinner and tea. On their release, they are at sea when they visit Government offices.

A person who has spent more than 183 days in an institution can be certified as homeless. Does this apply to prisoners? What is the position regarding former prisoners against whom barring orders have been granted? Many of those in prison are in this position, which makes it even more difficult to secure accommodation when they leave prison.

Ms Catherine Maher: I am not sure of the position regarding the Deputy's question on those who spend 183 days in an institution but I will revert to him on the matter.

On barring orders, we have implemented a protocol across all emergency accommodation which involves a reduction of the barring order. It also ensures there is sustainability for someone to get into accommodation. For example, if a person is barred from one place he could be allocated another place and then, if he gets in, the plan would be to maintain him in that accommodation. We work with the providers and we have agreed, where it is appropriate, to pair with a particular organisation. If that organisation has someone whose behaviour is unacceptable at a given point, that person could move across to our accommodation for a short period and

then go back. New protocols have been agreed throughout the homeless sector for emergency accommodation to sustain people in emergency accommodation rather than have them barred. This is a recent development within the emergency accommodation services.

Deputy Sean Fleming: My last question follows from an earlier point. I came in when Paul Delaney was speaking. It is important not to set someone up for a course that he is not able for. A person may be unable to concentrate for so many hours in a day or perhaps it is not in his nature and that is probably part of the reason he ended up in trouble in the first place. I am unsure who is best qualified to answer the question. How do the delegations find dealing with FÁS? The Probation Service is fine, the community welfare officers can be sympathetic and the Department of Social Protection will try to set a person up with a payment. Perhaps a community welfare officer will tide him over for a while until all that gets done. However, FÁS has an important role. I do not believe the sympathy element comes in at a FÁS counter. When organisations are trying to get someone onto a course it is important that FÁS is very much a part of the service to get people in during their first week out. A person can go off the rails after one week if three or four doors have not opened for him. What is the position with FÁS and the National Learning Network, which used to be called Rehab? Both these organisations can help ex-offenders or ex-prisoners. Is FÁS in the network for dealing with these projects?

Mr. Paul Delaney: Deputy Fleming has raised an interesting issue that is even broader than the issue of FÁS. It relates to having an integrated plan for offenders. We approach this with a case management plan. In other words, we try to avoid exactly what Deputy Fleming has just referred to, that is, where a person is all at sea or bounced around. The change outcome and indicator mapping, COAIM, system we use ensures that if we identify training as a need for a particular offender, then we are able to do the advocacy for them and we are able to take FÁS on board. In fairness, it has worked rather well. A representative from FÁS sits on our steering committee and FÁS is used to working with offenders. However, we must approach this in a case management way. I agree entirely with Deputy Fleming. To ask offenders, especially homeless dysfunctional offenders, to do such work themselves invariably leads to failure. Our COAIM system is predicated on having a plan. We refer to it as a change plan rather than a care plan; there is a slightly different emphasis. However, if one has a plan then the people who sit on our steering committee are committed to doing their part. We need not reinvent the wheel. If an organisation is responsible for housing, then that is what it does. If an organisation is responsible for finance issues, such as MABS, that is the role it plays. If an organisation is responsible for training and employment, then that is the role it plays as well. We act as the bridge between these groups. The case management approach is something that should be rolled out nationally because otherwise people will be left at sea and we have seen where that leads.

Mr. Paul O'Brien: I wish to add some comments. We find that what works well at the Cornmarket Project is to take the mystery out of what we do. This is why the case management approach works well because sometimes people looking from the outside in wonder where they could fit into a role in the Cornmarket Project. The steering committee of the Cornmarket Project adds to this as well. People can sit around and discuss the issues. They do not discuss individual clients per se but our COAIM system is able to bring up factual statements rather than anecdotal statements. Mr. Delaney referred to this earlier. We have been able to sit down with the housing officers and make the case that in our open access drop-in area accommodation has come up to the high 70% region. We were able to put the case factually. It helps when we work on a factual basis rather than on an anecdotal basis.

Chairman: I note that you work with the harder-to-work-with offenders and people with

little or no motivation to change. It is not simply a case of people who come to you. You have a relationship with the Probation Service and you identify people who are especially difficult to work with and who have a low motivation. This is even more challenging. As you have noted, these people can often slip through the system and be back and forth from prison. That is a real challenge.

Mr. Paul O'Brien: It is a real challenge. We have an automated system on the technological side. If a client is with the Cornmarket Project and we do not see him for three weeks an e-mail is automatically sent to our outreach worker. The outreach worker knows at that point to check in with the client. We are always seeking to reduce the gaps that a client can fall through and using technology is another way of doing that.

Chairman: I also note that you have a high level of training and an emphasis on teamwork for the people who work on the project.

Mr. Paul O'Brien: One of the last points of business at our last team meeting was to pick the next six training dates for next year. It is important for us to keep on top of this. We have spend a good deal of time tweaking and fine-tuning the COAIM system. We will spend a good deal more time on this as new information becomes available and as new statistics become available and also as we feed back into our system. We are always keen to go back and examine and see whether this is the best way of doing things today. It may have been the best way six months ago but we must determine whether it remains the case today.

Mr. Paul Delaney: I wish to add a rider to that. There is a principle called the responsivity principle, a principle on which there is great emphasis in other criminal justice jurisdictions. Basically it means matching the offender to the type of staff member and programme that will work for him. That is very important in terms of the training. We concentrate on ensuring that the staff we have delivering our services deliver them in accordance with the same evidence-based model. This means no one is doing his own thing. Many of our clients have literacy issues and we have staff members who are specifically trained in this regard. Many of our clients have anger management issues and these are all issues which staff must be trained in. Otherwise people simply do not come back; offenders vote with their feet and will not come back to our project.

Chairman: I believe we are done. I thank all the witnesses for their attendance today and for giving their valuable time and expertise to the sub-committee. We hope to have a report out of the end of January or thereabouts. Perhaps at that stage we will invite you back for the launch of the report. We hope to move it on from there. That will not be the end of the work of the committee. Your contributions are important. Thank you and have a good Christmas.

The sub-committee adjourned at 3 p.m. *sine die*.