

# CONNECT

January 2022

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***'You can't go back and change the beginning but you can start where you are and change the ending' – C S Lewis***



## WELCOME

**W**elcome to the first edition of the CONNECT Service User Newsletter. I am delighted that so many of you have wanted to contribute to this edition and want to thank each and every one of you.

### IMPORTANT CONNECTION

The last 20 months have shown how important connection is. After months of lockdown and restrictions, we know that not being able to connect to people in the way we usually have, can lead to isolation and loneliness, and can have a real detrimental impact on our health, both physical health and mental health. Human connection can help us when we are struggling, be that with loneliness, poor mental health or addiction. There is a journalist, Johann Hari, who

has carried out some research into the causes of addiction. He claims that the opposite of addiction is not sobriety, it is connection. For those of you who are interested, there is a really interesting TedTalk; just google 'Johann Hari TedTalk'.

### DIFFERENT VIEWS

We may all have different views on what Johann Hari says, but one thing we will agree on, is that stories are at the heart of human connection. We have always used stories as a way to connect person-to-person. Telling stories helps us relate to our circumstances and the circumstances of others. It has been claimed that, "after nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world" (Pullman).

Stories can be in written form, or art, or design or poetry.

### SHARING EXPERIENCE

In this CONNECT Newsletter, we're sharing experiences, advice, ideas and stories to help one another. We hope to publish a newsletter every year and would love to hear from you. If you have any stories, experiences or ideas that you want to share, or have any art, poems, quotes or recipes that you think others might enjoy, please get in touch either with your Probation Officer, Probation Service Officer or Community Service Officer or via [ServiceUser@probation-ni.gov.uk](mailto:ServiceUser@probation-ni.gov.uk)

I hope you enjoy reading.

Gillian Montgomery  
Director of Operations

## CHIEF EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW

**P**BNI's new Chief Executive, Amanda Stewart, travelled to Portadown on 17<sup>th</sup>

November 2021 to meet with the Connect Service User Involvement group. When the Connect Group were informed that PBNI had a new Chief Executive, they wanted to meet with Amanda to see what she is like for themselves! Never one to shy away from a challenge, Amanda accepted the invitation (little did she realise that the group had prepared some questions that any interview panel would be proud of!). A snapshot of some of the questions and answers are below.

**WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR PROBATION AND WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON BALANCING RISK AND REHABILITATION?**

I think PBNI's vision is really good. I have used that vision, 'Changing Lives for Safer Communities' so many times already. So I wouldn't want to change that, I would just make sure that the vision, and really importantly, our values, are lived in the organisation in terms of what we do. So it is about respect, integrity, openness and accountability. And, the community focus, that is really important for me, working in partnership, building good relationships with people. And, I have a job to do that at the top of the organisation, making sure that Probation is really well positioned. In relation to risk / rehabilitation, I don't think they are different, the two go hand in hand, because to rehabilitate, you need to manage risk. Now, that's maybe not the right answer, but when I thought about it, I don't see the two as being separate. I see them as being one complimenting the other. I think we need to get the balance right between the

two. We may need to balance more one way or the other, as everybody's circumstances are different.

**HOW DO YOU THINK PROBATION HAS COPEDED THROUGH THE COVID CRISIS?**

I am really impressed with the arrangements that have been put in place. I have been to a number of offices and the feedback is that we very quickly moved to staff being able to work from home but importantly to maintain a service to you. We have a Covid Recovery Plan that is flexible to the different stages of the Covid journey. As an organisation, I have been very impressed, we have kept everyone safe, which is the main priority. And we have been able to get on with the work. But it would be good to get your perspective again as well. I know we've sought your feedback a few times and that has shaped how we have developed. Everybody is different and everybody's needs are different, and I think that's what Probation is good at. We don't treat everybody the same. We try to respond to individual needs. There's some people that need more contact, and we respond to that, as opposed to seeing everyone as one. To be honest, all of us are living in this crazy world of Covid, and I think we are going to live in this Covid world for quite a while yet.

**HOW DO YOU VIEW THE RELATIONSHIP WITH NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE, AND ARE THERE WAYS OF MAKING IT BETTER FOR PEOPLE IN THE PRISON?**

I speak from the top of the organisation and have a really good working relationship with Ronnie Armour, who is the Head of the Prison Service. In

my first week I was invited to Maghaberry and Ronnie and the Governor walked me around, and I think that probably sent the right message to NIPS and PBNI staff. Ronnie phoned me on my first day and said, I want to take you out to the prison on your first week in office. So the relationship is there and it's good. If there's any sense that there is an issue between staff or anyone, we have a relationship that allows us have difficult conversations, in a way in which doesn't damage relationships. I have also been impressed with the relationships between the staff of our respective organisations in terms of how they work together to support you and others in prison care and the community.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU CAN DO TO STRENGTHEN TIES WITH ORGANISATIONS, LIKE THE PRISON FELLOWSHIP, THE PRISON ARTS FOUNDATION, NIACRO AND EXTERN?**

I see these organisations as really important; we are all part of the system, all part of the journey. I'm only a few weeks into post but I've already met with Fred Caulfield, Chief Executive of Prison Arts Foundation and will be meeting with Robin Scott from Prison Fellowship. As an organisation, we have decided to support the Prison Fellowship as our Christmas charity this year. I think as an organisation it is really important that we are seen to assist the charities that support the work that we are involved in. So we are collecting donations for food hampers. We have regular contact with NIACRO and look forward to working with their new Chief Executive.

*Interview continued...* →



**"I got to see an end product from my efforts ..."**



I haven't had any contact with Extern, yet! But all those relationships are very important, working with people who work with us, and vice versa to make sure we get the best from everybody.

**OVERVIEW**

At the end of the 'interview',

Amanda said, "I have a lot to learn from you. You have the experience, and you are best placed to advise me around some things. I am the sort of person who is very open. If I can achieve something for you, or do something for you, I will do it. If I can't do it, I will come back and say why I can't

do it and why it's just not possible. I'm not going to promise to make the world wonderful for anybody, there's things I can have a certain amount of influence over, and there's things I can't. But I will try and do whatever is possible—that's what a leader does"

**"...to make sure we get the best from everybody. "**

**SERVICE USERS VISIT THE LORD MAYOR**



**"It was a really good experience, to see the Lord Mayor – wouldn't think we matter but she obviously wanted to hear our stories. It was great in that wee room, on the inside, with all the fancy waters and fancy biscuits."**  
**David**

**PBNI SERVICE USER GROUPS**

**W**e have a number of service involvement groups that meet across PBNI teams. The groups provide a platform for you, our Service Users, to be included in the development of our services, to have your voices heard, to increase your confidence and help us make the service we provide the best it can be.

**WHAT IS IT?**

Service User involvement, as it is frequently referred to, is not a new and can be described as *"where an organisation involves Service Users in the*

*planning, management, delivery or evaluation of the services that it provides"* (Clinks, 2016).

**BENEFITS OF INVOLVEMENT**

There are many benefits to involving those who are, or who have previously been, supported by Criminal Justice services in the planning and delivery of services. These are that it helps you, the Service User, on your journey to avoid re-offending, it increases the effectiveness of the services we deliver, it increases your compliance with your order or licence, and it makes the service we deliver more credible

to other Service Users (Weaver, 2012).

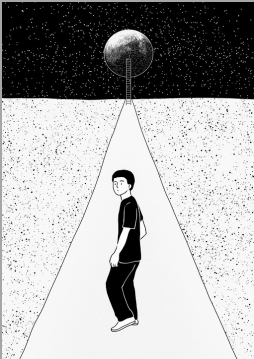
**SERVICE USER GROUP**

Would you like to become involved in the Service User group and make connections that can help you and others? If so, please speak to your Probation Officer, Probation Service Officer or Community Service Officer or contact:

[ServiceUser@probation-ni.gov.uk](mailto:ServiceUser@probation-ni.gov.uk)

**"...it helps you, the Service User, on your journey to avoid re-offending,."**

## NO LONGER ALONE IN MY DARK PLACE *Thomas*



**“Slowly but surely I made steady progress by engaging with all services...”**



**M**y life had hit rock bottom by the summer of 2017. I was a broken man, and found myself in a situation where I was destitute and homeless. Life no longer felt worth living and I actually felt it would be better for everyone if I was no longer in this world. My elderly mother was a constant thought in my mind, and I knew I had to continue for her sake.

### HOSTEL LIFE

I found myself in a Hostel, totally unfamiliar and alien surroundings as I had never used this service before but project staff offered a warm welcome, reassurance and listened to my worries and concerns. I found it difficult to focus on anything other than my dark thoughts and negative emotions. Staff explained the support they offered and gave me the opportunity to ask them any questions.

Throughout the induction process I was informed of other services available outside the project and how to avail of them. It had been a long day and I welcomed an early night.

### STEADY PROGRESS

Slowly but surely I made steady progress by engaging with all services inside and outside the Hostel. I progressed from living in the main building of the hostel to one of the project flats. I continued to grasp every opportunity which I knew would benefit my mental health and wellbeing. I engaged with services and found the Wellness College W.R.A.P programme very beneficial, along with Counselling. My new doctor was amazing and offered me help and a listening ear. My P.O. was a great source of encouragement and was there every step of the way, even to the point of finding a new skill in art I never knew existed. Without

these services I would have too much time to think negatively. By getting involved with help and services I found I was no longer alone in my dark place.

### INDEPENDENT LIFE

In January 2021 I was offered a flat with N.I Housing executive in the Armagh area. This was an exciting opportunity for me to live independently for the first time in my life. The online form filling and all that came with that I found difficult. Slowly things fell into place. I was very optimistic but a little nervous and there was always support should I ever need it. The project staff put my mind at ease. They reassured me that I could call at the hostel for a chat and a cuppa at any time. I moved into my own accommodation several weeks after I was offered it. I am now living the life I once thought wasn't worth living and I am very grateful to all who helped me along the way.

## A MUCH BETTER PLACE *Patrick*

**H**ello, my name is Patrick. Just before COVID-19 reached the UK, I was in a much better place than I had been in a while due to suffering from PTSD, depression, and alcohol issues. The reason I was in a much better place is because I ended up getting a job as a stone mason and I really loved going to work because every job was different and building different jobs was like a puzzle and it got me thinking where the next stone was to be placed and what way it needed shaped.

### MORE TO LIFE

When COVID-19 struck and the lockdown happened I ended up not in a routine, and due to the boredom I ended up with bad depression and turned back to the alcohol. I ended up drinking everyday to numb the depression. It wasn't until I ended up in trouble with the police I realized that there was more to life than drinking every day.

### BACK TO WORK

As lockdown was easing and work was starting again I got talking to my then girlfriend and my boss got me back to

work again. I finally felt that things were getting better because I was back working at a job I loved and was able to see my family and girlfriend and talk to them.

### FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Now that lockdown has ended I am in a much better place than before and I now know my triggers and when I feel them coming I know I can call and see my family and friends and talk to them.

EMPLOYMENT *TUCKER THE TRUCKER*

I started out on my maiden voyage for Production House Group (PHG) after receiving a call asking me to join a team of truckers touring with bands and musical artists all around the world. My first job was to drive to Skibbereen in County Cork to set up the sound, lights, video and TV systems for a musical festival headlined by a group called 'The Indians'. They were great characters and their show was very colourful, although I didn't see as much of it as I would have liked as I was wrecked from setting it up—so I spent most of the evening resting!

**BRYAN ADAMS**

From there it was straight to the O2 Arena to pick up *Bryan Adams* world tour! I was on this tour for 2 weeks as we criss-crossed cities all over the UK and Ireland. I loved his vocals and lyrics in all his classic hits like *Summer of 69*, *Run to You* and *It's only Love...*

to mention just a few! I have to say *Bryan* was a true gentleman and always treated the staff well.

**HOZIER AND DAVID GRAY**

Then it was back to the O2 Arena in Dublin, for *Hozier*. He is great musician, blending folk, soul and blues into his songs and is a fantastic guitar player as well as writing all his own stuff. After that it was off to the INEC in Killarney in County Kerry with *David Gray*. I have to say I found him quite a complex character and he could be a bit difficult to work with at the start. But about 3 weeks into the tour he opened up and as I got to know him I realised he was just meticulously professional in his preparation of the stage set up for his band. He had his own way of doing things! My favourite songs of his tour was *Babylon*, *Sail Away* and *This Year's Love...* to name but a few...it was a great tour!

**FROM GOSPEL TO METAL**

During my time touring the festival season, I toured with lots of different artists, with a range of different types of music from Gospel (like *Jesus Culture* and *Petra*), to Metal (with *ACDC* and *Triple X*), through various different pop groups, singers and musicians including *Tom Jones*, *Van Morrison*, *Boyzone*, *The Corrs*, *The Saw Doctors*, *The Waterboys*, *Flourance and the Machine* and *Ellie Goulding* to name but a few. What I learned from all these musical artists was that although they all had this amazing raw talent, whether it be singing, playing various instruments, or writing incredible lyrics was their dedication to their craft. Because away from the glitz and the glamour of the concerts, the fans and the fame was the endless practising, seemingly constant touring but it was their unconquerable will never to give up on their dreams that made it all worthwhile and impressed me the most!



**"I finally felt that things were getting better because I was back working..."**

MACRAMÉ —TEXTILE ARTWORK *Anonymous*

These are but a few of the Macramé projects I've done these past few years. Macramé, pronounced *muh-kraa-mee*, is a type of textile artwork that uses corded ropes to tie different types of knots to produce pieces like you see here. I always loved to create things. From as early on in life as I can remember I enjoyed art projects of all types. A place where you are free to do as you wish and watch as projects come to life in front of you.

**CHANGE**

As I got older I lost myself in the black hole of drugs and alcohol abuse. I forgot all that I was capable of. Over 20 years of substance abuse will do that. One day I decided things had to change, before the unthinkable happened. Almost 4 years ago I started to regain control over my

demons and have been sober since August 2018. As the fog of my mind started to lift I found myself asking internally, 'Who am I, what do I even enjoy to do?' You lose yourself in all the chaos. All the time chasing that high you forget what made you, you. The music that you love, the books, movies, hobbies. Until one day, in my sobriety, I remembered 'I used to love to create, to make things out of nothing. I wonder if I still can?'

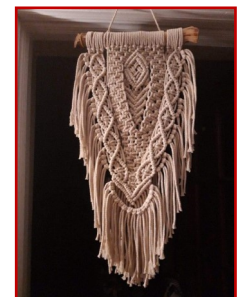
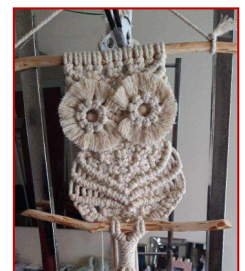
**ART PROJECTS**

I downloaded an app filled with art projects and inspirational ideas. Pinterest. And as I looked I saw wee things similar to projects I made as a youngster. So with that app and YouTube to help show me how I tried one thing, then another, and another. I started to feel a sense of pride in the fact that I was completing

pieces time and time again. In amongst the projects I found Macramé, and as you can see, I definitely found something I enjoyed doing. There's a saying and it most definitely has merit, 'Idle time is the Devil's playground!' And oh how true that is.

**HAPPY CREATING**

So one thing that has definitely helped me to continue to keep on my journey now is keeping my mind busy. It doesn't matter if you make a mess the first 100 times you try something new because you will, but that 101st time that you make something and feel that sense of pride in yourself again that you felt once upon a time, that's what it's all about. Happy Creating to you all!! If I can do all this, than you most definitely can too. There is a better life out there, stay strong, you are so very worth it!



FEEDBACK FROM SERVICE USER

“Support, assistance and signposting.”

We received some feedback from our female community service workers to suggest that they feel unsupported during community service: “Most people that are offending aren’t doing it for the craic, they have underlying issues. So even if you are on a Community Service Order, you should still have access to services which people on other orders do.”

“There was no one I could talk to at all. I didn’t get referred to any services which made me more likely to reoffend and led to me not engaging with my Community Service Order.”

HELP AND SUPPORT

We’ve taken this feedback on board and are currently ensuring that all Service Users subject to community service orders are offered support,

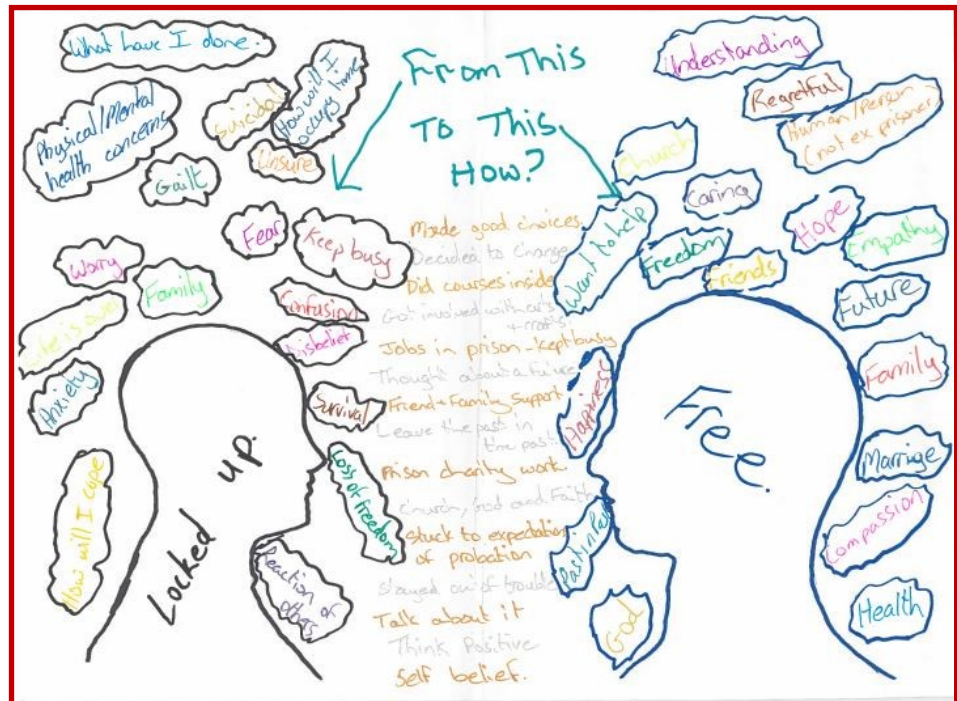
assistance and signposting to appropriate services at various stages during the order. Your feedback helps us deliver the best service to you that we can. If you are currently completing Community Service and need help, please link with your Community Service Officer.

feedback

we listen

LOCKED UP AND FREEDOM *Billy*

TALK ABOUT IT  
THINK POSITIVE  
SELF-BELIEF



POEM: CONNECT *Benny*

Chains can sometimes be broken  
Of the ways we sometimes think  
In not making a positive plan  
That creates the weakest link

Often we fail to plan  
And not listen to advice  
Thinking things to our own way  
It's like the roll of a dice

Not thinking about our actions  
And how it can cause us to fail  
That can cause so much hurt  
And to end up in jail

Not even asking for help  
Or reach out for a helping hand  
For someone to sit and listen  
That they might understand

Everything we go through in life  
Has an effect on our mind  
Sometimes we find it difficult  
To leave it all behind

Connecting and caring for each other  
Is the foundation of success  
By talking and listening  
That helps our feelings to express

Trust opens so many doors  
With positive feelings to effect  
Where the links grows much stronger  
When we share our thoughts and connect.

“Often we fail to plan and not listen to advice.”

I am in my 40s and I was given 75 hours Community Service for an Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm offence. Before that my life had been all over the place at times, I had personal issues and was the victim of domestic violence too. I also had previous charges connected with motoring offences. Because my 75 hours were part of a Combination Order, I also had a Probation Officer to help support me with looking at my offence.

#### APPROACHABLE

I have a lot of medical issues, and after feeling that my first day at my first placement was too physically demanding. I spoke to my Community Service Officer, and she agreed to move me to the Cancer

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

Research charity shop to make it easier for me. I was very nervous about starting, but the staff were lovely, and treated me as just another person.

#### SUPPORT

I was also in the middle of moving house, and they were able to help me locate white goods through another project so that I had things to wash my clothes, etc.

#### WORK DETAIL

My first few days in the charity shop were sorting and steaming clothes and the other items that were coming in, so that they would be ready for resale. Jenny, the supervisor then trained me in till work, and trusted me enough to deal

with customers. This made a real difference to me, as I felt that I was doing a good job and was more comfortable with it. I finished my 75 hours and am now volunteering with the charity shop a few days a week, and this has been good at getting me into a routine and I really enjoy the work.

#### FURTHER TRAINING

In the future, the shop is talking about putting me through training to be a manager, and I never thought I would have this opportunity. I didn't really want a Community Service sentence at the start, but it worked out great for me, and I enjoyed doing it. I am still attending my probation appointments, and they have been really helpful too.

**"I was very nervous about starting, but the staff were lovely, and treated me as just another person."**

## PROBATION *Joe*

My experience with probation has been quite positive.

#### PROBATION PERIOD

Yes, I've had a few different Probation Officers but each one has been just as helpful as the last. I found my time at the Building Better Relationships (BBR) program to be the most rewarding part of my probationary period. Not to play down my conversations with certain Probation Officers as they have also been really rewarding for the most part. BBR though is my biggest takeaway as it helped me so much in understanding myself a bit better.

#### SHOWING WE CARE

I identified my relationships with friends and family over the years and how these relationships effected the path I chose,

and essentially the man I became. I learned about how certain ways we speak to someone can help us reach a compromise by showing we care about the person in question, and active listening plays a major part in this also. Overall I would say I am far better equipped now to deal with conflict without abuse now than I ever was before. I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank Una and Kieran should they ever read this. The work they do is amazing and I hope a lot more people benefit from the BBR course in the future.



#### SONG

##### Verse 1

Sometimes my subconscious helps me to see how to live my best reality.

I can't ever change things that I've done wrong and it's knowing this that helps me to be strong. I've chose to walk a better road by shedding all my heavy load.

##### Chorus

My daughters are my life they're where I want to be. They're my best reality  
The reason I smile even laugh and cry  
And to be close to them there's nothing I will not try.

##### Verse 2

My life's been a long and difficult path  
But I've chose to leave all of that in the past.  
Now I am certain that I know for sure  
Me and my girls will have a brighter future.

Back to chorus...



**“I find keeping yourself busy everyday really helpful when released.”**

**THINK POSITIVE**

## IMPORTANT POINTS I FOUND AFTER RELEASE FROM PRISON *Stanley*

**B**eware of the culture shock and understand it. Beware of depression.

Communicate your frustration – this is very important. It was for me. You have to deal with rejection and resist negative influences.

### POSITIVE CHANGES

Combat addiction if you had one before you went to prison. Addiction is incredibly hard to work through, but with support and love from loved ones – your immediate family – you can work through it, stay positive and move forward. Make positive changes to improve your wellbeing.

### MENTAL HEALTH

I had to understand and accept that I was in prison because of my own actions and consequences – the consequences was a prison sentence. I thought even though I was a prisoner I could still achieve and make a success of my life. Also the mental side is very important. Everyone's mental health is up and down. We all have times when we feel down, stressed or even frightened; most of the time these feelings pass, but sometimes they could develop into a more serious problem. That is when you need support from Probation and the Mental Health Team; this is a very important point. I also had to learn what had changed. I had to establish a routine.

### KEY PROBLEMS

Finding stable housing. Employment. Mental health issues. Family strain. Finance. Relationships

### AFTER RELEASE

This is just a small article to encourage inmates how to hope after release from

prison, I know everyone has different circumstances, but I have a few pointers that could maybe help you along the way.

### PRISON SENTENCE

When I got a life sentence, with a minimum 12 ½ years to serve, I realised the seriousness of my offence. I was genuinely remorseful from day one, and wrote a letter of remorse to the victim's family. To make a long, long story very short, when I entered prison I was stunned and in shock, and indeed it took me three to four years to come to terms with what had happened.

### PRISON LISTENER

But two or three months into my sentence, the Listeners' Group, that the Samaritans' prison name came to be, asked if I would like to join them on a very intensive six week course, which I did, passed my exams and became a Listener on my wing in Prison Servicing to inmates of those on bail 24x7 along with my job.

### HELPING OTHERS

So I kept busy to put the time in as quickly as possible. This I did for 2 years, trying to help inmates with a range of problems and also suicidal inmates; I really got engrossed in helping others try to sort their problems out. So actually this helped me ten years later when I was preparing for release back into society again.

### FAMILY SUPPORT

When you are being released, you firstly need somewhere to live. If you are fortunate enough to have a family who wants you home, that is the perfect start. Or, you can go to a hostel until the authorities get you a place to live. I was

very fortunate to have a loving sister who had looked after me the whole 12 ½ years I was in prison, with regular visits, clothing and money. She made sure I wanted for nothing. She had her own house and she asked me to come home and see if living there would work.

### PROBATION

Probation went out to see my sister and recommended me staying with her, which has worked perfectly ever since – 4 years down the line. So the first pointer is to get a place to live; you have to do things you think would minimise the risk of re-offending. I have to say that Probation are absolutely brilliant advising you on these things. You have to be 100% motivated to help yourself as well, when out to start with.

### SIMPLE THINGS

Do something kind for someone else. Review your strengths and use one to improve a situation. Learn not to jump to conclusions, because when feeling overwhelmed, it can be hard to think clearly and make good decisions. Do things you find helpful; this can distract you until you feel calmer. Most important when released – talking with family and friends, will make you feel better.

### WORK

After finding accommodation, find work. I worked for a charity for six months. This was very therapeutic and satisfying. Also, I did some courses with Probation, also very helpful. When being released, our group had a list of places and phone numbers that you might need to claim your money from the Government, also helpful.

*Interview continued...* →



### OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS

#### PURPOSE

My faith has also been a rock for me; I have purpose in my life. I find keeping yourself busy everyday really helpful when released.

#### NEW HOBBIES

My sister has been the greatest help over those last four years. She now has health problems, and I find myself a full-time Carer for her. I got a small dog and have found new hobbies. All these things put together, plus Probation, work for me.

#### IT TAKES TIME

I hope this simple article will be of help to someone on release from prison. It takes time, it's a very slow road to recovery, but well worth all the effort you put in.

**"It's a very slow road to recovery, but well worth all the effort you put in."**



ARTWORK *Anonymous*



*Anonymous*

**DUKE OF EDINBURGH: ENDEAVOUR AWARD** *William*

I started the Endeavour Award in June. To complete it, there were three parts; skills, activity and volunteering.

**VOLUNTEERING**

The volunteering was in a church-linked shop in my own community, a community I have only just moved into. The volunteering helped me get to know the people in my new community, this was very beneficial to me.

**ACTIVITIES**

The activity was weight training for six months. After

three months, I have noticed my body fat has dropped and I have gained muscle. This has helped my mental health by reducing my anxiety and depression.

**CONFIDENCE BUILDING**

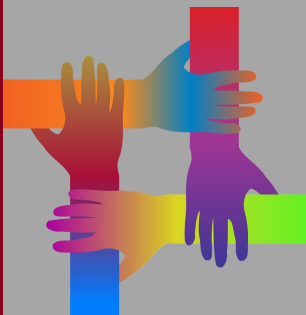
Also, for my skills, I worked with a company called *Network Personal*, completing motivation skills and confidence-building. I am on a waiting list to do a counselling course, which I hope to complete and work with young people, so their lives go in a positive route.

**OUTCOMES**

All over, the Endeavour Award has given me motivation and confidence to try new things. This will help me with future employment.



**“I got to see an end product from my efforts ...”**



My PO suggested that I may want to achieve my bronze Duke Of Edinburgh. I was aware it was something positive, an achievement I could take away from time when I was subject to Probation supervision.

I met with Claire, the DofE Officer and she gave me information about the award and we discussed the activities and task that I could undertake to fulfill the three different sections of the award.

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

I like running and I wanted to push my personal best and try to walk/run a 20k. I practiced and ran each week, trying to achieve my goal and I recorded my progress on relevant sheets provided to me. Although this was a bit annoying to fill in, it really showed me the reality of my progress over time.

**DUKE OF EDINBURGH** *Luke***SKILLS ACTIVITY**

I chose to paint a picture as I enjoy painting, I find it relaxing, creative and felt this was something I'm quite good at. I had new materials, I received as a Christmas gift and I wanted to paint a picture using oil based paint. I enjoyed this new challenge and feel the painting turned out 'ok'. I got to see an end product from my efforts and painting the picture allowed me time to relax. People have also told me I'm good at art/painting.

**VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY**

For the volunteering section of my award, I once again chose to pick something I like to do. My P.O. and I both like dogs, and animals and she suggested doing something for Assisi Animal Sanctuary which is close to me. It was my idea to undertake a sponsored run to raise money that I could donate to this organization. My goals for this were:-

Run 2k in 9 minutes – Achieved

Run 20k over 8 to 12 weeks – Achieved

**MONEY RAISED**

I raised £133 and we plan to go to visit the sanctuary and give them a donation for the wonderful work they do. I feel proud and happy to have finished this award. It will be something to include on my C.V.

**P.O** – I am delighted L.A. has achieved this award and more so as he committed to this of his own accord. He completed all tasks diligently, recorded his progress and stuck to time-scales /personal goals. I did not have to persuade him to do any of this, it was his personal choice. I am really proud of him.

## VOLUNTEERING *TONY*

I volunteer with The Conservation Volunteers in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum although there is opportunities to go to other places. The day starts at 9.30am and finishes at 4.30pm although I normally go around 10.30am as my dad leaves me in and I get the bus home. I have been there for around 2 and a half months and I can go as much as 4 days per week. I do not go into the office to everyone but I go straight to the volunteers and they ask me what I would like to do today.

### DAILY OPTIONS

The options are normally;

- 1 - Using a spade for digging
- 2 - Clippers (cutting hedges)
- 3 - Make flower beds from scratch
- 4 - Cutting grass
- 5 - Weeding flowerbeds

We get a lunch break and I normally bring my own lunch and then go back to work.

### OTHER VOLUNTEERS

There are normally 10 volunteers and one paid organiser. Some people have been there for years. They can also put me through qualifications in landscaping. Whenever I come out I feel good and normal. I feel a lot better in myself. I am able to interact with people more, it is really good for me. It helps my health, encourages me to eat which I wouldn't if I was at home doing nothing. They are really kind to me. Its made a big difference to my day.

### THE BENIFITS

Being out in the fresh air helps my head. The day flies in, you don't see the time. Everyone helps each other and I enjoy

meeting new people and having fun whilst meeting new friends. Volunteering means I don't have to think about anything else such as worries and because there is no phone signal there is no distractions.

### SUM IT UP

It is good for me, it really helps my mental health. The people are lovely, it is a great place to work for, and I have gotten to meet new friends.



## PRISON FELLOWSHIP *Stephen & Robin*

This Christmas PBNI have again chosen to support Prison Fellowship's Christmas Hope appeal. Probation staff have generously donated to this worthy cause for many years, and see it as a connection between their personal desire to 'give back' and their professional day job.

### CHRISTMAS HOPE

Christmas Hope is Prison Fellowship's annual project providing hampers and toys for families at a time of year when prisoners' relatives can feel alone, forgotten and under additional financial pressure. The project provides a hamper of food that will assist a family especially at Christmas time, each hamper contains food to make several meals as well as a few treats. Brand new toys are also selected for the children in each family home up to the age of 16.

### A THANK YOU

A thank you card received from a mother last year said: "Today we received a beautiful food hamper and gifts for my son's daughter. I am a mum of six children and have never experienced anything to do with the law or prison services before. These last eight weeks have been an absolute nightmare for me and the whole family but receiving this gift from Prison Fellowship has gone far beyond getting a kind gift; it has given us so much hope that there is somebody caring for us and our son. I don't sleep very much anymore but I want you to know that tonight I feel better than I have in a long time. Thank you so much for your kindness and love shown to so many people. My son called me, and I told him about the beautiful gifts for his daughter - he was over the moon. Even though he wouldn't be here to spend Christmas with her, he knows she will open these

beautiful gifts from her daddy on Christmas morning. From the bottom of my heart, thank you."

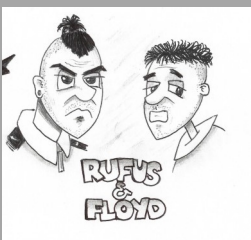
### A HAMPER REQUEST

In conversation with another mum, who Prison Fellowship called to let her know that her son had requested a hamper, the lady was out shopping at the time and began to cry. She explained that there had been a recent bereavement in the family; she was feeling totally overwhelmed by life and simply didn't know where to turn, because she knew that many services aimed at supporting folks such as herself were at breaking point, and getting appointments meant lengthy waiting times, she felt powerless as to where she would turn. She was so touched that her son was able to let his mum know that he was thinking about her at Christmas through Prison Fellowship providing a hamper.

**"I want you to know that tonight I feel better than I have in a long time."**



**“Creativity offers a fresh viewpoint, a way to move beyond isolation, challenges and develop a method for learning that suits an individual.”**



## PRISON ARTS FOUNDATION (PAF) ART FACILITATES CHANGE *Pamela*

**“Show us not the aim without the way.  
For ends and means on earth are so entangled.  
That changing one, you change the other too;  
Each different path brings other ends in view.”**

**Ferdinand Johann Gottlieb Lassalle, in [Arthur Koestler] *Darkness at Noon***

**P**AF supported by the Northern Prison Service (NIPS) have championed Artist-in-Resident positions in Northern Ireland prisons since its foundation in 1996. PAFs ethos is ‘to create, both individually and in partnership, access to the arts for all prisoners, ex-prisoners, young offenders, and ex-young offenders in Northern Ireland.’ For 25 years, PAF have worked passionately to deliver arts programmes as transformative. The late Mike Maloney, PAFs first Development Officer, qualified this powerfully: ‘Art is a medium for change, prison is just a venue.’

### POSITIVE ACTIVITIES

Activities offered by PAF include visual arts, ceramics, music, woodcraft, poetry and writing workshops, which are offered in HMP Magilligan, HMP Maghaberry, Hydebank Wood College and Women’s prison as well as in Probation hostels and PAF’s Support Hub in Belfast (partnership with Start360 and Community Sports Network). Positive activities that deal with issues pertaining to self-esteem, behavioural, and safer custody issues fall into a number of categories and contribute to positive social interaction between prisoners and others offering prisoners the opportunity to make constructive

use of their time such as development of interpersonal skills, communication skills, physical, mental and emotional well-being and rebuilding of family ties.

### POSITIVE RESULTS

Participation in the programmes is voluntary and the outcomes demonstrate that prison arts programmes have significant benefits and positive results for prisoners, their families, the prison environment and society. The importance of prison arts education can be understood through attitudinal and behavioural changes in inmates. Inmate-artists discover new things about themselves and the world through the creative process.

### EXHIBITIONS

PAF hold yearly exhibition and Fred Caulfield, Chief Executive of Prison Arts Foundation, believes that ‘the arts are a successful vehicle for rehabilitation and peace-building, and we are very proud that the people in custody can engage with the arts as they transition back into the community after release.’

### POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT

One inmate added that: ‘PAF has made my time in prison more productive. I feel that anyone who could continue

anything as positive as what the foundation offer will have a better chance of becoming and remaining a valuable member of any community.’

### FURTHER INSIGHT

Other comments included: ‘It could be used to keep the mind preoccupied and Influence how your creative skills evolve whilst continuing to utilise the scheme. It also helps us (prisoners) to establish ourselves within the creative/exhibitions community, instead of being linked to our offending pasts.’

### KOESTLER ARTS

Each year PAF artist submit prisoners work to the Koestler Arts awards. These prison arts awards plays a huge role in the lives of prisoners involved with artistic disciplines. The judges’ feedback proves invaluable. Creative writing is further entered into Listowel Writers in Prison, building on the success of previous years.

### SHOWCASE ACHIEVEMENTS

The PAF residency classes not only give the student a creative learning experience but the atmosphere of the class produces finished works with writings, paintings, music, ceramics, and other forms as a way to showcase achievements, enabling the augmentation and communication of ideas.

*Interview continued...* →

### PRISON ARTS FOUNDATION

#### A FRESH VIEWPOINT

Creativity offers a fresh viewpoint, a way to move beyond isolation, challenges and develop a method for learning that suits an individual. We become somebody we never knew we could be, somebody new through creativity. We communicate our interests, our stories, our experiences.

#### ART EDUCATORS

There is compelling evidence that art educators play an important role to inspire inmates and guide creativity, growth, and understanding. They are often the first positive role models for imprisoned men and women, especially in an educational context. As PAF achieve 25 years of delivering arts in prisons, it is worth noting that Prisons Arts Foundation provides, not only to the prisoner and our wider community, but the vital role that the arts have in the rehabilitative process.

For further information please contact:

Prison Arts Foundation, Unit 3, Clanmil Arts & Business Centre, Northern Whig Building, 2 10 Bridge Street, Belfast, BT1 1LU

Phone: 028 90247872

Email: [info@prisonartsfoundation.com](mailto:info@prisonartsfoundation.com)

**“...the vital role that the arts have in the rehabilitative process.”**

#### KOESTLER ARTS 2021

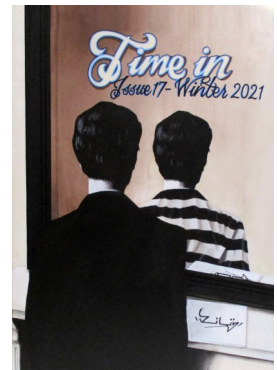
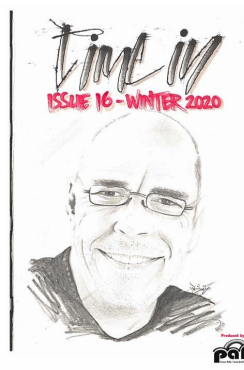
Writer based at HMP Magilligan: Poem selected from over 6,400 entries for inclusion in the Koestler exhibition of 200 art works at South Bank Centre in London: 'The I and the We'. Poems further selected for Koestler Vol. 3 biennial Poetry Anthology: *Voices*. Under 25s Special Award for poetry.

#### JAIL BREAK

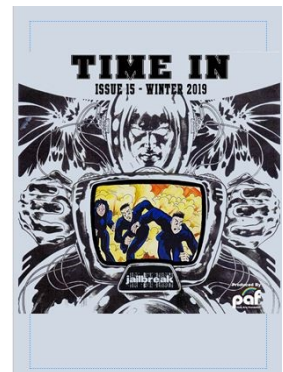
I'll not come back to jail  
Simply because  
There are not enough hours in the day  
Not enough days in the year  
And not enough years in a lifetime.



'Vision' Silver Award Winner Koestler Arts 2021



PAF SPONSORED MAGAZINE

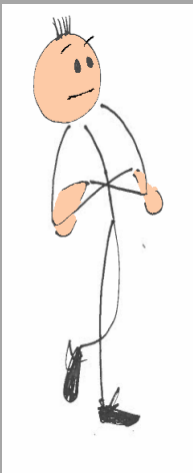


## HOW EXTERN IS PROVIDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE IN DARKEST OF TIMES

Emma Purdon



**“There are so many opportunities that Extern Works has to offer.”**



**S**TANDFIRST: For over 40 years leading local charity Extern has provided skills and employment opportunities to many who are marginalised or who have been through the Criminal Justice system.

### STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES

When Extern was founded in 1978, it was with the aim of enabling some of the most marginalized and disadvantaged people in our communities to feel that they could make a difference to their lives by offering more structured activities than had been available to them before.

### TRANSFORMATIVE

Supporting those who had been through the Criminal Justice system in Northern Ireland was a central focus of that early work – in fact, it was the inspiration behind the name ‘Extern’ – and remains so to this very day through projects such as Extern Works and Floating Support. Based in Newtownabbey, on the outskirts of north Belfast, Extern Works is a transformative education and employment-focused programme delivering a range of vocational training.

### NON-JUDGMENTAL APPROACH

As is the case for every one of Extern’s projects, we offer a friendly, open and non-judgmental approach to supporting people to help transform their lives for the better. Our ethos is that we ‘reach in’ to support people who may find it difficult to reach out, and that we never walk away from anyone who needs our help.

### REWARDING EXPERIENCE

Engaging with Extern Works can be a truly rewarding experience, as we offer recognised accredited training and skills through a range of well-known awarding bodies, including City and Guilds and the Open College Network NI, amongst others.

### ACTIVITIES AND TRAINING

Activities run for 3-5 days per week for six months and include a range of training courses linked to employer partnership employment opportunities, including electrical installation, joinery, plumbing, warehousing, recycling, ICT and catering.

### TUTORS

Our tutors are both professional and understanding, which creates a healthy learning environment. At every stage, participants are given support through mentoring programmes and development plans to ensure education and employment progression. Over the years, we have supported hundreds of people like **Robert\***.

### HOW EXTERN WORKS

“I came to Northern Ireland in 2015 from Romania, but I found myself homeless, sleeping in a night shelter and using a local hostel for support and comfort,” he says. “Eventually I found some permanent hostel accommodation, which is when I first found out about Extern Works.”

### CONFIDENCE BUILDING

“There are so many opportunities that Extern Works has to offer, and I managed to earn a Level 1 certificate in Electrical Installation. Not only that, but my knowledge, my practical

skills and my confidence also grew massively during this time.”

### SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

“The Extern Works team also helped me with employment support skills, like creating a professional CV, applying for jobs, completing application forms and interview techniques. Eventually I found a full-time job and my own home. Now I have the skills and the knowledge to move forward and keep succeeding.”

### FLOATING SUPPORT

Another much-valued project in Extern’s range of services is Floating Support, which offers support to those who been through the Criminal Justice system, male and female, from all backgrounds.

### PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Covering Greater Belfast, the Northern Trust and Derry/Londonderry, the project provides practical support in a range of areas, such as finding accommodation and sustaining tenancies; financial and debt management support; education and employment; and problem drug and alcohol use, among others.

### EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS

Floating Support accepts referrals from a wide range of professionals including, but not limited to, statutory/voluntary organisations, PBNI, PSNI, General Practitioners and self-referrals. Crucially, our support is centred on building upon the needs and aspirations of the individuals themselves, empowering them to live as independently as possible.

*Interview continued...* →

**A LIFELINE**

For former Service User **Claire\***, Floating Support offered a lifeline when things began to fall apart in her life.

**LIFE FELL APART**

"I had survived domestic, sexual, and mental abuse,

**EXTERN**

then I lost both my parents in traumatic ways, and my life fell apart."

**A NEW PLACE**

"At the time I was introduced to Extern, I was being evicted from my family home. Extern found me a new place to go to and stayed with me to make

sure I could sustain it, and start to live my life again. I owe so much to Extern."

*\*Names changed to protect identity*

To find out more about Extern's projects, visit [www.extern.org](http://www.extern.org)

or follow us on twitter at @ExternCharity

**"...start to live my life again. I owe so much to Extern."**



**N**IACRO is a voluntary organisation that has been working for 50 years to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities across Northern Ireland. At the heart of our work is the aim to reduce (re)offending in the belief that a flexible range of supports are most effective. We offer a range of supports to people in the community and those leaving prison:

**ASPIRE**

In partnership with PBNI, Aspire supports young men at risk of involvement in criminality to help prevent/reduce offending and enable young men to resist negative influences and develop to their full capacity. Aspire supports young men to access services, particularly healthcare, accommodation, and addiction services. Mentors also support clients with particular issues e.g., family relationships/isolation. The service also supports restorative practice approaches along with programme partners NI Alternatives and CRJI.

**NIACRO****TRANSITIONS**

The Transitions project provides a one-to-one mentoring for people (men aged 30+ and women) who are likely to face significant difficulties upon their release from custody. Practical support is provided with accommodation, healthcare, addictions, family and community relationships etc. A flexible, person-led approach supports people to address basic needs; break down practical barriers to engagement; and progress personal development using a strengths-based approach.

**WORKING WELL**

Our Working Well team provides employability support for those who are ready to work towards securing employment or training. People will be supported to:

- Assess employment interests/skills/training needs
- Develop CVs
- Carry out job searching
- Support to access online vocational and other helpful training
- Progress towards employment or work placements
- Advice on disclosing convictions & disclosure statements

**WELFARE ADVICE**

NIACRO provides a specialist Welfare Advice service to meet the particular needs of people

in contact with the Criminal Justice system. We provide information, advice and representation on subjects like benefits, housing and debt.

**FAMILIES AND MONEY MATTERS (FAMM)**

We also offer debt and money management advice to people and their families who are not engaging with mainstream debt advice services. We will support people to identify any potential debt issues and offer money management advice. After assessing circumstances, FAMM will offer advice, information and guidance, providing as much needed support. (for example, for accessing and completing forms or contacting creditors). We will also continue to refer to other specialist advice services for further support and information.

**BASE2**

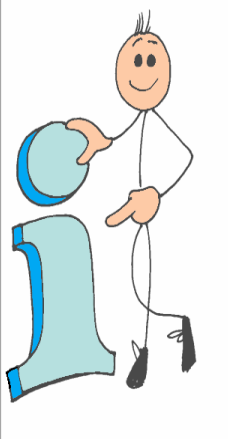
Base2 is a crisis intervention project which offers verification and mediation services to individuals and families at risk of violence or exclusion from their community. Base2 supports people to deal with conflict or difficulties they are experiencing within their local community or with paramilitary organisations, so that they can remain in their homes safely, or be supported to relocate.

For more information on any of our programmes please contact NIACRO on 028 90320157 or check out our website at [www.niacro.co.uk](http://www.niacro.co.uk)



**"...working for 50 years to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities across Northern Ireland.."**

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**ADVICE**  
**AID**  
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**SERVICE**  
**SUPPORT**

## Service User Newsletter

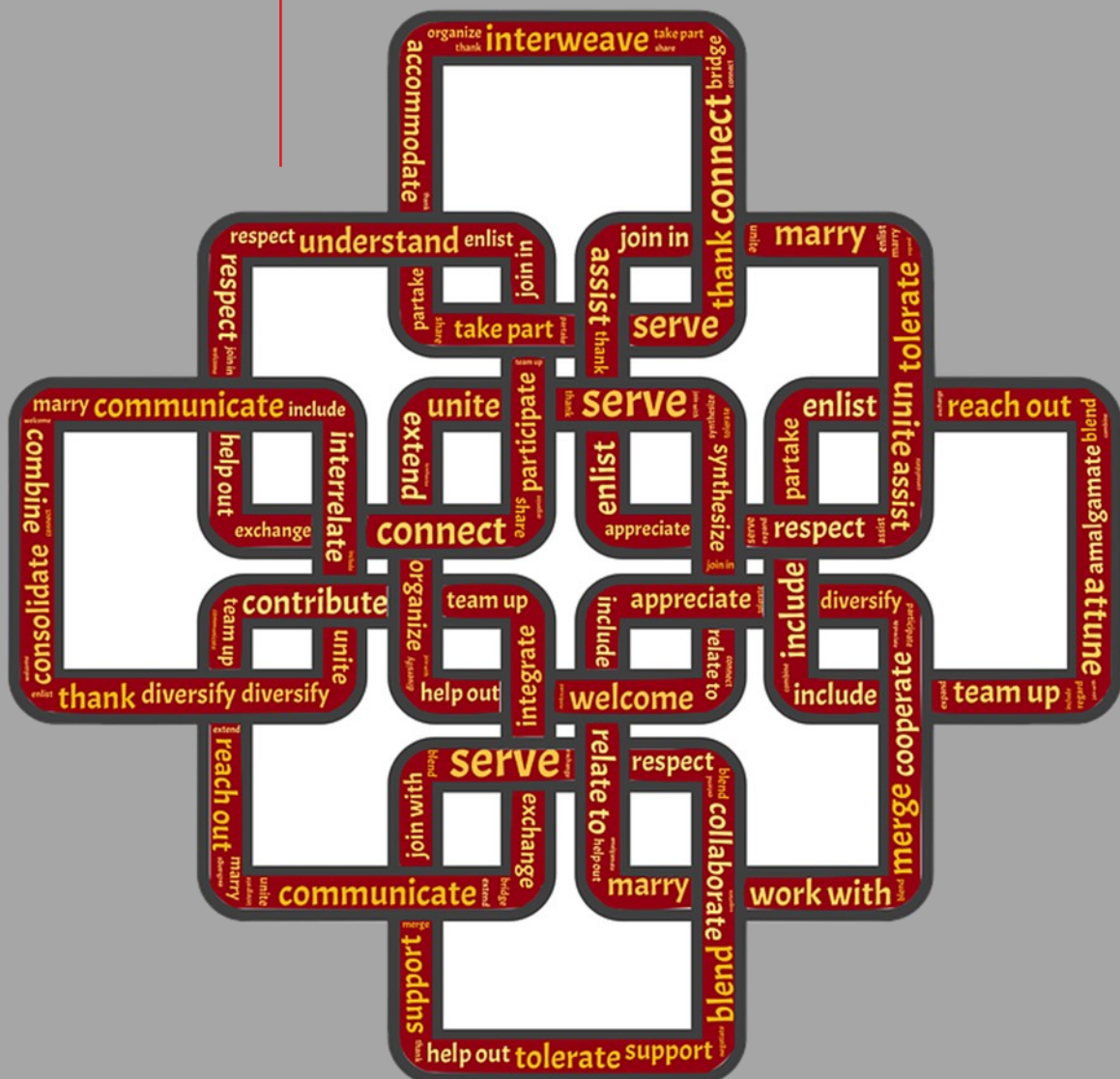
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Belfast BT1 1LD

Tel: (028) 9052 2522

Email: [info@probation-ni.gov.uk](mailto:info@probation-ni.gov.uk)

### SERVICE USER CONTENT INCLUDES:

- **Services** reflecting the views of those using them.
- Insights into how **Service Users** view Probation.
- **Service Users** gaining a sense of ownership of the **services** they use.
- Building communication with **Service Users**.
- Improving **Service User's** confidence and self-esteem.
- **Service User** skills that can be referenced in job applications.



Newsletter layout and design by Prison Arts Foundation's Creative Writing Group at HMP Magillan.

Masthead and matchstick images courtesy of Riko (PAF), other images sourced from pixabay.com