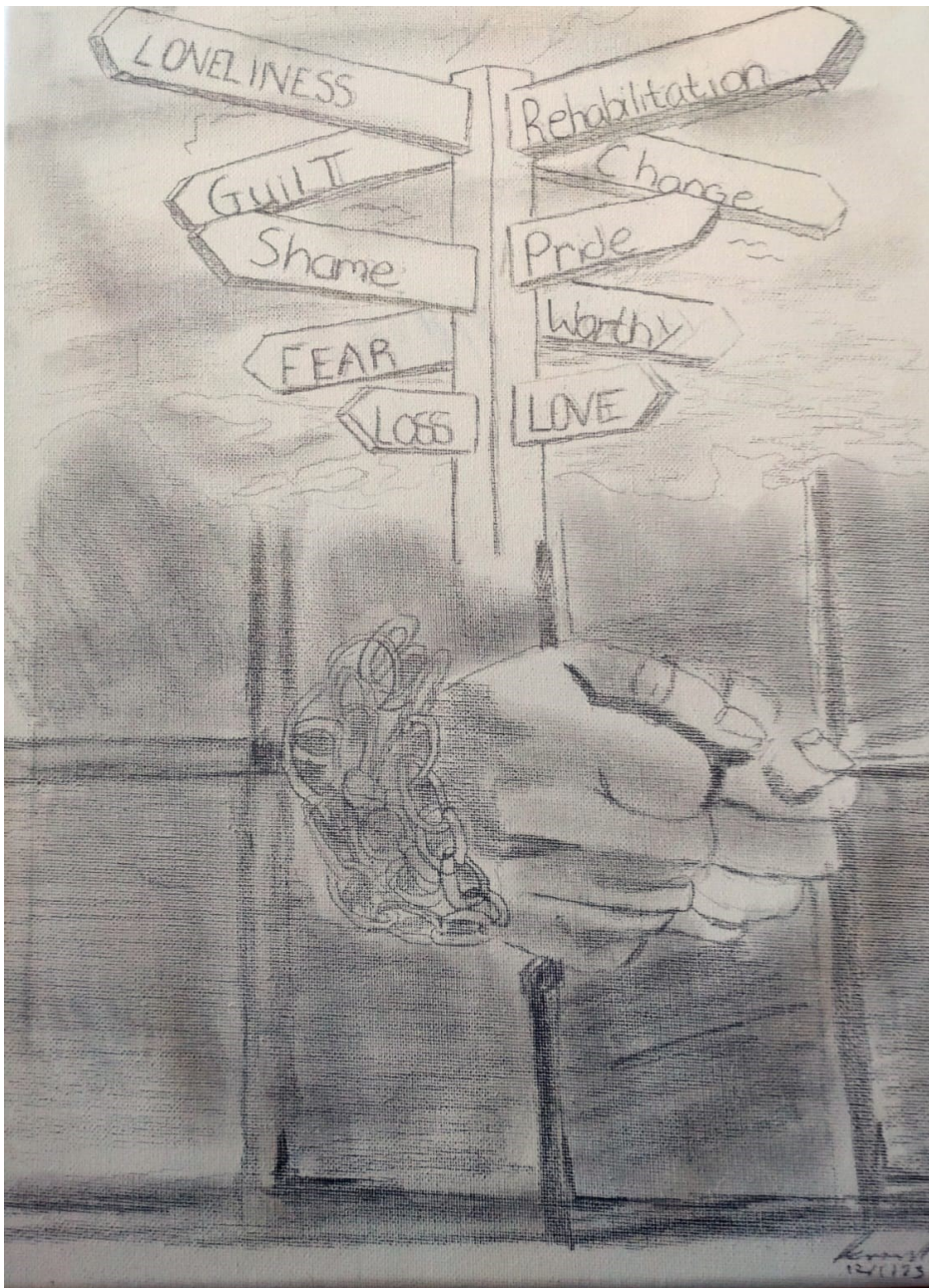


CONNECT

'Never underestimate the power of connecting with others, it holds within it, the power to change the world' —Michael Elliott



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Introduction.....	2
Complex and Challenging	2
My Journey.....	3
Improvements can be made in the Criminal Justice System	4
Duke of Edinburgh Award.....	5
Wordsearch Wellbeing	6
My Endeavour Award	7
The Turnaround Project.....	9
A Year On and Still Crafting.....	10
Why I Like Music.....	11
Cook Off Challenge	12
Connect Group's Request	13
How to Beat Addiction.....	14
Creative Writing Bête Noire.....	16
RAP: My Story.....	17
Why I Draw	18
The Box.....	18
A Lot of Firsts.....	19
The Bear and The Dove.....	19
Heavy Whackin'	20
Aspire Mentoring.....	21
Prison Arts Foundation	22
Contact Details	23

Introduction *'Every moment is a fresh beginning' —T S Elliot*

Welcome to the second edition of the CONNECT Service User Newsletter. This is another full edition and I'm delighted that so many of you have once again wanted to contribute. Every contribution is thought provoking, but even more, as Marianne Williamson said, *"as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same"*.

Connection with others remains as important now as ever. We are experiencing unprecedented challenges, which includes a cost of living crisis. As human beings, most will agree that we're designed to connect with each other. Yet many people experience loneliness, which has been linked to poor physical health, poor mental health, and reduced quality of life. It is also related to higher rates of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and other mental health issues. For others, feelings of

social isolation are linked to poor emotional well being. A connection doesn't always have to be a physical bond, and in this Newsletter, we're continuing to share experiences, advice, ideas, and stories to help one another. We're using it to reach out to everyone in a way that we otherwise couldn't. We hope to publish a Newsletter every year so if this edition has inspired you, if you have stories, experiences or ideas that you want to share with others, or have art, poems, recipes or quotes that you think others might enjoy, please get in touch with your Probation Officer, Probation Services Officer, Community Service Officer or via:

serviceuser@probation-ni.gov.uk

I hope you enjoy reading.

Gillian Montgomery
Director of Operations

Complex and Challenging *by R Tickle*

Drug addiction is a complex and challenging condition that affects millions of people around the world. As an addict in recovery myself, I can attest to the power of drugs to take over your life, and the immense challenge of breaking free from their grasp.

INCREDIBLY REWARDING

My own journey with addiction began growing up in a pharmacy. While I was passionate about helping people through medicine, I began to experiment with various drugs, using them as a means of coping with stress and anxiety. At first, it was just occasional recreational use, but before I knew it, I was using drugs every day, and my life was spiralling out of control. It wasn't until I hit rock bottom that I realized I needed help. I sought out treatment and began the long process of recovery. The journey hasn't been easy, but it has been incredibly rewarding.

RE-BUILD MY LIFE

Through therapy, support groups, and medication-assisted treatment, I have been able to rebuild my life and regain my sense of purpose. Something that

I believe cannabis helped me but it is not suitable for all and it is illegal – the debate around this is one for another day. Regardless of anyone's personal views, it is important to acknowledge that drug addiction is a serious problem that continues to affect people of all ages, particularly young people. In fact, the dangers faced by young people today are greater than ever before, due to the increased availability, purity, and variety of substances.

WAR ON DRUGS

People today have access to a wide range of drugs that were not available in previous generations, and these drugs are often much more potent and dangerous than their predecessors. Synthetic opioids like fentanyl, for example, can be up to 100 times stronger than morphine, and can be lethal in very small doses. My own view, is that how countries try to address the 'war on drugs' has only made the problem worse. Rather than focusing on treatment and harm reduction, many governments continue to prioritize law enforcement and punitive measures, which have done

little to curb the drug trade or reduce rates of addiction.

TAKE ACTION

On a more positive note, an Overdose Prevention Centre has just been approved for Belfast which will save many lives, albeit there are still a few hurdles to overcome! As a result, it is up to all of us to take action to address the issue of drug addiction and protect the health and well-being of our communities. This means providing young people with accurate information about the risks of drug use, increasing access to treatment and support services, and advocating for more sensible drug policies at the national and international level.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

If you or someone you love is struggling with addiction, I encourage you to seek out professional help and explore all the options available for treatment and recovery. With the right support and a commitment to change, it is possible to overcome addiction and build a better life. I know from first-hand experience.

My Journey by Dermot P

I'm going to give you a bit of my history and I hope that after reading this you will realise "time's in your hands" and take the right path. I was given the opportunity to do the Endeavour Bronze level award through probation and I'm able to draw on my artistic skills.

WHY I'M HERE

As a young boy my life and future seemed bright, because I had an opportunity to play professional football;

that was until I was assaulted by my stepdad at age 13. He broke my left and right arm with a metal pole. I should say, I had been sexually abused by him from

an early age. The brightness in me started darkening as I lay in the hospital bed knowing my football career, that my mum had consented to was over. I was meant to be leaving to live with a family in England to join Blackburn Rovers Boys team. I still struggle to understand that instead of the abuser being told to leave, I was taken into care. So now I am a 13-year-old boy, in a boy's home run by the religious orders wondering why I'm here. This question was never answered. I was moved from one home to another, where there were very strict regimes and severe consequences if you didn't comply. I joined circus training, also played Gaelic, hurling and water sports, although football was my focus. At this time, art didn't interest me; I didn't think I had a talent. My art teacher in the home went through my art book and paid me £15 a week to stay an extra hour to do work with him one to one. He brought out my talent, and my confidence increased from all the positive activities, slowly happiness was returning. Plus, I started getting visits from my mum.

"Lying in a prison cell gives you nothing to do but think about life on the outside..."

LOST WITH NO FUTURE

Things were difficult and at 14 I was sentenced to 3 months for criminal damage and sent to Lisnevin. Looking back, I welcomed this in a way as it allowed me get away from paramilitaries. However, at age 15 I was assaulted by paramilitaries. I can see now that I was led into offending through older boys in the home, I admired them and wanted to impress them. I felt lost

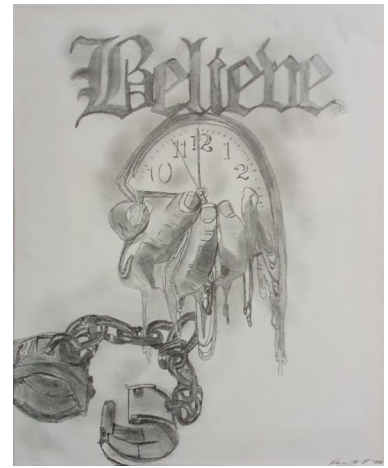
with no future, basically said I thought the only opportunity for me to earn money was crime. I went from joy riding to stealing cars to order, then burglary to get car keys.

THINK ABOUT LIFE

Alcohol was a big part of my offending, and I was on a downhill spiral. This changed when I got sentenced to 8.5 years (5 on licence) and was transferred to Magilligan prison. I remember walking into another inmate's cell and noticing a Mike Tyson canvas on his wall, it looked like a robot. Deep down I knew I was a talented artist, so I drew my own version of the Mike Tyson canvas and sent it to the woodshop to be varnished. The other inmates noticed I could draw and started requesting canvases to order. I joined the metal shop and got 3 certificates level 1 to 3 in welding, becoming a trained welder. Lying in a prison cell gives you nothing to do but think about life on the outside and how you are going to choose to live it when you get out.

PREPARE FOR LIFE

Listening to the stories of the older prisoners really helped me and helped me prepare for life on the outside again. I took in a lot of good advice and the good advice was, prison gets harder every time you're in. You might



"Time's In Your Hands"



Image

"This is my image, I always keep in my mind, plus I still train my upper body and I try to train my legs even tho my legs are shot through paramilitaries beating them but I keep this picture in my mind, strap up my legs and work them.

"Keep this picture in your mind and push through your pain."

"My main road sign to you is please think of your family outside, they're doing your time harder than yourself."

“If I can change, you can change”

think it is fun and good craic telling stories to your fellow inmates but what you have to always remember is, that for the crime you committed the victim is hurting. So the next time you're thinking of going to offend, try and keep it in your head that there is another person who is a victim in the crime but they aren't laughing or joking, they are hurt. And the stories they are telling are a lot different from yours. So, when you get to a crossroads in your life where you have to make a choice, it's up to you what you chose, it's your time, time is in your hands.

LICENCE

Being on licence was a really positive outcome in my life. I stayed in a hostel where I was away from previous associates and they helped me see how I could live a life without crime, to fund it. Staying away from my old associates was one of the main things I had to do. My alcohol misuse had

to stop due to my ill health - when I was 28, I woke up with tubes coming out of me and I remember the Dr saying I needed to stop drinking and taking drugs.

A GOOD ROUTINE

When I got out on licence I continued to draw. I drew a canvas of the Godfather and posted it on Facebook. Straight away I had an offer from someone wanting to buy it!

Getting into a good routine also helped me – I go to bed around 10pm every night waking at 8am, go to the gym at 9am, then come home around 11am. I keep myself busy during the day working on cars and around 6pm I start drawing canvases to order.

Basically, art that I thought I was no good at was the talent that saved me and helped me live a crime free life-style.

MAKING DECISIONS

I have lived the life, walked the line, twists and turns going down roads

not knowing where they are leading me. Some roads felt warmer than others, and I hope the road you are on is warm and bright. Try to think about your family, when you are making decisions, because of my life-style and choices I have little family support. I do have a beautiful daughter though who played for Cliftonville and Northern Ireland. If you don't feel positive on the road you are on, listen to yourself, try not listen to others unless they are giving you good advice on how to live on the outside crime free.

WRITE A BOOK

I'm out of prison from 2011 so I'm doing something right. I'm hoping something really good happens with my art as my art is taking me from a really dark to a bright place. Believe me, if I can change you can change. Speak free that's why God give you a voice, I could write a book of my life, maybe one day I will!

Improvements can be made in the Criminal Justice System *by Sean M*

I'm going to outline four key steps based on my journey through the criminal justice system (13 ½ years of lived experience) where I think improvements could be made. I have had some good experiences where empathy has been shown to me and some experiences where I felt the staff simply wanted me to be returned to prison. There is detailed and lengthy experience behind my four points.

Key Steps

1. There should be more than one Probation officer allocated to cases to get a fair appraisal of the individual. Not everyone likes everyone they meet!
2. What's vital for all probation staff to realise is if we don't see eye to eye, the individual is maybe more likely to end back up in prison – that's not right. Point 1 will help with that.
3. One thing you become really good at whilst serving time is reading people, and you can quickly tell if the person you're working with actually cares about you and wants you to do well.
4. Allow all prisoners have a voice; they have very valid points as to the changes that could be made. If you keep listening to the chosen few who are handpicked, you're never gonna get to the core of what's causing so many recalls.

So please listen and learn from the people who have been through the system.

Duke of Edinburgh Award

Probation hold the licence for the delivery of the DofE and Gaisce -Presidents Award for the justice system in Northern Ireland, including YJA and NIPS. It is the leading youth achievement award recognised by employers and further education establishments worldwide.

ENDEAVOUR AWARD

Probation also offers the Endeavour award, which is unique to PBNI and recognises personal achievement in those aged 25 years and up, unlike the DofE award which targets 14- to 25-year-olds. The award supports personal development (confidence, self-belief, skills in various subject areas) which promotes the participants desistance journey, and which may reduce likelihood of offending. It is to be remembered that the award is voluntary and is service user lead. It considers at all times the needs and requirements of the individual progressing at their own pace. The award aims to challenge the individual toward achievable goals.

LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT

The award comprises of 3 levels of achievement, bronze, silver, and gold. These comprise of 4 sections, skill, physical recreation, volunteering and expedition (the Gold award also has a residential section.) Unique to probation is the practice of rewarding each module. Success of the award depends on finding that one thing that makes it personal to the participant, capturing their interest, and what are they already doing in their lives that could be accredited to the award. This can then be recognised and celebrated.

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE USER

Probation staff play a key part in the success of the award, supporting and encouraging the participant on this new adventure. Making it an integral part of the supervisory experience and as a tool to further engagement, giving incentive and a degree of ownership to the programme. This can apply whether a programme is being executed internally or with our partner organisations. By the very nature of the award the risk indicators associated with reoffending can be targeted through the process. The step-by-step achievements of using probation's unique modular system provides encouragement for the user to progress through the award.



DofE Bronze Awards Joe N

Aim to inspire participants to:

Skill – “develop practical and social skills and personal interests.”

Volunteering – “make a difference within their communities, or to an individual’s life, and develop compassion by giving service to others.”

Physical – “achieve greater physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle.”

Expedition – “develop initiative and a spirit of adventure and discovery through planning, training for and completing an adventurous journey as part of a team.”

The case studies in the magazine illustrate how the award can be utilized in practice to showcase the participants abilities. These range through various programmes e.g.

- The IFA
- Equine Assisted Therapy
- Animal sanctuaries
- Art
- Prison Arts Foundation
- Community Sports Network
Men’s Shed / community Gardens
- Gym attendance
- Caring for a relative
- Drug/alcohol rehabilitation
(personal development)
- Victims and Survivors service

This list is not exhaustive as each section of the award is bespoke, focusing on meeting the individual needs. If you think this challenge is something you would like to try, please contact your supervising PO, and join the many participants who have benefited from the award!

Claire Forsythe
(DofE Officer)





Kelsey

Kelsey has been involved with the Duke of Edinburgh and the Irish Football Association which has opened many avenues for her.

WORDSEARCH

Wellbeing

R	E	L	A	T	I	O	N	S	H	I	P
Q	N	W	C	E	R	T	Y	A	S	D	U
P	G	U	H	E	A	L	T	H	I	O	R
O	A	F	I	G	H	J	K	L	S	A	P
S	G	Z	E	M	O	T	I	O	N	S	O
I	E	X	V	C	V	B	N	M	Q	W	S
T	M	W	E	L	L	B	E	I	N	G	E
I	E	E	M	I	N	D	F	U	L	R	T
V	N	Y	E	X	E	R	C	I	S	E	U
E	T	I	N	O	P	A	S	D	F	G	H
J	O	P	T	I	M	I	S	M	K	L	Z
X	C	S	T	R	E	N	G	T	H	S	V

- Relationship
- Exercise
- Achievement
- Emotions
- Engagement
- Strengths
- Wellbeing
- Mindful
- Optimism
- Purpose
- Positive
- Health

My Endeavour Award Equine Assisted Learning *by Sean*

As part of the skill section of my Endeavour Award I was given the opportunity to attend 'Horses for People' through funding provided by Victim and Survivor Service. I didn't know what it involved but I was keen to give it a go as I don't really like the conventional talking therapy. I've always had a passion for animals, this developed whilst in prison through day release at Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary, which I now attend fortnightly for the volunteering section of my award.

HORSES FOR PEOPLE

Claire collected me that first day, I felt excited to meet June and find out what it was about. *Horses for People* are based in a beautiful location overlooking Strangford Lough. We went into a room full of pictures of June and her horses, and I was made to feel at ease. I worked with June to identify what I hoped to achieve during my time there, aims included:

- To highlight my skills and strengths
- Increase self-esteem and self-worth
- To switch off and maintain a peaceful mind
- Boost my confidence
- How to handle difficult situations and people
- Motivate and Inspire
- Enable good judgement and make good choices moving forward
- Take small steps out of my comfort zone
- Maintain engagement and stretch my attention span
- Generate new ideas for self-regulation and relaxation
- Establish boundaries with confidence, and to dial up and dial down assertiveness
- Learn how to better listen and follow instruction
- To understand my already present animal skills can be transferred to help my people skills

LEARNING HOW TO LISTEN

Part of my engagement was learning how to listen and understand instruction then to relay it to the horse. This has helped me communicate more effectively

with others and to be confident, I also learned how to "dial up and dial down" assertiveness levels when necessary. This was put into practice when I had to lead Victor away from the grass!

EXERCISES WITH THE HORSES

During the sessions we did exercises with the horses that helped me slow down, take command, set clear boundaries, and manage my emotions to develop a clear and trusting relationship with the horse, all of which can be transferred to day-to-day life. I learnt that I had to approach each horse differently and the similarity of this when connecting with people. The first day I made a connection by hugging and breathing in sync with the horse.

One of the horses I hugged responded by putting her chin down onto my shoulder, at this point June helped me identify this connection, which made me realise that emotions are contagious and transferable. I learned how I can be "more horse" "go

back to grazing" – I learned that a horse in its natural state can sense danger, respond to it, then let it go.

BOUNDARIES ARE NECESSARY

By working with the horse, I learned how to make my boundaries clearer. By behaving consistently and making sure that the horse understood my boundaries, helped me to understand that boundaries are necessary in life and the clearer the better. In the final week we did join up, this involved the horse being brought into a round pen and let free. I stood in the middle, the first stage of the exercise was about respect, by using body language only I asked the horse to speed up and slow down, this required a high level of assertiveness but not crossing over to aggression. I learned how to read from the non-verbal signs of the horse that it was engaged and listening. The second stage was trust. This involved stopping the moving horse and joining up. This is when the horse chose to follow me around the arena which gave me a real sense of connection and authenticity. It was amazing that the horse wanted to be with me – thinking the horse was saying to itself 'why have I not met you before' it was real connection. You can't let the horse try and control you – you must show the horse 'this is me' – giving the horse clear instructions – the horse would

"A real sense of connection and authenticity"

Endeavour Award *(continued...)*

otherwise think 'he's an easy touch' and walk all over you if you didn't.

CONFIDENCE

My mind became more focused, and I developed more confidence throughout the sessions and the companionship with others. At the end of each session, we would sit and look at the parallels between the connection with the horses and everyday situations. I have to remember to use my own horse power to move towards future growth in my life, "Be more Horse!"

JUNE

June told me to be mindful of how the horse can test me and how people don't always do what you expect them to do, and to be able to deal with different situations, problem solve, have self-belief. Initially, June had her concerns about how I could engage in the process as I can be quite quiet and serious. However, by week 4 June was really surprised at how I had progressed, and how proud I was when getting photographs taken and a video made. I got a photo framed for my Mum which I will give to her for Mother's Day. I want to show her I have changed, and to hopefully make my Mum proud of where I am in my life now compared to years ago. I never thought I would have a chance to experience working with animals, so when the opportunity came

for me to go to Horses for People, I was excited, there is so much more in me than just being Sean who spent a big part of life in custody. Alongside all the therapeutic work with June, it was one of the most enjoyable experiences I've ever had.

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

I experienced the tranquillity of getting away from living in Belfast city, and how this made me feel good 'to get out of the road'. This has helped me realise that I would love to live in a countryside area where there is peace and quiet – making me feel so much calmer, less anxious and quieten my mind. I can see the benefits of alternative therapies for others – getting people involved and looking outside regular talking therapy which is not for everyone. I recognise now how important it is to have a plan in place to help move on with your life. I would be happy to develop this as it takes my mind off my problems. My levels of pregabalin use have dramatically reduced. I have relayed this to my CAT counsellor and shared the benefits this has had for me. Engaging in EAL has enabled me to progress and potentially access rehab within the coming months. I attended four sessions but think that I could benefit from further sessions to consolidate the therapeutic work and further develop my goals.



The Turnaround Project

The Turnaround Project is the only charity in Northern Ireland providing paid transitional employment opportunities for people leaving the justice system.

WHY WE'RE HERE

We offer opportunities for people who have served - or are still serving - prison or community sentences. We provide real jobs, breaking down the barriers to employment, enabling people to turn around their futures and encouraging communities to support people on that journey.

We have two social enterprises: Big Loop Bikes our bike repair and refurbishment enterprise and Outwork Property Services, which includes cleaning, grounds maintenance and other services. In the last year we have provided employment to over 31 people across our enterprises.

LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE

We are shaped by lived experience, actively employing and involving people with criminal convictions. And we want to keep pushing at the boundaries in service user voice, research, and access to networks that have lived experiences ingrained within their service delivery.

Last year we worked with people serving sentences in Hydebank Wood College to gather the views of their peers on what people need upon release, and with PBNI service users in the North West and Portadown to learn about their experiences in the community.

Meanwhile, our Lived Experience Podcast series continues to draw guests across the justice sector from

among 3rd sector leaders, academics, and people with convictions who have gone on to transform their lives.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We are growing, and we want to provide more opportunities. In the months ahead we want to develop a new enterprise which will appeal to women with experience of the justice system and are seeking ideas and views on what this could be.

COULD YOU GET INVOLVED?

We're inviting views from women who have been in contact with the justice system to shape our future enterprises. There are many challenges that exist for women seeking to enter employment, particularly when they have a criminal conviction - we want to help overcome those challenges.

If you would like to be involved in that or are interested in taking up a transitional employment opportunity with us, or to find out more, please get in touch using the email address below.

CONTACT US

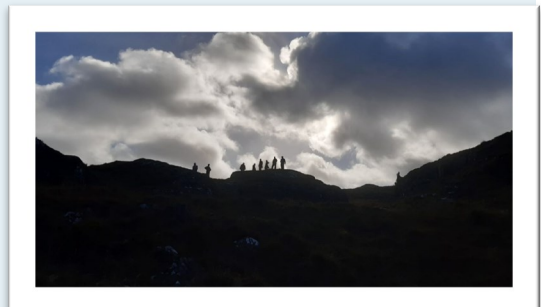
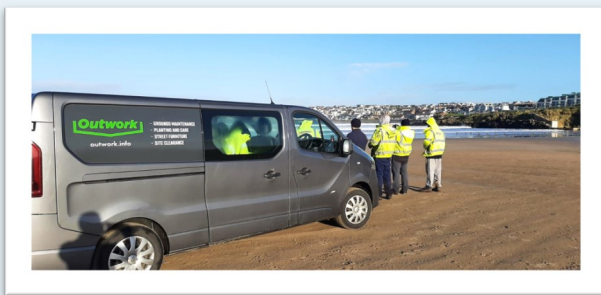
info@theturnaroundproject.org

or through our website

www.theturnaroundproject.org



Turnaround Outwork Branch—Team Day in the Mourne Mountains



A Year On and Still Crafting by Lisa aka Anon

If you read our 1st edition of Connect newsletter you will have possibly gazed over my article on what I do to keep myself occupied while trying to maintain my sobriety. I mentioned returning my mind to my youth and remembering the crafts I done without a care in the world, and the pride I felt in seeing something I made out of the materials I had to hand. As a youngster, it was so simple to pass your time. Awh sweet innocence! But as age progressed and the pressures of life, teenage rebellion and goodness knows what else came into play, I'd forgotten all those innocent past times. The wrong crowd, problems at home, or whatever other negative influences arose I found myself making decisions I knew in my gut were wrong. I started taking drugs before my 13th birthday, drinking at not much older.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

My mental health and self-confidence were becoming more and more affected but could I be told? Heck no!!1,000,000% I knew what was best. Who did my family, teachers, and sober friends think they were telling me what to do? Little did I realise they were trying to guide me towards a better quality of life. I'm not sure if it was somewhere between the violence and

“It wasn’t going to be solved overnight, right?”

abuse in my home, the bad choices in my teens and early 20s, or the domestic violence in relationships as I got older, but truly I lost my self-worth. I had all but given up. There was always this tiny voice in the back of my mind, screaming 'Please don't give up! You are loved! You can change!! You want better for yourself! You know you are worth it!' I heard my innermost thoughts. I heard me. In all the chaos, through all the trauma I was still in there.

ADDICTION

Fast forward and as I lay on my kitchen floor, now 36 and 5½ stone weight, heavily addicted to heroin, pills, alcohol, you bloody name it, knowing I'd never see 40, something inside snapped. I heard my soul cry out to live. That moment, 24 years after it all began, I finally heard myself scream, 'I don't want to die!' We drown out our pain, our heartache, and our constant disappointment in ourselves with our choices. We drown ourselves in all we can, forgetting it was that wee voice that was always trying to say, 'Please, don't give up! We can recover! It's NEVER too late!'

FOUR YEARS OF SOBRIETY

I am a testament to that last statement. In July of 2022, I turned 40!

And the next month, I celebrated 4 years of sobriety! I think I actually celebrated harder for that than making 40! Now I spend my time working on myself. They say Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was the mess I was calling my life. It wasn't going to be solved overnight, right? It's a process as is most things in life. But now it's a process I look forward to greatly. Owning up to my mistakes, and being accountable for

my actions has given me a sense of pride and achievement. I had some unfortunate court appearances to deal with once I got sober (comes with the territory in the drug world!). Thankfully the cases did not result in prison time. They did however result in 2 concurrent 2 year probation orders. And honestly, at this point, I was so grateful to be getting back on my feet I welcomed it. During my time on probation, I've learned more about myself, my strengths and my weaknesses, and what to do when those weaknesses rear their ugly heads and need a little help. Working with probation, I have felt supported in pushing myself to do things I never would have dreamed of. I've had the opportunity to work with different forms of therapy over my 4 years, something I desperately needed but could never afford, and have truly begun to see a massively positive change in my mind-set.

CREATIVE STRENGTHS

My strength is being creative, it's my favourite form of escapism now. In the past 2 years, I've been a part of an art exhibition, also entering my art further into a competition and best of all winning! Having my creations displayed in the office of a prominent parliament member, and now writing my second article for our service users newsletter. All of which I would never have dreamed of doing before.



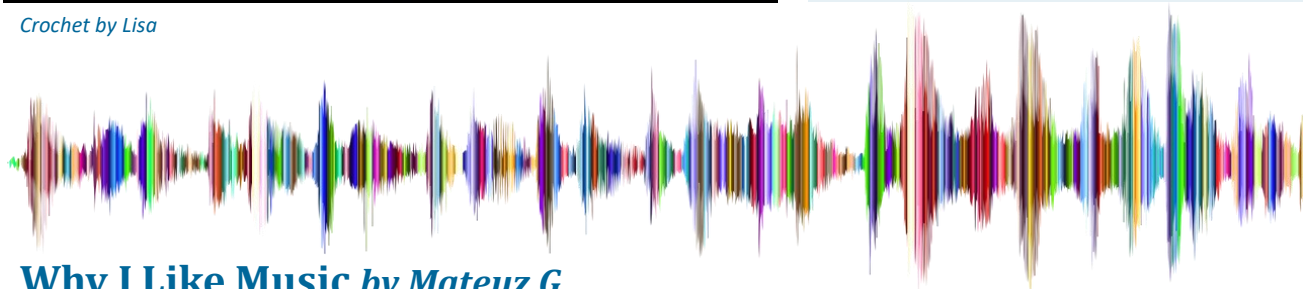


Crochet by Lisa

NEW IDEAS

Now, I continue to push myself creatively and I'm open to trying new ideas. My latest one is learning to crochet. Showing some of my latest creations in the pictures here. All self-taught through YouTube or Pinterest believe it or not! Always moving forward, and keeping those hands busy is my motto for sobriety! This is what works for me and hopefully by sharing my experience you too might feel inspired to remember those silly things you used to do that brought you joy!

IT'S NEVER EVER TOO LATE!
Wishing you, wonderful reader all the happiness, peace, and love and light you so truly deserve.



Why I Like Music by Mateuz G

I started getting into music after I completed my A-levels. At aged 20, I met two people from Spain who had their own music studio at their house which I visited. I observed one of them using Ableton which is a software for producing music, from here I instantly fell in love with techstep, dubstep and drum and base music.

ENHANCED MY INTEREST

I enrolled and began a course in web design at university, however I dropped out after the first week and while working as a manager for a food chain I began saving money to study a HND in music engineering at Belfast Met. Here, my teacher enhanced my interest in house music. I completed the course and got my diploma.

PRODUCING MY OWN MUSIC

I found making music was something I was really good

at, I was able to buy my own pioneer decks and began producing my own music which I started while still studying at Belfast Met. I uploaded my music on various different platforms including *SoundCloud* and realised that I had quickly gained a following. In 2013, I had the opportunity to perform in different cities around Poland.

COPING MECHANISM

I am currently in contact with one of the biggest music producers in Poland who taught me about frequency waves and how they can help heal your brain. I took a particular interest in this and found that certain frequency waves helped me with my anxiety and depression. I felt that I could produce this type of music for other people who struggle with trauma, depression and anxiety. Working on my music is a coping mechanism for my anxiety and depression, it is my release when I feel overwhelmed.

Irish Stew Ingredients and Recipe

- 350g Casserole beef / Stewing Steak
- 2 tbsp plain flour seasoned with black pepper
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 onions, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and finely chopped
- 4 carrots, peeled and cut into chunks
- 3 potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
- 300ml stock
- 400g tin chopped tomatoes (optional!)
- 2 tsp mustard / Worcestershire Sauce (optional!)

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 140°C/fan 120° C/Gas 1
2. Dip the beef in the seasoned flour, heat 2 tbsp of the oil in a large heavy-based casserole dish and brown the beef in batches
3. Put the browned beef onto a plate
4. Put the remaining 1 tbsp oil into the casserole
5. Add the onion and cook over a high heat for a couple of minutes
6. Turn the heat down and add the garlic. Cover and leave to sweat until tender
7. Once the onion and garlic are soft, add the carrots, potatoes, stock, tomatoes (if using), mustard, *Worcestershire* Sauce and the browned beef, then cover and cook in the oven for at least 2 hours or until the beef is really tender
8. Alternatively, cook it on the hob for the same amount of time
9. Make sure your dinner is fully cooked and piping hot before serving

PBNI 'Connect' service user group versus North Ayrshire 'MAD' service user group: Cook Off Challenge!

There are a number of service user groups across the province, and we have been linking with service user groups in Criminal Justice Social Work Scotland to share learning and to help make the groups the most effective they can be. The MAD group (Making a Difference) in North Ayrshire have cooking challenges a few times per year. Having spoken to the facilitators of the MAD group, we decided to raise the level of the competition! We linked with our service user groups to see who would be up for a 'cook off' challenge and the Connect group in Portadown were the first to accept.

THE INGREDIENTS

The MAD group made stovies and the Connect group made Irish Stew (a far superior version of stovies but don't tell our friends in the MAD group!) Everyone who took part was given a recipe (see below if you want to have a go) and the ingredients and set off to make their stew / stovies, taking a few pictures throughout the process



PBNI Winner Cook Off Challenge Patrick

(not that we doubted that they would make their own!) Staff in PBNI and North Ayrshire judged the photos of the final dishes. The results were incredibly tight and Patrick from Connect and Natasha from MAD received the most votes by the smallest of margins. It's fair to say that everyone thoroughly enjoyed the 'cook off' challenge and are looking forward to the next one already. We would be keen to offer cooking lessons to all our service users; if you would like to be involved or take part in any of our service user groups / activities, please link with your Probation Officer, Probation Services Officer, or Community Service Officer.



James



Rory



Stanley

Traditional Scottish Stovies



Andrew



John



Cat



Stovies Cook Off Challenge
Winner Natasha

The Connect Group's Request to PBNI

The Connect Service User Group have been meeting in Portadown for a number of years. Quite a few of us in the group have spent various lengths of time in prisons, both in Northern Ireland and England. We have spoken about our experiences of prison a few times and it quickly became clear that we've all had similar experiences. One of the things we all agree on is that looking back on our time inside, we really benefitted from the services offered by Probation, don't get us wrong, we weren't all thrilled to have to meet with our Probation Officer initially which is due to the myths that circulate about Probation which include, "they will recall you at the drop of a hat", "they won't support you to get out" and even worse, "they will try to keep you inside for longer than you should be".

"It did get us thinking though that if Probation became involved earlier in our sentence, these myths wouldn't circulate as much."

THE ROLE OF PROBATION

We know now this couldn't be further from the truth but at the time, it does make you a bit nervous meeting with them and doesn't help you be open with them, you keep things from them as you don't want it being used against you, which goes against everything we now know about the role of Probation and in building your relationship with them. It did get us thinking though that if Probation became involved earlier in our sentence, these myths wouldn't circulate as much.

PRE-RELEASE

We also think that Probation becoming involved earlier would actually help us get through our sentence more successfully. Without exception, when we got to the point when probation became involved, which is before pre-release testing starts for lifers and a year or so pre-release for shorter sentences, our probation officers highlighted things that would have been helpful for us to complete at an earlier point in our sentence, for example GOALS / ETS / MEG but we didn't know this. If we were able to meet with our Probation Officer just after we were sentenced, to start building that relationship, to really understand their role and for them to help us identify what we need to do, to help us understand why we did what we did, and also what we need to do to get out and stay out when we're eligible, it would really help.

PROBATION'S SKILLS

We mightn't want to see you at the start though as we've a lot to process at that time but that is where probation's skills really come in to their own! We know you'll keep trying with us. We also know that because of your staffing challenges that our Probation Officer might change during our sentence but as long as we have someone identified who we can link with, that's ok. A few of us have had different Probation Officers in prison and in the community and this is usually ok. We'd really like you to consider changing how often we see our Probation officers at the start of our sentence and hope that you can get more money to allow you do this.

How to Beat Addiction *by Stanley*



When I entered Prison having being sentenced to life for my offence, with a minimum of 12 ½ years to serve before being considered for release, I entered with an addiction, which was to alcohol. Over my lifetime, I went out at weekends and drank socially, but the 5 years before I committed the offence, were engulfed in alcohol, I was an alcoholic. Once in Prison it took me 3 to 4 years to realise the seriousness and gravity of my crime and the impact that alcohol was having on my life. The Judge said while sentencing me in Court, if I hadn't been drinking, the offence may not have happened. During my long Prison sentence, I began to think how was I going to beat this addiction once I was released? No way did I want to return to alcohol and land back into Prison when I was released.

"I had to be 100% motivated and positive in my thinking to beat my addiction."

GOOD ADVICE

I have to say in the 4 years leading up to my release, Probation took a great interest in me, giving me good advice and setting me up for release into society once again and I couldn't have done it without them. But the bottom line was, once I was released, it was up to me.

I had to come up with a plan that would hopefully work, and it did work, so I want to share the thinking behind my plan with you, hoping that you can take something from it that will work for you as well.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

From my personal experience, I think about 80% of people who enter prison whether long term or short term have an addiction of some sort and a lot return to drug or alcohol abuse after release from Prison. When released, the first thing I knew I had to look after myself, by that I mean I had to be 100% motivated and positive in my thinking to beat my addiction. I was lucky to be going home to a very loving family, my sister Margaret without whose help I couldn't have conquered my addiction. She offered me a home, love, and care and steered me through difficult times; I will be eternally thankful to her. Before I went to Prison I let worries and problems fester in my mind which would lead me to drink, but now Margaret takes time to sit and discuss things with me, about what was bothering me, which was great. They say a problem shared is a problem halved, so stay close to whatever family and supports you have.

A PURPOSE IN OUR LIFE

The next point is get active, don't hang about doing nothing and getting bored, put a purpose in our life. They say the devil finds work for idle hands, I can only speak for myself when I say this is quite true! I immediately got a position in a Drop-in Shop which was voluntary, but very important in my determination to beat my addiction. Make sure you keep yourself busy and active. With the help of Probation, I found a local church who welcomed me with open arms and there I made lots of new friends. My friends from before Prison were heavy drinkers, so I knew I had to stay well clear of them if I was to succeed. This wasn't easy at all, but I took the time to explain to them my circumstances and they supported me by staying away and I'm lucky, we are still great friends. My faith has helped a lot, and is a very important piece of my life.

MENTALLY ACTIVE

As well as keeping physically active, I knew I had to keep mentally active, keep my mind active. I would really recommend learning something new. I am studying Theology which I really enjoy, it takes a lot of my spare time up and I also think helps me think more positively. I try not to have any negative thoughts about life, this isn't easy but keeps me on the right track. It also helps me reduce my stress levels, as through my Theology studies, I have focused on mindfulness, meditation and relaxation.

Stanley's Plan

Try to make plans for your life ahead, I try not to wake up with nothing planned for the day, even if it is something really simple like going to the shop, but make plans for your future, this is really important.

STAY IN TOUCH WITH PROBATION

I have a very large family circle who all stay close to me now, so it's good to stay in touch with people, and most importantly, it's imperative you stay in touch with Probation. I had a Probation Officer in Prison and have now one outside Prison and I couldn't have made it this far without them. Their support and advice has been invaluable.

SERVICE USER GROUP

One last thing that has been so good for me is our local "Service User Group". We meet every 4 – 6 weeks and talk about different things related to Probation and how they can improve the service we get based on our lived experience of what actually works for us – we are making it better for the people coming after us. I would really encourage you to join our local group – great things are possible through these groups. The groups take time for staff to set up but they are really committed to giving us a voice and they have helped me more than they will ever know.

5 KEY STEPS

So I'm 18 years sober now, 6 years out of Prison and the points I have shared with you have helped me kick my addiction. When I look back on my actions that helped me beat my addiction, there are 5 key steps I took.

1. Set a quit date
2. Change your environment
3. Distract yourself
4. Review your past attempts at quitting
5. Create a support network

My first was setting a quick date. My second was changing my environment, I have a big family connection and they have all helped me achieve this especially my sister Margaret. My third was what I would call distracting myself, I got myself a job working in a Drop-In Shop and taking on lots of work at home that lasted 2 years before all was finished, keep your mind active and yourself. My Fourth step was I kept reviewing my past attempts at quitting and where I went wrong and why it didn't work for me. My fifth step was and most important was created a support network which included Probation, family, friends and my Church, I'm happy to say that for me, my faith is the most important. I hope this helps and I wish you all the best in overcoming your addiction – it's hard but good things are possible!

"Its hard but good things are possible!"

To Do List

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



GOALS

RISKS

PROJECT

CONTROL

ORGANIZE

DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNICATION

TEAMWORK

VISION

ANALYSIS

QUALITY

RESULTS

TEAM

CREATIVE WRITING: Bête Noire

Saturday November 5th. I woke with a sense of dread. This was my usual feeling so I thought nothing of it. It would pass, only to return again the next morning.

Looking around the room, nothing made any sense. Was this even my room at all? As I reached for my glasses, I realised it was and gave out a little depressed sigh. I was still here, in this crummy hostel, known tongue in cheek as the Blue Hotel.

Room 22, on the top floor was small but clean, much like my bank balance. I shared the landing with four other lost souls, three guys and a dame.

Hell, we could've made a tidy little quintet, but none of us had a note in our heads, besides which we didn't have any instruments.

Space was at a premium and you soon

learned the knack of knowing when to use the bathroom. In between the creaks and slams, you knew who was coming and going and when to make a move. It was much like trying to cross 5th Avenue on a rainy day. Anyways, this being Saturday, I remembered I'd signed up to some cockamamie meet up which was due to gather in a local coffee bar. They called themselves a writers group, but I suspected they were a front for the Reds. God knows why, I was probably on some sort of high and feeling sociable, but I'd made the commitment and I never welch out of one. Welchng out is for saps and I ain't no sap.

I listened carefully for the silences. Grabbing a towel and some soap, I made a dash out of the room. My hands fumbled the key. I was shaking goddammit and the stupid key wasn't playing ball. Someone was sure to appear and I'd have to smile sweetly and pass pleasantries. Eventually, it slid in the lock. I exhaled and entered the bathroom.

Now, if you know the type of guy I am, you'll know I like to make a good first impression. For me, that meant scraping off the peach fuzz that had collected on my chin over three days. I couldn't bear to look in the mirror as I'd seen that face a thousand times. Worn, deadbeat and desperate. I knew those contours like the back of my hand. I could do this without looking. So I closed my eyes. That

would turn out to be my first mistake of the day. Boy was it a gusher. This was embarrassing. Luckily I kept a little tin of petroleum jelly for such occasions, and just like a boxer who's gone one round too many, it stemmed the flow.

I couldn't put it off any longer, the moment I'd been dreading for so long had come. I'd have to get dressed. I tend to dress for the weather. Today was bleak, so I put on my bleakest, blackest shirt, a round docker's cap I'd got mail order from the back of a crappy magazine and my long black coat I kept back for funerals. I hadn't been to many funerals

lately and that played on my mind.

"How come nobody dies anymore?" I thought. People must be on some sorta health kick or something. It would take a

sharper brain than mine to figure that one out.

Philosophy aside, I had an appointment with some shady people. Of course, when I got to the joint, it was crammed with degenerates, looking for shelter from the rain, nursing their coffee like some precious artefact from Tutankhamun's grave. I made my way upstairs and found a table in the corner.

Out of nowhere this guy appeared dressed like an entire rainbow. I sat there wishing I'd brought my shades, but it wasn't the weather for them. He sat down and introduced himself as Colin. He seemed harmless enough, but the guy was obsessed with dialogue. Soon we were joined by the organiser in chief, the mysterious Leona. It was obviously a cover name for her nefarious activities in espionage. She moved gracefully through the joint, steadying herself on an elegant, ivory topped cane, probably matched by an ivory handled pistol in her bag.

They say three's a crowd. It was about to get even more crowded as someone caught my eye in the background. Another dame, this one had got lost on the way here. But this was no, "dumb blonde." She was a freaking zoologist! I'd never met one before. I wasn't even sure what one was, but there in front of me was a real live, bone fide zoologist! Her name was Charlotte, like the Brontë sisters (I remember being ridiculed in class, thinking they were just like the Beverley sisters). Boy did I not

"They called themselves a writers group, but I suspected they were a front for the Reds."

Bête Noire (continued...)

make that mistake again.

The four of us got on like a steam train and over a couple of hours had swapped stories and had some laughs. We agreed to meet again and get down to some serious writing.

As I was in the corner, I was the last to leave. I rose, put on my long black coat and docker's cap when I noticed a little pin badge on the ground. It was faded cherry red with the initials WCL printed in gold. It must have come from Leona, the group organiser. I was about to chase after her when it hit me like a hammer. WCL.

World Communist League...

As she left the building I put a hand on her shoulder.

"Excuse me, Leona, if that even is your real name..."

"I'm sorry, what do you mean?"

"Oh don't come the soft soap with me. You dropped this. WCL. World Communist League. You're a red!"

"You are a prize idiot Mister. That's my pin from the Women's Council of Literature. We meet here Wednesdays. Now if you don't mind, I have places to be."

I stood watching her turn and go. But I knew better...

RAP: My Story by Ross

See I never came from a broken home, but the system came and broke my home now I've got bros sitting in cells like chromosomes.

I have bipolar up and down like a roller coaster never sober.

I'm borderline schizophrenic and I need a medic cause I'm type 2 diabetic.

My mum says horses saved my life that's why I'm not doing life.

I could never fit in at school stuck out like a sore thumb, had to pop pills upon my lessons to get away from my adolescent depression.

See I was sensory overloaded, but horses made me understand the difference between the disorder and acting out of order.

Horses gave me purpose, discipline, responsibility:

It stopped the behaviour.

The fact that I used to ride bear back on a hack made me feel physically free and un-mentally imprisoned you see.

Involved from an early age, didn't speak until 4, Got Bluebell age 7 was only 12.2 but knew me before the experts went on a mission to finding out the difference to acting out of order and the disorder.

Unsocial to social horses taught me how.

11 schools always breaking the rules institutionalised and abused.

But

with Bluebell the trust we had was complete nothing

could ever compete.

In RDA my mates from Camphill community.

Suddenly became disability free.

So look listen to me, it's not Jackanory it's not filled with glory but this my story.

You can take all the traditional forms of therapy throw them away what worked for me was the bond the horse gave me.

Mentally fitter, sober.

So, if I didn't have horses, I'd not have the memories or be able to leave this legacy, cause I want to make a change I want to make an impact.

Horses gave me the Choice to become something when everyone thought I was nothing.

Come on people Reach deep into your pockets people are running out of luck and are stuck.

What you need to understand I want to be free not stuck in a cell you see.

I'm the truth I'm the proof that it works.....

<https://youtu.be/uivr-TtRggs>





Why I Draw *by Darren*

I began drawing around the age of 13, it was the only subject I remember enjoying in school. I didn't know it at the time because I was not diagnosed until I was an adult with ADHD but I remember it would settle and focus me and it was something I wanted to do. I remember drawing a picture of Bruce Forsythe, I was so proud of it because of the amount of people who told me it had such a great likeness due to the chin, I still remember that feeling.

UNSETTLED PERIODS IN MY LIFE

I left school at 14 years old and did not draw for a long time due to a number of unsettled periods in my life, until I ended up in Maghaberry prison. While in prison I fell back in love with drawing, and it is where I learnt the most about how to draw. I had remembered stuff from school but built upon this like how to draw the dimensions of a face properly and scales for landscapes. It is in Maghaberry that I painted the acrylic cubism type portrait of the male.



INFLUENCES

The artist who intrigues me the most is Banksy as his work keeps it real, but I do love landscapes. I like to draw landscapes and it is something I am getting back into. The boat scene picture is my most recent drawing with charcoal. I know I can do better but I have not picked up a paint brush or pencil in nearly 10 years, but I am determined to continue to do my art as I know it is a great way for me to focus on something positive and it makes me happy.

The Box *by Gary B*

The remorseful door slams shut, its noise is as enticing as the outstretched arms of an old friend, even though its true sound is as hollow as the fleeting kiss of Judas the betrayer.

A bed of steel brings haunting memories that whisper as echoes from the past. A constant reminder of promises and dreams long gone.

Eyes misted by the sea, gaze fondly upon the ghostly picture of a joy once shared. A photographer's capture of days gone past. The unnatural beauty of the frozen moment.

The tortured heart yearns for the flight of freedoms dove, even though it is bound in chains within the captive mind. A sky of stone becomes the summit of its flights.

The warning hiss from the coiled serpent of hate is heard among the shadows of the night. Its fangs poised to strike, anger its poison. Then unwritten future is forever cloaked in fear.

Hope, the illusionist, has disappeared within the slow rhythm of time. Captured for an eternity, in the cold embrace of stone and steel. The hardening of the heart becomes the sole testament to hopelessness.

A Lot of Firsts by Gary B

There have been a lot of firsts for me this year. The most prominent of which, was the fact that for the first time in over twenty five years of being homeless, I have received the keys to my own hall door. However, when Brendan my probation office asked me to write this piece for the newsletter, this became a first of a different kind altogether, particularly when you take in to account the life I have led.

ENGAGING WITH PROBATION SERVICES

Brendan had asked me if I could write and try to explain at what point did my thinking with regards to engaging with probation services change from being a negative to a positive. In other words, when did I stop viewing the service in the context of “them and us”. Before I attempt to explain this however, I feel that it is important to give a brief background on my past.

OVER THIRTY IN PRISON

I am a fifty-five year old man, of those fifty-five years, I have spent over thirty in prison. I have been both a heroin and cocaine addict and an alcoholic for more years than I care to remember. But I must point out, that I am now in recovery from all three. On top of that, as I said at the start, I have been homeless for twenty-five years. With all of this in mind, it then doesn't take much of a stretch of the imagination to figure out, that I have been dealing with the probation services in one form or another for over three decades.

A LITTLE MORE COMPLEX

Within this context, it must be stressed that for almost twenty-five of those years. I viewed all of my encounters and dealings with the different probation services, as being more than an inconvenience, which stood in the way of my freedom. To say that I viewed the service from a negative state of mind would be an understatement. The truth of the matter however, is a little more complex. Fast forward to present day and as I sit and look back, as they say with the wisdom of age and the benefit of hindsight. I can say with all honesty, that the negativity which I spoke of was largely down to the simple fact that once I was released from prison, even though I knew full well that this refusal would ultimately lead to me being sent back to prison. In my own defence though, I was at this time caught on the life wrecking ball that is addiction.

PATH TO RECOVERY

It was only when I started on the path to recovery and further education that I could start to see the roles that different organisations such as probation services played, in a more positive light. This didn't happen overnight though it would take many years and a lot of false starts and relapses before I even got to this point. There is however, one conversation I recall having with one of the top psychologist in the area of addiction, which I think best illustrates this change. He had instructed me to picture my recovery as a tool box, and on the inside of this tool box are all of my support tools. Each of these tools is designed to deal with a specific aspect of my long-term recovery.

THE SUPPORT I NEED

For instance, my family for the love and support that only a family can offer. My addiction counsellor, for giving me the support I needed to learn and to understand my addiction. My college tutor, whom even to this day I still have contact with, who gave me the support I needed in terms of trying to get my writing up to speed. And last but not least the probation service who have given me both advice and moral support in learning to deal with the pitfalls of independent living.

Poems by Gary B

‘The Box’ is a poem written a number of years ago, which is a metaphor for a prison cell, in light of the writer’s experiences in custody, throughout his life. ‘The Bear and The Dove’ was written specifically for the Koestler awards and the poet was inspired by the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Poems received Koestler Arts participation certificates.

The Bear and The Dove

A bear of forgotten beliefs, awakes
with hammer and sickle held high.

A tyrant’s vision of grandeur and
empires, now destroyed by an honest truth.

As the white dove of freedom
stands alone in green, with voice
unheard. A biblical tale of David and
Goliath, the end no longer foretold.

A lonely cry for help, a fear of annihilation,
the refusal, a world gripped
by fear of its own creation. As death
and destruction destroys a lonely
neighbour. Man’s inhumanity to
man, a blight as old as life.

An exodus of humanity, the hammer
smashes the dam. A sea of pain
and sorrow, washed into foreign
lands. A nations future cast adrift, as
the sickle slashes it in two. History
repeats, memories best forgotten.

As angelic princesses sing from
dusty shelters, to the deafen silence
of laughter. Their prince’s cross
nations with numbers on their hands.
A future of fairy tales and happy
endings, now destroyed by an ever
present evil.

A Lot of Firsts by Gary B (continued...)

INSTITUTIONALISED

If you bear in mind, the fact that I have spent over thirty years in prison and as a result I'm severely institutionalised. You can start to see just how invaluable this support is to me. My support tool-box is now complete and as different issues arise, I can now reach for all intents and purposes embraced all aspects of my recovery and for me at least the probation service has become an integral part of the process. So, as you can tell, I have now done a complete three-hundred-and-sixty-degree turn as to how I view the probation services and more importantly the input they now have in my recovery process.

WHAT I WANT FROM THEM

In simple terms, it means that I no longer ask what they want from me, but instead what I want from them and that for me is the key point. It has also allowed me to build the confidence and trust need, while dealing on a day-to-day basis with different organisations, in order to maintain my recovery. By way of summing up, let me just say that there is a line from a concept that I picked up a number of years ago, which I believe just about sums up the content of this piece of writing, it simply states that "you alone can do it, but you can't do it alone".

"Heavy Whackin" by Gary M

I boarded the prison bus to a place I've never been, For recently being caught with 4 kilogrammes of green,	Getting an orderly job that's the best thing I've done where I met the laundrette guy I call him wee Dunne	You'll hear the odd singer who thinks he's 50 cent but the place ain't that bad even the officers are 100%
To the first house called Foyle, which surely was a dump, looking over barbed wire walls, oh I wish I could jump.	Not much to do each day but play ping pong or chess and reflect on my life and how it became a mess	You'll meet travellers, Romanians, Russians and Jews while being told to lock up by the on duty screws
The first two weeks were 24 hour lock up, Just thinking and thinking on where I screwed up.	Some days I'm pissed off and a bit of a slacker which is quite the opposite of the big guy called whacker	Life throws us curveballs and we all make mistakes being in prison is one of them but I've met some new mates
Davis House isn't bad with the phone and shower and your cell, But it's still far away from normality and its hell.	You might hate playing ping pong and getting beat 10 – 1 or is it worse than playing pool and not getting a turn	Now I've got bail to enjoy Christmas at home what's my family and friends so I won't feel alone
I've travelled a bit but this is the worst of places where you wake up each day to a bunch of new faces.	Now they are doubling up with two to a cell so be an honest orderly and keep your single cell	I won't miss the stew or the Curry with no chicken I gotta go my freedom time is ticking
You'll miss the simple things in life like freedom and trees that you still don't see from up on the twos and threes.	Who would have thought that Catholics and Protestants could mix together while walking anticlockwise in the yard and freezing cold weather	Now you've heard my story so take some advice don't break the law and learn to be nice.

Aspire Mentoring: CASE STUDY

SERVICE USER PROFILE

Jamie (not his real name) was referred to NIACRO's Aspire Mentoring programme by his Probation officer. He had a substantial history of offending since his early teenage years, the majority of which was drug related. His addiction issues coupled with poor mental health and negative peer influences resulted in a fractious relationship with his mother with whom he had little contact.

SUPPORT

Initially, Jamie needed quite a lot of practical support with obtaining photo ID, opening a bank account, registering with a GP and applying for universal credit. His mentor went on to support him to get on a substitute prescribing programme and engage with the community addictions team (CAT). Jamie had been in temporary hostel accommodation and was keen to get his own place. With support he got a tenancy to his own flat and was given help to move in and get set up with the things he needed. Jamie worked hard to disassociate himself from negative peer influences and with the help of his mentor took steps to improve his relationship with his mother.

Mentoring

"Mentoring is a partnership between two people built upon trust. It is a process in which the mentor offers ongoing support and development opportunities to the mentee. Addressing issues and blockages identified by the mentee, the mentor offers guidance and support in the form of pragmatic and objective assistance"

Clutterbuck (2006).

"A helping relationship enables the person to move towards their personal goals and to strengthen their ability to manage issues or problems in their lives" Reid and Feilding (2007).

OUTCOMES

Jamie continues to receive support from the community addictions team and has had no recent drug use. He now has a positive relationship with his mother who is a means of support to him. He joined his local gym and attends regularly. He completed his driving theory test and plans to take his driving test in order to improve his future employment prospects. With these positive steps and achievements Jamie has improved his mental health and now has increased confidence and self-esteem, all of which are helping him to avoid re-offending and continue on his desistance journey.

CONCLUSION

Jamie's personal, social and environmental factors have all had an influential part to play in his desistance from crime. Although he faced many challenges in his life there are now many protective factors in place and his choice to disassociate from negative peers, engage in support for his drug use, actively engage in other supports and improve his family relationship have all been vital in helping him turn his life around and break away from previous patterns of offending.

Jamie to his mentor: "I really appreciate all your help, it is good to have someone who understands me, believes in me and listens without judgement"



PRISON ARTS FOUNDATION

Prison Arts Foundation are an arts organisation delivering effective, successful-outcome pioneering work. This is achieved through a team of professional artists over a wide range of skills, disciplines and applying their speciality as practitioners working across the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. It is a fact that 'the arts' offer people a vital lifeline in helping to improve their creative and communications skills. The creative aspects of PAF also bring prisoners into a self-reflective focus. The benefits of this focus enable and increase developmental facets: reading, writing and therefore 'communication' methods.

PUSHING GENRE-BOUNDARIES

PAF is flexible in pushing genre-boundaries that envelope the prisoner and effectively suit him/her with their specific creative requirements. There are specific genres of course: creative writing, art, sculpture, collage, drawing, painting, mosaics, ceramics, music, crafting, and model-making. While the list gives the parameters of visual arts, the creative writing offer skills such as, letter-writing, stories, poems, memoir, fiction, non-fiction, journalism, and magazine text/articles. Beyond this creative process through PAF's artists in the prisons there is the further developmental aspects including personal and social skills, building self-confidence and the unlocking of people's potential. The effectiveness of the various programmes directly relates to the ideal of feedback coming from prisoners and former prisoners themselves, including highly realistic outcomes of 'new outlook', 'future directions', 'positive wellbeing' and introspective-perspectives into 'self-discovery'.

OUTSIDE-THE-WALLS

PAF's outside-the-walls support and through Probation Service NI is community based, interconnective, and centred to strongly build bridges for a person after sentences, and particularly in the case of lengthy sentences. Fred Caulfield, Executive Director at Prison Arts Foundation, understands the benefits gained through partnerships, "We at PAF have collaborated with Probation in the context of assisting in the rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders over a number of years. In

my opinion the work collectively has successfully transformed lives and patterns of behaviour in and beyond the prison environments. Our joint com-



munity approach aims to work with people who may feel marginalised due to their past, to build skills and confidence and increase their opportunities for re-engaging in positive pathways. We also work with people who have received Community Service, an alternative to prison custody, and they work in PAF's Braille Support Hub in Belfast."

David Johnston manages the PBNI Community Service placements in the Braille Support Hub, David says "Community Service commitment within the Prison Arts Foundation-Braille Hub greatly values the input from those completing their Community Service. Those completing their Community Service with the unit represent a broad spectrum from society, and their skills and abilities contribute to the purpose of the unit—producing braille and tactile. It also provides a wider understanding in terms of the needs of those with disabilities, especially those with sight loss and impairments."

This support process, of course, has its genesis in the programmes/workshops within the prison which is the essential work of PAF in the prison environment. This is a central basis of the artistic philosophy when a prisoner-student presents into the creative programmes. The artists are immediately assessing their creative needs as well as looking towards a time when the prisoner is back in the community and reconnecting with society and normal life, re-engaging with life outside, and remaining there rather than returning to prison.

FUTURE HOPE

The vital aspect of the creative work is as a lifeline. PAF artists are cognizant of the psychological, trauma-based and inner-realities of the prisoner: from crime(s) to conviction to imprisonment. What is every prisoner's future hope? Release and probation and as successfully as possible, rather than relapse and return to prison.

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