

sacroSANCT

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SAFEGUARDING COMMUNITIES – REDUCING OFFENDING

An Opportunity and a Challenge

IN this issue of Sacrosanct, I wish to pay tribute to Scotland's Parliament in adopting the provisions within the *Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill* for a presumption against short prison sentences of three months and less. Sacro is fully aware how polarised these debates became as the cases for and against were so eloquently presented by politicians on either side of the debate. Foremost among the criticisms of this particular measure were the questions surrounding whether community sentences are sufficiently robust and challenging enough to give the public confidence. Opponents question whether this option is a suitable alternative to custody for those whom they recognise as a significant drain on the goodwill of law abiding citizens. Some also perceive those arguing for the presumption to be included in the Bill as well-intentioned 'do-gooders' who think in theories but perhaps are too distant from their reality on the ground. Against this backdrop, it was indeed heartening to hear the reasoned voice of so many professionals who do have to work with the problem of repeat offenders. These people are at the sharp end, working with vulnerable people often living chaotic lifestyles with many social and personal problems that have roots in the inequality of deprivation and poor life opportunity.

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On the other side of the debate, the evidence seems clear. Short prison sentences simply do not address offending behaviours. The overwhelming evidence is that community sentencing options when aligned to supporting services dealing with addictions to alcohol and drugs, homelessness, skills leading towards employability, relationship issues et al, are more effective in tackling offending behaviour.

There is a harsh truth that for some young men, a short sentence is a much easier and less stressful option than having to stay in their community, where they must face the responsibilities of living responsible and law abiding lives. Even more worrying, for too many of our women in prison, short sentences are perversely regarded as a safer option than returning them home to abusive partners. Too often, these women rely on prison as respite from their domestic, mental health and addiction problems.



So let us be honest; for many people, a community sentence 'is' a harsher sentence in their world.

But a word of caution! Those who oppose this sentencing policy are not simply wrong and are not to be disregarded without due respect for their view. They are suffering unacceptable levels of abusive behaviour in their communities. They do feel unsafe in their own homes and streets. They do see drunkenness, domestic abuse, the ugliness of vandalism and vomit in the gutters after a night of rowdiness. The causes and responses to these issues are many and varied, although this is not intended to explain or excuse any of that. The challenge for government, sentencers and importantly those professionals who will now have the opportunity to demonstrate that community sentencing is a more effective option than short custodial sentences, is to ensure that services are joined up. They must ensure information is not only shared but assessed and the solutions provided are credible and visible.

Importantly, it is these supporting services that build personal and social capital. A strong third sector, encompassing charitable purpose and volunteering offers enormous potential to make a positive difference to the lives of all affected by offending behaviour.

We must inspire confidence that we can not only build a good argument for our case but – most importantly – deliver on our assurances and together build safe, cohesive communities where we all can live, work and visit.

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Payback that benefits both communities and offenders.

GLASGOW Community Reparation Service works in partnership with Glasgow City Council Criminal Justice Social Work to provide offenders with an opportunity to give something back to society and to deliver a service of real benefit to members of the community.

The service provides support and guidance to community service teams who carry out unpaid tasks helping members of the community who are unable to complete household jobs themselves. People with physical or mental health difficulties, older people and those with a disability have all benefitted from help with household jobs such as painting and decorating, joinery work, laying flooring, garden tasks and moving house. Households with low incomes can also benefit and Sacro works in partnership with local charities and support services to identify those in need of this type of help.

The community service placements help offenders learn skills that can be useful when seeking employment. They can also use many of these skills in their own homes, contributing to their own family's quality of life. The placements also offer an excellent opportunity to help offenders learn how to work as a team and interact better with others. Those on placement often appreciate how the work they do is making a positive contribution to the lives of others. This is reflected in an almost 70% attendance record for those on placement – significantly higher than the national average for community service attendance

Comprehensive evaluation of the service is vital in assuring effective provision in the future. The service has measured success and effectiveness via referrals for tasks to be undertaken as well as feedback from recipients of the service, referring agencies, individuals on Community Service and Social Work case managers. The programme monitors referrals for work, waiting/completion times, number of placements offered, registered to attend and attendance. Individuals who leave a placement or are asked to leave are recorded and action taken as appropriate.

Much of this feedback has also contributed to enhancements in service provision throughout the pilot. Changes to vehicle signage and production/revision of promotional leaflets are just two areas that have benefitted from the involvement and feedback of all those involved.

Those on community service work hard. They receive instruction and guidance from staff which allows them to learn new skills and see first-hand the difficulties members of our communities face and how they benefit from their contribution and team work.

The service has achieved a great deal since it started. This model of payback brings tangible benefits to our communities while ensuring those on community service receive the support and guidance they need to ensure they get value from the experience. We are acutely aware of the positive effects on those undertaking the placements and we see it every day. The skills individuals learn and the sense of contributing to the community rather than taking from it can be of great benefit to them personally.



What do recipients of the service think?

"I am very grateful to the workers and supervisors for transforming my house into a home for me and my daughters. Their conduct in my house was exemplary. The full experience was positive. My seven year old daughter has waited years to have her room painted pink and is delighted with the outcome. My hall and kitchen are so clean it has made such a difference to us all. My Christmas present from all of you was priceless. My best wishes to every one of you".

"I feel that if they see how helpful they have been with the happy reaction from the benefactor then it just may help them see that they are appreciated and give them a moral boost. The lads that helped us on our removal could not have been anymore helpful. They were good workers and a cheery bunch; "service with a smile indeed". I look forward to having those lads do more work for us, thank you Sacro you have made a stressful time a lot easier."

"At first a bit apprehensive but the workers were really very good and I was delighted with the results of their work. I would recommend this service to anyone. Also my grandson was off school as it was a weekend and they were great with him chatting away. I can't praise this service enough. I do hope this service continues. It makes the people who are doing the work take praise – I saw that for myself. They were even pleased with the outcome of all they work they had done."

On the Estate

ARDEN CHILLOUT is a community-based centre for children and young people in the Arden housing estate in Glasgow's south-side. The centre was set up four years ago as part of a Channel Five TV show "*Colin and Justin on the Estate*" and spent most of this time operating from an ageing Portakabin. Increasing popularity and demand for the Centre made it necessary to seek larger premises. Although a new site was identified, this left the Centre faced with the challenge of refurbishing the premises on a tight budget with a handful of volunteers.

Sacro provided Community Service team placements whereby offenders undertook the redecoration of the project premises during February 2010. Two teams of five offenders spent four weeks (six hours per day) completing the work, amounting to 1,200 hours of community service input.

Not only have the improvements enhanced the service; the offenders have become an integral part of the community, since those offenders who participated mainly live within a five mile radius of the project. The workers' willingness to undertake any task, the hard work undertaken and the high levels of motivation were commended and appreciated by those at the Centre.

The participating offenders have benefitted from improved perception of their own self worth and abilities, increased levels of motivation and good attitudes towards assisting the local community. Consequently, this particular group have been much more active in pursuing training and employment options, utilising the skills gained in both manual redecoration, communication and behavioural skills.

Colin and Justin returned to Arden to officially open the refurbished premises and meet some of the Centre's young users (*right*).

Case Study: Arden Chillout, Glasgow.

"We are a community facility aimed at children and young people in the surrounding area. We are run solely by volunteers. We recently moved to new premises but we were struggling to carry out the work required to bring it up to a good enough standard to actually carry out services.

"Sacro and their Community Reparation Service have been a godsend to us, they provided workers and we supplied the paint etc. They worked in our building for roughly four weeks and decorated the whole place for us! They also took away any major rubbish from the decorating process as well as some old unwanted furniture. The teams accomplished in a few short weeks what it would have taken us months to do on our own. No job we asked them to do was too big – they were fabulous.

"We could see that because the workers could see the good that their work was doing in the community straight away, it made them work harder and enjoy the work they were doing so they were eager to come back the next week and get it finished!

"Thanks to them we were able to open a lot sooner than planned and can now provide our services to the whole community in a clean fun and happy environment".

Shirley Duguid, Chair, Arden Chillout.



Back to school

AS a new school year begins, Sacro often receives requests from Modern Studies students for assistance with dissertations on criminal justice subjects. Although we try to accommodate students where possible, this has proved to be a time-consuming exercise in the past as they have been arranged on a one-to-one basis.

Earlier this year we invited students and teachers from schools in Edinburgh and the Lothians to attend a presentation and Q&A event with us at National Office. Such was the demand, we ended up having two, two hour events with almost 70 students and teachers attending.

Feedback from the schools involved was excellent and as a result, we are currently planning further events at National Office for early 2011 and hope to offer something similar in other parts of the country if there is sufficient interest.

Helping rehabilitate prisoners through music

REPRESENTATIVES from Sacro and the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) met with musician Billy Bragg last month to discuss ways of developing his *Jail Guitar Doors* initiative in Scotland. *Jail Guitar Doors* was set up by the singer in 2007 with the aim of donating guitars to prisons to help them use music as a means of achieving the rehabilitation of prisoners.

The singer was in Scotland to promote the scheme at screenings of the documentary film *Breaking Rocks*. *Breaking Rocks* follows the development of *Jail Guitar Doors* from an idea of Bragg's to mark the fifth anniversary of Clash singer, Joe Strummer's death to an innovative scheme which now extends to prisons throughout the UK and United States.

Fundraising gigs by local musicians and sponsorship by instrument manufacturers has allowed the project to donate brand new guitars and other musical instruments to over 20 prisons in England. The initiative has recently moved into Scotland by providing six guitars to HMP Saughton in Edinburgh, where sessions have been so successful that it is awaiting a further batch of instruments to meet the demand for places on its courses.

Although *Jail Guitar Doors* donates the instruments, it is up to the prisons themselves to arrange music sessions and lessons. Following the meeting, the SPS now hopes to extend the initiative to more prisons in Scotland including HMYOI Polmont where Billy Bragg intends playing in person later this year.

Labour MSP George Foulkes, who has lodged a motion in the Scottish Parliament congratulating Bragg on the scheme, said: "*Jail Guitar Doors* is a fantastic initiative that will help in the rehabilitation of prisoners. There is a strong case to suggest that certain prisoners can be rehabilitated and put back into society.

"This is why I welcome Billy Bragg's innovative idea. It is essential that we find new methods of engaging with prison inmates so that, when they are released, they can contribute to the greater good of the community.

If you would like to find out more about *Jail Guitar Doors*, please contact them at www.jailguitardoors.co.uk.



Left to right: With the help of Jail Guitar Doors, Jonny Neesom and Leon Walker learned to play and write songs while in prison. They now perform and help to promote the scheme with musician Billy Bragg and Alan Miles, director of the "Breaking Rocks" documentary.

The Sacro Trust

THE Sacro Trust provides help and support for offender and ex-offender rehabilitation by providing grants during and after involvement in the criminal justice system. In the last decade, it has provided over 500 grants for:

- > Household items
- > Education/training/employment
- > Personal development and well being.

Individuals resident in Scotland may be eligible for a one-off grant to assist rehabilitation – assessed, according to need. The Trust is for people on licence or court order or who have been released from prison within the last two years. In exceptional circumstances, the Trust will consider applications outwith this timescale.

Applications can only be accepted from a local authority or voluntary sector worker and not from the intended recipient. All grants should assist the process of rehabilitation.

It is important to note that the Trust is not an emergency fund and assessment meetings are only held every two months. Applicants should have exhausted all other sources of funding: e.g. Community Care Grants (these should also have been appealed if initially refused), Social Care Loans, College Hardship Funds and local funding sources before applying to the Trust.

Grants for individuals are unlikely to exceed £300, although higher levels of funding will be considered by the assessors.

Application forms and guidance notes can be obtained from the Trust Fund Administrator at trust@national.sacro.org.uk or by downloading from www.sacro.org.uk.

Once an application has been submitted, receipt of your form will be issued notifying you of the date of the next meeting. A letter will be issued thereafter confirming the outcome of the application form.