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Press release

English charity hails Scotland for leading the way in fight against crime

Scottish community justice organisation Sacro has won two of the Howard League for Penal Reform's Community Programmes Awards 2007. Part of a partnership campaign with the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the Howard League for Penal Reform in England and Wales, the awards are aimed at increasing public protection by recognising outstanding community programmes that help to reduce the seriousness and frequency of re-offending.

Sacro's work with drug-using street sex workers in Edinburgh was recognised as a Scheme of Special Merit, while their Domestic Abuse Groupwork programme was also recognised as an Outstanding Scheme.

TV gardener Monty Don will present the awards later today, at a special reception in the House of Lords.

Monty Don said: "As I discovered with my own work with young adults who have committed crimes, it takes hard work and real dedication to run successful community programmes that tackle the underlying causes of offending.

"Yet there are people doing absolutely heroic work up and down the UK who do just that. The ten schemes the Howard League for Penal Reform has recognised in these awards are at the forefront of exploring new ways of reducing crime and helping people back on the straight and narrow.

"In particular, praise must go to Sacro, winners of two awards this year. Scotland is leading the way in terms of effective community sentencing and the Sacro schemes are inspiring examples of just what can be achieved."

Susan Matheson, Chief Executive, Sacro said

"Both these winning services demonstrate the commitment and dedication of Sacro staff that results in quality services that are respected by funders and service users alike.

Sacro operates in the fields of Criminal Justice, Mediation and Youth Justice. We offer a diverse range of services that all work towards reducing offending and making communities safer. The Another Way Service and The Domestic Abuse Group Work Programme offer those in charge of sentencing community options for vulnerable people whose needs are best met by support and provision that address their offending behaviour. We are extremely proud of the success of both these programmes and the awards recognise their effectiveness”.

Commenting on the Scottish success, Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform, Frances Crook, said: “The new SNP administration in Holyrood has been bold and imaginative in instructing an immediate review of community programmes over prison for those convicted of short sentences. In England, the government’s addiction to custody has seen prisons full to overflowing and a system that is truly on its knees.

“Put simply, community sentences tackle the underlying causes of crime. Research shows that community sentences cut reoffending by 14 per cent - and up to 22 per cent compared to a short custodial sentence of one year. In contrast, more than two thirds of prisoners will commit more crimes within two years of leaving jail.

“With Scotland pushing ahead on progressive community sentences, it is likely that the Commission on English Prisons Today that we have recently announced, led by Cherie Booth QC as its President, may well visit these two Sacro schemes in Edinburgh and the Sacro Alcohol Education Programme which won one of our awards of special merit last year, to see exactly what can be done.”

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Further information

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ISDN line available on 020 7923 4196 - uses a G722 system

Monty Don will present the Community Programme Awards 2007 at a reception in the House of Lords, hosted by Baroness Linklater, on Tuesday, 24 July at 6pm.

Monty has presented gardening and travel programmes for the past fifteen years and is now the lead presenter of the BBC’s Gardener’s World. He was presented with the Howard League Margery Fry Award in 2006 in recognition of his creative work to prevent re-offending through the Monty Project. In February 2007, he became an Ambassador for Penal Reform, along with Cherie Booth QC, Prunella Scales and Ray Fearon.

Sacro has won two awards. '**Another Way**', winner of one of three Schemes of Special Merit awards, provides a support and referral service to drug-using street sex workers facing prosecution for prostitution in Edinburgh. The service aims to encourage sex workers to engage with drug treatment and other services and if possible to exit prostitution. It enables the courts to defer sentence on those found guilty of prostitution offences for a period of time whilst the person is offered the option of engaging with a service worker. The service also acts as a diversion from prosecution, whereby an accused person can be referred directly instead of facing prosecution. The service provides information and advice relating to treatment services; harm reduction measures, housing, employment and social services relevant to women working in the sex industry. The service provides an intense level of support to counter the chaos and mistrust of authority that very frequently characterise the lives of these women.

Sacro's **Domestic Abuse Group (DAG)** and its services for women and children, winner of an Outstanding Scheme award, is part of a community-based intervention system, which aims to reduce the risk of men being violent and abusive to women and children. Men convicted of violent or abusive offences against their partner or ex-partner and who have shown some insight into their behaviour and a willingness to address it attend the programme. DAG offers a structured personal change programme for male domestic abuse perpetrators, in partnership with the Criminal Justice Service. It provides a structured environment where service users can explore their domestically abusive behaviour and the impact of this on themselves and others with a view to encouraging positive, achievable change. The programme place the safety of women and children at the forefront of any work undertaken with the men by providing a comprehensive support service to female partners and ex-partners of service users that links the men's programme. The programme provides men with support and allows them to make positive changes.

The Howard League for Penal Reform in England and Wales is a separate organisation from the Howard League for Penal Reform in Scotland. For more information on our sister charity in Scotland, visit

<http://www.howardleaguescotland.org.uk/index.php>