



PBNI Probation Board
for Northern Ireland

REFLECTIONS AT

40



MAX MURRAY CBE BOARD CHAIR

As we reach the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) I am delighted that we have this collection of first-hand accounts depicting working life within Probation over the last number of decades.



These contributions from former and current staff members are fascinating. Some personal reflections provide the political and societal context to the establishment of the organisation in 1982. The introduction of an evidence-based approach to practice and the innovation that took place during the 1980's and 1990's to contribute to building safer communities is also well documented.

Staff members describe the introduction of new sentencing options such as 'Community Service' and the change in probation work from an organisation that worked mainly with young people to one working with higher risk individuals. They also describe the introduction of new technology and records management which has modernised the service.

In those early years, the new Board prioritised community engagement and represented the work and needs of Probation to a wide range of interest groups and partner organisations. As our current Board develops its Corporate Plan for 2023-26, I am mindful that the pioneering work commenced by that first Board continues to this day. We want to further progress this work so that PBNI staff, and Probation more broadly become integrated into the community.

It is clear from these accounts that much has changed over the years but importantly the core elements of Probation's work and its values of openness, accountability, integrity and respect have stayed the same. Recognising everyone's capacity to change is fundamental in the work of every staff and Board member of PBNI.

AMANDA STEWART OBE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

As Chief Executive of the Probation Board of Northern Ireland (PBNI) I am delighted to contribute to the foreword of this booklet marking its 40th year.



The submissions from staff, both past and present, spanning four decades and beyond are wonderful to read and I would like to thank them all for their contributions. As Chief Executive it's particularly interesting to read the reflections from former Chief Officers Bill Griffiths and Breidge Gadd. Much has changed for PBNI in these 40 years and reading the reflections gives us an insight into not just how we operated as an organisation but also the times in which we lived. The commitment and dedication of staff is also very apparent and continues to be the most important asset of PBNI.

Much has been achieved but of course there is still much to do.

There are challenges ahead but what remains a constant is our ethos as a social work organisation, supporting individuals to change by tackling the root causes of offending behaviour and making communities safer.

It is clear from these contributions that Probation has always been an organisation which is innovative, creative, collaborative and solution focused. Over the next years my priority is on building our relationships and our connections within local areas and strengthening our partnerships with community and voluntary groups. It is only by working together that we can change lives for safer communities.

A call went out to current staff and members of the Retired Association of Probation (RAP) to contribute to this booklet to mark 40 years of PBNI. The following staff, both past and present, agreed to share their reflections of working in Probation across the four decades.

BILL GRIFFITHS

FORMER CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER

In the mid 1970's I was working in the Home Office in England as a Probation Inspector. We were invited to inspect the Northern Ireland Probation Service and I became part of a two-man team with my boss, Rob Speirs. Over six weeks, our conclusion became clear; there were great staff in the organisation but a dysfunctional structure and huge under investment.

A year or so later the job of Chief Probation Officer was advertised and I was encouraged to apply. Within less than two years, we had put in place a development plan and the Black Review of children's criminal justice services was announced. These were golden opportunities for Probation and we had tremendous support from the Lord Chief Justice and other important figures.

Within four years we had created a well resourced service with a new Probation Board which was quite distinct from its counterpart in England and Wales, remaining responsible for working with juvenile offenders rather than embracing a welfare system, avoiding divorce court and domestic work, responsible for funding voluntary organisations and, above all this new Board made up of community representatives rather than magistrates.

Our ability to negotiate with the courts rather than being directed by them was a change of fundamental importance. Once again, we were incredibly fortunate with individual appointments.

The first chairman of the Board was James Grew, a local businessman of independent mind and impeccable integrity.

He gave a splendid lead to the diverse membership of the new Board and we set about meeting the judiciary, politicians and community leaders.

These were very good years. We recruited more excellent staff from an incredibly high number of applicants and were punching above our weight in almost everything we were doing. For me, the greatest single achievement was that courts were using the Probation Service rather than relying on prison. Prison numbers steadily declined. The introduction of community service orders under the lively excited management of Sammy Chapman was a particular success.

We had a terrific management team and I wanted very much for a Northern Ireland person to take over from me, which duly happened and I left Northern Ireland to run The National Society for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).

The essential characteristic of Probation since its origins as police court missionaries is independence. Without this, it loses its vigour and purpose. At this time of political instability an independent community-based body like the Probation Board for Northern Ireland is more important than ever, especially in the complex challenging sphere of criminal justice.

GERALDINE WOODS**PROBATION OFFICER (RETIRED 2020)**

I had been applying for posts in mental health settings when I finished my degree in Manchester in 1977. I had a few interviews and each time was told that I was too young and needed more life experience before going into such a specialist field of social work. So, I came home and thought I would try my luck in my local employment market; and that is what brought me to my first and only professional role in the field of social work.

I made lifelong friends as a trainee Probation Officer completing the Masters in Social Work at Queens. We were very lucky to be part of a recruitment programme to increase the professional body of social work trained probation officers in the service. My first placement was in the Ulster Hospital where I was working at the time of the La Mon Hotel bombing tragedy. I've never felt so inadequate.

How did my work as a Probation Officer change over the 40 years? "Advise, Assist and Befriend". When I started out I felt responsible for everything that could have driven someone to a life of crime: poverty, unemployment, addiction, poor educational attainment and more often the community they lived in. I wrote reports asking the court to give another and another chance.

Thankfully, accountability, responsibility and impact on others also became the focus of my work. My nine years working in North Belfast allowed me to understand the impact of crime on one's mental health. We learned about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder before it was ever given a name.

When I started out I was looking for opportunities to work with people with mental health problems. As it turned out I have never been far away from doing just that whether it was supervising offenders in the community or working with victims of crime.

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EILEEN MCCOURT**ART THERAPIST (RETIRED 2012)**

I began working as a Probation Officer in Derry in 1978. During this period, I became interested in art as a means of communication and expression. Over those years I began attending art therapy courses (theoretical and experiential) run by Mrs Rita Simon, who had introduced the profession to Northern Ireland. I felt I had 'come home' since I had become dissatisfied with my mainly verbal probation practice.

In 1986 I applied for a secondment to train as an Art Therapist at the University of Hertfordshire. My application for secondment was based on the potential for art to provide a means of understanding behaviour and motivation, when used in the therapeutic context – often a more easily accessible vehicle than words. It was the 1980s and there was money then, and I was delighted when my application for secondment was approved. Secondment was a farsighted and creative decision by the organisation and on returning I worked for PBNI until my retirement in 2012.

Over time, from the early 1990s, the Art Therapy service in PBNI developed and grew with the help of many Probation volunteers who wished to co-work art therapy groups to gain supervised experience as a preliminary to future training. A large number of those committed volunteers are now experienced Art Therapists in various contexts including one who, in 2002 initiated the first Health and Care Professions Council approved training based in Belfast.

Area Managers (named Senior Probation Officers at that time) in prisons helped to establish and maintain Art Therapy groups and eventually all prisons had this service. In HMP Crumlin Road, Art Therapy began in its Hospital Unit and extended into the wings. In Maghaberry, Art Therapy became available in its new Psychiatric Unit and groups for Lifers ran for many years. The (then named Young Offenders' Centre) availed of the service over a long period and in Magilligan many groups were held in both the Hospital Unit and the main prison.

In later years, as PBNI's focus was on community supervision of people who had offended at high risk of causing serious harm, so Art Therapy became an integral part of their supervision plan.

My long number of years as Art Therapist with PBNI was hugely fulfilling. I learned so much from my clients, had excellent support from my various Area Managers and am so appreciative still for the encouragement and feedback from my Probation and Psychology colleagues.

TERRY MCLAUGHLIN
ACTING / AREA MANAGER, NORTH ANTRIM AREA

When I came into Probation in 1980, I was one of the last of the Probation trainees along with four other colleagues. I remember going up to Dundonald house to sit an entrance exam to be accepted onto the training course.

My first role in Probation was to help set up Community Service in the Omagh, Fermanagh and Strabane areas. Up until then it had just been a pilot in Belfast and that was a challenge. To get people to put their hand up to say “Yes, we will take people on Community Service” was a challenge. A lot of the old firmly held views still existed in the 1980s - they liked to know who you were and where you were from. It was something that people needed to know, so they felt safe and they felt that they weren’t going to compromise themselves.

Also in small rural communities, crime was still a big issue in the local weekly papers. Community Service was a completely new

sentencing option to the court and of course the press were all over it. People who got Community Service were even more visible in the local paper which didn’t really make my job any easier.

Comparing Probation in 1982 to now is like day and night really, and what I have seen in recent years has been a transformation. The old Probation Service had a very simple philosophy and that was Advise, Assist and Befriend and it was more geared towards a welfare focused role. When I worked in prisons we were seen as a welfare officer and referred to as such by the prison authorities. We are now engaged with service users in custody and the community with a focus more on their criminal behaviour and the causes of that behaviour with relapse prevention plans.

After more than 40 years in the post I still like coming to work and I think that speaks volumes.

YVONNE RODGERS
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, OMAGH

When I started in what was then the Probation Service in 1982 the Omagh office was situated just off the high street, down a narrow entry, above a butcher’s shop. The door was situated in the entry just opposite the “back door” of a public house.

Security was a buzzer entry system but many days we had jokers on the way out of the pub pretending to be clients. We also had clients who were intoxicated and administration staff vetted who could or couldn’t enter the building (lots of stairs to fall up or down!).

There were no interview rooms or booking system. Clients were interviewed in the Probation Officer’s own office.

We didn’t have a photocopier and I spent a lot of time in the Courthouse using their copier. The telephone system was a mini switch board, two lines with seven extensions, sometimes lots of flashing lights and cross Probation Officers when there were no free lines. We had a fax machine – messages came on a roll of shiny paper.

I was advised to open an index book for important information such as phone numbers and names. I had the number for every solicitor, psychiatrist and doctor in the Omagh area. Probation Officers regularly came looking for it. That book was in existence until 2018 until google became more accessible and replaced it.

BREIDGE GADD**FORMER CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER**

When one looks back to forty years ago when the Probation Board was first established, what is most striking is that such an innovative and far reaching legal and administrative change to a public service was introduced successfully into a small country which had already experienced more than a decade of bloody civil strife, and which would continue for the next decade and more, to experience continued serious civil unrest.

During those years, it was not unusual to see the iconic sign outside a bombed shop Business as usual. Reflecting back, that approach summed up the collective coping mechanisms of both people and institutions during the many years of the Troubles; Even in the midst of destruction, life must go on as normally as possible.

In 1982 this was the societal context in which PBNI came into existence, based on Sir Harold Black's philosophy and recommendation that a service working in and with the community should be run by representatives of that community. And so it was. Board members comprising business people, academics, representatives from allied stakeholders, and the voluntary and community sector were appointed to that first Board and became the employers of probation staff. Jim Grew, a successful business man became its first chairman. As well as the administrative job of resourcing and overseeing, the inaugural Board and subsequent Boards put great store on representing the work and needs of probation to a wide range of interests—so, public relations, especially engaging with communities with high levels of crime, was high on the list of essential Board activities. This enlightened approach worked.

For example PBNI in 1982/3 consulted widely about its corporate strategy (and may even have been the first public body to publish a corporate plan).

Essentially, Board and staff knew that if probation officers were to continue to carry out their work in safety and with the trust of courts, offenders, their families and their communities, it was essential especially given the volatile nature of society, that the whole organisation proved itself to be available, to be open, honest, professional, non-political and transparent.

During my period as Chief Probation Officer (1986-2000) there were many achievements of which I still feel proud. In those days the legislation required probation officers 'to advise assist and befriend' those placed under our statutory supervision. At that time the now ubiquitous American correctional model had not winged its way across the Atlantic into the psyche of UK policy makers and politicians. So, instead of public safety being the governmental imperative, PBNI could use international research on what works as our lodestone. Evidence based programmes were established, the purpose of which were to enable offenders change their behaviour, stay away from crime, and reintegrate into their community. We believed that (and global research consistently showed), unless the individual was a physical risk to others, helping the offender positively change his/her behaviour, through education or employment, contributed best to community and public safety. So with the help of additional funding (e.g. European funding through Making Belfast Work) there were many innovative projects developed in the 80s and 90s.

Some examples of which are when the Board employed (hopefully reformed) ex offenders, who were supported in gaining 3rd level qualifications. They became project workers helping in our work in running Intermediate Treatment schemes.

Sports tournaments, to attract and divert energetic and dangerous car thieves took place on a Friday and Saturday night.

Special programmes were devised for prisoners partners through 'Prison Link' – the services designed as a result of feedback from prisoners' families; The Duke of Edinburghs Award scheme was also a huge success throughout Northern Ireland. In all of these endeavours we worked with and relied on the willing and enthusiastic partnerships with the voluntary and community sector which in turn received funding through the Board's Community Development funding. Probably the most ambitious and far reaching programme designed to change persistent offenders behaviour was the Youth at Risk programme delivered in west Belfast in 1993 (researched by Heather Hamill Oxford University). This intensive programme showed that community based skilled and committed work was more effective in reducing offending amongst persistent offenders than prison or the horrific physical assaults perpetrated on young offenders by paramilitary groups.

Through these and other community programmes I believe that many users of PBNI's services and their families and communities were helped to lead law abiding, even fulfilling lives and that PBNI in those years made a significant contribution to peace in Northern Ireland.

Finally, the most important achievement? I return to single out that vital ability of Board members and staff during the first and subsequent years of PBNI, to establish, protect, defend, and nourish the professional neutrality and independence of the organisation and its staff. That firm foundation, in my opinion, formed the bedrock of today's professional and successful organisation.

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PAUL DEVLIN**AREA MANAGER, OMAGH AREA (RECENTLY RETIRED)**

When I started with PBNI in September 1982, I had just returned from England. By this stage I had completed five years of university and truth be told it was time to work.

In the early years in the Crown Court I recall set sentencing days, where it was compulsory for Probation Officers to attend. We were lined up almost like Jurors, maybe as many as 12 of us, each with report in hand waiting to be called. Talk about appearing before and being judged by your peers!

An early imprint was made in one such case. I recall a Probationer had been taken to the police station to “own up” to an offence he had disclosed in supervision. The matter was now before the Court, we were called, questioned under oath, then commended, and the judge in summing up was so effusive in his praise about the most responsible actions of Probation. It was a bit of a lightbulb moment as I realised then, the distinct, important and discreet role a Probation Officer can play in helping people, assisting our Courts, and in reducing risk to the community.

I was keen to gain experience and learn, so I asked for a transfer to Belfast. I got my request, and for the next seven years I would be part of the West Belfast Team based on the Falls Road. In those days practice standards were still to be born. There was more individuality and latitude, and a community element to the work was encouraged.

I even remember working out of one of the Divis flats which the Housing Executive allowed us to use. It had no toilet and no running water, but we met the Divis service users there.

After West Belfast I was transferred to the Maze Prison, and it was to be remarkably different in nature. But with Brian Rodgers, Michael Winnington, Paul Thompson, Margaret Skelley, and Catherine Maguire we delivered a voluntary programme of unique work. Brian produced an “outside the box” masterclass of how to work differently. By attracting arts funding the most creative writers, including Jenifer Johnston, Carlo Gebler, historian Jonathon Bardot, yoga teachers, and Auschwitz survivor Helen Lewis were all approached and agreed to participate and gave an authenticity to what was delivered. The work went on, quietly in the background, and would later be commended.

It is impossible to recount all the memories, and stories over so many years. Some things are much more professional than before with a focus on quality, and PBNI continues to set the bar very high. But nothing can be achieved without a service user believing we will treat them well and can at least be helpful to them, and the Court believing we can help them too to be less of a risk and be trusted with that responsibility on behalf of communities.

JEAN O'NEILL**MANAGER VICTIM INFORMATION UNIT**

I arrived at the Falls Road office in June 1984. It was a post-graduation placement arranged by Trinity College Dublin to familiarise myself with the work of PBNI. I drove up on my motorbike from Dublin, completed my placement and secured a position with PBNI. Alan Darnbrook was the Senior Probation Officer at the time, the team included Margaret Skelly, Leon Rogan, Paul Thompson, Vivienne Campbell, Paul Devlin, Gerry Heery, Carmel Cunningham, Carmel Greene and Deirdre Grant.

The Falls Road office and the satellite office in Cupar Street covered the West Belfast area and included Ardoyne. The office based at 272 Falls Road was a large house converted to offices for staff – in those days, staff worked from their offices and indeed would have met clients there. The role was to 'Advise, Assist and Befriend' clients. There was no Assessment Case Management and Evaluation (ACE) or the range of other assessment tools, there were no standards in place. Assessment and interventions were individualised and based on professional judgement and taking into consideration client's needs. There were no computers – records were kept by hand on 'C' sheets and reports were hand-written and typed by the Administrative Officer on a typewriter using two carbon paper so that two copies could be made – there were no photocopiers either. The final hand-written version had to be correct and legible, as only the very bravest of Probation Officers would go back and ask the Administrative Officer to make a change.

Belfast in 1984 was a very different city – the troubles shaped communities and lives and certainly impacted on the role and work of Probation. I recall looking out of the top window of the Falls Road office which looked out to the

street – a group of soldiers were manoeuvring down the road on foot, jumping for cover behind pillars and lamp posts, on alert for any imminent attack. At the same time, two women were passing the office, pushing two large prams with their children and shopping going about their daily lives. It was the contrast of a normal scene against the backdrop of an abnormal situation.

As a result, Probation Officers were encouraged to work both in and with the community. We met with clients in their homes, in local community groups and local hubs. We worked with colleagues in Education and Welfare offices, Youth Services and Social Services as well as established organisations such as EXTERN and NIACRO and as Probation Officers, we would have worked together in partnership before the term became popular. These early experiences certainly shaped my own philosophy and career in Probation, and I have always valued the importance of community resources in supporting our work.

Probation Officers attended court and completed court duty. We presented our reports to the Court and were available if further information was required. As a woman, court attire did not allow for trousers to be worn. I recall a Magistrate stopping the court and admonishing a colleague for attending court wearing a most elegant trouser suit – she was required to leave the court! I thought it was the most stylish outfit at the time and admired her daring and courage.

38 years on and PBNI has grown and developed as an organisation and in terms of staffing, professional skills and output. What has remained is the skilled dedication and belief in the work which we do, and I feel privileged to have been part of the organisation.

GERALDINE O'HARE ACTING / DIRECTOR OF REHABILITATION

The 7th August 1995 was the beginning of my career with PBNI as a Forensic Psychologist.

I had worked away from home as a Psychologist for a number of years in London and in Ireland in a range of health and justice roles, and when this position came up with PBNI I was delighted to be appointed. This was a split post between PBNI and the Northern Ireland Training Schools (St Joseph's Middleton).

PBNI was the first Probation Service to employ Psychologists and I will always give credit to our Chief Probation Officer at the time, Briedge Gadd, for having the vision to employ Psychologists, recognising the changing profile of the individuals PBNI were supervising at the time. This included individuals with mental health and addiction problems, those with a significant risk profile and individuals with a range of personality disorders linked to the offending behaviour.

I came into PBNI with another Psychologist, Roger Bailey and between us, we were tasked with providing a specialist psychological service to meet the needs of service users across the province. With only the two of us we decided to develop a consultation service, which allowed us to work with more probation staff and service users, therefore, seeing the high risk and those most in need of psychological assessment. This service grew then to developing Offending Behaviour Programmes training to address a range of offending needs such as sexual offenders, domestic abuse perpetrators, those with intellectual disabilities, arsonists and other offending types.

We worked with the courts, judges and the parole commissioners in shaping the Psychology service, and quickly became well established and embedded across all probation offices and courts, working closely with Probation colleagues, Health and other sectors. The service back then was as passionate and ambitious as it is today with wholly committed probation staff across the board.

Over these years, I have led the Psychology Department and then in 2018, I took up post as Director of Rehabilitation when Paul Doran took a secondment to the prison service.

The work of psychologists in PBNI over these 25 years has grown substantially and we now have 20 psychologists that work across Northern Ireland. The profile of the individuals we work with has not changed but the severity of their problems has. We have seen more people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and trauma related issues. We see the mental health and addiction problems become a serious issue and the psychologists work is very focused on partnerships with health and the community and voluntary sector in providing the appropriate interventions to meet these very complex needs.

I have loved every moment of my career in a wonderful organisation with such committed, compassionate people, who, every day, are making a real difference to people's lives. It has also been a very humbling and rewarding experience and time in my life.

LIZ ARTHUR**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR RISK**

I joined PBNI on 1st October 1991. I had just completed my post graduate qualification in social work at the University of Edinburgh and had planned to stay in Scotland as I had recently met my now husband. In those days, however, PBNI recruited infrequently and I knew if I didn't take the opportunity it could be some time before it came around again.

I had known from a fairly young age that I wanted to be a Probation Officer and to work for PBNI. Without wanting to sound twee, I was very aware of the advantages and opportunities I had experienced as a child and the 'good start' in life I had been given. I knew that, there but for the grace of God, it could have been me. I remember saying to Briedge Gadd (previous Chief Probation Officer) that I believed everyone deserved a second chance. To which she replied, and a third, and then a fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh chance. It's not an easy job being a Probation Officer, but it is a very fulfilling one.

In 2004 I was promoted to the role of Area Manager and commenced my first post as an Area Manager in West Belfast. I then moved to be co-manager of Belfast Intensive Supervision Unit. In this role I learnt a lot about the importance of working in partnership with the police, prison service and social services. I was fortunate to train as a trainer for SA07 (a specialist assessment tool) and to have the opportunity to Chair multi agency Local Area Public Protection Panels (LAPPPs).

In 2014 I moved to become the manager of the Probation team in HMP Maghaberry and in 2016 I successfully applied to become Acting Assistant Director for Risk. Apart from a brief sojourn into being Assistant Director for Rurals I have been in this role ever since. It is an area of work I am passionate about. I am privileged to manage a team of highly skilled managers and practitioners. Their commitment to what they do is second to none and I hope they all know they make a real difference in the area of public protection.

Many things have changed within PBNI since I joined the organisation. Not least the shift away from 'Advise, Assist and Befriend' to public protection and holding individuals to account for their behaviour. Some things, however, have not changed. PBNI staff are second to none. They are hard working, enthusiastic and committed. I have made so many good friends over the years I have been working for PBNI. In my opinion PBNI is a 'great place to work'.

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PAUL MCCUSKER AREA MANAGER, MAGHABERRY

I commenced as a new Probation Officer in February 1992 based in the East Belfast Office, 297 Newtownards Road. It seems like ancient history but we were still an Agency operating during the Troubles. It was not uncommon to be delayed for a meeting by security checkpoints or have to visit one of your clients in hospital, the victim of a beating or shooting. Throughout that period Probation was seen as neutral and able to work in every community.

The 1990's was a decade full of change for PBNI. It began with generic caseloads; you supervised everyone including a group of service users we called "Juveniles". Your diary was your bible, files were handwritten, and typed reports were corrected with "Tippex". There was yet to be any risk assessments and our administrative staff in East Belfast were getting to grips with a device called a "Word processor". The World Wide Web came into existence in April 1993 but it would be 2006 before PBNI fully computerised.

There was never a golden age of Probation (The job was always hard) but what we lacked in resources we made up in experience and dedication. I was surrounded by a wealth of experience from colleagues who had seen it all. Staff stayed in one place a lot longer. I remember a leaving do for someone who had been in East Belfast for eight years, it was akin to a retirement do and they were only moving to the Falls Road office. Our choice of properties for PBNI tended to rely on old private dwellings "modified" for office use. It was recommended that to visit the Falls Road or Camden Street offices you should bring a ball of twine so as to find your way back.

The white board was our GPS and the message book our version of Outlook Calendar! It was often inferred that the fewer messages for you in the book, the better you were at doing the job.

At least 60% of your caseload could be home visited by walking. A habit very useful for surprising juveniles who had trained themselves to spot your car a mile off!

By the mid 1990's a specialist unit for sex offender programmes was set up in Alderwood and Brian Mc McCaughey's grand design saw the creation of the Assessment Unit and the Youth Justice Unit. Specialisms were coming to the fore, but the Criminal Justice Review of 1998 recommended the creation of the Youth Justice Agency and by 2000 we said goodbye to the "juveniles". The new century was asking us to up our game and the creation of the Custody Probation Order, the implementation of ACE and the introduction of "Standards" was projecting the service into a new arena. Now the focus was on supervising higher risk clients, cognitive programmes, enforcement and accountability. After the Good Friday Agreement, as other parts of the Criminal Justice System struggled to recalibrate, PBNI, who had always kept our links with communities were now seen as the experts in assessing and managing risk, post conflict. The Custody Probation Orders were providing staff in prisons with a rationale to work with prisoners to prepare them for supervision on release (Foreshadowing Licences) and I was one officer in Maghaberry in 2001 doing just that. Our work on the landings and greater contact with prison staff saw "Probation" replace our old title; "The Welfare".

The past 20 years have continued to be challenging. The political uncertainty, austerity, social media, addiction, mental health, the pandemic, all factors which have impacted upon the communities we work and live in. PBNI is still a part of those communities and we are still providing a valuable service within them. At times it feels like a struggle but the teamwork and the solidarity within the organisation is still there and I remain, 30 years on, unashamedly proud to be a Probation Officer.

ROISIN LECKEY**AREA MANAGER, DOWN AND ARDS AREA**

I joined PBNI on 1st January 1991. At that time Probation Officer jobs were hard to get as posts only came available approximately every three years, so I worked for Social Services when I initially qualified.

I have always had an interest in crime and PBNI was seen as the 'crème de la crème' of Social Work due to our excellent conditions of work, annual leave and pay. Our ethos at the time was to 'Advise, Assist and Befriend.' Originally based in Newry I covered a rural/town area doing the normal generic fieldwork. A significant part of the role was Court Duty, usually two days per week. The benefit of this was the professional relationships developed with all the solicitors, police and judiciary. The team included Armagh, Lurgan, Portadown and Newry mostly with two Probation Officers in each office. The beauty of those days is I knew almost everyone in Probation, across the whole of Northern Ireland.

I saw a lot of poverty in those days. One image that has stayed with me was a young male who had written 'Addidas' with a felt tip pen on the side of his trainers. The pressures to conform to what is perceived as acceptable in society has always been there and always will be. Alcohol was a major issue in offending and hard drugs soon made their way from Dublin to Newry.

PBNI is a great organisation for professional development. I joined with my Masters in Social Work but was supported to obtain my Masters in Advanced Social Work, Post-Qualifying Award, Practice Teachers Award, NVQ Assessor and the Research Course at Ulster University where I did research on Life Sentenced Prisoners. There have been many more learning opportunities that I was able to avail of.

Probation still has the same underlining ethos but has changed significantly in my 31 and a half years. I still enjoy my work with PBNI, having been an Area Manager for over 18 years. I totally believe that people can change with the guidance and support of us all in PBNI. It is an honour to be part of PBNI's 40th Anniversary.

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TINA MCSHERRY**PROBATION OFFICER, WEST BELFAST AREA**

Fresh out of QUB with a Masters in Social Work, I joined PBNI in September 1992.

I started my employment as a Probation Officer in the Old Falls Road Office at Beechmount where Tom McGonigle was the Senior Probation Officer and Siobhan Breen was the Community Service Officer, a friendship that has endured over the 30 years.

Aspirations of changing the world and making a meaningful contribution to service users' lives was my utmost goal, and this aim was promoted by Probation's Social Work ethos then of 'Advise, Assist and Befriend'. Thirty years ago the organisation was less about recording and statistics and more centred upon the building of therapeutic relationships. Indeed, it was not unusual to 'inherit' a file where the recording was simply 'Case Opened'! Nowadays, especially with the risk profile of service users having changed in the aftermath of Public Protection Sentencing, there is rightly more focus upon risk assessment, management and professional accountability but equally a significant amount of time in front of the computer, sometimes to the detriment of face-to-face contact with your service users.

Reflecting over 30 years has really been a 'trip down memory lane'. I have had wonderful experiences and built lasting friendships with colleagues. In my early days as a 'rookie', I was very involved with young people and the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme and led a Young Girls Group in getting their Bronze and Silver Awards, taking part in skills classes and expeditions.

Within the now historic 'Prison-Link Team', this close contact with partners and family members allowed you to appreciate 'first-hand' the impact of crime, imprisonment and paramilitarism for families and sadly, the often inter-generational behaviour of offending and the harm it causes,

specifically to children. The impact of the 'Troubles' was also a 'lived' experience of PBNI staff in the 1990's, something our 'younger' staff will thankfully have no recollection of.

Having returned to work in the West Belfast area it is with sadness that you see the continuing impact of inter-generational trauma, as I now supervise many of the children of parents whom I supervised 30 years ago. Traumatized parents raising traumatized children. The increased addiction problems and poor mental health, particularly among our young men is stark and unparalleled to what I would have experienced 30 years ago in West Belfast, a trend replicated in all areas.

We need now to focus on increasing the resilience of our young people, on addressing poor emotional health and addiction, which must collectively be seen as an inter-agency response if we are to have any success in assisting these young people to lead offence-free, balanced and quality lives.

I have spent the greater majority of my career working within domestic abuse and sexual offending, with the Intensive Supervision Unit, Public Protection Team and Alderwood Team running groupwork programmes. A really challenging role, where I am proud to have contributed to 'protection of the public'. The support of your colleagues was often paramount to maintaining good emotional health, given the often challenging material and individuals we worked with. Whilst many things have changed in PBNI, the value of a supportive colleague who you could rely on to 'de-brief' and 'off-load' to has not changed. PBNI's greatest asset is its staff who I can say with great pride, despite the organisational and staffing difficulties we have experienced, is the gel that keeps this organisation together, makes meaningful contribution to service users lives, to public protection and ultimately to making NI a safer place for all.

JOANNE MEADOWS
RECORDS OFFICER

I started working in PBNI in April 2005 when I was appointed as the Records Officer. This was a new post based in the Compliance Unit which had been set up to look after Data Protection in line with the Data Protection Act (1998) and also after the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act (2000).

There were three other members of staff in the Unit when I joined, including Mairead Burns who I would go on to work closely with until her retirement in 2021. Mairead and I developed a strong and collaborative working relationship (and friendship!) over the next 16 years, although this was less than half of her time working in PBNI. Mairead had previously worked supporting the Board and had also worked as the Information Officer and was responsible for the 'Grapevine' staff magazine which was the forerunner to Probation News, before bringing her talent for detail to looking after the developing Data Protection laws and regulations. When PBNI look back at the last 40 years, Mairead was certainly a key part of the support for the organisation and was a really dedicated member of staff who is missed by all who worked with her.

It has been interesting to see the changes in the organisation during this time – I just started when PIMS our new IT system was being piloted so the transformation in how we manage the information we hold has been really significant. We have gone from being a paper-based organisation to one that creates virtually no paper files (although we're still not completely paperless as I believe is the case with all offices!). My role has also developed since I started and I am now a member of the Communications Team and really enjoy being part of such a supportive team.

I am now responsible for the Data Protection work that was so ably looked after by Mairead for many years. This work has developed with the infamous GDPR in 2018 and the revision of the Data Protection Act in the same year which led to all organisations needing to review their processing and sharing of personal information. The new Act also mandated the role of Data Protection Officer which I took on in 2019. I work with a recently appointed member of staff to look after FOI requests and we receive a number every year asking various kinds of questions relating to the running of PBNI.

I also assist the Complaints Officer in looking after complaints for the organisation and co-ordinating local resolution and internal investigations. I still look after Records, and we were one of the first public sector organisations to have a Retention and Disposal Schedule in 2006 approved by PRONI. We have developed a good working relationship with PRONI and they regularly review closed PBNI records. We also have a substantial archive of closed records in off-site storage, including Board records from 1982.

As I reflect on the last 17 years that I have worked for PBNI I can say that I am always very proud to say that is where I work. I believe that working through the last couple of years during the pandemic has shown that it's an organisation that has a great camaraderie and spirit and I look forward to seeing how the organisation continues to adapt and change.

CAOIMHE COLTON**PROBATION OFFICER, ASPIRE PROJECT**

I commenced my role as Probation Officer in November 2019. In 2015, I completed a Bachelor's degree in Forensic Psychology and Criminal Justice forming a specific interest in the rehabilitation of offenders. In 2017, I began my Social Work degree to achieve my goal to work within the Criminal Justice System.

I was fortunate to be welcomed into the Aspire Young Men's Project shortly after I graduated with the guidance of a skilled team and manager. Aspire is a collaborative project working with young men aged between 16 to 30, who are marginalised in communities and at risk of becoming involved in criminality. It combines restorative practices and peer mentoring with targeted support in relation to employment, training, housing, poor mental health and addictions issues.

Within my role as a Probation Officer, I have learned many skills and developed my professional practice.

EDDIE BLACK**COMMUNITY SERVICE SUPERVISOR**

I joined Probation in 2020 and in my view joined the best workplace in Northern Ireland. The job appeared daunting at first. At 9am on day one of the job I was responsible for leading a community service squad and I found myself faced with a diverse group of people who have offended, a very different scenario to the one I previously faced as a Kayak instructor.

In 2020 the Covid19 pandemic struck and I will always be grateful to PBNI for the support they provided to staff during this really difficult time.

Everyday has been a learning day and I enjoy being able to help service users achieve their daily goals and support their positive resettlement in the community. I cover Rural West including, Omagh, Enniskillen and Dungannon. I also worked within the Belfast team in 2021, which developed my practice and learning further. A good part about my job is the ability to meet other staff from various teams and feel I am continually learning from other colleague's experiences.

Working within PBNI I have gathered a wealth of knowledge from my colleagues, management, supervision and attending training days. The service users have also taught me how to manage different levels of risk whilst also balancing my role as a social work professional. Working with trauma has encouraged me to treat everyone as an individual, let them tell their story and provide a listening ear. I am very grateful to work within Aspire and believe the knowledge I have gained will continue to help me develop my competence as a Probation Officer.

Now we are hopefully out the other side of the pandemic the work is increasing but service users seem easier to work with and more compliant.

New community service sites and projects have been developed and people have grown and developed during their time on community service. Another new chapter starts with the commencement of the graffiti removal scheme in Londonderry and I look forward to being part of that project. Our team in Shipquay Street are exceptional and support one another while carrying out their roles so professionally. This is a wonderful and colourful job with a great range of colleagues and a wonderful team spirit. The future is bright for Probation!



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