

## Editorial

This year we enter a new era of the *Irish Probation Journal*. Last year's edition looked back on all we have achieved as a journal over twenty-one years. Now we look forward to the future of the Journal and how we continue our commitment to showcasing research, reflective practice, and innovation in probation on the island of Ireland.

In a new development, the editorial committee has agreed a theme for the 2025 Journal. From now on, we will continue to take a thematic approach to our annual journal, with a smaller and more focused number of articles from practitioners and academics aligned to our agreed theme.

This year's theme of 'community' lies at the very heart of probation's work. 'Community' can mean many things in probation. It can refer to the peer supports given to both practitioners and those we work with in helping foster an environment that is focused on promoting rehabilitation and supporting desistance. It can be the local communities where those under supervision live and work, in which maintaining community engagement and support while enhancing community safety is at the forefront of probation practice. It can be community-based organisations or specialised support services, where probationers can work with others to understand themselves better and to work towards future desistance.

The articles included in this edition span a wide range of experiences from both the academic and practice perspectives. They reflect how community can take different forms, while demonstrating the importance communities play in individuals' reintegration and desistance journeys. Some interactions can be direct, like the use of Community Service Orders, through which individuals may engage in reparative justice through physically contributing and giving back to their communities. Mental health supports – be they working directly with individuals or information sharing through innovative methods such as podcasts – create their own, smaller communities of support, which can greatly improve people's mental wellbeing and self-awareness. For practitioners, continuing to engage with research and learning helps to

encourage more inclusive practices. Through working with probationers in the community to improve their physical, social and emotional wellbeing, probation aims to restore relationships and create safer, more inclusive and supportive communities.

The first article of this issue sets out our theme in the context of probation across the island of Ireland. Written by Amanda Stewart, Chief Executive of PBNI, and Mark Wilson, former Director of the Probation Service, this article provides insights into the work that both services do with and in communities, in order to reduce harm and foster safer communities.

In our special edition last year, we did not publish the Martin Tansey Lecture from 2024. This year, we have both the 2024 and 2025 lectures. Not only do both these lectures fit with the theme of this year's journal, but they also provide different perspectives on women in the criminal justice system, as both perpetrators and victims of crime. The 2024 lecture, delivered by Professor Maggie O'Neill, demonstrates how women are a minority within the perpetrators of crime, offend for different reasons and behave differently from men when they do commit crime. Women who engage with the criminal justice system as perpetrators have complex interactions as they are also often victims, often non-violent, and often have children or other family who depend on them for care. This article highlights the work still to do regarding supporting women in their desistance journeys, particularly in relation to these additional needs and responsibilities.

The 2025 lecture, delivered by Dr Stephanie O'Keeffe, focused on the newly established agency 'Cuan', which is dedicated to tackling and reducing domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. This article discusses the current understanding of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in Ireland and the actions being taken by Cuan and partner organisations to reduce this type of violence in our communities.

Continuing the focus on women, the next article, by Leona Tate, provides practice-based insights into current strategy and practices to implement restorative justice principles and provide a trauma-informed approach to help women to understand their offending behaviour and reduce recidivism. This article discusses current strategies and approaches that may inform the increased use of gender-responsive practice in probation work.

The importance of expanding how understanding mental health practices can be better communicated and integrated into probation is discussed in the following two articles. Brigeen Mullan's article reflects on her experiences as a facilitator of a PBNI pilot programme, which introduced participants

to mindfulness, and the positive impact a small group of participants experienced as a result.

The next article explores the potential use of mental health podcasts within probation practice. Sally Condon and Dr Sharon Lambert show that there is potential benefit in using mental health podcasts with probationers as an accessible way to help improve their own understanding of the mental health challenges they face.

Dr Colm Walsh and colleagues discuss the importance of understanding how to tackle violent crime from a public health perspective, and outline how the public health for violence prevention (PH-VP) model has emerged as a leading paradigm that has helped to facilitate community coalitions around a common goal.

Encouraging the increased use of community service and reducing short prison sentences is a key objective of probation in both jurisdictions. Professor Nicola Carr and Dr Niamh Maguire provide a summary of the use of community service orders in Ireland, including how they have been used to date and judicial perspectives on their implementation and impact.

Across the island of Ireland, housing has become an increasingly pressing issue, which has had very significant impacts on probationers. Gail McGreevy and Stephen Hamilton present findings from a PBNI survey of Probation Officers, to explore issues faced by those under supervision, in relation to housing and accommodation.

Bringing the focus back to desistance, Gillian Montgomery's article discusses how probation can contribute to reducing reoffending in the context of a new Programme for Government in Northern Ireland, and the academic framework of desistance. She outlines PBNI's current contribution to desistance, its operating context and the opportunities for PBNI to contribute further to reducing adult reoffending in light of this new strategic approach.

The importance of inclusion and representation is highlighted in the article about the new Probation Service Social Inclusion and Reintegration Unit (SIRU). This article by Rachel Lillis, Adam Spollen and Jane Mulcahy explains how current strategy is being implemented by SIRU to ensure a consistent and coherent approach, leading to better outcomes for everyone engaged with the service.

We have two very different, yet interesting and topical, book reviews. The first is of *Becoming a Social Work Manager* by Angie Bartoli. Combining management theory and practical advice for success, this book provides a valuable and accessible resource for social work managers, Area Managers

and Senior Probation Officers in the probation context. Both the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Probation Service are rooted in the social work profession, reflective of our respective ethos, value and knowledge base. This review by Collette Lattimore emphasises the important role our management teams play in creating an empowering, compassionate culture, where both staff and, through them, those we work with have the best opportunity to succeed.

The second book review attends to a very topical issue in contemporary society. Dermot Griffin's recently published book, *Sentencing Serious Sex Offenders – How Judges Decide When Discretion is Wide*, explores sentencing decision-making in such serious matters. Daragh Bailey outlines the role of judicial discretion and the various factors that influence sentencing decisions. Given public interest and media commentary in respect of many sentencing decisions, this is an important and informative read.

Finally, the editorial committee would like to thank all those who have contributed to this year's publication, and acknowledge their commitment to sharing knowledge, creating awareness and generating debate on topical issues. Next year, 2026, will see a very exciting development. The *Irish Probation Journal* will commence a series of editions led by a guest editor – an academic from the field of criminology, social work or a related field. To our readers, we want to extend thanks to you all for continuing to support the *Irish Probation Journal*, and we hope you enjoy this edition of the Journal.

Editorial Committee