

# RELEASE



## Annual Report 2019

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# Letter from the CEO

Dear Friends,

2019 was a really important year for us at RELEASE with a key focus on developing our approach to the Governance Code which is being implemented to ensure that Release is fully compliant with all best practices for charities by end of 2020. In the spirit of compliance, we appointed 3 new Trustees this year and accepted the resignation of some Trustees who have served us well in the past 5 years. Our vision is a board of greater diversity in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and Christian domination. We are delighted to welcome Ray Kenny, Ashley Mary-Johnson, Fr. Pat Collins and Patrick McRann who were appointed to our board this year. We are grateful to Fergus Carey who resigned this year after a full term of 5 years on board.

## Activity

Our key focus in 2019 was in the upgrading of and the introduction of new training courses for staff, volunteers and trustees. This, in turn, allowed us to develop a new range of courses to be delivered in prison to assist prisoners in increasing their opportunities for successful community integration. We continue to recruit and train Mentors who support ex-offenders in avoiding re-offending and making a positive contribution to our society where they face growing complexity in the challenge to avoid re-offending. At the core of our future plans remains a commitment to reducing criminal re-offending through a variety of interventions including faith-based programmes in addiction recovery and living better lives, along with skills training in communication, job seeking and accommodation assistance. We are active in promoting restorative justice as an approach to reduce the number of people in our prisons, along with teaching restorative practice skills to volunteers who support family, social and church reintegration for our service users.

## Financial Challenge

This past year we have faced a growing financial challenge with a significant drop in revenue and a corresponding reduction in costs. While this has not affected our service levels in 2019 it will be a significant issue going forward. Whilst we will continue to seek additional volunteer support for some of our administrative tasks it is imperative that we have at least one paid employee in our volunteer and programme coordination role.

## Partners

We are very excited by the ongoing development of partnerships with other social justice agencies including the Joshua Project in Baileyborough who are now running the Addiction Recovery Course and the Methodist Church who continues to fund our housing loan project. Seven men have benefited from this so far. Another new partnership with ChristianBooks.ie and Speaking Volumes (UK) will allow us to delivery around 800 inspirational Christian books to prison libraries all over Ireland. We would also like to thank Willie Patterson of Family Spectrum who has been providing us with specialised training and guidance.

## Finally,

Despite the commitment of prison staff and those working in the voluntary sector, 2019 has not been a good year for prisons. Growing incarceration rates have contributed to high levels of overcrowding, violence and self-harm. I wish to thank and praise our amazing group of volunteers who give selflessly of their time, love, finances by visiting prisoners, running our courses and maintaining long-term mentoring relationships with those in prison and ex-prisoners recovering from the consequences of their behaviours. With your support Release is ready and able to deliver more programmes to more prisoners and ex-offenders in the coming years.



# Overview

## **Our History**

Release commenced as an outreach from St. Catherine's church in Thomas St. in 1995. Its main focus was to provide a time of worship and bible study on Sunday mornings to a handful of prisoners who were seeking to live changed lives. In 2014 we commenced a strategy of opening up our ministry to include volunteers from all Christian churches and to expand beyond Dublin to work with men still in prison and provide mentoring and reintegration services to ex-prisoners returning to our communities.

## **Our Vision**

Release is driven by the belief that restoration is possible for every person. We envision an Ireland where people with offences are treated with dignity, supported to live transformed lives, and make positive contributions to their communities.

## **Our Mission**

58% of prisoners in Ireland re-offend within three years. For many of these offenders, loss or lack of significant personal relationships was the most significant factor in their decision to commit a crime.

Release interrupts the revolving door of imprisonment by connecting prisoners with our trained volunteers from the community for mentoring. These mentors build relationships and self-esteem, provide consistency and accountability, and help prisoners to achieve goals – proven interventions in the prevention of crime.

## **Our Ethos**

We are faith based but not faith biased, and serve all clients with the same uncompromising love, respect, and dedication; regardless of offence, religion, race, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability or family status.

We are founded in the belief that we are all created in the image of God, regardless of who we are, what we have done, or where we come from. We believe no life is beyond the reach of God's unconditional love. We see the whole person, and pursue fulfilment of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health for each of our service users.

## **Looking Forward**

As we move into 2020 we will focus on key projects including the completion of our Cornerstone Project and its rollout in some of the prisons we serve. We will ramp up our co-operative involvement with a number of other criminal justice agencies, academic institutions and the Irish Prison Service under the banner of RJS4C. (Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change); a four-year, cross-European project, to help embed restorative justice and restorative practices within the Irish criminal justice system.

# Year in Review

## 17 service users graduated our:

### COMMUNICATION SKILLS COURSE

During the month of August Release facilitated the Communication Skills course in Mountjoy Progression Unit. It was the first of its kind run by Release and ended with 17 men graduating with a presentation day. Governor Geraldine Carrick presented the certificates to the participants with a celebration afterwards.

## 15 service users graduated our:

### PARENTING CHILDREN COURSE

Release ran the parenting children course in the progression unit of Mountjoy West in the Summer of 2019. This course provides parents and caregivers with practical support to strengthen their family relationships. It assists with meeting the child's needs, setting clear boundaries and teaching healthy relationships.



## 41 service users graduated our:

### ALPHA COURSE

3 Alpha courses ran in 2019 in both Arbour Hill and Mountjoy prisons. Alpha is an interactive series that addresses the relevance of Christianity in the world today and is one of the most successful courses run by Release.



## 23 service users graduated our:

### GRACE COURSE

The Grace course ran in Arbour Hill in the Autumn/Winter of 2019. The objective of the Grace Course is to enable Christians to experience God's grace. The content consists of practical exercises, times of listening to God, and a gentle ministry component: The Steps to Experiencing God's Grace.



## 30 service users graduated our:

### ADDICTION RECOVERY COURSE

3 Addiction Recovery courses ran in 2 prisons in 2019. This course is largely discussion based, following videos and a handbook. It explored the complex journey of recovery through community, faith, and forgiveness. Each week a guest speaker gave their testimonial on their own struggle with addiction.



*"I feel I could help people with any problems they have after taking part in this course especially myself"*

**PARTICIPANT OF OUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS COURSE IN MOUNTJOY PRISON**

# Year in Review

## **130 prisoners were visited through our:**

### **BEFRIENDING SERVICE**

Release volunteers visited 130 prisoners across 5 prisons during 2019. The volunteers met with prisoners to build friendships and support them through their sentence. This service also provides an information service for prisoners who need help with court appearances, personal matters and general information.

## **50 ex-offenders were supported by our:**

### **MENTORING PROGRAMME**

Release mentors provided social support, advocacy, and coaching to secure sustainable housing, employment, social welfare entitlements and provided supportive relationships which assisted service users while in prison and assistance to reintegrate back into their communities.

# RELEASE



**RELATE » RESTORE » REINTEGRATE**

## **65 service users attended our:**

### **MUSIC EVENTS**

Throughout the year, Release worship team continued their weekly music therapy sessions in both Mountjoy and Arbour Hill. Service users performed alongside our team and took part in our annual Christmas and Easter events. This service is growing in attendance numbers each year.

## **8 ex-offenders secured employment and training through our:**

### **POST PRISON SUPPORT PROGRAMME**

In 2019, Release assisted 6 men to secure employment and 2 men to participate in training courses. As a result of direct interventions training partnerships were established with the Larkin Centre and Business in the Community. The 'Get Ready Programme' provided a programme that is run by Business in the Community in cooperation with the Salvation Army. The programme provides early employment opportunities and it comprises a series of business-led workshops and One-to-One support. The Men's Health programme is a 10 week programme which focuses on Health and Wellbeing for men which is run by the Larkin Centre.

## 'Working with offenders' training day



In February 2019 Release volunteers completed 4 days training with the wonderful Jo Goldie who facilitated the Working with Offenders and Risk Assessment/Risk Management course. It was an enjoyable 4 days and staff and volunteers gained valuable knowledge and skills. 14 participants completed the course.

## Grasping the Nettles



Also in February 2019 Release welcomed Willie Patterson of Family Spectrum to present 'Grasping the Nettles' which is a Biblical approach of the management of working with offenders. Willie continues to train Release volunteers in specialised training and has many years experience as the Assistant Director for Family and Child Care -Causeway Health and Social Service Trust.

## Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change



In March 2019 Release's CEO Philip Larragy became a member of Strategies for Change. This strategy represents the first Irish output of the four-year, cross-European project, Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change. The purpose of the strategy is to help embed restorative justice and restorative practices within the Irish criminal justice system, building on existing practices and stimulating new work to fill gaps in policy and practice. Philp also attended the Restorative Justice Symposium at NUI Maynooth in April.

Release also attended the largest of the Strategies for Change events a national symposium, which took place at the University of Limerick on Friday 22nd November 2019.

The project was a partnership of ten countries – Albania, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Scotland – all of which took part in similar activities around the same time.



**Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change**

*A Collective Strategy for Ireland, 2019-2023*

## Restorative Practices Forum (NI) 25th Anniversary International Conference

The Restorative Practices Forum (NI) (formerly the Restorative Justice Forum) in November brought a wide range of people and organisations together to promote restorative justice, to offer opportunities to share best practices and to support research. It can claim that it has contributed to the rapid expansion of restorative practices over the past 20 years and to Northern Ireland's international reputation for high quality and innovative restorative approaches in a variety of sectors. The conference provided an opportunity to bring together policymakers, practitioners, and researchers from throughout the island of Ireland and to welcome visitors from Britain, Europe and beyond.

## Cinnamon Network Meeting in Belfast



Release attended our last meeting with Cinnamon Network in Belfast in 2019. Release has benefited greatly over the last 2 years in partnership with Tommy Stewart and Cinnamon Network. We will move forward with the skills and knowledge obtained to enable us to transform our communities and help those in social need.

## Launch of Care After Prison Strategic Plan



Release had the pleasure to attend the Care After Prison launch of their Strategic plan for 2018-2020. The event was held in the Mansion House in Dublin and was launched by Lord Mayor Niall Ring. This plan was developed using the views of service users, staff and the Board of CAP.

## Arbour Hill Play



In May 2019 Release staff and volunteers were invited to a production of Brendan Behan's 'The Quare Fellow' in Arbour Hill Prison. This production was performed by inmates who gave an amazing and professional performance. This was done in partnership with the Arbour Hill Education Centre.

## ACJRD Conference



In June 2019 Release staff and volunteers attended The 6th Annual Irish Criminal Justice Agencies Conference in Dublin Castle. The theme for this year's conference was "Sexual Offences: The Challenge of Balancing Rights in the Criminal Justice System". This one day conference was a collaboration of the Department of Justice and Equality, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Irish Prison Service, the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS), An Garda Síochána, The Probation Service and the Association for Criminal Justice Research and Development (ACJRD).

## INOUE Launch



In September Release attended the formal launch of the 26th edition INOUE's flagship publication 'Working for Work'. This book outlines an individual's entitlements to a number of social welfare payments and secondary benefits which can be a valuable recourse for people coming out of prison looking for employment and assistance.

## Addiction Recovery training with The Joshua Project



Release staff facilitated training in Addiction Recovery for the Joshua Project In October 2019. Release had the pleasure to be invited to facilitate this training with the Joshua Project whose aim is to set up community initiatives that help those who may feel marginalised. The training will assist them to provide an Addiction Recovery course in their community centre for those affected by addiction.

## Life and Soul Programme



Our Addiction Recovery Course was featured on RTE's Life and Soul programme. which takes a fresh approach to Christian worship. Presenters Colm Flynn and Áine O'Neill travel the country, hearing stories of how faith impacts on life and life on faith – how faith moves and inspires, challenges and sustains people in today's Ireland. The segment showed one of our volunteers giving his testimony of addiction and coming to faith to a group of prisoners who are attending the Release Addiction Course in Mountjoy progression unit.



## A word from our service user

Due to a dysfunctional childhood, my faith throughout my whole life was non-existent and it was not until late in life when I was incarcerated in prison that I turned to God. It was just before I was sentenced that I had a revelation which brought God into my life and I was very scared and confused as to who or what God was really about. I joined the Release group that took place every Sunday morning after mass in the prison church to try and find answers to the many questions I had. It was here that I met the most beautiful, kind, loving and non-judgemental people who has had a huge impact to this day on my spiritual future.

Over the next couple of years a lot of my questions and mysteries about God was answered, through reading and discussing different chapters of the Bible and participating in the 'ALPHA' and the 'GRACE' courses and also been trained as a Facilitator for the Grace course. It is thanks to Philip and his Mentors that I now have a new best friend, who is always by my side 24/7, who always loves me, who never judges me, who has forgiven me. I still struggle from time to time, but thanks to the wonderful Mentors, who over the years and even after being released have been there for me to help answer my questions and encourage me to develop my faith. We are all still in touch and they have become very precious in my life now.

My many thanks, prayers and blessings to all that are involved in the Release programme.

God Bless you All for the wonderful work that you are doing in God's name.

## A word from our volunteer!

I had never visited a prison. It never crossed my mind that I would ever be involved in meeting, chatting and sharing stories with prisoners. It's been over a year since I've been involved with Release. I initially got involved volunteering my skills in tech and helping the organisation. Over the next few months that followed, I felt the urge to be more involved on the ground after I heard many stories of how transformative the mission has been to the people in prison and when they are released. I got involved in the Alpha course that was run in Mountjoy progression unit. It eventually turned into a small Bible study. It's always been quite interesting to hear what the guys think. How they process the idea of a good & righteous God who cares about fairness and justice. I'm always surprised to hear their insights and points of view which also helps me in my faith.

There have been many incredible moments of insights and joy to share the love of Jesus. I remember another day where we were praying for the Holy Spirit and the choir downstairs who were practising started singing at the same moment – a Christian song about the love of God if I remember correctly.

Maybe it was a coincidence or maybe, just maybe, something planned by God. The guys appreciate us for taking the time every week to come and see them. Likewise, we are thankful to them for coming to our sessions. We know that they only have a short number of hours outside their cells each day and they have chosen to spend that with us.

We are privileged to be signposts to God.

Daniel

# Financial Report

## Finance Report Fundraising:

Release is grateful for the long-term commitment of donors and trusts who support us on annual basis. However, in 2019 a three year grant from Allchurches Trust came to an end. Significant effort has been made to find new donors to fill this gap and we pray that a new supporter can be found in 2020. In preparation for an anticipated shortfall in income in 2020 we achieved a significant cutback in expenses and returned a surplus which will shore us up for the first half of 2020.

	2019	2018
INCOME	57,180	59,810
EXPENSES	47,807	57,358
Operating Surplus	9,373	2,452
	16.40%	4.10%
Retained Earnings	17,478	8,105

Income by Source		
Donations / Grants	12,670	23,360
SSGT Grant	0	10,000
Allchurches Trust	21,783	22,145
Other UK Trusts	18,380	0
Direct Debit Giving	4,347	4,305
<b>Total</b>	<b>57180</b>	<b>59810</b>

Staff Costs		
Wages and Salaries	23,340	25,261
PRSI	2,069	2,256
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,409</b>	<b>27,517</b>
Average number of persons employed	2	3

A full set of audited accounts are available on our webpages at [www.release.ie](http://www.release.ie)

# Thank you to our Funders and Partners

## Funders



the Joseph Rank trust



## Partners



**Want to continue your generous support or become a new donor?**

**Below are ways you can make a difference and contribute to our mission:**

- Become a monthly or quarterly donor through a standing order
- Make a once off donation
- Ask your employer about making a gift or donation matching
- Organise a fundraising event

**Please contact us at [info@release](mailto:info@release) or 086 044 9351 for more information.**

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