



Probation Board Northern Ireland

Consultation on Corporate Plan 2026-2029

We appreciate the opportunity to feedback on the Probation Board's Corporate Plan for 2026-2029. Barnardo's NI is the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland. In the past year we worked with approximately 18,000 children, young people and families across more than 45 different services and programmes. Barnardo's Parenting Matters service works in partnership with the NI Prison Service to provide parenting programmes and support in all four prison establishments. From 2015 to 2025, Barnardo's delivered parenting programmes to parents and expectant parents on behalf of PBNI.

Priority 2- Societal Impacts

We recommend including poverty and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as societal issues that can impact reoffending.

Research conducted by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies found that people with a conviction or have experienced imprisonment face significant income penalties and therefore have a larger impact on experiences of poverty¹. Similarly, the Youth Endowment Fund commissioned a systematic review by the Jill Dando Institute Research Laboratory at University College London to look at the relationship between poverty and children's involvement in crime, and found that poverty relates to an increased risk of engagement in youth crime and/or violence, and identifying poverty as a risk factor is important for highlighting a population who may benefit from intervention².

Regarding adverse childhood experiences, an article in the Journal of Public Health determined that adults who experienced ACEs were at greater risk of poor educational and employment outcomes; low mental wellbeing and life satisfaction; recent violence involvement; recent inpatient hospital care and chronic health conditions³. The research also noted that ACEs suggest a cyclic effect on both the life experiences of the adult and any dependents.

¹ <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/cjm/article/looking-beyond-re-offending-criminal-records-and-poverty>

² <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/YEF-Poverty-Evidence-Review-Technical-Report-August-2025.pdf>

³ <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/ftd038>

Priority 3- A trauma-informed, whole-family approach

We agree with the importance of implementing trauma-informed policy, practice, and service development to better understand and support people through the probation process. However, we know that any trauma-informed approach needs to include a specific lens for children and young people, whether as children who have experienced the criminal justice system or as children of adults who are/have experience with the criminal justice system. Trauma-informed approaches need to be implemented alongside a whole-family approach, where our services see people not just as individuals, but also within the context of their families, caring responsibilities, and the wider community. As part of the UK Government's Independent Sentencing Review, roundtable events were held to gather valuable insight from a range of stakeholders, and during this process the attendees noted the criminal justice system "treats the needs of families as collateral damage" instead of thinking about whether a sentence is effective and proportionate, referencing the needs of dependants⁴.

Priority 4- The role of families, children, and young people

We strongly recommend recognising the role of families in rehabilitation and support, and how providing whole-family services to everyone affected by probation can positively impact the probation journey.

In a 2014 thematic review of resettlement provision for adult offenders, the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection found that families needed to be more involved in sentence planning, especially coming up to release, with family involvement a missed opportunity for preventing homelessness following release⁵. The report confirms the family as the most effective resettlement arrangement for offenders and can contribute to their successful rehabilitation. Families Outside, a Scottish charity that works to support the families of people involved in the criminal justice system, stated in their briefing to the Scottish Government that "family relationships can be a positive resource that can help people resettlement into the community by providing social capital in the form of advice, emotional support or by helping to resolve personal difficulties such as homelessness"⁶. Whilst accounting for situations where it is not safe for family reunification, the evidence

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/682d8d995ba51be7c0f45371/independent-sentencing-review-report-part_2.pdf

⁵ <https://www.nicco.org.uk/userfiles/downloads/562%20-%20Resettlement-thematic-for-print-Sept-2014.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/11/families-outside-in-brief-9.pdf>

demonstrates that familial involvement in the rehabilitation process improves outcomes across social, health, and financial wellbeing.

In 2015, Barnardo's NI was commissioned by the Probation Board to run a Parenting Family Support Service to deliver parenting support to those subject to Enhanced Combination Orders and subsequently to those subject to a probation order. As the needs of each parent differs, Barnardo's NI created a menu of individual support sessions which address the following common themes for this group of parents:

- Understanding the impact criminality, including imprisonment, has on children and families
- Understanding the parental role and children's needs at various ages and stages throughout their lives
- Understanding children's behaviours and how parents can manage this in a positive way
- Re-establishing or maintaining contact with children when parents separate, and family relationships break down
- Support provided to expectant and new parents offered an opportunity to involve both parents, and where relevant their child, in activities such as baby massage.

We recognise the impact trauma and adversity can have on the individuals and families we support. However, evidence and experience demonstrate that negative outcomes for people who have experienced adversity and trauma are not inevitable and that effective interventions can break the cycle of inter-generational trauma, leading to improved outcomes and life chances for parents and children.

The following is a summation of the Support Service outcomes:

- Feedback from parents has demonstrated the impact the service is having on them in a relatively short time.
- The service noted a significant increase in the number of parents being referred due to child cruelty convictions.
- Evidence of parents putting their learning into practice and being able to articulate this.

- Being able to build on existing relationships with those Barnardo's staff who are based in prison settings has accelerated the depth of work able to take place and supported reintegration into the community.

This service demonstrated the importance of a family approach to rehabilitation for parents- focus on relationships, healthy behaviours, education- that will contribute to reintegration into the community and reduce reoffending.

Final Comments

A holistic approach to rehabilitation is integral to supporting people through the probation journey, including the support from and for families, children and young people, and the wider community. As we have seen through extensive research and through the Barnardo's Parenting Family Support Service, providing learning opportunities, peer support, and facilitating communication and space for parents and families has had a significant impact on positive reintegration. We strongly recommend implementing a whole-family approach to probation services that is informed by the experiences, histories, and contexts of the adult, child, young person, and families to improve life outcomes and reduce reoffending.

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