

Irish Red Cross Community based health in Justice Programme as an agency of psychological and behavioural change to support desistance from crime.

Supported by: Irish Red Cross & Irish Prison Service partnership.

Introduction

The Community Based Health in prisons programme (CBH) in Ireland is operated as a partnership between the Irish Red Cross, Irish Prison Service (IPS) and the Educational Training Board (ETB). This global programme consists of nine modules of health and well-being topics and was introduced into Irish Prisons in 2009 and extended to all prisons by 2014. The CBH programme is operated in over 100 countries in the wider community but Ireland is the only country to introduce it into a prison community and have prisoners as special status Irish Red Cross volunteers.

Since its inception, over 1000 prisoners have been trained. In 2015, of the 700 prisoners trained at that time, 350 had been released. Of that cohort, 25% had returned to prison, which compares favourably with Irish re-committal rates. Whilst it was too early to claim success in reducing re-committal, it was nevertheless encouraging.

Community Based Health in prisons programme (CBH) is a health, first aid and well-being peer-to-peer education *action learning* programme within an action research framework. It empowers prisoner volunteers to take responsibility for their own health and help build a safer and healthier prison community with their peers.

A 'Lessons Learned' workshop was undertaken in 2013 where prisoner volunteers were asked to complete a self-report questionnaire around their perception of: their living environment, behaviours, capabilities, beliefs & values, identity and goals both before and after becoming a volunteer. There was an interesting correlation between the types of language structure and content that volunteers used to describe themselves before, and after, becoming a Community Based Health in prisons programme (CBH) volunteer.

In 2015, a 5-year collaborative evaluation was carried out linked to Western University of Ontario Public Health Program (Irish Red Cross, 2016). In this evaluation, it became apparent that whilst health behavioural changes could be measured, evaluation of the personal development of volunteers required a different approach to provide an evidence base. All formative reporting can be viewed on the Irish Red Cross website www.redcross.ie/cbhfa.

In addition, over a number of years there were anecdotal examples from Governors, Teachers and other prison staff about positive changes in the volunteers including less censures for negative behaviours in those prisoners becoming volunteers.

Area of Research Proposed

The intended focus of this study is an exploration of the impact of this Community Based Health in prisons programme (CBH) on psychological and behavioural markers. Further, the study should investigate how it may assist the process of desistance from crime and make recommendations for further development of this model of working with offenders. It may also make recommendations for the Community Based Health in prisons programme (CBH) to further develop its range of activities with marginalised groups in society based on the outcomes of the research.

It is anticipated that the applicant will make use of relevant psychometrics applied before and after completion of the programme and to do this meaningfully may require a cohort of up to one hundred participants in an experimental group and one hundred in a control group.

It is also envisaged that there would be a qualitative component involving interviews to give colour to the quantitative findings possibly using language structure.

Requirements

Proposals made in response to this call should demonstrate an awareness of the judicial system and experience of working in a challenging environment. The applicant should hold a Master's degree in Psychology, Sociology or related subject and be willing to undertake a 4-year PHD programme. The applicant should be cognisant of the need for the integration of the organisational development, his or her own personal development and the need to add to the body of knowledge in the field of psychological and behavioural change in relation to the rehabilitation of offenders. To this end, the following will be achieved:

1. Research should inform the Irish Prison Service, Irish Red Cross, and Educational Training Board partnership of the impact of the current programme and inform future practices of peer-led programmes in prisons that support pathways to desistance from crime.
2. Provide the applicant with an opportunity to develop their existing portfolio of research skills & expertise and inform their teaching or practice whilst at the same time gaining relevant work experience within the Irish Justice system.

Timeframe:	48 months from commencement of project
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Applicants interested in preparing an application under this co-funded strand should contact the Irish Red Cross directly with an expression of interest as soon as possible and **in advance** of submitting their application.

The point of contact is: Carrie McGowan CMcGowan@redcross.ie

The **Irish Red Cross health in Justice Programme** will select which potential applications they will support.