

Care After Prison Submission

# Homeless Action Plan For The Dublin Region 2014-2016



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## CAP. Care After Prison What We Do.

In response to your call for submissions CAP (Care After Prison) would wish to make the following submission. Care After Prison is a Voluntary Agency that was established in October 2011. Our Goal is to promote safer communities and support ex-prisoners in leading crime free lives. We work with both male and female individuals of any age. Cap is a Voluntary Charitable Organisation existing only on grants and funding from external sources. CAP also raises funds through internal fund raising activities. Our work in the community is also extended to family members of those either in prison or before the courts. CAP regularly holds Social Justice Workshops aimed at teenagers to reflect the implications imprisonment can have on an individual. CAP does and expects to work and support persons affected by crime also.

In CAP we offer a non-judgemental confidential service. We also offer service users a safe environment where they can explore and identify areas of need within their lives where need support to achieve their goal of leading a crime free lifestyle.

We currently employ a Holistic Needs Assessment approach based model to help identify a person needs so we can offer support tailored to each individual service user. These needs include support with obtaining Social Welfare payments, Temporary Accommodation and other Housing Needs, Support with Drug / Alcohol and other Addictions, Training and Education, General Counselling, Family Mediation and Support, Support Re-integrating into Communities, Advocacy.

CAP liaises with other Agencies not exclusive to but including Probation. Local JLO's, Community Gardai and local Youth Work services to best support young people who have been displaying criminal and / or antisocial behaviour. The aim of this work is to try and prevent the

young person, family and wider community experiencing the negative consequences of these behaviours, therefore attempting to address these issues before the situation escalates to imprisonment.

CAP advocates and will refer service users to external services if the need arises. We offer a Peer-Support Group in conjunction with our various internal services. This service aims to show new service users there are other alternatives and ways of achieving lifestyle change by using a Peer-led approach.

During our consultations and interventions over the past eighteen months we have identified a need for a short term drug and alcohol free accommodation style service. We are continuously experiencing newly released service users returning to the community drug and alcohol free after serving varying lengths of sentences. In a lot of cases an individual's only option is to avail of emergency accommodation.

Established accommodation services such as PACE and TRAIL have waiting lists, are unknown to our service users or service users have been released under the current Temporary release scheme employed by the Irish Prison Service where prisoners are released without notice with no care-plans or assistance because bed capacity is full and places are needed.

## Risk Factors

Upon release if the individual presents as homeless typically due to family breakdown, previous substance use and criminal behaviour. Placement by the Homeless Persons Unit usually involves a Drug and alcohol free person being placed in emergency accommodation with individuals who are currently active Drug users or problem drinkers. Cases have arisen where the only

accommodation available to an individual after successfully addressing their substance use in prison is being released to emergency accommodation such as Camden Hall. Emergency accommodation style hostels like and similar to Camden Hall are unsuitable places of residence to place such individuals, not only for substance free newly released prisoner, but for individuals exiting Detoxification programmes such as Cuan Dara (Cherry Orchard Hospital) St Michael's Ward ( Beaumont Hospital) and persons awaiting admission into Transitional Housing and residential Drug/Alcohol treatment services.

## International Research

Research undertaken in America by Binswanger et al in 2012 states 'In particular, former inmates who stayed in homeless shelters found it took substantial effort to stay away from drugs and alcohol after release from prison' he also states that participants 'described a return to drug use after a short period of time after release because of an overwhelming urge to use alcohol or drugs to cope with frustration, 'numb out' and 'forget' the daily stresses of the transition period'. Similar research compiled in England for the Prison Reform Trust in the Out For Good report 2012 states 'The main problem seemed to be that hostels brought people together with offending and (often) drug taking lifestyles together under one roof'.

Closer to home research carried out by the Irish Probation Service 2007 states 'Given the well-documented relationship between substance misuse and offending behaviour, increases in alcohol and drug consumption in Ireland are a cause for concern for criminal justice agencies' . CAP believes substance use is of grave concern to Homeless services in the four Dublin Regional Councils.

CAP is calling on the relevant bodies to take this research on board when implementing the new 2013 to 2016 Homeless Strategy. Creation of a short term, low capacity, substance free accommodation could help alleviate the pressure currently being experienced by Homeless Services in the greater Dublin Regions. It has the potential to reduce the financial costs and social implications associated with an individual returning to a crime led lifestyle i.e. safer communities, reducing the numbers before the courts, imprisonment, accessing substance misuse services, homeless services and ultimately the need to come in contact with emergency accommodation services. Research shows ‘More than three-quarters of prisoners (79%) who reported being homeless before custody were reconvicted in the first year after release, compared with less than half (47%) of those who did not report being homeless before custody’ (Ministry of Justice, UK 2012).

## Multi-Agency Approach

To provide a pure Holistic Needs Assessment model a multi-agency approach and collaboration is not only essential but paramount to the successful implementation of this submission. Mechanisms already exist to facilitate this proposal however can be ad-hoc at times. Individuals are slipping through the gaps. Relevant bodies both voluntary and statutory such as the Irish Prison Service, Probation Service, Drug/Alcohol services, Threshold, Homeless Services, CAP, PACE, TRAIL and Community Welfare Officers, Department of Social Protection etc. are already ideally placed within and outside the prison system to identify individuals in need of this service.

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Sandwick,T. (2013) et al states ‘During the first few days and weeks after people re-enter the community, they are at heightened risk for arrest and relapse any progress made through jail based programs can evaporate’ she also suggests ‘ the need for service providers to collaborate to strengthen linkages between jail and community.

The Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service have identified a lack of housing or accommodation amongst other needs as predisposing factors for an individual’s return to crime. Such multiple factors are often interrelated and mutually reinforcing. CAP foresees the Homeless Agency as a one of the leading Stakeholders in helping to create a multi-agency approach to address and support an individual’s re-integration back into the community as suggested in the Joint Irish Prison Service & Probation Service Strategic Plan 2013-2015 (IPS,PS, 2013).

## Protective Factors

A creation of a short term, low capacity, substance free accommodation can give not just a newly released prisoner but individuals who have recently completed a Detoxification programme from Cuan Dara Cherry Orchard Hospital and St Michael's ward in Beaumont Hospital a safe, secure and substance free environment to live while awaiting for a bed in a residential drug treatment centre or entry into the private rental sector and transition housing services.

Staff employed in this suggested accommodation should have mandatory training in the Holistic Needs Assessment protocols set out in The Pathway to Home Strategy coupled with Addiction training so they can quickly and efficiently facilitate creation of a support network with a service user seeking to gain independent living in the Private Rental Sector. Creation of this proposed

support network can be achieved using the Holistic Needs Assessment tool to identify both Voluntary and Statutory Agencies needed to support an individual's area of needs.

Suggestion for a low capacity service is so workers won't be overwhelmed with caseloads, accommodation units can be placed strategically around the city, reduce the danger of a 'warehousing effect' of individuals. Short term because an individual needs, time to arrange viewings in the private rental sector and access transitional housing. Substance free accommodation is needed to provide a 'protective factor to reduce return to drug use and potential risks of overdose' (Binswagner, 2012).

Fast track mechanisms also need to be put in place in collaboration with The Department of Social Protection to assist individuals to access rent allowance quicker than the current Postal Rent Unit application process that currently exists.

## Conclusion

This submission aims to highlight an existing gap in current housing policies but also try and suggest a means to alleviate the financial burden currently being experienced by the current configuration of existing homeless services. As previously mentioned it also has the potential to promote safer communities, lessen the negative social impacts that crime has on wider society. It is not a critical analysis of existing services but rather a suggestion to be considered by the relevant Statutory Bodies to work in collaboration with community based services. CAP would like to thank those responsible for making this submission process possible and to taking the time to read and consider it.

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