

# Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee

## Annual Report 2004

We are pleased to submit our annual report for 2004 to Mr Michael Mc Dowell, TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

In the past two years we have requested that plans be drawn up for this prison as soon as possible, so far we have not been given any final plans or location for 'Mountjoy Prison'.

As previously pointed out 'padded cells' are unacceptable within the prison system and it was announced last year that 'padded cells' were replaced with 'observation cells'. This has not happened in Mountjoy Prison where padded cells continue to be used on a regular basis.

Again we wish to draw your attention to the situation of slopping out in the prison. In the interest of health and safety and welfare of both prisoners and staff we urge you to address this situation without delay.

We request that matters highlighted in previous years' reports to you be re-visited as a matter of urgency.

Despite all of the above there appears to be a fairly good atmosphere at Mountjoy Prison and a good relationship between staff and prisoners.

### **Education**

There is a comprehensive range of subjects and courses taught in the Education Centre in Mountjoy Prison. Prisoner participation is on a voluntary basis. Becoming involved in education is an important means of helping cope with imprisonment and assists with their continuing growth and development.

A priority for the Education Centre is to ensure help for prisoners with reading and writing difficulties by means of an emphasis on basic education, but the needs and interests of all students are catered for and several students sit the Junior and Leaving Cert. Exams.

However we have been advised that the V.E.C. were unable to sustain a full programme because of cutbacks. Evening classes that operated on four evenings a week had to be completely cut off. Without the necessary funding, aspirations to the provision of alternative educational opportunities for prisoners who may have had negative schooling experiences shall remain in conception rather than realisation.

### **Library**

The prison library is equipped to offer a wide variety of books and reference materials. Daily newspapers are usually available and a video viewing section is also included. The year 2004 was a difficult one for the library as it remained closed for up to three days at a time. We appeal for a sustained effort to be made to facilitate the uninterrupted availability of the library services.

## **Drama**

Previous reports have paid tribute to various annual productions that have been staged by staff and prisoners. However, due to the prevailing financial restraints it was not possible to undertake a commitment to such a project during 2004.

It is generally believed that Drama plays a central role in developing interpersonal/social and communication skills by all working together, accepting direction and giving an out of cell commitment to an enjoyable project.

We make a strong appeal that provision is made for the re-introduction of the Drama Project as a positive means of support for prisoners in developing a new range of skills to deal with problems in a different way.

## **Community Works Party**

The Community Works Party was initiated in 1978 when one Prison Officer and a small work party of prisoners refurbished a training centre in Rathfarnham. Since then over two thousand prisoners have participated in the completion of various training centres, scout halls and community centres. The most recent completed project was the St. Brigids Parish Resource Centre, Killester. The official opening was performed by the President Mary McAleese. The President and other speakers acknowledged the tremendous contribution, outstanding commitment and quality of the workmanship by the works party. Governor Lonergan thanked the community for inviting the works party to participate in this wonderful project. He thanked all those who participated and said they should be proud of their contribution and achievement.

From the outset the three main objectives of the works party were ;

1. To allow prisoners make a positive contribution to local communities.
2. To experience the value and therapy of working in a positive environment.
3. To place them in a position of trust.

Governor Lonergan said he could confidently state that all three objectives had been fully achieved.

## **Kitchen**

The Kitchen in Mountjoy Prison is operated to the highest standards in hygiene and service. This year it again gained the ' Excellence Ireland ' Award, and for that we compliment the management and team.

During the past year chefs from all prisons throughout the country met and drew up a 28 day menu for the whole prison service. A new centralised H.A.C.C.P. (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) plan has been in operation since October 1st.

Prisoners work in the kitchen alongside staff and 12 prisoners completed their training this year. An Environmental Health Officers Course is also up and running and inmates take part in this course. The next step is Hygiene Training.

All cardboard wrappings and used oil are re-cycled from the kitchen. All floors are newly laid non-slip tiles.

## **Work Shops**

Following on from a great Year in 2003 with all the work done for the Special Olympics,as we have already reported to you, 2004 has been a very difficult year for the workshops in Mountjoy.To appreciate the difficulties facing the staff in the workshops,the staffing levels should be ;

6 Industrial Supervisors

13 Assistant Industrial Supervisors

The reality is,there are 6 Industrial Supervisors,2 Assistant Industrial Supervisors,6 Acting Assistant Industrial Supervisors with the balance provided by Officers on a daily basis.This year the efforts of staff have been eroded with cut backs and workshop instructors re-deployed on a daily basis, leaving workshops closed.As a result of this, relationships with outside agencies such as FAS, which took years to build up are now gone, because certain standards cannot be met.Workshops which are regularly closed have left offenders aggrieved and the Instructors dis-illusioned.The dignity and right of offenders who want to work should be respected by serious consideration to resolving this problem.

In spite of all of the above,staff in the workshops are dedicated and committed to their area and have contributed to the success of these workshops under difficult circumstances.

## **Medical Unit**

The Medical Unit holds an average of 50+ prisoners at any given time,mainly consisting of prisoners on drug treatment/detox programmes,kitchen workers and cleaners.The Unit is run on a very professional basis and great credit is due to all staff concerned.It has it's own kitchen and caters for its prisoners separately from the main kitchen.All cells have in cell sanitation and T.V. with shower blocks located on each landing.Normal school and library facilities are also provided.The Unit has its own Welfare Officer and a psychology service is provided 4 days per week,regular contact is also provided with be-friender societies such as St. Vincent De Paul. The Drug Treatment Programme is on going and has a very small failure rate.On completion of the programme prisoners are then transferred to the Training Unit.

## **Dóchas Centre**

The Dóchas Centre has again suffered an overcrowding problem throughout the year but in spite of this there remains a very good atmosphere there.There are various workshops in place such as Hairdressing,Sewing and Fashion.All prisoners take part in workshops or education.A large number take part in Keep Fit Classes and are very health conscious.

Dr. Boyle is doctor to the Dóchas Centre and is very highly thought of by both prisoners and staff,she is very attentive and caring.Administration and documenting of drug use is extremely professional.There has been no psychologist attending the Dóchas Centre for the past number of years but it is hoped to have one in place in the near future.It is a must that a Counsellor be appointed to the prison full time as it is not enough to administer drugs to a prisoner, they must receive full support and this means counselling for drug addiction,sexual problems and psychological problems.The cause of the problem must be treated as well as treating the problem with medication. Padded/Observation Cells are clean and heated.They are only used for self protection or if requested by the prisoner

The kitchen in the Dóchas Centre is operated to the highest standards.Prisoners

selected to work there are trained to work and qualify for placements in Hotels and other places of employment, which helps them get back into the workforce and society. They go through very strict training and are assessed by four different groups

1. A Health Officer
2. Environmental Officer
3. Eastern Health Board
4. Irish Prison Service.

Overall there is a relaxed and calming atmosphere in the prison and this is to be highly commended as it gives inmates a sense of belonging and builds confidence.

### **Conclusion**

The Visiting Committee conducts monthly meetings in the prison where we meet with prisoners who have requested to see us and report back to them with our findings. We wish to acknowledge the competence and co-operation of the Governors and particularly Staff and a special thank you to our Secretary, Dermot Murray.

We are resolved to serve our function in full and look forward to working in close harmony with our Justice Minister Mr. Michael Mc Dowell, T.D. and the Irish Prison Service.

Go mbeirimid beo ar am seo arís.

Bernie Nolan (Chairperson)	_____
Betty Minihane	_____
Stephen Langton	_____
Bridie Fitzgerald	_____
Paddie Connellan	_____
Carmel Bolger	_____