

# **MOUNTJOY PRISON ANNUAL REPORT 2005**

## Introduction:

The Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee met 51 prisoners during 2005. There were monthly meetings held, after which a Governor would be told of the issues raised by the prisoners. Two members of the visiting committee would then visit the prison later in the month and report back to the prisoners who had raised queries at the meetings.

There is still no in cell sanitation in the main prison however the Committee welcomes the improvements that have been made to sanitary conditions at the end of each wing during the year.

There have been many more than 400 prisoners in Mountjoy meaning that overcrowding is a regular problem facing the staff. There are often prisoners sleeping on mattresses on the floors of the cells and this is deplorable in 2005.

There is an urgent need for extra staffing in the prison.

## Library:

The prison library is well equipped to provide a wide variety of choice for the prison population. Unfortunately staff cutbacks have meant a reduced number of hours at which this facility is available to the prison population. It is a hope that this situation can be reversed and more use be made of the library particularly in the evenings. Funding should be allocated to the library with immediate effect.

## Educational Facilities:

There is a wonderful school situated in Mountjoy Prison that offers a wide curriculum. Amongst the subjects offered there are basic literacy and computer skills as well as the mosaic and ever-popular art classes. There are also many of the traditional State Examination subjects on offer to the students as well as specific courses in anger management and pre release training. There is a dedicated teaching staff of 24 in the main prison and some more in the Medical Unit. The average class size is 7. There are approximately 150 prisoners on the books of the school and daily attendance levels are between 60 and 70 prisoners. Regretfully there is no longer a provision for evening classes that were quite well attended in the past. There are FETAC modules run in the school as well as the opportunity to take the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations. Currently there are 6 students enrolled at various stages in Open University Courses. Accreditation ceremonies are held during the year and this is a wonderful part of the year for the prisoners who achieve at the school. The provision of an even better choice of subjects to the prisoners could happen if there was more funding made available to the Education Unit in Mountjoy Prison. The staff are to be commended on the great work they do which is much enjoyed by the prison population.

### Drama:

This year was a very successful year in the Drama Department of Mountjoy Prison. The wonderful production of 'The Lonesome West' by Martin McDonagh, as well as the participation in the Dublin Fringe Theatre festival by the Prisoners is to be commended. The personal benefit to those who participate in the Drama productions is most worthwhile as drama is recognised to enhance interpersonal and communication skills and shows how the prisoners can through their participation develop such skills. In our 2004 Annual Report an appeal for the reintroduction of Drama to Mountjoy was made and we are happy that this has happened and wish that the provision for a Drama production be included in the yearly plans for the Prison from now on.

### Medical:

Mountjoy is the largest Methadone maintenance clinic in the country. There are at least 200 prisoners on maintenance in the main prison and 30 prisoners on maintenance in the female prison. They receive first class medical care throughout the prison from doctors, nurses psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors & dieticians. In the medical unit, there is a 9-week detox programme in place. Also in this unit, they receive triple therapy for HIV.

The Medical Unit holds in excess of 60 prisoners and regrettably there are on occasions more prisoners there than the capacity. All cells have in cell sanitation and a TV. There are new shower blocks in place and this is to be welcomed. Normal school and library facilities are provided and the dedicated staff create a nice environment for all in this part of the prison.

### Probation and Welfare Service

There is a probation officer assigned to each of the wings and the medical Unit as well as to the Dóchas Centre.

The welfare officers work each day from a list of prisoners that have to be seen by order of the court. They then work on any requests from the prisoners themselves. In addition they attempt to visit those prisoners who have never requested to see a welfare officer. There is one welfare officer assigned to deal with long-term prisoners and prisoners serving life sentences. The Welfare staffs facilitate visits from Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotic Anonymous.

### Chaplains

A total of five chaplains representing the major religious denominations serve the prison. A nun who is the chaplain in the Dóchas Centre is available every day during the week from 9.30a.m. to approx 5.30 pm. She is also a trained counsellor. She is also very involved in contributing to looking after the

prisoners needs and contributes to making their stay more pleasant by helping organise as many social activities as feasible within the prison. Barbeques, Fashion shows, Christmas parties, and Carol Singing are organised and the highlight at Christmas is Mass attended by the women's children.

### Work Parties Projects.

They originated approx 30 years ago for the purpose of building community centres, scout halls, football pavilions etc., in the deprived areas of Dublin. They achieved this with a 30% savings on cost. These are made up of 6 prisoners and two officers. The Rehabilitative value of these schemes cannot be overvalued, as there is an opportunity to learn how to hold down a regular job. Some of the prisoners go on to become foremen and site clerks after the programme. Absenteeism is low on the scheme. No project has run overtime except where funds have not been available.

### Work Shops:

There are various workshops available in the main prison but once again staff shortages means that there is not an opportunity for as many prisoners as would like to undertake work in them. The dignity and right of offenders who want to work should be respected by serious consideration of allocating additional resources to this particular part of the prison. Once again the staff who are working in the workshops are to be commended on the dedication and commitment they show in the face of difficult circumstances.

### Drugs:

We welcome the recommendations of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform Mr. Michael McDowell T.D. to tackle the drug problem in Irish Prisons. We recommend that a way be found to deactivate mobile phone signals coming into the prison. The introduction of a sniffer dog and extra Gardaí is also recommended to assist in the fight against drugs entering the prison.

Unfortunately there is still a problem existing whereby drugs are getting into the prison and there is relatively easy access to drugs for the prison population. Mountjoy is the largest methadone maintenance clinic in the country. The other prisons refuse to deal with more than 80/90 prisoners on maintenance. This aggravates the problem.

The trustees and not drug users are now under huge pressure to bring in drugs. They are intimidated/ threatened personally or by phone. Their families are also threatened. A number of prisoners are allowed out for different events in the family and these prisoners too come under huge pressure to bring drugs back. A large number of drugs are getting in over the walls from the North Circular Road. The provision of more CCTV cameras as well as an increased

Garda presence in such areas may help this problem somewhat. However the only way that drugs can really be curtailed from getting into Mountjoy prison would be by the introduction of screened visits for all prisoners. This committee would strongly suggest that if there is to be a real effort to help stop drug abuse by prisoners and all of the problems that ensue as a result, the immediate introduction of screened visits is to be recommended.

#### Suicide Committee

There are two suicide Committees one in the Main Prison and one in the Dóchas Centre. The Main committees meet four times a year with the Governor, representatives from the medical areas within the prison, medical staff, social workers and the prison chaplains. After consultation with each area they decide how conditions can be improved in order to ensure that the prisoners do not harm themselves.

The introduction of TV's into the cells has helped in the reduction of self-mutilation. There is a marked improvement in the prisoner's behaviour since TV's were installed. They are much happier to retire to their cells in the evening. The recent provision of new Observation cells is to be commended and they should help further in the aim of preventing suicide in the prison. Unfortunately there was 1 suicide in the prison in the past year and the Visiting Committee extend their sympathies to the family of the deceased prisoner.

#### Kitchen

The kitchen area in Mountjoy Prison is operated to the highest standards in hygiene and service. Management and Staff have been recognised for their professional approach at all times and indeed they have been successful in gaining many prestigious awards over the years.

This year Mountjoy Kitchen was nominated for the Champions Award in the Excellence Ireland Awards. A total of 5 finalists were nominated and Mountjoy was awarded a certificate and a plaque.

Prisoners work in the kitchen alongside staff. A new training course was run this year viz. an Environmental Health Officers Primary Food Hygiene Course together with Elementary Cooking Skills Course certified by FETAC. A base figure of 15 inmates availed of this course.

This year saw the introduction of a new centralised menu developed by a core team of staff from the Irish Prisons.

A variety of menus are prepared, to include approximately 8-10 special diets for coeliacs on a given day. The dietician networks with the medical and catering staff and reports to kitchen management regarding prisoners requirements. A good balanced diet is provided for prisoners.

Mountjoy Kitchen caters for functions in the prison such as the Annual Drama Gala Night usually in the month of April. A seasonal Christmas Menu is prepared on Christmas day. Prisoners are offered Irish Breakfast and full Christmas Dinner.

Recycling is very much incorporated into kitchen routines. Used kitchen oil is taken back by the supplier and used in cattle feed manufacture. Cardboard and tins are recycled. The Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points Plan (H.A.C.C.P.) has been in operation for almost two years.

### Dóchas Centre

There are approximately 81 women in the Dóchas Centre ranging in age from 17 years to 58 years and at times this number can reach 90. There is a danger that if the number continues to increase the purpose of this top class facility may be defeated. In the Dóchas Centre there is a medical area where prisoners who need constant observation are accommodated. This area also has new observation cells that have in cell sanitation, a call button and a TV.

The Dóchas centre has it's own dedicated medical doctor who is responsible solely for the Dóchas Centre . The Doctor is very dedicated and gives so much time to each prisoner. The Doctor never seems to be short of time where a prisoner is concerned. The medical care they receive from doctors, nurses, psychologist and psychiatrist is first class.

The Educational facilities of the Dóchas Centre are well used by the prisoners and once again the dedication of the staff to further developing the needs of the prisoners is to be commended.

The Kitchen in the Dóchas Centre is run to a very high standard and the menus are well received by the prisoners. Prisoners selected to work in the kitchens receive the best training again preparing them for employment on release. The Dóchas Centre is a place of calm and where there is a great mutual respect between staff and prisoners alike. This is to be highly commended as it creates a positive atmosphere for all.

### Conclusion:

We acknowledge the competence and co-operation of the Governor and management and wish to record a special thanks to our esteemed secretary Dermot Murray. We are resolved to serve our function in full and look forward to working in close harmony with our Justice Minister, Michael McDowell and the Irish Prison Service.

Go mbeirimid beo ar am seo aris.

Members of Mountjoy Visiting Committee:

Bernie Nolan (Chairperson)

Paddie Connellan (Vice Chairperson)

Stephen Langton

Betty Minihane

Eoin Hardiman

Niall Tempany

Nicola Byrne

Carmel Bolger

Noel Cloake

Liam Hogan