



## 2024 Annual Report



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## Chairpersons Report

On behalf of my fellow Board members at the Cork Alliance Centre, I am pleased to present our Annual Report for 2024.

Since its establishment in 2002, the Cork Alliance Centre has remained committed to developing a range of community-based services that support individuals in making a fresh start. Our work focuses on reducing offending, fostering personal growth, and encouraging constructive engagement with family and community. While our services are rooted in the community, we also maintain a strong presence within the prison system through in-reach initiatives.

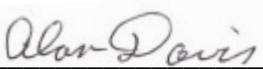
Our team operates with a trauma-informed and gender-responsive approach, guided by the principles of desistance theory. At the heart of our work is a person-centred, strengths-based model that meets individuals where they are, working at their pace to help them identify and implement meaningful changes in their lives.

The Centre seeks to support personal recovery and empowerment, with the overarching goal of desistance from crime. We strive to equip individuals with the tools and confidence needed to lead more positive and self-directed lives.

The dedication of our Board members - reflected in their care, expertise, and shared belief in the Centre's ethos - is vital to our success. Their support of the CEO and the wider team plays a crucial role in enabling the Centre to fulfil its mission.

We welcomed two new members to the team in 2024. We are deeply grateful to our compassionate and skilled team, whose commitment ensures the continued delivery of high-quality services. Their hard work and dedication are the foundation of everything we achieve, and I want to extend my sincere thanks to each of them.

We also acknowledge and appreciate the ongoing support of the Department of Justice, particularly through the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service. Their funding, referrals, and collaborative approach are essential to our work and to the lives of those we support. Without their partnership, the Cork Alliance Centre would not be possible.

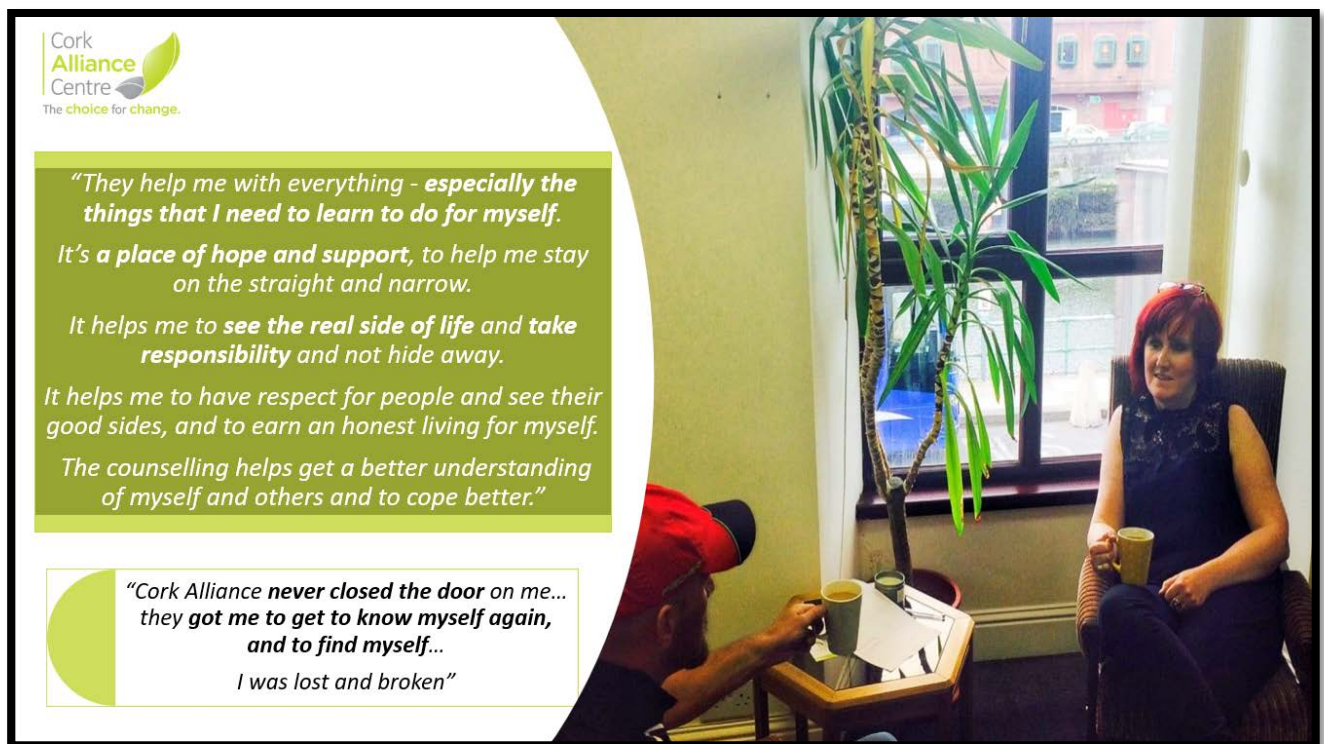
Signed:   
Alan Davis, Chairperson

# CEO Report

## Cork Alliance Centre

Maruna (2001) identified that *“to desist from crime, ex-offenders need to develop a coherent, pro-social identity for themselves”*, within this building self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-respect and self-determination is fundamental to our work. Therein we strive to facilitate people who use our services, to restore positive relationships with their family, friends, community, society and most importantly with themselves. Those who choose to access the services of the Centre do so voluntarily.

The Centre’s core funding is from the Department of Justice through the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service.



The research that informs how the Cork Alliance Centre works to support people desist from crime tells us that *“ultimately the pathways to desistance are through repaired relationships – within families, within communities, within the state”* (McNeill et al, 2012). *“The onset and maintenance of desistance depends, to a large extent and for a significant proportion of offenders, upon them developing pro-social thinking styles, higher levels of self-efficacy and pro-social bonds”* (Sapouna et al.; 2011; p 42). We can only restore our relationships when *“we understand ourselves and relate to others in our everyday lives”* (Johnstone and VanNess 2007, p 15). The force of social influence and our interconnectedness and bonds are more influential in *“inducing law-abidingness”* (Robinson, 2002, p 375) than the threat of punishment from the criminal justice system. McNeill and Weaver (2007) highlight *“If we want to reduce reoffending, ... we need to facilitate the development of maturity by*

*enabling people to take responsibility (rather than taking it from them), we need to facilitate positive life transitions and the development of positive social ties, and we need to enable 'offenders' to look beyond that label and to recognise their own potential and their possibilities."* For this to be effective, we all have a responsibility in facilitating it across all statutory, policy and practice levels as it applies equally to society as a whole not just those we label as 'offenders' - at each opportunity the Cork Alliance Centre actions and advocates for this.

***"Cork Alliance never gave up on me, when everyone else around me did."***

***Former Client BA***

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Dr Graham Cambridge's 2019 research demonstrates the complexity of desistance as *"a process that very often incorporates recovery from addiction, and avoidance of behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity"*. Cambridge names *"addressing issues of toxic masculinity, calling out cultures that prioritise violence, risk taking and bravado, challenging identity that is intimately linked to the kinds of masculinity prioritised in adolescence"* as essential to sustaining recovery and desistance. The importance for people of *"learning a new, more positive way of doing masculinity, and a resilience regarding the acceptable ways to be a man; this forms the basis of an adapted identity that in a circular way sustains recovery, living a good life, and achieving peace of mind."* Cambridge reinforces the idea that addressing issues of housing, education, employment etc is part of the solution but alone cannot address the underlying problems of crime and addiction.

With a trauma informed, strengths-based approach being fundamental to the project we seek to create a climate that generates understanding, encourages and reinforces positive behaviours and positive relationships of mutual respect and support. Therein creating a safe environment, where responsibility for actions and the associated impacts are intrinsic, as we seek to support change and challenge the disconnect in society.

***The Cork Alliance Centre "is a beautiful bubble to walk into, ...I wouldn't change it for the world"***

***DISP Client A***

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Building on McNeill et al 2012 IRISS document outlining the how and why of supporting people to desist, the scope of the trauma informed one-to-one support work offered within the Cork Alliance Centre provides a platform to address the deeper work outlined in Cambridge's (2019) research. Building on its ethos, understanding and day to day operations the Cork Alliance Centre models this in our person-centred, one-to-one work by

- *"being realistic about the complexity and difficulty of the process*
- *individualising support for change*
- *building and sustaining hope*



- *recognising and developing people's strengths*
- *respecting and fostering agency (or self-determination)*
- *working with and through relationships (both personal and professional)*
- *developing social as well as human capital*
- *recognising and celebrating progress*" (McNeill et al, 2012)

Maruna 2025 highlights that *"the vast majority of desistance research still points to factors outside of rehabilitative programming as being central to successful change"* and that *"promoting desistance is less about changing individual lives, one at a time, and more about making substantial social and structural changes in the lives of all system-impacted people, helping people with convictions reintegrate into society by reducing the stigma and obstacles they face"*



**Our Responsibility is to form collaborative relationships where:**

**Consistent**

we have the responsibility of consistently being there to enable and support change **while leaving the responsibility, power and autonomy to make it happen with the individual**

**Accept**

we have the responsibility of accepting people where they are at and working at their pace – slips, falls and all – **while not pushing or pulling them as 'we know best'.**

**Connect**

we have the responsibility to stay connected and nurture healthy relationships that are safe, accepting and caring, **while not accepting harms done or colluding with destructive behaviour.**

**Someone of worth**

we have the responsibility of letting people show and explore their inherent goodness and that they are someone of worth, with the power and responsibility to make good choices and to cope peacefully with frustration and conflict, **while leaving responsibility, power and autonomy with the individual.**

Cambridge's (2019) research reaffirms that *"Not doing crime, or not participating in substance abuse is not success, for the men in this study being a good person, a thoughtful introspective person, living clean and contributing to society were all key parts of the process. The path to success was about honesty, avoiding problematic linked behaviours, working on oneself and ultimately the purpose of all this, was to achieve peace of mind."*

The Cork Alliance service is based in the community with in-reach work in the prisons, with on average 150 persons engaging at any one time. With the support of the Cork Alliance several people have been through university (15 people in education this year alone), and many more are at, or have been to college. Many have found recovery from addictions, and while others are struggling with their recovery, they are seeking support to change.

## Objectives

The objectives of the Cork Alliance Centre include:

- to challenge offending behaviours
- to increase awareness and self-management
- to enhance thinking skills and behaviours
- to improve self-management of addictions
- to facilitate improvement in personal living environment
- to support access to social & health activities
- to improve level of education, training, and employment

## History

Twenty-two years ago, the Cork Alliance Centre started with the insight and oversight of the Probation Service into the need to respond to the ‘revolving door’ of prison sentences - where unless people were sentenced with post release supervision orders with Probation Service - there were no direct supports available to people. With no supports, by which offending behaviours could be address and no mechanisms for supported change, the same people were often presenting repeatedly before the courts and being sentenced on a recurring basis with the same results as there were no mechanisms to intervene and support change.



To address such challenges, the Probation Service supported the Cork Alliance for Justice and Social Care CLG to establish the Cork Alliance Centre to work with people on release from prison. Therein providing the intervention and supports to allow people to voluntarily seek change, to voluntarily seek

supports and to voluntarily address the causes of their behaviours, thereby increasing desistance and reducing the risk of reimprisonment. Further to that, through building on relationships and connections with society and people in general, the longevity of desistance is increased, and the risk of harm is further reduced. The support of the Probation Service was two-fold, one with financial support and oversight and secondly with referrals, joint-working practices, and a shared-caring approach. The work of the Cork Alliance Centre complements that of the Probation Service as community-based work practices are at the core of our shared working environments.

Based on the effectiveness of the Cork Alliance Centre and its strong working relationship with the Probation Service, when the Irish Prison Service (IPS) sought to pilot and later rollout a community-based intervention for short term sentence holders, the pilot was championed by the Cork Alliance Centre. Our experience, insight and knowledge helped design and operate the Community Sentence Scheme (CSS) which is now a national programme of the Irish Prison Service in conjunction with three other community-based organisations alongside the Cork Alliance Centre.



The work practices of the Cork Alliance Centre are grounded in research – specifically desistance, addiction recovery and trauma research. In line with research, the work of the Cork Alliance Centre is person centred and specific to the needs of the individual. The people we work with are more than the sum of their offences and by connecting and working with *the whole person*, we can build on strengths and repair harms.



Together with the direct person-to-person work, the Cork Alliance Centre is also an advocate for change and a champion of the change process. The Centre has hosted two national conferences (2013 and 2016) on desistance and facilitating change. Not only have leading national and international academics supported our work through these conferences, the people we have worked with over the years also champion our work and have presented at our conferences.

Amongst other actions that have arisen from our advocacy work, include a partnering with the Irish Prison Service Training College to facilitate a Voice of the Prisoner Workshop with all Recruit Prison Officers (RPO). The workshop is co-facilitated with one of the people we work with. It allows the RPOs an opportunity to better understand life inside and peoples journey into and out of prison. As we explore the desistance and change process, we reflect and inform RPOs on the potential *footprint* they leave on the life of each person they meet in prison, and to understand that with the right supports people can change and are more than the sum of their convictions. While returning to a prison environment (albeit the IPS college) is a daunting experience for many former prisoners, this workshop attracts the attention of *would-be* volunteers to participate in it, as they see it both as a valuable intervention and an opportunity to show their true self within the prison and justice system.

It is one thing to desist from crime, it is entirely another to become an active and connected member of society, who has not solely moved away from crime but who has recovered and live a life far removed from it. The Cork Alliance Centre works to support people as they achieve both. In a world where measuring success can often be the focus point for others, we know that success is in healing. Healing is not a protocol, it is a process of whole-hearted connection, time, safety, caring and honesty. It is a nervous system event, not a statistical one. It happens in relationship, not in tasks and benchmarks.

*The Cork Alliance Centre "was a place where I could come that I could feel safe in an unsafe world"*  
*Former Client BA*

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As President Michael D Higgins stated at our 2016 Conference *"This work is critical, and the benefit of your work cannot be overestimated, and it will not just last for a day, it is something that will endure and it is a crucial contribution, a building block, towards building the ethical society in which we all want to share, in all our imperfections and the versions of our wounded selves."*

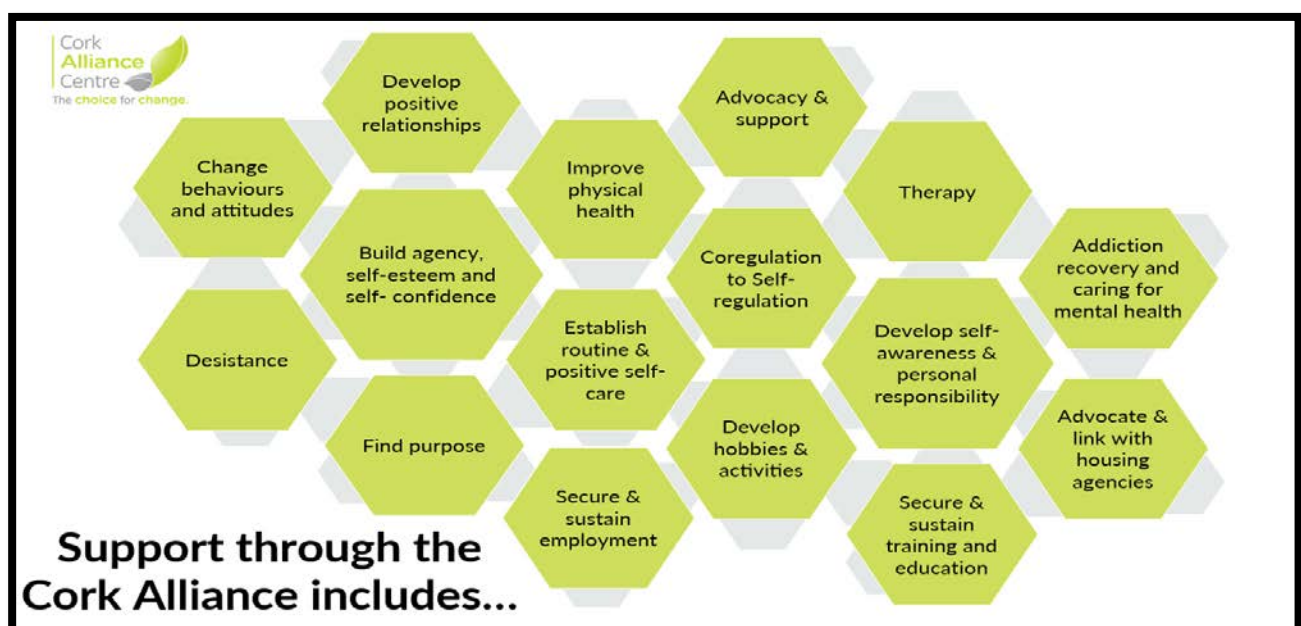
## Desistance and Integration Support Programme

The Desistance and Integration Support Programme is available to all soon-to-be and recently released prisoners returning to or living in the Cork area. Access to the Centre is voluntary. While referrals are made through the Probation Service, we welcome referrals from the Irish Prison Service ISM, Psychology, Addiction and Resettlement services, together with self-referrals, referrals from family members, and from community-based service providers who are concerned about someone in prison or recently released.

Our practice framework is grounded in the academic research on desistance and guidelines on using a person-centred strengths-based, trauma informed approach. The work of the Cork Alliance Centre is much more than providing referrals, it establishes supportive relationships for change, where everyone we work with is supported to live a crime free life and develop the skills and resources to do so. In recognising the individuality of each person's needs, people's involvement with the Centre is not time defined and grows and develops with the person as their circumstances change.

### *The Cork Alliance Centre "means absolutely everything, it saved my life" DISP Client C*

Prisoners exiting custody and returning to mainstream society are confronted with a range of personal, economic and social challenges. According to O'Donnell et al (2008) "60 per cent of those with prison experience in the recent past will be re-imprisoned." These challenges can minimise the likelihood of a successful and crime-free integration with the broader community. Rehabilitative services and support provided both before and after release can improve a prisoner's chance of successful integration into the community. Interventions to address persistent offending require a multi-faceted and multi-agency approach, which can impact upon a broad range of risk factors for that one individual.

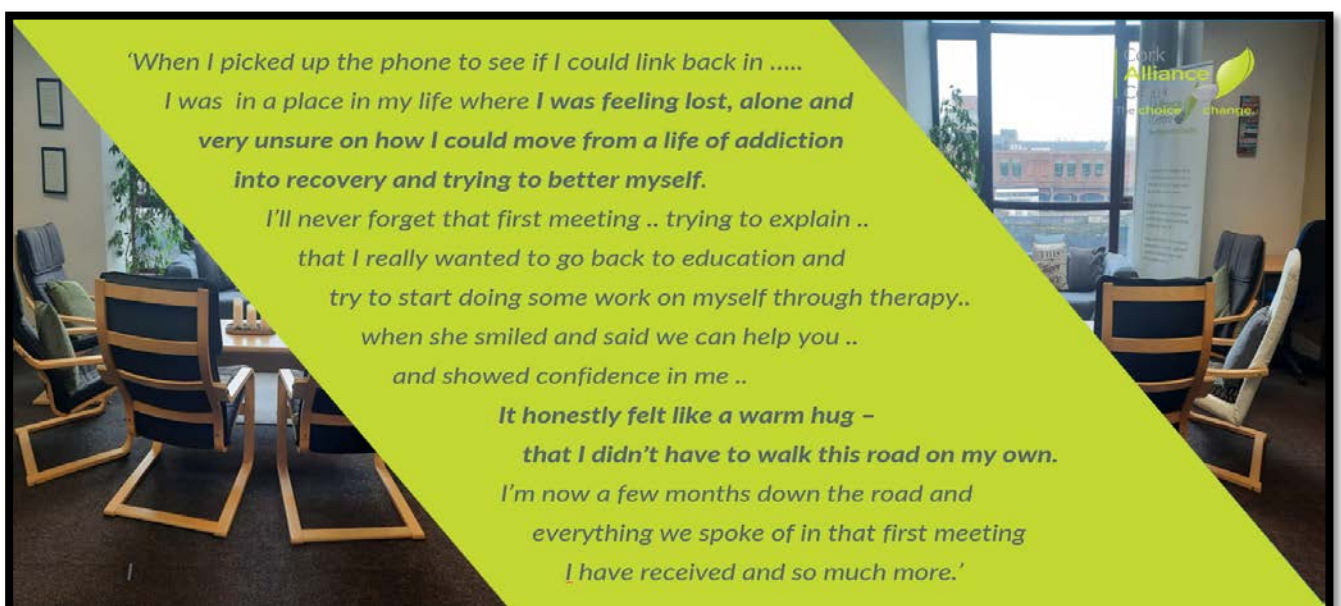


## DISP Intervention

DISP is open to all people from Cork who have been in prison. Together with supporting people to address their offending behaviour, the team work to support people as they seek to build a constructive and connected life. The support is offered on a one-to-one basis, as personal plans are developed, realised, and built upon. As the Centre works with a person on all aspects of their life, a better 'wrap around' service is provided, linking in where appropriate with other agencies and departments in a more joined up service.

The services of the Cork Alliance Centre are grounded in positive and respectful relationships, when we truly connecting with someone, our work is effective and sustainable. Within that the services we offer include

- Support and motivation work, where among other areas addressed are
  - Offending behaviours
  - Thinking skills
  - Integration skills
  - Harm reduction
  - Coping mechanisms
  - Self-regulation skills
  - Addiction/recovery work
  - Socialisation skills
- Supporting access to professional counselling and acupuncture
- Linking and supporting access to source, secure and sustain
  - addiction treatment programmes and services
  - trainings, education and literacy support,
  - employment schemes and employers
  - accommodation via voluntary and state organisation
  - financial supports
  - parenting and family programmes
- Highlighting emerging trends and developments among people who use our service and wider community



People for who prison has been part of their journey, live complex lives – often with adverse childhood traumas, traumatic events in adult life, living with multiple addictions and poor mental health, dysfunctional family lives, poverty, leaving school early and deprived communities. To affect change means empowering people to be active in their own lives (building agency and self-efficacy). In a disabling world, where decisions are often made ‘about and for people’, a ‘with people’ approach is vital. The disconnect that often occurs long before prison takes time to repair and rebuild, given these complexities the Centre provides a means for people get to know themselves better, to strengthen themselves and build agency and self-efficacy in an empowering process.

*"They believed in me until I could believe in myself, they supported me through the challenges and celebrated my wins"*  
*DISP Client D*

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The foundations of the Cork Alliance Centre are based in a shared-caring approach, where with the agreement of the person, support and assistance is garnered from state, semi-state and voluntary organisations and their representatives.

## **DISP Intervention and the Probation Service Strategy**

The Cork Alliance Centre supports the values of the Probation Service, as outlined in the Probation Service Statement of Strategy 2024-2026 - Changing Lives in Our Communities for Safer Futures of

- Accountable
- Empowerment
- Collaboration
- Inclusivity
- Compassion

Further to that, within the Probation Service Statement of Strategy 2024-2026, the Cork Alliance Centre strives to support the Probation Service in each of its strategic pillars and directly with

- Pillar 1: Enhancing Community Safety,
- Pillar 3: Building Collaboration and Engagement and
- Pillar 4: Enabling Social Inclusion.

The specific commonalities in our strategic actions with the Probation Service are

- **Strategy 1.3** Strengthen and further develop our approach to through-care for those subject to Probation Service supervision on release from prison and Oberstown Children Detention Centre.
- **Strategy 1.4.** Align and strengthen our multi-agency work processes, prioritising risk of harm.
- **Strategy 3.1.** Actively engage with the Department of Justice and criminal justice partners to maximise the effectiveness of supervised community sanctions and measures in achieving a safer and fairer Ireland.
- **Strategy 3.2.** Work with our network of community-based organisations to further develop and deliver dynamic services that are responsive to the needs of a modern probation service.

- **Strategy 3.4** Develop an enabling environment that supports collaboration and information exchange with key partners to advance the work of the Service.
- **Strategy 4.1** Ensure the Probation Service is accessible and responsive to the needs and circumstances of our diverse clients
- **Strategy 4.2** Develop mechanisms to embed lived experience, victim and community voices to inform and enrich our work
- **Strategy 4.3** Establish opportunities and pathways to mainstream services in the community and advocate for the inclusion of our clients in all relevant national strategies.

The commonalities between the Probation Service strategic actions and the work of the Cork Alliance Centre focus on participant support and enhancing interagency cooperation in the rehabilitation. The specific focus on supports is central to both organisations, as we aim to facilitate effective supports and proactive sentence, pre-release and post-release planning and implementation. The Probation Service actions to facilitate collaborative relationships and collaborative multidisciplinary work, is directly supported by the Cork Alliance Centre across the board.

*"She didn't give up (on me) ... she was always there ...if she hadn't been there, I don't think I'd be where I am today"*

**DISP Client F**

## DISP 2024

253 people were in contact with DISP in 2024, of which 98 remained actively engaged at year end.

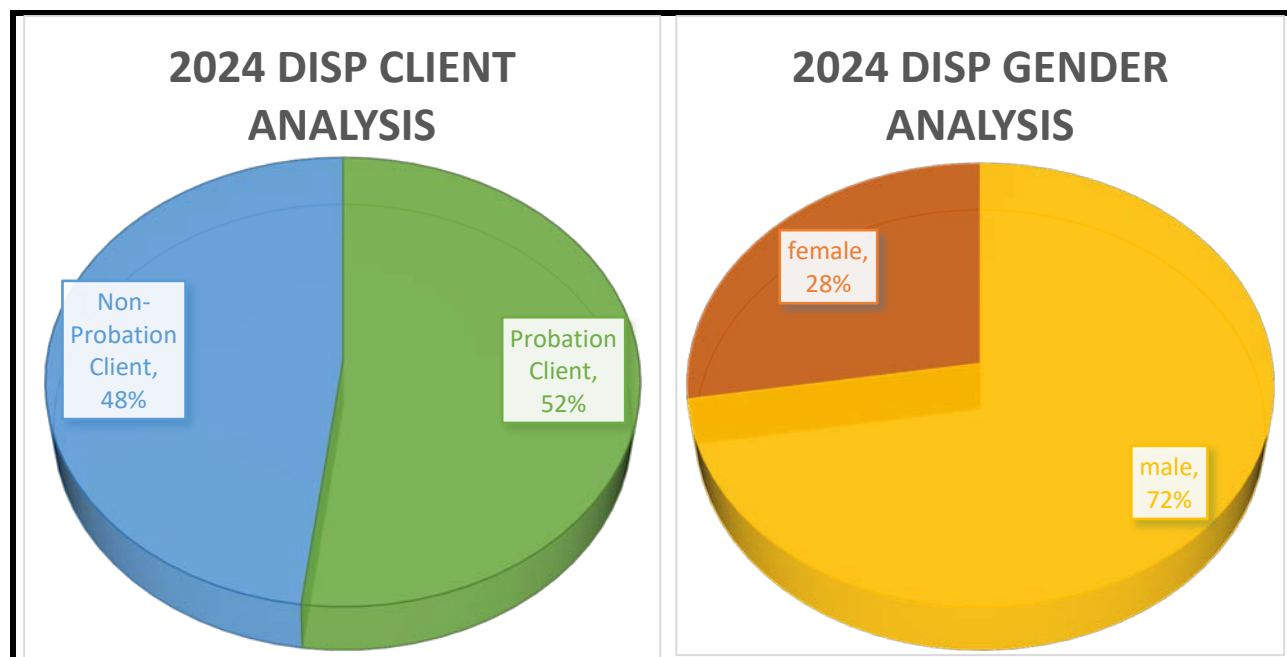
| DISP Analysis 2024                             | Total Referrals |             | Probation Referrals |            | Non-Probation Referrals |            |
|--|-----------------|-------------|---------------------|------------|-------------------------|------------|
| Active Participants at year end                | 94              | 37%         | 50                  | 38%        | 44                      | 36%        |
| Awaiting placement                             | 4               | 2%          | 1                   | 1%         | 3                       | 2%         |
| Successful Completion                          | 23              | 9%          | 13                  | 10%        | 10                      | 8%         |
| Referred On                                    |                 |             |                     |            |                         |            |
| Brief intervention in the community            | 58              | 23%         | 26                  | 20%        | 32                      | 26%        |
| Brief intervention in prison                   | 17              | 7%          | 10                  | 8%         | 7                       | 6%         |
| Engaged 1-6mths intervention                   | 19              | 8%          | 8                   | 6%         | 11                      | 9%         |
| Extensive intervention in the community 6mths+ | 18              | 7%          | 15                  | 11%        | 3                       | 2%         |
| Deceased                                       | 2               | 1%          | 1                   | 1%         | 1                       | 1%         |
| Disengaged while Awaiting Placement            | 18              | 7%          | 7                   | 5%         | 11                      | 9%         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                   | <b>253</b>      | <b>100%</b> | <b>131</b>          | <b>52%</b> | <b>122</b>              | <b>48%</b> |

*"My life is completely turned around; I've given up the life of crime for a better life today... I have a freedom within that I never had"*

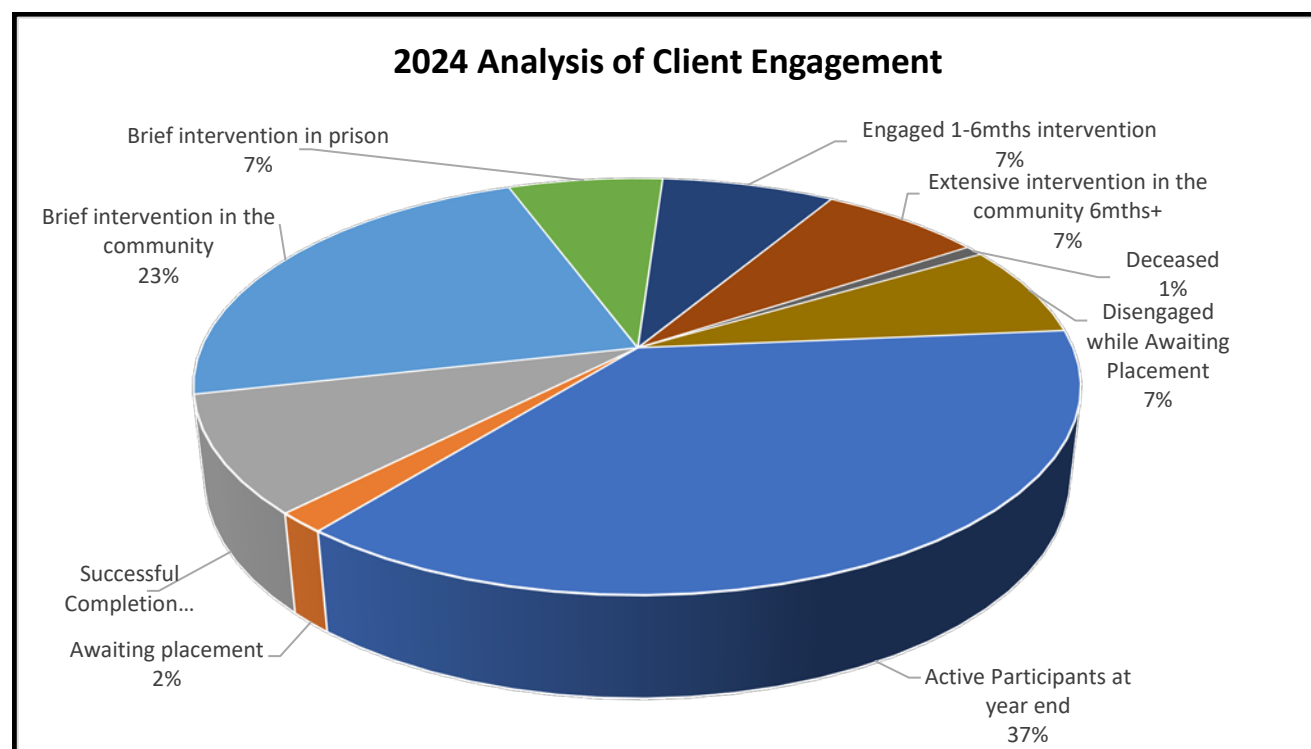
**DISP CLIENT F**



In line with the prison population, most referrals in 2024 were men, with 28% of our referrals being women. The substantial increase in women is primarily due to our regular presence in Limerick Women's Prison and the pilot project of a specialized Probation Service response for women serving short sentences for women at Limerick Prison includes a structured temporary release scheme .



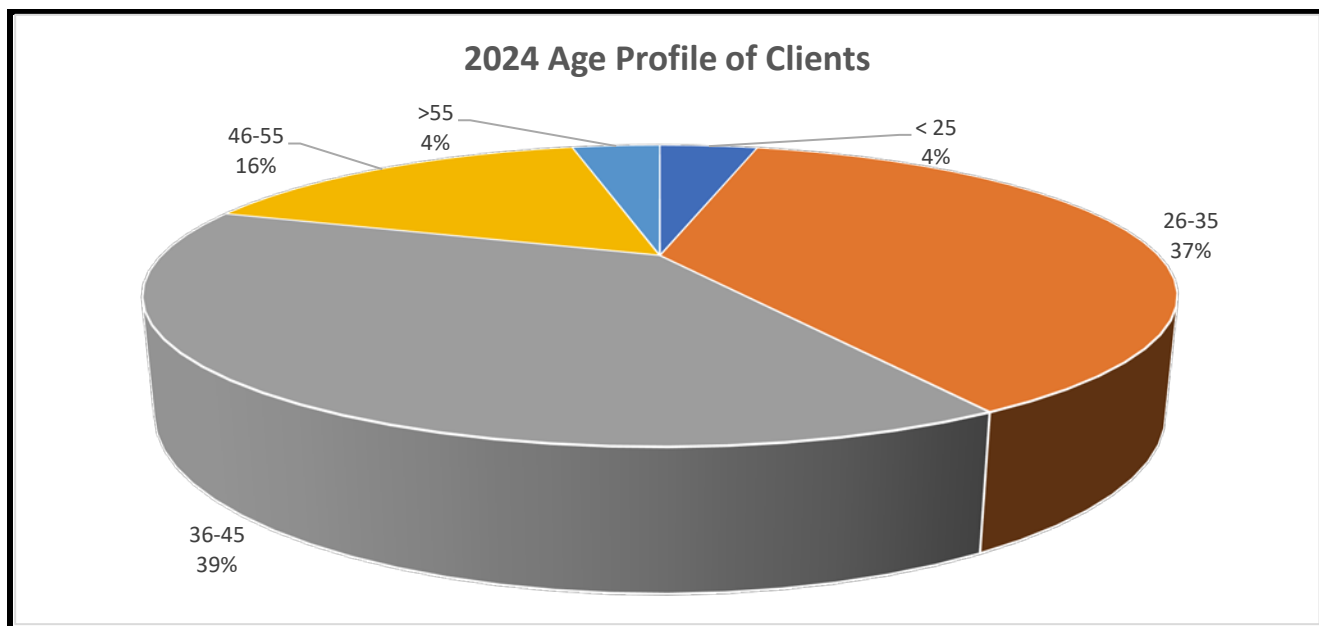
In 2024, 37% remain actively engaged with the service, with 44% of people engaged with the service, either as brief interventions or for more substantial pieces of work. The reasons for this are broad and include family commitments, sufficient improvement to maintain status quo, or addiction relapse. Unfortunately, two people died while engaged with our service in 2024.



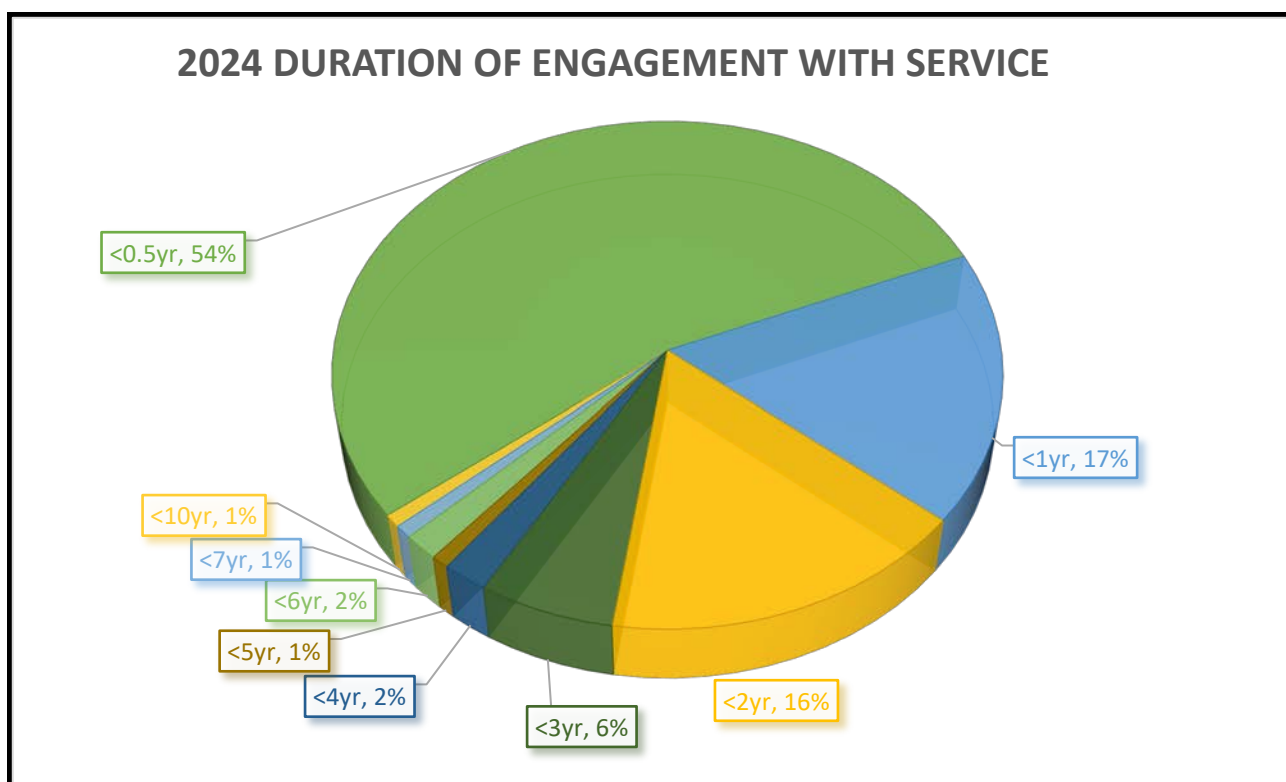
All participants are afforded the opportunity to return to the programme at a later date, if they so wish.



Therein providing scope to continue to address their presenting needs, their behaviours and be better grounded in their recovery. The main age profile of people who access our service are 26-45 years of age – accounting for 76% of people who access the Centre.



People spend up to 3 years accessing the service (93%), those who go onto college (15 people in education and training in 2024) tend to remain engaged with the service as their ongoing supports needs differ from their initial reasons for engagement, nonetheless the self-determination and efficacy to sustain ‘second chance’ education can be daunting in itself. Further to that, as with taking on student-hood to garner employment after college can involve substantial personal development to address the stigmas a conviction history brings.



## CSS Programme

The pre-existing experience, expertise, and skill-base of the Cork Alliance team of working with people on release from prison (for all sentence durations) ensured that the formation and foundation of the CSS programme in 2013 was grounded in research, best-practice, and ability. Therein the scheme is best placed to provide strongest outcomes for both the people referred to the programme and the Irish Prison Service, as both our funder and programme partner, while always mindful of the safety and security of the individual and wider society.

In partnership with the Irish Prison Services since 2013, the Cork Alliance Centre operates the Community Support Scheme (CSS) within Cork Prison, the Midlands Prison and Portlaoise Prison. It is a community-based programme for the “operation of temporary release programmes on a structured, planned basis where it is earned by good behaviour and engagement with services” for prisoners serving of 3-12 months. The programme also operates an inter-prison assessment process, with referrals via our partner organisations of Care After Prison (Dublin), PALLS (Limerick) and IASIO (Roscommon) for prisons in other regions on the guidance of the Irish Prison Service.

Prisoners exiting custody and returning to mainstream society are confronted with a range of personal, economic and social challenges. According to O'Donnell et al (2008) *“60 per cent of those with prison experience in the recent past will be re-imprisoned.”* These challenges can minimise the likelihood of a successful and crime-free integration with the broader community. Rehabilitative services and support provided both before and after release can improve a prisoner's chance of successful integration into the community. Interventions to address persistent offending require a multi-faceted and multi-agency approach, which can impact upon a broad range of risk factors for that one individual.

*"Honestly, it's probably one of the best times in the week coming to meet my Support Worker"*  
CSS Client AA

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## CSS Intervention

The Community Support Scheme (CSS) offers a short-term practical intervention linking those availing of the early/ temporary release programme to services and service providers within Cork or the county they are returning to. The temporary release contract is made between the Prison Service and each individual, while the Cork Alliance Centre facilitates the functioning of the programme of support in the community. This constructive community-based alternative to imprisonment is a means of positive sentence management offering a chance for change for the prisoner in an effort to break the cycle of repeated short-term imprisonments. The opportunity to serve a sentence in the community rather than in prison is a short-term practical intervention linking those availing of this early (temporary) release programme to services and service providers within their home locality, to improve the individual's

chances of sustaining life outside of prison.

## CSS Intervention and IPS Strategy

The CSS supports Strategic Pillar 1- Prisoner Pathways of the Irish Prison Service Strategy 2023-2027 - to “*evolve existing and develop alternate prisoner pathways to better reflect sentence types, increase capacity within the system and achieve better outcomes for prisoners*”. The Strategic Aims within this pillar that the Community Support Scheme has a role to play in are

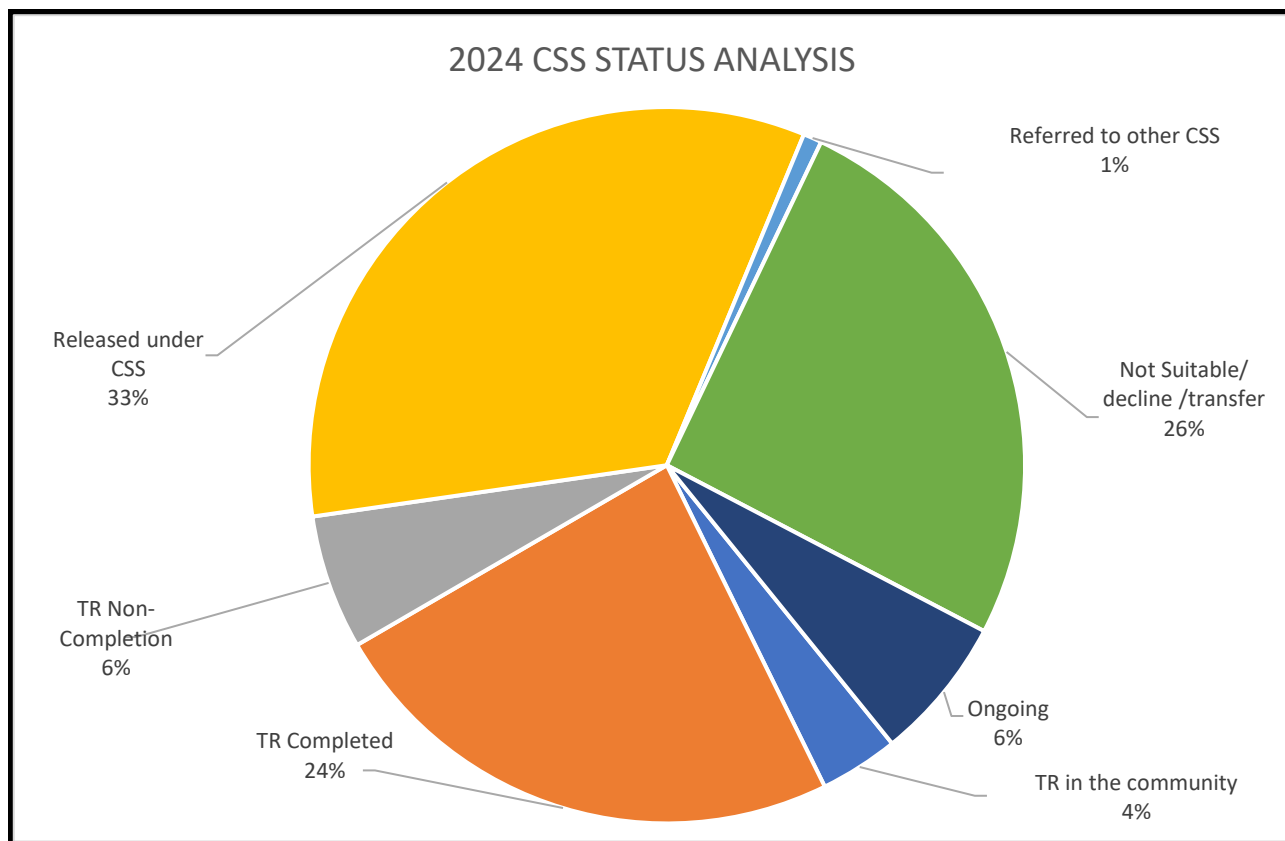
- Alternate Prisoner Pathways and
- Enhanced Prisoner Services and Outcomes

The commonalities between the Irish Prison Service strategic actions and the work of the Cork Alliance Centre focus on prisoner support and enhancing interagency cooperation in the rehabilitation of offenders. The specific focus on prisoner support is central to both organisations, as we aim to facilitate the effective and safe transition of prisoners from custody to community through enhanced collaborative relationships and proactive sentence planning.

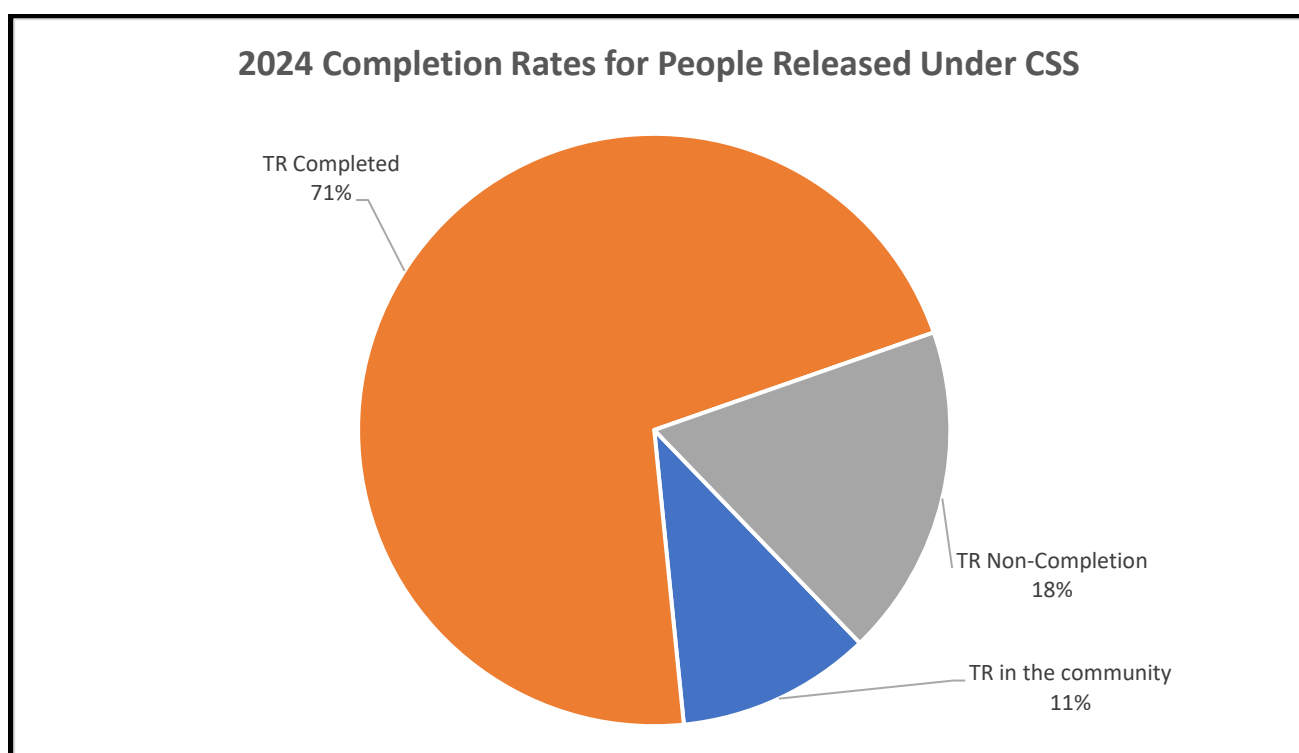
## CSS under Cork Alliance Centre 2024

In 2024 there were 317 referrals to CSS, of those 54% were assessed as suitable for temporary release under the scheme. Of those released 77% were successful at year end, with an additional 9% on the scheme in the community. The decrease in both people referred and released under CSS is a reflection of the prison population at the time.

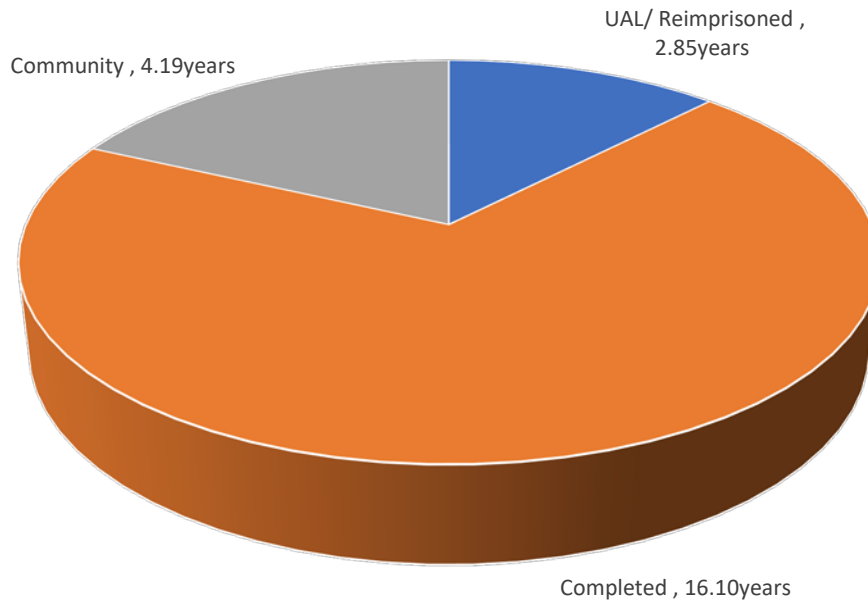
| CSS Analysis 2024                        | People referred to CSS | % Total Releases |
|--|------------------------|------------------|
| People On Temporary Release at Year End  | 17                     | 11%              |
| People Completed Temporary Release       | 114                    | 71%              |
| People Not Completed Temporary Release   | 29                     | 18%              |
| <b>Total 2024 Released under CSS</b>     | <b>160</b>             | <b>100%</b>      |
| Referred to other CSS projects           | 4                      |                  |
| Not Suitable for CSS                     | 122                    |                  |
| Ongoing Assessment in Prison at Year End | 31                     |                  |
| <b>Total 2024 Referrals to CSS</b>       | <b>317</b>             |                  |



Of those released 71% completed successfully, with a further 11% active in scheme in the community at year end. Therein only 18% of those released under the scheme in 2024 were returned to prison. People deemed not suitable for CSS primarily had domestic violence convictions or had more charges pending that extended their time in prison or had mental health challenges that would make the terms of CSS release too arduous. The homelessness crisis has also impacted the programme as without a safe place to live people cannot be released on the scheme.

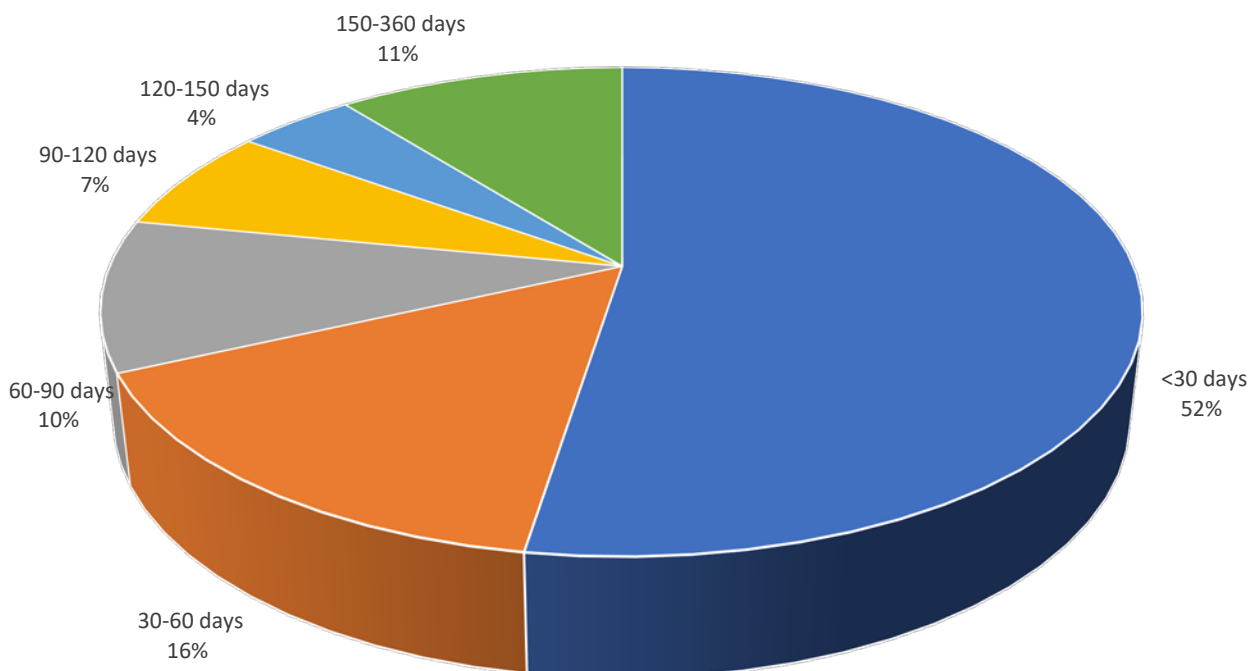


## 2024 Duration of Sentences Served in the Community



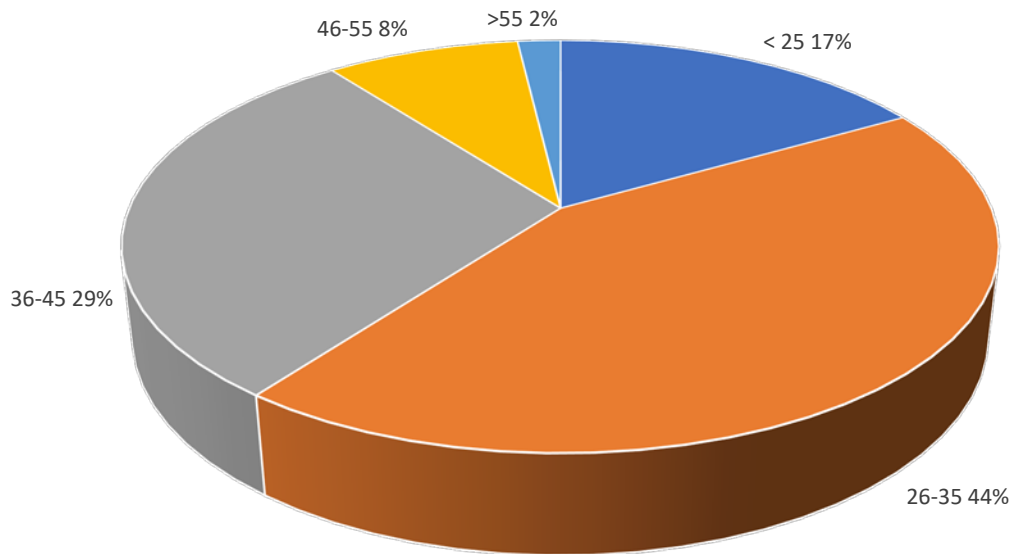
78% of sentences served in the community were for less than 3 months.

## 2024 Analysis of Sentence Served in the Community



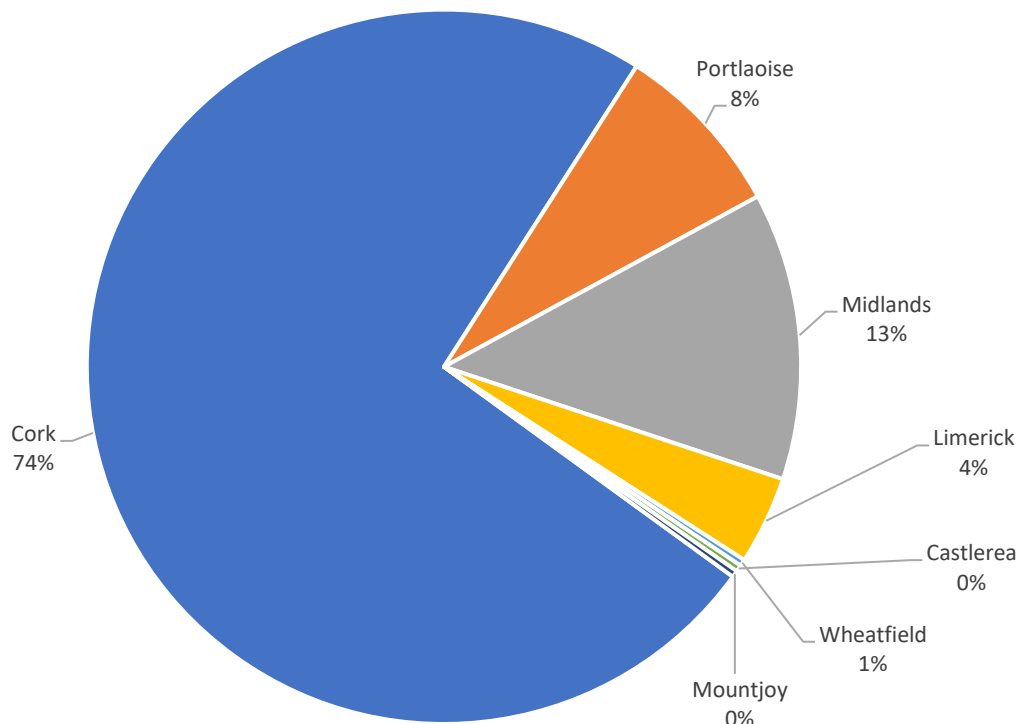
3% of people referred in 2024 were women, primarily due to the pilot project of a specialized Probation Service response for women serving short sentences for women at Limerick Prison includes a structured temporary release scheme. The age profile of people referred to the programme is primarily 26-45 years as they make up almost 73% of the referrals, with under 25-year-olds representing 17% of referrals.

**2024 Age Profile of CSS Referrals**



The provision within the national scheme for the community transfer of referrals based on their home community, meant that 74% of the 2024 referrals are from Cork Prison with 21% representing The Midlands and Portlaoise Prisons, with the remaining prisons accounting for 5% of people referred.

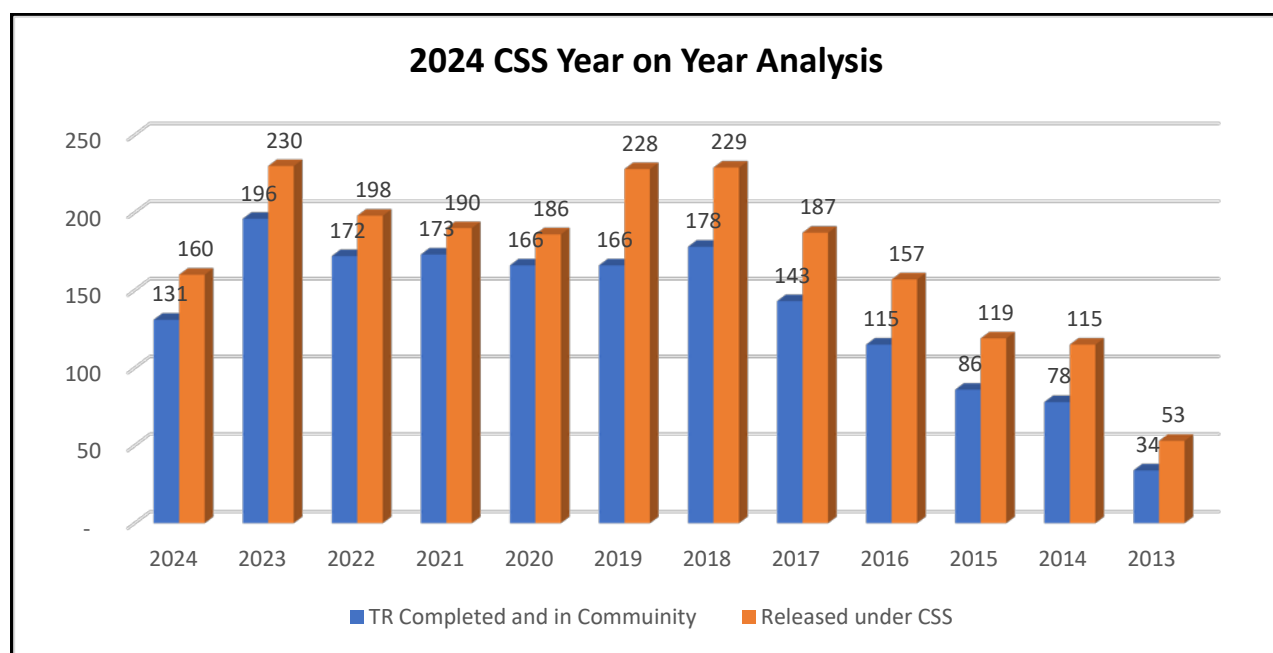
**2024 People Released under CSS by Prison**





## CSS Year on Year Review

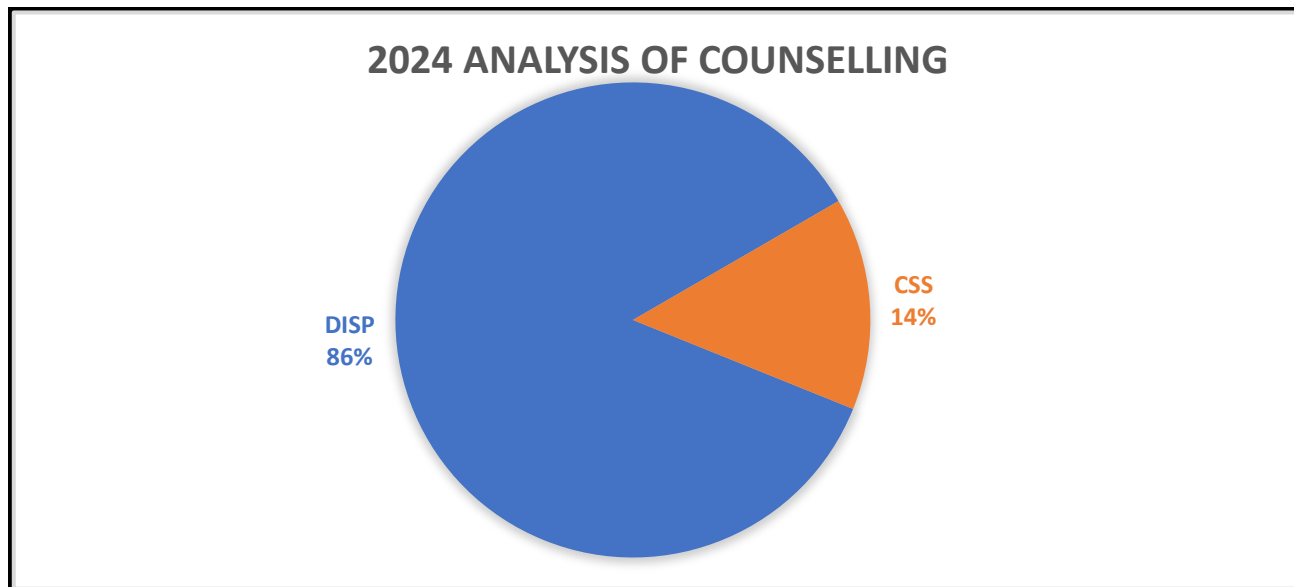
When reviewed since the programme inception in 2013 we can see its consistent success.



| Year   | 2024 | 2023 | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| % of totals referrals released under CSS         | 50%  | 54%  | 63%  | 57%  | 59%  | 47%  | 48%  | 49%  | 55%  | 61%  | 71%  | 96%  |
| % of completions of referrals released under CSS | 82%  | 85%  | 87%  | 91%  | 89%  | 73%  | 78%  | 76%  | 73%  | 72%  | 68%  | 64%  |

## Psychotherapy and Acupuncture Interventions

Of the psychotherapy sessions arranged in 2024, there was 90% attendance. Therapeutic interventions were facilitated for 40 people across the project - 33 participants on the DISP programme and 7 participants on the CSS programme. Each programme funds its own therapy.



Each Tuesday morning acupuncture is available in the Cork Alliance Centre. The non-talk therapy combined with a group meditation allows for a holistic therapeutic approach to our work.

## RPO Training Workshop

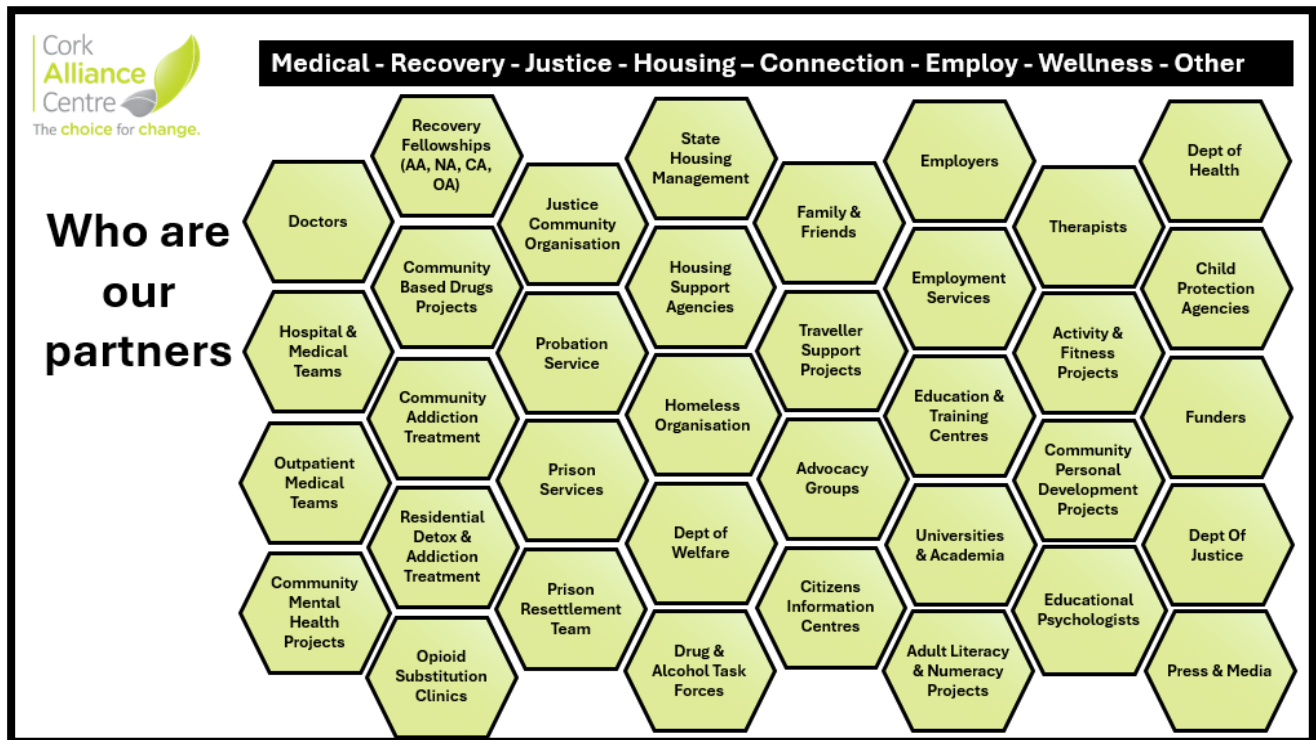
Amongst other actions that have arisen from our advocacy work, include a partnering with the Irish Prison Service Training College to facilitate a Voice of the Prisoner Workshop with all Recruit Prison Officers (RPO) – in 2024 we facilitated 10 workshops. The workshop is co-facilitated with one of the people we worked with previously.

The workshop allows the RPOs an opportunity to better understand life inside and peoples journey into and out of prison. As we explore the desistance and change process, we reflect and inform RPOs on the potential *footprint* they leave on the life of each person they meet in prison, and to understand that with the right supports people can change and are more than the sum of their convictions.

While returning to a prison environment (albeit the IPS college) is a daunting experience for many former prisoners, this workshop attracts the attention of *would-be* volunteers to participate in it, as they see it both as a valuable intervention and an opportunity to show their true self within the prison and justice system.

## Partnerships

None of the work of the Cork Alliance Centre is done in isolation. In that our partner organisations include



- Partnerships allow us to work strategically, in solidarity and service.
- Collaborations are essential for addressing the complex and interconnected needs of people on release - ranging from housing and employment to mental health care, addiction recovery, and social reintegration.
- By partnering across sectors, we can build holistic, person-centred approaches that are more effective than siloed efforts.
- Working in solidarity means acknowledging the systemic barriers faced by people and centring their voices in the design and delivery of services. This fosters dignity, empowerment, and agency, rather than reinforcing cycles of marginalisation.
- When services are grounded in mutual respect and shared responsibility, partnerships become a means of transformative support, not only helping individuals rebuild their lives but also strengthening community well-being
- Ultimately, by thinking and acting collectively, we co-create pathways to justice, healing, and long-term stability for individuals and communities affected by imprisonment.

## Advocacy

As we endeavour to provide a voice for our people and our work, we participated in a wide range of activities across 2024

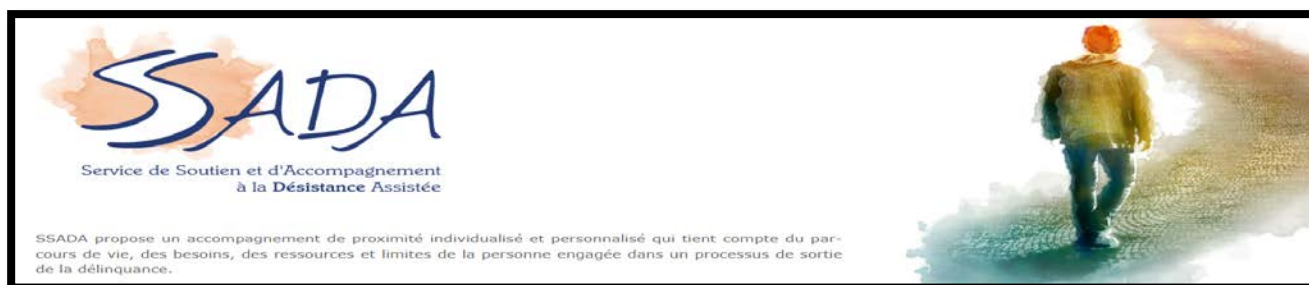
Alongside the Irish Penal Reform Trust, we spoke to the **All-Party Oireachtas Group on Penal Reform** meeting chaired by Alan Farrell TD, on both the work of our Centre as a whole and on the specific work of the Community Support Scheme we operate in partnership with the Irish Prison System



Sheila Connolly is the Community Representative for Ex-prisoners and Homeless on the **Cork Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force**



Cork Alliance supported the **Belgium Houses of Justice** design their desistance-based approach to work with ex-offenders, at its launch in 2024 they kindly noted how the work of the Cork Alliance Centre "has been such inspiring for us".





Despite the untimely death of one of **Paul O'Rourke** in 2023 his wisdom, knowledge and thoughtful insights on homelessness post prison, shine through in the **legacy article** he cowrote titled The ["Soul-Destroying" Release from Prison into the Void: A "Walking Map"](#) Highlighting Some of the Systemic Drivers of the Prison-Homelessness "Swinging Door" in the Republic of Ireland by Paul O'Rourke, Katharina Swirak and Ute Krenzer. The article is a follow-on piece to the [Clean Slate Cork](#) research project with UCC and Cork Alliance.



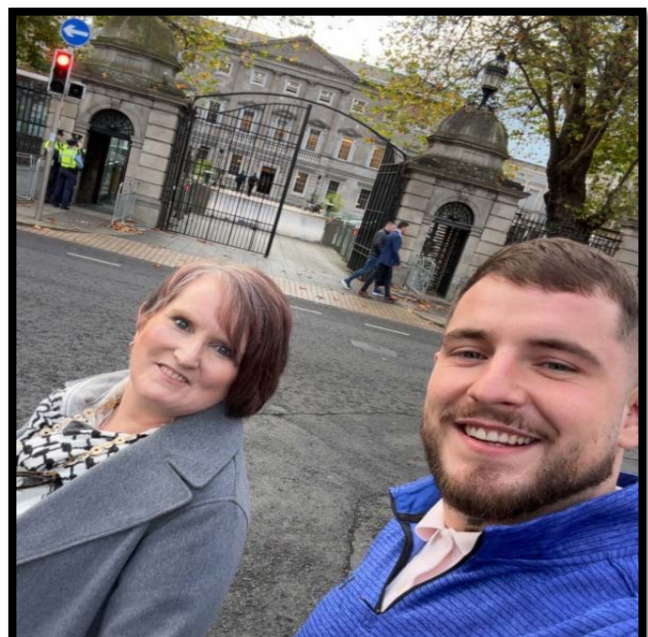
In recognition of the work of the Cork Alliance Centre, Sheila Connolly was nominated as **Cork Person of the Year for May 2024**



We were invited by Dr Mary Rogan, to Trinity College Dublin to meet the **California Legislative Womens Caucus** to discuss our work with women who have been in prison and how we support change. Together with women who have accessed our supports we shared our experience, knowledge and insights with the Womens Caucus and in doing so we all hope to have effective some change.



As one of the primary organisations - together with As I Am, ADHD Ireland, Irish Prison Service, IPRT, TCD - partaking in Phase 1 of an important and ambitious project, aiming to implement a **new model of care for neurodivergent people in custody** lead out by Senator Lynn Ruane, we attended the launch of the Report produced by Dr Orla Gallagher on Phase 1 in **Leinster House**.





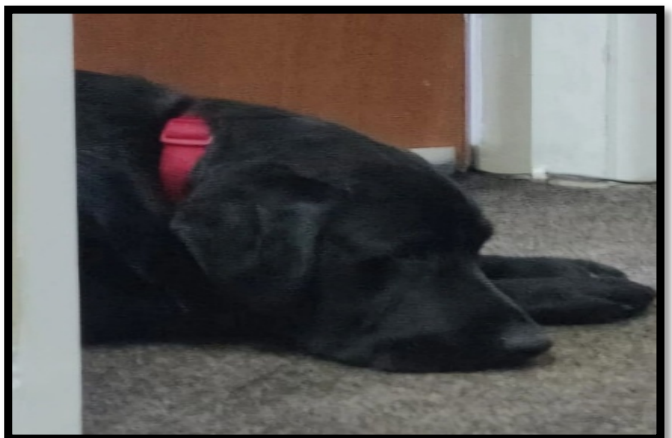
At the request of our colleagues in the **Probation Service in the Munster region** Vicky Seaman, a Support Worker with the Cork Alliance Centre and a PhD Criminology candidate at University College Cork, presented an overview of her research into the broad life experiences of **women in the criminal justice system**, incorporating the voices of frontline workers.



As part of the Irish Prison Service hosting of the **Prison Service of Singapore**, together with some of our clients we spent an afternoon with the delegation discussing our work with them, sharing experiences and learnings and exchanging ideas



Finally in 2024 we welcomed some students on placement from **Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland (AADI)**. As the dogs near the end of their training it is an added bonus to both the staff and clients of the Cork Alliance Centre to host them.



## Conclusion

2024 brought the familiar mix of challenges, progress, and setbacks that define the desistance journey. One of our ongoing priorities is ensuring that support for those who use our service is delivered promptly and appropriately. We remain deeply aware of the trauma and difficulties people face as they strive for change, and this has strengthened our commitment to trauma-informed practices and approaches.

Wider than the scope of our own work is the shortage of accommodation – both long-term and emergency. Without adequate and appropriate housing people are held in *daily survival mode* and it is inherently difficult to work towards change and sustain it without adequate housing. Together with this the challenges of prison overcrowding are compounding the crisis we find ourselves working within. With a focus on over-crowding the vital points of alternative to prison – where it is seen solely as a last resort – are missed. The vast majority of people in prison are there with poor mental health and/or addictions, by supporting people to manage these better in the community through adequate, timely and effective resources only then will we address the overcrowding in prison

The dedication of our staff and the therapists we collaborate with is both tangible and inspiring. Having the right team is fundamental to the work of the Cork Alliance Centre, and we continue to prioritise this. Our staff work alongside individuals navigating complex challenges, and we never lose sight of the courage it takes for people to open up and accept support. This trust is an honour we do not take lightly.

We are privileged to witness people who want—and do—change their lives for the better. We understand the immense effort this requires: the healing, the recovery, and the hard work to make change sustainable. We see the anger, fear, and false personas that must be addressed, and yet we also see transformation happen every day. We know good people who have made harmful choices but who now strive to live honourable, caring, and connected lives. They cannot undo the past, but they can take responsibility and repair harm through positive action.

We are grateful to the Probation Service, the Irish Prison Service, and the Department of Justice for trusting us with this work. Our programmes are shaped not only by research but by the insights and wisdom of those who have accessed our services. Ownership, connection, and responsibility are at the heart of what we do, and our “nothing about us, without us” approach ensures that the voices of our people guide us in delivering the best possible support.

Looking ahead to 2025, we aim to strengthen in-prison engagement before release, as this fosters better relationships, reduces anxiety, and creates a smoother transition with more consistent support.

This work is never easy—for those seeking change or for the staff who support them. Without the commitment and expertise of a highly skilled team, the standard of care we provide would not be possible.

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