



SPÉIRE NUA
HELP, SUPPORT, ADVICE & GUIDANCE





About

In 2023, a consortium of educators and peer mentors were awarded funding by the Irish Prison Services to deliver a range of adult education and training programmes across prison services throughout Ireland. Central to the consortium's work is the Spéire Nua model, which stems from the process of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This approach recognises and values learning acquired outside formal education settings. Individuals with criminal convictions engage with Spéire Nua to develop a Certificate of Commitment to Change through this process.

This certificate recognises the positive transformations individuals have made in moving beyond their criminal past. Designed as a strengths-based model of disclosure, its aim is to reframe the narrative from negative to positive, offering reassurance to those who are open to creating opportunities for individuals with a criminal record.

Led by Damien Quinn, the Spéire Nua social enterprise has significantly advanced this alternative approach. It aids individuals with criminal convictions in transitioning away from a life of crime, re-integrating into society, and entering the labour market. The criminal justice system increasingly acknowledges the value of 'lived experience' as a vital tool for rehabilitation, reform, and guidance. This concept has found applications across various sectors, from prisons to probation services, with its core strength lying in its transformative potential to connect, guide, and inspire.

Spéire Nua has been instrumental in advocating for enhanced recognition and understanding of lived experience, profoundly influencing the prison system's policies and practices. In collaboration with social enterprise Amicitia, they are developing a network of employers, educators, and peers to support individuals leaving prison. They provide a comprehensive service, informed by lived experience, aimed at reducing recidivism rates. This document outlines the training and educational services that the consortium makes available to prisons.

These programmes include motivational speakers who offer prisoners alternative perspectives on overcoming life's challenges, especially post-release. Additionally, there are personal development and life skills courses designed to help those in custody who are striving for change. These courses encourage participants to examine their habits, attitudes, and behaviours while equipping them with new skills for their lives after release.



Personal Development

*We are born in relationship,
We are wounded in relationship,
We are healed in relationship*

- Harville Hendrix

Many of those incarcerated have had difficult life paths, beginning with a myriad adverse childhood experiences. Unresolved trauma from early life, can cause people to shut down parts of themselves, and disconnect from their bodies, emotions and trusting relationships. Such constriction can cause suffering. Many turn to substances to cope with the pain (70% of those entering the Irish prison system have some form of addiction).

When the original wounds go unhealed, the cycle of pain, addiction, dysfunctional behaviour continues. According to CSO findings (2018), just under 50 per cent of people released from prison in 2018 reoffended within one year of release, with 83% of those under 21 reoffending within 3 years.

The Circle - Self Development Program

The potential for healing, growth, and possibility is within people. A step towards 'recovery' is recovering themselves. This involves peeling back the layers and building a healthy relationship with their authentic selves - their bodies, gut feelings, values, and other people. Over a 4-week period, groups go on a transformative developmental journey. They dive into a range of life-related topics in a safe and immersive learning space. Participants equip themselves with the skills, awareness, beliefs, and attitudes to navigate life from an empowered, compassionate place.

The person-centered approach puts groups in the driving seat. By unearthing the group's collective wisdom, they become their own teachers. They walk the talk together, having their growth mirrored back to them along the way.

This personal development course is delivered by Ronan Conway. Over the last 12 years, Ronan has been actively involved in leading self-development programmes nationwide. For the past two years, he has focused on delivering these programmes in Mount Joy Prison. His approach is heavily influenced by his studies with Dr. Gabor Mate, particularly in areas like child development, trauma, addiction, and recovery.

More information on Ronan's transformative work can be found here: <https://www.ronanconway.ie/>

Programme Overview



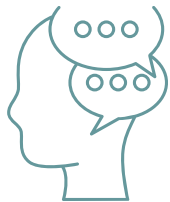
Session 1: Emotional Intelligence Toolkit

This session aims to delve into the 'why, what, how' of emotional intelligence (E.Q). Participants will explore the benefits of E.Q and understand various skills such as active listening, emotional expression, self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. The session includes small group exercises to practice these skills and discussions on integrating them into everyday life.



Session 2: My Path

This session focuses on fostering self-acceptance, self-awareness, and forgiveness. The session begins by setting the context and parameters of the programme. It then guides participants through exploring key influences in their life paths, including significant characters, the role or absence of mentors, and other pivotal figures.



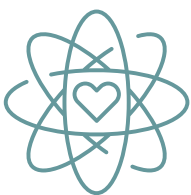
Session 3: Inner Processes

This session is designed to help individuals gain a deeper understanding of their inner workings. This session will cover learning about and differentiating thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, triggers, and beliefs. It aims to develop participants' ability to step back and observe their internal experiences. Additionally, the session focuses on the concept of 'Responding vs Reacting,' teaching ways to return to the present moment.



Session 4: Resilience

This session encourages the group to explore life lessons gained from adversities. The session will start with defining resilience and understanding the 'wisdom behind the wound' – the lessons learned from living a resilient life. Participants will act as teachers for each other, sharing their experiences and insights. Additionally, the session will introduce meditation as a method to build emotional resilience.



Session 5: Values

This session aims to help participants identify the values they wish to embody in their lives. The session will begin by defining what values are and discussing examples of individuals in their lives who demonstrate strong, healthy values. Participants will then be guided to identify four values that are meaningful to them and explore behaviors that align with these values. As a practical application, the session will conclude with 'homework' where participants are encouraged to live in accordance with these values for the following week.



Session 6: Integration

This session is designed for participants to reflect on and integrate what they've learned throughout the program. They will start by discussing the values identified in Session 5 and then reflect on the entire program. The focus will be on how to apply these learnings in their lives, relationships, and both inside and outside of prison. The session will also cover how participants can support each other, act as mentors and role models on the landing, and post-release. Finally, it will acknowledge the contributions of each participant to the program.

Practicalities

These personal development programmes will be implemented with the support of the Irish Prison Services. Based on Ronan's experience of working in Mountjoy Prison the following practicalities should be taken into consideration:

Structure

- Ideally, the program consists of 6 workshops.
- Preferable days are Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday afternoons.
- 4 of the sessions would be delivered on 4 consecutive weeks.
- On weeks 2 and 3, there would be 2 workshops - one in the morning and one in the afternoon.
- If these double sessions aren't possible - the program would be run each week over the course of 6 weeks.

Room

- For each session, I require a room that would be free of interruptions or noise, with enough chairs for everyone.

Clearance

- Each week, it would be great to have my name on the visitors list at the main gate.
- I will have my own projector, speaker, and laptop.
- At the beginning of each week, it would be great to get this equipment cleared to bring through security.

Officers

- An officer who will bring the group to the room each week.
- There is no need for the officer to remain present in session.

Target Audience

- Ideally, people who are aiming up in life, who are keen to learn about themselves, develop new skills, and build their 'emotional muscle'.
- The ideal group size is between 5 and 15 people.

Course Completion

- If you miss the first session, you cannot join thereafter.
- In order to receive their certificate, they will need to be at 5 of 6 sessions.



Life Skills

Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future.

- Paulo Freire

EQUAL Ireland, a not-for-profit charitable trust, is dedicated to promoting equality and facilitating access to higher education for disadvantaged learners. The trust engages with a wide array of partners, including individuals, EU and government agencies, community organisations, employers, and unions, reaching participants across Ireland.

A central aspect of EQUAL Ireland's strategy is their commitment to aiding individual success via an array of supportive learning features. The organisation's tutoring staff possess significant experience in assisting disadvantaged adult learners. Their educational offerings include distance learning or blended learning options in community or group settings. Furthermore, EQUAL Ireland conducts tailored workshops in small group settings, with about 15 participants per group, led by experienced tutors.

Crucial to EQUAL Ireland's courses is the provision of regular, personalised feedback through one-to-one interactions, as well as the facilitation of peer learning and the support of weekly study groups. Their approach veers away from traditional examination methods, opting instead for a more inclusive and supportive educational framework.

Recognising the specific needs of individuals exiting the prison system, EQUAL Ireland has developed two Life Skills Programmes, particularly targeted at supporting those seeking to reintegrate into society. These programmes place a strong emphasis on personal development and acquiring recognised qualifications that are critical for employment, self-employment, and active citizenship. They are designed to enable participants to understand and positively contribute to their communities.

This focus on life skills is vital, as it equips former prisoners with the tools and knowledge necessary for successful reintegration, thereby benefiting not just the individuals but also the wider society they are re-entering. This not only benefits the individuals but also has the potential to create a positive impact on the society they will re-enter.

More information on the work of EQUAL Ireland can be found online: <https://www.equalireland.ie/>

Programme Overview



Life Skills Foundation Programme

This programme typically runs for 2-hours per week across a 4-week period covering topics such as:

Motivation, Goal Setting and Time Planning

Empowering participants to set and work towards positive goals, giving them a sense of purpose and motivation.

Digital Skills and Financial Literacy

Providing participants with the necessary tools to navigate and succeed in today's technology-driven world and to manage and make informed decisions about personal finances.

Communication Skills and looking at Next Steps

Enhancing participants ability to express themselves effectively and to explore additional opportunities for further education and skills development.

At the end of the 4 weeks participants will have been provided with a broad range of skills (digital skills, financial literacy, time management). They will know how to manage and take responsibility for their own learning and most important they will be ready to move forward towards a Higher Certificate Programme.



Certificate in Enterprise and Community Development

This is a comprehensive 8 Month Programme certified by the Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and covering the following topics:

1. Learning to Learn
2. Information Technology
3. Enterprise Development
4. Community Development
5. Communications
6. Sociology

Successful completion of this programme will earn participants a Certificate in Enterprise and Community Development awarded by the Atlantic Technological University (ATU).

Participants often find that their personal and academic confidence has increased as will have their employment opportunities and they will be ready for greater social and community engagement.

On completion, participants will be eligible to progress to a Higher Certificate programme followed by a BA Degree with the Technological University of the Shannon.

It can be done. It has been done, and it can be life changing.



Motivational Speakers

'As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison'

- Nelson Mandela

The criminal justice system has been progressively acknowledging the significance of "lived experience" as a valuable tool for rehabilitation, reform, and guidance. We see this principle reflected in various sectors, ranging from prisons to probation services. The essence of lived experience lies in its transformative ability to connect, guide, and inspire.

As part of a recent tender award there are a range of guest speakers available to deliver various talks to the Prison community to inspire and motivate and to encourage them to take positive action in their lives. These speakers offer alternative perspectives on overcoming various life challenges particularly following release from custody. The benefits of these speakers include:

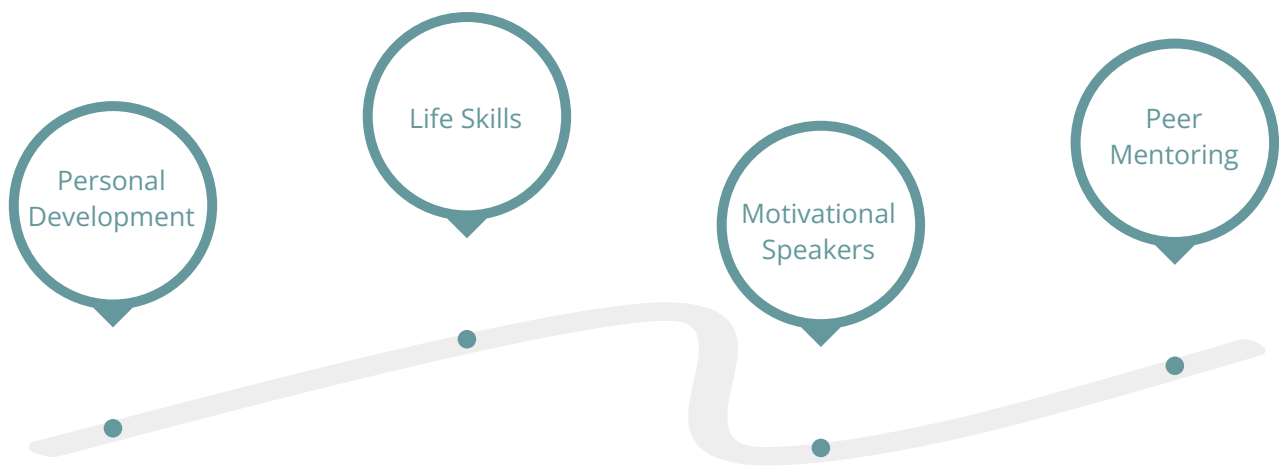
- **Authenticity:** Speakers with personal experience in the prison system can offer genuine insights and understanding that resonates deeply with people in prison.
- **Influence Behaviour:** Listening to individuals who have walked the same path can motivate people in prison towards positive behavioural changes.
- **Empowerment:** Providing a platform for former prisoners to share their stories fosters a sense of purpose and empowerment.
- **Inform Policy & Practice:** Real-world insights can significantly shape the prison system's policies and practices.

Given the evolving nature of the criminal justice system and the promising results seen from harnessing lived experiences, it's opportune for the Irish Prison Service to embrace this change.

By incorporating motivational speakers with lived prison experience, we can potentially redefine rehabilitation, foster a collaborative culture, and pave the way for a more inclusive and effective justice system.

Building upon the foundations of the Life Skills and Personal Development Programmes within the Irish Prison Service, providing space for these speakers aims to further enhance the overall offering of the consortium.

Further details on the Spéire Nua project can be found here: <https://speirenuia.org/>



Conclusion

In conclusion, the consortium, supported by the Irish Prison Services, represents a holistic and transformative approach to prisoner rehabilitation and reintegration into society. At its core, the consortium's programmes, ranging from personal development to life skills and motivational speaking, are designed to equip individuals with the necessary tools and perspectives for a successful transition from prison back into society.

The Spéire Nua model, with its Certificate of Commitment to Change, underpins this approach, recognising the value of learning achieved outside formal education and the potential for positive transformation in individuals. This strengths-based model fosters a shift in narrative, encouraging a move from a past of crime to a future of contribution and growth.

The consortium's multilayered approach addresses various aspects of reintegration. The Personal Development Programme, led by Ronan Conway, focuses on self-discovery and healing, crucial for individuals who have faced trauma and adversity. The Life Skills Programme by EQUAL Ireland provides practical skills and qualifications, essential for employment and active citizenship, enhancing the participants' ability to positively contribute to their communities and the labour market.

The inclusion of motivational speakers, sharing their lived experiences, adds a layer of authenticity and relatability. These speakers not only inspire but also serve as tangible examples of successful reintegration, influencing both the participants and the broader policies and practices of the criminal justice system.

In essence, this consortium represents a comprehensive support system for individuals leaving prison. By focusing on personal development, life skills, and motivational guidance, the programme creates a pathway for learning, growth, and opportunity. This approach not only aids in reducing recidivism but also opens doors for employment and societal reintegration post-release.

It exemplifies a collaborative, experienced-based strategy that can significantly impact individuals and, by extension, the society they re-enter, marking a progressive step in the rehabilitation and reform of the criminal justice system in Ireland.



The Spéire Nua consortium is administered by Amicitia, a social enterprise based in Athenry, Co. Galway. This project provides meaningful training and employment opportunities to support people with criminal histories.

More information on the Amicitia project can be found here: <https://amicitia.org/>

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