

Annual Report – Training Unit – Year 2014

We wish to submit the Annual Report of the Training Unit for 2014. A total of 12 meetings were held and all very well attended.

Committee advised that Irish Prison Service had commissioned special report on review and role of Training Unit to be finalised within 3 months – review to be carried out by Mr Timothy McFadden. Inmate numbers in Training Unit stabilising @ 96. Methadone introduction continuing to go smoothly.

Committee met with Mr McFadden on 20th February and very productive meeting ensued for number of hours, during which, role of Training Unit was discussed in detail – Report to be finalised within three months – by end April 2014.

A training Seminar for all visiting committee members was held on Thursday 27th March, in Brian Stack House, Portlaoise. Workshops were held with members from various committees interacting and exchanging ideas. Lectures were given on mental health issues within prisons and self defence and security issues were played out with committee members participating in role play.

The Red Cross Course within prison is a major success and there were 9 graduates from course at the end April with a new course commencing early May. The metal work shop and picture framing facilities are a major success within Training Unit. Metal shop had recently made 55 ornamental bikes – 50 more on order.

At the request of two committee members, 2 garden seats were made in metal shop and donated to Raheny and Blanchardstown Hospices. One to be donated by Visiting Committee (and committee paid for material costs) and the second was donated by Training Unit staff. This was duly agreed.

Training Unit Committee visited Limerick Prison on Thursday 8th May. Very informative visit – history of prison outlined on tour of prison – kitchen, workshops etc. A very worthwhile programme, detailed to committee by Governor & staff. Family rooms very impressive.

Five prisoners sat state exams in Training Unit. Committee concerned at low number sitting Junior & Leaving Certificate examinations. Those attending DIT and other colleges had completed their exams. Low numbers cause for concern.

Training Unit has very impressive art room with an excellent and dedicated art teacher in situ for many years. An Art Exhibition is held in Training Unit at end of June every year. Over the years many committee members have purchased some very fine paintings.

Committee has continually raised concerns about the months of July / August where heretofore schools in Training Unit were closed and prisoners had lot of time on their hands. However, 3 teachers had agreed to work over school holidays and also a new art teacher will be coming in on voluntary basis.

At Chairpersons meeting in Portlaoise in July - Director General advised that the McFadden

Report into feasibility of the Training Unit will be available to Visiting Committee end September.

Concern was expressed to Governor by some committee members re the amount of waiting time experienced by some inmates awaiting replies from the Parole Board. Governor said he would investigate and expedite matters accordingly. This concern was acted on and resolved without undue delay.

A staff member at Training Unit was highly praised for his involvement with the Unit Soccer Team. Matches were arranged with other prison teams. Unfortunately Training Unit Team heavily defeated by Loughan House.

Some prisoners were commencing work and college in September and would be using leap cards on transport system. They would also be provided with packed lunches giving them a certain sense responsibility with their expenses and economising with sum of money allocated to them.

On Friday 17th October an exhibition of artworks by prisoners in Training Unit and two Post release Centres was held in Hunt Museum, Limerick. The exhibition entitled “ Fallen Birds” was opened by Rugby Pundit, Brent Pope, who is himself a landscape painter. It proved to be a huge success and got some very positive newspaper coverage.

The McFadden Report was discussed in detail at a meeting in early December. Whilst there were many positives in the very comprehensive report two very experienced committee members had reservations on some points outlined in report.

The report entitled “The Review of the Role of the Training Unit” is to be discussed in greater depth at a further meeting.

The Training Unit is being run with greatest efficiency possible. It has state of the art kitchen which has won numerous awards – excellent chefs and nutritious meals provided with dietary requirements of all nationalities included in all menus. Unit freshly painted with great frequency by inmates – cleanliness is of the essence. Unit run in a very humane manner – all staff very open and friendly towards inmates with noticeable air of relaxation and calm recorded by committee members on unannounced visits.

The Visiting Committee wish to thank the Governor, Assistant Governors and all staff for their total co-operation and help at all times. The ultimate goal of all is to rehabilitate and reintegrate, where possible, at a future date, the inmates back to fully functioning members of society.