

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

IRISH COUNCIL FOR PRISONERS OVERSEAS



"THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT THIS YEAR -
IT SAVED MY LIFE"

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INTRODUCTION

Irish prisoners overseas are one of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups of Irish emigrants. They face significant difficulties, including discrimination, language barriers and dealing with unfamiliar legal systems. In some countries prison conditions are a major cause of concern and prisoners may experience extreme hardship, with limited access to food, water and medical treatment.

The Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) works to help reduce the burden faced by these prisoners and their families. Established by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference in 1985, the ICPO continues to operate under the auspices of the Irish Council for Emigrants.

Vision

The vision of the ICPO is of a world where the human rights of Irish prisoners overseas are respected and their dignity is honoured.

Mission

To bring hope to Irish prisoners overseas and their families by helping them to cope with the challenges of imprisonment and to increase their chances of rebuilding their lives after release. This is done by providing pastoral care, information, support and advocacy.

Values

Inclusivity

We work with all Irish prisoners and their families, wherever they are and at all stages of the imprisonment process. We do not make any distinction in terms of religious faith or the nature of the conviction.

Respect

We treat everyone with dignity and respect.

Confidentiality

We ensure the privacy of everyone we work with.

Person-centred

Everyone we work with is treated as an individual and the service provided is tailored to their needs.

Presence

We stay with people on their journey, maintaining a presence for as long as it is needed.



COORDINATOR'S REVIEW

2020 marked the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas' (ICPO) 35th year in operation. Plans to mark this important milestone in the organisation's history including commissioning a piece of research on the needs of prisoner's families and holding a conference at which to launch it, were quickly set aside in March with the onset of the global pandemic.

Covid-19

As with so many others, ICPO responded promptly to this situation – adapting to a work-from-home setting, and identifying priority issues and responses in respect of client need in the vastly changed circumstances. ICPO clients, including family members, experienced a considerable degree of additional stress and anxiety worrying about their loved one contracting Covid-19 in the confined setting of a prison; the cancellation of all prison visits; 23 hour lockdown for months on end, and the inability to access education and offender behaviour courses necessary to progress their sentence.

ICPO prioritised communication and Hardship Fund grants to tackle some of these concerns. Additional payments were made to many clients to enable them to maintain contact with their family, in-cell resources were provided and the ICPO staff availed of new opportunities to communicate with clients in novel ways such as via email or video-call. We also made representations on behalf of prisoners in urgent need of medical care and contacted the prison where serious concerns about the mental health of clients arose.

The pandemic also precipitated funding cuts from a core funder which resulted in a reduction in hours and the level of service provision. Such cutbacks are not sustainable in the medium term. The inability to undertake any prison visits since March 2020 has also negatively impacted on clients, particularly those for whom, a visit from ICPO is the only one they receive. On average, 1,000 prisoners are visited annually.

General Supports

Between the Maynooth and London offices, in excess of 10,000 calls, letters, emails and (to a lesser extent this year) prison visits, to, from or on behalf of prisoners and their families occurred in 2020. ICPO worked with approximately 1,200 Irish citizens imprisoned in 32 countries around the world.

COORDINATOR'S REVIEW

In addition to Covid related concerns, ICPO provided information, support and advice on a range of issues from licences and repatriation to resettlement and access to healthcare. Family support is always a priority issue for ICPO and even more so in 2020, in view of the heightened anxiety and fear so many had for the health of their loved one in prison abroad. We held a virtual Family Information Day that was well attended and will use this model for additional future events, as well as returning to our in-person Day when circumstances allow.

Crisis returns during the pandemic, including deportees who had not lived in Ireland for decades required a lot of additional planning, with a number of clients needing to be advised of and referred to quarantine facilities during the year.

"I have been in a very bad place since the Covid lockdown, little time outside the cells and worry and stress of seeing my cellmates coming down with Covid, some going to hospital and not coming back. ICPO is always there with support whether it is cards and newsletters or letters. I know I will get through this thanks to ICPO."

Policy Priorities

2020 was another disappointing year for prisoners and their families regarding repatriation (prisoner transfer). Whilst applications were processed much more quickly than before it coincided with uniformly negative decisions by the Minister for Justice and Equality. The ability to serve one's sentence in an Irish prison close to family is in their interests as well as societies, and it continues to be a source of much distress that the outstanding legalisation required for some applications and the implementation of the long overdue Framework Decision (2008/909) for others remain unresolved.

ICPO also made a submission regarding spent conviction seeking to have this legislation apply to minor convictions received in other jurisdictions.

A client survey was undertaken in December 2020 and ICPO is making steady progress in achieving the organisation's goals set out in its 2020-2023 strategic plan.

Acknowledgements

It is important to acknowledge the essential support provided to Irish prisoners by Irish embassies and consulates throughout the world. Moreover the collegiality and cooperation of the Dublin based Consular Assistance Unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade greatly enhances our ability to support Irish prisoners overseas.

ICPO is especially grateful to its ongoing funders – the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Sisters of Mercy, without whom we could not provide this service. We are also very grateful to the Gubay Foundation and the AllChurches Trust for their grants at a critical time this year.

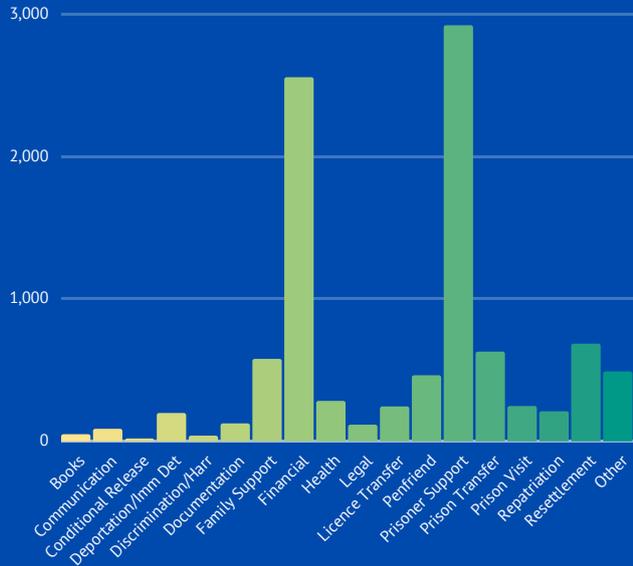
The ongoing commitment and professionalism demonstrated by staff and volunteers alike, remains the bedrock upon which we continue to provide this challenging but essential outreach.

BRIAN HANLEY

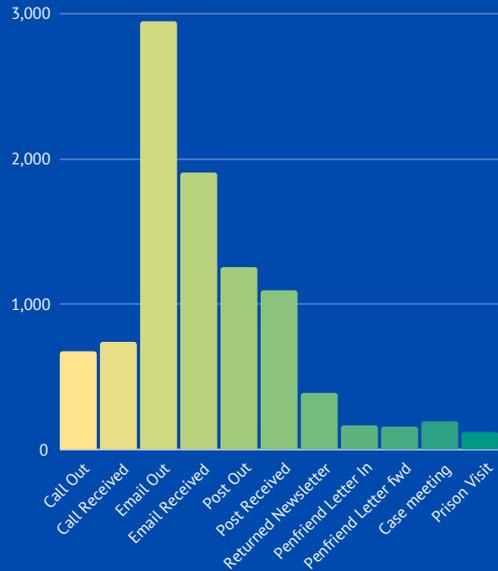
ICPO Coordinator

ICPO STATISTICS 2020

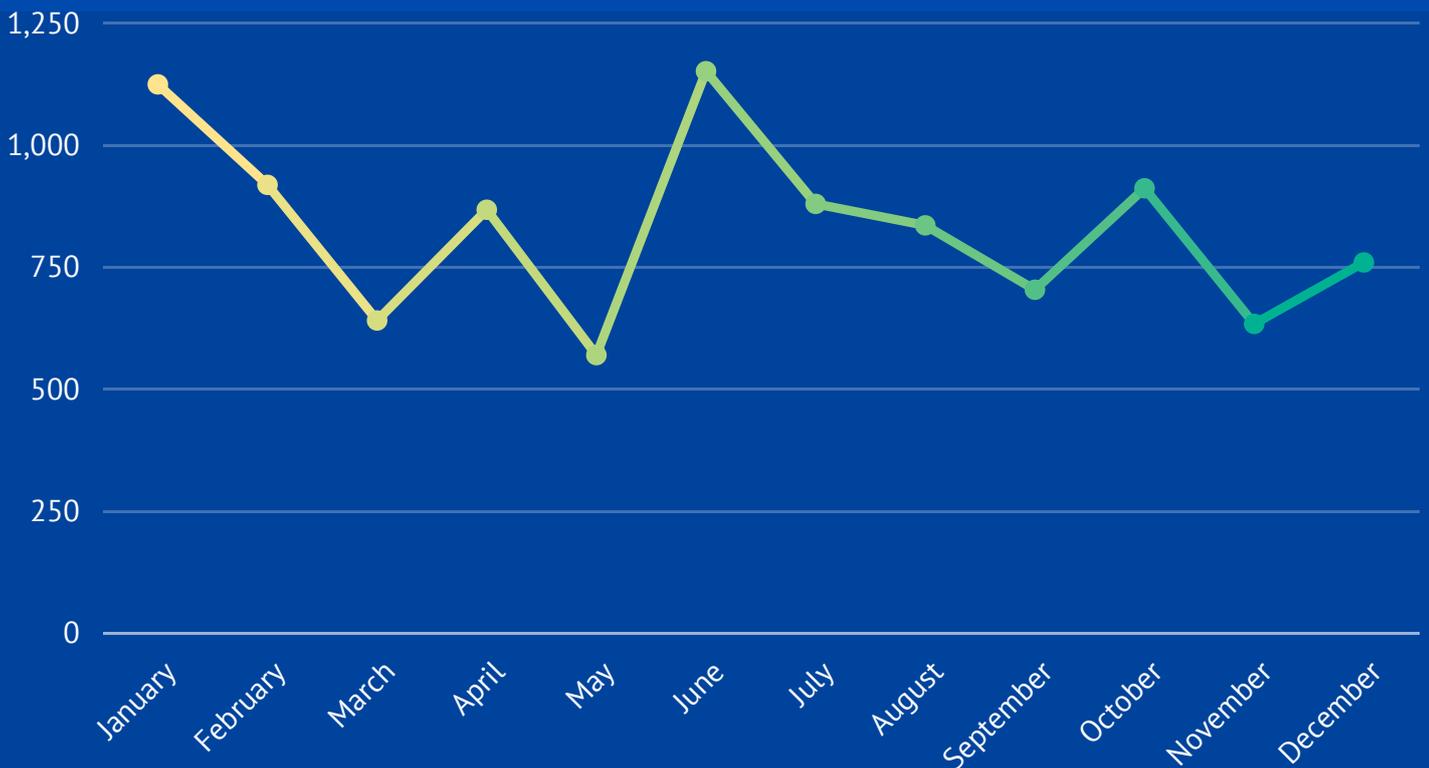
ISSUES



ACTIONS



MONTHLY CONTACTS





**ICPO IS PROVIDING SUPPORT
TO 1,042 IRISH PRISONERS
OVERSEAS**



**ICPO PROVIDED HUNDREDS OF
GRANTS FOR FOOD, MEDICINE,
COMMUNICATION AND
RESETTLEMENT**



**84 NEW CASES WERE
OPENED**



**ICPO IS SUPPORTING IRISH
PRISONERS IN 32 COUNTRIES**



**HARDSHIP FUND GRANTS
TOTALLING \$43,595 WERE
GIVEN TO IRISH PRISONERS
OVERSEAS**



**10,000 LETTERS, PHONE
CALLS & EMAILS WITH
AND ON BEHALF OF IRISH
PRISONERS OVERSEAS**

CASEWORK

ICPO clients require support in relation to a range of issues, including repatriation, deportation, health and legal matters, discrimination, ill-treatment and access to post-release support and accommodation. We advise clients on these issues and work closely with Government Departments, statutory agencies, solicitors, probation officers, prison officials, local authorities and welfare agencies to meet their specific needs. ICPO caseworkers are assigned to particular countries or regions. This enables them to gain experience and expertise in the legal and penal systems in the areas they manage as well as developing a network of contacts who can assist and support the prisoner as needed.

An important part of our work involves making representations on behalf of clients to prison authorities and other relevant parties. In the past year ICPO interventions resulted in a number of clients receiving essential medical treatment. A particular focus since the pandemic has been in supporting ICPO clients to maintain good mental health. This has undoubtedly been challenging for many; having to deal with 23 hour lockdown, difficulties accessing education, work and offender behaviour courses necessary to progress with their sentence and a protracted absence of visits from friends and family. ICPO has adopted new communication methods made available by many prisons including the increased use of email and video calls. We have also provided a significant increase in communication grants to prisoners and made the most vulnerable and isolated prisoners a particular focus.

In addition to providing advice and support, we provide practical assistance to prisoners by allocating funds to help them buy phone credit, stamps, clothing, books and writing materials. The ICPO makes a special effort to write regularly to clients, especially those who have little or no family contact. Prisoners serving long sentences are a particular concern and we maintain regular correspondence with these clients as they move through the prison system. The use of pre-addressed, post-paid envelopes allows clients who have limited funds to maintain contact with the ICPO.

Another key component of the ICPO's work is the provision of family support. Those with a loved one imprisoned overseas endure significant upset and trauma. ICPO devotes considerable resources to facilitating communication between the prisoner and his/her loved ones; to assisting some families in organising visits to see their family member and to providing a listening ear when required. It is often necessary to explain the different prison rules and regimes which can be very difficult to understand.

ICPO has developed an extensive network of prison visitors over many years. These prison visitors may for some, be their only contact with the outside world. Some prison visitors bring food and medicines to Irish citizens incarcerated in the more deprived regions of the world. In addition to these prison visitors, ICPO staff undertake a considerable number of prison visits in the UK, US, Europe, Australia and more recently parts of Asia, the Middle East and South America. Unfortunately, from March 2020 and due to the pandemic, visits to 900 prisoners for the remainder of the year needed to be cancelled.

CASEWORK

"I appreciate all that ICPO do for people like me - having literally no-one to turn to when things get drastic. It has been a crutch at times when I have been insecure and I want to say thank you for your support."

Brian*

In conjunction with the Irish Embassy in Australia, ICPO undertook an information and outreach campaign to establish numbers of Irish prisoners in Australia. As a result, and with the prisoner's consent, they gathered a list of Irish people in prison from the respective state correction services and ICPO wrote to each of them.

Brian was one of the clients that reached out to ICPO following that campaign. Brian is in his mid-50s and is currently serving a 10 year sentence for manslaughter. Brian advised that he had a troubled upbringing and has struggled with drugs and alcohol and has been in and out of prison a lot of his adult life. As a result of Covid-19, international post was suspended but the caseworker was able to arrange video calls to Brian in prison to assess his situation, how he was managing and if he had any family or social support. The video calls helped develop good rapport and enable the ICPO caseworker to establish that he would benefit from a hardship grant and would need intensive support when his sentence is complete, as he has no family back in Ireland. Brian advised that when he heard about ICPO, it "boosted my spirits to know you care".



Sinéad *

Sinéad was sentenced to 4 years in early 2020 in a country in northern Europe. She is appealing her sentence. The ICPO was contacted by Sinéad's grandmother Maureen soon after her imprisonment. Maureen is Sinéad's main family support. She described Sinéad as "frightened and lonely with little or no activities". Since her imprisonment Sinéad has been moved four times and has found it hard to settle. The ICPO sent Sinéad an information pack including information on the prison system there and we keep in regular contact with her by post. We also provide her with a quarterly hardship grant which she uses for regular calls with her grandmother and other family members in Ireland. We also provided a small grant on her behalf to a nearby university to access a course. While life in prison is still difficult for Sinéad, especially as like most prisoners she cannot have family visits due to Covid-19; as a result of the support from ICPO she can call her family regularly and has started language classes to assist her in engaging with prison officials and other prisoners.



CASEWORK

Michael*

Michael was having serious health issues and difficulty accessing appropriate medical assistance including a referral to a specialist (based on an assessment by a clinical nurse practitioner). Letters were written to the prison and contact was made with the Irish consulate outlining our concerns. The consulate provided assistance by contacting the prison. Following these interventions the client received a medical review by the health team; his case was referred to a specialist - although this has been delayed because the nearest medical centre has postponed patient appointments due to COVID-19. His caseworker regularly reviews Michael's health status with him to ensure that his condition is not worsening due to treatment delays.



"That letter has been the only thing I received during this whole sentence. It's the first time in four months I have been able to make a phone call to my family as well thanks to your grant. The posters and prayers have brightened up the cell and really lifted my depressed mood."



“I will always remember Christmas 24 years ago when my life and the lives of so many changed forever. It was a very dark time for so many people because of my actions. Some walked away from me as if we had never known each other but then others came along and filled their place including those at the ICPO. Over 2 decades now and the ICPO are still with me, thank you all in ICPO, past and present.”

FAMILY SUPPORT WORK

The experience of having a loved one in prison can be frightening, confusing and destabilising. Families are thrust into navigating and understanding a foreign legal and penal system; possibly a non-English speaking one. They often struggle to find out if their loved one is okay or which prison they are being detained in.

The pain of separation is hard to bear and often feelings of shame make it hard to discuss it with friends. The prisoner may have children who have now lost contact with their parent and are confused about why. The experience can make families feel vulnerable and isolated and afraid of what others will say. The ICPO aims to counter this by providing direct, personal assistance in a non-judgmental way that gives families the information and confidence to survive what is a difficult journey.

Covid-19 has added to and exacerbated a great many of these strains; with additional worries for families relating to the confined settings of prisons and how the virus can spread in such places; underlying health problems, the increased use of 23 hour lockdown and the toll this might take and the inability to visit their loved in prison.

ICPO supports families in the following ways:

- Advising families on processes around arrest, detention, release, deportation specific to an individual country and providing relevant information while engaging with them about how they are feeling about the situation
- Providing ongoing emotional support to families, both in person and by telephone
- Assisting with the logistics of and providing financial assistance towards the cost of family prison visits and providing communication grants in lieu of visits as a result of Covid-19
- Facilitating the lines of communication between family members and their loved one
- Liaising with external agencies, including government agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs, embassy personnel, probation services, legal and welfare groups, housing authorities and other specialist agencies as appropriate and advocating on our client's behalf to further the level of support provided
- Coordinating virtual Family Information Days to adhere to government Covid-19 guidelines
- Working with prison chaplains, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HNPPS) and others to locate prisoners who have been moved
- Building relationships with Irish welfare associations abroad that may be able to provide localised support to prisoners and to families when they go to visit
- Dealing with lawyers on behalf of the family where there is a need for clarification of costs or other issues
- Meeting with families in person and around the country
- Linking families with UK based resources - for example, Story Book Dads, Email-a-Prisoner and local family support groups
- A designated Family Page in the ICPO newsletter provides interesting and practical advice for families
- Maintaining a series of up-to-date resources on the ICPO website for families to access when needed.

FAMILY SUPPORT WORK

Due to Covid-19 restrictions and to ensure the safety of the families we work with, we hosted our first virtual family day in 2020. There were 30 participants including staff, volunteers, interns, family members and speakers. We provided clear guidelines about how to access the meeting and for families who were not familiar with the technology, we provided an opportunity to practice accessing the meeting beforehand. Although we would have preferred to meet in person, having a virtual meeting afforded us the wonderful opportunity to invite a client who is in a minimal security prison to speak to the families about his experience and the wonderful work he is doing to help others in prisoners in dealing with trauma through meditation and mindfulness. During the meeting, we broke up into smaller groups giving families a chance to talk to caseworkers and to other families who have a loved one in the same region. 17 families took part in the virtual family day.

Below is a small snapshot of the comments from the day:



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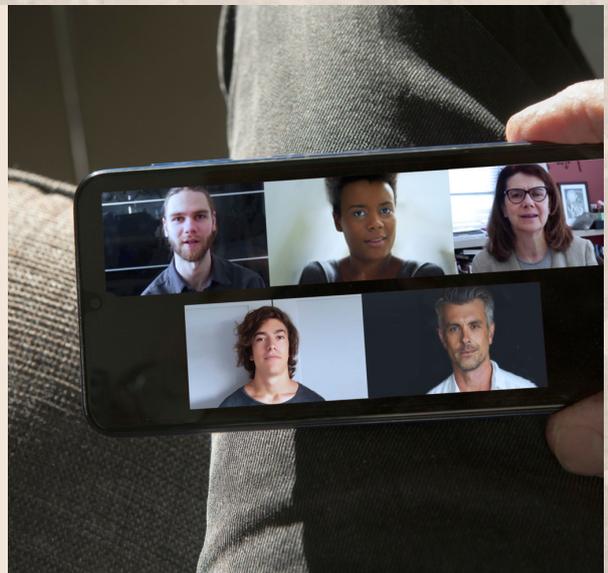
"The message from the client who spoke was powerful and we have taken a lot from it. We are really looking forward to the next Family Day. It's funny how you do not realise how much we actually missed meeting and chatting with you all."

”

“

"Mike and Teresa have emailed thanking us for the day. Both of them enjoyed it and it was Mike's first time using Zoom. Both would definitely be interested if we were to have another virtual Family Day."

”



FAMILY SUPPORT WORK

Marie*

Marie called the ICPO in October in relation to her son Jack who had been arrested and detained in a European country where he had been living for a brief period. Marie was very worried as she did not speak the language and could not obtain any information about her son or his charges. Marie also told ICPO that the family were experiencing financial problems and were not in a position to support Jack. The ICPO provided information to Marie on the criminal justice system in the country where Jack was imprisoned. ICPO liaised with Jack's social worker and provided a hardship grant so that Jack could call his family and buy some basic necessities in the prison. Jack was released at his trial in December. His mother wrote to say:

"Thank you so much. Jack would have been lost without your help and so would I."



Eoin*

Eoin is serving a lengthy sentence for fraud and is a long term client of ICPO (who is also in contact with his elderly parents). He has respiratory as well as some psychological issues which are major worries for him under normal circumstances, but exacerbated by the arrival of the Covid-19 virus. ICPO contacted the prison healthcare management team advising them of his anxiety and stress about the Covid-19 virus and his vulnerability. Immediate preventive action was taken and Eoin and his parents are satisfied with the ongoing measures in place. Covid-19 has meant no visits, so ICPO assisted his family in establishing the Purple Video link which enable his parents to virtually connect with Eoin on a regular basis. In addition ICPO sent him their in-cell resource pack, the keeping-in-touch pack as well as a once off financial support grant as part of a response to the lockdown introduced by the prison. Before Christmas ICPO advised his parents about the changes to Prisoners Monies Policy, informing them of how to lodge money to Eoin's account. Eoin and his parents are coping well with the restrictions brought about by Covid-19 thanks to the ongoing support from ICPO.



Marie informed us that when her son was arrested, it was like a death in the family and she had no-one to talk to. She said "I will never forget that you were there, it meant the world to me." She had also told us that her husband was out of work at the time and they had nowhere to turn. The ICPO provided financial assistance to their son to keep in touch with his family which was greatly appreciated. Marie thanked ICPO and offered to volunteer for ICPO to help fundraise in the future.*

Mother of client in Australia

ICPO PENFRIEND SCHEME

The ICPO operates a popular Penfriend Scheme which involves volunteers in Ireland corresponding on a regular basis with ICPO clients.

The scheme is especially beneficial to those who have little family contact and many prisoners have commented how it has helped to alleviate their sense of loneliness. ICPO provides post paid envelopes to prisoners and the guidelines for both prisoners and volunteers were amended and updated in 2020.



The penfriend scheme involves 64 volunteers throughout Ireland writing to 58 clients. The past year has been particularly difficult for both prisoners and volunteers, with international post significantly interrupted for an extended period of time in some countries. The volunteer support is greatly appreciated by clients with one writing to their penfriend to say:

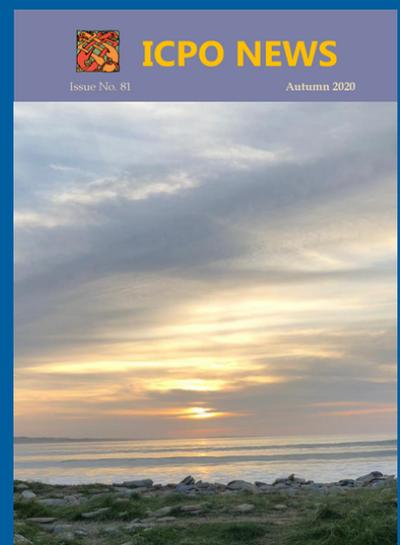
"I really loved the postcards you sent me, one of them was of my home town...it brought back many happy memories. Your friendship really keeps me going."

ANCILLIARY SUPPORTS

We published two editions of our Newsletter, ICPO News, in 2020. The newsletter allows us to communicate directly and effectively with prisoners about issues that are of interest to them. It also allows prisoners to share their stories with each other. Every ICPO client also received a Christmas newsletter, Christmas card and St. Patrick's Day card.

We send CDs, language dictionaries and phrase books to prisoners who wish to learn the language of the country they are in and provide books, particularly those by Irish authors of Irish interest, to clients who have limited or no access to a prison library. This is especially beneficial for prisoners who are detained in a country where English is not the most spoken language and for prisoners who have limited access to education or work.

The ICPO coordinates the entries and sponsors the Prisoners Overseas Award in the 'Writing in Prisons' section of the Listowel Writers' Week. Owing to Covid-19, Writers Week did not go ahead in 2020 but will take place in 2021 either virtually or in-person - news that will be welcomed by many, including the many ICPO clients who participate.



POLICY AND INFORMATION

In 2020 the ICPO continued to progress important policy issues with the relevant authorities and develop additional information resources to better support prisoners and their families during this very challenging year. ICPO has also continued to work closely with a range of agencies at home and overseas to increase the knowledge of the supports provided by ICPO to prisoners and their families. The following is a summary of the most significant developments that occurred throughout 2020.

Transfer of Prisoners (Repatriation)

Transfer of sentenced persons (repatriation) remains the key advocacy issue for ICPO. The ICPO continues to seek quarterly updates from the Irish Prison Service on developments relating to the repatriation applications of ICPO clients and during the year prisoners were kept updated on developments by their caseworkers as well as through the ICPO newsletter.

While processing times for applications improved during 2020, the vast majority of decisions were negative, causing considerable distress to prisoners and their families, particularly as some prisoners had waited several years for a decision. There was no progress made by the State on amending the current legislation, despite the Scheme of a Bill being approved in 2019. In addition, Ireland was referred to the European Court of Justice by the European Commission for its failure to transpose Framework Decision 2008/909/JHA which governs transfers between EU countries. The ICPO developed a briefing paper setting out our concerns with the repatriation process and wrote to the Minister for Justice in October last year requesting a meeting to discuss these issues. Unfortunately, no response was forthcoming from the Minister's office. We will also continue to engage with opposition spokespersons and other interested parties in 2021.

Public Consultation on Developing a Strategy for the Criminal Justice System

The ICPO responded to a Department of Justice consultation on "Developing a Strategy for the Criminal Justice System" in August 2020. Our submission focused on four key areas of concern: Transfer of Sentence (Repatriation); Resettlement; Voluntary Supervision of prisoners released on licence who have resettled in Ireland and Spent Convictions. ICPO was grateful for the opportunity to feed into and influence the development of this new Strategy.

Spent Convictions

Under the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016 a limited number of convictions can become spent after a period of 7 years including convictions for motoring and public order offences. However these convictions must be handed down in Irish courts – generally the District Court. This means that people who have served a short prison sentence overseas for the offences set out in the Act do not benefit from its provisions. Former prisoners returning to Ireland often face additional barriers in resettling and reintegrating into Irish society, in particular in accessing housing, training and employment. The ICPO believes that spent convictions legislation should apply equally to all Irish prisoners whether they serve their sentence in Ireland or overseas. This is the case in other countries such as the UK and Australia.

POLICY AND INFORMATION

The Department of Justice and Equality launched a public consultation in autumn 2020 seeking proposals on potential changes to the existing legislation. The ICPO made a formal submission outlining the situation for Irish people returning from serving a prison sentence abroad and requesting that any changes to existing legislation apply equally to all prisoners. We will continue to engage with this process in 2021.

Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs)

In 2020, the ICPO worked closely with academics from the Law Faculty, Maynooth University to develop a funding proposal for research on the needs of Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs) in Irish prisons. In December 2020 the Irish Research Council agreed to fund a needs assessment and feasibility study pertaining to this vulnerable and under-supported group. This research will inform a possible future project providing information, advice and pastoral care to FNPs in Irish prisons which it is well placed to provide given its over 35 years' experience providing services to Irish prisoners abroad.

Detention Rights Working Group

The ICPO is a member of the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centres (CIIC) Detention Rights Working Group. This group explores detention and immigration issues in the United States. In 2020 the Group met on three occasions primarily to discuss the impact of Covid-19 on prisoners and detainees in the US and how best to support them during this difficult time.

Client Survey

One of the Strategic Priorities of the ICPO Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023 was to undertake further research into clients' needs to better understand the nature of the supports required. To this end, the ICPO prepared a survey that was included in our Christmas Newsletter (2020) and sent to 1,200 ICPO clients in approximately 30 different countries. The survey covered areas such as life in prison and the difficulties they face including how Covid-19 has impacted on them. We also asked prisoners about their background – age, family in Ireland and length of sentence as well as what helps when they are feeling stressed or anxious. Finally the survey asked about their engagement with the ICPO. These responses will be collated in the first quarter of 2021 and analysed, after which a report will be put together that will inform our future work in the areas of policy, information provision and casework.

POLICY AND INFORMATION

ICPO Strategic Plan 2020-2023

2020 marked the first year of the ICPO's Strategic Plan. Strategic priorities had been identified in the following areas:

- Client Wellbeing
- Service Development
- Advocacy and Profile Raising
- Human Resources
- Funding
- Governance and Structure

Despite the challenges of the past year, considerable progress was made under many of the headings, most notably:

Client Wellbeing

The ICPO adapted to the communication challenges which resulted from the Covid restrictions including setting up email accounts to ensure speedier contacts with prisoners especially in the US, UK and Australia and also arranging video calls where possible with vulnerable prisoners and those who do not have family contact. Particular focus was given to the mental health of clients under prolonged lockdown. To this end, the ICPO London Office put together a range of in-cell activities including exercises, spiritual materials and puzzles that were distributed to clients in the UK. Work was also carried out on the completion of a comprehensive Wellbeing Pack which will be sent to clients worldwide in early 2021. We also prepared a client survey in order to get a better understanding of the needs of clients and how best we can respond to those needs as described below.

Service Developments

The ICPO is committed to expanding its service provision to clients. In 2020, despite the challenges of the pandemic, we managed to maintain services as normal with the exception of prison visits. We worked closely with existing partners including Crossscare Migrant Project and SafeHome as well as newer partners such as Care after Prison. As described elsewhere in this section, we are also looking to extend our services to foreign national prisoners in Irish prisons and secured funding to commence research on the needs and issues facing this group of prisoners.

Advocacy and Profile Raising

The ICPO continued to advocate on behalf of clients in relation to a range of matters, including repatriation, release on licence and access to medical care. We continued also to work with key partner organisations, both in Ireland and internationally (especially but not limited to the US, UK and Australia), and have also identified a range of organisations working in both service provision and policy that we will reach out to in the coming year including the Irish Penal Reform Trust and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. In autumn 2020, the ICPO contributed an article to the Europris Autumn Special Edition FNP Newsletter. Europris comprises representatives from European Probation and Prison Services and its newsletter is widely distributed.

RESETTLEMENT SUPPORTS

On release from prison, ex-prisoners may require a range of supports in order to successfully resettle into the community and avoid re-offending. Most immediately, they will require access to accommodation and money, for example through the social welfare system. Some ex-prisoners may also have physical and mental health issues, including addiction issues, and may need to access relevant services, as well as registering with a GP and obtaining a medical card. In the medium term ex-prisoners may have re-training and educational needs to address in order to re-enter the workplace. Whilst these resettlement needs may be common to all ex-prisoners, the ICPO has observed that the particular circumstances of Irish people in prison overseas and the peculiar difficulties they face, can put them in greater need of post-release support and place them at a particular disadvantage when it comes to preparing for their release in comparison to those released from an Irish prison.

Whilst it is not possible to state precisely the number of Irish overseas prisoners seeking to resettle in Ireland on an annual basis, ICPO estimates it to be between 40 and 70. This may seem a relatively small number given that ICPO assists approximately 1,200 prisoners overseas. However, most will have been imprisoned in the UK, and with family and other social support structures in place there, they do not necessarily wish to return to Ireland. Others may have been imprisoned elsewhere overseas but may be returning to a country other than Ireland on their release, for example, in the case of dual nationals. Also, only a percentage of ICPO's clients are due for release in any given year. Of those returning to Ireland each year, approximately 10-20 need considerable post-release assistance.

Irish prisoners overseas are at a disadvantage as they do not have the same opportunities to prepare for release as people imprisoned in Ireland. As inward prisoner transfers (repatriation) are, regrettably, non-existent for a number of years now - prisoners who might ordinarily have been able to serve the remainder of their sentence in Ireland, thus availing of the supports and supervision of the Irish Probation Service in the lead-up to and following release, continue to be unable to do so.

The biggest issues that prisoners initially face in returning to Ireland are accessing benefits and finding suitable accommodation. We advise clients to gather and keep any documentation they have in relation to their detention and to keep a copy of their passport or temporary travel document.

There are a small number of residential programmes available to help people who have recently been released from prison and we refer clients to these programmes if suitable to their needs. Unfortunately, spaces in such programmes are limited and for those returning without family support – the only other option is homeless services. We also refer clients to organisations that assist former prisoners in accessing employment and training. ICPO's ground-breaking research in 2015 on the resettlement needs of foreign national (Irish) prisoners returning to Ireland, continues to provide a sound basis from which to move forward and develop our resettlement services.

ICPO's Resettlement Handbook is a comprehensive, 55 page resource that provides practical information on preparing for release, as well as where to get support when you return to Ireland. It covers topics such as preparing for release, accessing medical care social welfare and housing, as well as getting help with mental health issues and addiction. It also provides useful tips on money management and information on gaining access to employment, education and training.

RESETTLEMENT SUPPORTS

In the last 12 months we provided post-release grants to 8 clients who returned to Ireland and had limited or no support here. Such post-release grants are essential in bridging the gap between a prisoner's return to Ireland and accessing benefits. Crisis returns during the pandemic, including deportees who had not lived in Ireland for decades, required considerable additional planning; with a number of clients needing to be advised of and referred to quarantine facilities.

Considerable time is spent by ICPO caseworkers liaising with clients in the UK who are subject to licence but wish to return to Ireland under the voluntary supervision of the Irish Probation Service. The ICPO enjoys a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with the Irish Probation Service and is involved in supporting clients in returning to Ireland under Probation supervision each year. We are very grateful to the Irish Probation Service for facilitating ICPO clients and also wish to acknowledge the assistance provide by the following agencies:

Crosscare Migrant Project

Assists many ex-prisoners in accessing emergency accommodation and obtaining their statutory entitlements which is essential as they make the transition to life outside prison.

The Linkage Service

Supports ex-prisoners with employment and training issues.

PACE Priorswood House

Provides post-release accommodation ad key worker support to newly returned ex prisoners.

Trail

Provides post release accommodation and key worker support to returned clients convicted of a sexual offence.

SafeHome

Advises ex-prisoners on housing and statutory entitlements.

Matthew*

Matthew was nearing completion of a medium length sentence for burglary in England. He had only arrived a short time before he was arrested. He had no family connections living in England. ICPO was in regular contact with him and his family had visited him yearly except for 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. About 18 months prior to his release ICPO answered questions for Matthew and his family about applying for a Transfer of Supervision to Ireland. Once his application was submitted ICPO worked closely with his UK Probation team and the Irish Probation Service. It was determined by both Services that it was not in Matthew's best interests to be sent to a homeless or Probation hostel for a number of years on release, when all his family and social supports were in Ireland. During all of this time ICPO was in contact with his family updating them on issues and maintaining a communications link between them, Matthew, the Probation Services and other state agencies. Shortly after his release Matthew was transferred to Ireland and is adhering to the terms of his transfer and has secured a job in an area he likes. ICPO continues to support him and his family.

"I read the information you sent me and it helped me greatly. So thank you. It cleared a lot of questions I needed to know."

RESETTLEMENT SUPPORTS

Mark*

Mark served a long sentence in a European country. During that time the ICPO assisted him by providing a quarterly hardship grant and keeping in regular contact by letter. Mark's imprisonment was a very difficult time for his family; especially his mother Sheila and ICPO supported her by regular calls and occasional face-to-face meetings. Mark was released in September 2020 and in the 6 months prior to this, the ICPO supported both Mark and his mother in preparing for his release. Mark's ICPO caseworker referred him to Care-After-Prison for support in accessing social welfare and liaised with the Irish Embassy in the country of imprisonment to obtain documents from the prison confirming Mark's release date. Mark was provided with a post-release grant and we have also kept in regular contact with Sheila since Mark's return.



" I want to thank you for all the support you and everyone at ICPO provided to both my family and I while I was in prison, it is greatly appreciated and will not be forgotten"

FINANCE

The Finance and General Purposes Council of the Irish Episcopal Conference (IEC) oversees the budget of the ICPO Maynooth office. The day-to-day management of the budget is undertaken by the ICPO Coordinator and the IEC Finance Manager. The Irish Chaplaincy (formerly the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain) has this responsibility for the ICPO London office.

The Irish Episcopal Conference provided funding in the amount of €124,547 towards the running of the Maynooth office in 2020. Grant funding from outside agencies also forms a significant part of the organisation's overall funding. In 2020 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFA) awarded ICPO €172,144 towards caseworker posts, Family Information Days, prison visits and the ICPO Hardship Fund. The Irish Abroad Unit's agreement to fund the North of England caseworker post for the first time was particularly welcome and an reflection of the importance of the service and the level of support provided.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul continues to provide essential grant funding in the amount of €50,000 annually. The funding is used to provide casework and family support services to some of ICPO's most vulnerable and isolated clients. ICPO sees the long time support of this core funder as an important endorsement and recognition of our work by a much respected organisation and we will continue to ensure its grant is spent prudently in support of some of the most vulnerable within our community. This is true of all the organisation's funders.

The Sisters of Mercy have been a longtime supporter of ICPO's work and their recent funding has been invaluable. A grant from the Albert Gubay Charitable Foundation of €9,600 was used to provide additional Hardship Fund grants to Irish prisoners during the pandemic and the grant received from the AllChurches Trust of €8,184 will be used to develop, print and post an extensive in-cell resource pack for clients.

The ICPO greatly appreciates the generosity of all its funders without whom we could not continue to do this important work.



Government of Ireland
Emigrant Support Programme



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



CONGREGATION OF THE
SISTERS OF MERCY



AG

THE ALBERT GUBAY



IRISH CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
COMHDHÁIL EASPAG CAITLICEACH ÉIREANN

SVP

Society of St Vincent de Paul

HARDSHIP FUND

The ICPO administers a Hardship Fund which provides direct, effective and tangible support to vulnerable Irish prisoners. This fund allows us to assist clients who are unable to access basic necessities, such as food, water, clothes and medical treatment. The Hardship Fund also allows families to maintain contact with their loved one, either through the provision of phone credit or a grant to help with travel and accommodation costs for prison visits.

Requests for financial assistance come directly from prisoners or their families, from Irish embassies and consulates and sometimes from the Irish missionary visiting a prisoner. In relation to UK based clients, requests often come from ICPO prison visitors, prison chaplains or social workers. Owing to the significant number of Irish people imprisoned in the UK it is only possible to give small, once-off payments.

There was a noticeable increase in the level of demand for financial support from this fund in 2020.

Breakdown of Maynooth Hardship Fund in 2020				
01 Jan 2020 - 31 Dec 2020				
Prisoner Support:				€30,343.07
230* grants were provided to 71 clients in 14 countries (Australia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Northern Ireland, Japan, Netherlands, Spain, Tanzania, Togo, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America).				
42 clients received 128 Quarterly payments, of €150 each on average. They also received an additional and larger payment in Christmas 2020 to assist in maintaining contact with their family during the Christmas period in the absence of visits. 29 additional payments were made in December, bringing the overall total of Quarterly payments to 157.				
58 clients received one-off grants (e.g. for food and clothing needs, toiletries, phone credit to keep in touch with support network or where family were not in position to help)				
Family Support:				€4,188.89
7 families were assisted visiting their relatives in prison overseas prior to the imposition of travel restrictions due to the pandemic. All were visits to family members in the UK. In addition, Stg€2,000.00 was sent to the ICPO London Office (at a cost of €2,329.26) at the outset of the Covid-19 emergency to facilitate clients to maintain contact with their families by telephone at such a difficult time.				
Post Release Support:				€751.19
8 clients were given a post-release grant and assisted with accommodation etc.				
Books:				€201.10
Books were sent to 6 prisoners in the period from January to March 2020 prior to Covid restrictions being implemented.				
Bank Fees:				€97.90
				DFA TOTAL
				€35,582.15
GUBAY FOUNDATION GRANT (€8,000.00)				
UK Prisoner Support:				
153 Grants ranging in amounts from Stg€10 - Stg€30 per prisoner.				
				€5,167.73
60 In-Cell Wellness Packs.				
				€2,821.47
Bank Fees				€24.05
				GUBAY TOTAL*
				€8,013.25
				GRAND TOTAL
				€43,595.40

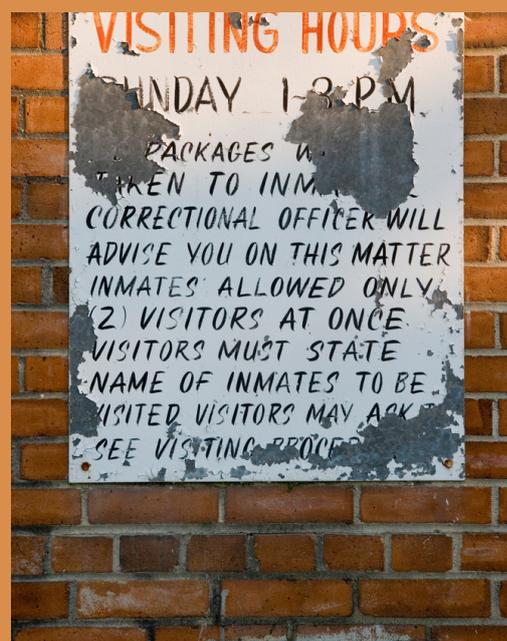
REPORT FROM ICPO LONDON

The year 2020 was unlike any year in living memory for the London Office. The Chinese have a saying "May you live in interesting times". Well, since March 2020, we have certainly been living in "interesting times". Lockdown has affected people's lives in ways we could never have imagined. Needless to say, the work of the ICPO has been severely affected by the pandemic. The Coronavirus which resulted in Lockdown on 23 March 2020, put paid to prison visiting (which at the time of writing has still not resumed) and forced staff to find new ways of working from home in different parts of the country. Notwithstanding the difficulties resulting from lockdown, our staff managed to provide a steady pattern of support for prisoners and their families. In fact, we managed to maintain as normal a service as possible except for the prison-visiting.

Before lockdown, the first two months of the year were the busiest in terms of prison visits in some time. ICPO London Manager, Fr Gerry McFlynn, made 7 visits in January and February, meeting with 21 prisoners. There were plans for another 5 visits to prisons in the north of England with ICPO Caseworker, Ian Hanna, from the Maynooth office, as part of the Prisons North project. However, the week before these were due to happen, news of the pandemic broke with the resulting lockdown.

Breda Power, who is responsible for prison visiting and casework in the Greater London area, made 13 prison visits between January and March, meeting with a total of 110 prisoners, while Sally Murphy, our volunteer prison visitor in the north-west, made weekly visits over the same period to 5 of the prisons in her area before the lockdown.

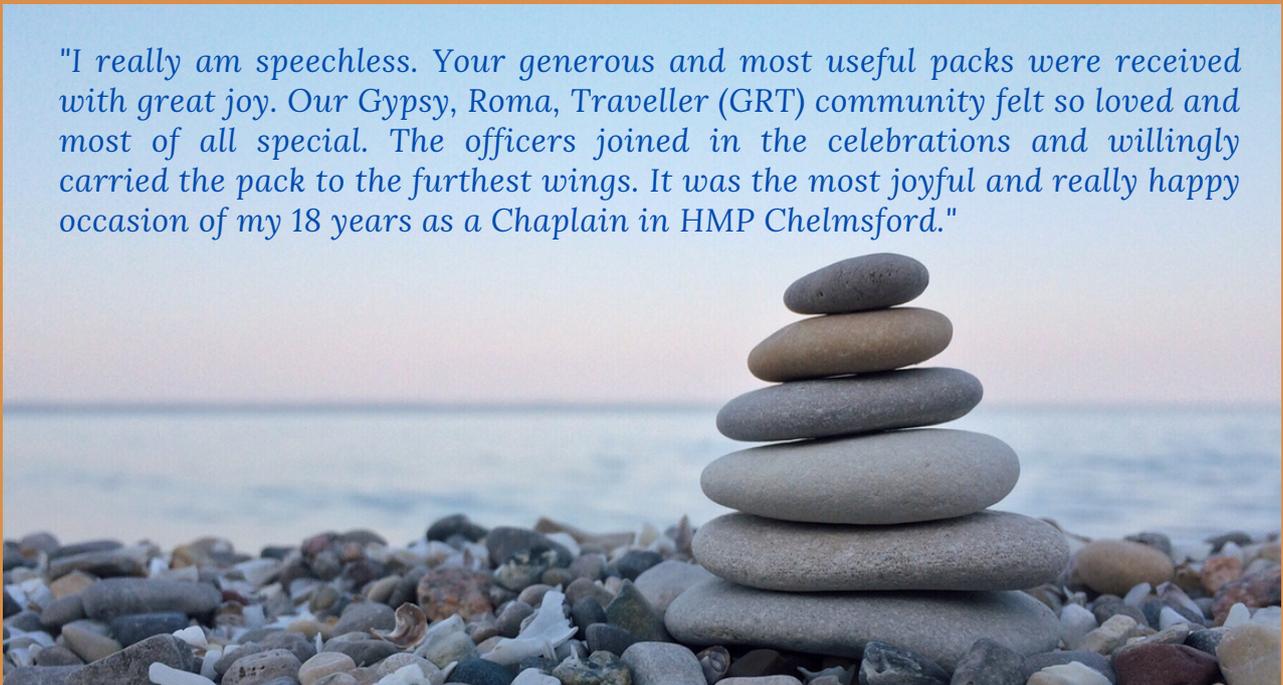
The effects of the lockdown have caused additional challenges for prisoners and their families. The lack of movement within the prisons (due to staff shortages), meant that prisoners found it difficult to access courses for their sentence plans or to get transferred to local prisons for the final part of their sentence. Also, not having face-to-face meetings with Probation, Benefits Advisors, plus the lack of work, recreation and education, have made life particularly difficult for them. Confinement in cells for up to 23 hours a day continues to have an adverse effect on their mental health - especially Travellers who are used to outdoor living and find it difficult adjusting to such confinement. The plight of prisoners has also been made worse by the suspension of family visiting.



REPORT FROM ICPO LONDON

However, throughout the year we engaged with prisoners by emailing them and keeping in touch with their families. At Easter, we carried out a mass mailing of prisoners apprising them of the impact of lockdown on our service. Throughout the year we provided them with phone credit so that they could keep in touch with families and loved ones. We sent them booklets, puzzles and games, meditation CD's, mindfulness booklets, colouring books and pens - everything in fact from prayer cards to game and puzzle books to help keep them occupied and mentally stimulated during a very difficult time. We also provided them with in-cell resources, including a special pack for 103 women prisoners. One prisoner said:

"I really am speechless. Your generous and most useful packs were received with great joy. Our Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) community felt so loved and most of all special. The officers joined in the celebrations and willingly carried the pack to the furthest wings. It was the most joyful and really happy occasion of my 18 years as a Chaplain in HMP Chelmsford."



At Christmas we were able to purchase Christmas presents for the children of more than 100 prisoners. A new service was the provision of basic essentials (basic clothing and a winter coat) for those being released from prison with nothing more than the clothes on their backs.

Prisoners who were released during the pandemic faced - and continue to face - many problems. Some were released without any accommodation provision or winter clothing. The lack of money for basic essentials combined with homelessness can often lead to them being unable to comply with the terms of their licence and being recalled to prison. Thanks to generous grants, we were able to help such prisoners to buy essentials, winter clothes and a smart phone to enable them to keep in touch with Probation, family members and access benefits.

"Thanks so much for your help and support. You really have gone above and beyond for my brother Martin." (sister of client)

REPORT FROM ICPO LONDON

We also maintained contact with prison chaplains, probation officers and solicitors about problems and issues certain prisoners had and kept in touch with their families. Vulnerable prisoners and their family members were able to keep in touch with us directly via Fr Gerry's mobile phone which was greatly appreciated. This was certainly the case in early November when an elderly prisoner died and Fr Gerry was able to support his only family member, a sister, who was housebound and in poor health. She said that just being able to talk to someone from the ICPO at the time of the funeral made all the difference.

Our annual Family Day, which brings together family members of prisoners worldwide (but mostly in England and Wales) for a day of sharing and support, had, like so many other meetings, to be conducted by Zoom. A highlight this year was the personal testimony by a prisoner who expressed his gratitude for the help and support he had received from the ICPO over many years.

Good publicity is always welcome and an interview Fr Gerry gave to The Tablet (14 November 2020), highlighting the ICPO's support for prisoners and their families during lockdown was well received and resulted in two generous donations to our work.

We were delighted that a major report in October 2020 by HM Inspectorate of Prisons thematic review of "Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning", made several references to our prison work, describing it as "a notable positive practice". The report also recognised our work in organising events in prison for Travellers to socialise and celebrate their culture.

The Year in Figures

For the year 2020, we logged some 6,880 actions on behalf of prisoners and their families, including with solicitors, probation officers, chaplains, etc.

Almost 1,100 payments were made to 590 people from March to December 2020 at the height of the pandemic. We opened 62 new cases and helped about 40 with emergency Release Grant payments amounting to £2,050 from March to December. Throughout this time phone credit grants amounted to £12,860; In-cell Resources allowances £2,000; Christmas payments to clients and their family members \$4,140 and separate payments to female prisoners £2,050.

All in all, we did remarkably well in what was truly a difficult and trying year for all concerned.

Fr Gerry McFlynn
April 2021

APPENDIX

Breakdown of Contacts													
1st January 2020 - 30th June 2020													
Issue	January		February		March		April		May		June		
	UK	Non UK											
Books	8	13	14										
Communication	15	4					36			7	4	1	
Conditional Release												1	
Deportation/Immigrant Detention	9	1	5				52			6	2	5	
Discrimination/Harrassment	5	11	4		2								
Documentation	8	10	7		4	1					10		
Early Removal Scheme													
Family Support	16	35	10	39	7	51	7	36	15	29	15	15	
Financial	121	56	71	15	72	73	107	94	146	41	302	26	
Health	8	16	6	38	3	40	2	6	1	4	1	2	
Legal	4	6	5	18	2	4		13		2	3	3	
Licence Transfer	5	6	10	6	3	18	5	9	16	66	5	22	
Lifer Support	49								1				
Parole		3	1	6	2			6				5	
Penfriend	3	61	3	43		15		51	4	29	1	41	
POB													
Prisoner Support	172	99	214	124	94	81	158	180	38	80	101	112	
Prison Transfer	62	98	13	35	26	26	7	4	10	4	97	88	
Prison Visit	11	41	22	88	5	25	1	17		5	1	20	
Repatriation	5	35	7	11		7	6	15		28		10	
Resettlement	21	72	29	35	9	48	13	34	19	16	38	21	
Safeguarding	2							2		1	1	2	
Other	1	63	1	23	2	5				2	77	120	
Total	493	632	413	506	229	412	312	556	250	320	658	494	

