



2023 Annual Report



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Chairpersons Report

On behalf of my colleagues on the Board of the Cork Alliance Centre, I am delighted to introduce our Annual Report for 2023.

Since its foundation in 2002, the Cork Alliance Centre focuses on the development of a range of services to support people make a 'fresh start' in terms of reducing offending and strengthening their own positive self-efficacy while engaging constructively with their family and community. Our service is based in the community with in-reach work in the prisons.

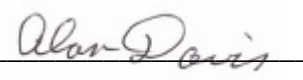
While first and foremost, our team are both trauma informed and gender responsive, the Centres practices are in line with desistance theory and practice. The person-centred strengths-based approach of the Centre embraces an acceptance of where people are at and working at their pace, assisting them to identify and address the changes they need to bring into their life.

The Centre seeks to facilitate the process of personal recovery and empowerment with the overarching view of desistance from crime, as people seek to become better equipped to manage their lives more positively.

The board members commitment to the Cork Alliance Centre and the care, competencies and core believes in the ethos of the Centre shown by them is fundamental to the Centre and to the support of the CEO and team in fulfilling their roles.

The strong and caring team allow the Cork Alliance Centre to continue to provide the high quality, high standard service that is and has been delivered to date. Without the dedication of the staff the work could not be achieved, therein I want to specifically thank them and acknowledge their hard work and dedication.

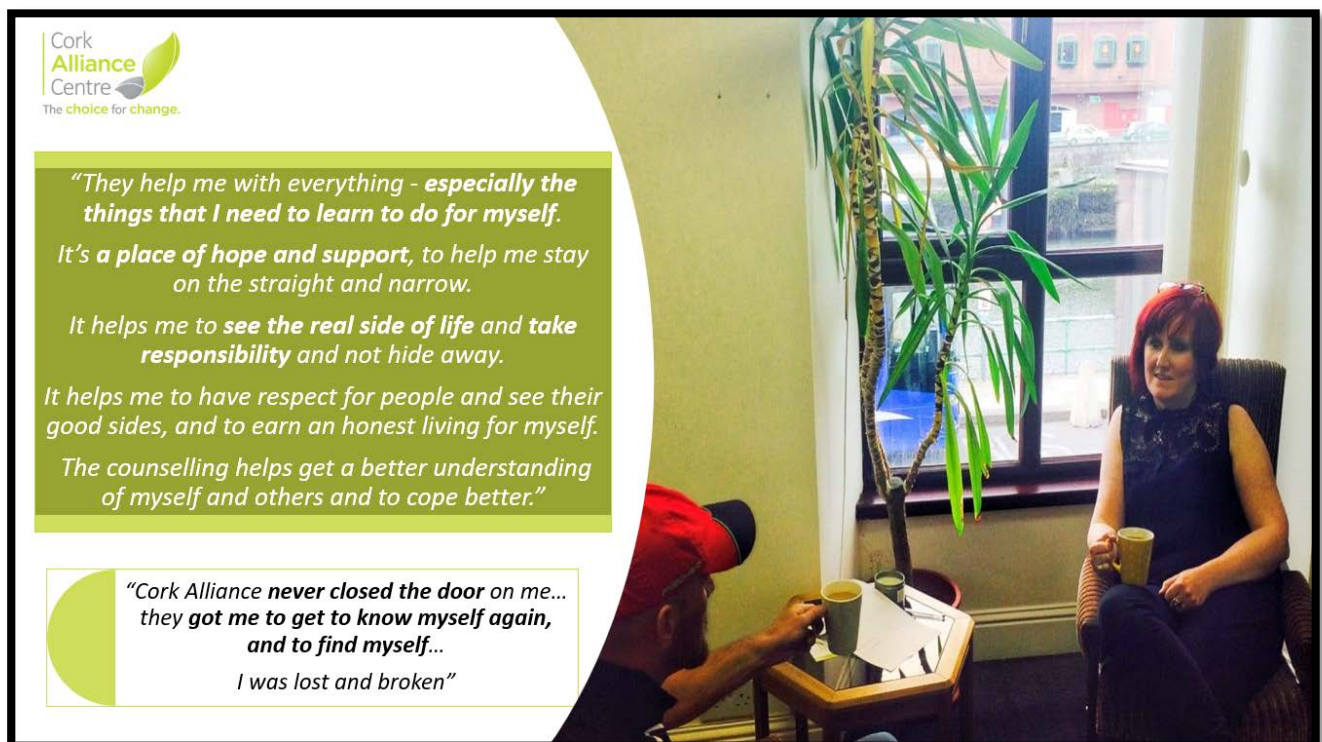
We appreciate the support and commitment of the Department of Justice through the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service with both funding for the Centre, referrals to the programmes and a shared-caring approach to the work and the people we support. Without their support the Cork Alliance Centre would not be possible.

Signed: 
Alan Davis, Chairperson

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.

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.

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)

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. Some people have been through university, 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-one 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 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.

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.

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 offered include

- Support and motivation work, where among other areas addressed are
 - Offending behaviours
 - Harm reduction
 - Addiction/recovery work
 - Thinking skills
 - Coping mechanisms
 - Socialisation skills
 - Integration skills
 - Self-regulation skills
 - etc
- 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.

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 fundamental principles of the Probation Service, as outlined in the Probation Service Strategy Statement 2021-2023 - Probation Works for Community Safety of

- Professional & Accountable
- Respect & Integrity
- Innovation & Creativity
- Transparency & Openness
- Collaboration & Partnership
- Evidence Informed & Data Driven

Further to that, within the Probation Service Strategy Statement 2021-2023, 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 2: Strengthening Collaboration and Engagement and
- Pillar 3: Promoting Inclusion.

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

- **Strategy 1.4** To support desistance and successful re-settlement after custody.
- **Strategy 2.2.** ^[OBJ]To work creatively to challenge stigmatisation and reduce barriers to participation in society, promoting desistance, social inclusion, and citizenship.
- **Strategy 2.3.** ^[OBJ]To work through community-based organisations delivering best practice, innovation, and measurable outcomes
- **Strategy 3.3.** ^[OBJ]To optimise life opportunities for those engaged with the Service, enabling their positive participation in society.
- **Strategy 3.4.** ^[OBJ]To create opportunities for people supervised by the Service to participate in the work of the Service.

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

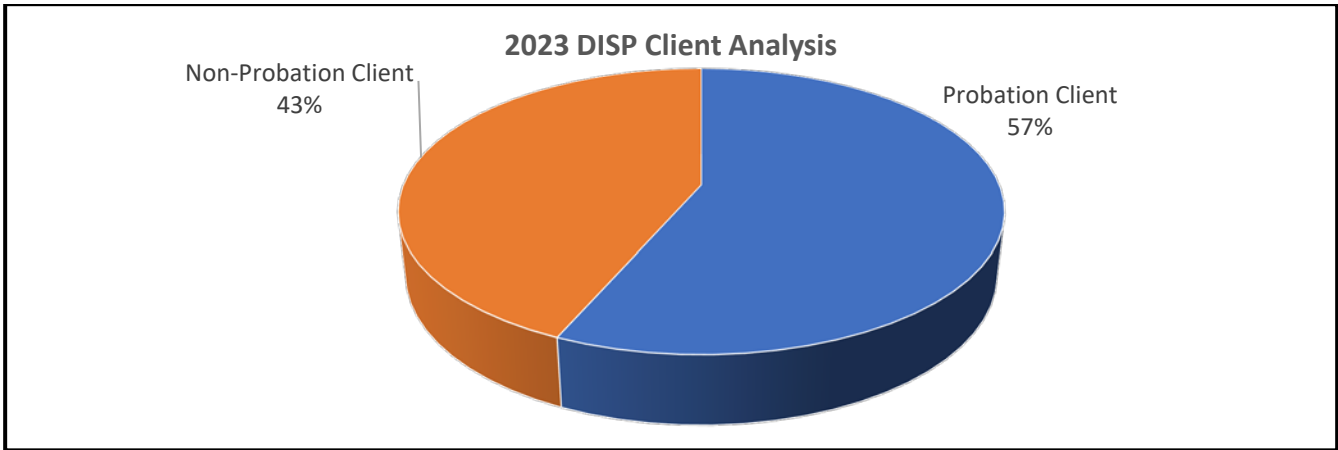
specific focus on supports is central to both organisations, as we aim to facilitate effective supports and proactive sentence, pre-release and post-release planning and implementation. The Probation Service actions to facilitate collaborative relationships and collaborative multidisciplinary work, is directly supported by the Cork Alliance Centre across the board.



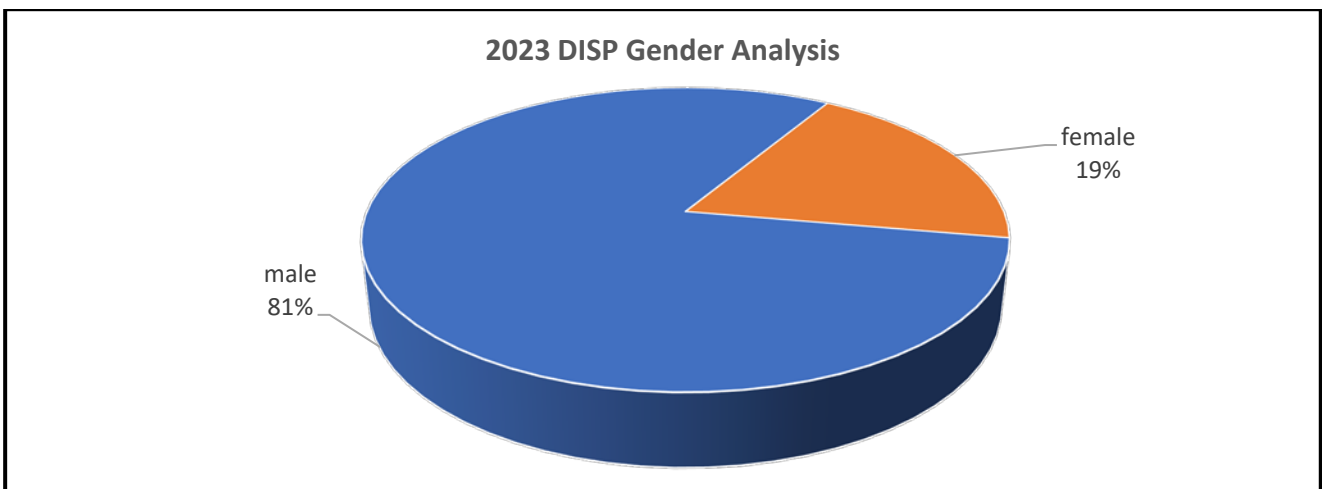
DISP 2023

251 people were in contact with DISP in 2023, of which 106 remained actively engaged at year end.

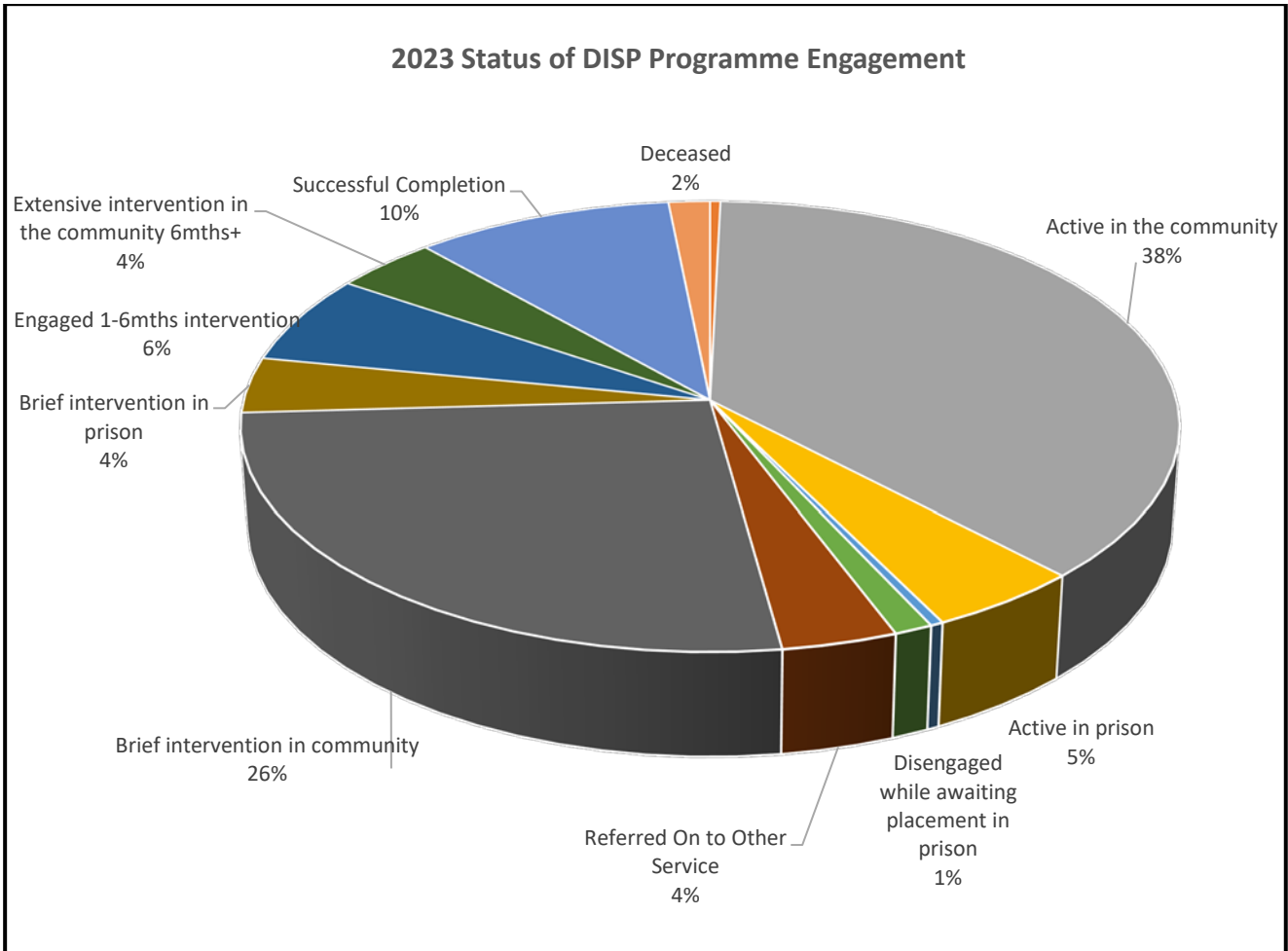
DISP Analysis 2023	Total Referrals		Probation Referrals		Non-Probation Referrals	
Active Participants at year end	106	42%	64	45%	42	39%
Awaiting placement	1	0%	1	1%		
Successful Completion	25	10%	13	9%	12	11%
Referred On	9	4%	3	2%	6	6%
Brief intervention in the community	66	26%	36	25%	30	28%
Brief intervention in prison	10	4%	5	4%	5	5%
Engaged 1-6mths intervention	16	6%	8	6%	8	7%
Extensive intervention in the community 6mths+	10	4%	7	5%	3	3%
Deceased	4	2%	3	2%		
Disengaged while Awaiting Placement	4	2%	2	1%		2%
TOTAL	251		142	57%	108	43%



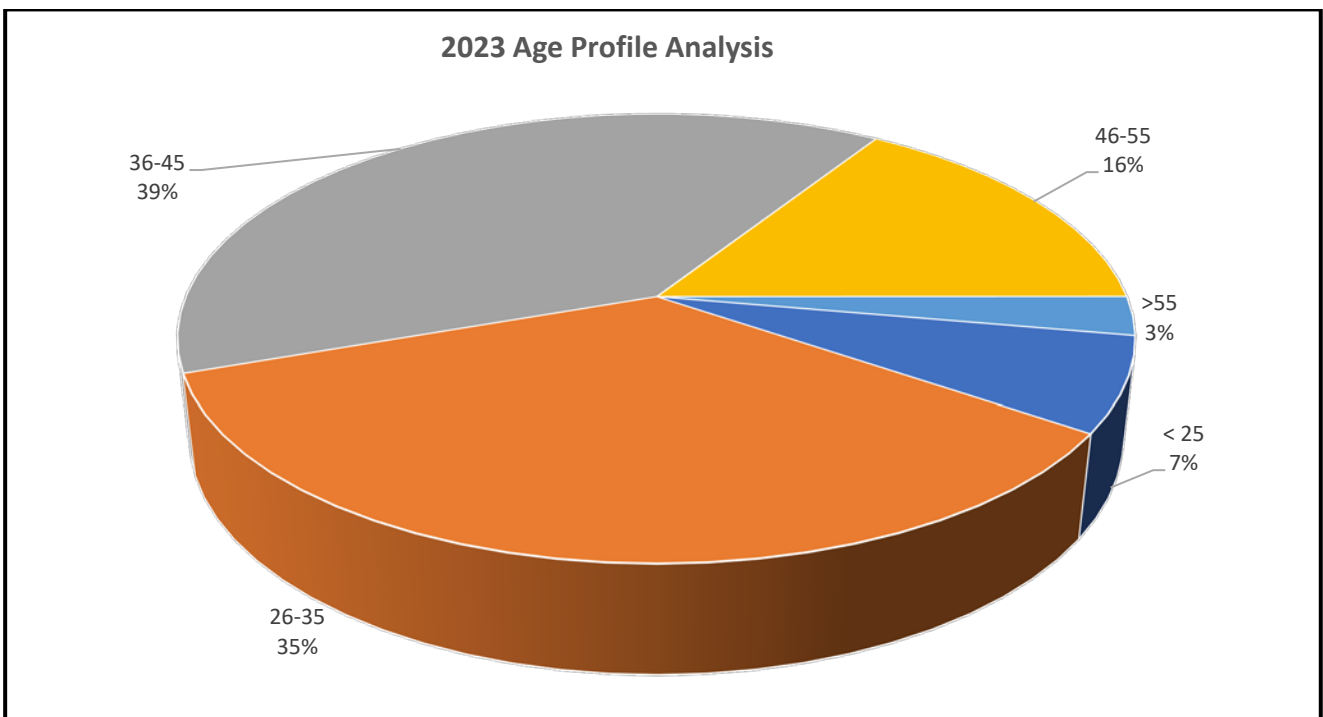
In line with the prison population, most referrals in 2023 were men, with 19% of our referrals being women.



In 2023, 43% remain actively engaged with the service, with 50% 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. 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. Unfortunately, four people died while engaged with our service in 2023.

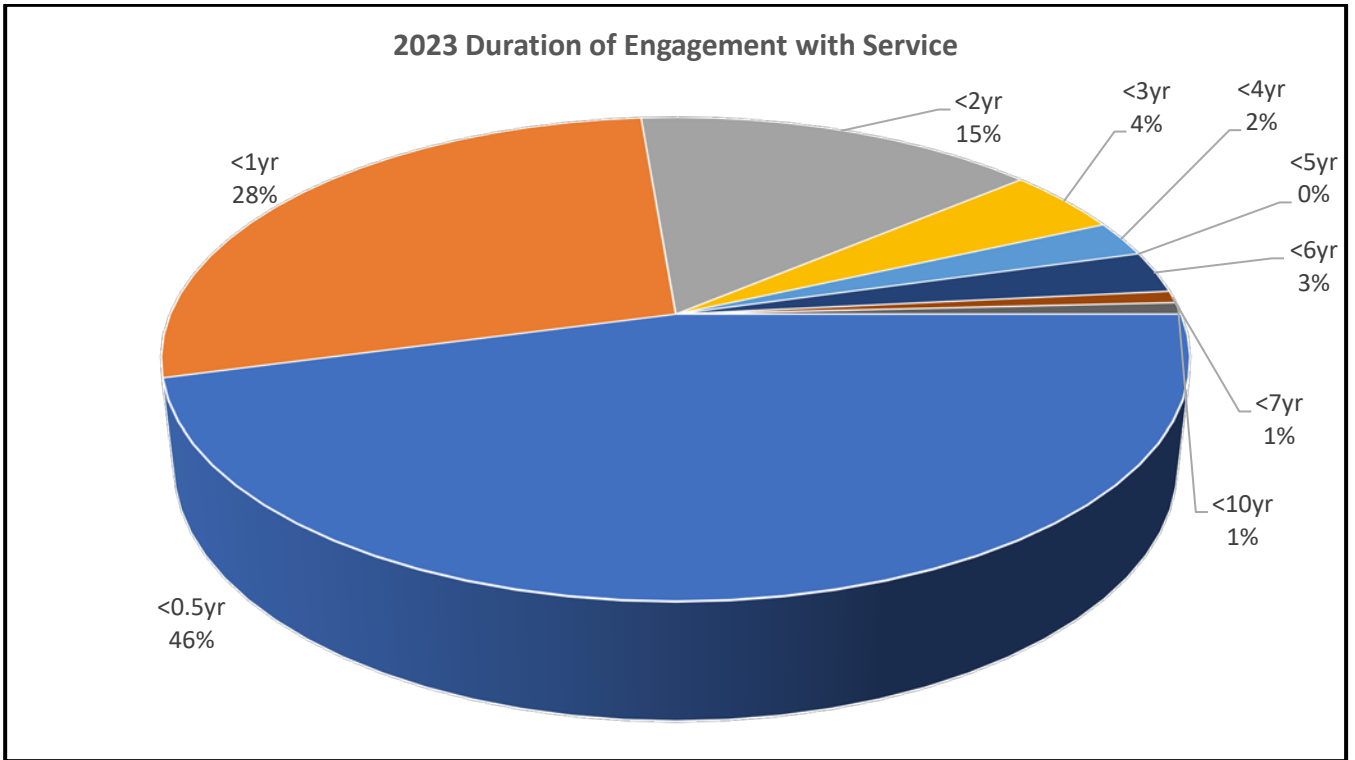


The main age profile of people who access our service are 26-45 years of age – accounting for 74% of people who access the Centre.



People spend up to 3 years accessing the service (93%), those who go onto college 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.

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

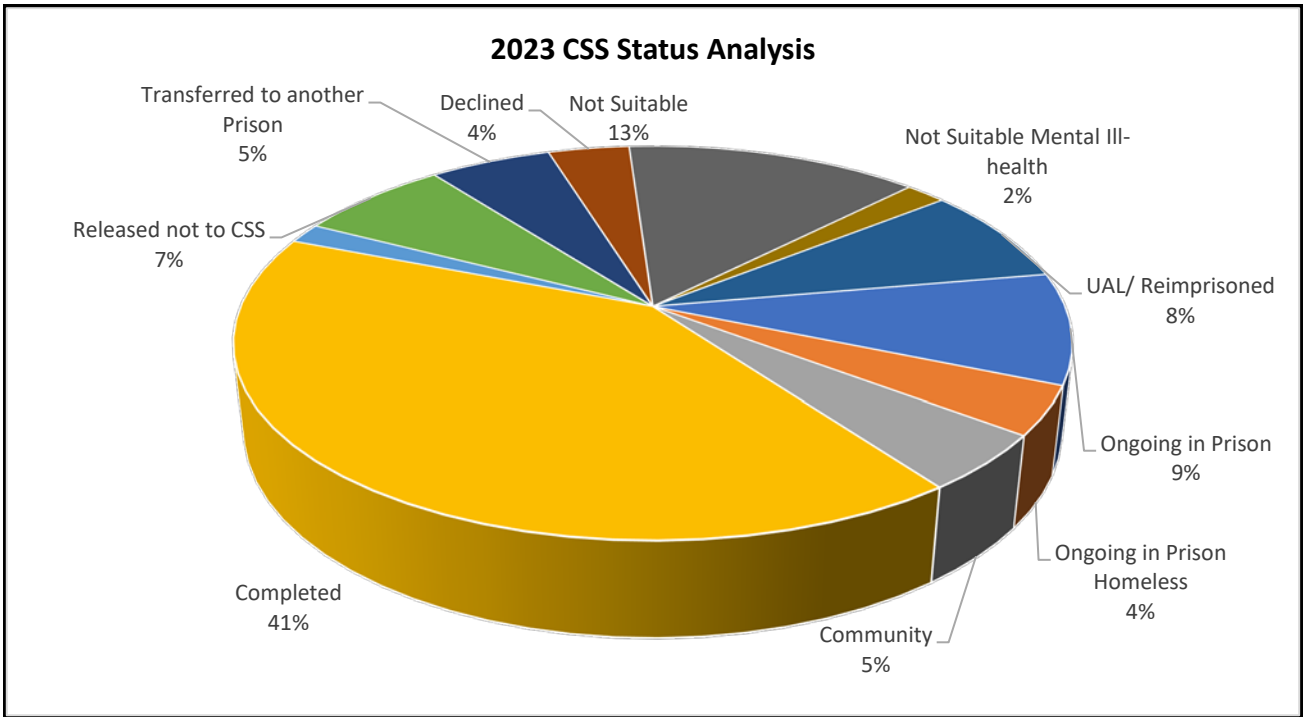
The CSS is established in support of Strategic Action 1.4 of the Irish Prison Service & Probation Service Strategic Plan 2018-2020. The overarching Strategic Objective of the IPS and Probation Service in their Strategic Plan 2018-2020 is to “continue to work collaboratively to improve formation and delivery of coherent multidisciplinary sentence plans and supports for individuals from committal to post-release”. The Cork Alliance Centre has a role to play in supporting both agencies in this and specifically for the CSS under section 1.4 to “continue to build on the success of incentivised early release schemes including the Community Support Scheme and the Community Return Scheme.”.

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. The Prison Service actions to facilitate appropriate services and access to programmes to aid rehabilitation and reintegration, together with their focus on collaborative multidisciplinary work, is and can be directly supported by the Cork Alliance Centre across the board and specifically by the Community Support Scheme.

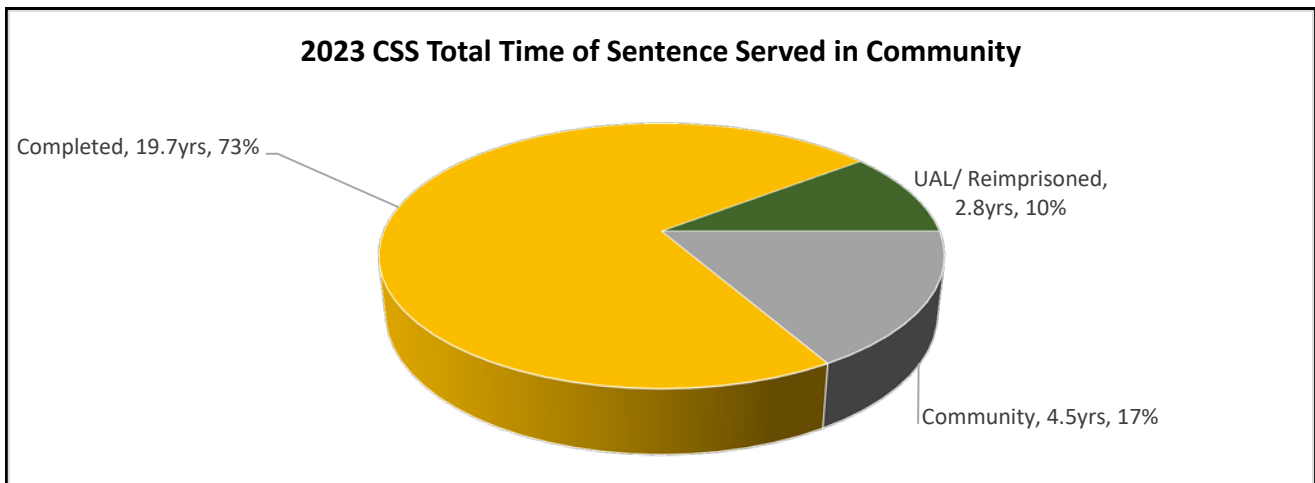
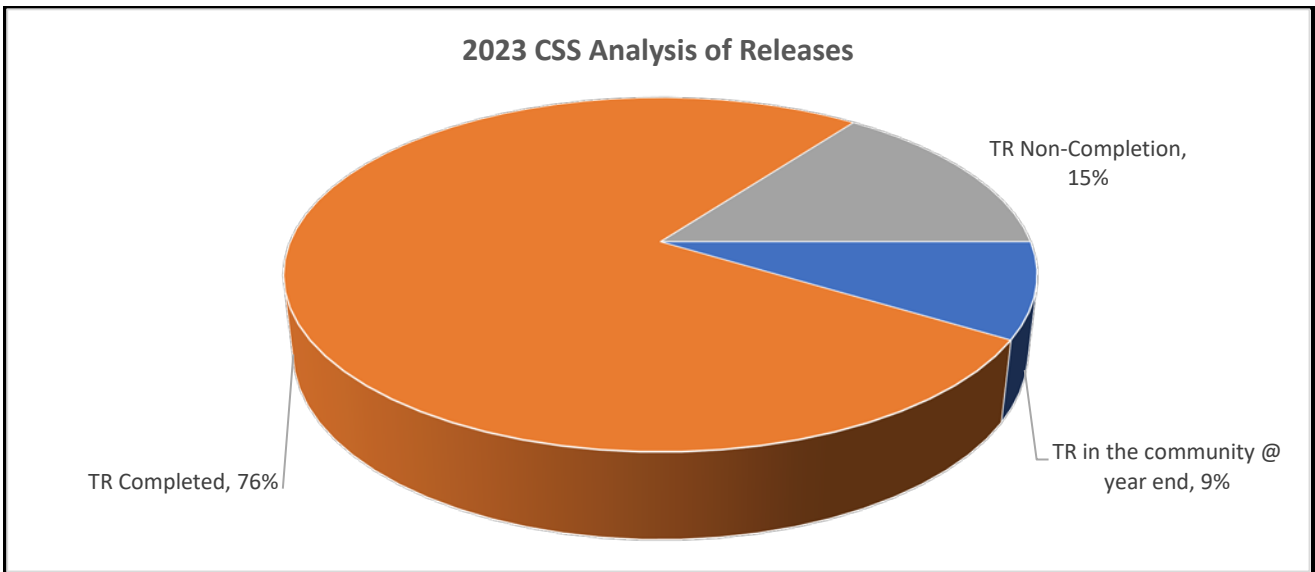
CSS under Cork Alliance Centre 2023

In 2023 there were 429 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.

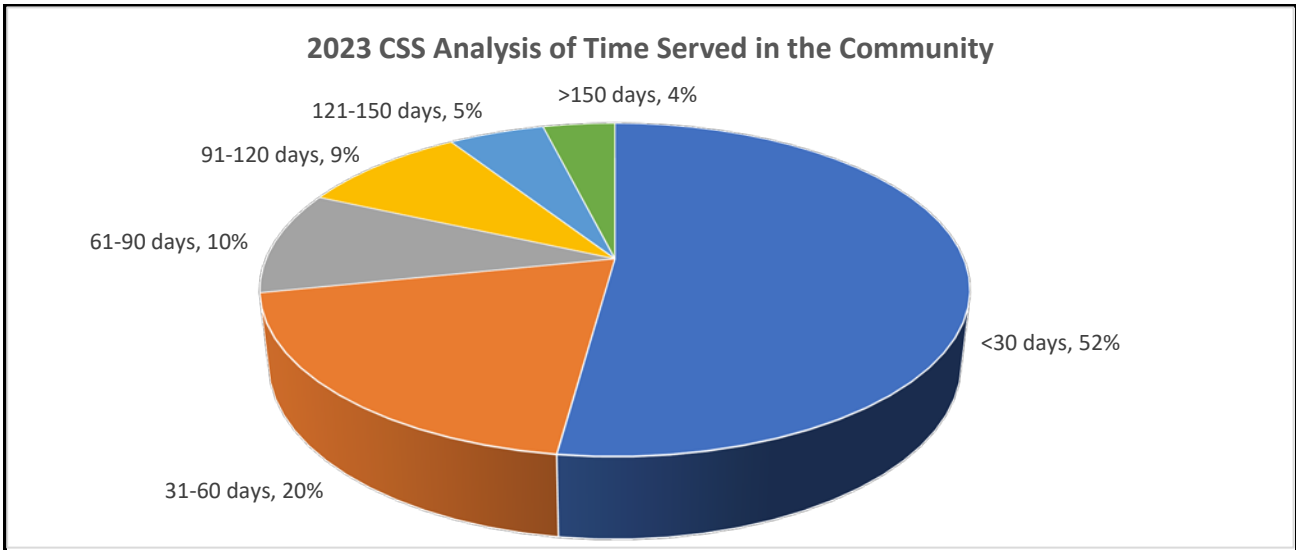
CSS Analysis 2023	People referred to CSS	% Of total people referred	% Of total people released
People On Temporary Release at Year End	20	5%	9%
People Completed Temporary Release	176	41%	77%
People Not Completed Temporary Release	34	8%	15%
Total 2023 Released under CSS	230	54%	100%
Referred to other CSS projects	7	2%	
Not Suitable for CSS	136	32%	
Ongoing Assessment in Prison at Year End	56	13%	
Total 2023 Referrals to CSS	429	100%	



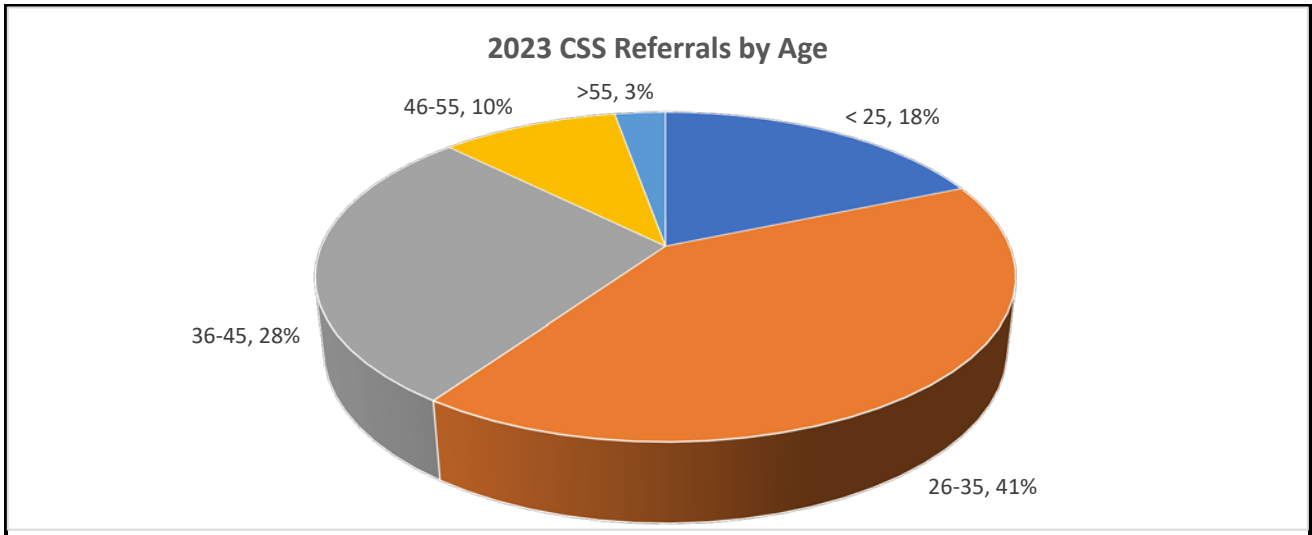
Of those released 76% completed successfully, with a further 9% active in scheme in the community at year end. Therein only 15% of those released under the scheme in 2023 were returned to prison.



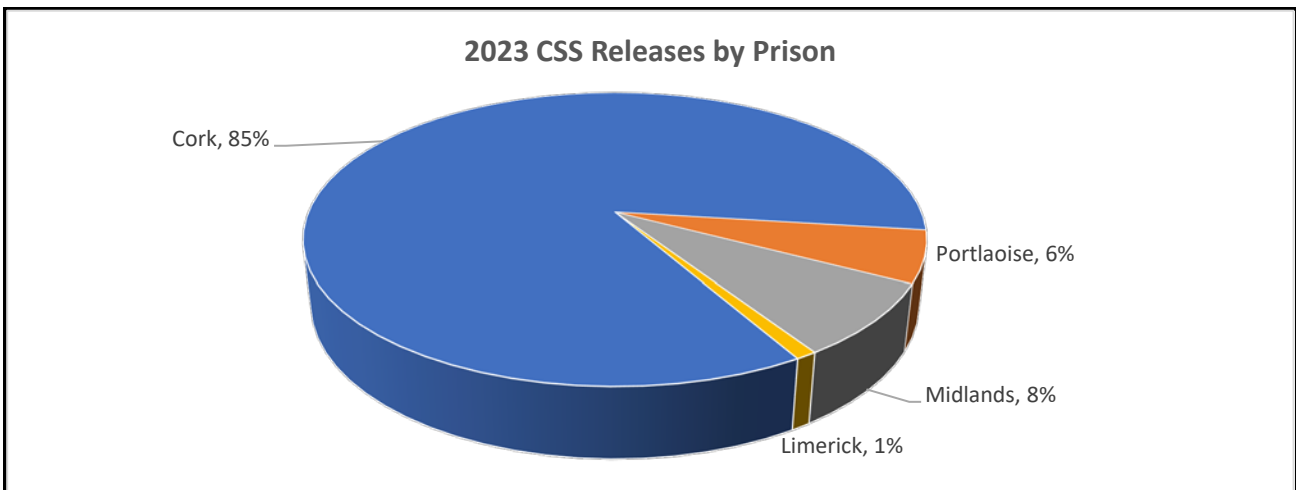
Almost 86% of sentences served in the community were for less than 3 months.



The age profile of people referred to the programme is primarily 26-45 years as they make up almost 69% of the referrals, with under 25-year-olds representing 18% of referrals.

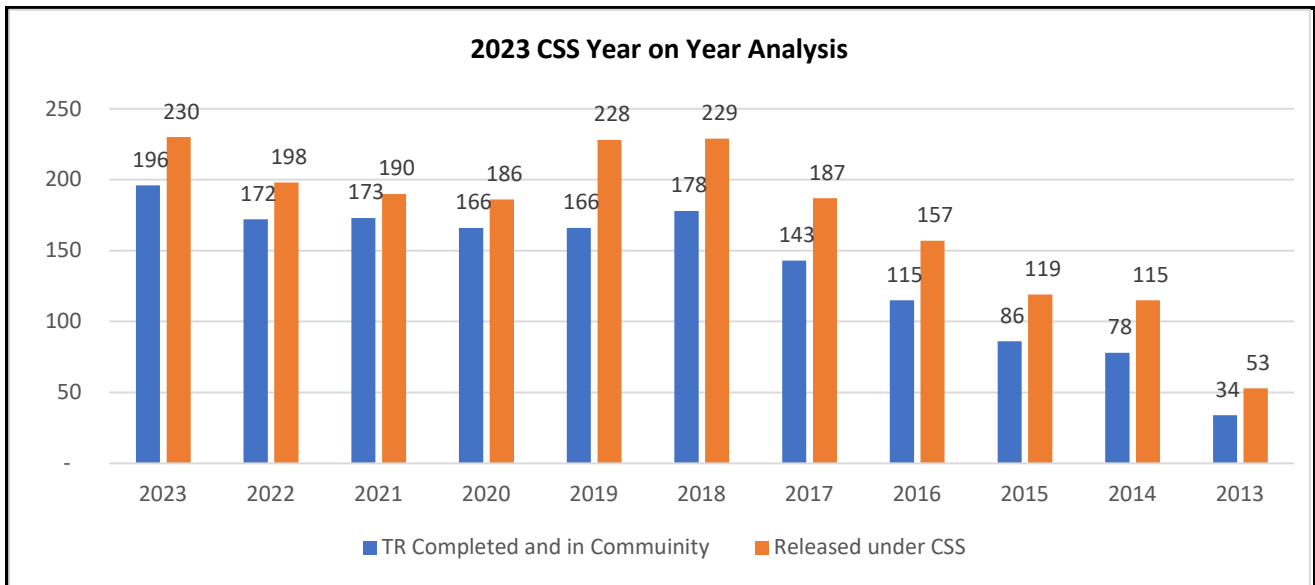


The provision within the national scheme for the community transfer of referrals based on their home community, meant that 81% of the 2023 referrals are from Cork Prison with 18% representing The Midlands and Portlaoise Prisons.



CSS Year on Year Review

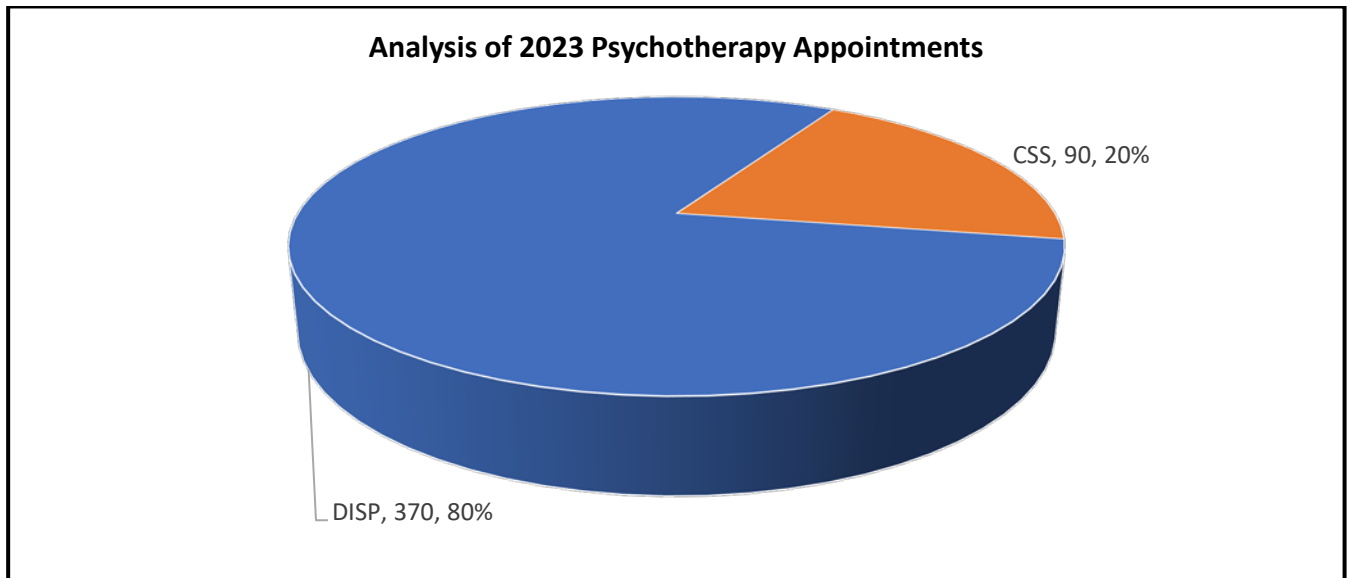
When reviewed since the programme inception in 2013 we can see its consistent success.



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

Psychotherapy and Acupuncture Interventions

Of the psychotherapy sessions arranged in 2023, there was 90% attendance. Therapeutic interventions were facilitated for 36 people across the project - 28 participants on the DISP programme and 6 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 2023 we facilitated 9 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.

Clean Slate Cork

As part of the Clean Slate Cork Research Project with UCC we participated in a podcast with the Two Norries, to discuss the research project and the importance of ‘peer-to-peer’ when researching about the lived experience of navigating life after prison,



Clean Slate Cork also launched its own website with the research findings and the biographical walking tours of the researchers.



Ministerial Visit

In July 2023 Minister of Justice Helen McEntee, Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Employment Simon Coveney, Colm Burke TD and Senator Jerry Buttimer visited the Cork Alliance Centre to learn more about our work. Our people shared their personal recovery journeys and what supports are needed to bring positive changes to their lives.



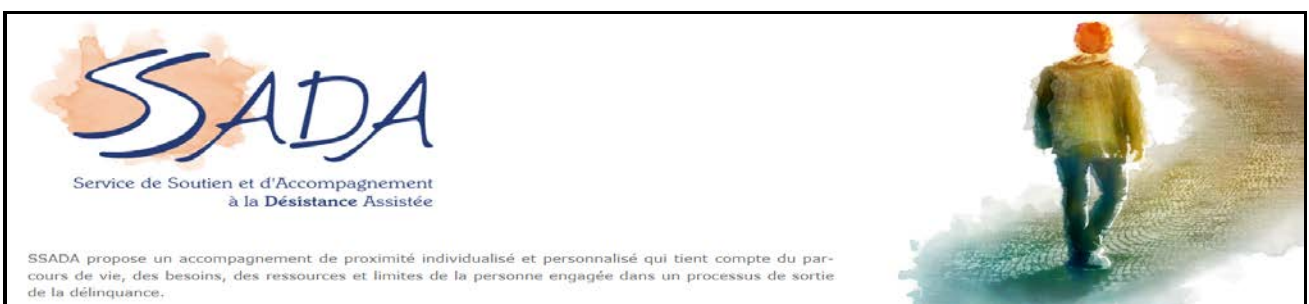
Advocacy

As we endeavour to provide a voice for our people and our work, we participated in a wide range of activities across 2023, including hosting a visit from the Minister for Justice.

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, which became active in 2023 and is based on our project and our in-house tools.



As CEO, Sheila Connolly presented at **Probation Service CBO Summit 2023** on the panel on innovation.



As CEO, Sheila Connolly represents our Traveller men in the **CETB Traveller Men’s Education and Training Task Group**

As CEO, Sheila Connolly is a member of **Advisory Group** on research on neurodiversity within Irish prisons, under the **Office of Independent Senator Lynn Ruane**.

Together with two of our former clients – Keith Purcell and Brian O’Sullivan, as CEO, Sheila Connolly presented at the **Citizens Assembly on Drugs 2023**, discussing the role prison in the lives of people living with addiction, together with what supports are required to support people move both out of addiction and crime



As CEO, Sheila Connolly presented on the work of the Cork Alliance Centre alongside the IPS and The Two Norries at **the International Corrections and Prisons Conference in Portugal 2023**



Conclusion

2023 presented the challenges and highs and lows we have come to expect on the desistance journey. The challenge of sustaining and maintaining our work with people who use our service, in a timely and appropriate manner is always present. Mindful of the trauma and difficulties in people's lives, as they seek to make changes, we are more trauma informed in our practices and approaches.

The commitment and dedication of the staff and the therapists we work alongside as we seek to support people who use our service on their journey is tangible and inspiring. We are always conscious of the challenges facing people, as they are endeavouring to bring change into their lives. With this in mind, we recognise the honour afforded to us by people opening up to us and accepting our support. Having the right staff is fundamental to the work of the Cork Alliance Centre and in 2023 we faced recruitment challenges with a much smaller pool of people available to employ, especially with a strong understanding of addiction and trauma, together with the flexibility to deal with any challenges that may arise.

We appreciate that in the Cork Alliance Centre, we are in the enviable position of knowing people who want to, and who do, change their lives for the better. We know how much work and effort that takes. We know the healing and recovery that has to be journeyed to make that a sustainable process. We know the anger, the fear, the upset, and the false personas that need to be worked on and addressed. Yet we see people do this every day - we know change happens. We know good people who have done bad things, who every day are trying to do the right thing – they cannot change what they have done but they can take responsibility for it, they can seek to repair the harm through living honourable, caring and connected lives.

We are grateful that the Probation Service, the Irish Prison Service, and the Department of Justice have trusted and allowed us to do this work. Work where we are guided not only by research in the development of our programmes and but the insights and wisdom of our people, who in the past or present accessed the service. Ownership, connection, and responsibility are fundamental to our programme, and our “nothing about us, without us” approach ensures that our people guide us to ensure the best service is available to the next person who needs and wants our support.

We look forward to a 2024 where we have more in-prison contact with people prior to their release, as this provides for improved relationships and lessens anxieties on release, allowing for more positive impacts and consistency of service.

Nothing about this work is easy, for the people who access our support or for the staff. Without the commitment and dedication of a highly skilled team the standard of work achieved would not be possible.

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