

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland's Cognitive Self-Change Programme: An Overview of the Pilot Programme in the Community

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Summary: With probation agencies increasingly charged with supervising offenders in the community who are assessed as posing a high risk of reoffending and a high risk of harm if a further offence was to occur, the need for an effective offending-behaviour programme for violent offenders is both timely and essential. One such intervention is the Cognitive Self-Change Programme developed by Jack Bush and researched extensively within secure facilities in North America. More recently, this programme has been adapted within a number of prisons in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, with the relapse prevention component of the programme being available to offenders upon their release to probation supervision in the community provided they have successfully completed the core elements of the programme in prison.

This article provides an overview of the ethos, principles and components of the Cognitive Self-Change Programme, and offers some preliminary reflections on the process of piloting this programme in its entirety with high-risk violent offenders subject to supervision in the community by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. The roles and responsibilities of the programme and treatment managers are also outlined and a brief consideration of some of the difficulties encountered along the way, and the lessons learned, is included.

Keywords: Cognitive-behavioural programmes, risk management, cognitive self-change programmes, high-risk offenders, instrumental violence, community-based interventions.

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