

The Roma Project: A Case Study of Community Service

Brian Horgan*

Summary: The criminal justice system has a responsibility to address offending behaviour in a manner that is sensitive to the offenders' culture, identifies the special characteristics of their offences and also addresses their unique needs. In Tallaght (southwest Dublin), a District Court judge requested the help of the Probation Service to address the repetitive offending behaviour and difficulties experienced by Roma women in particular. The result was the development of a community service project to engage these women in a non-threatening and productive manner. It was built on the known skills of Roma women (sewing) and their manifest need for English language classes. It proved popular and there was a high rate of attendance: of three projects completed, not one participant has been returned to court for non-attendance. The presentation of toys made in the project to a children's hospital received positive media coverage. Community service therefore can both address offending behaviour and bring about behavioural change.

Keywords: Social and cultural factors, communication, added value to community service.