

Loughan House Open Centre - Ireland

Introduction



Loughan House Open Centre (from now on “Loughan House”) is a low-security, open prison situated in Blacklion, located in the western region of County Cavan, Ireland. Loughan House operates under the oversight of the Irish prison service and was established in the year 1972. It is characterized by its secluded location.

Scale

Loughan House can accommodate 140 people and is divided into two separate units: the Main House and the Pine Lodge. Up to 80 of the residents stay in the Main House and up to 60 residents stay in the Pine Lodge. Pine Lodge offers one-bedroom accommodations and houses residents that have progressed from the Main House. On arrival, residents are assigned to the Main House accommodation, which has both single and double rooms.

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

Differentiation

Target group:

Loughan House houses men aged eighteen years and above, who require lower levels of security. The Irish Prison Service has established specific criteria for placement in open prisons like Loughan House. These criteria consider various factors such as the nature and length of the sentence, the remaining term of the sentence, and the assessed risk to public safety. Notably, certain offender categories, including sex offenders are ineligible for placement at this facility.

The admission of individuals into Loughan Houses doesn't occur immediately following their conviction. Typically, a brief period in conventional prisons is necessary before people in detention become eligible for transfer to an open facility. This practice aligns with the Irish Prison Service's Open Center Policy, which highlights that open centers primarily assist people in detention in the later stages of longer-term sentences. For individuals to fully benefit from the reintegration opportunities of this environment, it's

generally expected that they have a minimum of six months left on their sentence at the time of transfer. However, the duration can vary significantly, including cases where residents are serving life sentences.

Forms of security:

Loughan House staff try to create a sense of community within the facility, with little security, the inner accommodation areas are surrounded by a fence, however the gate is open during the day, facilitating access to work, training education and leisure pursuits. Central to this approach is relational security, a cornerstone emphasized by the staff's commitment to trust, transparency and communal involvement. This is evident in the interactions between residents and staff. They maintain a trusting rapport and talk freely in the hallways and other common areas. Staff and residents know each other by first name and the staff do not wear uniforms, which creates an environment of respect and mutual recognition. In cases where house rules are violated, the prison disciplinary process commences. Each instance is dealt with and if proven, a number of sanctions of various levels may be applied. The prison management determine sanctions, if necessary, on a case-by-case basis.

Visible static security measures are limited to strategically placed cameras and secure administrative areas. Gates to the facility remain open during the day. Residents staying in individual rooms have the option of securing their bedrooms when otherwise occupied with work, training, education and engagement with services.



Loughan House uses various procedural security measures. These may vary by unit, as the Pine Lodge offers residents a greater degree of personal responsibility and living conditions than the main building. Between 8 a.m. and 10-11 p.m., residents can move freely during the day, both within the facility and in the surrounding outdoor areas. People are regularly counted during the day. At night, residents must remain in their rooms, which, however, are not locked. Specific rules are enforced, including a strict ban on drug and alcohol use, with random testing to ensure compliance. A ministerial order in Ireland allows residents to use a cell phone in prison.

This allows the residents to maintain greater links with their families and loved ones. These can be bought in the tuck shop. The phones have no camera and can only be used to text and make calls. Computers can be used in a dedicated room and the use is monitored.

Activities

Loughan House actively promotes resident involvement through a structured daily program. The daily routine is tailored to each resident's preferences and chosen pursuits, including work, education and sports. Although residents have a say in their activities, they do not have complete control over their schedules, and participation in activities is mandatory.

There are several opportunities to work for residents both inside and outside the facility. Inside Loughan House, work opportunities such as farm work/maintaining the grounds, Poly-tunnel/horticulture, washing and valeting cars, repairing bicycles and running a coffee shop are available. The on-site education and training unit offers a variety of learning opportunities, including Art, English, Horticulture, IT Skills, Home Economics, Woodworking, driving lessons, languages and more. In addition, residents have the opportunity to engage in educational activities outside the facility. There are a number of accredited courses such as Clean Pass (Industrial Cleaning), Safe Pass, Working at Heights, Abrasive Wheel (Requirements for working on Construction sites & projects) and Fork Lift Operation which are also available to residents. Although Loughan House is somewhat isolated geographically which poses challenges for residents engagement with education and work, residents may have an opportunity to attend educational courses in Sligo, as well as supporting the local Tidy Towns Committee in Manorhamilton.



In terms of recreational pursuits, residents have the opportunity to participate in a mix of outdoor and indoor activities. These options include running, soccer, gym sessions, meditation, yoga, basketball, and handball, as well as visits to the library and the local chaplain. Additionally, residents can participate in Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous meetings and take advantage of addiction counseling. Residents can have visits from family and friends every day, but leaving the facility to visit them is more rigorous and not possible for everyone. Residents can progress to a programme of Temporary Release, where they can return home for periods of resocialization. A significant number of residents are able to avail of this facility.

Community-integration

Location and architecture:

Loughan House is located in Blacklion. Blacklion is a small village in western County Cavan, on the border of Northern and Southern Ireland. It has about 175 inhabitants (2022).¹ The facility is isolated and surrounded by green spaces. There is a daily bus service to/from Sligo (the nearest station to Loughan House) from/to Enniskillen which stops on request. Although the facility is generally not that easily accessible.

Loughan House has two units known as the Main House and the Pine Lodge, each offering different types of accommodation. The Main House offers both single and double rooms, with shared toilets and showers for residents. The Pine Lodge offers single rooms, complete with private bathrooms. Both units are equipped with small kitchens with appliances such as toasters, countertop grills, kettles and microwaves, although there is no seating. The Main House houses a tuck shop with a wide selection of healthy options such as vegetables or fruits, even canned ones, are available.

First impression of a visitor: "Arriving at the facility, you may be taken aback by the large green spaces surrounding the facility, which is completely isolated in the countryside. Prisoners and staff were very smiling".

Loughan House has two visitor rooms, each serving a different purpose. One visitor room is specifically for children, with playgrounds, games and murals (created by a resident), creating an inviting and child-friendly atmosphere. The second visitor's room is equipped with a kitchenette, allowing residents and their loved ones to have, for example, tea together. Each room has access to outdoor space where visits can take place, weather permitting. In addition, Loughan House has spacious outdoor spaces, a poly-tunnel/garden centre facility, a theater room, a chapel, a library, a dining room, a coffee shop (with outdoor seating area), a handball building, tennis court, football pitch, a gym, and several specialized areas for work, education and computer use.



Interaction with the community:

Loughan House is an open prison allowing residents to move freely in the outdoor areas surrounding the facility during the day. Even though the facility is remote, the staff and residents create interaction with the community. There is openness to the general public/interaction with the community, the public is encouraged to visit the Coffee shop, poly-tunnel/garden center, and to avail of the car wash/valet service.

¹Blacklion (Cavan, All Towns, Ireland) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map, Location, Weather and Web Information. (2022). City Population. Retrieved August 28th, 2023, from https://www.citypopulation.de/en/ireland/towns/cavan/32059__blacklion/

All these services are operated by the residents. Additionally, residents have the opportunity to work both inside and outside the open center, attend training sessions and courses, go to schools, etc. Nevertheless, this happens less frequently due to the remote and difficult location.

Loughan House offers some services to the community such as selling flowers and coffee and car wash/valeting service. Residents may also become involved in rearing calves for export to Africa as part of the Bóthar project.

Other aspects of community interaction include; a Christmas Market in 2022 and 2023 which was held in the prison grounds and open to the public. The residents played a significant role in preparing for the event and acting as stewards on these days. This was supported by several dozen local traders and crafters. The residents of Loughan House have also created a number of Podcasts, over 2 series, focusing on Loughan House, its' history, the local area, its residents and some of their journeys.

Loughan House Open Centre

Founded: 1973

Capacity: 140

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town: Blacklion
(Ireland)

Nature of interaction: Visited by
Prison Insider and RESCALED
(21/03/2023)

Publicity/ read more

- About Loughan House Open Centre at the official website of the Irish Prison service:
Loughan House. (2023). *Irish Prison Service*. Retrieved August 28th, 2023, from <https://www.irishprisons.ie/prison/loughan-house/>
- Podcasts made by the residents of Loughan house:
Loughan House Radio / Podcasts. (n.d.). Spotify. Retrieved January 30th, 2024 from: <https://open.spotify.com/show/14ARq5GYMXXgoEJwUi62vU> (a search for "Loughan House" will bring listeners to our channel)