

# Shelton Abbey Open Centre - Ireland

## Introduction



Shelton Abbey Open Centre (from now on “Shelton Abbey”) is an open, low security prison located just outside Arklow, on the southeast coast of Ireland. It falls under the jurisdiction of the Irish prison service and was founded in 1973. Shelton Abbey is, on the one hand, known for their unique location. The estate was owned by the Earls of Wicklow in the past but they had to sell it to the Irish state due to financial problems. This is why it is a very large, vast

domain with an abbey building that houses the detention facility. On the other hand, this detention facility is known for their Dogs for the Disabled program.

## Scale

Shelton Abbey can accommodate 115 people. The facility consists of two different units, the main building and the Avoca House. The Avoca House has mostly single rooms and accommodates people with long sentences. People with other sentences are housed in the main building, which has dormitory-style accommodations.

### RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

## Differentiation

### *Target group:*

The target group of Shelton Abbey are men aged nineteen years and older who are deemed to need lower levels of security. The Irish Prison Service outlined some specific criteria for placement in an open prison like Shelton Abbey. These criteria take into account several factors, including the nature of the sentence or crime, the length of the sentence, the remaining term of the sentence, and the assessed risk to public

safety. It is important to note that certain categories of offenders, such as sex offenders and those with Immigration Warrants, are not eligible for placement in this detention facility.

The placement of people in Shelton Abbey does not happen immediately after their conviction. A short period in conventional prisons is usually required before inmates can be transferred to an open facility. This practice is consistent with the Irish Prison Service's Open Center Policy, which emphasizes that open centers are designed primarily to facilitate inmates in the final stages of a longer-term sentence. To maximize the reintegration benefits of this environment, people in detention are generally expected to have at least six months of their sentence remaining at the time of transfer. Nevertheless, the duration varies considerably, with some residents also serving life sentences.

#### *Forms of security:*

At Shelton Abbey, the concept of security is multifaceted, including relational, static, and procedural security measures. Relational security plays an important role here. This is visible through the staff's commitment to trust, transparency and community, which reinforces the facility's dedication to low security and absence of physical barriers. In practice, this can be seen in the relationship between residents and staff. People talk freely in the corridors, demonstrating a high degree of familiarity. Both residents and staff address each other by first name and do not wear uniforms, creating an environment of mutual recognition and respect.

Static security measures are visible primarily only through strategically placed cameras in the facility and secure administrative offices. Residents' rooms remain unlocked.

Nevertheless, there are several procedural security measures in place. These can sometimes vary by unit, as the Avoca House offers residents a different level of autonomy than the main house. For example, some residents in the Avoca house can cook for themselves in a shared kitchen, unlike residents in the Main Building. During daytime, residents have the freedom to move inside the facility. They are not allowed to go beyond the visitors point, which is at the entrance of the facility. Staff conduct multiple residents' counts throughout the day. During nighttime, they have to stay in their rooms. Residents have access to daily temporary release programs (work, education, training and sports) outside the facility, but staff drop them off and return them to Shelton Abbey at the end of the day. There are still several rules, including the use of drugs and alcohol is strictly prohibited, and random tests are conducted to ensure such compliance. Each resident has his own mobile phone as part of the program.



## Activities:



Shelton Abbey encourages active participation among its residents within a structured daily routine. The open center encourages residents to immerse themselves in community life and participate in various activities inside and outside the facility. The daily schedule varies depending on individual residents and their chosen activities, including work, education and sports. It is mandatory to participate in activities.

Residents can participate in several work activities, inside and outside the facility. Inside the facility, this can be farm work, garden work or working in a barber shop, car wash, bike repair shop or coffee shop.

Furthermore, an education and training unit provides learning opportunities in the facility, covering subjects like art, English, woodworking, driving classes, languages, and more. Another possible activity is joining the Dogs for the Disabled programme. Dogs for the Disabled is a unique charity to improve the lives of individuals with physical disabilities in Ireland by providing fully trained assistance/therapy dogs. Residents can play an important role in the dogs' training process. In this programme, residents are taught everything about dog behavior, care and learning principles during weekly training classes. However, residents also have the opportunity to pursue education outside the facility.

In terms of leisure activities, residents can enjoy a mix of outdoor and indoor activities, including hillwalking, football, gym sessions, meditation, yoga, and visit the library or the local chaplain. In addition, residents can attend Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous meetings and receive addiction counseling.



## Community-integration

### *Location and architecture:*



Shelton Abbey is in Arklow, about an hour south of Dublin (the capital of Ireland). Arklow is situated at the mouth of the River Avoca, which is the longest river in County Wicklow. It has approximately 13 399 inhabitants (2022).<sup>1</sup> The facility is surrounded by forests, a farm and some industrial areas or companies.

While the exterior reflects the elegance of the abbey's design, the architecture of the interior may not exude the same atmosphere. Shelton Abbey consists of two separate units: the Main House and the Avoca House. These units consist of different spaces. The main building has dormitories, where several residents, often up to ten, share a room. Within this unit, communal toilets and showers are shared between the residents. The Avoca House, on the other hand, mainly has accommodation in single rooms. This unit offers a sense of privacy that contrasts with the shared dormitory style of the main house. Shelton Abbey also has a kitchen, a gym, a greenhouse and a few other special purpose rooms, including for work, teaching or using the computer.

### *Interaction with the community:*

Despite the fact that Shelton Abbey is located about three kilometres from the centre of Arklow, there is still interaction with the community. On the one hand, residents can leave the facility for work or education in the community. Some residents leave the facility every day to work in the community with their employer partners. On the other hand, the facility gives great importance to community support. Residents contribute to the Dogs for the Disabled program and in rearing calves for export to Africa as part of the Bóthar project. The facility also offers vocational opportunities such as bicycle repair services and a coffee shop. Lastly, their involvement in the Darkness into Light run reflects their commitment to mental health causes.

#### Shelton Abbey Open Centre

Founded: 1973

Capacity: 115

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town: Arklow (Ireland)

Nature of interaction: Visit by Prison Insider and RESCALED (20/03/2023)

<sup>1</sup>Arklow (Wicklow, All Towns, Ireland) - population statistics, charts, map, location, weather and web information. (2022). City Population. Retrieved August 25th, 2023, from [https://www.citypopulation.de/en/ireland/towns/wicklow/15378\\_\\_arklow/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/ireland/towns/wicklow/15378__arklow/)

## Publicity/ read more

- About Shelton Abbey Open Centre at the official website of the Irish Prison service:

Shelton Abbey. (2023). *Irish Prison Service*. Retrieved August 25th, 2023, from <https://www.irishprisons.ie/prison/shelton-abbey/>

- The official website of the "Dogs for the disabled" programme:

Our Community Projects. (2018, October 15). *Dogs for the Disabled*. Retrieved August 25th, 2023, from

[https://dogsfordisabled.ie/about/community/#:~:text=Shelton%20Abbey%3A%20Mens%20open%20Prison%20\(Wicklow\)&text=On%20entering%20the%20Buddy%20Dog,for%20their%20dog%20to%20learn.](https://dogsfordisabled.ie/about/community/#:~:text=Shelton%20Abbey%3A%20Mens%20open%20Prison%20(Wicklow)&text=On%20entering%20the%20Buddy%20Dog,for%20their%20dog%20to%20learn.)