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Evaluation of Youth Diversion Projects

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RESEARCH MATTERS LTD

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 2

Table of Contents 3

List of tables 6

List of Figures 7

Acronyms 8

Chapter 1. Context *9*

Organisation of this report 10

Chapter 2. Literature Review *11*

Introduction 11

Nature of offending by young people 11

Risk factors 11

Protective factors 13

Diversion as a response to youth offending 13

Variation in diversion 15

Limitations of diversion 16

Effectiveness of diversion 17

Interventions with young people at risk 18

Assessing risk 21

Youth work and youth justice work 22

Relationships and active participation 24

Previous studies of YDPs 26

YDP policy guidelines 27

Summary 30

Chapter 3. Methodology *32*

Introduction 32

Aims of the evaluation 32

Theory of change 32

Realist evaluation 33

Methods 33

Literature review 35

Interviews 35

Administrative data 36

Case studies 37

Surveys 39

Triangulation, synthesis and integration of findings 40

Ethical considerations 41

Limitations 41

Chapter 4. Findings: Governance, funding, future directions and profile of key personnel, participants and projects *43*

Introduction 43

Aim and objectives of the YDPs 43

Governance of the projects 45

Governance structures at national level 45

Governance structures at project level as set out in policy 46

The internal processes of the CBO 49

Local governance in practice 49

Funding of projects 54

Sources of funding 55

Overview of project funding 2020 and 2021 55

Future strategic direction 59

Comments in survey re implementation of new services 61

Profile and characteristics of personnel 61

Profile and characteristics of YDP managers 62

Profile and characteristics of YDP YJWs 63

Profile and characteristics of YDP Juvenile Liaison Officers 66

Profile and characteristics of YDP participants 67

Diversity in individual needs and risks 67

Diversity in family contexts 69

Number of participants enrolled in YDPs since 2006 70

Gender, foreign background, disability and disadvantage 71

Labour and educational status on entry to the YDP 72

Profile of projects 72

Community contexts 72

Characteristics of projects 75

Summary 78

Chapter 5. Findings: Processes, interventions and mechanisms *80*

Introduction 80

Participant pathways through the YDPs 80

Entry to projects through primary or secondary referral 80

Referral Assessment Committee 81

Length of time young people are engaged in the projects 83

Disengaging from the projects 83

Processes in use in YDPs 84

Philosophical underpinnings of the work that takes place 85

Relationships 85

Group work and one-to-one engagement 88

Availability of YDPs 89

Interventions that take place in the project 90
Overall number of interventions 92
Standardised programmes 92
Interventions according to individual YLS area 92
Differences across projects with regard to interventions 100
Perceptions about the usefulness of various interventions 101

Summary 102

What works, for whom and in what circumstances 103
CMO 1: Creating an environment where participants choose to engage 104
CMO 2: Assessing and reassessing 107
CMO 3: Shaping an alternative life, now and in the future 110
CMO 4: Facilitating, enabling and supporting an alternative life 116
CMO 5: Communities and families supported and enabled to respond to the needs of young people 119
Summary 122

Chapter 6. Findings: Outcomes and impact of YDPs ***123***

Introduction 123

Survey findings overview 123

YLS analysis findings overview 124
Changes in YLS scores according to area of risk 127
Differences between projects 128

Overview of findings from interviews, focus groups and site visits 129
Maturing process 130
Realistic expectations 130
Scaffolding outcomes 131
Impact of YDPs on crime rates and crime seriousness 136
Impact of YDPs on family circumstances and parenting 138
Impact of YDP on Education/Employment 140
Impact of YDPs on peer relations 143
Impact of YDP on substance abuse 144
Impact of YDP on leisure and recreation 147
Impact of YDP on personality/behaviour 149
Impact of YDP on attitudes/orientation 151

Summary 152

Chapter 7. Synthesis of key findings, conclusions and recommendations ***154***

Overall conclusion 154

Findings and conclusions 155
Q1. How are the Youth Diversion Projects structured, governed and resourced and what are the key inputs into the projects? 155
Q2. How are these projects implemented – what are the main processes, actions and activities associated with their implementation? 161
Q3. What works for whom in which circumstances; what are the mechanisms that operate; and, how does the context influence outcomes? 167
Q4. What changes for young people, their families and the broader community as a result of being involved in the YDP? 167

Q5. What recommendations arise from the evaluation 174

Recommendations for improvements in governance 175
Recommendations in respect of resourcing of YDPs 175
Recommendations in respect of personnel 176
Recommendations in respect of the implementation of YDPs 177
Recommendations in respect of outcomes and impacts 177
Recommendations in respect of further research and data development 178

References 180

List of tables

Box 1: Key features of Irish Youth Justice Policy (Reddy, 2018) 30
Table 1: Number of key informants who took part in individual/group interviews 35
Table 2: Key characteristics of case study sites 38
Table 3: Type of interview and participants 39
Table 4: Managers' perceptions on the extent to which they feel supported 45
Table 5: Role of Project Committee – Committee Members 52
Table 6: Number of services and range of funding amounts 2020 and 2021 56
Table 7: Number, percentage and request for funding for all personnel in the 2021 budget 57
Table 8: Number of full-time workers according to number of hours worked 57
Table 9: Range and mean average pay requested for personnel working full-time 58
Table 10: Number and percentage of years experience of managers 62
Table 11: Number and percentage of years experience of YJWs 64
Table 12: Perceptions of YJWs to a number of statements about their jobs 65
Table 13: Likelihood of YJWs remaining in their post for two years or more 66
Table 14: Number and percentage of years experience of Juvenile Liaison Officers 67
Table 15: Key characteristics of YDPs based on survey of projects 75
Table 16: Number and percentage of participants according to the length of time in the YDP 83
Table 17: Responses by young people about key elements of their relationships with their Youth Justice Worker 86
Table 18: Percentage of YJWs who spent time in a typical week on group work and one-to-one activities with project participants 88
Table 19: Overall percentage of plans according to the number and area of intervention 92
Table 20: Number of plans by types of interventions relating to leisure and recreation 94
Table 21: Activities carried out by YJWs by frequency 100
Table 22: Success of projects – Summary of adult survey results 124
Table 23: Changes in risk categories 126
Table 24: Change in risk level (participant %) 127
Table 25: Summary of changes in risk levels (percentage point changes) 127
Table 26: Distribution of projects by percentage showing change in risk level 128
Table 27: Distribution of change in risk level by ethnicity, type of referral, continuity of engagement status or age 129
Table 28: Impact of project participation on organisational skills 133
Table 29: Impact of project participation on self-confidence 134
Table 30: Impact of project participation on hope for the future 135
Table 31: Changes in risk levels relating to prior and current offences/dispositions 137
Table 32: Impact of project participation on crime rates and seriousness of crime (adult surveys) 137
Table 33: Changes in risk levels relating to family circumstances and parenting 139
Table 34: Impact of project participation on family circumstances/parenting 140
Table 35: Changes in risk levels relating to education and employment 142
Table 36: Impact of project participation on education/employment 142
Table 37: Changes in risk levels relating to peer relations 144

Table 38: Changes in risk levels relating to substance abuse 146
Table 39: Impact of project participation on substance abuse 146
Table 40: Changes in risk levels relating to leisure and recreation 148
Table 41: Impact of project participation on leisure/recreational opportunities 148
Table 42: Changes in risk levels relating to personality and behaviour 150
Table 43: Impact of project participation on personality and behaviour 150
Table 44: Change in risk level relating to attitudes and behaviour 152
Table 45: Impact of project participation on attitudes/orientation 152

List of Figures

Figure 1: Preliminary theory of change 33
Figure 2: Data sources and methods 34
Figure 3: Overview of administrative data sources 36
Figure 4: Online surveys about perceptions and experiences of the YDPs – Questionnaire distribution and responses 40
Figure 5: Funding by individual source 2020 55
Figure 6: Percentage of respondents reporting they are 'confident' or 'very confident' that new services can be implemented 60
Figure 7: Supports considered to be most important in the introduction of new services 60
Figure 8: Commentary regarding new services 61
Figure 9: Number of participants enrolled by year of enrolment 71
Figure 10: Overall population size of catchment areas for individual projects 72
Figure 11: Percentage of respondents that agree/disagree that participants face transport issues that make it difficult for them to participate in YDP 76
Figure 12: Multi-stakeholder perceptions of level of crime and intimidation in the project 77
Figure 13: Responses by young people to the question of 'How likely is it that you would come to the project if you did not get on with the Youth Justice Worker?' 86
Figure 14: Percentage of YJWs and JLOs who report project relationships are 'good' or 'very good' with various organisations 87
Figure 15: YJWs availability during a 'typical week' 90
Figure 16: Overview of interventions as documented in 99 Youth Diversion Project plans for 2021 91
Figure 17: Types of interventions relating to personality/behaviours 98
Figure 18: Percentage of JLO and YJWs who consider named interventions as 'extremely useful' 102
Figure 19: Summary of CMOs 103
Figure 20: Changes in risk scores between T1 and T2 125
Figure 21: Changes in YLS risk scores by period between assessments 125
Figure 22: Distribution of YLS risk scores at enrolment and most recent assessment 126
Figure 23: Scaffolding outcomes 131
Figure 24: Participants' self-reported changes in criminal or antisocial behaviour 138
Figure 25: Participant self-reported changes in substance abuse 147

Acronyms

ACE	Adverse childhood experience
ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
APR	Annual Project Report
BPDT	Best Practice Development Team
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CMOs	Contexts, mechanisms and outcomes
DoJ	Department of Justice
ESF	European Social Fund
FFT	Functional family therapy
IYJS	Irish Youth Justice Service
JLO	Juvenile Liaison Officer
MST	Multi-systemic therapy
OJJDP	Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
RCT	Randomised control trials
REPPP	Research Evidence into Policy Programmes and Practice
YDP	Youth Diversion Project
YJW	Youth Justice Worker
YLS/CMI	Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory

Chapter 1. Context

This report presents the findings arising from an evaluation of the Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs), formally referred to as Garda Youth Diversion Projects. These projects support the Diversion Programme which is provided for in the Children Act 2001 (Part 4). YDPs are primarily targeted at 12-17 year old 'at risk' youths in communities where a specific need has been identified and where there is a risk of them remaining within the justice system. The projects provide an opportunity for diversion from any, or further, contact with the criminal justice system and this is aligned with the vision set out in the Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027 (Department of Justice (DoJ), 2021) of:

> *'Collaborating across all sectors of government and society in the development and delivery of opportunities for children and young people, to harness support in their families and communities in order to strengthen their capacities to live free from crime and harm.' (p3)*

The projects are community-based multi-agency crime prevention initiatives, which seek to divert young people who have become involved in crime/anti-social behaviour and to support wider preventative work within the community and with families at risk (DoJ, 2022). At the time of data collection, it was reported that there were 105 YDPs state-wide (Minister for Justice, 2022).

The YDPs are co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Social Fund Plus 2021-2027 Programme, which is the European Union (EU)'s main instrument for investing in people and supporting the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and has a particular focus on supporting employment, social, education and skills policies, including structural reforms in these areas. The ESF fund has a specific focus on improving the education and employability prospects of young people engaged in the projects. Funding for the projects has increased each year since 2015 and an allocation of €18 million was provided for in 2021 (Minister of State at the DoJ, 2021).

This evaluation took place between December 2021 and November 2022. While the closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic had ceased, interviews with key stakeholders highlighted many challenges for young people and the projects over the course of 2020 and 2021. The challenges had largely dissipated by the time of the evaluation field work and consequently COVID-19 is not a specific focus.

The overall purpose of this evaluation is to generate policy-relevant knowledge concerning the structure, conduct and impacts of the YDPs and to consider issues relating to the governance, processes, outputs, and short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. Five key research questions are addressed in the evaluation, and these are:

1. How are the Youth Diversion Projects structured and what are the key inputs into the projects?
2. How are these projects implemented – what are the main processes, actions and activities associated with their implementation?
3. What changes for young people, their families, and the broader community as a result of being involved in the YDP?

4. What works for whom in which circumstances; what are the mechanisms that operate; and how does the context influence outcomes?
5. What recommendations arise from the evaluation in terms of funding, governance, supports, synergies, coherence and balance between interventions and wider engagement?

Organisation of this report

The remainder of this report is organised into the following chapters:
Chapter 2 presents a literature review which sets out the context for YDPs.
Chapter 3 provides a detailed understanding of the methodological approach adopted and methods used.
Chapter 4 presents the findings emerging from an analysis of structures, governance, and resources for the YDPs.
Chapter 5 describes and analyses processes, interventions, and mechanisms used in the implementation of the service.
Chapter 6 identifies key outcomes arising from the YDPs.
Chapter 7 presents a synthesis of the main findings, conclusions drawn and key recommendations for the future funding, governance, implementation and reporting of YDPs.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

This review presents an overview of literature relevant to YDPs and includes material relating to the nature of offending by young people, diversion as a response to youth offending, interventions with young people at risk, assessing risk, youth work and youth justice work, relationships and active participation, and previous studies of YDPs. The chapter concludes with a consideration of policy guidelines relating to YDPs in Ireland.

Nature of offending by young people

Large scale criminological research over many years has revealed clear patterns of offending linked to levels of maturity. It has observed consistently that offending behaviour (both detected and self-reported) peaks in the mid-teens before dropping steeply at the onset of young adulthood and declining more slowly thereafter (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983; Bottoms, 2006). It has been observed that indicators of high risk during adolescence are weak predictors of longer-term offending (Vincent et al, 2012).

Young people who commit offences can largely be separated into two groups: 'adolescent-limited offenders' who exhibit antisocial behaviour only in adolescence, and 'life-course persistent offenders' who constitute a much smaller group that tends to start antisocial behaviour earlier and continue into adulthood (Moffitt, 1993; Carlsson and Sarnecki, 2016). Adolescent-limited offenders quickly grow out of offending as developmental maturity proceeds and self-control improves – they are essentially law-abiding children who are temporarily drawn into adolescent delinquency (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2019 p7). Life course offenders exhibit a range of risk factors such as impulsivity, impaired cognitive abilities, low self-control, often amplified by deficient parenting (ibid, p8). Moffit (1993) sees the life-course persistent offenders as drawn from a larger population who very early in life exhibit impaired cognitive ability and difficult temperament and other deficits in neuropsychological functioning (Fergusson and Horwood, 2002).

The differentiation has also been presented in terms of 'early-onset' and 'later-onset' delinquency, with the early-onset group having a greater pre-disposition to long-term offending. Early onset delinquency is linked to family influences such as inept parental discipline, poor parental monitoring and inadequate family problem-solving. Those who show late onset are not immune to family difficulties but their moderate risk status is exacerbated by affiliations with delinquent peers (Patterson, 1996). Late onset, adolescence limited offending has been linked to 'processes of social mimicry and peer influence' (Fergusson et al, 2000, Moffit et al, 1996, Patterson and Yoerger (1997). Studies of offending trajectories have mainly involved males and there is evidence that females may not share the same patterns. Silverthorn and Frick (1999), for example, suggest a common female trajectory in which the onset of offending is delayed until adolescence.

Risk factors

Risk factors associated with youth offending and antisocial behaviour are often classified under family, school, community and individual/peer headings (McCarthy et al, 2004, Thomas et al, 2008).

Family factors include poor parental supervision and discipline, family conflict, family history of problem behaviour, parental involvement in problem behaviour and condoning attitudes, low income and poor housing, and experience of authority care. Family management problems, family contact and inappropriate modelling behaviours may all affect whether a child becomes involved in offending.

School risk factors include low achievement beginning at primary level, educational failure, aggressive behaviour, lack of commitment, school exclusions and early antisocial behaviour. A clear link has been established between truancy and school exclusion and offending behaviour. Young people are more likely to feel attached to school if they feel able to participate and are rewarded for effort they put into school work and other school activities.

Community factors include community disorganisation and neglect, availability of drugs and high turnover and lack of neighbourhood attachment. Risk associated with community also include lone-parent families, unemployment, poor housing, crime and antisocial behaviour, community norms tolerant of crime, vandalism, economic deprivation and social exclusion. High levels of such risk may help identify locations for targeting resources and establishing interventions such as youth projects. The individual and peer risk factors include alienation and lack of social commitment, personal attitudes that condone problem behaviour, early involvement in problem behaviour and friends involved in problem behaviour. Demographic characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity are also associated with levels of risk, as are biological and physiological traits such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and alienation/rebelliousness.

A rapid evidence review of antisocial behaviours by Vaughan et al found strong evidence to suggest that 'a confluence of factors at the individual, family, peer, community (neighbourhood and school) and wider societal level are implicated in the manifestation of anti-social behaviours' (2022, p9). They listed 'promotive factors' that include personality traits and genetic and epigenetic factors; exposure to violence, family conflict and the absence of positive parenting practices; neighbourhood deprivation, neighbourhood disorder and high levels of neighbourhood crime; low educational attainment, an unstable school environment and the perception of teachers being unfair; and social deprivation and poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and in certain contexts/jurisdictions, contact with the justice system.

It is of note that substance misuse was not identified as a specific risk factor given its prevalence. European data on early onset of substance abuse show that an average of 2.4% of students aged 15-16 used cannabis by the age of 13 and 33% used alcohol by that age; the corresponding figures for Ireland were 3.1% and 24% respectively. The figures for intoxication in the previous 30 days were 13% (European average) and 16% (Ireland). Figures for life-time use of cannabis were 16% (European average) and 19% (Ireland) (ESPAD Group, 2020).

The existence of one or more risk factors is not considered a good predictor of outcomes and the majority of young people with risk factors do not engage in crime or antisocial behaviour. However, where multiple risk factors exist, there is increased likelihood of poor outcomes. Public Safety Canada (Savignac, 2010, p2) notes, citing Hawkins et al (2000) and Thornberry et al (2004), that 'Studies have shown that the more risk factors a young person accumulates in different domains, the

greater the probability that he or she will move onto a trajectory of serious offending, as the risk factors have cumulative and interactive effects'. This is recognised in the Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027 which observes that 'multiple disadvantage often underlies involvement of children and young people with the Criminal Justice System' (DoJ, 2021, p6). The profile of participants in the YDPs reflects the multiplicity of risk factors, with a recent study of young people in the YDPs revealing an 'alarming rate' of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) with 63% having four or more ACEs compared with 12% in the general population. The study urges alignment of practices and policies with the needs of traumatised populations if trauma symptoms are not to go unrecognised or be misunderstood and ensuing behaviour mislabelled as 'challenging'. This can impact on how workers treat young people and can compromise the continued engagement of a young person in a service, possibly resulting in the young person's needs going unmet and objectives of the programme not being achieved (Dermody et al, 2020, p7).

For children aged between 6 and 11, committing an offence seems to be the best predictor of future delinquent behaviour, while for those aged 12-14, a lack of social ties and association with antisocial peers provides the strongest predictors (McCarthy et al, 2004).

Protective factors

Protective factors can help build resilience and ameliorate risk. McCarthy et al (2004) point out that the more protective factors there are, the greater the likelihood that a child will be resilient to risk. They identify four broad types of protective processes, notably promoting self-esteem and achievement, and providing positive relationships and new opportunities. (The other two process types identified comprise reducing the impact of or exposure to risk and reducing chain reactions to negative experience.) Thomas et al (2008) surmise that resilience is more likely where children have a stronger sense of attachment to other people, a more positive outlook on life, more plans for the future and more control over their lives. Protective factors are strong bonds with family, friends and teachers; healthy standards set by parents, teachers and community leaders; opportunities for involvement in families, school and community; social and learning skills to enable participation and recognition and praise for positive behaviour.

Community protective factors identified by McCarthy et al (2004) include supportive adults, pro-social peers with whom they can talk and listen to, a sense of belonging and connectedness, opportunities for success and supportive agencies. Family can be a source of protective factors through supervision/monitoring, sharing time together, and giving praise. As regards individual-focused protective factors, they highlight social skills and coping behaviours as important. Personal protective factors identified by Howard and Johnson (2001) include personal attributes such as emotional strength, a sense of humour and social competence; coping behaviours such as problem-solving skills and optimism; and self-beliefs such as high self-esteem, sense of purpose and self-confidence.

Diversion as a response to youth offending

Recognising that most youths mature out of offending and that it is a short-lived, normal part of adolescence which should be met with minimal intervention aimed at facilitating 'a successful, pro-social transition to adulthood, while also holding youths accountable' (OJJDP, 2017), the preferred

response by authorities is to divert young offenders from the mainstream criminal justice system. Diversion is also seen as providing a proportionate response while holding young people accountable (Farrell et al, 2018, p3). Adler et al (2016, p44) point out that 'it must be borne in mind that some individuals will desist from crime without any intervention. There is also evidence to suggest that drawing young people who commit low level crimes into the formal youth justice system may increase their reoffending. Therefore, diversionary approaches, including restorative justice, which direct these individuals away from the justice system, may be appropriate for some young people'.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018, p29) also makes the point that 'most youth grow out of delinquent behaviour without any intervention, and formal processing substantially increases the likelihood of future arrests, while doing little or nothing to improve behaviour', when arguing that 'retaining the threat to reopen or process the cases of youth who fail to meet the conditions of the diversion program is unnecessary and counterproductive'.

Diversion is recognised as being 'at the core' of the Irish youth justice system (Convery and Seymour, 2016). The Children Act 2001, which provides the legal framework for the Irish youth justice system, stipulates that detention is used as a last resort when all other community-based diversion responses and sanctions have been exhausted (Reddy, 2018). Diversion is attractive also because it minimises the negative, stigmatising effects associated with involvement in the system (Schwalbe et al, 2012). A growing body of research demonstrates clearly that involvement in the juvenile justice system is associated with an increased likelihood of offending behaviour (Wilson and Hoge, 2013, p.499). A meta-analysis by Petrosino et al (2010) concluded that formal justice system processing 'appears not to have crime control effect, and across all measures [of prevalence, incidence, severity and self-report] appears to increase delinquency'. According to the Centre for Justice Innovation (2019, p.8), 'outcomes get worse the further young people progress into the [criminal justice] system' and formal processing 'extends and deepens young people's criminal careers'.

A Scottish study of more than 4,000 young people found that those brought to court were twice as likely to admit to engaging in serious offending within a year than those who were not, with matched backgrounds and comparable self-reported offending behaviour; the authors described involvement in the juvenile justice system as 'inherently criminogenic' (McAra and McVie, 2007, p.318). A study in Northamptonshire found that prosecution increased the likelihood of reoffending even when controlling for personal and offence characteristics (Kemp et al, 2002). A Liverpool study found significant increases in elapsed time to reoffending, identified as a key measure of desistance (Haines et al, 2012). The Centre for Justice Innovation identified at least three ways in which diversion is more cost-effective than standard system processing: cost avoidance, reduced re-offending and earlier access to support for physical health, mental health or other social service needs (p.9).

Two main negative effects of processing through the traditional criminal justice system are commonly identified. First, consistent with labelling theory, the young people may be viewed and 'labelled' as offenders, and they may internalise this label themselves. A 'deviant identity' is not generated by the initial act of offending, but rather the justice system's response to it, and in turn the young person's response to the system (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2019, p9). The young

people may, as a result, view their legitimate options in society as limited and conform to their labels by engaging in additional offending behaviour (Farrell et al, 2018, p2). Second, consistent with differential association and social learning theories, involvement in the criminal justice system may expose the young people to more delinquent peers as a result of which they become more heavily involved in offending behaviour (ibid, p3). The detrimental effect of additional contact with the justice system is 'compounded by [a] contagion effect when formal processing puts young people in close contact with negative peers' (Hoge, 2016). Diversion is intended to reduce or avoid these risks and is often targeted at first-time offenders charged with less serious offences.

Benefits of diversion thus potentially include reduced stigma and avoidance of association with negative peers but can also result in improved relations with community and police and opportunities to connect with services in the community. Diversion also avoids collateral consequences of formal processing such as interference with education and having a criminal record. System benefits are said to include reduced court caseloads and costs, allowing more resources to be devoted to those who pose a greater risk to public safety and have greater needs for services (OJJDP, 2017, p3). In relation to cost avoidance, it is telling to consider costs of crime and detention. Estimated costs of crime in the UK may be a good indicator of costs in Ireland, with for example, violence with injury estimated to cost £14,050 per offence (in 2015/16 prices), domestic burglary £5,930, theft from the person £1,380, and criminal damage other than arson £1,350. The corresponding estimated total costs of these crimes were £15.5bn, £4.1bn, £0.6bn and £1.4bn respectively (Heeks et al, 2018). As regards detention, the average annual cost of an available staffed prison space was €80,335 in 2021 (Irish Prison Service, 2021) while the cost of detaining a young person in Oberstown Children Detention Campus is significantly greater. The cost of diversion and programmes such as the YDPs can be considered in this context.

The achievement of these benefits depends on the nature of the diversion programme chosen and how programmes are implemented. It is possible that programmes such as the YDPs reintroduce elements of labelling and negative peer association by bringing together groups of 'at risk' young people despite their limited offending record to date; on the other hand, YDPs may enhance access to services and thereby reduce the risk of re-offending.

Variation in diversion

Internationally, there is a wide variation in types of diversion programmes for young people. They can vary as regards point of contact with the justice system (e.g. pre- or post-arrest), form, target population, eligibility criteria, interventions, how charges are handled, consequences of non-compliance and desired outcomes. Farrell et al (2018, p5) categorise intervention types as police-led (typically cautioning and warning), service co-ordination (case management programmes that link young people to services, including wraparound services that build a team around the young people and their families), counselling and skill-building programmes (including mentoring and education and training programmes) and restorative justice programmes (including victim-offender mediation and family group conferences). Some diversion programmes rely exclusively on caution and surveillance while others lay down conditions for entry into diversion and continued inclusion, including participation in interventions that are therapeutic in nature, focus on behaviour modification, involve community service or entail restitution (Wilson and Hoge, 2013, p499; OJJDP, 2017, p3). Examples of such interventions include, among others, restorative justice, truancy

intervention, curfews, respite or shelter care, parent training and underage-drinking prevention programmes (Cocozza et al, 2005). Separate evaluations of these intervention programmes have not always taken place – evaluations have tended to focus on the overall diversion programmes of which they are part. This variability in types of diversion programme complicates comparison of results and evaluation of effectiveness.

The Garda Youth Diversion Programme relies on informal caution for less serious cases and formal caution with supervision for more serious cases. Participation in programmes such as YDPs is not a condition of entry to diversion but a support for effective diversion after a decision to divert has been taken. Voluntary participation is seen as a strength of the projects, ensuring that a young person in a project has actively made a decision to engage and has a prior intrinsic motivation to change, increasing the likelihood of change as a result of the intervention (Irish Youth Justice Service, undated, p2). A relevant consideration is how young people experience participation in diversion programmes. Sandoy (2020) argues that diversionary, consent-based measures should be characterised as alternative punishment and not alternatives to punishment and categorises deprivations experienced by young people charged with drug offences as deprivations of time, social bonds, dignity and self. Involvement in programmes such as YDPs entails giving up time for participation (and associated travel) and varying degrees of stigma, social isolation and loss of personal identity. The extent to which participation is actually experienced as voluntary is a matter for empirical research. Swirak reported from her interviews with Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs) and Youth Justice Workers (YJWs) that 'the principle of voluntary participation … was found to be compromised at times'; she commented that project workers who confirmed their belief in the principle could nevertheless accept that participation was a condition of the young person's supervision under the diversion programme (2013, p238).

Limitations of diversion

Potential limitations of diversion programmes have also been identified in the literature. They apply to diversion projects as well as parent programmes. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) (2017, p5) draws attention to concerns of net-widening and discrimination. The risk of net-widening is that diversion may include young people who might not otherwise come into contact with the criminal justice system and who are unlikely to re-offend anyway. In this view diversion extends social control, does not prevent stigmatising and may even increase recidivism. It can be appreciated that net-widening could apply to YDPs, especially if numbers of referrals of higher-risk individuals drop, although the requirement to risk assess and exclude low-risk young people mitigates the risk.

The risk of discrimination is that personal biases and arbitrary decision-making may result in under-representation in diversion programmes and over-representation in the criminal justice system of youths from different backgrounds (e.g. race, economic status). Discrimination could conceivably affect referrals and enrolment in YDPs as well as the parent diversion programme. Increased re-offending is also seen as a possibility because young people do not view participation as being 'negatively consequential' and may feel uninhibited to continue in their problematic behaviour (Mears et al, 2016; Farrell et al, p4).

Effectiveness of diversion

Studies of effectiveness of diversion as regards recidivism have produced mixed results. A meta-analysis of 45 evaluation studies by Wilson and Hoge found evidence of increased effectiveness of cautioning programmes compared with traditional juvenile justice processing (Wilson and Hoge, 2013; Wilson et al, 2018). The 2013 analysis concluded that maximising diversion and minimising intervention was most effective for low-risk youth while a higher level of intervention was more appropriate to medium- and high-risk youth. A YDP focus on higher-risk young people would be consistent with this finding. The 2018 analysis focused on cautioning programmes with low-risk groups and highlighted the finding that whether or not programmes referred participants to services made no significant difference as regards recidivism. A 2012 meta-analysis of 28 studies found that family-based treatment programmes produced a statistically significant reduction in recidivism but found no significant effect of diversion programmes overall (Schwalbe et al, 2012). Several meta-analyses cited by Wilson and Hoge (2013, p507) showed that diversion programmes which targeted young people prior to charge were more effective than those targeting young people after charge, although it was acknowledged that this could be due to differences in the underlying seriousness of offending. The Garda Diversion Programme is pre-charge in that a prosecution is avoided and the record of caution is not disclosed (with some exceptions); the YDP is also pre-charge in this sense. The studies also demonstrated that therapeutic interventions delivered in community settings were more efficacious that those delivered in institutional settings (ibid, p499). A meta-analysis of 21 restorative diversion programmes found them to be 'overall effective at reducing recidivism' (Wong et al, 2016, p1310). Programme implementation has been found to be critical, with higher quality implementation and fidelity to model standards resulting in larger effects on recidivism (Schwalbe et al, 2012; Wilson and Hoge, 2013; Lipsey, 2009).

Some examples of RCT-based evaluations follow. Randomised control trials (RCTs) are regarded as the gold standard for measuring effectiveness of an intervention. They allow for sampling control of known and unknown variables that may influence an outcome and facilitate meaningful comparison of results for a group that receives an intervention and those that do not. Although no study is likely on its own to prove causality, randomisation reduces bias by balancing participant characteristics (observed and unobserved) between the groups allowing attribution of any differences in outcome to the study intervention. This is difficult if not impossible with any other study design (Hariton and Locascio, 2018). RCTs are relatively uncommon outside clinical trials and alternatives are regularly used in criminal justice and other areas. The meta-analysis of Schwalbe et al (2012) included 14 studies using RCTs and 14 using quasi-experimental experiments, with the latter involving matching or statistical control for pre-treatment variables. A US-based review of aversion programmes involving prison visits by young people to 'scare them straight' identified nine studies with RCTs that found the interventions counter-productive (Petrosino et al, 2000; Thomas et al, 2008, p108). A study of wraparound services for juvenile offenders in Ohio used random assignment and found no advantage in comparison with conventional services as regards re-offending, but identified other positive results such as fewer school absences, suspensions and expulsions (Carney and Buttell, 2003; Farrell et al, 2018, p8). A RCT was used in an evaluation of a diversion-cum-reading programme and was found to reduce likelihood of re-offending as compared with diversion cum community service (Seroczynski et al, 2016). On the other hand, a review of studies of interventions to prevent gang violence excluded all identified studies because they did not involve randomised or quasi-randomised control trails (Fisher et al, 2008; Thomas et al, 2008, p103).

Comparisons with other relevant groups can also provide valuable information. As an example of alternative approaches to the use of RCTs, an examination of the impact on early adulthood recidivism of a US diversion programme for youth with behavioural health concerns compared results for participants who completed the programme with two groups: youth appropriate to the programme who did not take part and youth who participated but did not complete treatment (and reported lower odds of offending as young adults and fewer offences for those who completed the treatment) (Kretschmar et al, 2018). What was described as a 'quasi-experimental study' of teen courts in the US compared results for 635 young people processed through teen courts and 186 regular diversion participants from the period prior to the teen court being established (Norris et al, 2011). A similar approach was adopted in a quasi-experimental study of pre-arrest diversion in Philadelphia schools where recidivism rates for participants were compared with arrested youths prior to establishment of the programme (Goldstein et al, 2021). A US study of pregnant teens compared results over different sites, some with intervention, some without, on the assumed basis that differences between sites would be marginal (add reference). A US study of access to mental health services through diversion compared an intervention group in one city with similar groups in neighbouring cities without diversion (Barret et al,2021). To be included in the meta-analysis by Wilson and Hoge (2013, p500), a study had to examine the recidivism rate of youth offenders referred to a diversion programme compared to those subject to traditional processing and where more than one comparison group was used, the group 'that most matched the diversion group (on risk-related information and demographics)' was chosen.

Many summaries of intervention evaluations do not discuss methodologies and several urge caution because of poor quality or call for evaluations with stronger designs.

Interventions with young people at risk

As regards types of intervention, OJJDP reports on the proposition by Dryfoos (1990) and Shelden (1999) that the most successful diversion programmes are those that provide intensive, comprehensive services over an extended period, coupled with placement in community-based programmes. On the other hand, OJJDP (2017, p4) also posits that responsiveness to risk and need equates to providing 'precise yet minimal interventions' given that diversion programmes are usually reserved for youth who present with low or moderate levels of risk. Research also suggests that services offered within diversion programmes are most effective when they are based on the youths' level of risk of offending (August, Piehler and Bloomquist, 2016). While recognising common pathways that may lead to individuals' situations, a flexible, individualised approach must be taken in delivering services to reflect the complexity of human behaviour (Thomas et al, 2008, p16).
The evidence of effectiveness of early interventions suggests that care is needed in selecting appropriate interventions. A rapid evidence assessment of early interventions for at-risk youth found sometimes contradictory evidence of effectiveness for family interventions aimed at improving parental skills or family relationships and consistent positive results for school interventions (Thomas et al, 2008, p19). A US meta-analysis of 36 studies found conflict resolution education programmes to be effective in reducing antisocial behaviour, particularly in middle and early adolescence (Garrard and Lipsey, 2007; Thomas et al, 2008, p104). A US systematic review of 53 studies found

that universal school-based programmes were effective in reducing violent or aggressive behaviour (Hahn et al, 2007).

The meta-analysis of diversion programmes by Wilson and Hoge (2013) provides valuable information on a number of fronts. They looked at 73 programmes, 13 of which were caution only and 60 of which involved some form of intervention. Interventions included community service, restitution and restorative justice and treatments such as counselling, skill-building (cognitive behaviour techniques, employment training), advocacy and crisis intervention. Programmes providing treatment were divided evenly between those providing services themselves and those referring to other services with a small number doing both. The researchers assessed the degree to which treatment adhered to the rehabilitative principles of risk, need and responsivity (discussed below) but many did not provide sufficient information to allow assessment and of those that did, none adhered to all three principles, only five adhered to the risk principle, two adhered to the need principle and three adhered to the responsivity principle. They found that there was no statistical difference in the effectiveness of programmes that offered treatment compared with those that did not but found greater effectiveness where treatment targeted medium- to high-risk offenders and where they adhered to the responsivity principle. They acknowledged that inclusion in interventions could lead to negative labelling and peer exposure but concluded that the benefits in reduced recidivism outweighed these negative factors. They recommended that agencies pay particular attention to assessing the level of risk and needs of youth entering the system. They also recommended that in assessing diversion programmes, researchers should focus not only on re-offending but also on 'outcomes relating to attitudes and values, school performance and adjustment and mental health functioning' (p514).

Farrell and colleagues (2018, p11) identify several practices that support effective diversion programmes and some of which are relevant to YDPs. They present the 'best practices' under seven headings. The first practice that they recommend is the use of standardised risk screening and assessment tools to help identify those most at risk of re-offending and to match youth to available resources based on their risks and needs. The YDPs rely on the YLS-CMI assessment tool, discussed elsewhere, for this purpose. A second practice is the clear definition of the target population to limit the potential for net widening and ensure the programme serves the intended population. Under this heading they recommend the setting out of clear eligibility criteria in written guidelines and close monitoring to ensure participants meet the criteria. The YDP operational guidelines and requirements, discussed later, set out clear criteria on the target population.

The third heading they present relates to development and use of a wide network of community-based providers. This is seen as important because participating youth may present with a variety of needs, including academic difficulties, substance misuse and mental health challenges. Programmes need to be able to access a wide range of services and need strong relationships with providers. Farrell et al point out that referral to services should be based on need rather than availability, and new services should be created where gaps are identified. A fourth, related set of best practices is grouped under strong cross-agency partnerships, including partnerships with schools and community members as well as providers and state agencies. The YDPs are firmly community-based and seek to have strong relationships with all potentially relevant stakeholders. A fifth set of practices concerns use of written agreements on programme objectives, expectations and

conditions. Under this heading, Farrell et al note requirements about victim input, voluntary participation and family involvement. The sixth set of practices relate to avoidance of prosecution and expungement of records and are not relevant to YDPs since disengagement and failure to complete do not of themselves give rise to criminal justice consequences. The final set of practices relates to equity and cultural competency and calls for elimination of potential biases based on gender, sexual orientation, race and other factors.

The Centre for Justice Innovation (2019) lists 20 principles of effective diversion practice, while acknowledging that there is not a settled consensus on which specific models and strategies work best. Many of its principles are more widely relevant to diversion than to YDPs; those that are YDP-relevant are presented below. The Centre highlights three core principles, reflecting other cited material: minimise labelling, avoid net-widening and do not over-expose young people in programmes. As regards defining eligibility criteria, it argues that these should be as broad as possible, giving young people 'more than one shot at succeeding' and avoiding exclusion based solely on offence type. It cites supporting evidence that includes a study from Northamptonshire that found that diversion continued to outperform formal processing through at least a young person's fourth involvement with authorities. Speed of referral is seen as important to minimise exposure to the criminal justice system and minimise delays in access to services. Citing Bonta and Andrews (2007), it states that schemes should assess young people's strengths and needs, particularly to match them with appropriate services consistent with Risk-Need-Responsivity principles, and interventions should be attuned to individuals in respect of specific strengths, motivations, personality and demographic characteristics.

Sessions should be held away from sites associated with the criminal justice system and caseworkers should be dedicated diversion workers rather than statutory caseworkers. Casework should reflect the voluntary nature of engagement with diversion schemes, which makes casework 'qualitatively different'. Citing Lipsey (2009), the Centre points out the importance of programme implementation and that incomplete service delivery, poor training, staff turnover and high drop-out are associated with lower impact. The Centre notes that much of the evidence on programme effectiveness relates to relatively lengthy interventions that may be at odds with proportionality to participants' low-level offending ('perhaps even if their assessed risk level would suggest that this is otherwise appropriate'). The Centre also alludes to examples of short-term programming that can be valuable (including personal skills training, counselling, reparation, family involvement and motivational interviewing (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2019, pp11-15).

These findings are broadly consistent with those from a rapid evidence assessment conducted for the UK Ministry of Justice relating more widely to the management of young people who have offended (Adler et al, 2016, p1). The UK assessment highlights that effective programmes to reduce re-offending consider a number of key factors: (i) the individual's risk of re-offending, needs and ability to respond; (ii) therapeutic programmes (rather than programmes emphasising punishment or control) that focus on skills building (including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), social skills), restorative justice and counselling/mentoring (including for families); and (iii) use of multiple services. Effective programmes also consider programme implementation (including quality and quantum of service and fidelity to the model) and the wider offending context (including family, peers and community issues). Adler and her colleagues also highlight four specific interventions that

are effective in reducing offending and can be used in multiple settings: restorative justice, CBT, other individual counselling and behavioural programmes (like motivational interviewing) and mentoring (op cit, p16).

Vaughan et al (2022, p9) identified a number of approaches to addressing and preventing antisocial behaviour in their rapid evidence review, including complex family and community-based interventions. They noted that effective approaches were mostly based on social-ecological theoretical frameworks, such as functional family therapy (FFT), multi-systemic therapy (MST) and other similar approaches. They also identified several community-based, collaborative and participatory interventions and noted that prevention programmes tended to adhere to developmental approaches, which targeted risk and protective factors. They observed a lack of evidence for the effectiveness of juvenile justice approaches.

In relation to the need to customise interventions to individuals, the Ministry of Justice report (Adler et al, p64) alludes to the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model derived from the work of Andrews, Bonta and Hoge (1990) and 'widely adopted in criminal justice'. In essence, the risk principle requires matching the level of service to the offender's risk of re-offending, the need principle requires assessment of the offender's criminogenic needs and targeting the need in the intervention, and the responsivity principle requires maximising the offender's ability to learn from the intervention by providing CBT and tailoring the intervention to their learning style, motivation, abilities and strengths.

The report also comments on international evidence about communicating with young offenders. No one style is thought likely to be effective, but it is generally agreed that effective communication is characterised by mutual understanding, respect and fairness. Motivational interviewing and other techniques that support a young person in confronting the consequences of their action are seen as potentially useful if used with other supports and individual therapies (op cit, p45). The researchers go on to urge care that young people understand how they arrived where they are and how to move forward – they need to be 'encouraged to develop agency and autonomy and respect for others as well as themselves'.

Assessing risk

Much assessment in childcare has relied historically on professional judgements but this has been described as problematic without a way to establish the reliability or validity of assessments made; validated assessment instruments are seen as offering greater structure and reliability although professional judgement is still an important ingredient (McCarthy et al, 2004, pxi). A number of assessment tools are available for use in assessing risk of re-offending by young people: for a listing and review of tools see Public Safety Canada (2010). The Canadian review includes the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory ('YLS/CMI') tool for assessing risks and needs which is used in the YDP projects. It notes that the information required to complete the assessment is obtained through interviews with the young person and family and reviews of case records such as police reports and healthcare/social service records. Assessment is acknowledged as a thorough, time-consuming process that requires completion by trained personnel. There is also a recognition that it is not an exact science and entails risks of false negatives and positives and there is consequently a

need for practitioners to beware of the potential negative consequences for young people in terms of becoming negatively labelled (McCarthy et al, 2004).

The YLS/CMI Risks/Needs Assessment tool assesses young people on eight dimensions: prior and current offences and dispositions, family circumstances/parenting issues, current education/employment problems, peer relations, alcohol/drugs problems, leisure/recreation issues, personality/behaviour problems, and attitudes/orientation problems (Hoge et al, 2011). It was used initially in relation to offenders who were in custody or under probation supervision personnel and therefore offenders who were involved in more serious or persistent offending. The conduct disorder element relates to 'prior and current offences and dispositions' and is scored under five sub-headings, four of which are about past events – prior convictions, prior probation, prior custody and current convictions – all of which are likely to rule out diversion as an option and therefore of limited value in relation to the YDPs. Use of the tool provides for input of professional judgement. A section of the instrument on case management review provides for recording changes in risk or contact levels as well as 'incidences of non-compliance with court orders' (again illustrating its primary use in relation to more serious offenders) and any changes in the young person's situation. The primary purpose is on identifying needs that respond to identified risks and the review element is focused on case progress and an update of the offender's plan (Public Safety Canada (2010, p67).

A shorter screening version (YLS/CMI-SV) is used to identify young people at risk and assess suitability of inclusion in programmes. It assesses risk under eight similar headings but does not require the same level of information or inquiry. Simple yes/no answers, indicating presence or absence of problems, are sufficient for six headings, while three-point scales are used for the other two headings (family circumstances/parenting and attitudes/orientation) Public Safety Canada (2010, p33). The YLS/CMI tool was designed in Canada for use with young people aged 12-17. Questions have arisen in respect of its validity and reliability in relation to offenders in other countries and minority groups. A number of studies have shown a weaker predictive validity of the tool in minority groups and supported a hypothesis of 'disparate impact' – that the ethnic minority would present more risk factors, less protective factors and more criminal recidivism that the non-ethnic group (Gomis-Pomares et al, 2021, Threadcraft-Walker et al, 2018; Liddell et al, 2016; Onifade et al, 2009). No literature was found in relation to testing on an Irish population or in relation to its use with less serious offenders.

All YDP project participants are subject to assessment using the YLS/CMI-SV screening tool and those with a moderate- or high-risk rating are considered appropriate for admission. For low-risk young people (rating of 3 or less) a clear rationale related to their criminogenic needs is required. A more detailed YLS/CMI assessment is required after admission to prepare the case management plan and projects are required to review the need for continued participation every six months at least using the same tool (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2018, pp9-11)

Youth work and youth justice work

Swirak (2013) referred to common core principles that distinguish youth work from other practices of working with young people. She highlighted four principles of youth work: a focus on young people's individual needs and empowerment; personal development and social education in informal settings; voluntary participation in youth work processes; and the development of trusting

and egalitarian relationships between youth workers and young people. She noted that the evaluation by Bowden and Higgins (2000) concluded that work with young people in the projects very much resembled youth work in terms of activities undertaken. According to their evaluation, the majority of activities focused on personal development, combining leisure or arts activities with planned group or individual interventions although social education was only 'minimally present' (p50).

Swirak detected a move from a youth work approach in the early YDPs to a later focus on youth justice work. She argues that by putting an emphasis on prevention of the onset of offending or re-offending, the 2002 YDP Guidelines took a 'first significant step towards distinguishing the projects from traditional youth work'. In her opinion, this distinction was accentuated by a more recent focus on training based on behaviour psychology and pro-social modelling, notwithstanding that project workers still had plenty of latitude to choose the activities and the ways in which they engage with young people in those activities (p95). She went on to query the extent to which involvement of the youth sector in provision of State services might compromise youth work principles to such an extent that moves away from central principles and core ways of working.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013) carried out a systematic mapping of the international literature youth work. It found no internationally agreed definition of 'youth work' but identified core characteristics as follows:
'Youth work:

- intends to build mutually trustful and respectful relationships with and between young people, into which they normally enter by choice;
- occurs mainly in informal community-based settings, but not exclusively;
- works through purposeful practices tailored to the interests and concerns, needs, rights and responsibilities of young people, giving priority to how they identify and understand these;
- seeks to build personal and social competencies and capacities;
- favours active, experiential and collective learning over didactic and individualised forms, or predetermined curricula;
- encourages young people to participate voluntarily where they are supported to work with adults in partnership;
- provides opportunities that are developmental, educative, challenging, supportive and creative, and are intended and designed to extend young people's power over their own lives and within their wider society;
- seeks to enable young people to clarify and embrace key features of their individual and collective identities in relation to class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability;
- supports young people as they deal with difficulties, threats and risks which may impact in damaging ways on them, in their communities and wider society.' (D/CYA, 2013, p8)

The 2013 mapping report noted that

> 'the most identifiable group of studies was informed by "positive youth development" theory (e.g. Lerner, 1999). This theory asserts that for young people to meet developmental targets, they need to be engaged in activities delivered in settings that are safe, supportive and foster meaningful relationships. This approach is considered to be vital to ensuring

successful personal and social outcomes, and is considered secondary to the type of activities delivered.' (D/CYA, 2013, p23)

It would appear that YDPs exhibit many of these characteristics but youth justice work differs in a number of ways. Swirak (2013, p238) reported general agreement among JLOs and YJWs whom she interviewed – they noted that YDPs were different from other youth work interventions insofar as they increasingly limited work to those already 'in contact with the law', focused more on challenging behaviour through individual work and involved families more.

Young people's voluntary and active participation is frequently referred to as a hallmark of youth work (Swirak, 2013, p102). Davies (2005, p8) described voluntary participation as 'the defining feature of youth work' and viewed it as tilting the power balance between youth workers and young people towards a more egalitarian relationship. In youth work, young people are free to choose when to start or terminate a relationship with a youth worker, in contrast to relationships in other settings, including YDPs. Active participation is also seen as a strength of youth work, providing young people with an opportunity to shape and participate in democratic decision-making (Swirak, 2013, p103). Swirak questioned the extent to which active participation was a feature of YDPs. She reports that several project workers whom she interviewed as part of her research implied that young people's participation in choosing activities had to happen in the framework of contributing to the reduction of offending behaviour, with one project worker suggesting that 'young people's needs and interests would be met but only if they fit with the broader agenda of preventing crime' (p217). Another project worker was of the opinion that what distinguished YDP provision from other kinds of youth provision was that the young people's behaviour warranted certain types of activities aimed at changing that behaviour; they were referred to as 'offenders' who needed to undergo particular 'treatment' (p218). Swirak noted that across the projects interviewed, young people's participation in project governance was confined to only one project, while two others were in the process of setting up more participatory structures. In one project, the regional youth work organisation had set up an organisation-wide youth council which included membership of YDP participants; the youth council was significantly involved in deciding on project activities and project budgets across a range of projects (including the YDP) (p219).

Relationships and active participation

Relationships are acknowledged to be critical to working with young people across a range of human services and have been highlighted as vital to success in a variety of reports and studies. An examination of value for money in three youth programmes carried out by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs identified relationships as one of seven potent programme outcomes associated with improvements for targeted young people. It observed that:

> *'Relationships are an effective mechanism for getting young people involved in positive activities through valued personal relationships with peers, adults or siblings. A beneficial change in young people's relationships with other adults through their participation in positive activities can be transferred to academic learning and may lead to better outcomes.' (D/CYA, 2014, p106)*

In guidance to the YDPs, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform observes that crime prevention work involves linking young people with non-offending peer groups and the forming of stable and trusting relationships with adults in the community (2002, p4), and notes that 'Since a large part of the successful work done with young people is attributed to the relationship young people have with project workers, projects should attempt to choose the option that will allow for maximum continuity' (2002, p37).

A study of the projects in 2008 highlighted:

> *'Though obvious, it is worth stating that if there is no relationship between the project staff and the young person, then there is no intervention. It follows therefore that there is a need for the young person to value the relationship with the project in order to engage and to sustain that engagement. There are particular challenges inherent in the relationship, not least in challenging offending behaviour, which for the young person will probably be an uncomfortable and unfamiliar experience.' (Redmond, 2009, p50)*

In the related field of mentoring of young offenders, the importance of strong relationships is well established. A US meta-analysis of 55 evaluations found that results were significantly improved if best practice was followed and the mentor-mentee relationship was strong; the researchers reported that effects were greater where, among other things, the mentoring involved more frequent contact and emotional closeness and where the duration was of six months or more (DuBois et al, 2002). A review of research by Rhodes (2008) concluded that poor relationships could have negative impact. The UK Ministry of Justice suggested that mentoring was most likely to be effective when the relationship was maintained over time 'rather than consisting of just one or two sessions' (Ministry of Justice, 2014:28). The Danish Crime Prevention Council recommended that programmes should be 'intense with weekly meetings lasting several hours and involving a supporting, trusting and emotional relationship for a period of at least a year … and that especially volunteer mentoring should include professional staff to screen, match, train, support and supervise the mentors' (DKR 2012:6).

In summarising international evidence, Adler et al (2016:21) noted that 'when meetings lasted longer and took place once a week (as opposed to less frequently), mentoring had a greater effect on reducing re-offending'. As regards relationship quality, Sale et al (2008) reported greater impact on social skills for youths who felt higher levels of trust, empathy and mutuality from their mentors. Rhodes et al (2005) found a link between long-term relationships and successful outcomes and negative and sometimes harmful effects where relationships dissolve early. On the other hand, Jolliffe and Farrington (2008) reported from their rapid analysis for the Swedish Crime Prevention Council that programmes that had a longer duration were not more effective than shorter programmes. Building a trusting relationship with an adult who is interested in them was identified as a critical first step in a theory of change in an evaluation of Le Chéile Mentoring (O'Dwyer, 2017, p38).

A literature review aimed at identifying the key features of effective relationships, identified core skills involved in developing effective working relationships with young people (Fullerton et al, 2021). These included 'active listening, taking the time to get to know the young person, empathetic responding, advising, guiding, modelling pro-social behaviours and challenging ideas and behaviours in a non-threatening or judgemental manner'. Their report highlighted equally important worker qualities such as 'dependability, consistency and commitment to the young person' and noted that intangible qualities such as warmth and humour also appear to be critical (p8). They urged adoption of strengths-based approaches to instil hope and belief in the possibility of change, building on the trust established. They reported that 'working with the young person to identify and achieve goals and targets increases the young person's sense of agency', essential to achieving results 'because nothing significant can happen without [the young person's] willing and active engagement'. They noted also that 'Having high expectations for achievement within warm and responsive "firm but fair" relationships helps young people to accept challenges to their behaviours without prejudicing the relationship'.

Consistent with findings relating to mentoring programmes for young offenders, the researchers identified different styles of supportive adult relationships from which young people benefit, including coach-like (offering practical support), friend-like (offering social support) and parent-like (offering practical, social and emotional support). In their opinion, 'it is the workers who are key to success', and they highlight the importance of recruitment of people with the right skills and qualities and the provision of ongoing support, training and opportunities for development (p9).

Previous studies of YDPs

A study of YDPs carried out in 2008 (Redmond, 2009) focused, among other things, on patterns of youth crime in the catchment area and profiles of those committing the offences. Practitioners were asked about intended positive impact of their projects and how they understood changes would occur, and also about intended changes needed to improve effectiveness and barriers to implementing the changes. Alcohol-related offences were the single largest category of offence of concern (notably public disorder, criminal damage and assault). In many cases, alcohol-related crime had a clear temporal dimension, related to weekends, certain calendar events and summer. Departures from these patterns were noted where groups of friends were involved in repeat drinking episodes or where families tolerated the behaviour. Situational factors also came into play, notably around access to alcohol and personal and social circumstances, which mostly mirrored risk factors identified in the international literature (such as impulsiveness, lack of empathy, non-effective parenting, poor school affection and performance and living in a fractured community). The study saw a role for interventions designed to engage young people to reflect and develop consideration for others, as well as improve parenting and school outcomes. Redmond called for YDPs to be 'sufficiently reflective to innovate where there is a clear rationale for a course of action' and for space for bespoke responses in individual localities (ibid p146). He also called for what is known to be associated with youth crime to be considered alongside a very local narrative and argued that higher performance would 'derive from a productive exchange with practitioners within a clear logic-led framework' (p149). The study resulted in an increased emphasis on three aspects of the projects: increased alignment of plans with an agreed local narrative of youth crime and evidence-based logic on how the YDPs will improve matters; capacity-building through core training

initially based on pro-social modelling and harnessing the knowledge and talent in the YDP networks; and provision of direct advice and support for five trial sites to assess the effectiveness of the YDP approach advanced in the baseline report (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2009).

The Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS, 2018a) commissioned research to explore the views of YDP participants on how the projects assist them to avoid or move away from criminal or antisocial behaviour. The research consisted of seven consultations with a total of 41 young people. What young people said worked well in the projects, in order of frequency of mention, were the YJWs, activities and trips, programmes (based on choice and solutions, citizenship and impact of crime), meeting new people and making new friends, education/training/employment supports, opportunities such as youth exchanges, having something to do/somewhere to go, drop-ins (recommended for weekends), JLOs and food. The young people liked that the YJWs were youth-centred, friendly and non-judgemental and listened and provided support and advice.
What the young people said did not work well were project times (once a week was not enough, and they should be open at weekends), staff that were not youth-friendly or did not include males, facilities (no dedicated facilities or far from home), lack of activities and trips, young people retention, negative relationships with workers from other organisations, negative impact of having a drug use in a project, negative interaction with Gardaí, mixing younger and older age groups, stigma and stereotyping, leaving projects at age 18 and how this is communicated, courses, and poor food (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2018).

YDP policy guidelines

The purpose and scope of the YDPs are set out in the Garda Youth Diversion Project Guidelines (D/JELR, 2002) and Operational Requirements (IYJS, 2018b and DoJ 2022). A later 'Together Stronger' document (IYJS, undated) further clarified roles and responsibilities for YJWs and JLOs, assigning primary responsibility for preparation of the annual plan to YJWs (p8). The Guidelines were drawn up to give effect to a recommendation in an evaluation of the projects two years earlier (Bowden and Higgins, 2000). That evaluation argued that a set of guidelines was needed for a planned and strategic approach to the development of the projects, which had grown significantly since the original two projects in 1991 (to 64 in 2001).

The Guidelines begin by making a number of general points, including that youth justice work is different from youth work generally in that it focuses on helping young people deal with the issues surrounding their offending and the need to change behaviour. They state that the purpose of youth crime prevention is to engage such young people in a process of learning and development that will enable them to examine their offending and make positive lifestyle choices. They stress that this is achieved through linking young people with non-offending peer groups and forming stable and trusting relationships with adults in the community (D/JELR, 2002, p4). Among operational guidelines are the stipulation that participation is voluntary and should not be a condition of supervision (p38) and identification of the primary target group of the projects as those most likely to stay in the justice system into adulthood while recognising that not all young people who enter a diversion programme will be suitable for a diversion project (p40). Guideline 7 (p42) calls for the number of participants in a project to keep at a level that ensures meaningful intervention with them. A participant-staff ratio of 4:1 is recommended where participants require a high-level

intervention and the ratio is seen as determining the numbers in each group, number of groups, level of individual contact time and overall number of participants without affecting the quality of the work. Guideline 8 provides for inclusion in project activities of participants outside the primary or secondary target groups for strategic purposes such as encouragement of participation by those in the target groups or to introduce a positive peer influence into a group. Activities such as 'drop-in', 'one-off' activities or summer programmes are seen as having similar strategic purpose. Guideline 9 provides for local decision-making on exact activities provided they are in line with the guidelines and good practice principles. All programmes and activities are required to be approved annually by the project committee and reviewed quarterly, and involve young people in planning and evaluation. Short-term goals are required for all participants.
The Operational Requirements (DoJ, 2022, p4) update and elaborate on the material in the Guidelines as regards the framework for the operation of the projects and the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders. They highlight, among other things, the importance of projects engaging in partnership with community organisations and agencies and programmes focusing on the 'needs, issues and circumstances surrounding young people including their offending behaviour'. They emphasise the need to draw on a range of practices, resources and techniques that have a demonstrable and measurable result in preventing either the onset of offending or re-offending'. The Operational Requirements repeat the commitment to voluntary participation but urge YJWs to make 'every effort' to encourage reluctant referred young people. An exit strategy or plan is required for each young person leaving the project that includes links with other services, preparation of the young person and follow-up within four weeks and again at six months (pp25-6).

The YDPs are described in the Operational Requirements as 'community based, multi-agency, youth crime prevention initiatives which primarily seek to divert young people involved in criminal/anti-social behaviour away from the criminal justice system' (DoJ, 2022:4). Those 'at risk of offending' are also specifically included (p4). The network of projects is presented as supporting the Garda Síochána in the implementation of the Youth Diversion Programme provided for in Part 4 of the Children Act 2001. The aim of the diversion programme is to deal as far as possible with young people who offend by administering a formal or informal caution, 'diverting the young offender away from the courts and minimising the likelihood of further offending' (ibid). They thus share a common diversion objective.
Young people who are cautioned under the diversion programme may be referred to a YDP depending on their perceived risk and need, with priority given to those for whom it is thought a caution alone (with or without supervision) would be insufficient to prevent re-offending. Formal caution under the diversion programme entails supervision by a Juvenile Liaison Officer for a period of 12 months while informal caution does not involve any supervision. Participation is likely to be more relevant to those who received a formal caution and are under supervision and they are likely to be prioritised for referral to projects in their area where they exist. Swirak (2013:81) points out that when the first YDPs were set up in 1991, they were not designed as a corollary of the diversion programme and were a very local response to specific local challenges. The projects had broader objectives than diversion, such as awareness raising in local schools and 'making a contribution to the quality of life for young people within the target areas'. She observed that the projects became linked with the Garda Diversion Programme when they were put under the auspices of the Irish Youth Justice Service, established in 2005. Prior to that, she argues that the projects were largely detached from any strategic consideration of the wider youth justice system but were then placed

centre stage in youth justice policy. However, the 2002 Operational Guidelines (D/JELR, 2002) already stipulated that the primary target group were young people who had entered the diversion programme and were considered at risk of remaining in the justice system and that the Diversion Programme was to be the primary source of referral (Guideline 5). Priority was to be given to those who were less likely to be diverted from crime by means of a caution alone. A secondary target group was identified as young people who, although not included in the diversion programme, had come to the attention off the Gardaí, the community or local agencies because of their behaviour and were at risk of entering the system at a future date (Guideline 6).

The Operational Requirements document states that the YDPs seek to achieve their objective 'by providing suitable activities to facilitate personal development, promote civic responsibility and improve long-term employability prospects' and that in doing so, they aim to bring about the conditions whereby the behavioural patterns of young people towards law and order can develop and mature through positive interventions and interaction with the project (DoJ, 2022:4). The earlier YDP Guidelines described the purpose of youth crime prevention work as 'to engage young people who have offended in a process of learning and development that will enable them to examine their own offending and to make positive lifestyle choices that will protect them from involvement in criminal, harmful or socially unacceptable behaviours' (D/JELR, 2002:4).

The Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027 (DoJ, 2021) makes frequent mention of YDPs. The Strategy (p6) commits to supporting the development of effective practices in the projects, enhancing collaboration between the projects and schools, other education services, drug projects and other community-based programmes, and aligning project activities with community development, employment and training strategies and supports. With respect to prevention and early intervention, the Strategy commits (p21) to YDPs assisting schools to retain children in education and to aligning with the further development of access to work-based learning opportunities (such as traineeships and apprenticeships). It also commits (p21) to promoting collaboration with the Youth Work Sector and ensuring that youth work activities are enhanced and available to vulnerable and at-risk young people. It also commits (p17) to enhancing the capacity of all those working directly with young people and their families by, among other things, pursuing effective supports and training for front-line staff (including in relation to disability and special needs, substance misuse, trauma and mental health) and strengthening their capacity to interact effectively with young people (to enable appropriate responses and referrals to other services); it makes specific reference to YJWs in this regard. The Strategy (p24) sees strengthened and rebranded YDPs as the first line of targeted support for young people at risk of becoming involved in serious offending (and their families), with supports that include early intervention, family and parenting support, working with those who are harder to engage, mentoring and promotion of restorative practices. Finally, it commits (p26) to developing the network of YDPs, aligning with local needs and working collaboratively with local services. In this connection it lists actions that link more closely with the Probation Service, ensure access throughout the country and assess potential to embrace young adults (18-24) and achieve inclusion of young people from migrant, Traveller or Roma communities and other harder-to-reach young people.

The Strategy, accordingly, emphasises the need for State and State-funded services to engage effectively with the range of community, family and personal circumstances applying to each child or young person. In this connection, the Strategy recognises the role of YDPs in providing 'links to community services based on their local knowledge and contact networks' (ibid, p6*).* The Strategy makes several references to victims of crime, including a commitment to 'conduct Criminal Justice Processes to, as far as possible, support children to refrain from offending and make positive life choices, while also upholding the rights of victims' (p29) and a statement that 'upholding the best interest of the child … is consistent with upholding the interest of society and vindicating the rights of victims' (p33). The Operational Requirements were updated to take account of commitments in the Youth Justice Strategy (DoJ, 2022).

Key features of Irish Youth Justice policy identified by Reddy (2018) are set out in Box 1. They highlight the central role of diversion and spell out principles underpinning all aspects of youth justice policy. Among those most relevant to YDPs are the focus on child-centred and partnership approaches, early intervention and family support, minimal disruption to home life, and restorative approaches.

Box 1: Key features of Irish Youth Justice Policy (Reddy, 2018)

• An effective and responsive youth justice system is child-centred and rights-focused;
• Detention should be used only as a last resort in responding to youth crime and only imposed once all other community-based diversion responses and sanctions have been exhausted;
• A partnership approach across justice and child welfare sectors in reducing youth crime and the delivery of youth justice services should be focused and coordinated at both national and local levels;
• There should be ongoing development of an integrated, multi-layered model of crime prevention for at-risk children and young people emphasising early intervention, family support, welfare and protection;
• Youth justice-related decisions should consider a young person's age and level of maturity in addition to the importance of protecting family relationships and their home life;
• Practice based on a restorative ethos should be expanded in youth justice interventions, maintaining and maximising opportunities for victim-offender responses;
• There should be compliance with best practice and service delivery standards; and
• Programmes and services should be evaluated to indicate their effectiveness and efficiency in achieving desired outcomes.
(Reddy, 2018; Reddy and Redmond, 2019)

Summary

Most offending by young people is a temporary phenomenon, carried out by 'adolescent-limited' or 'later-onset' offenders whose offending drops steeply in early adulthood. Any response to youth offending needs to take account of this pattern and a preferred, cost-effective response is to divert young people away from the criminal justice system, while holding them accountable. Diversion, which may be more effective with lower-risk offenders, seeks to minimise negative, stigmatising effects of involvement in the formal justice system such as labelling as 'offenders' and exposure to more delinquent peers. Concerns about diversion include a danger of net-widening and

discrimination. Diversion models differ and may involve subsidiary programmes, such as the YDPs, which themselves need to be consistent with diversion principles.

The literature identifies various risk factors associated with youth offending and antisocial behaviour. They include family factors (such as poor parental supervision, attitudes that condone criminal activity), school factors (such as truancy, exclusion), community factors (such as disadvantage, availability of drugs) and individual and peer factors (such as alienation, friends involved in problem behaviour). The risk factors have cumulative and interactive effects such that a multiplicity of factors increases the likelihood of poor outcomes. The literature also identifies protective factors that help build resilience and ameliorate risk. They include promoting self-esteem and achievement, providing positive relationships and new opportunities, and developing social and learning skills. Community protective factors include supportive adults and pro-social peers. Personal protective factors include optimism and self-confidence. Responses to youth offending typically seek to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors.

The evidence suggests that interventions with young people work best where they are flexible and individualised, adapted so as to respond best to established risk and need. Much emphasis is placed on systematic, standardised assessment of risk and need. Several practices and principles are identified that are relevant to YDPs, including clear definition of the target group to avoid net widening, use of a wide network of community-based providers, adequate staff training, and retention of staff and young people. The importance of voluntary and active participation, trustful and respectful relationships, and safe and attractive settings is emphasised repeatedly. Much of the approach is that of generic youth work, but it is widely accepted that youth justice work involves challenging certain behaviour and attitudes and equipping young people with awareness and skills to make positive lifestyle choices and avoid repeating their offending behaviour while living fulfilled lives.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Introduction

This section provides an overview of the methodology used in this evaluation and sets out the aims of the evaluation, theory of change, evaluation design, implementation of the study and limitations to note.

Aims of the evaluation

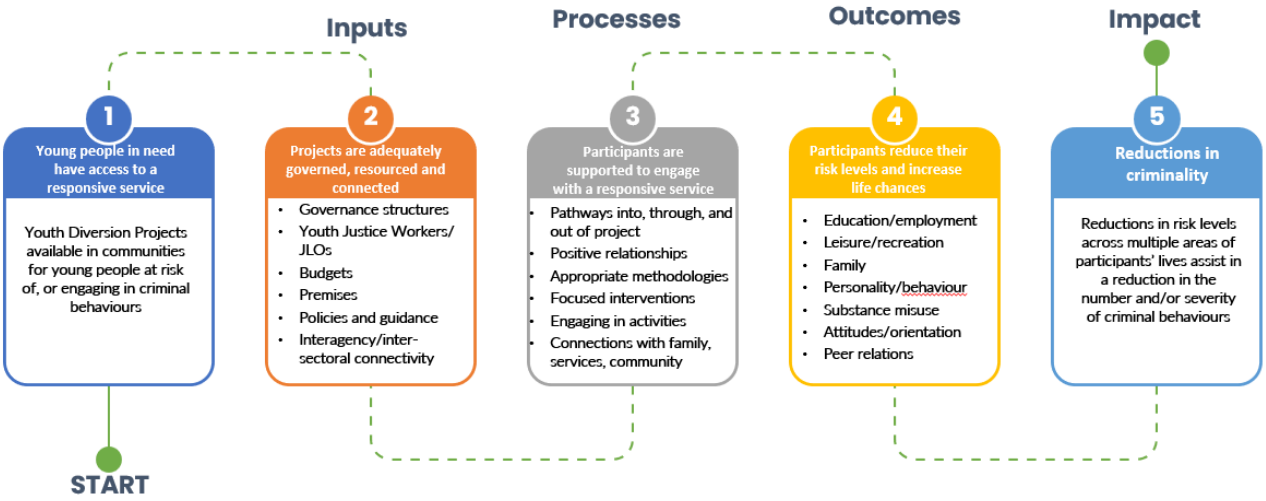
The overall purpose of this evaluation is to generate policy-relevant knowledge concerning the structure, conduct and impacts of the Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs) and to consider issues relating to the governance, processes, outputs and short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. The key research questions addressed in this evaluation are:

1. How are the Youth Diversion Projects structured and what are the key inputs into the projects?
2. How are these projects implemented – what are the main processes, actions and activities associated with their implementation?
3. What changes for young people, their families and the broader community as a result of being involved in the YDPs?
4. What works, for whom, in which circumstances; what are the mechanisms that operate; and, how does the context influence outcomes?
5. What recommendations arise from the evaluation in terms of funding, governance, supports, synergies, coherence and balance between interventions and wider engagement.

Theory of change

This evaluation is underpinned by a theory of change which presents an explicit representation of how a programme or intervention's inputs and short- and mid-term outputs are expected to interact with each other to achieve an outcome and through that an overall impact (Weiss, 1997). A preliminary theory of change was developed following interviews with key stakeholders (Figure 1). The theory of change starts from the availability and accessibility of Youth Diversion Projects which are adequately governed, resourced and connected for those young people who are at risk of engaging, or who are engaging, in criminal behaviours. Through their engagement with a project that is responsive to their particular needs, their risk levels are reduced and their life chances improved so that they are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour or that the seriousness of such behaviour is reduced.

Figure 1: Preliminary theory of change



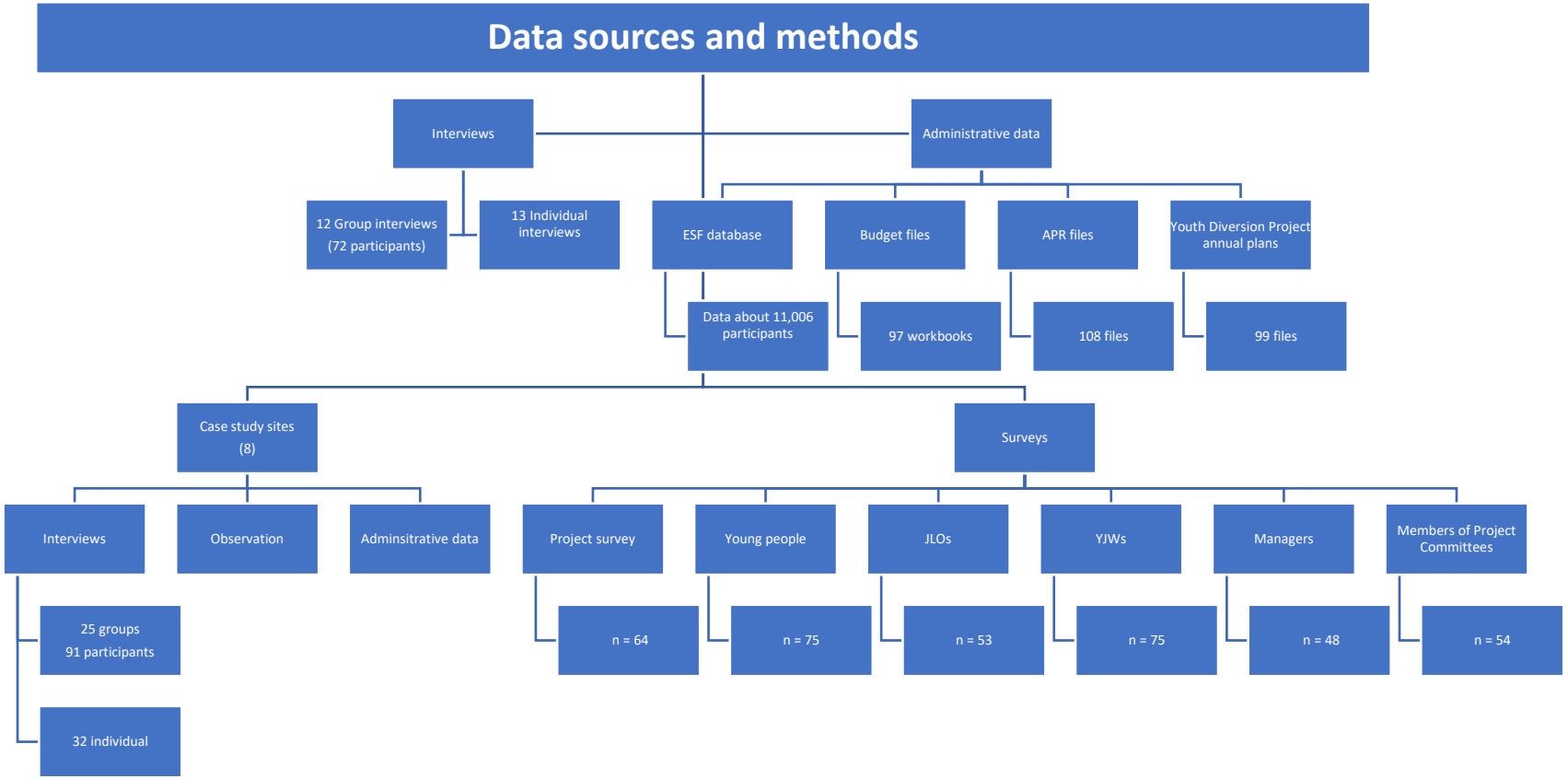
Realist evaluation

This evaluation set out to describe, appraise and quantify the inputs, processes and outcomes of the project and to consider how these impact on the participants of the YDPs. The evaluation also sought to understand *"What works, for whom, in what respects, to what extent, in what contexts, and how?"*. This element of the evaluation, informed by Pawson and Tilly's (1997) Realist Evaluation, focuses on identifying and describing the underlying generative mechanisms that explain how the outputs arose, how the outcomes were caused and the influence of context on the impacts arising.

Methods

The evaluation adopted a multi-method approach that included a review of literature, analysis of administrative data received, case study sites examination, and engagement with key stakeholders in face-to-face, online and telephone interviews and online surveys, in an iterative and multi-strand process which is set out below in more detail. Figure 2 presents an overview of the main data sources, the numbers of stakeholders who took part and the methods used.

Figure 2: Data sources and methods



Literature review

A scoping review of both grey and peer-review literature was carried out. While drawing from an international peer-reviewed literature, this scoping review placed a particular focus on the Irish context and included published documents such as those relating to the inception, operation and evaluation of YDPs (7, 8). The review focused on the context and rationale for youth diversion projects, risk and protective factors associated with youth offending, effective practices in assessing and responding to risk, the importance of relationships, and guidance and monitoring.

Interviews

Interviews were held with 85 stakeholders drawn from or representing national and regional organisations (e.g. Advisory Group for the YDPs; CBOs; JLOs) and personnel from individual projects who could provide insights into how they worked. Of these 72 took part in 12 group interviews and the remaining 13 took part in an individual interview, a total of 25 interviews (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of key informants who took part in individual/group interviews

Stakeholder	Type of interview	No. interviews	Number taking part
Academic	Individual	2	2
An Garda Síochána (national level)	Individual	3	3
Best Practice Development Team (BPDT)	Group	1	4
Community Based Organisation (CBO) representative	Individual	1	1
CBO	Group	3	16
JLO	Individual	4	4
JLOs	Group	2	9
Manager	Individual	1	1
Managers	Group	2	16
Policy maker	Individual	1	1
REPPP	Group	1	3
YJW	Individual	1	1
YJWs	Group	3	24
Total group interviews		12	72
Total individual interviews		13	13

Preliminary contact with key stakeholders with a national or regional level remit was made by the DoJ, to inform them about the project and to seek their assistance in recruiting relevant representatives to take part in interviews. Following liaison between the Evaluation Team and these key stakeholders, representatives who volunteered to take part were provided with additional information and offered an opportunity to take part in either a group or individual interview.

Interviews were recorded and notes were written up within 24 hours of completion, which provided an opportunity for reflection on the process of the interview. All recordings were transcribed though some

challenges were experienced in this due to strong local accents of some participants. Memos were made as a means of capturing ideas, views and intuitions at all stages of the data gathering process. Following transcription, each transcript was read through several times to get an overall sense of the data. Each recording was also listened to in order to allow for a familiarisation with the nuances and content of each tape. The data were then imported into NVivo, where data coding took place. Open coding, where a provisional name is given to each category, was used and 'compare' and 'contrast' were adopted as the two main tools to form categories, establish the boundaries of the categories, and assign data segments. Following this, data related to each category were retrieved and a narrative around each segment created. The analysis of focus group interviews took account of the interaction between participants, as well as the content expressed. Anonymisation of the interview data involved removing all personal information (e.g. names and locations) and the assignment of pseudonyms. Where necessary, the qualitative data were edited to safeguard participants' anonymity while ensuring that their data were not distorted or key messages changed.

The naming convention for these interviews where referenced in the text is the number of the interview, the type of interview (focus group (FG) or individual), and the role of the participant/s.

Administrative data

Four administrative sources of data were made available to the Evaluation Team (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Overview of administrative data sources

ESF Database	Annual Project Plans (2021)	Annual Project Report (APR) data	Budget files
•The database comprises seven worksheets which includes demographic, participation and exit, and labour and education status at time of exit. •The data refers to 11,006 participants who commenced in a YDP from 2006 and had completed their engagement by 2021. •This data was provided in a single workbook which allowed for analysis to take place without any additional software development.	•Each project submits a plan to the DoJ each year that includes interventions to meet the prioritised needs identified in the plan. •Each plan is presented in Word format. •99 individual project plans for the year 2021 were received by the Research Team. •All plans were combined into a single database that allowed for analysis. •The compilation of the database was based on the development and application of a bespoke software programme.	•Each project submits an APR file to the DoJ each year. This file contains historic data in respect of participants. •119 separate Excel workbooks were provided, each containing eight separate worksheets. •The time period identified in these sheets ranged from 1999 to 2021. •Following some data cleaning, 108 APR files were collated into a single database that allowed for analysis. •The compilation of the database was based on the development and application of a bespoke software programme.	•Each project submits a budget excel workbook for each year that includes information about the budget allocation the previous year and their request for the next year. •97 individaul budget files were made available. •Each budget file included the budget allocated for the year 2020 and the requested budget for the year 2021. •Each budget file was collated into a single database that allowed for analysis. The compilation of the database was based on the development and application of a bespoke software programme.

According to DoJ (2021), there are 105 YDPs, 'and a further 10 projects with a special focus (for example: more challenging children, family support)'. The number of project files received by the Evaluation Team

from the DoJ varied from 97 (Budget files), 99 (YDP Annual Project Plans) to 119 (APR workbooks) although this was reduced to 108 following the removal of duplicates. On further analysis, two files relating to two projects were identified as missing. Despite several iterations, it was not possible to identify the correct number of files for each dataset.

Data in the ESF, APR and Budget files were subject to a cleaning process which allowed for preliminary analysis to take place. Preparation of the data took a considerable amount of time as neither the APR nor Budget files had been integrated into a database or analysed collectively prior to this. Additional data cleaning was needed prior to further analysis taking place. These combined databases were imported to IBM SPSS v27.0 and a descriptive analysis was carried out using key variables.

Annual Project Plans were provided in respect of 99 projects. YDP annual plans are extensive and set out information about the catchment area, risk/needs and responsivity factors of the young people, priorities targeted and unmet needs, the logic model, preventive work, family support, harder to reach young people and inter-agency initiatives and wraparound services. A common elements analysis was carried out on these plans which focused on identifying the extent to which elements relating to interventions differed across projects. The process adopted was informed by the work of Chorpita et al (2005), Garland et al (2008) and Price-Robertson and Paterson (2021). This approach involved reviewing the YDP plans to identify key categories of interventions, coding each element by YLS risk area, and carrying out a descriptive quantitative analysis.

ESF files: These files were received in a single Excel workbook and provide demographic and engagement data in respect of 11,006 individuals who participated in the YDPs between 2006 and 2021. A descriptive quantitative analysis was carried out on the data.

APR files: These files provided records in respect of 11,371 individual participants in 105 separate Excel sheets for time periods ranging from 1999 to 2021. This file contains similar information to that of the ESF file and also includes several other datasheets. The analysis of the APR files is based mainly on a comparative analysis between the 'first' (T1) and 'most recent' (T2) findings recorded for participants who had two available assessments. In total, 7,686 participants were recorded as having only one YLS assessment completed (130 of these took place prior to 2015) and 4,629 participants had two YLS assessments on the APR file. Analysis took place in both Excel and SPSSx V.27.

Budget files: These files included data for two years, the budget provided for 2020 and the budget requested by the YDP for 2021. Some errors were identified in submissions for the 2021 budget (e.g. where amounts did not total) and while these are likely to have been picked up by the DoJ in their discussions with the individual projects, the revised information was not available in the files provided. The data in these files was analysed in Excel.

Case studies

Eight case study sites were included in this evaluation. These case study sites were identified through a survey of YDP managers which was circulated by the DoJ on behalf of the Evaluation Team. Each

manager was asked to provide demographic, service and participant information in respect of each project they had responsibility for and to indicate whether they would be able to facilitate a case study. In total, responses were received in respect of 64 YDPs, and of these 37 responses indicated they would be willing to participate in the case studies.

A multi-criteria analysis (MCA) was used to select the 8 case study projects. This is a structured approach used to determine overall preferences among alternative options, where the options meet a number of different objectives. The criteria considered by the Evaluation Team included Garda Region; number of primary and secondary participants; CBO; availability of a premises; implementation of key initiatives, such as early intervention and family support; and type of area (including whether high crime levels and transport challenges were present).

Table 2: Key characteristics of case study sites

Case study site	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Garda Region	Southern	Dublin Met. Region	Dublin Met. Region	Eastern	Southern	Southern	North-Western	DMR
CBO	Youth Work Ireland	Foroige	Crosscare	Foroige	Youth Work Ireland	Youth Work Ireland	Foroige	Independent
No. years	More than 10 years	More than 10 years	More than 10 years	More than 10 years	Not available	More than 10 years	More than 10 years	6 to 10 years
No. YJWs	1-2	5-6	1-2	1-2	More than 6	More than 6	1-2	1-2
No. primary referrals 2021	1-25	26-50	1-25	1-25	51-100	101-150	1-25	1-25
No. secondary referrals	1-25	26-50	26-50	1-25	1-25	26-50	1-25	1-25

Additional information about the case study sites, including interventions adopted and YLS outcomes, are presented in Appendix 1.

Two researchers visited seven of the eight case study sites and both preparatory and follow-up interviews and engagement took place. In the eighth case study site, despite attempts by the researchers and the YDP, it was not feasible to visit the site and in that case telephone and online interviews took place. For the sites visited, two main methods were used to collect data and these were non-participant informal observation and interviews. Non-participant informal observation maximised the capacity to gain insights into the project and, where possible, photographic evidence was collated with permission. Individuals were not included in the photographs. These were used as an aide memoire for analysis and write up. The photographs do not feature in the report and have been deleted.

Multiple stakeholders were interviewed either on an individual basis or as part of a small group at each case study site. A total of 123 people were interviewed, 91 in 25 group interviews and 32 individually.

The number of interviewees per case study site ranged from 7 to 24. Interviewees included 36 young people and 21 family members as well as 35 project personnel and members of Project Advisory Committees. JLOs were interviewed individually (5) or as part of the above groups. These case study interviews are additional to the 85 interviews set out above (Table 1). Participants included family members (n = 21), participants (n = 36), JLOs (n = 5), Member/s Project Committee including JLOs, YJWs and managers of YDPs (n = 26), Project personnel including JLOs, YJWs and managers of YDPs (n = 35).

Table 3: Type of interview and participants

Case study site number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
No. interviews	10	6	10	11	4	4	6	6	**57**
No. participants	19	22	16	19	24	8	8	7	**123**

All interviews from case study sites referenced in this report indicate the case study site number prefaced by CS, the type of interview (focus group (FG) or individual), and the role of the participant/s.

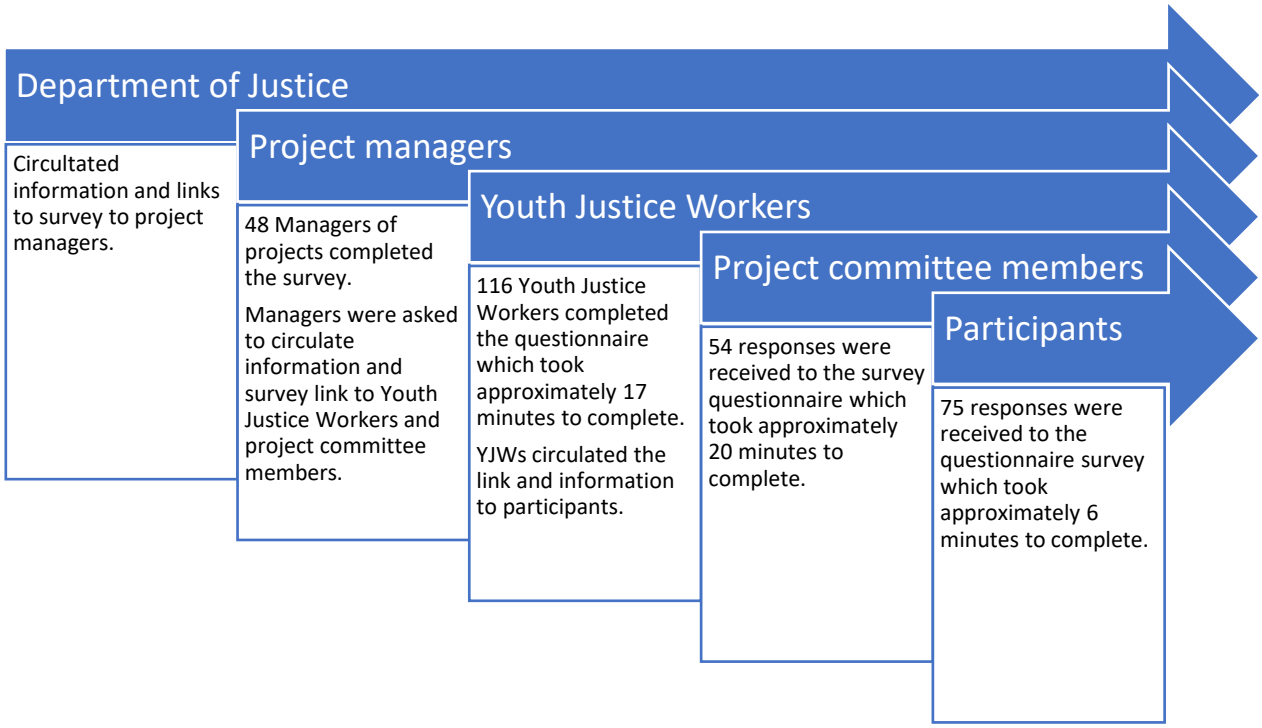
Surveys

On-line surveys were carried out with YDP managers, YJWs, Members of the Project Committees and Young people. Separate questionnaires were developed for each stakeholder group, with maximum commonality between them. Questionnaire design was informed by a scoping review of peer-reviewed and grey literature and instrumentation and the interviews already conducted with national and regional representatives. Pre-testing was conducted with young people (2), YJWs (4), managers (1) and JLOs (2).

Questionnaires and tailored information were prepared by the Evaluation Team in respect of the JLOs and submitted to the Garda Youth Diversion Bureau who circulated information and a link to the JLOs along with three reminders. In total, 53 JLOs completed the survey questionnaire which took about 11 minutes. The response rate is 50%.

A similar process was adopted for the other stakeholders and questionnaires and tailored information were prepared by the Evaluation Team in respect of four key stakeholder groups (managers, YJWs, project committee members and participants in the YDPs). The multi-stage sampling approach set out in Figure 4 was adopted.

Figure 4: Online surveys about perceptions and experiences of the YDPs – Questionnaire distribution and responses



Response rates

Calculation of response rates is problematic. First, managers are referred to by a number of different titles and some are employed as youth justice workers. The analysis of the 2021 budget identified 240 personnel which includes managers and YJWs. A estimated overall response rate for managers and YJWs is therefore calculated at 68%. Responses rates to the surveys of young people and project committee members cannot be calculated as it is not known how many individuals were circulated with the link. It is clear, however, that the number of responses are very low compared with the number of individuals involved with the projects.

Data preparation and analysis

The survey data were exported from the internet survey provider (SurveyMonkey™) into IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences v27.0). Open-ended and unstructured question responses were coded separately and re-merged into the original datafiles. All items were checked for missing values. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables and frequency tables generated. Appendix 1 provides additional information about the key characteristics of survey respondents.

Triangulation, synthesis and integration of findings

Triangulation, synthesis and integration of findings were carried out in respect of stakeholders, methods and geographical distribution on completion of the overall data analysis. The integration of the findings focused on providing:

- a detailed, rich description of the overall programme and differences and similarities within and between the projects (in their governance, design, interventions, resources and implementation);

- an evaluation of client participation, engagement and achievement, including how, who, why and what works well and what does not;
- a consideration of the extent to which objectives were met, outcomes achieved, impacts accomplished and an examination of the extent that these are attributable to the YDP; and
- recommendations that take account of funding, institutional arrangements, operational issues arising, capacity and training, synergies with other agencies and programmes, and any other issues of relevance.

Ethical considerations

As a starting point, all researchers were Garda vetted before the project commenced.

Two advisors with expertise in ethics review of research proposals that included young people in diverse situations were commissioned by Research Matters to review each element of the project prior to and during implementation. The advisors reviewed three submissions: the overall approach to the project, the proposed approach and documentation in respect of the case study sites, and the survey questionnaires and documentation. Amendments were made in response to commentary by the advisors and no particular problems were experienced in the implementation of the study. Key areas considered in the ethics application related to confidentiality, anonymity, protection of data, best practices in carrying out research with vulnerable populations and an emphasis on participation in the evaluation being entirely voluntary.

Participants who volunteered to take part in an interview, either group or individual, were provided with supplementary information and were requested to complete a consent form agreeing that they had read the information provided, had an opportunity to ask questions, were freely and voluntarily taking part in the study, could withdraw at any time, could be contacted again if necessary, and understood the interviews were being audiotaped. Both consent and assent forms were completed for young people who took part.

Each case study site contacted was provided with information about the evaluation and proposed process and a consent form was signed for each case study site by the manager/coordinator agreeing to take part. Assent and consent forms for young people taking part in interviews were received by the project personnel prior to the site visit by the researchers and a form confirming all procedures relating to informed consent and data protection had been adhered to was signed by project personnel and returned to the Evaluation Team.

Limitations

All research has some limitations. This mixed-methods, concurrent triangulation, multi-stakeholder evaluation incorporated four main approaches. These were interviews, secondary analysis of administrative data sources, case studies and online surveys and each has limitations.
An online survey can be efficient for researchers and convenient for respondents. It allows a shorter time frame for data collection than more traditional methods and it allows for a substantial amount of information to be collected and easily prepared for analysis. However, the diverse and complex contexts in which YDPs operate cannot be fully captured by survey data and in addition, there is likely to be some

bias in those who respond. Further, responses to the surveys varied considerably by stakeholder group. For example, only 54 members of the Project Committees responded to the survey questionnaire and only 75 young people responded. Findings arising from both these surveys should be considered as indicative because of these low numbers.

Limitations arising from the surveys were offset by conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with key stakeholders nationally, regionally and within the eight case study sites. Again, there are limitations in this since only case study sites which volunteered to take part were able to be included and within each site, the site manager/coordinator identified relevant young people, family members and Project Committee members to take part. Only young people and family members who had engaged with the service were interviewed and it is likely that they differ in context and outcomes from those who had disengaged. Causality cannot be inferred from the survey results (as with any cross-sectional design). The results demonstrate associations and relationships but could not be used to conclude that characteristic X causes outcome Y.

Another limitation of this evaluation relates to the outcome measure used to determine effectiveness. While the feasibility of getting access to Garda offending data on the PULSE system was explored and a number of requests submitted, it was not possible to gain access to relevant data even on an anonymised basis. This is a significant limitation since crime data, particularly re-offending by participants, provide an objective measure of the effectiveness of the projects in reducing crime. The YLS data provided some measure of progress in key areas relating to several key risk areas, notably offending and substance abuse, education/employment, attitudes, peers, personality/ behaviours, offences and dispositions, family and substance misuse. However, YLS scores are based on professional judgement and, furthermore, less than half of participants enrolled in the projects had assessments recorded in the APR file at two points in time. The final issue which is addressed in more detail later on in this report relates to the section on crime/dispositions where the risk rating is almost exclusively based on past behaviours and, consequently, any reduction in risk rating is almost impossible to achieve.

The use of multiple methods, engagement with multiple stakeholders, and the inclusion of data from all areas of the country, however, helps to mitigate many of these limitations, particularly since there was a high level of consistency between different categories of participant and between participants within categories.

Chapter 4. Findings: Governance, funding, future directions and profile of key personnel, participants and projects

Introduction

This chapter of the report presents findings from an analysis of ESF data , project case studies, and interviews and surveys with key stakeholders. Key areas considered relate to project aims and objectives ; project governance and supports, with a particular focus on the role, function and perceptions of the Project Committee; budget allocations; and a profile of YDP participants, personnel and projects.

Aim and objectives of the YDPs

The Irish Youth Justice Service (2022) states that the aim of the YDPs is to bring about the conditions whereby the behavioural patterns of young people towards law and order can develop and mature through positive interventions and interaction with the project. The projects are primarily targeted at 12-17 year old 'at risk' youths in communities where a specific need has been identified and where there is a risk of them remaining within the justice system.

The Department further notes that the objectives of the YDP are to:

- Promote focussed and effective interventions to challenge and divert young people from offending behaviour;
- Utilise YDP resources in areas of greatest need and to establish effective crime prevention supports in cooperation with other youth service providers nationwide; and
- Actively promote crime prevention policy through focused educational interventions influencing positive development of young people towards becoming responsible citizens.

There is strong support across project stakeholders for this stated aim and these objectives and, overall, there was agreement that the main purpose of the YDPs is to divert young people from crime, reduce offending and re-offending and 'give kids a second chance'. This was highlighted by personnel from different backgrounds and is exemplified by the quote below:

> *'I think it's important to say that, you know, on a macro level that the projects are to, you know, that they would reduce youth offending in the catchment areas that they're based [in].' (FG6A, manager)*

Interviewees also reported that guidance from the Department and the Best Practice Development Team is 'very clear on what the function is', although there are some nuances around this, and it was noted that a reduction in crime could include a reduction either in the frequency or the severity of crimes committed by an individual, or both. There is also some agreement that the reduction in crime takes place as a consequence of increasing young people's life chances rather than through criminal activity being directly addressed by the projects. Interviewees referred to what might be called 'proximate' objectives including:

- engaging, building relationships with, helping and supporting young people that are at risk of antisocial behaviour and young people that have been involved in the criminal justice system;
- reducing the risks and risk factors that are linked with offending behaviour through the identification of the risk and promoting protective factors 'that would act as a buffer in terms of their involvement in crime'. Noted protective factors include producing the 'best opportunities for young people', 'supporting parents', 'giving them better pathways', connecting people into support networks, 'keeping them in education or getting them into employment' and facilitating 'more positive outcomes';
- understanding crime patterns 'situationally, temporarily and behaviourally', identifying local needs and responding by building alliances and understanding what tools and resources are available; and
- improving Garda-community relationships, for young people to be seen in 'a positive light' and to 'build safer communities'.

The groups of objectives set out in the first two bullet points above are referred to as scaffolding outcomes in other parts of this evaluation as they provide the scaffolding or framework on which other outcomes can be built.

It was recognised that in some projects 'you could be taking very small steps' and a preliminary objective that was mentioned by a number of interviewees was to get young people into the project itself and meet with the YJWs. There was general agreement with the statement by one participant in a focus group that 'a big, big objective is to get them to interact with us and to come in'. While it was recognised that an unwillingness to interact could be due to transport issues (e.g. in rural areas), it was also highlighted that there were many other reasons, including intimidation of the young people by the 'local criminal fraternity', unsupportive parents, chaotic lifestyle, and family circumstances.

It was also reported that while the overarching objective is to reduce offending there can be differences in the understanding of the objective depending on the type of area and participant. One example was given of a project in an area considered to have a very high crime rate and where all participants are primary referrals, exclusively referred through the JLOs. It was stated that this project was '100 percent zoned in on the criminal behaviour' and this compared with other projects where there might be secondary referrals from schools and 'there would be a lot more preventative work' taking place.

Overall, there is a common understanding of the aim and objectives of the YDPs between funders, CBOs, projects and other stakeholders. This understanding is predicated on a belief that a reduction in crime (including volume and severity) is achieved through increasing young people's life chances rather than something that can be directly addressed by the projects. These understandings also reflect the localised nature of the projects and the intention that they respond to local circumstances.

Governance of the projects

Governance structures are in place in respect of the YDPs at national and project level and these are now considered.

Governance structures at national level

In the discussion with national stakeholders, it was generally agreed that there is a clear governance structure in place to provide oversight, advice and support to the YDPs. This structure includes the DoJ and in particular its Policy and Finance sections; the National Advisory Group; the Garda Youth Diversion Bureau (GYDB) which has responsibility for overseeing and developing the diversion programme nationally ; the Best Practice Development Team, and the REPPP Project based in UL.

It was highlighted in interviews that the structures at national level worked well and benefited from the amount of work that has taken place in recent years. Attention was drawn to the ways in which the current structures facilitated good communication and attention was paid to the benefits of the ongoing exchange of information that takes place between all the various stakeholders.
In respect of the National Advisory Group one member noted that:

> *'… over the years, we've had such a good relationship with the Department. And there was previously a community programmes team … So in a way, the National Advisory Committee does fill some of those roles in terms of the subgroups and stuff, and there has been some developments. I think that really benefits, you know, it's a two-way communication, really'. (FG2, National support structure)*

Managers' perceptions of national supports

Managers were asked to indicate the level of support which they experienced from a number of national level structures and the results are very positive (Table 4). Overall, high levels of support were reported, with the majority of managers of projects perceiving they were supported or very supported in respect of each particular structure (between 58.5% and 90%). A very small proportion of respondents indicated they were 'unsupported' (2-4%) and none indicated they were 'very unsupported'. There were significant numbers in the 'Neutral' category, but this is likely, at least in respect of some structures, , to indicate lack of need for contact rather than the quality of the engagement when it There were significant numbers in the 'Neutral' category, but this is likely, at least on some occasions, to indicate lack of need for contact rather than the quality of the engagement when it did take place. It is also worth noting that, while the feelings of being supported are high, in most cases it was the 'Supported' rather than the 'Very Supported' category which was indicated.

Table 4: Managers' perceptions on the extent to which they feel supported

Source	Very supported	Supported	Neutral	Not supported	Very unsupported	Total
The Best Practice Development Team	23.8% 10	47.6% 20	23.8% 10	4.8% 2	0.0% 0	42
The REPPP Project based at UL	19.5% 8	39.0% 16	39.02% 16	2.4% 1	0.0% 0	41

The Policy Unit at the Department of Justice	21.9% 9	53.7% 22	24.4% 10	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	41
The Funding Unit at the Department of Justice	24.4% 10	61.0% 25	14.6% 6	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	41
The CBOs	56.1% 23	34.1% 14	7.3% 3	2.4% 1	0.0% 0	41
An Garda Síochána	43.9% 18	41.5% 17	12.2% 5	2.4% 1	0.0% 0	41

Some challenges were identified, particularly in terms of data provision and reporting to multiple funders. The existence of multiple funders did not, however, emerge as a significant issue either in interviews at project level or in the surveys carried out with a range of stakeholders. One individual noted that:

> *'when you look at the YDP broader level of youth work type interventions and projects that are funded by a range of departments, YDPs are among some of the most structured, most well thought out and well supported youth interventions in that area.' (FG2, National support structure)*

Governance structures at project level as set out in policy

Governance structures and responsibilities at project level are set out in a number of documents including –

- Garda Youth Diversion Projects Operational Requirements published in 2018 and updated in 2022
- The Together Stronger Guidelines for Effective Partnership between JLOs and YJWs
- The Grant Agreements between the Department of Justice and the individual CBOs.

The key governance structures at local level are –

- The Project Committee
- The Chair of the Project Committee
- The Referral Assessment Committee
- The CBO and its internal processes

Overall, the principles of good governance are reflected in the structures and documents put in place at local level. However, there is a potential for difficulty to arise due to some lack of clarity in language, and due to the same responsibilities being assigned to different parties in different documents.

The Role of the Project Committee

The Project Committees are referred to extensively in the 2018 and 2022 Operational Requirements. Their functions are stated as 'determining the direction of the project and setting and monitoring the project targets in the Annual Plan.' It is then stated that this includes –

- development and approval of an Annual Plan for the project;
- approving proposed project expenditure as part of the annual planning process;

- monitoring the implementation of the agreed Annual Plan for the project;
- consultation with the DoJ and the GYDB *(Garda Youth Diversion Bureau)* where a Project Committee proposes to significantly alter their Annual Plan for any reason;
- submission of an end of year report on implementation of the Annual Plan to the IYJS and the GYDO. Annual Performance Report (APR) data is also required to be submitted with the Annual Report;
- submission of the Quarterly Financial Returns and end of year audited accounts for the project;
- submission of all information required for ESF reporting purposes; and
- submission of any other reports or information as requested by the IYJS or the GYDO.

An important point to note is that all of these functions are to be carried out 'in conjunction with the CBO' but it is not clear what that means.

The tasks of the Project Committee use a mixture of executive and oversight language (e.g. 'development' and 'monitoring', as well as 'approval' and 'review') although the Committee is given the task of submitting reports and information, but not, specifically, of approving them.

In the document 'Together Stronger' referenced below, the roles of the JLO and the YJW, with respect to the preparation of the Annual Plan, are referred to. This states that 'While preparation of the GYDP Annual Plan is primarily the responsibility of the Youth Justice Worker, the JLO plays a significant role in supporting them to develop and complete a plan which recognises the complexities of the catchment area and the youth population and ensures a nuanced response to local youth crime issues'. This is a statement which presents yet another variation of the process involved in the development of the Annual Plan.

It is also clear that the terms of reference of the Project Committees do not envisage them being used for ongoing collaboration between participating organisations or for addressing the needs of individual participants in the projects. It is precisely these activities of the Project Committees that many interviewees and case studies identified as important. In addition, 92% of Project Committee members who responded by survey indicated that one of the functions of the Committee was to 'Work collaboratively to address common challenges (e.g. with individual young people, the local community)'.

Role of the Project Committee Chair

Amongst the duties of the Chair of the Project Committee are the following –

- support the Project Committee in the development and monitoring of the implementation of the Annual Plan;
- approve and sign off the Annual Plan and Executive Summary form prior to submission to the IYJS and the GYDO;
- liaise with the CBO with regard to the recruitment of project staff and ensure that there is appropriate representation on interview boards established for the purposes of recruitment of staff.

The first bullet point again implies that the members of the Project Committee are actively involved in the development of the Annual Plan; the second bullet point appears to be a conventional oversight function on behalf of the committee; and the third bullet point seems to introduce a role that does not appear to be assigned to the Project Committee as set out in the terms of reference and could encroach on the management role of the CBO. It should be noted, however, that the Grant Agreement does require that the CBO 'should invite a representative from The Department and An Garda Síochána to interviews for the recruitment of new YJWs' (p15).

The Grant Agreement between the Department of Justice and the CBOs is another important part of the governance framework of the YDPs. There are a number of salient points in the 2021 Grant Agreement template:

1. The Project Committee is stated to be 'the committee established to **oversee the management** of the GYDP and is responsible for determining the direction of the project and **setting and monitoring project targets'** (emphases added). This identifies an oversight role of the Project Committee with minimal operational responsibilities.
2. The CBO is required to 'provide and submit on a quarterly basis the following reports:
    i) Financial Return;
    ii) Progress Report;
    iii) Non-financial data (such as ESF indicators); and
    iv) any further documentation as required by the Minister from time to time.'

In the Operational Requirements document, however, this responsibility is given to the Project Committee.

3. The CBO is required to submit an Annual Plan. This is not inconsistent with the Operational Requirements. However, the Grant Agreement refers to the possibility of engagement around the plan and the budget in the following terms, which does not involve the Project Committee:
'The Minister and the Grantee shall consult in good faith, on the funding and services proposed in the Annual Work Plan.' (p6)

There are similar references throughout the Grant Agreement but these examples and those regarding the Project Committee and its Chair are included here to highlight the lack of clarity as to the precise role of the Project Committee both in relevant documentation and, to some extent, in the minds of Project Committee members and staff of the CBOs.

The Role of the Referral Assessment Committee

The Referrals Assesssment Committee is another key part of the governance structure of the projects. The nature and functions of this Committee are set out in the GYDP Operational Requirements document. The membership of the Referral Committee is stated to be the local Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer and one or more YJWs and depending on local requirements and circumstances may include the Probation Service, Tusla and other relevant bodies. It is also noted that where the Referral Assessment Committee deems it necessary and appropriate, other persons may attend.
The functions of the committee are stated to be –

- The consideration of all referrals (both from the primary and the secondary target group) and assessment of their suitability for participation in a Youth Diversion Project.
- Taking account of the Annual Plan and the capacity of the YDP, to provide the interventions required for the young persons concerned.
- Consider engaging with existing agencies as appropriate who are in a position to provide the necessary ancillary support services Maintaining and storing records in relation to all referrals and its meetings.
- Providing returns on a quarterly basis, or as requested by the IYJS/GYDB, with the approval of the Chairperson of the Project Committee.
- Managing, monitoring and reviewing, on an on-going basis, the engagement and progress of participants on the project.
- Discussing exit strategies for participants leaving the YDP. Prior to the preparation of a structured Exit Plan.

Guidance on the operation of the Committee and of the roles of the YJW and the JLO are further developed in the document 'Together Stronger'. The roles of the JLO and the YJW are clearly set out in this document, which also states that the JLO and YJW work in partnership and that 'YJW's and JLO's are equal partners in these meetings'. This does have the potential to cause difficulties in the case of disagreement. However, the document also includes a suitable process for resolving irreconcilable differences using the Project Committee Chair and CBO Representative initially.

The internal processes of the CBO

The Grant Agreement between the Department and the CBOs, requires that the CBOs have in place structures and processes which will ensure that a high quality of service is provided and that the resources provided by the state are properly used. Amongst the items mentioned in the Grant Agreement are reporting and records, project financial recording and reporting, systems and procedures, asset management, staffing and management, insurance and indemnity, retention of records, confidentiality, child protection and security, data protection, rights of the Minister in the event of a breach of the agreement, corporate governance reporting and public duty. Many of these are set out in great detail in the Grant Agreement and are, ultimately, the responsibility of the Board of the CBO. Therefore, many of the governance aspects of the projects fall to be delivered by the CBOs themselves and it is important that these processes are not compromised by any of the other governance structures which exist.

Local governance in practice

Despite the above technical issues with the various project governance documents, the governance operates in a satisfactory and positive manner overall. This is in no small part due to the commitment of those involved and their willingness to work together. However, any system which relies on goodwill to overcome structural weakness is not desirable in the long term.

Project Committees

Each project has a Project Committee. During interviews, examples were given of where there were 'very, very strong' committees in place that provided guidance and support for the projects and comments such as 'I think it's a really valuable structure to have'. The ability to respond to local issues that present themselves was identified as a real positive and it was suggested that the strength of the Project Committees is that they enable good working relationships with Gardaí and other stakeholders and this assists in 'that people understand the role of the projects'.

Others described the role of the Project Committee as being supportive and advisory. One person noted that:

> *'And so it is very much an advisory structure as it should be because there's no local project that would want to stray into the area of kind of shadow employer, as the CBO is the employer.' (FG4, managers)*

This view was supported by others in the group interview who noted that 'the committee doesn't have a legal identity or a legal standing in its own right'.

It was suggested that the Project Committee function 'is really around supporting the youth justice workers to assist in overcoming blocks' or 'if there's issues arising'. It was also noted that 'they would sign off on the annual plan that they agree' and it was reported that while 'the plan is developed mainly by the youth justice workers' there is strong input by the Gardaí, 'with the statistics and stats and you know, the profile of the criminal activity, youth crime in their catchment area'.

There was some agreement at a focus group that there is some diversity in how the Project Committees operate and it was noted that while some Committees operate as 'advisory', others might 'block' certain initiatives because they assume a responsibility for areas such as equipment. One example was given of a situation where a project

> *'believed that it was like they got their instructions from the Project Committee, not from the manager. So there was confusion around who actually was directing the work and place, that that impacted negatively.' (FG1, CBO representatives)*

While one Project Committee member noted 'we're there to do the best job we can on any issues that come up or do what is needed, respectfully …' others highlighted difficulties ('a kind of battle') in getting the Committee to take ownership and give guidance to the project.

It was also suggested, however, that there may be some confusion about the role of the Project Committee. One example given related to the funding when it was highlighted that, despite the funding agreement and legal agreement being with the CBO:

> *'the allocations for funding letters went to the chairpersons of the committees at Christmas, to the Committees, even though we've highlighted that they don't have any legal role to accept the funding.' (FG 4, CBO representative)*

Chair of the Board

It was reported that 'in the guidelines that the chair is a member of An Garda Síochána not below the rank of Inspector and it was identified that this was 'really important' in 'giving credibility' to the project. One individual noted:

> *'The influence that middle management brings with them … Maybe, they may not be aware of the full picture of what's going on in other areas of resources. And I'm not saying you have all the answers, but you'd hope to [have some]. You're in that rank for a reason. You probably have a little bit more experience. Sure. I'd be, I'd be quite adamant that that's who should be involved.' (1, individual interview, senior member An Garda Síochána)*

However, it was noted that in practice, this did not always happen due to promotions or reallocation of Sergeants and Inspectors, or other issues (e.g. shift work, timing of the meetings, etc.). One example was given of where the JLO acted as chair on an ongoing basis. It was also suggested that due to regular changes the Inspector may not be fully familiar with their role and the coordinator of the project 'actually runs the meetings and they sit there and sign off on stuff'.

Composition of the Project Committees

Some consideration was given to the composition of the Project Committees and understandably, given the diversity of communities, there is a wide range of personnel included. One individual noted that the need for a broad stakeholder point of view 'goes back to the youth justice strategy and the ambitions that were set out in terms of focusing much more on interagency coordination at local level and with a wider range of stakeholders'. Examples given included personnel from Tusla, the education sector/Education and Training Board (ETB), employer organisations, community development project, local community members included businesses, and sports managers or coaches from GAA teams, soccer and boxing.

In respect of some projects and at one focus group it was highlighted that members of the Project Committees are 'a group of people unconnected legally and with no contracts', which makes it challenging. While one individual indicated that it was important to have 'representatives' from a number of different statutory organisations because it demonstrated a commitment to the projects at 'national level', it was also highlighted that some organisations would not allow their employees 'within their own capacity or their role, their employment, they wouldn't legally be allowed sit on boards or be directors or trustees'. The numbers of personnel on the Committees varied. One example was given of having 15 people that included all the agencies. Others were much smaller.

Some concerns were raised in respect of the commitment by the various stakeholders to the projects. The involvement and engagement of personnel from other agencies at local level was noted to be heavily dependent on getting the right person in place and it was highlighted that this could be very difficult.

Some challenges were also noted in respect of the level of priority of YDPs within the Garda Síochána and it was suggested that this was not consistent across different areas. One interviewee noted that this was not helped by the 'constant changes and gaps' in personnel and a manager stated:

> *'You might have an Inspector step in for six months and it is just part of his brief, but he has no real interest necessarily or just hasn't got time to maybe get to grips with everything … and then he's gone and someone else is in place …'. (FG 8A, manager)*

Other perceptions of the Project Committee

The response to the survey of members of Project Committees was disappointingly low, with only 54 responses in total. Consequently, the views expressed are very limited in their representativeness. The views, however, are consistent with information gathered through other sources and stakeholders and consequently they can provide some insights into the workings of the committees.

In response to the question of whether there were organisations that should be involved on the project committee that are not there at present, about half indicated 'yes' (47.2%; n = 25) and only four respondents indicated 'no' (7.5%). Interestingly, about one quarter (24.5%; n = 13) responded that they 'don't know' and this suggests that greater guidance might be needed with regard to those who should be on the committees.

Functions of the Project Committee

Because they are in place for some time now, respondents were also asked to indicate if they were clear as to the functions of the Project Committees. Respondents were happy that they were clear overall with more than 90% indicating they were either 'very clear' (64.1%; n = 34) or fairly clear (28.3%; n = 15). Only a small number of respondents expressed any lack of clarity at all (n = 4; 7.5%). It should be noted, however, that just because respondents report themselves as being clear, that does not necessarily mean that their perceptions are coherent with those of other respondents.

To investigate that matter further, respondents were asked to indicate the functions that the Project Committees performed. The responses are shown in Table 5. It is interesting to note that, despite the high level of clarity expressed about the functions of the committees, there is considerable disagreement about what those functions are. This, in the context of even a limited number of respondents, suggests that there is considerable variation in the way that the Committees operate and in what they actually do. As noted earlier, the one role which most respondents assigned to the Committee – that of *Working collaboratively to address common challenges (e.g. with individual young people, the local community),* is not mentioned anywhere within the Operational Requirements as being part of the Committees' remit.

Table 5: Role of Project Committee – Committee Members

Project committee activity	Yes	No	No.
Review plans submitted by the project personnel	96.2% 50	3.9% 2	 52

Prepare the annual youth diversion project plan	58.5% 31	41.5% 22	53
Approve the annual plan	92.5% 49	7.6% 4	53
Review the project budget	79.3% 42	20.8% 11	53
Approve proposed project budget	75.0% 39	25.0% 13	52
Review project performance information	96.2% 51	3.8% 2	53
Monitor project spending and finances	78.9% 41	21.1% 11	52
Work collaboratively to address common challenges (e.g. with individual young people, the local community)	92.5% 49	7.6% 4	53
Submit information required for the Department of Justice	71.1% 37	28.9% 15	52
Submit information required by other organisations (e.g. other funders, Charities Regulator)	56.0% 28	44.0% 22	50

Project working relationships

Overwhelmingly positive views were expressed in responses from Project Committees (n = 54) and project managers (n = 40) about their working relationships, similar to those expressed in respect of national structures.

In terms of working relationships, almost all members of the Project Committees agreed that there are good working relationships between personnel working in the YDP and the Project Committee (96.3%; 52); that members of the Project Committee work in partnership with each other (92.6%; n = 50); that there is good engagement from all Project Committee members (81.5%; n = 44); and that members of the Project Committee work well together to address common issues to provide the best service to YDP participants (86.8%; n = 46). These findings are replicated in the responses from the managers' questionnaire where 97.6% (n = 40) indicated there are good working relationships between personnel working in the project and the Project Committee; 87.8% (n = 36) agree or strongly agree that members of the Project Committee work in partnership with each other'; and 75.6% (n = 31) agreed or strongly agreed that there is good engagement from all members of the Project Committee.

Effectiveness of the Project Committee as a governance structure

Both managers and Project Committee members were asked about the extent to which the Project Committee operated as an effective support structure for the projects. The survey of Project Committee members shows that 79.6% (n = 43) either agree or strongly agree that it is an effective support. Most of the remaining responses indicated they were unsure (16.7%; n = 9). In response to the same question, only 58.5% (n = 24) of managers indicated they agreed or strongly agreed, while 21.9% (n = 9) indicated that they were unsure. Similar differences between project managers and Project Committee members were identified in response to a question of whether the committee was an effective governance

structure for overseeing the budget. Less than half of managers (43.9%; n = 18) indicated they agreed that it was, while almost 40% (39%; n = 16) indicated they were unsure. A higher proportion of Project Committee members (71.7%; n = 38), indicated that it was, while 15.0% (n = 8) indicated they were unsure. Commentary provided by one manager in response to an open-ended survey question on any important aspects of the Project Committee noted that:

> *'I see a stronger responsibility for the CBO/employing agent in some of the roles highlighted above - i.e. oversight of risk management; support structures.'*

However, the view of the committees as providing a good governance mechanism and of managing risk and the budget was seen in a somewhat less positive light.

Community Gardaí

One role which is not referred to formally in the documentation regarding governance is that of the Community Gardaí. However, they were often referred to in very positive terms during interviews, usually by YJWs. Although the lack of a reference to their function does not prevent their participation in the work of the projects in practice, it is worth considering whether their potential role should be recognised so that the projects feel that it is another Garda resource on which they can call if required and that the Community Gardaí can feel that participation in project activity is a legitimate part of their function.

Peer networks

It is often the practice in community-based delivery of social programmes, that peer networks of those managing and delivering the programmes are established in order to facilitate consistency of delivery and peer learning and support. While there is no suggestion that the level of consistency of delivery between YDPs is anything other than very high, through the use of standard mechanisms and the work of the Best Practice Development Team in particular, it is something worth considering for the future, even in terms of mutual support and sharing of experience. It is likely that some of this is available to the projects which are part of larger organisations, but it could be of considerable benefit to smaller, individual projects. These networks would have no direct governance role but would provide some level of peer support for managers and YJWs, in particular.

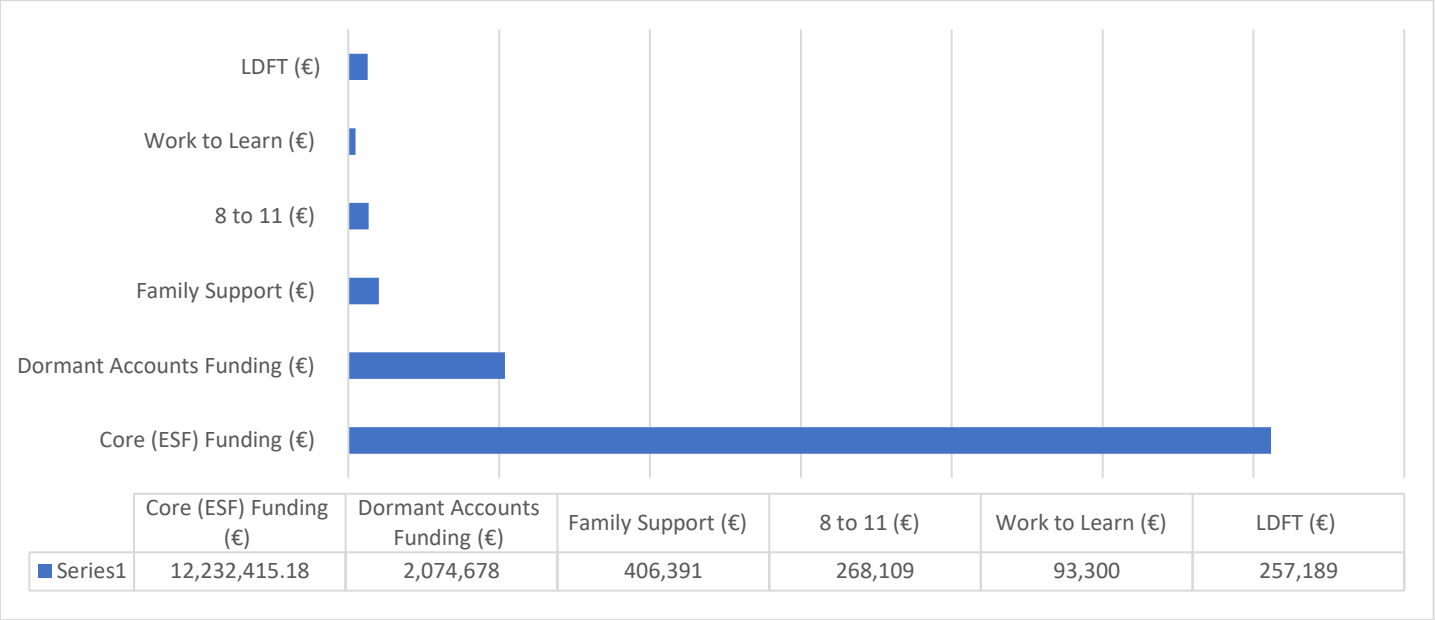
Funding of projects

The findings presented in this section are based on the 97 Excel workbooks which contained information about the budgets allocated to projects by the DoJ in 2020 and the budgets requested in 2021, made available to the Research Matters team for analysis. It is important to note that individual budget files may not refer to a single project and it is also possible that some project budgets are not included. The total budget accounted for in this analysis is €15,332,082 allocated in 2020 and a requested funding allocation of €16,676,300 for 2021.

Sources of funding

The main source of funding for YDPs is the European Social Fund (79.8%) and this is followed by funding from the Dormant Accounts (13.5%). In both 2020 and 2021, 89 projects received ESF funding, 29 projects received Dormant Accounts funding, 22 received both and seven projects received only Dormant Account funding. Funding sources presented in Figure 5 are based on 2020 data. Six sources or areas of funding were identified and the distribution is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Funding by individual source 2020



	Core (ESF) Funding (€)	Dormant Accounts Funding (€)	Family Support (€)	8 to 11 (€)	Work to Learn (€)	LDFT (€)
Series1	12,232,415.18	2,074,678	406,391	268,109	93,300	257,189

Additional sources of funding are allocated for specific purposes as follows: family support, 8-11 years, Work to Learn and the Local Drugs Task Forces. The total funding under these categories was just over one million euro (€1,024,989[1]) in 2020 and 2021 (€1,172,533) and as highlighted in Figure 5 the highest allocation is for family support and the lowest is for Work to Learn.

Overview of project funding 2020 and 2021

This section considers the funding allocation and requests according to individual projects.

Funding allocations and requests by individual projects

The total funding allocated to individual projects (2020) or requested by them (2021) ranged from €77,890 to €859,287 in 2020 and from €70,150 to €971,309 in 2021. While the mean average allocated to individual projects was €158,063, about half of the projects (n = 47; 48.5%) included in this analysis were allocated €130,000 or less in 2020. The mean average budget request in 2021 was €171,921. While

[1] All figures relating to budget are rounded to the nearest whole sum.

the mean average increased by about 8% (€13,858) between 2020 and 2021, a similar pattern was observed in that about half of projects (n = 51; 52.5%) requested €140,000 or less. Just under one in six 2021 files involved a request for an increased allocation in 2021 over what had been received in 2020. Table 6 highlights the relatively small number of projects which accessed or requested specific funding relating to family support (n = 11 files), younger children aged 8-11 (n = 8 files), Work to Learn (n = 13 files in 2020 and n = 8 files in 2021) and the Local Drugs Task Force (n = 4 files in 2020 and 2021).

Table 6: Number of services and range of funding amounts 2020 and 2021

	2020			2021		
	Total funding	No. projects	Range of allocation	Total funding	No. services	Range of allocation
Family support	406,391	11	€6,827 to €58,597	537,009	11	€6,827 to €97,194
8-11 years	268,109	8	€2,180 to €56,349	313,889	8	€3,575 to €56,349
Work to Learn	93,300	13	€4,600 to €9,100	54,799	8	€4,600 to €8,600
LDTF	257,189	4	€59,771 to €77,890	268,355	4	€78,150 to €180,241

Pay and non-pay of 2021 budget allocation request

The cost of pay accounts for about three-quarters of the budget requested (€12,245,579; 73.1%) and non-pay costs account for the remainder (€4,432,403; 27%). The mean average budget requested is €171,938 and of this, pay costs account for €126,243 or 73.4%. The proportion of the total requested budget allocated to pay in individual projects, however, ranges from 54.4% to 84.4%.

Personnel

Budget requests in 2021 were identified in respect of 288 personnel in total. Just over three-quarters of these personnel were identified as YJWs (n = 221; 76.7%) and about one in ten (n = 26; 9%) were identified as coordinators. Only four family support workers were identified. It was not possible to categorise the role of 31 (11%) individuals referred to in the budget as no information was provided about their roles.

The number of personnel identified in individual budgets varies from one (a YJW) to fifteen, with the average number allocated to projects being about three (2.97) and the average number of full-time staff being 2.4. More than three-quarters of budgets (78.9%; n =75) had budget requests for between one and three personnel, about one in five (20.6% n = 20) had allocations for between three and six personnel and only two projects (2.1%; n = 2) had allocations for seven or more personnel.

The average overall request for salary costs for personnel working in the projects is €42,251.86 although this ranges from €1,884 to €76,564. On average, requests of €42,921.68 were made for YJWs, and

€44,961.45 for coordinators/managers. The average funding request for individual family support workers (n = 4) was €36,231.89. It was not possible to categorise the working hours of 24 individuals whose pay ranges from €23,008 to €60,319 (Table 7).

Table 7: Number, percentage and request for funding for all personnel in the 2021 budget

Role	No.	%	Average pay	Minimum pay	Maximum pay
YJW	221	76.7%	€42,921.68	€1,884.00	€76,564.00
Category not stated	31	10.8%	€41,359.80	€3,526.32	€62,224.18
Coordinator	26	9.0%	€44,961.45	€16,140.01	€65,848.21
Other*	6	2.1%	€14,461.07	€3,714.61	€52,557.44
Family Support Worker	4	1.4%	€36,231.89	€22,596.41	€45,625.60
Grand Total	**288**	**100.0%**	**€42,251.86**	**€1,884.00**	**€76,564.00**

*Other personnel refers to: 'WTL', Best Practice Team, Service Manager and 'QQI support'.

The following analysis presents the data relating to 264 individuals whose working status was identified. Of these, 228 (86.4%) were identified in the budget as working on a full-time basis (defined as 35 hours or more weekly), 28 (10.6%) were identified as working part-time (defined as working between 10 and 34 hours weekly) and eight (3%) were identified as working less than 10 hours weekly.

The vast majority of personnel were working on a full-time basis, with 228 personnel (79.2%) in this category. A range of working arrangements were identified, and in this analysis, personnel were considered to be working on a full-time basis if they were allocated for 35 or more hours per week. While their hours per week ranged from 35 to 40, the vast majority worked for 35 hours per week (Table 8).

Table 8: Number of full-time workers according to number of hours worked

Number of hours	Number of personnel
35	160
37	1
37.5	34
38	1
38.5	5
39	25
40	2
Total number of personnel	**228**

Understandably there are differences in pay according to whether the individual works full- or part-time. Of the 10.6% of part-time personnel about whom information was available, YJWs accounted for more than two thirds (n = 19; 67.9%) and about a quarter (n = 7; 25%) are identified as coordinators.

Table 9: Range and mean average pay requested for personnel working full-time

	Full-time					Part-time				
Role	**No.**	**%**	**Av. pay**	**Min. pay**	**Max. pay**	**No.**	**%**	**Av. pay**	**Min. pay**	**Maximum pay**
Youth Justice Worker	199	87.3%	€44,459.50	**€33,221	€76,564.00	19	67.9%	€30,913.56	€12,742.00	€54,805.00
Coordinator	18	7.9%	€49,870.67	€41,423.04	€65,848.21	7	25.0%	€31,975.07	€16,140.01	€42,240.00
Other*	1	0.4%	€52,557.44	€52,557.44	€52,557.44	1	3.6%	€9,494.39	€9,494.39	€9,494.39
Family Support Worker	3	1.3%	€40,777.05	€36,863.04	€45,625.60	1	3.6%	€22,596.41	€22,596.41	€22,596.41
Grand Total	**228**	**100.0%**	**€44,863.64**	**€33,221**	**€76,564.00**	**28**	**100.0%**	**€30,116.93**	**€9,494.39**	**€54,805.00**
Category of personnel is not stated	7	3.1%	€44,129.61	€34,879.69	€62,224.18					

*Other personnel refers to: WTL, Best Practice Team, Service Manager and QQI support.

**Please note, the pay allocation in respect of one YJW identified as 'maternity leave cover 35 hours' was €12,500; as it is likely that this individual did not work for the full year, the data has excluded this pay.

Budget requests for pay were made for 16 workers who were identified as working less than 10 hours weekly and the amount ranged from €1,884 to €7,000.

Non-pay costs

In total, non-pay costs account for €4,432,402.98, just over one-quarter of the overall budget (27%). The mean average non-pay allocation is €45,695 with a range from €20,100 to €243,717. Non-pay costs range from 15.6% to 45.6% of budgets of individual projects.

The highest percentage of non-pay costs relates to management fees (27.8%; €1,233,883.43) followed by intervention costs (23.2%; €1,026,342.12) and rent (15.5%; €688,237.04). In terms of the overall total budget, management fees account for 7.4%, interventions account for 6.2%; and rent accounts for 4.1%. A small amount of 'other' costs, accounting for 2.6% refer to a small number of projects incurring these costs and include, for example, once-off set up, COVID-19 costs, security and HR support.

Overall, the budgets in the 97 files analysised set out detailed information about the costs associated with each project. There is, as expected, variation in the budget requested by, and allocated to, individual YDPs and this is generally accounted for by the number of personnel employed. There does not appear to be a common payscale across projects and considerable variation was identified in budgets allocated to individual personnel. This warrants further exploration. In addition, an analysis of the funding shows that the allocation to personnel costs ranges from 54.4% to 85.6%.

Future strategic direction

It is the intention, as set out in the Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027, to include additional services in YDP areas. The additional services are early intervention (8-11 year olds), family and parenting support, working with harder-to-engage young people, mentoring and restorative justice. Responses from the survey of managers about their intentions for the development of additional services, highlight that many projects currently provide, or intend to provide, these services in the next year.

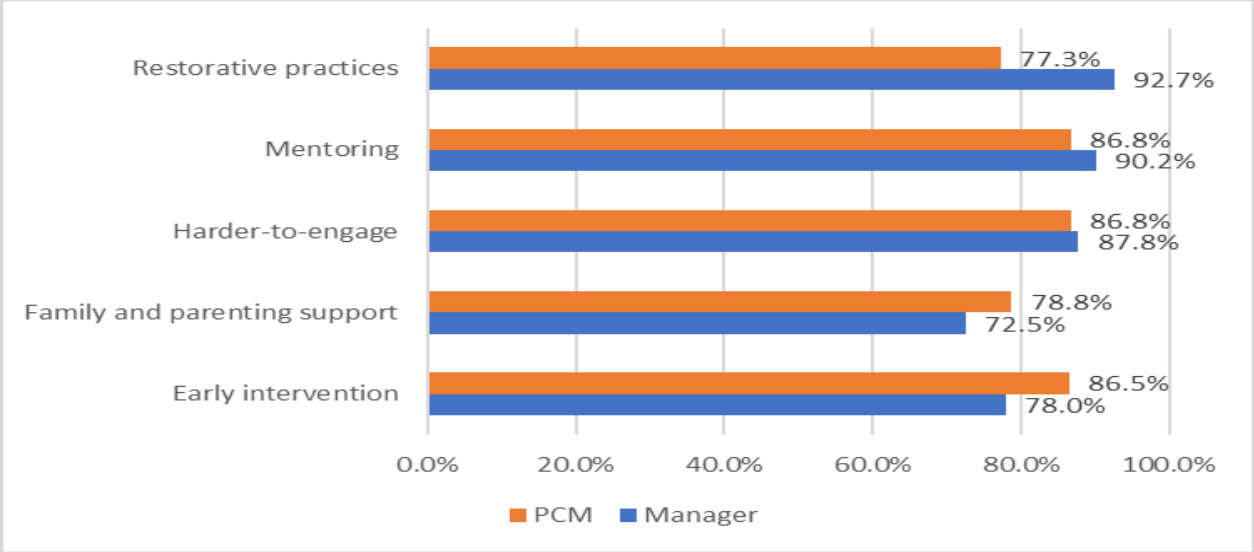
- Early intervention: About one-third (33.3%; n = 14) currently provide early intervention and a further 42.9% (n = 18) intend to do so in the next year, while slightly more than one-tenth stated that they did not intend to provide that service (11.9%, n = 5).
- Family and parenting support: Over half of managers stated that they provide this service at present (52.38%, n = 22), a little over one-third plan to provide it in the next five years (36.09%, n = 16), while 4 or 9.52% do not intend to provide the service. crimina
- Harder-to-engage young people: A little over half (55%, n = 22) indicated that they already provide services for harder-to-engage young people, 40% (n = 16) intend to provide such a service in the next five years, while only 2% (n = 5) do not intend to provide the service.
- Mentoring for young people is currently provided by 75.61% (n = 31) of projects, a further 19.52% (n = 8) intend to provide it in the next five years, while only two projects (4.88%) do not intend to provide this service at all.
- Restorative practices: Well over two-thirds of services state that they provide this already (70.73%, n = 29), while close to a further quarter (24.39%, n = 10) intend to provide it within the next five years. Only 4.44% (n = 2) do not intend to provide the service at all.

Thus, significant majorities of the projects already provide these services or intend to do so in the next five years. From the managers' perspective, only a very small number of projects do not intend to provide the services at all. The service that the largest number of projects did not intend to provide is the early intervention service (12%). It was also noted by a small number of interviewees that that while this is a worthwhile service and could be delivered through the same overall structures, it is likely to require different interventions from the main YDP service and may also require different people on the Project Committees.

Respondents to the surveys of managers and Project Committee Members (PCMs) were asked about how confident they were that the additional services would be provided and the following results, from the managers first and then the Project Committees, are shown respectively in Figure 6**.** More than 70% of respondents indicated they were confident or very confident that all could be implemented. In all

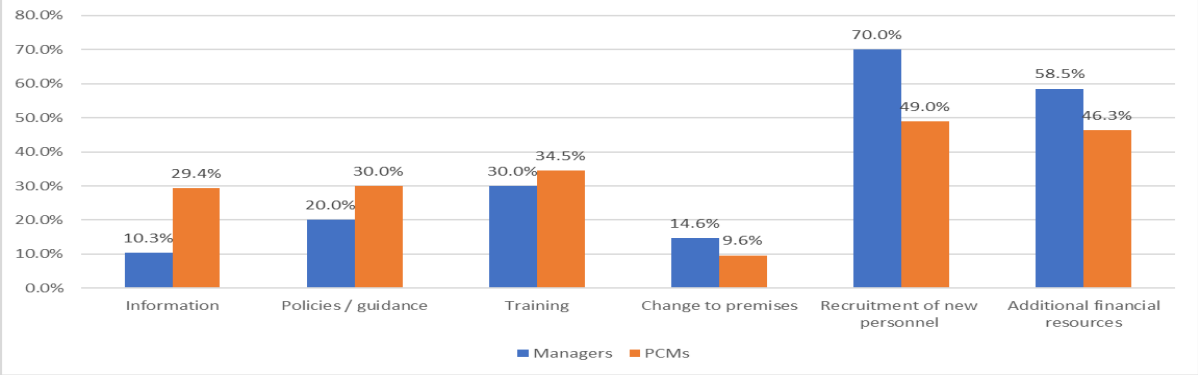
cases the numbers 'not confident' or 'slightly confident' were extremely low though the numbers who were slightly confident were higher for PCMs than for managers.

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents reporting they are 'confident' or 'very confident' that new services can be implemented



Managers and Project Committee Members were asked to rank a series of factors in order of importance to the implementation of the interventions outlined in the previous two questions. The following were the responses from the managers and the PCMs.

Figure 7: Supports considered to be most important in the introduction of new services



Not surprisingly, recruitment of new personnel and financial resources were identified by both managers (70%) and PCMs (49%) as the most important supports to be provided. A higher proportion of managers identified the provision of additional personnel and financial resources and changes to premises as important, compared to PCMs. In contrast, a higher proportion of PCMs regarded information, polices and training as being important.

There is a considerable amount of enthusiasm within the projects for these new developments with most project managers indicating that they intend to provide these services if they are not already doing so. There is also a high degree of confidence that these services can be delivered provided the necessary personal, financial and training resources are put in place.

Comments in survey re implementation of new services

Both the managers and the Project Committees were offered the opportunity to comment on the provision of the new services. These comments were largely positive. Amongst the comments from managers were the following which reflected a number of important areas of focus.

Figure 8: Commentary regarding new services

The youth justice strategy

- *The (Youth Justice) Strategy is ambitious and forward thinking. It embodies important aspects of quality delivery particularly in relation to collaboration, early intervention work, family work, harder to engage and the over 18's. (Manager)*
- *An excellent way forward in the climate of ever changing needs to suit the YP, families and the community in which they reside in. (*PCM)

Importance of the Family Support Worker

- *The Family Support Worker has improved the operation of the YDP immeasurably. (Manager)*
- *Family and parenting support is essential to ensure the YDP participant is returning home to a nurturing home environment. (PCM)*

Addressing the needs of the hard-to-reach communities

- *Concentrating on the hard to reach is the priority for us and is going well. (Manager)*
- *Think the needs of some inner-city projects have additional needs which need to be taken into consideration during funding applications. Visits to the projects by those approving applications would be welcomed. (PCM)*

Early intervention

- *Engaging with early intervention is positive going forward and supports families. (PCM)*

Taking on other forms of work

- *A young person who is over 18 will continue to receive support if it is still needed. (Manager)*
- *Funding has been approved for expansion of the service, yet recruitment is an issue. (PCM)*

Inclusion of community Gardaí

- *Revert back to community guard who built a relationship and challenged the kids' views of a Garda, saw them in a different light. Also the bubble approach where the child, parent, grandparent are all involved and give input. (PMC)*

Overall, there is a willingness, an appetite and, indeed, an expectation that the range of services offered by YDPs will be increased. Both the managers and the Project Committees seemed committed to this even if with slightly different priorities. The Youth Justice Strategy is seen as an empowering and integrative mechanism for future work, though it is also clear that additional financial and personnel resources will be needed.

Profile and characteristics of personnel

This section provides a description of key aspects of the demographic and occupational profile and perceptions of project managers, YJWs and JLOs. As highlighted in the budget information, about three-quarters of project personnel are YJWs (n = 221; 76.7%) and about 26 individuals are designated

coordinators. This information is incomplete, however, since information is not available on 31 (10.8%) of the personnel included in the budgets.

Profile and characteristics of YDP managers

The survey of managers (n = 46) highlighted that the nomenclature around this role varies with titles such as 'manager' (50%; 23), coordinator (13.0%; n = 3), team lead/supervisor (2; 4.4%) and 'youth justice worker with management responsibility for the project' (8.7%; n = 4) being used. A further 23.9% identified 'other' as their title.

Managers were asked to indicate the number of YDPs for which they are responsible, and the findings show that just over half (55.3%; n = 26) are responsible for one project, 29.8% are responsible for between two and three projects, and 6.3% (n = 3) are responsible for more than three projects. Four respondents indicated a different structure with one noting a divisional project that amalgamated six projects into one.

Managers were asked how many years' experience they had in the youth justice sector, in their current organisation and in their current job. The responses show that managers have high levels of experience in the sector with 86% having at least six years' experience in the sector, 75% having at least six years' experience in their organisation and 57% having at least six years' experience in their current roles. This is again a positive as it means that experienced people are being retained and their corporate and operational knowledge is available to the organisations.

Table 10: Number and percentage of years experience of managers

	Less Than 1 Year	1-2 Years	3-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	More Than 15 Years	Total
The youth justice sector in Ireland	2.3% 1	0.0% 0	11.6% 5	27.9% 12	20.9% 9	37.2% 16	**43**
Your current organisation	2.2% 1	4.4% 2	17.8% 8	13.3% 6	11.1% 5	51.1% 23	**45**
Your current job	6.8% 3	13.6% 6	22.7% 10	18.2% 8	15.9% 7	22.7% 10	**44**

According to the survey of managers , about one-third are male (33.3%; n = 15) and 60% (n = 27) are female, with the remainder (n = 3) indicating 'other' or did not wish to say. Findings from the survey also show that almost two-thirds (61.4%; n = 27) are aged between 30 and 50 years. Just over one-third (34.1%; n = 15) are over the age of 50 years and only 4.5% (n = 2) are aged under 30 years.

Managers were asked to indicate their highest level of qualification and the responses show that the vast majority of respondents had obtained a post-graduate certificate/diploma (31.1%; n = 14) or a post-graduate degree, Masters or Doctorate (46.7%; n = 21). Just over one in ten (11.1%; n = 5) managers reported their highest level of qualification as a certificate/diploma below degree level. Nine respondents (20.0%) indicated they had a specialist youth justice qualification with five of these reported as post-graduate and the remainder undergraduate.

Respondents were asked about their intention to stay or leave their current job in the next two years and the findings show that over three-quarters are likely to stay in their post (definitely stay 57.7%; n = 26; probably stay 20%; n = 9), with only one person definitely leaving and 20% (n = 9) indicating that they will probably leave. There is thus uncertainty in the case of 40% of the respondents. This can be considered a relatively high proportion, though perhaps less so in today's work environment than in the past.

In general, there are high levels of experienced managers working in the YDPs. Almost 80% hold a post-graduate qualification suggesting a very highly qualified workforce. Only about 20% report a specialist youth justice qualification, however, and this needs some consideration. Managers report high levels of intention to stay in their current job for the next two years which is a relatively high proportion.

Profile and characteristics of YDP YJWs

The findings from the survey of YJWs shows that about two-thirds identify as female (64.2%; n = 70) and the remainder identify as male (35.8%). About one-third (30.9%; n = 34) of YJWs are aged between 21 and 30 years and a further third are aged between 31 and 40 years (32.7%; n = 36). About one-quarter are aged 41-50 years (23.6%; n = 26). Three are aged under 20 years (2.7%) and four are aged 61 years or older (3.6%).

YJWs were asked to indicate their highest level of qualification and the results show that about one-third of YJWs (30.9%; n = 34) hold a post-graduate degree (Masters, Doctorate) and a further quarter (23.6%; 26) have a post-graduate diploma. Just under 40% (38.2; n = 42) indicated that their highest level of qualification was a primary degree and the remaining 7.1% (n = 8) indicated they had a post-leaving certificate or diploma (below degree level). They were also asked whether they had a specialist youth justice qualification. Over three-quarters (78.18%, n = 86) indicated that they did not, with 11.82% (n = 13) indicating that they had a post-graduate qualification and 10.00% (n = 11) indicating that they held an undergraduate qualification. Reference was made by a small number of interviewees of the MA degree available under the REPPP programme and this was identified as a welcome development. It was also reported that some YJWs were in the process of completing, or had already completed, this masters programme.

YJWs were asked to indicate the level of experience they had in the youth justice sector, their current organisation and their current job. The responses from the YJWs show wide variation in the length of time in the sector, organisation and role. However, 70% have at least three years' experience in the sector, 72% have at least three years' experience in their organisation, (72.22%, n = 77) and over 60% have at least three years' experience in their current role (61.47%, n = 67). There are also strong cohorts with six or more- and 10 or more-years' experience which gives a solid base of experience which can support and mentor newer entrants to the sector. In addition, it is a positive feature that there is a significant number of new entrants as it is an area which needs to be refreshed with younger

professionals on an ongoing basis. 10.91% (n = 12) have less than one years' experience in the youth sector in Ireland, for example.

Table 11: Number and percentage of years experience of YJWs

	Less Than 1 Year	1-2 Years	3-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	More Than 15 Years	Total
The youth justice sector in Ireland	10.9% 12	19.1% 21	28.2% 31	11.8% 13	15.5% 17	14.6% 16	**110**
Your current organisation	12.0% 13	15.7% 17	23.2% 25	16.7% 18	17.6% 19	14.8% 16	**108**
Your current job	**18.35% 20**	**20.2% 22**	**23.9% 26**	**11.9% 13**	**12.8% 14**	**12.4% 14**	**109**

YJWs were asked to indicate the nature of their contract. These responses indicate that the vast majority of YJWs are full-time in the service and two types of contract predominate. Two-thirds of YJWs report having permanent full-time contracts (67.0%; n = 77) while under one-third have fixed-term full-time contracts (27.8%; n = 32). Only five respondents reported working on either a permanent (n = 4; 3.5%) or fixed-term (n = 1; 0.8%) part-time contract. This is not an unusual pattern though it would be worthwhile investigating the nature of the fixed-term contracts.

Job satisfaction and future intentions

The YJWs were then asked to indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with a number of aspects of their work. The results are shown in Table 12. Overall, the results are very positive and reflect the commitment to their jobs. Just over 90% (90.9%; n = 100) of YJWs reported to be either very satisfied or satisfied with their job as a whole, taking everything into account. On the positive side, the things which stand out are the level of support from managers (86.2%; n = 94), the opportunities for training (85.5%; n = 94) and the quality of service provided to service users (97.2%; n = 106).

Two negative responses stand out. Almost half of respondents indicated they were either unsatisfied (30.9%; n = 34) or highly unsatisfied (15.5%; n = 17) with their opportunities for promotion, which is not surprising in such a flat structure. The second negative area which was raised by a number of YJWs in interviews relates to the level of professional supervision received where a similar proportion indicated they were either unsatisfied (16.8%; n = 18) or highly unsatisfied (29.9%; n = 32).

Commentary in interviews relating to professional supervision highlights that those who receive such supervision benefit from it although as highlighted in the following comment it is not always included in the budget provided:

> *'So it's really important that we're allowed to do this [professional supervision], encouraged to do it and actually paid to do this because at the moment it isn't covered by what the type of funding that we get.' [FG7A, manager]*

It is also noteworthy that nearly half of respondents were satisfied as well, so it may be that this is a matter which is determined by the CBO with varying outcomes.

Table 12: Perceptions of YJWs to a number of statements about their jobs

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Highly Unsatisfied	Total
Your job as a whole, everything taken into consideration	45.45% 50	45.45% 50	9.09% 10	0.00% 0	110
Your physical working conditions	51.82% 57	38.18% 42	10.00% 11	0.00% 0	110
The way your abilities are used	51.38% 56	38.53% 42	10.09% 11	0.00% 0	109
The amount of flexibility in your working hours	66.36% 73	28.18% 31	4.55% 5	0.91% 1	110
The physical demands placed on you during work	44.55% 49	43.64% 48	11.82% 13	0.00% 0	110
The autonomy you have in carrying out your work	57.27% 63	38.18% 42	3.64% 4	0.91% 1	110
The involvement you have in decisions which affect your work	50.91% 56	35.45% 39	11.82% 13	1.82% 2	110
Your opportunities for professional training and development	49.09% 54	36.36% 40	12.73% 14	1.82% 2	110
Your opportunities for promotion	12.73% 14	40.91% 45	30.91% 34	15.45% 17	110
The level of support you received from management	53.21% 58	33.03% 36	7.34% 8	6.42% 7	109
The level of professional supervision you receive	24.30% 26	28.97% 31	16.82% 18	29.91% 32	107
The quality of service given to your service users	69.72% 76	27.52% 30	2.75% 3	0.00% 0	109

Commentary from YJWs and managers interviewed at both case study sites and national level interviews reflect the findings relating to job satisfaction as highlighted in the following quote:

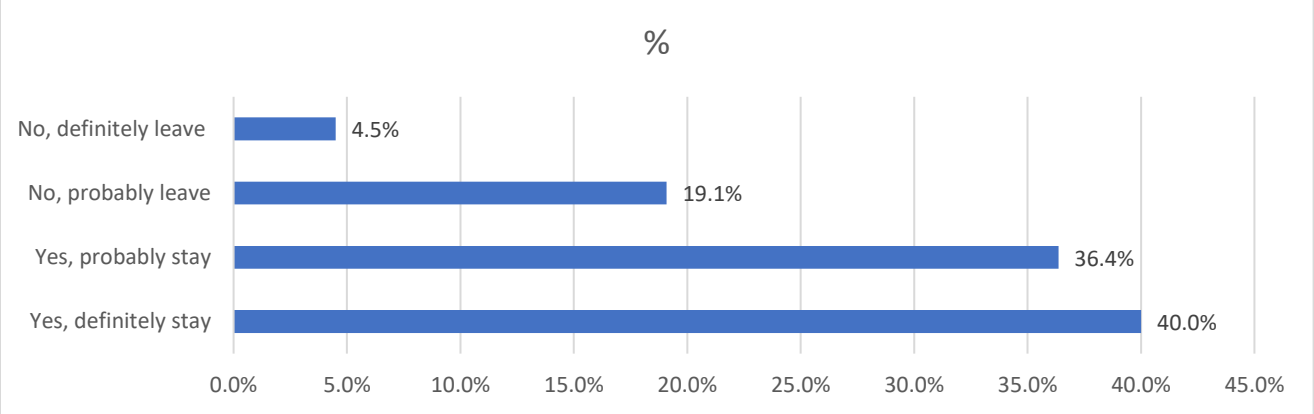
> *'[name of manager] being our manager, we're very lucky. He's always encouraged us to use our own strengths as the means of what we do with the young people. He's very much always there in the **background**, but he very much lets us follow our own goals, our own instincts when it comes to what we need to do, which is really good.' (FG7B, YJWs)*

A member of a national support structure highlighted that:

> *'like, the people who get into this work are in it because they want to make a difference and want to do right by the young people and families that they work with.' (FG3, member national support structure)*

YJWs were asked to indicate whether they intended to leave or stay over the next two years. The responses are set out in Table 13. This indicates that over three-quarters are likely to stay in their post (76.4%, n = 84), made up of 'definitely stay' (40%, n = 44) and 'probably stay' (36.4%, n = 40), with a small number definitely leaving (4.44%, n = 5). There is, however, uncertainty regarding more than half of the respondents (55.45%, n = 61), which is relatively high given the high levels of commitment to their jobs expressed by these workers during this project.

Table 13: Likelihood of YJWs remaining in their post for two years or more



Similar to managers, there are high levels of well experienced and highly qualified YJWs working within the YPDs although there are lower levels of YJWs with a specific qualification in youth justice. There are also very high levels of overall job satisfaction among YJWs particularly in respect of the level of support from managers, the opportunities for training and the quality of service provided to service users. Two issues to be considered relate to the opportunities for promotion and access to professional supervision. While there are high levels of intention to stay in their current job for the next two years, there are also high levels of uncertainty about this. Given the importance of the professional relationships between YJWs and participants, this may need some consideration.

Profile and characteristics of YDP Juvenile Liaison Officers

Juvenile Liaison Officers were asked how many years' experience they had as a Garda, as a JLO and in their current assignment. The responses show that JLOs have high levels of experience as Gardaí with 83.67% (n = 41) having more than 15 years' experience. More than half (54%, n = 27) have more than 10 years' experience as a JLO, with another 16% (n = 8) having between six and 10 years' experience as a JLO. Two-thirds of the JLOs have been in the same assignment for more than six years (66.66%, n = 28), which suggests a high level of stability in Garda personnel in this area. This is very much a positive situation, as it means that experienced Gardaí who know and are known in the community are in their

post and can build up a knowledge of the area, develop good relationships with the projects and the community and be a positive presence for all.

Table 14: Number and percentage of years experience of Juvenile Liaison Officers

	Less Than 1 Year	1-2 Years	3-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	More Than 15 Years	Total
as a Garda	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	6.1% 3	10.2% 5	83.7% 41	**49**
as a Juvenile Liaison Officer	6.0% 3	8.0% 4	16.0% 8	16.0% 8	32.0% 16	22.0% 11	**50**
in your current assignment	4.8% 2	7.1% 3	21.4% 9	14.3% 6	31.0% 13	21.41% 9	42

The Juvenile Liaison officers were asked whether they had a specialist qualification in youth justice. A little over three-quarters (76.47%, n = 39) indicated that they did not, with 15.69% (n = 8) stating that they had a post-graduate qualification and 7.84% (n = 4) indicating that they had an undergraduate qualification.

There are high proportions of well experienced JLOs who have been in their current job for more than six years giving a high degree of stability. Most JLOs do not have a specialist qualification in youth justice.

Profile and characteristics of YDP participants

This section presents demographic information available from an analysis of the ESF database which provides information about young people who enrolled on, and had disengaged from, the projects prior to 2021. It also draws on interviews with family members, JLOs, YJWs and managers from the case study areas to provide insights into the lives of participants engaging with the projects.

Diversity in individual needs and risks

There is considerable diversity in how young people grow and develop, respond to change and manage the adolescent period where mental, physical and emotional changes are significant and extensive. While all young people are likely to have some additional need for support over these years, it is clear that some young people have greater resources than others. Several young people interviewed in the course of this evaluation were strong, resilient, attending school, had good friendships and were on a very positive trajectory.

Others, however, experience extensive challenges arising from their individual needs and family contexts. Some young people attending the projects were noted to have additional educational or health needs such as learning difficulties, ADHD or were on the autistic spectrum. It was highlighted that the manifestation of these can result in young people getting into challenging and criminal situations. It was also noted that COVID-19 had a negative impact on the mental health of young people and their involvement with the projects was more limited. One JLO highlighted that:

'So that's I see a change in on mental health as well, coming out of the pandemic. Yeah. It's where like it's hard for them to, kind of, navigate themselves back into being sociable after being isolated for so long.' (CS 8 FG, YJW)

Some young people come from families that are living in impoverished situations including poor housing or homelessness. One YJW gave an example of the context, and its impact on one young person, explaining that they called to a participant's house and:

'You could see like, oh my God, the kids actually have no bed. They're sleeping on the couch because you got granny and all the family living in this two bed … So every night he was waiting for everyone to go to bed so he could sleep on the couch. Yeah. He then was late for school or when he did go to school, he was disruptive because he was wrecked. Yeah. Yeah. He hadn't eaten because everyone else is in bed late and no one's got up to give him breakfast or whatever.' (2, individual interview, Garda Inspector)

Particular concerns were raised about the engagement of young people in the care of the State who are placed in residential centres. It was highlighted that these young people have often experienced 'dramatic' and 'challenging' lives before been placed with one JLO saying that 'the children are just traumatised'. One JLO highlighted that in residential care homes there can be 'a bad mix' [of young people together] and they can 'spark off each other'. This, in turn can result in them ending up in the criminal justice system, as noted by another JLO who said:

'As you know, if you live in residential social care and have a fight, you know that is just way more likely to result in the police arriving than if you do that at home.' (CS4 FG JLO)

Some personnel identified the importance of getting young people involved at an early age in the projects before they were too far into criminality, although one YJW said that 14-15 years is the optimum age if they are joining as part of a group while those aged 17 might be too old. One project committee member, however, urged caution noting that:

*There's net widening, but there's also **mesh** thinning … Because net widening is, where someone who would not have been detected otherwise is now detected. But mesh thinning is where someone who would have been detected but their thing would have been resolved entirely informally is instead put through a formal process. And that's where I see some risk in stuff like this. And that's why [name of two organisations] were concerned about it going down to eight, because now you're going to have eight-year-olds who plausibly are going to be engaged by people who are not positive and so on, but also plausibly are going to be engaged by people who just are more likely to call the police than if there weren't anyone there.' (4, individual interview, member of national support structure)*

Attention was also drawn to gender differences in some families, mainly Traveller and Roma families, where due to culture, girls may not be allowed the freedom to attend the project.

Several young people who took part in this research spoke about having been on 'reduced timetables', suspension from school, sometimes more than once, and of having been expelled and not allowed to return to the school. One youth worker said, 'it's huge … school refusal for that age' and gave the

example of one young person who 'missed 50 days since the [beginning of the school year] but is now attending three days a week]'.

Diversity in family contexts

Several personnel working within the YDPs highlighted the importance of family context to how the young person progresses and in the ways in which they are exposed to challenges and supported through difficulties. For some young people who were interviewed, their families were supportive and encouraging of them in every way. In some situations, both financial and family resources were available to help the young person in their education, in getting into employment and in engaging in leisure activities. One mother spoke about waiting outside a gym for two hours a couple of times every week so that her son could get involved in an activity. Another spoke about a family member who had indicated they would give the young person a job during the summer months and yet another spoke about changing her work times to a split shift in order to bring her son to school and pick him up so that he would get there on time. Examples were also given by parents of 'shame' and 'embarrassment' experienced by them in response to a young person 'bringing the guards to the door' and of where, within their family, criminal behaviours were an exception rather than the norm.

For other young people, however, the family contexts were described as 'chaotic', where parents and, sometimes other siblings in the family, and extended family, have had long standing engagement with the justice system. Issues highlighted included parents who experienced 'mental health problems', 'drug and alcohol abuse problems', 'where there might be child protection involvement', and where long-term and intergenerational unemployment were common. One YJW noted that many of the young people involved in their project come from families where they 'feel marginalised' and 'so they're suspicious of ... certainly of the guards anyway'. One YJW said:

> *'… And it's ones where there's family difficulties, where there's abuse and substance abuse and the attraction of crime and are involved in drug dealing and all that. That's what you're up against …'. (CS8 FG YJW)*

Another manager noted that:

> *'Before I came here. I always found the families always wanted better for the kids than they had. Always wanted. So, if they're involved in it, they didn't want their kids using drugs. They didn't want their kids selling drugs. They didn't want the kids knowing about it. It's the opposite here. Yeah, for so many of them, like they're tots and they're running up and down the **scooters** and we're very aware of something else in their bags ... [It was] really sad, like those young people strategically placed on corners of streets that they could see two angles or three angles and they have a phone, that kind of stuff.' (National level individual interview 11, manager)*

Family breakdown through divorce, separation or being in conflict with family members were all identified as triggering points for young people 'going off the rails'. One mother said 'I was in a divorce, during that period. And he was a bit everywhere. He didn't know what to do, which way to go'. Another mother spoke about having significant conflict with siblings following the death of a parent and the

negative impact on the young person who had lost not only their grandparent but also uncles and other family members who would have been very involved in his life up to that time.

Throughout this project, it was clear that grandparents can play a significant role in the lives of young people particularly where there was conflict between parents and the young person and where, 'for whatever reason the parents are out of the picture'. One young person highlighted this saying he was 'very involved in her [his grandmother's] life. Like if something was to go wrong, she'd be one of the first people that I'd tell'. It was also noted, however, that many grandparents are 'much older and have their own health conditions' and can have other problems that lead to challenges in caring for the young person. The death of a grandparent was identified as a trigger by parents and young people for the young person getting into trouble. One grandmother spoke about the impact on her son of the death of her mother noting that:

> *'So, and, [name of young person] got in to trouble two years ago when my mum died … I mean he was coming to the school when my mum was alive and yeah, well when my mom died [name of young person] just went off the rails'. (CS3 FG2 Family member)*

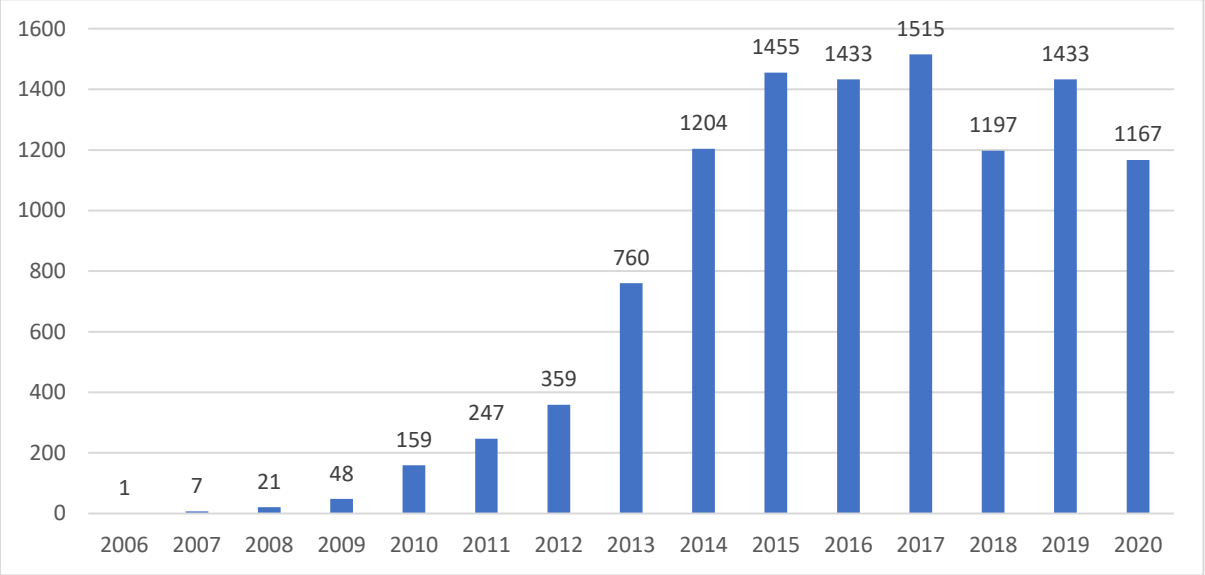
The family within which the young person lives also has an impact on how the personnel working in the projects engage. One JLO explained that he didn't worry about a particular young person on the days he came to the project because he knew 'he would get pizza that day'. A YJW highlighted that in some families, 'the real hard stuff, drugs', are a serious problem and that due to 'feuding between families' you have to talk to people in 'kind of silos' where different times and places have to be arranged for young people to come to the project. Others noted that being in a home environment where criminal activities take place can be very difficult for young people and one member of a project committee highlighted that this can mean:

> *'The child is stressed, yet you know, and the worries … children know something's going wrong and all the things wrong in the home and they might not always articulate what's going on, but they hold all those stressors in their own lives.' (CS5 FG, Project Committee member)*

Number of participants enrolled in YDPs since 2006

Information about the profile of 11,006 participants in the YDPs who enrolled since 2006 and had completed their engagement by 2021 is drawn from an analysis of the data in the European Social Fund (ESF) workbook provided by the DoJ. The data shows an inconsistent growth in the number of participants involved in a YDP. One participant is identified as having commenced in 2006, seven in 2007 and 21 in 2008. The highest number of participants were enrolled in 2017 (n = 1515) and the data shows that 1,167 enrolled in 2020 (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Number of participants enrolled by year of enrolment



Gender, foreign background, disability and disadvantage

The analysis shows that about three-quarters of participants (75%; 8,264) are identified as male and the remainder female (24.9%; n = 2,742). The analysis of gender by year of enrolment shows that between 2008 and 2019, the percentage of female participants in the YDPs ranged from 19% to 28%, and from one-quarter to one-fifth in most years. No particular trend is evident in these figures, with the number of female participants fluctuating on a year-by-year basis. The year for highest female participation was 2019 at 28.3%, while the lowest was 2008 at 19.0%.

Information was presented about the background of 11,003 participants and the information shows that about one-fifth of participants overall (n = 2382; 21.6%) were reported to be of a 'foreign/minority' background. This proportion is well beyond that identified in the general population, documented in the State of the Nation's Children report in 2016, which stated there were 79,536 foreign national children in Ireland accounting for only 6.6% of the overall child population. Information was requested but not provided by about 4% of participants.

On commencement 840 participants (7.6%) were reported to have a disability and a further 474 (4.3%) did not provide the information requested. This is somewhat higher than the percentage of the overall child population in Ireland with a disability as reported in the State of the Nation's Children Report (2020), which stands at 6.4%.

Information was provided regarding 10,998 participants in terms of whether they had unspecified 'other disadvantage' and the analysis shows that more than half of those for whom information was provided (56.8%; n = 6256) were reported to have 'other disadvantage'. The meta-data for this defines 'other disadvantage' as 'any disadvantage not covered by the preceding indicators eg persons facing social exclusion eg, ex-offenders, [with] substance abuse addiction'. Information was requested but not provided for about 8% of participants (n = 929; 8.4%) and in a further 39 cases (0.4%) this information was not requested.

Labour and educational status on entry to the YDP

Information was available about the education and employment status of 10,982 participants on entry to the YDPs. The findings show that about 8% (n = 877) were 'inactive but not in education or training' and the majority of participants were identified as 'inactive'[2] (n = 9,831; 89.5%). A very small proportion were reported to be employed or self-employed (n = 158; 1.5%) and less than 1% were reported to be unemployed (n = 82; 0.7) or long-term unemployed (n = 2). These figures are not unexpected as it would be likely that the majority of participants would still be in education or training during their years of participation. It would also be expected that a small number would be counted as being in the labour force, whether employed or unemployed. The figures do show, however, that while pathways to employment are important and that while preparing participants for a role in the labour force in due course is an important focus of the projects, the overall role of employment in the YDPs is relatively small. That is not to say that it is not of significant importance in certain contexts and that good relations with employment providers should not be focused on for the cases in which such engagements are necessary.

Information was available regarding 11,001 participants in respect of their highest educational attainment on entry to the project according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). The results are shown below and highlight that on entry to the YDP, about 90% (n = 9,980; 90.7%) had either completed primary education or lower secondary education while about 7% (n = 746) had completed either upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education. The level of education identified in this analysis is consistent with expectations for the age group included in the YDPs.

Profile of projects

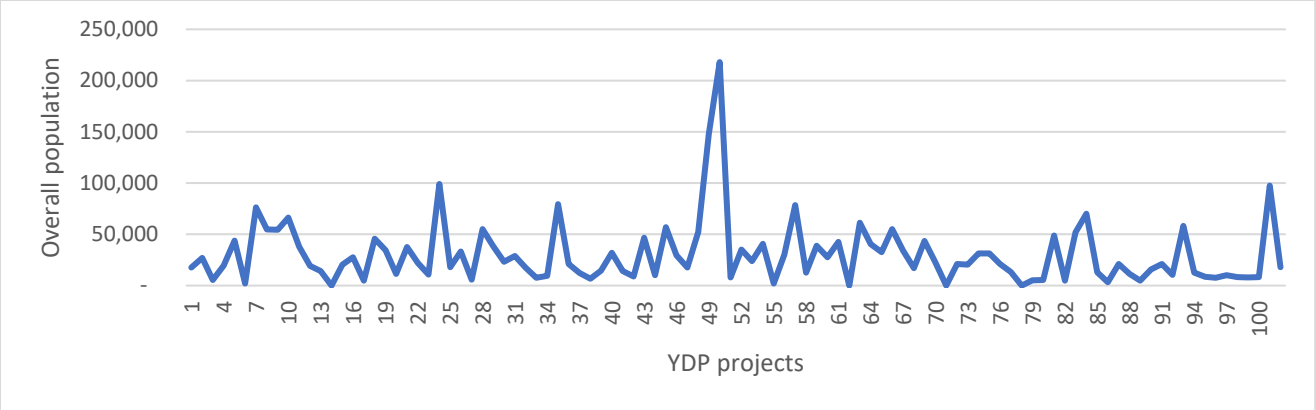
This section considers the profile and characteristics of YDPs, the personnel who work within them and the participants. The findings emerge from an analysis of interviews at case study sites, annual project plans, and surveys with key personnel.

Community contexts

The communities within which youth diversion projects are based are diverse, geographically distributed and vary according in population size. According to data compiled from the 2021 annual project plans, the population size of the catchment area for the projects ranges from 1,963 to 218,018 with a mean average population size of 31,305 (SD: 3,163.5) suggesting considerable differences in the size of the populations from which young people are drawn. This diversity is highlighted in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Overall population size of catchment areas for individual projects

[2] Participant currently not part of the labour force (i.e. is not employed or unemployed) and is not available for/ seeking work. This includes full-time students.



An analysis of the context, drawn from the eight case study areas, provides an insight into the circumstances within which projects operate. The findings highlight a multiplicity of conditions under which young people attending these projects live and the spheres of influences on the young person including their family, their school, their community and their peers.
It was highlighted that communities in general can be very unwelcoming of young people, 'looking down on them' particularly where they are 'hanging around', 'just sitting on the wall with their friends'. One parent said:

> *'I don't think the community is good to teenagers to be honest. They kind of forget they were teenagers themselves.' (4, individual interview, mother)*

Another parent noted that while there were lots of activities and places for younger children there was very little available in their area for teenagers asking, 'What are they to do at their age?'.

A number of interviewees identified Halloween as being a particular flashpoint where young people got into trouble in the community. It was highlighted, however, that engaging the young people as part of a community project allowed the people to see young people as part of the community while the young people 'got more of a pride in it'. New communities were identified as presenting some challenges. One YJW highlighted that many of the families of young people coming to the project would have been known intergenerationally but that nothing was known of the newer populations, who were often 'transient' and 'had language and cultural differences'. This was also noted by a JLO who said:

> *'We don't know the families, the language barriers its ... very different. They don't know us … lot of problems come with young girls, you know with issues, young girls mixing with older drug dealers and ... tend to move around a bit more.' (CS7, individual interview, manager)*

A number of comments were made about the chaotic nature of some communities and within certain communities there are 'big groups of families that are all intertwined', young people are being 'dragged into things that they shouldn't be'. Some professionals spoke about the influence of the community on the aspirations young people may have noting that 'if you grow up on a street where everyone is not bothering about school [and if you are bothering about school, you are] ... definitely the odd one out.' The impact of living in a community where there is high drug use was noted by one JLO, who stated:

'The chaos is normal to them to walk over a door and see some dealer and just walk on, go to school or so on and injecting or something that no five, six-year-old should ever see, that they've seen it numerous times in a week.' (CS2 FG Member of Project Committee)

In that regard it was reported that some children, well under the age of criminal responsibility, have been under pressure by their families or others in their community to commit crimes in the knowledge that these children will not be prosecuted because of their age. One JLO noted that as a consequence, while these children may be known to the Community Gardaí, 'a child of 12, their life could be chaotic by the time they come on our radar'. The ubiquitous nature of drug use was highlighted, and it was suggested that substance misuse is normalised in some families and communities and that young people could be caught up 'in the glamour of the parks and selling drugs'. One JLO said:

'I think that the majority of kids that come through do have problems with marijuana … marijuana ... and cocaine and then on to heroin and then on to everything else, which we can't control until there's a bigger discussion around drugs. The drugs are so normalised.' (FG7, CBO managers)

Normalisation of drug use

This normalisation of drug use was also highlighted by others who noted that some young people live in communities where they 'are seeing a lot of criminal activity and drugs on the street, like on their door stop literally' and for them, they have 'just grown up with drug use 'and 'it's so normalised they don't even see it'. It was also highlighted that young people might start on 'antisocial behaviour' at a minor end but then as they 'get older the drugs … start coming into it and then they are involved in crimes'. Some young people enter the YDP as a consequence of being found with drugs, either for their own use, or for supply and sale to others. One JLO highlighted that 'when you hear of a person ... being done for possession and drug sale and supply like you automatically you might picture in your head an adult or a dealer or something and somebody with a BMW Jeep but … some of those involved can be as young as 14, 15 years old'.

In some cases, it was noted that drug use may not be a topic that can be talked about, that young people can 'shut down', or 'don't see anything wrong with it' when discussions about it arise. One JLO highlighted that drug debt can be a very big issue for some young people saying that 'we're dealing with drug debt. We're dealing with intimidation ... it opens up a whole kettle of fish'. It was also noted that drug use is constantly changing, and this is often not taken into account by services and that 'cannabis is not just the stuff you put in a cigarette anymore. It's the edibles, the vapes, everything'.

The communities within which youth diversion projects are based are diverse, geographically distributed and the catchment areas vary considerably in population size. Drug use, intergenerational criminality and unemployment were all identified as problematic. New and diverse communities with particular needs are more common and it is highlighted that a very high proportion of participants are recorded as being from a migrant/foreign background compared with the proportion in the general population. Some communities are unwelcoming of young people, recreational facilities for them are limited.

Characteristics of projects

The survey of managers was completed in respect of 64 projects accounting for 61% of all projects. While the data is incomplete, it is nevertheless helpful in identifying issues of interest to the evaluation. Key findings are presented in Table 15.

Table 15: Key characteristics of YDPs based on survey of projects

Characteristic	Number and percentage of respondents to survey
Number of years in existence	1-2 years 1 (1.6%); 3- 5 years 2 (3.2%); 6 to 10 years 4 (6.5%); More than 10 years 55 (88.7%)
CBO	Foroige (42.0%; n = 29); Youth Work Ireland (11; 15.9%); Extern 1 (1.4%); Crosscare 11 (15.9%); None of the named CBOs: 17 (24.6%)
Location	Dublin Metropolitan Region 29 (42.03%); North-Western 7 (10.1%); Eastern 14 (20.3%), Southern 14 (20.3%); Don't know (5; 7.5%)
Type of area	City area 28 (45.2%); Rural area 2 (3.2%); Town area 32 (51.6%)
YPD premises	Yes, the project has a premises 53 (84.1%); No, the project does not have a premises 10 (15.9%)
Integration with a wider youth service	Yes 43 (68.3%); No 20 (31.7%)

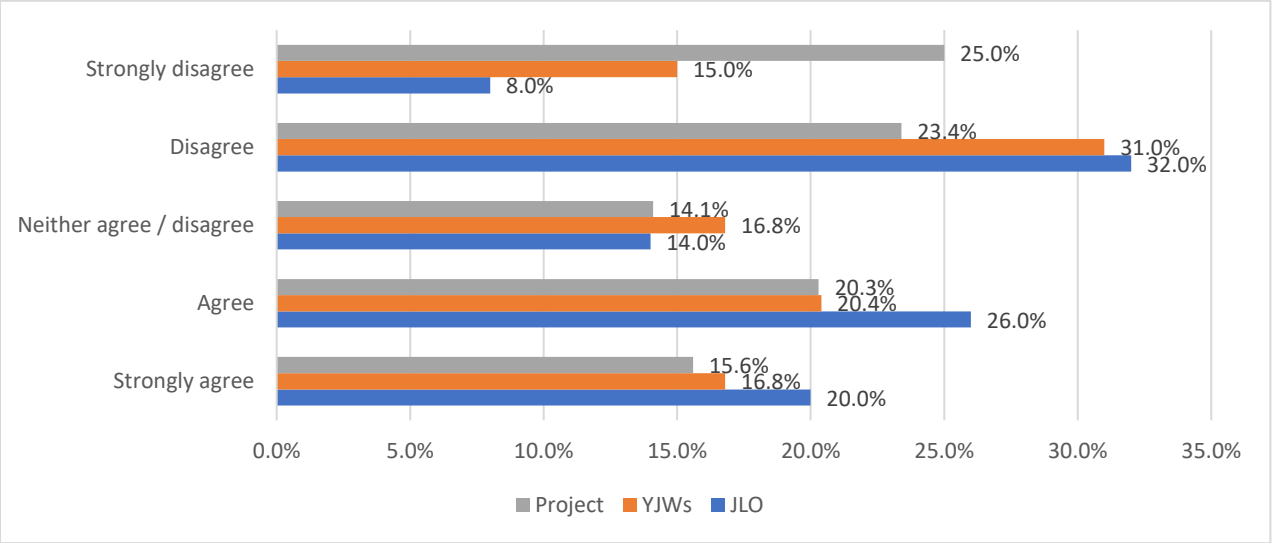
Findings from the survey show there are significant differences in the extent to which the YDP premises, if available, meet the needs of participants and examples ranged from those that were 'excellent', 'large' and 'well-resourced' to those where there was insufficient space or access, with one respondent indicating they would welcome a 'budget for bigger premises' noting 'we are working out of two rooms'.

Geographic location and general context

The survey provided some useful, albeit incomplete information about the projects. As regards Garda Region, about 40% (42.0%; n = 29) were based in the Dublin Metropolitan Region, 20% in the Southern (20.3%; n = 14) and Eastern Regions (20.3%; n = 14) and 10% (10.1%; n = 7) in the North-Western region. Five respondents (7.2%) indicated they did not know.

Respondents to surveys carried out by YJWs, JLOs and managers showed that there is some agreement that participants faced transport issues that made it difficult for them to participate in the YDP (Figure 11). About one-fifth of JLOs indicated they 'strongly agreed' and a further quarter of respondents agreed with this statement. A lower proportion of respondents who completed the survey of managers agreed (15.6% strongly agreed; 20.3% agreed) although this was similar to the proportion of YJWs who reported this (16.8% strongly agreed; 20.4% agreed). Between 8% (JLOs) and 25% (project respondents) strongly disagreed with this statement.

Figure 11: Percentage of respondents that agree/disagree that participants face transport issues that make it difficult for them to participate in YDP



Perceptions of the prevalence of crime and impact on the project

Findings from the survey of projects (n = 64) completed by managers, YJWs (n = 114) and JLOs (n = 53) show some differences in terms of the extent to which crime is perceived to be an issue in the environment of their project. One question which was asked of all three stakeholders related to the types of areas in which the projects were based and, in particular, the crime profile of those areas. This was considered relevant for two reasons: projects are targeted at areas of high need in terms of crime and antisocial behaviour, but participation in a project could be impacted if pressure was being put on participants by others in the area involved in criminal activity not to participate or to do so to a limited extent only.

Findings from the survey of managers suggest that the majority of the projects that responded are based in areas of high serious crime and high youth crime. More than 60% (61.9%; 39) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their project was based in an area that experienced high levels of serious crime. The percentages were higher in respect of youth crime and 30.2% of respondents strongly agreed and 46.0% agreed that their project was based in an area that experienced high levels of youth crime. Only a small number of respondents disagreed (4.4%, n = 5) that their project was based in an area that experienced high levels of youth crime suggesting that the projects are situated within appropriate contexts. The survey also shows that a majority of respondents (58.8%; n = 37) believed that young people attending the projects are perceived to experience intimidation by groups/individuals involved in crime. The analysis also shows, however, that staff are not perceived to experience the same intimidation, with only 8 (12.9%) agreeing with this statement.

YJWs were also asked to respond to these questions. Again, more than 60% (64.1%; n = 73) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their project was based in an area that experiences high levels of serious crime. The percentages were higher in respect of youth crime and 51.8% (n = 59) of respondents strongly agreed and 33.3% (n = 38) agreed that their project was based in an area that

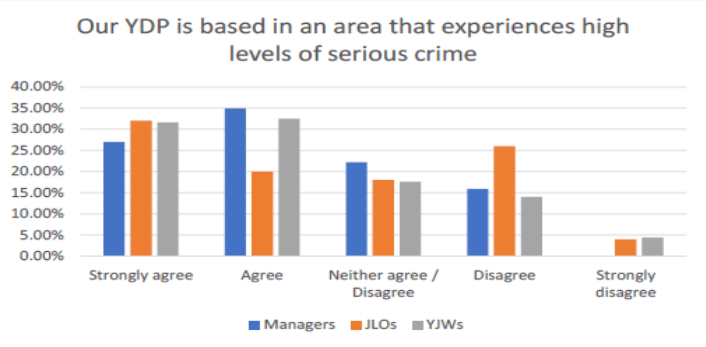
experienced high levels of youth crime. An even smaller proportion of YJWs than managers disagreed or strongly disagreed (3.59%, n = 5) that their project was based in an area that experiences high levels of youth crime, reinforcing the likelihood that the projects are situated within appropriate contexts. Again, with respect to the intimidation of young people attending the projects by groups/individuals, a majority (67.6%; n = 77) indicated that such occurred, although staff do not experience the same intimidation with only 7 (6.1%) agreeing with this statement, a significantly lower proportion than for the managers who perceive that the problem is greater.

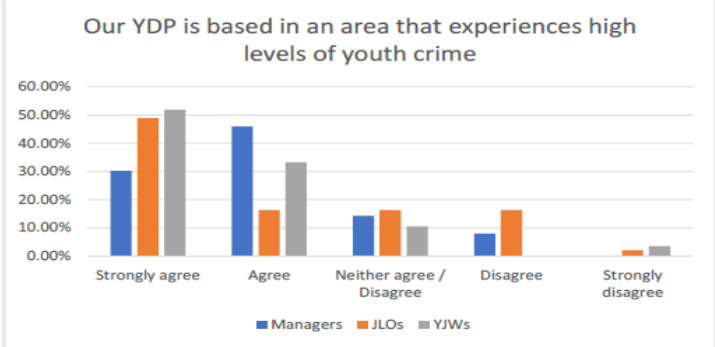
Finally, Juvenile Liaison Officers were also asked to respond to these questions. The number agreeing was slightly less than those for the other respondents, with 52.0% (n = 26) either agreeing or strongly agreeing that their project was based in an area that experiences high levels of serious crime. The percentages were higher in respect of youth crime with 48.98% (n = 24) of respondents strongly agreeing and 16.33% (n = 8) agreeing that their project was based in an area that experienced high levels of youth crime. A somewhat higher proportion of Juvenile Liaison Officers than either YJWs or managers disagreed or strongly disagreed (18.37%, n = 9) that their project was based in an area that experiences high levels of youth crime, though the proportion is still low enough to support the likelihood that the projects are situated within an appropriate context.

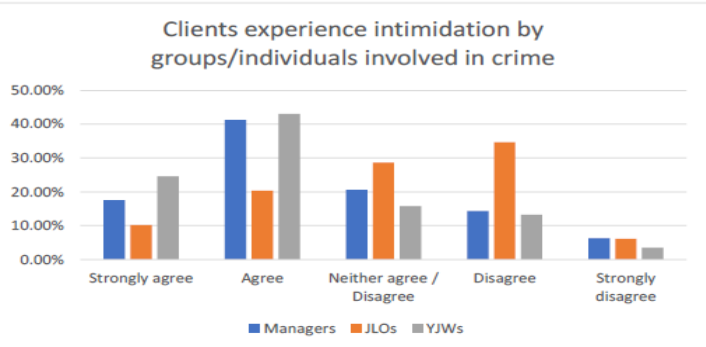
With respect to the intimidation by groups/individuals of young people attending the projects a much smaller number of Juvenile Liaison Officers than managers or YJWs saw this as an issue (30.6%; n = 15), while a greater number (40.8%, n = 20) disagreed or strongly disagreed. JLO respondents also agreed that project staff do not experience intimidation,with only two respondents (4.2%) agreeing that they did.

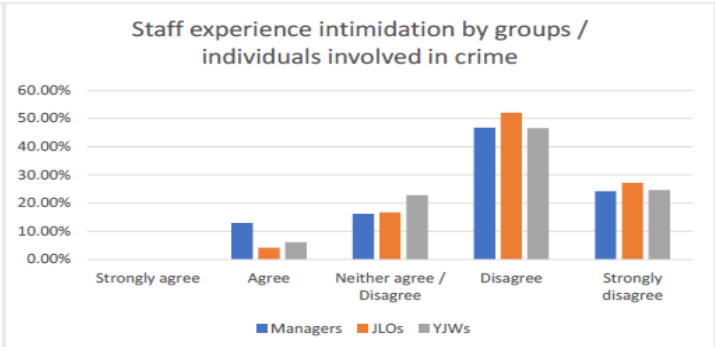
The following diagram sets out the responses for each of the three sets of respondents with regard to the four questions asked. It indicates a considerable degree of agreement overall although it does also point to some differences of viewpoint. Some of these may reflect the differences between the areas in which the projects are based, and some may reflect differences of perspective between different categories of respondent. It is not possible to say to what extent each type of variation influences the outcome since, because the responses were anonymous, there is no information as to the projects from which each respondent came.

Figure 12: Multi-stakeholder perceptions of level of crime and intimidation in the project









In response to a survey question of what they would change about the project, one manager wrote:

> *'Access to alternative suitable premises. Some young people engage in feuds with neighbouring estates and having access to alternative venues would reduce barriers for attendance where young people feel intimidated accessing certain venues due to the presence of individuals they are feuding with.' (Survey, manager)*

The vast majority of YDPs have been in existence for more than 10 years, are based in city or towns, about two-thirds are integrated with universal youth services. A majority of YDPs are based in areas that experience high levels of serious crime and youth crime where young people may experience intimidation by groups/individuals involved in crime. Transport problems and lack of a specific premises were identified as challenging.

Summary

This chapter has considered key issues arising in respect of the aim and objectives and governance of the projects. The findings show that there is good coherence between stakeholders in their understandings of the purpose of the projects being predicated on a belief that a reduction in crime (including volume and severity) is achieved through increasing young people's life chances rather than something that can be directly addressed by the projects.

There are high levels of positivity in respect of the support provided through the national governance structures. There are a number of local governance structures in place for YDPs and overall, the governance of the projects works well in practice. At local level there is a good sense of support from the national structures, there is good cooperation and interaction between partners, and there is a feeling of commitment and a willingness to engage overall. There are, however, a number of matters to

be addressed, with the managers at project level having more reservations regarding the suitability of the Project Committees in the areas of overall governance, risk and financial management than the Project Committee members themselves.

An analysis of budget files highlights some diversity in the budget allocations (allowing for project size) while, overall, about three-quarters of the budget is allocated to pay costs. The amount of the budget allocated to pay costs ranges from 54.4% to 84.4% and this warrants further exploration. In addition, there does not appear to be a single pay scale in operation across the projects and this needs some consideration.

Findings relating to managers, YJWs and JLOs show a highly experienced and well-educated workforce. However, less than 20% of the workforce holds a specific qualification in youth justice and further education in this area is warranted across all three groups. YJWs report very high levels of job satisfaction, particularly in respect of their training opportunities, support from their managers and in the quality of the service they provide. Some consideration needs to be given to the issues arising in respect of promotional opportunities and professional supervision. The availability of the MA degree under the REPPP programme was identified as a welcome development.

The final part of this section presents an analysis of projects and the communities within which they are situated. While there is considerable diversity across communities, most are based in areas where there are high levels of serious crime and high levels of youth crime. Drug use is reported to be ubiquitous and problematic and intimidation of young people by individuals or groups is common, though such intimidation is not experienced by the YJWs.

Chapter 5. Findings: Processes, interventions and mechanisms

Introduction

This section presents an overview of the findings arising in respect of the processes, mechanisms and interventions that take place in the YDPs. The findings are drawn from a descriptive analysis of the administrative data, interviews with key stakeholders, survey questionnaires of multiple stakeholders, a components analysis of interventions identified in the 99 YDP annual plans for the year 2021 and an analysis of the findings arising from case study sites. The section commences with a consideration of key processes in use in the implementation of the projects, followed by a description of pathways through the YDPs and a realistic evaluation of the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes (CMOs) that lead to change. The chapter finishes with a detailed analysis of the extent and focus of interventions in use in projects.

Participant pathways through the YDPs

This section presents a description of the processes involved in engaging with the projects, and disengaging in a planned or unplanned way from them. The findings are based on an analysis of interview, survey and administrative data.

Entry to projects through primary or secondary referral

It was reported that there are two broad approaches to referrals, primary and secondary. Young people who have come through the Youth Diversion Programme, been cautioned by the JLO and who accept responsibility for the offence they have committed are referred to as primary referrals[3]. Not all young people who are referred to the Youth Diversion Programme are referred to a project although one JLO suggested that 'most JLO's would probably be referring in maybe 80 to 90 percent in some cases into the project' . Examples of young people who would not be referred include those for whom the 'project might do more harm than good' because their lives were going very well otherwise (e.g. attending school, strong family support), or because they would be too problematic to be dealt with within the project (e.g. maybe violent and unsafe for personnel working in the project). One YJW said they did not take young people involved in 'really high levels of offending, you know we're not psychologists, we're not psychiatrists, we're not social workers'.

An analysis of the APR data shows that just over half (54%) of participants included in the files (n = 6,217) were referred through the Youth Diversion Programme although a higher proportion (61.7%; n = 7,105) were identified as 'primary referrals' suggesting referral through the Youth Diversion Programme is not always the equivalent of a primary referral.

Young people who have not been formally cautioned but are considered to be at risk of criminal behaviour are considered as secondary referrals. Once in the projects, both primary and secondary

[3] It was reported by stakeholders that the differentiation between primary and secondary referrals is not expected to continue.

participants are dealt with in the same way. Sources of secondary referrals include schools, family resource services, community guards, Youthreach, education and welfare officers and other services involved with young people as well as parents and family members. It was suggested that many agencies have 'a vested interest' in referring young people to the projects, particularly those that are 'on the verge of or engaging in antisocial or criminal behaviours'. One YJW noted that they are 'often trying to engineer it … a secondary referral that we can kind of fit him into the project'. Another JLO argued for a cautious approach in engaging young people in the YDPs, noting that:

> *'it all depends on what the needs of the 12-year-old are. I [would] hate it for it to be little Jimmy's kicking up a fuss, let's put him in the diversion programme'. (CS8, individual interview, manager)*

Different projects reported different trends in the proportion of young people who were primary or secondary referrals. Some personnel reported that in their project they 'don't have room for secondaries' or they don't 'get as much [secondary referrals] now as we did before' while other personnel reported having a high number, which they highlight as a positive thing as it means the young people have not 'reached the level where they are involved with the JLO'. A YJW highlighted that in rural locations where there may be no other alternatives for young people 'you have to be able to … stand your ground in some way' as you could be overwhelmed [by secondary referrals]. A representative of a CBO also highlighted the problematic nature of a lack of other services saying: '... a lot of times YJWs will take on those high-risk cases because [there is] no one else there to take it on'.

Referral Assessment Committee

Each project has a Referral Assessment Committee that comprises the JLO and one or more YJWs and it was reported that the 'job of this committee is to evaluate the need for intervention and the risk factors attached to the young person'. Based on that, a decision is made about whether a young person is enrolled. The YLS screening version was identified as a core tool for assessing whether young people would be enrolled on the project. This was highlighted as a good support to decision-making but it is also clear that discussions take place around a broad range of circumstances impacting on the young person. It was noted that if a young person is urgently in need of a place, they would be accommodated and 'maybe the contact time might be lessened a little bit' with the other participants to facilitate that. A small number of interviewees spoke about having a waiting list and an issue of concern noted by one YJW related to the gap in the time between the criminal behaviour having taken place and referral to the project, which it was suggested had a negative impact.

Workings of the Referral Assessment Committee

There is broad agreement that the Referral Assessment Committees work well as a mechanism for determining entry to the project. Findings from the survey of managers show that more than 90% (90.5%; n = 38) of managers agreed or strongly agreed that there are 'good working relationships among all members of the Referral Assessment Committee', that 'decisions on the suitability of new referrals to the project are informed by the YLS/CMI SV', that 'YJWs and JLOs are equal partners in Referral Assessment Committee meetings' and that the Referral Assessment Committee functions well . Comments written by managers noted they 'work well', 'are an effective and transparent method of making decisions', provide an opportunity for 'a collaborative approach' and that 'young people benefit

from the joined-up thinking at this meeting'. A number of comments highlighted the 'professional and mutually respectful working relationship, the 'excellent working relationships between JLO/Community Garda/YDP Staff and line Manager', and the 'parity of esteem' between participants.

One manager noted that in their project, some parents who want their children to attend 'have not wanted their child's details of referral discussed with Gardaí at referral meetings', while another manager noted they had 'expanded the amount of people that are on our referral assessment committee' because there was 'loads of informal ringing over and back' and 'it was easier to include additional people about who's going to be accepted onto it, what we're going to do with them when they get there'.

Voluntary nature of the referral

It was reported that engagement with the project is '100% voluntary' and there is some agreement, although not a consensus, that the non-mandatory nature of referral was the most appropriate approach. It was argued that making attendance obligatory would be contrary to the work and the approach of the projects, with one YJW explaining that 'Young people choose to go to them. They don't have to … So you are already empowering them to take control of their own change ...'. Another YJW highlighted that if a young person 'has been coerced through fear' into engaging with the project, that 'it comes out in the wash very early on in the relationship with young people' noting that there is little point in them being in the project 'if they don't want to be there', 'are not motivated to change' or 'if they're resistant'. A number of JLOs and YJWs highlighted, however, that while engagement with the project is voluntary they use ''gentle persuasion', 'try and seek them out', 'do a selling job' and 'try and sell it as best they can' while 'making clear the difference between a youth club and a YDP'. It was also highlighted that each young person, and their guardian/parent has to agree to come and 'sign a consent form' and that they are provided with relevant information as well as being told they can withdraw if they want. It was reported that there is a standard referral form available for use.

Not all interviewees agreed attendance at the project should be voluntary and one manager suggested there needed to be 'bit of debate about whether it should be or it shouldn't be'. Another manager working in an area of high criminality where there are multiple services in place for young people suggested that services could be played off against each other and that because of the voluntary nature of the engagement, the YDPs were in a less favourable position. This manager who reported being in an area that was 'saturated with services' said:

> *'And yes, it's always been voluntary. However, we have young people that are particularly hard to reach in our work … involved with probation and under probation, and their bond is that they have to attend the project once a week … Young people have become extremely talented from a young age of dropping into services and getting what they want ... but challenge any behaviour, they go … on to the next one [service] and they can do that. I would question if voluntary is going to do it.' (National level individual interview 11, manager)*

For some young people, engagement is not voluntary. One parent interviewed explained that she had not told her son it was voluntary although she was aware of that herself. She explained that she told him he 'had to go' until he was 18 years old or else he would not have engaged. A young person said:

> *'I didn't come for the first year and a half and then they were sending letters and stuff and then I got the one where they said I was going to be taken to court or something so I came then'. (CS5 FG participant)*

In response to a question in the survey of young people (n = 75), 60% (n = 45) responded that when they started at the project they were 'happy' about coming, while 33% (n = 25) were 'neither happy nor not happy' and 6.7% reported they were 'unhappy'. In response to how they felt now almost 90% reported they were happy and the remainder indicated they were 'neither happy nor not happy'.

Length of time young people are engaged in the projects

Analysis of the ESF datafile shows that the average length of time spent in youth diversion projects varies considerably. Information available for 8,440 participants who had exited the project by the end of 2020 showed that the mean average length of time spent in the project was 21.8 months (SD: 19.037) with a range from 0 months to 138.6 months. Data in respect of the overall length of time in the project was available for 8,435 participants. The findings show that just over 10% of participants (10.58%) are in the project for between one and three months (n = 892), about 11% (n = 967) for between four and six months and almost 20% (1,682) for between seven and 12 months. A similar proportion (19.1%; n = 1,611) remain in the YDPs for more than three years.

Table 16: Number and percentage of participants according to the length of time in the YDP

Number of months in project	Number of participants	% of participants
Less than 1 month	97	1.15%
1-3 months	795	9.43%
4-6 months	967	11.46%
7-12 months	1,682	19.94%
13-18 months	1,205	14.29%
19-23 months	713	8.45%
2-3 years	1,365	16.18%
More than 3 years	1,611	19.10%
Grand Total	**8,435**	**100.00%**

Some 2,346 participants were identified as continuing to engage in the projects in 2021, to be joined by new enrolments during the year.

Disengaging from the projects

Interviews with YJWs reflect the planned and unplanned nature of disengagement. Young people are expected to exit the project when they reach 18 years, and one JLO said:

'it's not meant to be over 18. And they don't want adults, you know, bigger fellas over here … Even if they're doing very well. But we do have to look to at them at 18 and say, yeah, this is not the place.' (CS8 individual interview, JLO)

Several examples were given, however, of ongoing contact between project personnel and former participants including in situations where they needed advice on an ad hoc basis or help applying for a job or preparing a CV or where they needed a place to go or somebody to talk to, and, at special occasions, such as weddings or christenings. One YJW noted that 'we invested in their life at some point … so we can't just abandon them just because they turned 18 and or they've left the project'.

Planned and unplanned disengagement

An analysis of the ESF datafile in respect of the 8,440 participants who had exited the YDPs by the end of 2020 showed that 5,261 (62.32%) were documented as having had a 'planned disengagement' and the remainder (3,179; 38%) were reported to have had 'unplanned disengagement'. Some references were made to planned disengagements, in interviews and also in survey information. Responses by managers to the survey showed that 86% (n = 36) agreed that 'ongoing progress and potential exit strategies for participants leaving the project are informed by the YLS/CMI 2' suggesting planned disengagement takes place on the basis of level of risk and need. It was also highlighted that planned disengagement may be discussed at the Referral Assessment Committees.

Unplanned disengagement (3,179; 38%) takes place where the young person stops engaging with the project and where this is premature in the view of the project personnel. Several comments highlighted that despite the project doing everything they should and could, the young person might still leave. One interviewee said that some young people are caught up in a cycle of criminal behaviour and 'they just don't want to take up the opportunity to change'. This was also identified by a YJW who said 'maybe that young person doesn't want to change and doesn't see what they're doing is wrong. So you can spend a lot of time with a person and they get nowhere with you and then they disengage'. One grandmother highlighted that her grandson stopped attending because 'he was being slagged off' for coming by his friends. It was highlighted that the voice of the young person is 'so crucial to all of this' and that while YJWs see it as a negative reflection on them if a young person doesn't want to engage, you have to respect that and ensure 'that you did make every effort and removed any barriers to participation. And that's all you can do'. One CBO representative said that where young people disengage in this way there should be 'a reflective piece with the justice worker to see every effort was made to engage in the process with the young people'.

Processes in use in YDPs

This section focuses on the approaches that underpin and inform practice in place in YDPs. It first considers the philosophical underpinnings of the work that takes place, and this is followed by a consideration of the extent to which relationships across a range of stakeholders are viewed as positive. This is followed by an analysis of issues arising in respect of one-to-one and group work with participants.

Philosophical underpinnings of the work that takes place

There are a number of different lenses through which the work of YJWs takes place. It was noted that the ethos of many of the CBOs overseeing the implementation of the YDPs is one of supporting and helping young people and this is also reflected in the YDPs. Different stakeholders who took part in evaluation highlighted that, in addition to the 'professional outlook of the organisation' the YJW may also have a particular philosophy ranging from a 'youth work' approach, a 'welfare' approach or a 'youth justice' approach. As against that, one manager who had responsibility for youth work projects and had taken on a number of YDPs suggested that 'it's still youth work'. Some interviewees drew attention to the commitment set out in the (Youth Justice) Strategy of 'no wrong door' highlighting that it 'allows a far better and easier response for families that are particularly challenging, might have a lot of issues going on for them' and means that 'you can work with young people's resilience around how they survive' the challenges and difficulties they experience externally and which they cannot change. Working with families was also highlighted by others who suggested that while working in a 'youth work' way may result in a focus only on the young person to the exclusion of the family, a 'social care point of view' would bring a broader perspective and would allow for opportunities for engagement with parents. Attention was also brought to the role and focus of An Garda Síochána and it was noted that perceptions of the Guards within families and communities can be very negative. A senior guard highlighted that it is important to recognise that the job of the Gardaí is more on enforcement rather than on support. One YJW suggested that if a 'youth justice' approach is adopted care would need to be taken to avoid escalating the young person through the criminal justice system

Others spoke about the need to adopt a 'trauma-informed and trauma practice' approach that recognises that it may be 'harder to work' with some young people because of 'the traumas they have experienced in their lives and that are ongoing'. They argued, however, that such an approach would bring a realisation that this could also mean 'there's a ton of baggage that has to be worked through before you can get to the real source of the problem'.

Relationships

Stakeholders interviewed in this evaluation highlighted the importance of the relationships within and between the projects and with others.

Relationships between YJWs and participants

Relationships between YJWs and young people are core to the work of the project. Key elements identified in interviews with stakeholders highlighted the importance of spending time with young people, building trust, listening to them, responding to their needs and maintaining the relationship with them. One YJW explained this saying:

> *'A lot of people who work with young people kind of would see it as a very young person centred approach. That would be the focus, like developing those softer skills … I mean, not that they've lost the focus of the justice, it's more that the priority is to build a relationship or to look at a more holistic view of the young person …'. (National level FG3, member of national support structure)*

As highlighted earlier, this work has taken account of the work of Fullerton et al (2021) in respect of important areas of the relationship between YJWs. Responses by young people who took part in the survey confirm the importance of key elements identified by them.

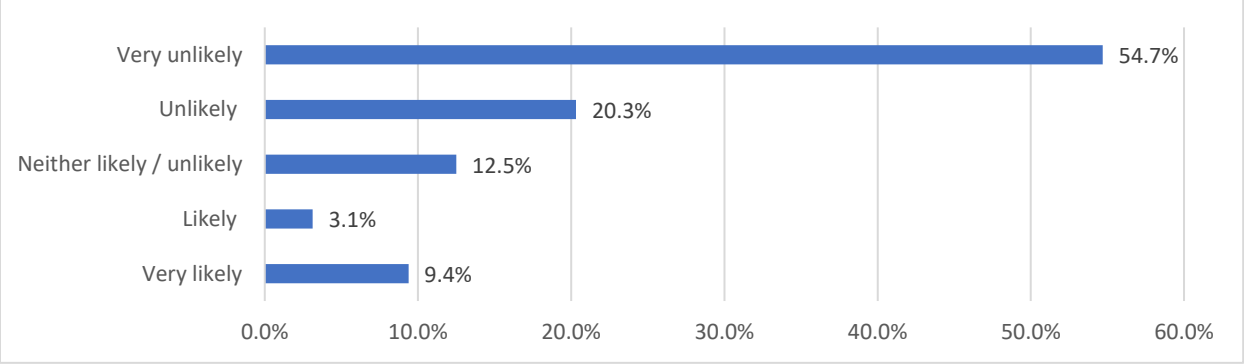
Table 17: Responses by young people about key elements of their relationships with their Youth Justice Worker

Does your Youth Justice Worker?	Yes	Sometimes	No
Listen and respond to you	97.3% (n = 73)	2.7% (n = 2)	0.070%
Advise you	97.3% (n = 72)	2.7% (n = 2)	0.070%
Challenge your ideas and behaviours	77.0% (n = 57)	23.0% (n = 17)	0.070%
Judge you	6.8% (n = 5)	9.5% (n = 7)	83.8% (n = 62)
Get on well with you	93.2% (n = 69)	4.0% (n = 3)	2.7% (n = 2)
Do you?			
get on well with your Youth Justice Worker	94.7% (n = 71)	5.3% (n = 4)	5.3%
trust your Youth Justice Worker	89.3% (n = 67)	9.3% (n = 7)	1.3%
talk to your Youth Justice Worker about things that bother you	58.7% (n = 44)	24.0% (n = 18)	17.3% (n = 13)

- Note limitations of small number of survey respondents.

Young people were also asked 'How likely is it that you would come to the project if you did not get on with the Youth Justice Worker?'. About three-quarters of the young people who responded to the survey indicated they were either 'very unlikely' (54.7%; n = 35) or 'unlikely' (20.3%; n = 13) to come.

Figure 13: Responses by young people to the question of 'How likely is it that you would come to the project if you did not get on with the Youth Justice Worker?'



- Note limitations of small number of survey respondents.

Relationships between YJWs and JLOs

In addition to relationships with young people, the relationship between the YJW and JLO is also critical and in general, very good relationships between individuals in these two professions were identified. One JLO said:

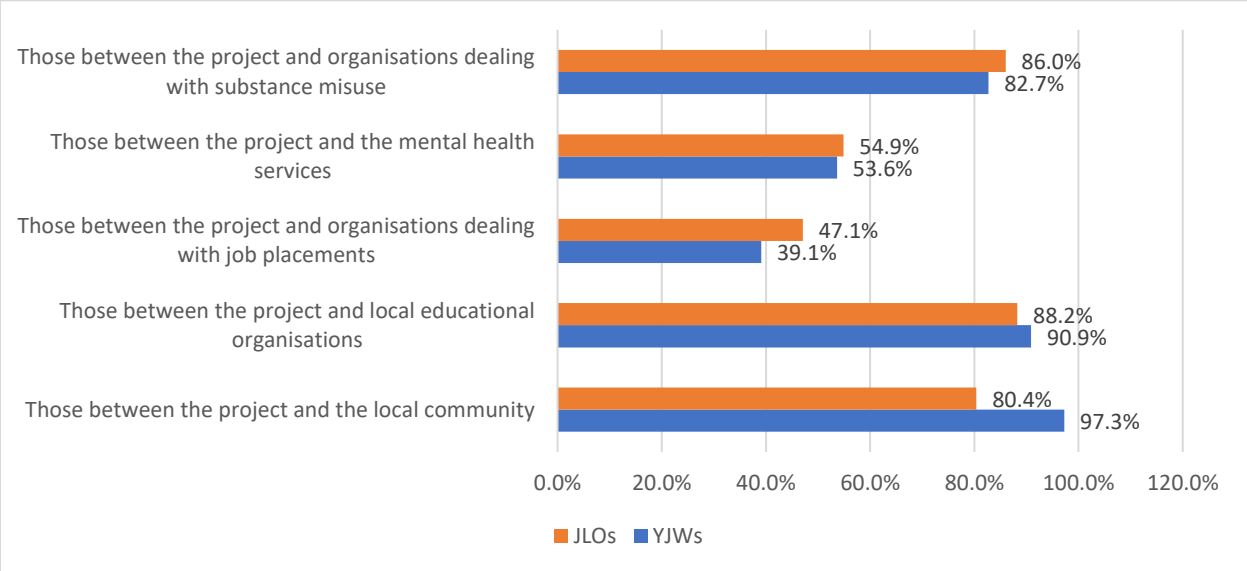
> *'but what I have to say, a great working relationship with the two [YJWs] that are there. And if something is urgent, I would be getting a phone call or vice versa. I can get in touch with them and we can go to a house. We can do whatever is needed at that time…'. [CS5 FG JLO)*

Another JLO highlighted being 'in contact quite a bit, linking in with different referrals and seeing how things are going and getting updates' while a member of a Project Committee identified that the JLOs and YJWs co-created the Working Together document'. Although one manger cautioned that while in general JLOs and YJWs do work well together, 'I know that they don't all work well together, and I think that that's a problem'. Almost all JLOs and YJWs report 'very good' (73.6% according to YJWs; 78.4% according to JLOs) or 'good' (24.5% according to YJWs; 17.6% according to JLOs) relationships.

Relationships with other stakeholders

Several interviewees highlighted the importance of having good relationships with the Community Gardaí, the community itself and the statutory and other organisations they engage with. Figure 14 presents the findings from an analysis of survey answers by JLOs and YJWs in respect of 'good' or 'very good' relationships with specific organisations within their communities. The findings show that while relationships between the project and 'local communities', 'educational organisations' and 'organisations dealing with substance abuse were identified as 'good' or 'very good' by over 80% of YJWs and JLOs, the percentage of 'good' or 'very good' relationships in respect of mental health services and organisations dealing with job placements is considerably lower.

Figure 14: Percentage of YJWs and JLOs who report project relationships are 'good' or 'very good' with various organisations



Relationships are at the core of the work that takes place in YDPs. The findings are almost universally positive among respondents to the surveys. Almost all young people (95%) report that they get on with their Youth Justice Worker, and in support of the importance of this relationships, about three-quarters of young people indicated they would be unlikely or very unlikely to come to the YDP if they did not. Similarly high levels of 'good' or 'very good' relationships were identified by both YJWs and JLO respondents about each other. In general, very high proportions of JLOs and YDPs report 'good' or 'very good' relationships between the project and organisations dealing with substance misuse, with local educational organisations and between the project and the local community. Less positive findings were identified in respect of the YDPs and mental health services and those dealing with job placements.

Group work and one-to-one engagement

Over half of young people (55.4%; n = 41) that responded to the survey indicated that, in the previous week, they had met in a group with their YJW and about the same proportion (51.4%; n = 38) reported they took part in activities arranged by the YDP. About 40% (43.2%; n = 32) reported they met on their own or had a text or telephone conversation with their YJW. One third of respondents indicated they had 'hung out' at the project in the previous week.

These findings are also reflected in the findings from the survey of YJWs which identified that 80% (80.5%; n = 91) do 'one-to-one' work with participants in their project 'every day' or 'almost every day' in a typical week and just under half of respondents (46.0%; n = 52) spend time on group work. Almost one-third (30.9%; n = 35) of YJWs reported they 'never' (3.5%; n = 11), 'almost never' (9.7%; n = 11) or only 'occasionally' (17.7%; n = 20) do group work (Table 18).

Table 18: Percentage of YJWs who spent time in a typical week on group work and one-to-one activities with project participants

	Never	Almost never	Occasionally/ sometimes	A substantial amount of time	Almost every day	Every day	Total
Group work with participants in your project	3.5% 4	9.7% 11	17.7% 20	23.0% 26	22.1% 25	23.9% 27	113
One-to-one with participants in the project	0.9% 1	1.8% 2	4.4% 5	12.4% 14	33.6% 38	46.9% 53	113

Almost all YJWs reported that one-to-one work with participants was 'extremely useful' (94.5%; n = 103) and the remainder reported it was 'fairly useful' (5.5%; n = 6) in bringing about positive change for young people in the YDP. The figures were lower as regards group work, with about two-thirds (65.5%; n = 72) of YJWs indicating it was 'extremely useful' and a further 26% (n = 29) indicated it was 'fairly useful' in bringing about positive change for participants. Just over a third of JLOs (35.3%; n = 18)

indicated that group work was 'extremely useful (35.3%) while just over half (51.0%; n = 26) indicated it was 'fairly useful'. Just over three-quarters of JLOs considered that one-to-one work with participants was 'extremely useful' 78.4% (n = 40) while almost 20% (19.6%; n = 10) indicated it was 'fairly useful'.

Some key benefits of undertaking group work were identified. These included providing opportunities to share their views and experiences with others in a safe space, where they can set the agenda themselves, where they can talk without interruption and be able to be honest. This was highlighted by one YJW who noted that in group work

> *'they talk really openly with each other as well, you know, like there's not all kind of secret stuff going on, you know, that only a couple of them know about.' (CS1 FG YJW)*

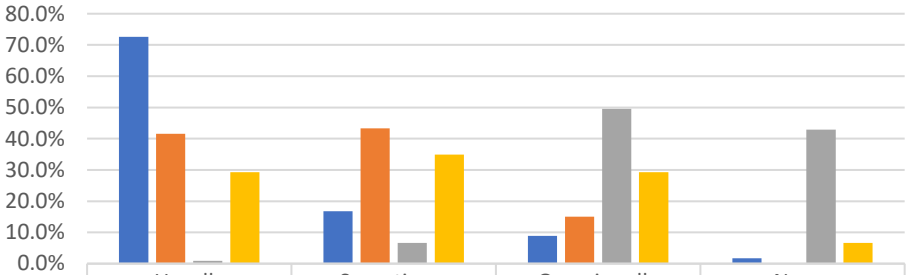
Another mother highlighted that her daughter enjoyed group work because 'she hears other people's problems and ways to solve them ... and can give her opinion on somebody else's problem'.

Almost all YJWs report spending a substantial amount of time or more on one-to-one work and there is agreement between YJWs and JLOs that this is extremely useful in bringing about change in young people. There are considerable differences, however, in the extent to which group work is a feature of YDPs and about one-third of YJWs report they never, almost never or only occasionally do so. This finding suggests the option for participants to take part in group work is based on the particular circumstances of the project (e.g. availability of a suitable premises) or the YJW (e.g. the expertise or views) rather than the needs of young people. More than 90% of YJWs identified group work as either 'fairly' or 'extremely useful' in bringing about positive change for young people and while this was lower for JLOs, some consideration needs to be given to a broader implementation of this approach between projects.

Availability of YDPs

The availability of the project to young people can vary. The survey of YJWs provides a quantification of the extent to which YJWs are available during a typical week. These findings show that about three-quarters (72.6%; n = 82) of YJWs usually work during the daytime and 41.6% (n = 47) usually work in the evenings (6-10pm). About 1% 'usually' work at weekends although about half (49.2%; n = 52) occasionally do so. About 30% (29% to 34%) work more than one hour after they are supposed to finish work usually (29.2% n = 31), sometimes (34.9%; n = 37) or occasionally (29%; n = 31).

Figure 15: YJWs availability during a 'typical week'



	Usually	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never
Daytime (9-5pm)	72.6%	16.8%	8.9%	1.8%
Evening (6-10pm)	41.6%	43.4%	15.0%	0.0%
Saturday /Sunday	1.0%	6.7%	49.5%	42.9%
More than one hour after you are supposed to finish	29.3%	34.9%	29.3%	6.6%

Legend: Usually (at least half of the days worked over the previous four weeks); Sometimes (between a quarter and a half of the days worked over the previous four weeks); Occasionally (less than a quarter of the days over the previous four weeks but at least one hour); Never (on no occasion over the last four weeks).

A similar proportion of JLOs (70.6%; n = 36) reported in the survey that they 'usually' work from 9-5pm. However, a higher proportion of JLOs compared with YJWs reported to 'usually' working in the evening time (62%; n = 31) and a considerably higher proportion usually work weekends (56.9%). The survey findings also highlighted considerable differences between JLOs in the amount of time they spend 'in a typical week' 'on the youth diversion project': about 40% (n = 20) reported they spend about 0-4 hours, 43% (n = 21) spend about 5-8 hours and only 6.1% (n = 3) spend more than eight hours on the projects. Five JLOs (10.2%) identified 'other' amounts of time. While the amount of time spent by JLOs on the youth diversion project is understandably low, the availability of JLOs and YJWs at similar times during both daytime and evening hours means they can build relationships, engage with each other around individual young people and the JLOs can come to the projects and meet with both personnel and young people, which has been highlighted as very beneficial.

While the availability of YJWs, and through that the availability of the YDPs, during the daytime and evening time is positive, weekend availability is extremely limited. It is noted that weeks can be a time where young people are more likely to engage in criminal behaviours.

Interventions that take place in the project

The following section is based on a common elements analysis of the 2021 annual plans for 99 YDP projects provided to the Evaluation Team by the Department. The projects used a number of different approaches to document interventions in these annual plans. Some plans refer only to 'educational support' while others provide substantial detail about the intervention provided. Consequently, while interventions are presented under broad areas in Figure 16, some projects have more than one instance of an intervention categorised under a particular heading (e.g. homework club, ICT access categorised under project supports). Each instance has been recorded separately to reflect the YDP plan, they are counted as two separate instances of an intervention in Appendix 1.

Figure 16: Overview of interventions as documented in 99 Youth Diversion Project plans for 2021

Education / employment (89 plans; 144 references in plans)

- Project supports (41); Programme (36); Interagency work (31); Educational award (23); Individual supports (20); Referral (18); Alternative approach (11); I-Scoil (11).

Leisure/recreation (78 plans; 137 references in plans)

- Activities (42); Programme (24); School holiday activities (15); Unstructured activities (8); Other (8)

Family (73 plans; 108 references in plans)

- Programme (52); Individual work (29); Referral (26)

•Personality/behaviour (89 plans; 105 refererences in plans)

- Programme (53); Motivational interviewing (30); Mental health (21); Anger management (18); Individual work (17); Restorative justice (8); Referral (7)

•Substance misuse (77 plans; 94 refererences in plans)

- Programme (77); Motivational interviewing (22); Drug awareness/harm reduction (20); Brief intervention (17)
- Interagency/referral (29); Other (21)

•Attitudes / orientation (58 plans; 72 refererences in plans)

- Programme (36); TAG (18); Motivational interviewing (13); Community engagement (12); Other (8)

•Peer relations (52 plans; 84 references in plans)

- Programme (28); Team building/group activities (13); Motivational interviewing (10); Gaise/Foroige/ Citizenship (9); Pro-social modelling (9); Other (10)

•Offences / dispositions(16 plans ; 24 references in plans)

- Programme (8); Individual programme (8); Interagency/ referral (6)

Figure 16 presents an overview of the findings arising from the common elements analysis. The findings are categorised according to the specific YLS areas (education, leisure/recreation, family, personality/behaviours, substance misuse, attitudes/orientation, peer relations and offences/dispositions). The number of types of intervention according to each YLS area are then presented and then the total number of instances of intervention.

Overall number of interventions

The total number of interventions according to individual projects ranges from two to 37 interventions and the mean average number of interventions overall is 7.56 (SD 3.271). Differences are identified in respect of the mean average number of interventions by specific YLS areas of risk, with the lowest number relating to offences/dispositions (0.48; SD 2.480) and the highest number relating to education/ employment (2.88; SD 14.316). Project plans not listing any interventions for specific areas range from 10% in respect of education/employment to 84% for offences/dispositions.

Table 19: Overall percentage of plans according to the number and area of intervention

	None	1-3 interventions	4-6 interventions	More than 6 interventions	Mean	Std. Deviation
Education/employment	10.1%	81.7%	7%	1%	2.88	14.316
Substance abuse	22.2%	76.7%	0%	1%	1.88	9.368
Peer relationships	47.5%	51.5%	1%	0%	1.28	6.382
Attitudes	41.4%	56.6%	2%	0%	1.44	7.171
Family	26.3%	69.7%	4%	0%	2.16	10.739
Personality/behaviour	31.3%	63.7%	5.1%	0%	2.10	10.446
Leisure/recreation	18.2%	73.7%	7.1%	1%	2.74	13.653
Offences / dispositions	83.8%	15.1%	1%	0%	.48	2.480

Standardised programmes

There are a number of standardised programmes in use in the projects that were referred to by managers and YJWs as being good supports to their work. One programme that is commonly in use is the 'Life of Choices' which is a ten-week programme that has been manualised and includes a set of activities to do with young people across a range of YLS areas. References in focus groups to the way in which this, and other programmes, are implemented suggest that the programmes are used in a less formal way, with an example given of 'one young person who was out trying to rob a bike' and of using the different activities in the programme relating to stealing in a more informal way, as well as using the programmes as a source of information. One YJW said:

> *'we just pull pieces from it … maybe an activity here or there depending on what the young person is looking for'. (CS8 FG YJWs)*

Another colleague agreed with this saying 'we rarely run a full ten weeks of life choices'.

Interventions according to individual YLS area

The following presents a detailed description of the types of interventions according to specific YLS areas, the rationales identified for these, and the extent to which they take place across YDPs.

Interventions relating to education/employment

In total, education/employment was identified as a priority for intervention in 89 project plans for 2021. The main focus of the interventions was identified as being on young people who:

- are showing signs of early school leaving including young people who are displaying behaviours which place them at risk of disengaging from education, those who are 'in constant trouble' or 'likely to be expelled', young people who display low achievement in school or are underachieving and at risk of leaving formal education;
- have left school early and are not seeking employment;
- are identified in the moderate to high-risk categories on the YLS screening for this area; and
- young people who are involved in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour and are out of school.

The link between offending behaviour and not being in education or employment was highlighted in plans and it was noted that a high proportion of the young people on their project are not in any form of education, training or employment. It was also noted that poor school attendance and a negative attitude on the importance and purpose of education were common.

Types of interventions

The main types of interventions used included:

Project supports (41 plans): These comprise, for example, exam support, developing organisational skills, study skills, homework clubs, and lunchtime groups. Employment supports include, for example, employability workshops, CV development support, interview skills.

Programmes (36 plans): These include those specific to a particular issue (e.g. support programmes to re-engage with education), as well as named programmes such as 'Get Back Programme', 'CODY Schools Outdoor Education Programme', 'Work to Learn programme', 'Career taster programme', 'Disengaging Programme', 'Don't suspend me programme'.

Interagency engagement (31 plans): Specific interventions focused on the engagement with key educational and employment organisations, the three specific components identified in plans being relationship building, liaison and advocacy.

Educational and other awards (23 plans): Specific educational (e.g. QQI awards), employment (Safe pass, manual handling, driver theory test) or citizenship and leadership awards (e.g. Gaisce, Foroige citizenship award) were identified.

Individual support (20 plans): These types of supports were identified as being 'tailored' to the individual needs of young people (e.g. exploring the young person's educational and career interests, mentoring, assistance with school subjects by workers and volunteers) as well as 'bespoke' education and employment supports.

Referral (18 plans): Referral to other projects, services and supports such as Youth Education Training Initiative, course referral and application support, and referrals to Training Centres.

iScoil (www.iscoil.ie) (11 plans): A non-profit online learning service that offers young people a pathway to learning, accreditation and progression.

Interventions relating to leisure and recreation

Seventy-eight plans identified interventions relating to leisure/recreation. The rationales identified for supporting young people to engage in pro-social activities (through activities such as advocacy, information, facilitation and funding) were to:

- offer young people new opportunities and constructive ways to spend time and to encourage them to find hobbies and interests within the locality
- reduce the amount of unstructured free time young people have
- allow participants to meet new people, become physically and mentally healthy and build and regain confidence in their skills
- build greater connectivity with the local community allowing participants to continue their involvement when they leave the project
- build on strengths and capacities and
- respond to needs identified in the YLS assessment .

It was also highlighted that being involved in the project allowed young people to take part in activities that might otherwise not be accessible to them due to socio-economic or behavioural factors.

Types of interventions

The main types of interventions are set out in Table 20.

Table 20: Number of plans by types of interventions relating to leisure and recreation

Type of intervention	No. of plans	Examples
Activities	42	• One-to-one activities including 'taster sessions' • Sporting activities (e.g. taekwondo, basketball league, peer-led personal training, MMA, fitness training and yoga • Outdoor activities (e.g. hill walking, cycling, BMX track biking, 'horses and hounds') • Indoor activities (e.g. woodwork, art, cookery, dance, Techspace, STEM challenge programme) • Competitive sports such as soccer league/tournament, youth active challenge • Other activities for example, trips to the beach 'to provide positive childhood experience', youth participation structures, youth groups, CAMP Diversion/ Residential • Links with communities including setting up interagency leagues and challenges in the community locally, pool/soccer tournament.
Programmes	24	Examples included the 'Be Healthy Be Happy' programme, NFTE programme, RSA Road Safety Programme, A Life of Choices, Shed Programme, REAL U, a fitness programme, and Skills to Succeed programme.
School holiday activities	15	Leisure/recreational interventions during school breaks including summer programmes, Halloween programmes and mid-term programmes
Unstructured activities	8	Examples included 'youth café, hang out group, a drop-in programme and an evening and late-night drop-in café'
Other	8	Examples included development of positive relationships, being a positive mentor for the young person and motivational interviewing

Interventions relating to family circumstances/parenting

The focus of interventions in this area was in respect of situations where:

a) parents experience difficulty in controlling behaviour and setting boundaries for young people
b) Participants' families have been involved in criminal behaviours and parents display ambivalence towards crime
c) participants experience a lack of appropriate parental supervision, inappropriate discipline and ineffective parenting practices
d) families are experiencing child to parent violence
e) support to improve parenting capacity and skills is needed.

The main focus was on the importance of equipping parents to enact their role, including developing skills to support their young people to develop routines, set 'boundaries', promote pro-social attitudes towards crime and increase parental supervision. It was highlighted that named parenting programmes were 'evidence-based'.

Types of interventions

Interventions in this area were identified in 73 plans and three main types of intervention were identified. These are:

- **Specific programmes** (52 plans) which identified 'parenting programmes' as well as 'evidence-based' programmes such as 'Families', 'Parenting Plus', 'Common Sense Parenting Programme', the 'Triple P' programme and the 'Non-Violent Resistance Parenting Programme'.
- **One-to-one work with the family** (29 plans) including home visits, being in 'constant contact with parents', parent coffee mornings and parenting groups.
- **Referrals** (26 plans) for various supports including the Meitheal programme, Family Resource Centres, Barnardos, community support programmes, and family support workers or other organisations who provide direct family support.

Interventions relating to substance misuse

The focus of these interventions was on young people whose offending behaviour related to drug or alcohol misuse and on those who were identified through the YLS as being at risk in this area. These included young people who are 'engaging in substance misuse', 'who present as using Cannabis', 'whose family are involved in the sale and supply of drugs' and those 'who are at risk of becoming problematic alcohol and substance users with a focus on polydrug use'. The rationales for these interventions were that:

1) if young people have 'good information' they can make informed decisions;
2) some young people and families need addiction support; and
3) engaging young people from the community in relevant programmes enhances the reputation of the project in the community.

It was also highlighted that intervening in drug use is a slow process where a 'a diverse range of interventions are needed in order to be able to reduce substance abuse interventions'.

Types of Interventions

The following interventions were identified in YDP plans:

- **Specific programmes** relating to drug awareness or reducing drug use (77 plans) and including specific modules from the Life of Choices programme (around drug use, drug dealing and drug running) and specific programmes such as a 'school-based cannabis awareness programme', 'Smart recovery programme', and more generically titled 'substance use awareness' programmes and 'harm reduction programme'.
- **Interagency referral** to specific services (29 plans) including referral of participants on the project to a variety of substance misuse services (e.g. Matt Talbot Services, Ana Liffey Project and MIDAS drug service); community drugs workers (also referred to as outreach drugs worker, the Community Substance Misuse Team, Drugs Task Force workers, Youth Drug and Alcohol worker) and signposting to specific sources of information. Collaboration with drug related services was also highlighted and examples included: community-based drug initiatives, probation (services), the Local Drugs Task Force, treatment services for drug users, Gardaí and social workers.
- **Motivational interviewing** (22 plans) highlighted as a key intervention and linked with active listening.
- **Harm reduction** (20 plans) through one-to-one information and information in school settings, and one plan identified their intent to implement a 4-6 week drug awareness/harm reduction programme that included 'legal facts' which had been adopted for both 1:1 and group work.
- **Brief intervention** (17 plans) making explicit reference to the Foroige brief interventions programme.
- **Other** (21 plans) including ACRA (n = 6), therapeutic intervention (n = 5), skill development (2), leisure activities (n = 6), and outreach (2).

Interventions relating to attitudes

While it was noted in one plan that all young people who attend the project receive an intervention around attitudes, in general, the plans identified specific characteristics where intervention may be required. These include young people who present as 'impulsive', 'defiant', 'actively reject help' and 'refuse to follow direction from their parents, teachers and other authority figures', or 'are hostile to the criminal justice system'. Other young people who exhibit 'pro-criminal antisocial behaviour', 'have pro-criminal attitudes or a pro-criminal value system', 'who are supportive of criminal or antisocial behaviour' and those who think that 'social rules do not apply to them' were also highlighted. Young people who have 'anger issues', 'lack empathy' or have 'a lack of empathy for their actions', and those who have 'low self-esteem' were also identified as well as those who exhibit racist or sexist attitudes. One plan stated that:

> *racism is a major issue within the community leading to criminal damage to property, gang fights, houses and young people being targeted and assaulted because of their race or religion.*

Types of interventions

Interventions relating to attitudes were identified in 58 plans. These interventions included:

Specific programmes (36 plans): Among the programmes identified, the Life of Choices programme, with a focus on modules relating to 'understanding emotions and managing behaviour', was the most commonly identified. Other programmes included: 'Crime Awareness Programme', 'Alcohol and Drug Awareness Programme', 'Safe Driving/RSA road safety/Safe Driver Programme', 'Wrecked Programme', , 'Copping On', 'Junior Copping On', Putting the Pieces Together, One People Programme (Dublin Bus/Gardaí) and Street Violence Knife Crime Programme.

Interventions to enhance Garda-young person relationships (18 plans): The Teenagers and Garda (TAG) programme was identified as a specific programme that involves joint Garda and group activities and initiatives. Other plans indicated that they invite Community Gardaí to events during the year to encourage positive Garda-community relations, and invite Community Gardaí/JLOs to do talks on relevant topics such as substance misuse and road safety. One plan identified visits to the local Garda Station and one further plan indicated that they facilitated 'new Garda community placements'.

Motivational interviewing (13 plans) in response to issues arising for young people.

Community engagement (12 plans) including facilitating engagement between young people in the project and local communities such as the Tidy Towns competition, the National Spring Clean, undertaking a woodwork project to create decorations for the local St Patrick's Festival and developing cards for the elderly. The Gaisce award and the Foroige Citizenship area were also highlighted in these plans as interventions relating to changing attitudes of young people.

Other (8 plans) included focused interventions such as specific approaches to combat racism.

Interventions relating to personality/behaviours

The rationales for intervening in respect of personality and behaviours included the availability of an evidence-based programme or approach (e.g. the Life of Choices programme and motivational interviewing). It was also highlighted that 'the link between the management of anger and self-control has been well established' and resolving anger issues led to an increase in pro-social behaviour.

Types of interventions

Sixty-nine plans identified some form of intervention relation to personality and behaviours and some plans identified multiple and varied approaches (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Types of interventions relating to personality/behaviours

Programmes (53 plans)

- The Life of Choices programme (particularly the decision-making; peer influence; impulse control; understanding offending behaviour modules) featured strongly as an intervention for personality and behaviour issues. Other programmes identified in plans were REAL U, Foróige Citizenship programme, One People Programme, Behaviour Modification Programme, Impacts and Consequences of Crime Programme, Link Up Programme, ACRA, Copping On Programme and Junior Copping On Programme.

Motivational interviewing (30 plans)

- Reported to be 'an evidence-based approach which has great results in getting young people to see the need for change in a particular area of their life but more importantly gets them to a point where they actually make the change'.

Mental health initiatives (21 plans)

- For example 'a mental health awareness week', the 'Mind out' programme (which focuses on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management and responsible decision-making) and cognitive behavioural therapy was identified in eight plans.

Anger management (18 plans)

- This included working on an individual or 1:1 basis as well as specific programmes such as 'Non-Violent Resistance Programme for Child to Parent Violence', 'Use Your Brain not your Fists Film and Resource pack' and 'Cool Anger management'.

Individualised work (17 plans)

- This included adopting an approach that was based on empathy, non-judgement and interpersonal skills. Other examples included brief solution focused intervention, life coaching and mentoring and in one plan, a 'pro-social methodology using our Key Worker system'.

Restorative justice (8 plans)

- This was described in one plan as focusing a set of skills that have a core aim of building strong relationships and resolving conflict in a simple and emotionally healthy manner.

Referrals (7 plans)

- These referrals were 'specialised services as the need arises', counselling and psychotherapy, addiction support services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Jigsaw, and anger management courses.

Interventions relating to peer relations

Sixty-two plans identified interventions relating to peer relationships. It was noted that the focus of these interventions was on young people who:

- Are negatively influenced by peers, who are known to engage with peers, who hold antisocial or pro-criminal attitudes, who are caught up in gangland feuds, and those who are co-offending within peer groups;
- have few positive acquaintances and friends;
- have peer groups who are outside of their own age range and who 'hang around' with older antisocial peers;
- are with peer groups who are becoming known to local Gardaí; and
- score high on the YLS CMI 2.0.

It was highlighted in plans that friendship networks of young people are assessed and evaluated using observation, engagement with schools, Community Gardaí and others as sources of information. One plan noted that they 'worked in collaboration with schools to identify those at risk'.

Types of interventions

Specific programmes (28 plans) within which core modules on 'peer influence' and 'social skills' from the Life of Choices programme were most commonly identified. Other programmes mentioned included the 'Big Brother Big Sister Mentoring Programme', Real U (relationships and sexual health programme), Putting the Pieces Together, Copping On and Be Happy Be Healthy. One project plan mentioned the provision of a 'knife crime first aid-online course' and 'a street violence and knife crime programme'.
Motivational interviewing (10 plans), noting that this was coupled with the 'A Life of Choices' which provided tools to engage in conversation with young people 'regarding negative/positive personal relationships' while also 'challenging the young person to identify the influences on which their peers exert on their own lives'.
Team building and group activities (13 plans) which included activities (e.g. rock-climbing, orienteering, seasonal diversion trips and activities, late night football leagues) which provided opportunities for young people to develop more positive friendships and to increase their number of pro-social friends.
Pro-social modelling (9 plans) focused on increasing levels of engagement with peers who model pro-social behaviours (e.g. a football programme with 'older positive peers').
Gaisce/Foroige Citizenship awards which it was noted provided a planned approach to opportunities for pro-social engagement.
Other interventions (10 plans) including 'Drop in times', 'late night drop in' and a 'youth Café'.

Interventions relating to offences and dispositions

The focus of interventions relating to offences and dispositions is on young people who have committed offences (notably public order, drunkenness, simple possession and theft from shop), those at risk of offending, those who are referred to the project by the JLO, 'schools, education welfare officer, social workers, parents', 'young people who have been expelled from school' and those whose family life is 'chaotic' or are 'reared in multi-generational unemployed households'. Rationales for interventions are that the programmes are 'evidence-based' and it was noted that they have previously had a high success rate in the project. One plan stated that the interventions are based on the 'principles of effective youth justice practice' which allow for the young person to consciously and actively engage in their own development and in the development of society as set out by the CBO. The principles include worker role clarification, pro-social modelling, etc., and using motivational interviewing in informal education, problem solving, and goal setting.

Types of interventions

Sixteen plans identified interventions relating to crime. These interventions include the delivery of specific programmes, individual engagement with the young person and interagency working and referral.

- **Specific programmes** (8 plans) A Life of Choices, CHART, Putting the Pieces Together, Alcohol awareness programme and Transforming Hate Programme were the main programmes identified in the plans in respect of offences and dispositions.

- **Individualised work** (8 plans) identified one-to-one engagement with young people and within this, building a relationship was identified as crucially important. It was also reported that one-to-one work aimed at building skills/strengths, improving decision-making, dealing with conflict and anger took place.
- **Interagency work and referrals** (6 plans) A range of organisations and services were identified as providing support and these included: Meitheal, mental health services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Jigsaw, Barnardos, Crosscare and 'other mental health supports in the community for bereavement and trauma-age-appropriate referral'.

Differences across projects with regard to interventions

The survey of YJWs asked respondents to indicate how often they were involved in specific activities. Administrative work is reported to take place every day or almost every day by almost two-thirds (64.6%; n = 73) of respondents and this is considerably higher than any other activity.

Almost half (45.5%; n = 50) of respondents reported spending time every day or almost every day on 'targeted initiatives' and this was followed by 'interagency activities relating to individual participants' (36.0%; n = 40). About one third of respondents indicated that they spend time every day or almost every day on mentoring (33.7%; n = 35) and just under 30% reported this in respect of 'formal programmes' (29.7%; n = 33) and family support (27.9%; n = 31). Less than 10% reported spending time on a daily or almost every day basis on 'Work to Learn' (2.9%; n = 3) or 'i-scoil' (2.8%; n = 3) (Table 21). Commentary by one respondent to the survey noted that 'when "Work to Learn" was running, a significant amount of time each week was allocated to its implementation'.

Table 21: Activities carried out by YJWs by frequency

	Never	Almost never	Occasionally/ sometimes	A substantial amount of time	Almost every day	Every day	No.
Mentoring	7.69%	8.65%	35.58%	14.42%	24.04%	9.62%	
	8	9	37	15	25	10	104
Family support	2.70%	7.21%	39.64%	22.52%	18.02%	9.91%	
	3	8	44	25	20	11	111
Targeted initiatives	2.73%	2.73%	22.73%	26.36%	26.36%	19.09%	
	3	3	25	29	29	21	110
Formal programmes (e.g. Life of Choices)	6.31%	4.50%	36.94%	22.52%	23.42%	6.31%	
	7	5	41	25	26	7	111
i-scoil	65.42%	15.89%	9.35%	6.54%	2.80%	0.00%	
	70	17	10	7	3	0	107
Restorative justice interventions	10.38%	18.87%	37.74%	22.64%	7.55%	2.83%	
	11	20	40	24	8	3	106
'Work to Learn'	62.50%	13.46%	13.46%	7.69%	1.92%	0.96%	
	65	14	14	8	2	1	104

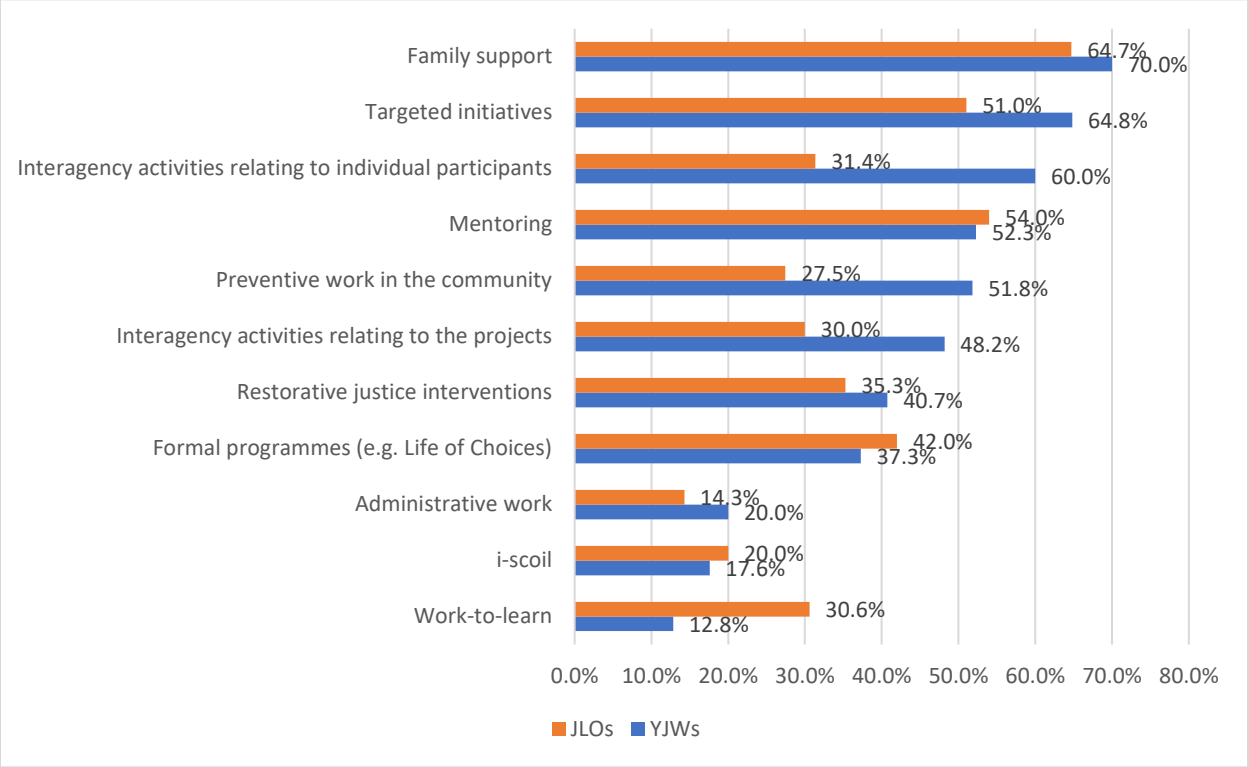
	Never	Almost never	Occasionally/ sometimes	A substantial amount of time	Almost every day	Every day	No.
Administrative work	0.88% 1	0.00% 0	6.19% 7	28.32% 32	31.86% 36	32.74% 37	113
Preventive work in the community	2.75% 3	8.26% 9	43.12% 47	25.69% 28	12.84% 14	7.34% 8	109
Interagency activities relating to individual participants	0.90% 1	1.80% 2	33.33% 37	27.93% 31	26.13% 29	9.91% 11	111

Almost all YJWs report spending at least a substantial amount of time on administrative work and further consideration is given to this in the conclusions and recommendations.

Perceptions about the usefulness of various interventions

Findings from surveys of YJWs and JLOs show that three areas, family support (64.7% to 70%), targeted initiatives (51%-64.8%), mentoring (52.3%-54%) are considered by more than half of both professional groups to be 'extremely useful'. The three areas identified by the lowest proportions of both JLOs and YJWs to be 'extremely useful' are 'administrative work; i-scoil and 'Work-to-Learn' although it should be noted that neither i-scoil or 'Work to Learn' are widely available and this is likely to account for these findings. There are also some areas of difference. A significantly higher proportion of YJWs than JLOs indicate that 'interagency activities relating to individual participants' , 'preventive work in the community' and interagency activities 'relating to the projects' are 'extremely useful'. In contrast, a higher proportion of JLOs consider 'targeted interventions' and 'Work to Learn' to be 'extremely' useful.

Figure 18: Percentage of JLO and YJWs who consider named interventions as 'extremely useful'



It is also noted that a high proportion of respondents indicated that these interventions were 'fairly useful'. The 'extremely useful' data is presented here because of the likelihood of prioritisation of interventions being affected by these assessments.

More than half of JLO and YJW respondents identify family support, targeted initiatives and mentoring as 'extremely useful', while administrative work, i-scoil and 'Work to Learn' are identified by the lowest proportion. It should be noted that i-scoil and 'Work to Learn' are not in widespread use which may account for these findings. Differences arise between JLOs and YJWs about the extent to which interagency and community work are 'extremely useful'.

Summary

This section has presented a detailed analysis of the interventions adopted in YDPs as set out in the YDP annual plans. In general, the rationale for adopting particular interventions reflects the focus of the particular areas in response to issues arising in the YDP plans. In the case of specific programmes, particularly 'The Life of Choices', interviews with YJWs suggest that there may be low fidelity in implementation and that the different components of the programme may be used in a targeted, responsive way rather than the blanket implementation of the totality of the programme.

The main body of findings presented aligns the number and types of interventions according to YLS areas of risk. The findings highlight considerable diversity and while more than 80% of plans included at least one intervention relating to education/employment, only 16 plans included a specific intervention

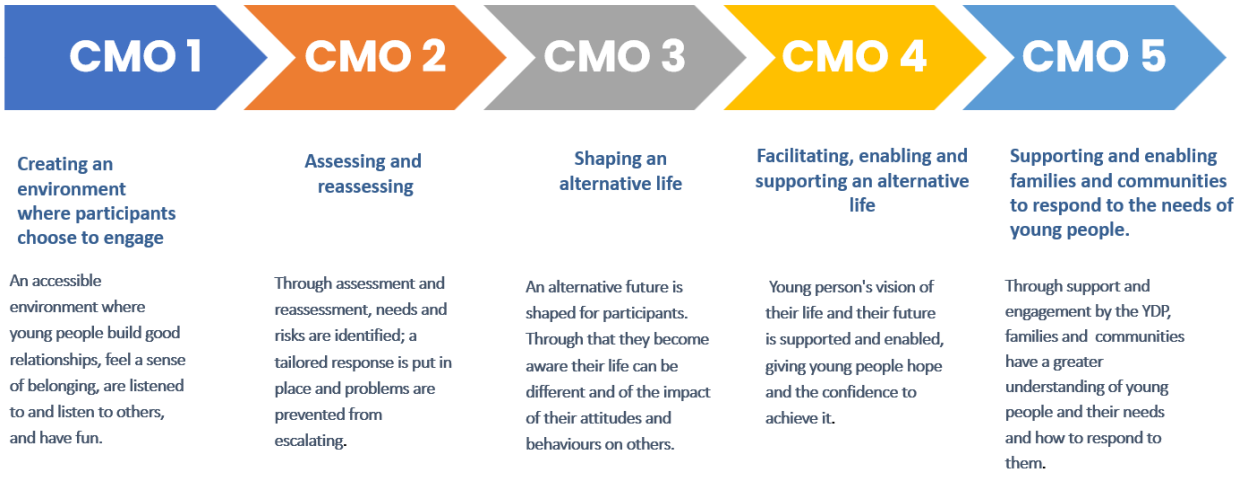
about offences/dispositions (although interventions addressing peer relations and personality/ behaviours include interventions which are also relevant to criminal behaviour). While this is surprising in the context of the focus of the projects, it also lends support to the focus across projects of potential criminal behaviour being reduced by building better life chances for young people.

Consideration has been given in this section to the reports of young people, YJWs and JLOs about the extent to which particular interventions are delivered and their usefulness. The range and focus of these reflect those identified in the analysis of YDP plans suggesting a coherence between planning and implementation. These findings can be considered as positive since they reflect the stated intent that the nature and structure of the YDPs are guided by specific local needs. Differences in the views between YJWs and JLOs around the usefulness of some types of activities, particularly around interagency work and preventive work in the community are significant and may reflect a difference in training, philosophy and/or experience of the two professions.

What works, for whom and in what circumstances

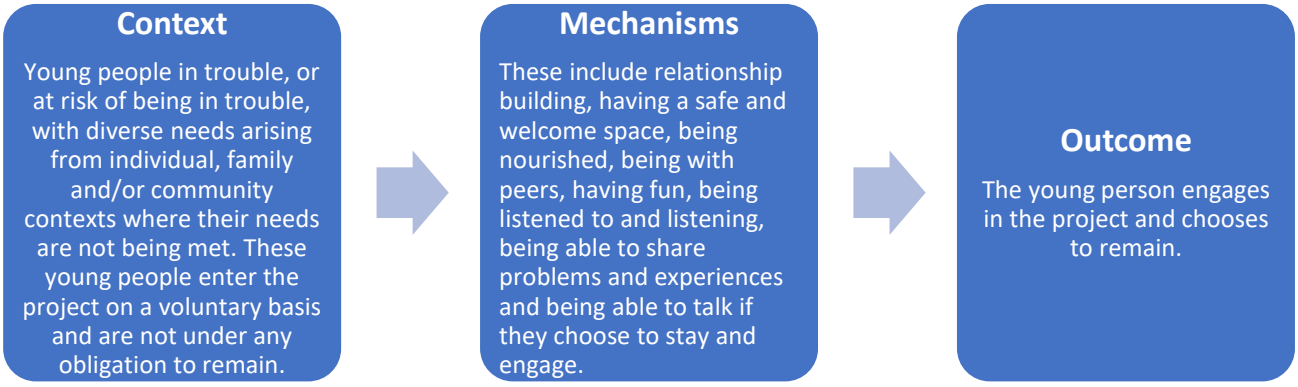
This section presents an analysis of interview data and documentation from case study sites for the purpose of making explicit the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes (CMOs) arising for young people who engage in YDPs and, through that, identifying what works, for whom and in what circumstances. The mechanisms are predicated on a foundation of positive relationships within the youth justice projects, between the YJWs and participants, and between participants attending. They particularly recognise the centrality of the relationships between YJWs and participants as described by Fullerton et al (2021) and their importance in developing, maintaining and enabling interventions to take place. The CMOs described in the following section are iterative, and vary according to different individuals and their particular needs, risks and context.

Figure 19: Summary of CMOs



The CMOs for each of these five CMOs are now described and an explication of the context, mechanisms and outcomes for each of the five areas presented.

CMO 1: Creating an environment where participants choose to engage



As described earlier, the process of engagement and referral with the project takes place on a voluntary basis and participants are free to leave the project at any time they wish. Consequently, it is important that the environment and circumstances are such that the young person wants to engage in the project and chooses to remain.

Building relationships

As highlighted earlier, CMO 1 focuses on the relationship-building that takes place between the young person and the YJW and is central to what takes place subsequently. Gaining trust in the YJW, building a rapport, and being comfortable about talking to them, were all highlighted as important. Some young people spoke about going on trips and their importance in giving them opportunities to 'talk and share', noting that 'you'd have to work with people to be able to do stuff. They helped me to be more open to deal with other things'. Even when young people had disengaged from the project, the relationships sometimes continued with one YJW highlighting if they:

> *had built a relationship with young people who had stopped engaging with the project and were involved in drug use we would continue to 'send a little text … just to let them know that you're still there for them, you know, if they want to come'. (CS8 FG YJW)*

Having a safe and welcoming space

Many participants spoke about the importance of the project as a place where they felt welcomed, safe, and could have fun. Through this, young people were able to talk about things if they wanted to, be nourished, form relationships with YJWs and peers and be listened to and listen to others, have their basic needs met and feel a sense of belonging.

The physical space associated with the project was described as a 'a place to go', 'a drop in', 'a meeting place', 'a social outlet', and 'a warm space' and it was considered an important place. Several comments were made about the projects being 'a place where they are welcomed and met with 'a smile', where 'they find it welcoming'. It was noted that they 'find it easy to come here', are 'treated with trust and respect' and, unlike school, they can choose to 'leave if they want to'. The culture, atmosphere and approach adopted were all identified as important in creating an environment where young people feel they belong and relationships can be built. This was highlighted by a volunteer in a project who said:

> *'I think that they look forward to coming because it's their place. It's not school, it's not at home. As I say it's the place where they come to be with the people they want to be in an environment where they can speak their minds and not be penalised for it.' (CS1 FG Volunteer)*

It was also identified as a place 'to get you off the streets' and 'take you off the roads' and as 'an alternative to hanging around getting into trouble'. One father explained:

> *'It's so hard to keep them right now isn't it. It's so hard to keep them safe now. They're hanging around. They have nothing to do they're getting bored and then they get depressed. And then there's other fellows and someone's coming round the car and in then there probably smoking so he smokes. Then it goes from that to the weed, drugs like, and to drink. So like I said it keeps them away from all that. He is not mixing around the town as much with the lads around town when he's here, you know.' (CS4, individual interview, father)*

The impact of being and feeling welcomed was highlighted by one mother who in response to the question of "How did your son change as a result of coming to the project?", noted:

> *'He's more kind, more he likes to come because he likes the people around him. You know, they were very nice with him. He was appreciated. Like when he came into the centre or when he goes, people are welcoming him.' (CS7, individual interview, mother)*

Listening and being listened to

The availability of a safe space where you can be listened to was highlighted as particularly important since these types of opportunity may not be available to young people in other environments. This was highlighted by a member of a project committee who said:

> *'Marginalised young people are isolated young people. They don't get a lot of attention. And I think people are not really interested in them. And when they're out around and around the streets, they're sort of, they're a problem. Whereas when they go in to somewhere like [name of project] and you have workers there to sit down with them and talk to them for the first time, they're actually able to speak about their issues.' (CS8, individual interview, Project Committee member)*

This was also highlighted by a mother who noted that 'it is not adults preaching down to children … they are allowed to express themselves and, you know let them lead sometimes'. YJWs spoke about having a contract with the young person when they came to the project, about taking a participative approach with the young people to developing boundaries around confidentiality and respect, particularly in group work, and about agreeing the parameters for going on trips or outings.

The lack of pressure on young people to speak was identified as a critical element of this and both parents and young people spoke about the choices in being 'just free to talk'... you know, amongst themselves', 'It's just whatever they want to tell', about being able to 'come in and chat or if you want to be serious about your feelings, you can also do that here too', and that young people 'learnt that it's good to talk, you know, and share things with people and it helps to deal with it better'. It was suggested that the environment and atmosphere 'allows them to be themselves' and through that they are able to 'open up about [their] feelings' and 'I know I have somewhere to go. If I need to talk to someone or talk about something, I can make it happen'. This was reiterated by a young person who said:

> *'There's never any pressure. Like when you come in, it's just like a happy environment. There's just like it's no pressure … just talking individually. Everyone is chatting. Yeah, so.' (CS1, individual interview, participant)*

Being able to speak about their feelings in a space where confidentiality is a core principle enables young people to raise issues without being judged and facilitates them being honest about things. One young person said 'And you don't have to, like, worry that someone's going to think like, Oh, she' weird or something' while another noted 'I know if I come in here after a bad day, I can talk about things and get advice. And nobody is going to tell anyone else as well.' This was also highlighted by another participant who, in response to a question about why they come to the project, said:

> *'To enjoy. The joy of what it is. How nice the [YJWs] are and how safe you feel when talking to them knowing that it would not leave the room'. (CS1 FG participant)*

Food

It is clear that providing food meets an important basic need and it is used in different ways as a form of nourishment, as a mechanism for building independence through being able to cook for themselves, and of the process of sharing and eating together. Most of the case study sites visited during this evaluation provide young people with food and they spoke about getting 'toasted sandwiches and a cup of tea at lunchtime' as well as treats such as 'hot chocolate and muffins'. In one project, young people were observed coming into the project and making their own sandwiches using food which was made freely available to them by the project. One participant noted that, because of where they lived and the contexts they lived in, food was very important, saying:

> *'So we'll come here and they do, they provide you with free food, you know what I mean? Which is very great for people that probably can't cook or can't afford to cook at home.' (CS3, individual interview, participant)*

In many projects, cooking is one of the activities on offer and one parent highlighted that 'doing a bit of cooking' was a way of the YJWs 'trying to integrate her [daughter] into a group'. YJWs highlighted that sometimes they would just meet the young person 'for food and a chat' if an issue was arising; offer food in the project at times when young people may be exposed to trouble such as at Halloween, noting that 'we open up the project for a drop in and have stone pizzas' and deliberately using food as a mechanism to encourage young people to talk to them. Finally, it is important to note that throughout COVID-19, many projects provided and delivered food parcels to participants and their families and in addition to ensuring nutrition was available for the young people, this was also a mechanism through which personnel at the projects maintained contact with participants.

Havi ng fun

The importance of having fun at the project should not be underestimated and, when asked to identify what was positive about the project, many young people and parents commented on the 'fun', on 'having a laugh', 'being able to mess about without getting into trouble', 'having the craic', 'being able to act the maggot' and doing fun things. Activities that took place within the premises included, for example, playing pool, cooking, playing on x-box, playing music and other activities such as special events including make-up evenings and candlelit dinners.

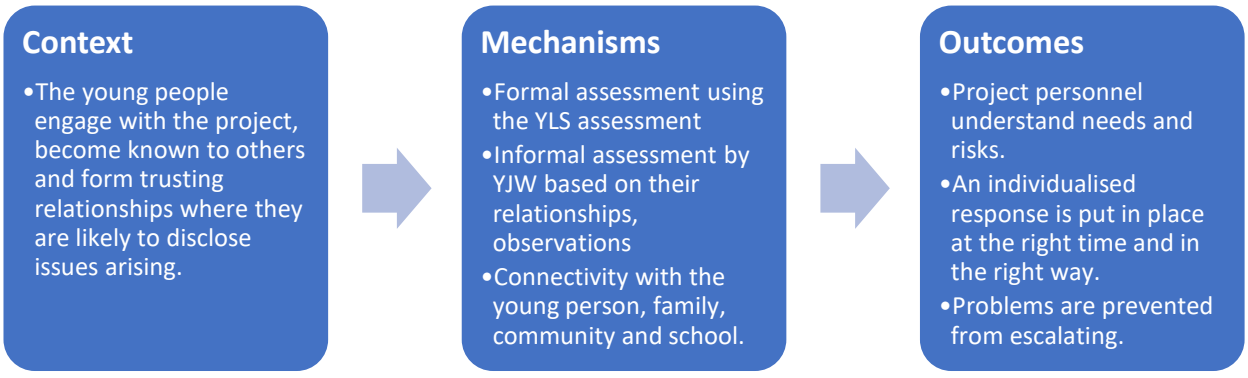
Many activities also took place outside the project premises and activities available locally included football, rock climbing, canoeing and surfing. It was also noted that activities were generally linked in with the needs of the community. In one case study site, the young people on the project were involved in looking after horses, while in another they were involved in repairing bicycles.

Some challenges were identified in the gendered nature of the activities provided and it was highlighted that sometimes 'boys are thinking like that the girls weren't interested in pool, that if they came the time would be on their phones … Ah, send them to the kitchen' which led to some YJWs developing a more inclusive approach for girls in all activities. Another young person spoke about having been very happy to have been involved, but also happy to finish up now because the activities were 'more for younger ones'.

Day or overnight trips away were identified as particularly important to the young people and decisions around these were often made in association with the young people themselves. Planning for these trips was identified as an important step for the young people in setting out, understanding and adhering to rules and boundaries around which a trip could take place.

Many of the comments made about having fun, however, were also linked to the seriousness of the work taking place in the project and with 'being able to work through' or 'seek solutions to problems'. One family member noted 'yeah, well it wasn't all fun and games. Like they did do other deeper stuff'. In response to why you come here one participant noted having fun and like there's always like solutions to my problems. Just talking openly'. Another participant said: 'It's like a fun, safe space where you can have the crack, but also kind of get down into like, deep convos if needed'. In summary, the projects provide a place of welcome and safety where young people can build relationships with YJWs and peers, be listened to and listen to others through having a choice about talking and sharing problems and experiences, have basic needs for fun, nourishment and a sense of belonging met, and in a very practical way, provide an alternative to hanging around the streets where they may be getting into trouble. All of these combine to support continued engagement by young people in the project.

CMO 2: Assessing and reassessing



The second mechanism through which change takes place is through informal and formal assessment and reassessment which takes place on an ongoing basis.

Views on carrying out assessments of risk and need using the YLS CMI 2.0[4]

A formal assessment of each young person takes place following referral to the project and this is generally done jointly between the JLO and YJW using the YLS. This tool is described as 'a

[4] This tool is referred to throughout the remainder of this section as the YLS since this is how it is referred to by stakeholders.

quantitative screening survey of attributes of juvenile offenders and their situations relevant to decisions regarding level of service, supervision and programming' (p1). There is good support among project personnel for the use of the YLS in assessing young people and it was variously referred to as 'an excellent tool', 'an extremely useful tool' and as 'quite efficient and quite good' by YJWs and JLOs. One JLO noted that the YLS 'sheds a massive light on the reality of their needs and whatever risk factors might be there.' It was highlighted that the YLS assessment as the basis for referral 'has brought a consistency to identifying the suitability of young people entering the project'. It was also highlighted that extensive training has taken place in its use through the Best Practice Team and this training was highly valued.

Others, however, suggested that 'it was far from perfect' with key criticisms being the amount of work involved in completing it; an emphasis on a deficits-based assessment rather than on strengths; giving a poor reflection, numerically, of the situation for young people who are very hard to reach and involved in 'heavy criminal or drug related crime, and drug dealing or drug running and violence'; and of it not being appropriate to ask about some issues relating to parental alcohol or drug misuse, mental health problems, or employment, particularly in the context of GDPR.

Some YJWs made reference to the utility of the YLS in interpreting the level of risk with one saying that 'from a statistics point of view, you'd be able to see it from their YLS, whether they've reduced or increased' but the 'soft outcomes' are not captured 'which is unfortunate'. The interpretation of the findings arising from the YLS was also highlighted in terms of its meaning as explained by one YJW who said:

> *'So what I find is when you do the YLS, they might score medium. Six months down the road when you actually know the young person, have a relationship and understand the level of chaos that they're at, the score will go up rather than go down.' (CS2 FG YJW)*

Informal assessment of needs and risks

While the YLS assessment is completed at various stages throughout the participant's involvement with the project, it is clear from interviews with stakeholders that a less formal, but nevertheless important assessment of young people takes place on an ongoing basis. One member of a Project Committee spoke about the 'continuous' nature of the assessments that took place within the project, and also at the point of exit for the purpose of identifying any additional supports needed outside of the project. Young people and parents spoke about YJWs who 'kept checking in on me' and 'rang me [a parent] if they couldn't get [name of young person] to see how they were doing'. A YJW spoke about the effective, but informal approach to understanding what was happening noting that if there was something going on for them in school she would say:

> *'c'mere how was woodwork now this week, was he giving you a gruelling or whatever? Or if we knew that they were, you know, at a disco or something, we'd ask them well how was the disco or what have you. So they all get their moments to kind of have their talk, you know. And then I suppose they then talk to each other about whatever they're talking about.' (CS1 FG YJW)*

Several adults highlighted that while young people would respond to questioning by the YJW they were much more reluctant to do so if the questions were asked by a parent. One mother highlighted this noting that:

'so definitely the communication of somebody who is not their parent and is seen as being more wise, you know what I mean …So being able to do that while you're, you know, having coke and rashers, or are making pancakes or whatever they were doing. Not in a dictatorial sense. Yeah, I think has been a big influence for her …'. (CS8, individual interview, mother)

Others highlighted the regular collation and assessment of information by YJWs from multiple sources such as the JLO, the school, local community and parents about individual participants. One young person explained to an interviewer that the YJW had been in touch with the school saying:

Participant 'They just were going in, checking up, saying if everything was okay, like okay.
Interviewer: Do you would you feel that that helped keep you in school then?
Participant Yeah. It was like it just linked it with this and it was easier. It was really good.

Tailoring responses to the individual needs and risks

The initial and ongoing assessments that take place facilitate and enable a tailored approach to meeting the needs of young people and this type of approach was identified as 'the secret of their successes' in achieving good outcomes. Many YJWs spoke about taking the time to assess and reassess each individual's needs and then work out a programme of intervention in response to this, saying 'we offer different kinds of experiences, explore different interests and hobbies and stuff'. In respect of peers, one YJW highlighted that while it can be hard to get them away from 'the negative peers', they can be introduced to positive peers through the project and activities can be used to promote particular friendships. Having the flexibility to respond in a way that works for the young person was noted by one manager who explained:

'… when we look at our six-month plan, we look at how are we going to respond best? Rather than what responses can we give ... and we are lucky to have that flexibility'. (8, individual interview, manager)

The importance of this was highlighted by one JLO who, in response to a question about what made the project successful, said:

'I think it's all the planning that they put into the work they do. I've seen the [number] girls with books and research stuff fired across the floor as well as putting together a programme that they think is going to work for the young people that they are engaging. Okay. And even though they make it look easy, there's a lot of work going into each programme. Yeah.' (CS1, individual interview, JLO)

Such a tailored approach is required at all stages from preliminary engagement with the project to responding appropriately to an expressed need and all the way through to identifying educational or employment trajectories. Examples were given of doing one-to-ones with a young person when they first came to the project until they felt 'comfortable' and ready to join a group'. Others highlighted being able to use the responses by young people to things happening in their locality as a mechanism for identifying and developing values, or, as a gateway into discussing other issues. One example given was where the young people's response to climate change and further discussions facilitated a focus on impacts of this on their community. Another example given was where during a walk in the park with YJWs, the young people raised issues relating to sexual health. The YJWs were

then able to engage in discussions with the young people about sexuality and contraception over the following weeks 'because we know they're interested'.

The tailored response to expressed needs of young people was particularly evident in respect of the identification of interventions relating to education and employment, where a wide range of interests and options are available. In interviews with both young people and their parents, preferences identified ranged from remaining in school through to Leaving Certificate and onto third-level college to young people who were happy to exit mainstream school at an earlier stage and gain a QQI qualification or move into an apprenticeship. Each of these trajectories requires different approaches. YJWs noted that the plan they develop around this 'is all dependent on the needs of the person … and they want different things'. This was supported by another YJW who said:

> *'realistically, we can't keep a child in school. Yeah. We can't make them study for an exam. So the best thing that we can do was kind of have our wrap around approach.' (CS8, FG, YJW)*

Preventing problems from escalating

The ongoing assessments and reassessments also assist in identifying issues arising at an early stage which, in turn, ensures that YJWs can identify ways in which these can be de-escalated. In one example, one mother spoke about how their daughter had stopped coming to the project because she had 'fallen out with the friends'. This mother went on to say, so [name of YJW] is going to try and see if she can meet up with her for a coffee and get her involved in activities over the summer. The level of trust and confidence young people have in their relationship with YJWs was noted by young people who commented that 'if you're having a bad day when you come in here, it just clears your mind, and you can tell the girls anything that's going on' and they just 'let you talk about things that are important in your life'. This was also highlighted by a YJW who spoke about 'checking in, not checking up' with a group of participants which allowed them to show they cared about the young person while at the same time identifying a potential problem. This YJW said:

> *'And you care about them. You know, you care about how school went today, what happened afterwards last week, and were you sick? You weren't here. We were worried. And the parents buy into that as well … it's that concern that you show rather than you're ticking off a number.' (CS1, individual interview, YJW)*

In summary, assessment and reassessment is a core mechanism through which the needs of young people can be identified and planned responses made. These assessments take place in both formal and informal ways. The YLS tool provides a formal mechanism for assessment and this takes place at entry to the project and also at other times throughout the young person's engagement. The importance of having a trusting relationship between YJWs and young people is particularly important for informal assessments. In carrying out assessments and reassessments, the right interventions can be implemented at the right time, and tailored responses can be provided in a way that best responds to changing individual needs and risks. In addition, problems identified can be de-escalated if necessary.

CMO 3: Shaping an alternative life, now and in the future

The third mechanism through which change takes place is named 'shaping an alternative life' now and in the future. This is particularly important for young people who can be trapped in 'a vicious cycle' where criminality, substance misuse, early school leaving, and long-term unemployment are normalised within their families and communities. Shaping a new life means young people come to an understanding that their lives can be different to what they currently see and experience. Five main approaches are adopted to achieving this in the projects. These are: exposing young people to different scenarios, providing opportunities for them to explore differences, providing opportunities for them to achieve success, challenging their behaviours and attitudes, and role modelling.

Role modelling

It was highlighted that YJWs, volunteers and sometimes older young people attending the project act as role models for participants and examples were also given of where popular sports figures were invited to the projects. Role models from their own communities were identified as being particularly helpful in allowing young people to see alternatives. The importance of good role models was identified by one JLO who highlighted that the participants may not have other positive role models in their lives. Young people also identified the importance of the role modelling that takes place within the projects and one young person explained:

Male 1: They bring us on trips, obviously, to bring out the group and that helps all of us to keep out of trouble.
Interviewer: Okay. So how would you say that kind of keeps you out of trouble?
Male 1: Them bringing us off and telling us, you know, not to do what you're doing and they're showing us why we shouldn't do it.

Being able to explore alternatives

All stakeholders highlighted the importance of the activities that take place at the projects and while these activities contribute to the fun that young people have, they also serve other purposes. These include being able to try out different leisure activities that they may continue with after they have left the project, thus giving them a social outlet. It was reported that many young people had never been involved in formal club-based activities (e.g. soccer, dance, boxing) while others may have been involved but either dropped out, aged out ('there's none for my age bracket now') or were asked to leave when they started to have problems. The YDPs support, guide and sometimes 'push' young people to re-engage or try out different things. One young person explained he had joined a boxing club saying:

'You know it would have been mainly [name of YJW] pushing us to do sport or something … we were kind of on and off going to soccer like and he just helped us stick with it.' (CS3, FG, participants)

Others highlighted that some young people did not have the confidence to return to hobbies they had been involved in previously, or take up new ones, and YJWs often helped the young person to do so. One young person, in response to a question as to whether the project had resulted in any change, said:

'If I was around in the house, I would be just sitting around. That wouldn't be helping … But then everything really changed. I start getting into gardening. So I was, I was helping in the garden, cutting the grass, trimming the trees. I found it very therapeutic.' (CS3, FG, participant)

There is strong recognition that mainstream school is not the most appropriate educational trajectory for everyone and several young people spoke about getting help in identifying educational alternatives they might be interested in. One young person noted they had been given opportunities to try out woodwork through the project and was now being helped by the YDP saying 'they offered me up for an apprenticeship and I got accepted for it'. Another young person said that the project had arranged work experience for him in a gym and then went on to say 'they actually, they taught me that I want to do this. I go in and if I want, I can do it again'. YJWs identified self-care (including putting on make-up), as an activity in their project highlighting that some of their former participants went on to become beauticians.

In terms of peer relationships, it was reported that some young people join the projects as part of a group of young people ('because they're usually in with the crowd, if they're being referred, maybe two or three of the pals are too') and those that remain in the project grow and develop together, becoming a support for each other. Others highlighted that the project provided them with opportunities to develop friendships. One young person said:

'I was very unsocial. So, like, I would always be in my room, be on my phone and I'd never leave my house … and then when [name of youth justice worker] came over and explained … and they said I should go. I said, 'I don't want to go'. And then like, I went and an hour later and amazing, like, I'm still unsocial, but not as bad as I was.'

Interviewees gave examples of how the project introduced young people to friends that were more positive and that had a shared interest ('they start off engaging with each other and doing things together', 'when they come to the drop in, you know it links them in with positive peers'). One young person highlighted that by coming to the project she viewed the friends she had been getting into trouble with before differently, noting that:

'So I used to just let people walk all over me in friendships and stuff. But now I know what it's like. Remove myself from those situations in a proper way without, like, you know, getting into bad situations.' (CS1, FG2, participants)

Being challenged on behaviours and attitudes

Challenging attitudes and behaviours is an integral part of the work of the project personnel and takes place in a subtle way on an ongoing basis. This was highlighted by one Project Committee

Member who noted that 'while an observer might think the projects are the same as youth clubs the reality is different' and that young people are challenged on their behaviours, beliefs and attitudes. This understanding was supported by others and one JLO highlighted that for some young people, their behaviours or attitudes have never been challenged but that when it is done in a good way, they can start to think about things differently. Being able to challenge young people requires considerable skill and it requires a delicate balance between maintaining a relationship with the young person while making it clear that something is inappropriate. One YJW said:

> *'I think being challenged in a way that is gentle, right? It's not someone screaming and shouting at them, telling them they're wrong. It's about exploring the behaviour … Do you think that's okay to do that? And if they say yes, well why do you think it's okay?. Okay. And … pull it apart layer by layer until they just say, well, actually, yeah, you're right. I know.' (CS1, FG, YJWs)*

Another YJW highlighted this also, noting that the young people have to take responsibility for what they have done. This YJW said:

> *'there's discussions about their behaviour, what they've done, how they've behaved in different situations and they have to reach into that and examine it and take ownership for behaviours that maybe weren't so great and then behaviours that were brilliant.' (CS1 FG volunteers)*

The process through which this is done was also identified by one parent who noted that while YJWs are nice to the young people,

'They would be looking at, you know, what's appropriate and what's not appropriate. Okay. It's not just somewhere for them to play pool. Yeah. There's a lot of work done there'. (CS2, individual interview, mother)

One young person highlighted that the YJWs helped them 'to cop on' and in response to a question of how they did that said:

> *'You know, just help your maturity. They show you, you do not need to be getting in trouble … Just by pointing it out - common things like what's the point of getting into trouble - getting into trouble with the guards?' (CS5, FG, participant)*

In being challenged, young people develop an awareness of the perspectives of others and of the impact of their attitudes and behaviours. This awareness can lead to a more empathetic approach being adopted by them.

Provided with opportunities for achieving and experiencing success

It was pointed out that many of the young people attending the projects were 'in trouble in school and at home' and in their communities and they often felt that they could not succeed in anything. Projects provide many opportunities for young people to achieve success, even in areas they might find difficult, and they support them doing so. Some projects offer young people an opportunity to do the Gaisce award which can be challenging, as noted by one young person who said: 'The Gaisce now in two weeks we're going away for three days. Three days and no sleep during the day. So it's a 25 K hike'.

Another young person spoke about the driver learning theory test noting that while 'it's very hard, needs lots of practice' that the YJW is helping him with it. Another JLO spoke about the involvement of young people in fixing bikes and then giving them to newly arrived refugees in the country. The JLO said:

> *'We were down to [the refugee centre] and when the [individual] couldn't speak English, the lad [project participant] was like, "Show him how to put up and down the saddle". But he was dealing with it himself. But he was able to show this other person, you know. And there's a pride. Yeah, there's pride in it. And I think if any of them just go get a bit of pride, they probably do more.' (CS2, individual interview, member of AGA)*

Several young people gave examples of successes they had as a result of joining the project, achievements including 'speaking in front of a couple of hundred people' and creating a booklet that is being used for other young people.

Provided with opportunities to engage with adults in a positive way

Many of the young people attending the projects hold negative views of adults and particularly of teachers and Gardaí and, sometimes their parents, which has an impact on their attitudes and behaviours towards them. One YJW highlighted that many of the young people attending the project have little experience of positive engagement with adults and when they experience this by the YJW, it 'is a huge thing' because 'these kids never get attention. It's only bad attention'.

The importance then of building positive relationships and engagement between adults and young people in the project was described by a YJW who said:

> *'… because they're coming from an authoritarian situation in school … And I suppose the same as home. They're always in trouble … And so I think coming in here and dealing with adults who are actually willing to listen, who will give them a chance to express themselves … but will also, you know, maintain that that idea of respect for themselves and everyone around them. I think that's huge. I think that has an absolutely massive bearing on how they progress and how they turn out.' (CS1, FG, YJW)*

Speaking about the YJWs in the project, one parent said 'I think it shows them then like not all adults are scary'. Another parent highlighted that her son was now in employment and working with older people noting that this was a result of the way he was dealt with by adults in the project.

While there are differences in the level of engagement between JLOs and projects, many JLOs spoke about regularly dropping in, having a game of pool or football, and of generally engaging in a positive way with the young people in the project. This was highlighted as being important as it 'builds positive relationships as well' and young people don't see the guard as 'the big bad wolf'. One young person explained that this interaction meant 'you get to know the guard as a human being, as somebody, not just the uniform'.

Other JLOs spoke about meeting young workers in other circumstances and being thanked by them for referring them to the project.

Community guards

Community guards were identified as being very important, particularly in those projects where they are engaged with the project. One YJW highlighted the importance of the perspective and knowledge they bring to the project saying:

> *'The community guards, they know the kids, they know the families. They know what's going on, the concerns, the tensions, and people know them. So a new person walks in here, they see a guard no problem. They feel very comfortable and relaxed with the guards around here.' (CS7, individual interview, manager)*

Several YJWs spoke of not having any engagement with the local Gardaí due to stations having closed and changes having taken place in personnel.

In summary, an awareness that things can be different is central to shaping an alternative life now, and in the future, for the young people attending the projects. The mechanisms through which this is achieved are role modelling, opportunities to explore alternatives, being challenged about their behaviours and attitudes, opportunities to achieve success, and opportunities to engage with adults in a positive way.

Awareness that their lives can be different

Stakeholders highlighted that family and community norms for some young people attending the projects can be very different to the norms for most other people in society. One YJW explained:

> *'if they're in a family with criminality or, you know, any abuse of any kind, their education is at home. They might grow up with something that they come to accept because it's what's happening in the family. But when they come here, they see something different. Yeah, they learn something different. And they go back to the family with new eyes, you know. And as they get older, more mature eyes and where they, as you say, they have that agency to start to think for themselves and to question things.' (CS1, FG, volunteers)*

This was also highlighted by a young person who had been cautioned and whose family had a history of criminal activity. In response to a question of 'what changed for you as a result of coming to the project' this young person said:

> *'Because my family, you know, aren't the best influence people. Okay. I feel like it just kind of changed my mindset being in here from being like my family to be myself … Like I don't think the way they do things anymore. Like, I'm not going to, you know, go judging them because they have this opinion … You have your opinion, but I'm not going to go and do what you are doing. Right, because how is that going to be good for me? So I probably would have still been doing all the same stuff that I was doing maybe [if I hadn't come to the YDP] …' (CS4, individual interview, participant)*

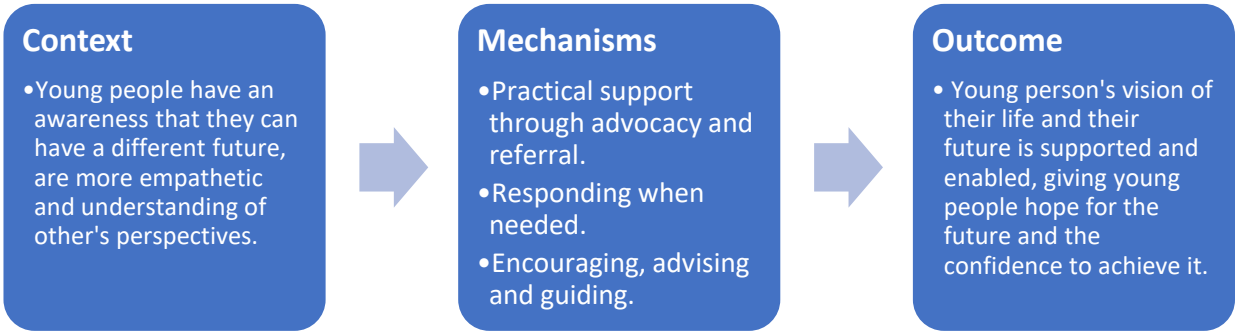
Others highlighted that living your life on social welfare is 'a big thing that we all try to challenge here', that 'teenagers that are struggling, can be so black and white. A lot of teenagers fail to see that things can get better'. It was also highlighted that some young people attending the youth diversion projects are:

'… hardened and they are not going to go …. they're in with the crowd who maybe they are selling the drugs. Maybe they're doing exactly what they want to do. And they do not want to talk about changing that, you know.' (CS8, individual interview, JLO)

In summary, through assessment and reassessment the individual needs, risks and potential solutions are identified. Mechanisms that are used to deal with these include role modelling, opportunities to explore alternatives, achieve successes and engage in a positive way with adults, often for the first time. Young people are also challenged on their behaviours in a careful and considered way which allows them to identify the impact of their attitude and behaviours on others and to become more empathetic in their responses to them.

CMO 4: Facilitating, enabling and supporting an alternative life

The fourth mechanism through which young people change as a result of engaging with the YDPs focuses on facilitating, enabling and supporting young people to achieve an alternative life.



Encouraging, advising and guiding

Participants highlighted the encouragement, advice and guidance they were provided with throughout their time with the project and a number of examples of the difference this made were given. One young person who had been successful in getting a college place to study art explained that before coming to the project she would have,

'you know, just sat in my room watched telly ... and then [name of YJW] was like, 'Oh, we should do this'. Or, you know, 'you'd be really great doing this' and art, as well. I didn't really do a whole lot of drawing until I came here and [name of YJW] was 'Oh my God, look, there's this PLC you can do in [name of place] and I can help you with this. And she helped me with my schoolwork as well.' (CS4, individual interview, participant)

Several young people highlighted that they were encouraged and motivated to stay in school or to find employment through their engagement with the project. At one focus group, participants noted that being in the project helped them 'take their mind off the stress of being in school' and gave them tools to identify ways of dealing with particular issues arising. Another young person highlighted that a YJW came to her home and

She goes, 'there's no point sitting [at] home, go and do something'. So they, they actually gave me the little boost I needed to go do so. And I got there. And then [although] I'm not where I want to be. No. Look ... Bit by bit and then I got a job.' (CS3, individual interview, participant)

Another young person reported that the YJW supported and guided him to stay out of trouble saying:

'I feel like that they're pushing me to be good. Like it wouldn't be like if you are [good] ... it's just if you show up and you do what you are asked, we will reward you.' (CS3, FG, participant)

Many young people experience anger and difficulties in managing this anger can bring them into conflict at home, in school and in their communities. YJWs spoke about helping participants to find ways to deal with their anger 'so it's not just a punch. Yeah. Or a kick or, you know, they learn to use their voices rather than their hands'. It was also highlighted that within some families the way of dealing with things is to 'maybe shout at the young person', which, the YJW noted, 'teaches them that that is how to deal with it and they probably end up doing more stuff'. This YJW said that by 'actually approaching it from a calm place and then supporting them when they do nice things around that and reassuring … they see that over time that things can be different'.

In terms of drug and alcohol misuse, one JLO noted that personnel in the project would have 'chats about alcohol and drug use' while in another it was reported that 'we've done dynamic work on drugs, we've worked on whatever the issues may be'. Other young people, their parents and YJWs gave examples of encouraging the young people to develop hobbies and this was also highlighted by YJWs who noted 'So we try to care as much as we can. So to encourage them with their hobbies right now because it's good for them'.

Practical supports

Several direct supports are provided for young people attending the projects, particularly in terms of their education and employment. Examples given included home-work clubs, access to computers to carry out schoolwork, payment for grinds for young people doing exams and the provision of I-scoil within the project. One young person highlighted being able to 'hop on' the computer and being able to do their homework which they would not have been able to do otherwise. An example of engaging practical support for young people doing exams was highlighted by a YJW who said:

'We actually offered them a few weeks ago if they want to get grinds you know with math and stuff. Like they were alright anyway and we have offered them [name of room in the project premises] if they wanted to come in and have that quiet time.' (CS8. FG YJW)

It was also highlighted that the project also provided a place for young people to go for a period of time if they were having difficulties remaining in school for the full day. One parent explained that:

'So if he has trouble [name of YJW] brings him back in here and does one-to-one in the mornings. And she would drop him into Youthreach maybe at 12. He'd come in here for an hour or an hour and a half.' (CS2, FG, mother)

Another young person who had been expelled from school just prior to his Junior Certificate spoke about how the project arranged tutors for him which allowed him to sit his exam and pass it. He had continued on in a different school. Support was provided for young people who want to attend third level college with one young person explaining that when he was thinking about it the YJW brought him to events where he could talk to people about 'courses I should be engaging with'. Many young people spoke about having been supported in putting a CV together and in making an application for a job.

An example of a young person who had come through the project and had gone to a third level college was identified by a YJW who spoke of the support given to the young person to apply for the

CAO, to make an application for the SUSI grant and also highlighted that 'we bought her a pack to take to university and calculators and books and everything'. The Manager said:

'at the end of the day, she just couldn't cope with university yet. But for us, that's not failure. That's for us to be honest enough and to be aware enough that, "Well, that's not for me." (CS8, individual interview, manager)

The manager then highlighted that she had got a job and "it opens up the possibility of going back or whatever she wants her journey to carry on".'

Advocacy and referral through connectivity between the YDPS and others

The connectivity of personnel in the YDPs with other services was very notable, especially services which provide leisure and recreational facilities and activities, education and employment services, substance misuse management and mental health services. It was also highlighted that many projects include representatives of these sectors on their Project Committees. Arising from this, YJWs are able to advocate on behalf of young people and ensure that referrals to other sectors and organisations are made and followed through. The informal nature of many of the relationships between individuals involved was highlighted and YJWs spoke about their knowledge over the years of these services; of building relationships over time that allowed them to link with the specific service; and the consequent challenges of working in areas where there is a high turnover of personnel in these services.

Many YJWs highlighted this involvement with other organisations and services and noted that this facilitated them in making referrals and helping young people to engage in other structures. In some services, YJWs advocated within the system to ensure referrals were expedited. One young person who needed counselling said that as a result of an intervention by the YJW he had gone 'from one list straight up to the top, and I was sent straight away'. There are particularly strong links between the projects and Youthreach and many participants attending the projects also attend this educational service. One young person reported being expelled from school

> *'in fifth year and I had nowhere to go and they got me into Youthreach and got me internet and everything I needed.' (CS5, FG, participant)*

In some cases, services are co-located with the project (e.g. jobs club, substance misuse services) and in those cases there are direct mechanisms through which young people can be referred or advocated for. In some cases it was highlighted that young people can be involved with a lot of different services. One YJW based in an area of high criminality noted that the YJWs almost operate as case managers because the young people:

> *'have lots of services involved in their life. They're off to probation courts and social work ... everyone is in the mix and their life is chaotic and as a consequence of that have difficulty remembering all the things they are supposed to do and all the people they need to meet.' (CS6, FG, YJWs)*

Responding when needed

Being responsive to immediate needs was important in circumventing problems arising and one YJW spoke about accompanying young people to work experience saying:

'And then if we think they won't go, we actually go. We might offer to bring them up. It's only for 5 minutes, but having someone there with them, we actually get them in the front door.' (CS8, FG, YJW)

Another example was given by a parent who spoke about her son who was due to attend an interview that he had been preparing for with the help of the YJW. However, on the morning of the interview he missed the bus and rang the YJW who drove him to the interview which was a considerable distance away. He was successful in this interview and was now on an apprenticeship. His mother highlighted that without the preparation of the CV and interview, and especially without the intervention by the YJW in driving him to the interview, he would not have been in the apprenticeship. A number of YJWs gave examples of young people being able to contact them outside of the project hours and noted that this allowed for timely support. The following iteration between a volunteer in a YDP and a YJW highlights the flexibility of contact:

Volunteer: Yeah. And they know if something is really affecting them or they're having a really hard time, they can pick up that phone and they can [ring].
Youth Justice Worker: Or they can pop in.
Volunteer: And there's, there's a welcome here for ... And a little bit of a safe harbour from the bad stuff.

In summary, when young people have an awareness of the possibility of a different life now, and want their future to be different, YJWs provide encouragement, advice and guidance for them to achieve this. Practical supports are also provided, including advocacy and referral and this is enabled through the connectivity between the project and various other sectors, stakeholders and organisations. In the longer term, the young person's vision of their future is enabled and they can be more confident and hopeful of achieving it.

CMO 5: Communities and families supported and enabled to respond to the needs of young people

Facilitating, enabling and providing supports for families

Many stakeholders identified the importance of family in the trajectory taken by the young person and in the extent to which they can succeed in achieving good outcomes. One YJW noted that good relationships with families are 'half the battle because they are invested in the work that you do'. It was also highlighted that when parents see their son or daughter engaging with YJWs in the project they can be 'bowled over' because

'they're used to their kids getting like, whatever, abuse or they're getting arrested or it is that when they have these youth workers are just as talking to them, trying to do something and they find out what they're trying to do for them.' (CS8, FG, YJW)

In some projects it was reported that YJWs 'might have very little to do with the families' of some young people and that in some cases 'they [family] don't want to get involved and you have to track them down then around consent and things of that'. It was also noted that in some families they have multiple services 'calling to the door' including social workers, probation, health workers and it was noted that they don't have any problem engaging with the project because they are so used to 'getting calls to the door'. At one focus group interview, a JLO said:

'I think initially when [name of project] first started, there was a little bit of suspicion from parents. Okay. You know, our young people have been sent to this, so we'll tick the box. But over the years, they've [YJWs] got relationships going with parents and parents actually come in and engage.' (CS1, individual interview, JLO)

Some projects are funded to provide family support and employ a specific family worker. In one case study site this worker was engaged in doing a lot of work with families 'where drug addiction, alcohol addiction, poverty plays a big part'. An example of this was of supporting mothers and fathers in developing better literacy skills themselves with one YJW noting 'And you'd be surprised how much that will actually help the kid.' While some projects reported having access to family support workers, it was also clear that many YJWs provide support for the broader family. YJWs spoke about giving parents reassurance and this was confirmed by parents who also spoke about getting reassurance from the YJWs with one parent noting 'But I think that reassurance, it's always the first place I go to get help'.

Others highlighted the importance of being able to be in touch with families as a way of connecting with young people (e.g. 'to check in around why the young person hasn't attended'; 'if the young person isn't answering the phone') and observing that it is difficult if that is not in place. Other YJWs spoke about providing advice and support to families and this was also highlighted by a mother who said:

'I remember he was having such a tantrum one day and I didn't know what to do . And one of my cousins said to me, 'just go down to them and go down to [name of youth justice worker]. Talk to her, tell her what's going on and find out how to handle the tantrums because I literally did not have a clue how to handle it. And I jumped in the car and came down. And they told me exactly which way to approach him and to stop him running amok in the house.' (CS3, FG, mother)

Other parents interviewed in the course of this research gave specific examples of practical supports provided for them by the personnel working in the projects. Examples included filling out forms, dealing with statutory organisations (such as local authorities) on their behalf, helping them to get involved in a support group and enrolment in a programme to manage relationships, particularly violent relationships, with their children. One grandparent, whose grandchild had disengaged from the project, highlighted that the YJWs had 'got everything that I needed. It was not that … I was ever refused. I got every bit of help I ever asked for'. This was reiterated by a manager who noted that a lot of family support 'goes on behind the scenes', that 'everybody in all the families know us. They know if they are stuck then it won't be a problem. They ring up one of the girls'.

It was also highlighted, however, that there can be difficulties with the workers engaging with families. It was noted that the primary focus of the YJW is on the young person but that you can be 'divided between who you're supposed to be supporting and your time is very much absorbed by families'. One YJW said:

> *'you can get very much sucked into the family dynamics and you know, you could turn right up to [the] home and the family can be shouting at you to get him sorted. Why is he doing all this stuff? And then you're trying to talk to the family. Particularly during the pandemic the young people might not want to engage but the families very much wanted to be supported.' (CS7, FG, YJWs)*

This YJW also emphasised that it can be challenging because the young person might think you are 'on the parents' side and not their side'. Another YJW reported that some parents, 'especially single parents' can be at the end of their tether but that they can take up a huge amount of the YJW's time.

It was also highlighted that sometimes it is the parents that are the problem and that many parents have problems themselves and 'you can really see the cycle and how it's being perpetuated at home and they want to change, but they can't change it'. And that there are some families where 'they're the ones that are triggering the young people that are constantly kind of pushing them in the wrong direction'. In that regard the Non-Violent Response (NVR) programme was identified as particularly useful as it helped parents to look at their reactions, triggers and responses to the young person.

It was noted that by supporting young people to get the help they need, the impact on the family was reduced and 'parents then, established their own situation a bit more'. And in some cases where the young person is involved with drug misuse, the YJWs follow the 'steps necessary' and 'kind of link into the families'.

Engagement with the community

Some personnel reported that the young people in their projects were involved in positive ways with their local community. Examples given included getting participants to help out with the 'tidy towns competition' and going on a 'light into darkness walk' to raise money for suicide prevention. One manager of a project said:

> *'I think what we're really good at is making sure that our projects are in the community and a part of community as well. So there's that connectivity with the local community, and it's not just the location of where it's at, but also that there are some really good advocates in the community … And that lends itself to … good support from parents as well.' (CS2, FG, manager)*

It was noted that sometimes this engagement can be a function of the length of time the project has been running, or because some of the personnel have themselves come from that community and this leads to trust in the project and belief that they can help the young people. One manager reported that:

> *'If there's a project happening [in the community], we can link some young people into there and they could get their fingers out and maybe learn a new skill or passion in life.' (CS7, individual interview, manager)*

One JLO highlighted that where projects come into 'greenfield sites' and that prior to setting up there may have been 'drinking, anti-social behaviour and criminal damage' that the community didn't know how to challenge it, address it or respond to it. In those situations the JLO noted that communities were often very happy for the projects to be in place. It was also reported, however, that in many communities, there is a lack of awareness about the existence of the projects and about what takes place there, with one JLO saying:

> *'they walk past it every day, every day of the week in town and not realise we are in here'. (CS2, FG, YJWs)*

Summary

A consideration of what works for whom, and in what circumstances, has been informed by a realistic evaluation methodology and five CMOs identified each based on an explication of the evidence from interviews with key stakeholders. These are: creating an accessible environment where participants choose to engage, assessing and reassessing, shaping an alternative life, now and in the future, facilitating, enabling and supporting an alternative life and supporting and enabling families and communities to respond to the needs of young people.

Young people engage, and remain involved in the project, when they develop good relationships with others in the YDP; where they have a safe and welcome space; when they are nourished, listened to, and can listen to others; where they can choose to share problems and experiences; where they can be with their peers; and when they can have fun. Through formal and informal assessment and reassessment, their needs and risks are identified; tailored responses are put in place; and problems are prevented from escalating. An alternative life, now and in the future, are shaped through role modelling, opportunities to explore alternatives, achieve successes and engage in a positive way with adults; as well as by being challenged on their behaviours and attitudes. Through this, participants develop an awareness that things can be different and that their future can change. Young people also develop a greater awareness of other perspectives and the impact of their behaviour on others leading them to be more empathetic. By providing practice support, advocacy and referral, by responding when needed, and by encouraging, advising and guiding, young people are facilitated, enabled and supported to achieve an alternative life giving them confidence to achieve, and hope for the future. Finally, engagement between personnel involved in the project and families and communities, leads to better understandings of the needs of young people and how to respond to them.

Chapter 6. Findings: Outcomes and impact of YDPs

Introduction

The evaluation relied on five data sources for purposes of measuring impact of the youth diversion projects: surveys of stakeholders, analysis of YLS risk levels, case studies, qualitative information from interviews and focus groups. The findings are presented in the sections that follow on impacts in specific areas. The Evaluation Team sought Garda data on levels of new offending by project participants as a way of measuring impacts on crime rates and seriousness of crime – a critical outcome category. Unfortunately, official crime statistics could not be made available even in anonymised form. The evaluation thus relies exclusively on subjective, proxy measures.

Survey findings overview

Five surveys were carried out, four of adult stakeholders and one of young people. The surveys of YJWs, JLOs, project managers and Project Committee members asked how successful their project was in achieving certain outcomes for young people who engage with the project. The outcomes examined in this analysis relate to crime rates, seriousness of crime, substance abuse, leisure use, family, education and employment, behaviours, attitudes, self-confidence, hopefulness, and communication and organisational skills.

The survey of young people asked about changes in selected areas of their lives that could be attributed to the project and whether their involvement in the project had changed certain behaviours. The survey is somewhat limited because of the small sample size (n = 69) and its questionable representativeness, but it provides relevant information, nevertheless.

The adult surveys show very positive results. Percentages reporting that projects were successful or very successful in achieving outcomes ranged from 79% to 98% for 11 of the 12 categories, the exception being substance abuse where the range was 60% to 70% (Table 22). Percentages reporting no project impact ('neither successful nor unsuccessful') ranged from 0% to 21% for the 11 categories other than substance abuse, where the range was from 30% to 33%.

A small percentage of respondents gave consistently low scores, with 4-6% of YJWs expressing the view that projects were unsuccessful or very unsuccessful in achieving outcomes across all the outcome categories. Eight percent of JLOs thought that projects were unsuccessful or very unsuccessful as regards substance abuse but were less pessimistic for other categories. Overall, managers tended to be the most positive in their views and JLOs the least positive.

These positive results were supported by results from the survey of young people. The largest percentages reporting improvements were in respect of the way they think about or behave towards others (71%), their hopes for the future (71%), their happiness (70%) and getting into trouble with friends (68%). Of those who were engaged in the type of behaviour described, 72% said that they were less involved in criminal or antisocial behaviour as a result of their participation in their project, 46% said that they were less involved in drinking alcohol, 58% less involved in using weed and 69% less involved in using other drugs.

Table 22: Success of projects – Summary of adult survey results

Outcome category	Project successful/very successful (% of respondents in each survey)	
	Min	Max
Reducing crime rates	82	95
Reducing the seriousness of crime	79	93
Reducing substance abuse	60	70
Increasing leisure/recreation opportunities	88	96
Improving family circumstances/ parenting	79	89
Improving education/employment	90	96
Increasing self-confidence	93	98
Increasing hopes for the future	88	96
Improving communication skills	83	98
Improving organisational skills	86	90
Improving positive behaviours	94	98
Improving negative attitudes	87	98

Surveys of YJWs, JLOs, managers and Project Committee members. Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses.

Survey findings of JLOs, managers, YJWs and project committee members all identify very positive impacts (ranging from 79% to 98%) arising from the projects in all areas except reducing substance misuse. Overall, the views of managers tended to be the most positive and the views of JLOs the least positive. These views were reflected in the findings from the survey of young people.

YLS analysis findings overview

The value of the available risk data is limited by a number of factors, not least the non-availability of both initial and subsequent scores for a majority of participants, the fact that some risk measures are historic and incapable of being improved, and the possibility that some risk levels change as staff get to know more about the participants (as was stated by many interviewees). Analysis of risk factors is useful nevertheless in helping form a picture of impact.

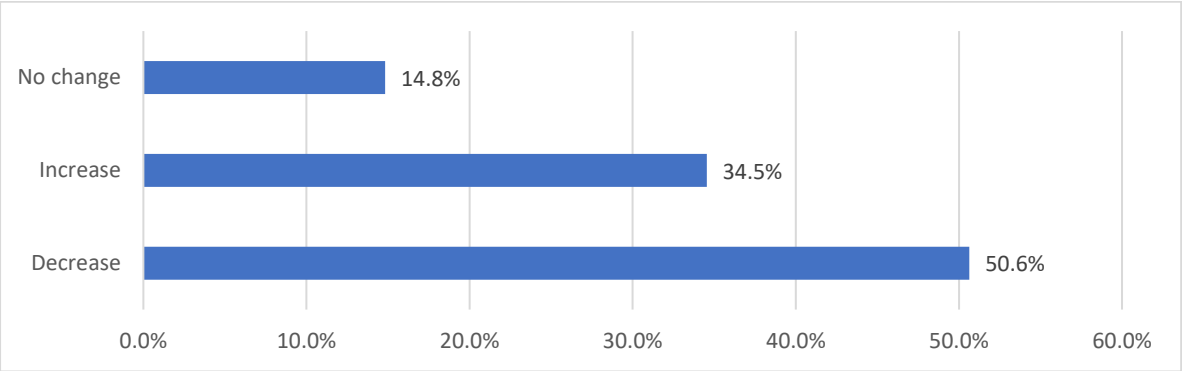
The YLS is scored according to the level of risk identified for each participant across eight areas of risk as follows: prior and current offences/dispositions, family circumstances/parenting, education/employment, peer relationships, substance abuse, leisure/recreation, personality/ behaviour and attitudes orientation. Each area has between three and seven elements under which participants are assessed. The level of risk/need for the participant is categorised as low, moderate or high according to the number of risk elements identified.

This analysis looks at changes in YLS scores between two points in time, enrolment (referred to in the analysis as T1) and 'the most recent' assessment (referred to as T2). Scores for T1 and T2 were available for a minority of participants (41%) and the analysis that follows is based on the 4,629 participants for which change could be measured. Their demographic profile is similar to that of the

other participants. It is noteworthy that projects differed significantly as regards the percentage of participants who had at least two assessments, ranging from zero to 94%.

About half of the participants (n = 2,344) were assessed as having decreased their overall risk score, about one third (n = 1,599) were assessed as having increased their risk score, and about one-sixth (n = 686) were assessed as experiencing no change (Figure 20).

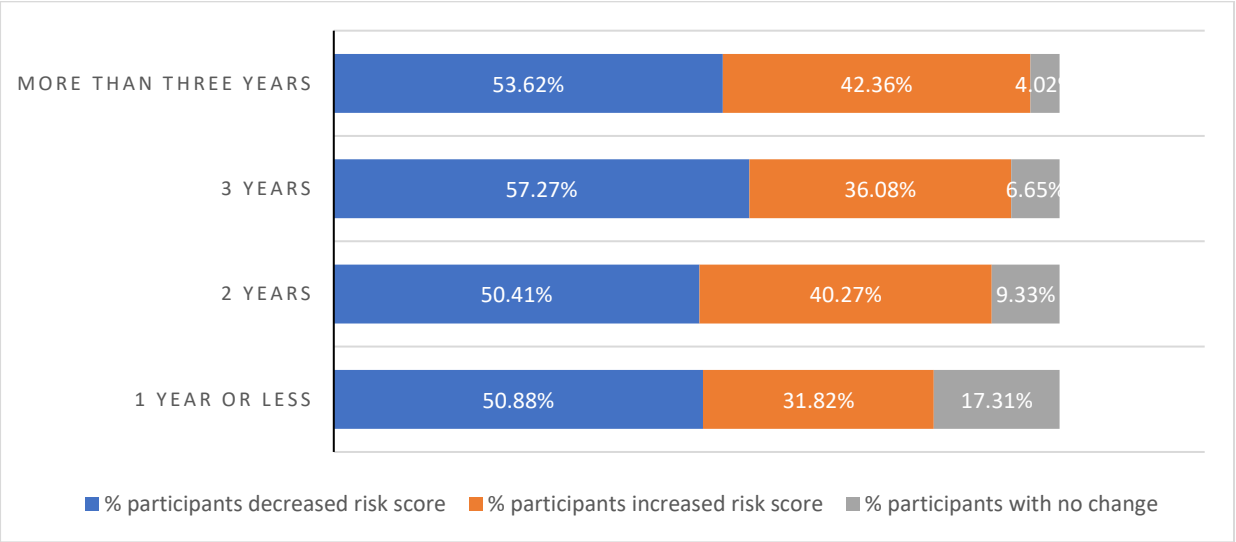
Figure 20: Changes in risk scores between T1 and T2



The total risk score across all eight risk areas can range from 0 to 42 for any individual, a total of 0 indicating absence of any risk in any area and a total of 42 indicating maximum risk in all eight areas. The mean risk score at first assessment was 16.1 and at the most recent assessment was 14.8, signifying a decrease in risk score of 1.3 points The range of individual changes in risk scores was from minus-29 to plus-29. For those whose risk score increased, the mean increase was small, rising from 21.3 to 21.5.

Almost half of the most recent assessments were within one year of the initial assessment and almost 80% were within two years. The extent of change varied somewhat by length of time between assessments(Figure 21).

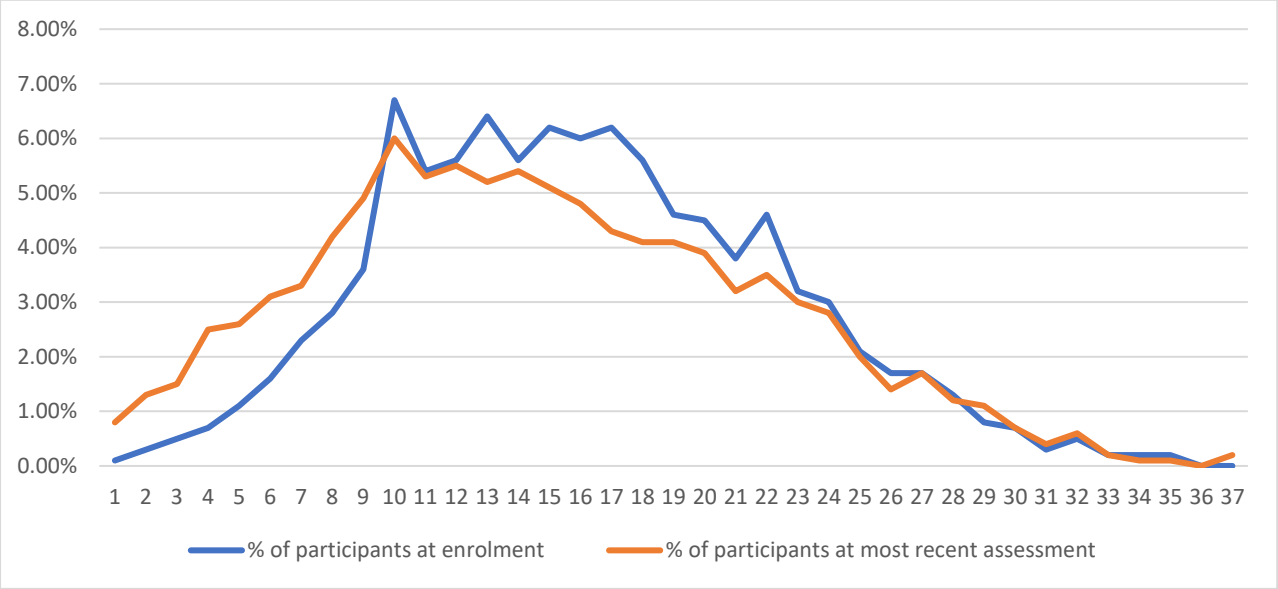
Figure 21: Changes in YLS risk scores by period between assessments



Findings from a comparison of YLS scores at entry to the project and 'at the most recent assessment' show that about half of respondents decrease their risk scores, about one-third increase their risk scores and there is no change for the remaining participants. Numerically, overall changes in risk scores are small.

Actual individual risk scores ranged from 1-37 (compared with the theoretical range of 0-42). In the lower risk range, percentages at enrolment were lower than at 'most recent' assessment, higher in the mid-range and broadly the same in the higher range, reflecting the lowering of risk overall (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Distribution of YLS risk scores at enrolment and most recent assessment



The YLS tool classifies the total risk level of those assessed as low, moderate, high and very high. At enrolment, about 10% of participants were identified as low risk and this increased to 22% at the most recent assessment. Two-thirds of participants (67%) were assessed as moderate risk at enrolment, and this decreased to 58% at the most recent assessment. While the same pattern holds for those identified as high risk on enrolment, the percentage change is lower, from 21% to 19%. No differences were identified in respect of the small number deemed to be at 'very high' risk (Table 23). This clearly reflects the identified lowering of risk overall, with an increase in the low-risk category and reductions in the moderate and high categories.

Table 23: Changes in risk categories

Risk category	At enrolment (T1)		At most recent assessment (T2)		Change (T2-T1)	
	N	%	n	%	n	% points
Low	444	10.3%	940	21.8%	496	11.6%
Moderate	2,896	67.0%	2,482	57.6%	-414	-9.4%
High	914	21.1%	814	18.9%	-100	-2.2%
Very high	69	1.6%	71	1.6%	2	0.1%
Total	4,323	100.0%	4,307	100.0%	-16	0.0%

The extent of change was primarily in a range of 1-10 points where a score of '1' indicates a change in one element and a score of '10' a change in 10 elements. On average, 44% of project participants showed a decrease in risk in this 1-10 range, compared with 50% that showed a decrease in risk of any size; 33% showed an increase in risk in this range compared with 36% showing an increase of any magnitude; very few showed increases or decreases greater than 20; and 14% showed no change (Table 24).

Table 24: Change in risk level (participant %)

Nature of change	Change range	% change
Decrease in risk	1-10	44.4%
	11-20	5.3%
	20+	0.6%
	Any decrease	50.3%
Increase in risk	1-10	33.0%
	11-20	2.4%
	20+	0.1%
	Any increase	35.5%
No change	0	14.2%
Total n = 4,629		100.0%

Increases or decreases in risk scores at an individual level are small with the majority between 1-10.

Changes in YLS scores according to area of risk

The YLS tool classifies the risk level for individual risk areas as low, moderate and high. Details for each area are presented later in this section. In summary, risk was lower at the most recent assessment than at enrolment for six of the eight categories of risk assessed. Changes in respect of education and employment were greatest, with the low-risk category increasing by 9.6 percentage points and the high-risk category decreasing by 14.9 percentage points. The categories where risk was higher at the most recent assessment were offending and substance abuse. The construct of the offending category, focusing on historic data, means that change could really only be negative, and there was a reduction of four percentage points at the low risk level, mostly accounted for by an increase at the moderate risk level. The substance abuse category was also anomalous, with a decrease of nine percentage points at the low-risk level and increases at both the moderate-risk and high-risk levels.

Table 25: Summary of changes in risk levels (percentage point changes)

	Low	Moderate	High	Change in risk level
Prior and current offences and dispositions	-4.0	3.2	0.8	Negative
Family circumstances/parenting	6.8	-4.2	-2.5	Positive
Education/employment	9.6	5.3	-14.9	Positive
Peer relations	3.8	-2.4	-1.5	Positive
Substance abuse	-8.7	5.7	3.0	Negative

Leisure/recreation	2.3	3.0	-5.3	Positive
Personality/behaviour	2.0	2.9	-4.9	Positive
Attitudes/orientation	3.6	-5.0	1.4	Positive

Findings from the analysis of changes in YLS risk scores support those of the survey results. Risk scores in respect of substance misuse increase. There are minor level increase in the risk scores for crime/ dispositions and limitations in the data regarding this area are explored in greater detail later in the chapter.

Differences between projects

There were substantial differences between projects as regards levels of change. To illustrate, over 70% of participants showed decreases in risk in 19 projects while the percentage showing decreases was 30% or less in another 16 projects. Percentages of participants whose risk decreased ranged from 0% to 90%. Increases in risk on the other hand were recorded in respect of over 70% of participants in just one project and in respect of 30% or less in 36 projects. The range in percentages of participants whose risk increased was 6% to 88% (Table 26).

Table 26: Distribution of projects by percentage showing change in risk level

% of participants showing decrease in risk	Number of projects (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative	
			n	%
10% and under	3	2.9%	3	2.9%
11%<20%	1	1.0%	4	3.8%
21%-30%	12	11.5%	16	15.4%
31%-40%	13	12.5%	29	27.9%
41%-50%	28	26.9%	57	54.8%
51%-60%	17	16.3%	74	71.2%
61%-70%	11	10.6%	85	81.7%
71% and over	19	18.3%	104	100.0%
Total	104	100.0%		
% of participants showing increase in risk	**Number of projects (n)**	**Percentage (%)**	**Cumulative**	
			n	**%**
10% and under	5	4.8%	5	4.8%
11%<20%	10	9.6%	15	14.4%
21%-30%	21	20.2%	36	34.6%
31%-40%	30	28.8%	66	63.5%
41%-50%	21	20.2%	87	83.7%
51%-60%	11	10.6%	98	94.2%
61%-70%	5	4.8%	103	99.0%
71% and over	1	1.0%	104	100.0%
Total	104	100.0%		

Findings from the analysis of changes in YLS risk scores show considerable variation between projects and this warrents additional exploration.

Changes in risk level varied somewhat according to ethnicity, type of referral, continuity of engagement, engagement status, and age. There was little difference as regards ethnicity, but more than half of White Irish participants recorded a decrease in risk level, while just under half of Travellers did so and almost exactly a half of participants of other ethnicities. Primary referrals showed greater decreases in risk than secondary referrals, reflecting in part at least their higher level of risk on enrolment on account of their previous offending. The mean average risk score for primary referrals was 16.9 at entry to the YDP compared with 14.8 for secondary referrals.

As might be expected, participants who remained in unbroken engagement with their projects fared better than those who did not. The greatest differences between groups occurred in relation to engagement status, with those who had a planned engagement recording significantly better outcomes than those who had an unplanned disengagement, which is hardly surprising. They also performed better than those who were still engaged. Age was also a factor, with the percentage showing lower risk rising progressively by age category, with two-thirds of the small number of young adults showing lower risk levels at most recent assessment. A similar progression applied in respect of increased risk, with 40% of the youngest category showing an increased risk level.

Table 27: Distribution of change in risk level by ethnicity, type of referral, continuity of engagement status or age

Category		Increase in risk	Decrease in risk	No change
Ethnicity	White Irish	33.0%	52.0%	15.0%
	Traveller	39.0%	46.9%	14.1%
	Other	36.4%	50.2%	13.4%
Referral type	Primary	33.7%	52.8%	13.5%
	Secondary	35.5%	47.7%	16.8%
Continuity of engagement	Continuous Yes	32.9%	52.5%	14.5%
	Continuous No	40.6%	44.0%	15.4%
Engagement status	Engaged	41.6%	44.6%	13.7%
	Planned disengagement	25.9%	60.3%	13.8%
	Unplanned disengagement	44.3%	37.6%	18.2%
Age	11 and under	40.2%	45.5%	14.4%
	12-14	39.4%	46.1%	14.5%
	15-17	30.2%	54.7%	15.1%
	18 and over	21.1%	66.0%	12.9%

Some variation was identified in changes in risk scores according to a range of demographic and project engagement variables.

Overview of findings from interviews, focus groups and site visits

The qualitative data from interviews and focus groups, including site visits, provided many insights into influences on changing risk levels and the change process. Interviewees (individually, in small numbers or in focus groups) elaborated on many of the risk factors explored in the surveys and YLS analysis. They also discussed more general issues relating to outcomes, including change due to

ageing and maturing, the need to have realistic expectations, and intermediate changes that can build a platform for achieving more substantive change.

The interviews showed that there is some agreement that the 'main long-term outcome is just to reduce criminal activity in young people'. There is also some agreement, however, that there are many other outcomes and some of these are referred to as 'soft outcomes' or 'scaffolding outcomes'.

Maturing process

It was highlighted that the time of adolescence is a period of transition and that some young people 'grow out' of the behaviours that get them into trouble. One YJW noted that 'offending definitely drops' as young people move through their teenage years and that 'if he comes out the other end of that, maybe 18, 19, 20 years, he matures and all anyway'. Another YJW commented that 'at the end of the day, behavioural change sometimes comes with age, time and maybe the interference from us, just holding them all until they get to the stage that they're ready to make change themselves' but noted that 'there's a lot of young people that can get lost in that period.'

The ageing factor was also highlighted by young people who spoke about having matured over the course of their time in the project while at the same time attributing change to the projects. In response to the question 'since you joined the project, do you think that your life has changed?', one young person replied 'Yeah. Maturity. Helped me to cop on … Because if I didn't get in here, like, I'd probably still be in trouble now' and another 'You know, just help your maturity. They show you, you don't need to be getting in trouble.'

Realistic expectations

Many stakeholders noted that the amount of time young people spend in the project is relatively short in the context of their daily lives and there is a need to be 'realistic about what can be achieved'. A YJW also drew attention to this saying that

> *'for every success there is a failure … For every young person who's gone away from whatever they are doing and they're out to get themselves into employment, there might be another young person out there working in the park [selling drugs] … the environmental factors, the external factors, the family, the community, the attraction of maybe selling and stuff like this. Sometimes you cannot combat that. And the most you can do is maybe offer some comfort to a young person. But once they've made up their mind and they stopped coming ... Yeah there's unfortunately nothing you can do sometimes.' (CS8, FG, YJWs)*

This was also highlighted by a JLO who said:

> *'I can't say that everyone I refer there is changed, the certain percentage that no matter what any of us do are going to.' (CS8, individual interview, JLO)*

And one mother noted that sometimes despite everything that the project does:

> *'Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, you know, sometimes works for some people and it doesn't work for everyone. So, I wouldn't fault them anyway whatsoever.' (CS3, FG, mother)*

There is also a recognition that the process of achieving good outcomes can be slow despite the best efforts of everyone involved. One YJW highlighted the importance of parents being aware that it can take time for the young person to make changes noting that:

> *'I think the parents, like, that see that it will be a slow process are the ones who benefit the most … Those who want you to fix them right there and then are the ones who get very disappointed.' (CS7, FG, YJWs)*

Scaffolding outcomes

There are a number of what are sometimes referred to as 'soft outcomes' that are often a necessary step in the young person's journey towards a more productive and fulfilling life. These are referred in this section as scaffolding outcomes since they build towards longer-term outcomes.

One YJW alluded to this in the following terms:

> '*You have your main outcomes like education. But all of that interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in between … sometimes the main outcomes are like a by-product and it's like we get there in the end … And everything that we're doing now is … the relationships and actually building up an idea around building their own empathy or their self-confidence around what they're doing … let's go to the gym for a little bit, let's look at, actually, how we communicate at the deli. So the little things have a knock-on effect, actually, when it when they're ready to actually engage in education in a meaningful way, they're actually on their own terms.' (7, FG, YJWs)*

There are a number of scaffolding outcomes that can develop independently of each other although they may be inter-linked. The process through which they develop is iterative and not every young person will achieve all of them. Key outcomes include engaging with the project, understanding boundaries and rules, gaining confidence, dealing with conflict, stress and anxiety, understanding different perspectives and having hope for the future (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Scaffolding outcomes

Getting connected

The non-mandatory nature of the referral to the projects means that there is a choice for the young person and their family about whether they wish to engage or not. In general, there is not any sanction if they choose not to attend, or if they choose not to engage. For some participants, success

is getting them through the door and engaging them in the project, being realistic about what the projects can be expected to achieve. One manager explained this saying:

This was also highlighted by a JLO saying 'definitely it's the small steps that … make a big difference to the young people' and referring to progress in engaging with 'a hard-to-reach group in the area, that this cohort of people that nobody could get near, and they are starting to break down the barriers … they are starting to engage them.'

Respecting boundaries

Several YJWs spoke about the lack of boundaries that some young people had and noted that in some projects a considerable amount of work went into setting boundaries and getting participants to a point where they understood what was acceptable and what was not. One manager said:

> *'huge pieces of work are going into boundaries. You know, when you come in and we have respect for people, you don't own the place, you don't you can't throw your weight around and get what you want.' (National level individual interview 7, manager)*

This was also highlighted by a manager noting that sometimes

> *'parents are hearing parenting messages for the first time, like hearing that actually, you know, young people do need boundaries … and rules because that's how your person feels safe and secure when they know that there's always a consistent response that helps the young person feel stable and safe.' (CS4, individual interview, manager)*

A YJW also spoke about the importance of adopting a participative approach to setting rules so that

> *'between themselves so they know what they, how they can behave. Yeah. They know what behaviour is acceptable within their group that they have devised for themselves.' (CS1, FG, YJWs)*

Other YJWs highlighted that because of the chaotic lives some young people live, successful outcome could be very limited, with one YJW saying that it could be 'having young people that will turn up on time or that you will have to knock the door'. One manager said:

> *'If he can't respect boundaries, he has no soft skills, he's never going to fit in education and an education place. He's never going to be able to go to a restaurant and deal with a cranky waiter. He's never going to be going to the workplace. And so, we can instil in them basic skills.' (National level individual interview 6, manager)*

Managing stress and anxiety

Several stakeholders identified high levels of anxiety in young people and dealing with this anxiety was highlighted as an outcome. One young person explained that when they were anxious, they were unable to talk to anyone about it but that as a result of coming to the project they were able to deal with it. This is highlighted in the quote below from one young person who said:

> *'I get anxiety. So I used to like never be able to talk about what happened to me in school and stuff and then I got panic attacks. But now I understand that it's just something that happened to me and it's natural and I'm able to talk to my friends about it. So if I do get really bad in class or something, I can turn to them. I can tell them that I need to like step out. And I told*

everyone at group what was happening to me and they like reassured me that it was okay and normal. And that happens to a lot of people.' (CS1, FG, participant)

This was also highlighted by a parent who said they could see a difference in their young person when they had been at the project noting that:

'I know by her mood and if she's sitting on something or she has a problem she's dealing with or whatever, she'll bring it up down [at the project]. And I can tell then when I pick her up … it's nearly like she's relieved, she's freer than when she comes … she kind of knows that this is somewhere that she can talk freely if she was having a dispute with someone or trouble in school or anything like that.' (CS1, individual interview, mother)

Improvements in organisational skills

The adult surveys enquired about the impact of the project participation on communication and organisational skills, but the survey of young people did not. Significant majorities of respondents across all groups also believe that the projects are successful in improving participants' organisational skills as evidenced for example by improvements in timekeeping and keeping appointments. Percentages considering the projects successful or very successful ranged from 86% for YJWs to 90% for managers. Comparatively fewer respondents considered the projects 'very successful' rather than 'successful' and those considering they were neither successful nor unsuccessful ranged from 7% to 11%.

Table 28: Impact of project participation on organisational skills

	Very unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Neither	Successful	Very successful	Total responses
YJWs	3.7%	0.9%	9.2%	60.6%	25.7%	**109**
JLOs	0.0%	2.1%	10.6%	72.3%	14.9%	**47**
Managers	2.4%	0.0%	7.1%	71.4%	19.0%	**42**
Project Committees	**0.0%**	**2.2%**	**8.7%**	**56.5%**	**32.6%**	**46**

Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses.

One manager said:

'So I suppose what I've learnt in my time is success, how to look at success very differently and to look at the much smaller things. So having young people that will turn up on time or like I said above that you will have to knock the door, but that's like, we're at that point.' (National level individual interview 4, manager)

Gaining confidence

A number of parents and young people spoke about the confidence they gained from coming to the project despite the relatively short period of time spent there. One mother said: 'I know. It's only about twice, three times a week or whatever like, but yeah, I think, I think it has definitely brought her out of herself and just gives her confidence'. Young people also spoke about their confidence 'having been boosted' and about being 'more confident to talk about my family situations now or like my friends' situations if we're fighting or something'. One young person said:

'It has made me more confident in myself and believe in myself on my future decisions. Yeah ... Talking through everything step by step and help me prepare for like my interview or things like that.' (CS1, individual interview, participant)

One parent noted that as her daughter had grown in confidence, she too had 'become more confident in being her parent'.

The five surveys in this evaluation also enquired about self-confidence**.** Perceived impacts as regards improving participant self-confidence were very high, with percentages considering the projects successful or very successful ranging from 93% by YJWs to 98% by Project Committee members and managers. Few if any respondents thought that the projects had no success under this heading. Young people themselves reported their confidence was better because of the project (61%) or that there was no difference (39%). Self-confidence of participants is not measured on their joining and leaving the projects, but anecdotal evidence is that it can be low for many participants and hinder their development.

Table 29: Impact of project participation on self-confidence

Survey	Very Unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Neither	Successful	Very successful	No.
YJWs	3.7%	0.9%	2.8%	48.6%	44.0%	**109**
JLOs	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	60.9%	34.8%	**46**
Managers	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	38.1%	59.5%	**42**
Project Committees	**0.0%**	**2.0%**	**0.0%**	**51.0%**	**46.9%**	**49**

Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses.

Understanding different perspectives and through that gaining empathy

A number of stakeholders highlighted that by talking things through, being listened to by others and being challenged, participants empathised more, developed better interpersonal skills and were better able to deal with multiple perspectives. One volunteer working with a group of young people said:

'I think they learn to negotiate here, to talk things out and to understand what's happening on the other side. You know, that they might have all these emotions, but there have to be emotions on the other side as well. And they learn to maybe explore or at least understand that there are emotions on the other side.' (CS2, FG, YJWs)

One YJW gave an example of a young person and his father he had been working with who had a very 'empty' relationship because of their strong views who 'used their tools and their mediation, you know, they just sat down, and they just sorted it themselves. So that like that's empowering for them'.

Another mother highlighted that by coming to the project, her daughter had developed a social conscience saying:

'I suppose it would give them a bit of a social conscience. Maybe that's, you know, because from listening to the other people and the groups problems and that, so they might have more

sympathy and empathy for other people and you know, that might then spill over into the real world and the bigger world and that that they just kind of can see other people's viewpoints of it.' (CS1, individual interview, mother)

Having hope for the future

Several young people highlighted that as a result of attending the project they were more optimistic about their future and about their intentions for their lives. At one group interview, one participant said he intended to 'get a job' while another said he would 'probably go to college and study engineering'. They both agreed that this 'wasn't something that I would have if I hadn't come here'.

Many young people highlighted that the project taught them that there were alternatives available to them and they would be supported to access them. The impact of this was highlighted by one young person who had been excluded from school. He said:

'Just being able to actually see that like basically my life isn't over, you know, that kind of way. Like that was the first thing like that popped into my head. I'm just thinking, that's it. Now I'm just going to be rock bottom. I'm going to do nothing. I'm going to end up nowhere in life, you know. And then I ended up coming … Got my qualification and then I went to Youthreach, finished that, got my second level three and a four.' (CS7, individual interview, participant)

Another young person also highlighted this saying:

'But they do make you realise that if you do get in trouble with the guards, you're not going to go really badly forever. You're not always going to be in trouble.' (CS2, FG, participant)

The surveys also enquired about impact of the projects on hope for the future. Like self-confidence, hopefulness of participants is not measured at project entry and exit, but again anecdotal evidence is that it can be low for many participants, with many presenting without much thought about the future or no great expectations for it. Significant majorities of YJWs, JLOs and Project Committee members, ranging from 84% to 87%, thought the projects were successful or very successful in increasing participant hopes for the future; the question was not asked of managers. A comparatively high percentage of JLOs (12%) considered the projects to have little or no impact, while 5% of YJWs felt they were unsuccessful or very unsuccessful. A majority of young people reported increases in their hopes for the future (71%) and happiness (70%).

Table 30: Impact of project participation on hope for the future

Survey	Very unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Neither	Successful	Very successful	Total responses
YJWs	3.7%	1.9	5.6%	45.4%	43.5%	**108**
JLOs	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	56.3%	31.3%	**48**
PCMs*	**0.0%**	**2.1%**	**2.1%**	**51.1%**	**44.7%**	**47**

Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses. Questions not asked of managers.* PCMs (Project Committee members)

Outcomes such as getting connected, respecting boundaries, managing stress and anxiety, gaining confidence, gaining empathy and having hope for the future are often referred to as 'soft outcomes'. Achieving these outcomes, however, can require extensive time and effort and the findings from this evaluation illustrate the ways in which these impact on life chances. For that reason, these outcomes are better understood as building blocks necessary to improve life chances and they are referred to here as 'scaffolding outcomes'.

Impact of YDPs on crime rates and crime seriousness

Qualitative data – crime rates and crime seriousness

A number of stakeholders noted that 'in the ideal world, you would like to see a reduction in crime' and 'reduced recidivism rates'. Some JLOs suggested that reductions in crimes as a direct consequence of young people attending the projects did occur and one JLO said:

> *'In terms of the actual outcomes to it, we can see specific cases where young people like go from being referred for a specific reason of criminality and see and that young person progresses. Yeah or also we can see like our PULSE stats in the annual report and stuff.' (CS8, FG YJYs)*

Another JLO suggested that the project was very successful in keeping young people out of trouble, noting that the number of JLO referrals had 'been dramatically cut since the Garda diversion project was set up … Youth crime is dropped I would say maybe 30-40%.' This JLO also noted that 'whatever the girls are doing here is working and repeat offending from these kids is very, very rare'.

A direct link between the projects and a reduction in crime in the area was also identified by a Garda Inspector who gave the following example:

> *'Halloween and [name of area], now different things. At night to keep the young people engaged, they come into the project and there is a serious reduction of anti-social incidents at that period.' (CS2, individual interview, AGA Inspector)*

Others were less sure about being able to show a direct relationship between project participation and crime reduction. One JLO noted that while the projects work and having good relationships are key, it is difficult to put changes in crime in the area down to the projects. This was also highlighted by a YJW who said:

> *'We take a holistic approach. We don't just go in there and look at the criminal behaviour. We look at all the aspects of their existence, their leisure activities, their peers, their family situation, substance abuse. There's, you know, a huge conflict in some families and you just wait and target young people and then that results in a reduction of criminal activity.' (CS3, individual interview, manager)*

YLS scores – offending

The first area of risk assessment in the YLS tool concerns 'prior and current offences/dispositions'. It comprises five sub-scales, namely three or more prior convictions, two or more failures to comply, prior probation, prior custody and three or more current convictions. The level of risk is categorised in the assessment as low (0), moderate (1-2) or high (3-5). The vast majority of participants were assessed on enrolment as having a low level of risk in this area – 96% if missing values are excluded. This is hardly surprising given the profile of those targeted by the projects – offenders included in the Garda Youth Diversion Programme (generally first-time offenders) and young people who are

seen as being at risk of offending. Most of the rest were in the moderate risk category with a handful at high risk (11 individuals).

The majority of participants remained at low level of risk in this area on the most recent assessment – 92% excluding missing values. Overall, there was a modest increase in the number of participants with higher risk levels between the first and most recent assessment (n = 178, 4%) and of these, 81% increased from low to moderate risk, mostly (66%) from level 1 to level 2. Risk assessment under this heading is a static measure based on past performance and improvement in the level of risk is not really possible – individuals cannot reduce the number of prior convictions, failures to comply or current convictions or eliminate instances of prior probation or custody. The direction of change can only be negative, with the possible exception of 'failures to comply'. The modest increase in level of risk (4%) has to be interpreted in this context and provides an indication that the projects are effective in keeping participants who engage with the projects out of trouble.

Table 31: Changes in risk levels relating to prior and current offences/dispositions

Risk category	At enrolment (T1)		At most recent assessment (T2)		Change (T2-T1)	
	n	%	N	%	n	% points
Low	4,227	95.5%	4,067	91.5%	-160	-4.0%
Moderate	187	4.2%	331	7.5%	144	3.2%
High	11	0.2%	45	1.0%	34	0.8%
Total	4,425	100.00%	4,443	100.00%		

Missing values T1: 204, T2: 186.

Survey data – offending

Significant majorities of all adult groups surveyed believe that the projects are successful or very successful in reducing crime. Project managers were most positive, with 96% expressing this view. The degree of success attributed by other groups was only slightly lower at 82%-90%. A quarter of YJWs felt that the projects were very successful. A very small minority felt that the projects were unsuccessful or very unsuccessful. The survey of young people asked about change in 'criminal or antisocial behaviour'. A majority (61%) said that they 'do this less' while 22% reported no change and 15% said that they were 'not doing this before coming to the project'. Caution is required in interpreting these results since the sample may over-represent lower-risk participants (Table 32). A related question asked about change in respect of 'getting in trouble with your friends'. Over two-thirds (68%) said that 'it is better' and 30% reported no difference.

A similar picture emerges from the survey data as regards reducing the seriousness of crime, with large majorities expressing positive views and very small minorities expressing negative views. Managers were again the most positive group (93% considering the projects successful/very successful) with the other groups again closely aligned (79%-80%), a little less positive than their views as regards reducing crime rates.

Table 32: Impact of project participation on crime rates and seriousness of crime (adult surveys)

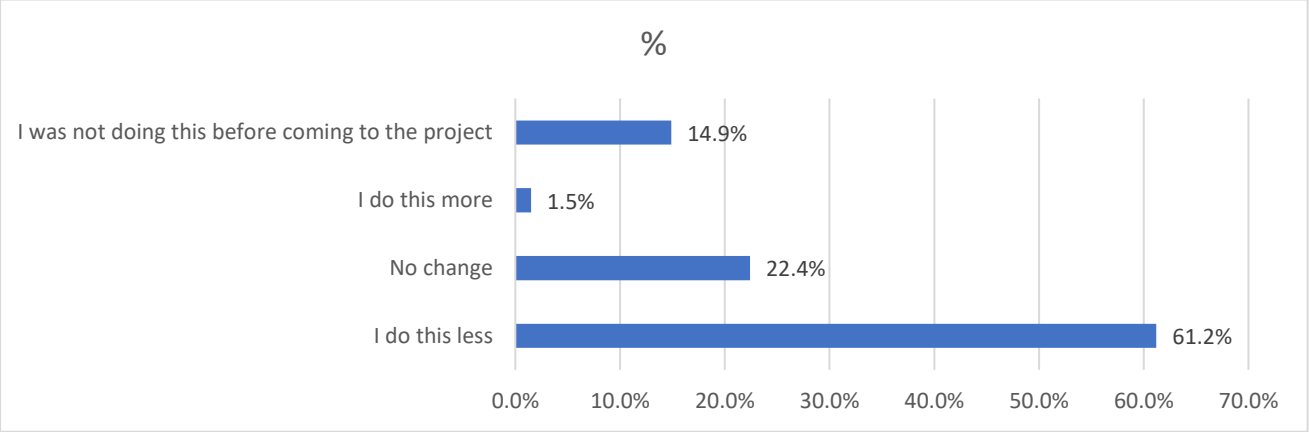
Survey	Very unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Neither	Successful	Very successful	N

Reducing crime rates						
YJWs	3.6%	1.8%	12.7%	56.4%	25.5%	**110**
JLOs	0.0%	0.0%	14.6%	66.7%	18.8%	**48**
Managers	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	75.0%	20.5%	**44**
Project Committees	0.0%	2.1%	8.3%	75.0%	14.6%	**48**
Reducing crime seriousness						
YJWs	2.8%	1.8%	16.5%	51.4%	27.5%	**109**
JLOs	0.0%	0.0%	20.8%	64.6%	14.6%	**48**
Managers	2.3%	0.0%	4.7%	76.7%	16.3%	**43**
Project Committees	**0.0%**	**2.0%**	**18.4%**	**65.3%**	**14.3%**	**49**

Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses.

Similar type findings are also reported by young people where about 60% (61.2%) indicated they were engaging in criminal or antisocial behaviour less since coming to the YDP. Of note, about one in six respondents indicated they were not engaged in this prior to coming to the project.

Figure 24: Participants' self-reported changes in criminal or antisocial behaviour



Findings arising from interview and survey data with multiple stakeholders identify positive impacts on reducing the levels and seriousness of crime among participants. in this evaluation, changes in YLS risk scores are not considered a valid measure of progress as regards crime.

Impact of YDPs on family circumstances and parenting

Qualitative data – family circumstances and parenting

The family circumstances for some young people are very challenging and the relationships between YJWs and participants may be the only non-conflictual adult relationships they experience. As highlighted earlier, even in projects where there is not a designated family support worker, the YJW may be available to provide support and guidance for parents too. In those situations, it was highlighted that parents can develop better parenting skills themselves, thus helping the overall situation for young people.

One manager noted:

> *'I think the family work is important though too, because sometimes it's the parents that will go and reach out for the support, even when the other person doesn't or the person has disengaged. But the parents are still connected and that keeps that support mechanism between the parent and the child rather than between the projects. And because sometimes that's what's required.' (CS2, FG, manager)*

One young person highlighted that they were better able to manage their home environment noting that:

> *'I think how I handle, like, arguments with my mom, because I used to always have fights with my mom at home, 24 seven ... I just felt angry, like it was really bad. But now me and my mom get along like my best friends. And so I'm like, let out on my anger by like talking to people here. And I got their opinions on it, too. And now I'm able, like, if I do get angry … I just like step out of the room where it's like I don't go to mental like I used to. So yeah.' (CS1, FG, participants)*

Another young person said that his involvement in the project made

> *'a really big difference at home, especially how I treat my ma now and definitely my younger two sisters … A lot of the teachers in the school have said to me how much I've improved. And they're, everybody's, constantly telling me how proud they are of me, even my nanny.' (CS3, FG, participants)*

YLS data – family circumstances

Risk in relation to family circumstances and parenting is assessed in the projects under six headings: inadequate supervision, difficulty in controlling behaviour, inappropriate discipline, inconsistent parenting, poor father-youth relations and poor mother-youth relations. A risk score of 0-2 is considered low risk, a score of 3-4 moderate risk and a score of 5-6 high risk. Family circumstances and parenting show higher levels of risk than for prior offending. Over half of participants were at moderate or high levels of risk under this heading on enrolment and just under half at the most recent assessment.

Overall, there was a reduction in the level of risk as regards family circumstances and parenting between time of enrolment and the most recent assessment. The findings show that 47% of participants had a low level of risk when assessed at enrolment and this increased to 53% at the most recent assessment. There were corresponding decreases in the proportions of participants with moderate risk (40% to 36%) and with high risk (13% to 11%), see Table 33. Percentages in each of the sub-elements in the low-risk category increased and decreased in each of the sub-elements in the moderate and high-risk categories.

Table 33: Changes in risk levels relating to family circumstances and parenting

Risk category	At enrolment (T1)		At most recent assessment (T2)		Change (T2-T1)	
	n	%	n	%	n	% points
Low	2,163	46.7%	2475	53.5%	312	6.8%
Moderate	1,844	39.8%	1648	35.6%	-196	-4.2%
High	621	13.4%	504	10.9%	-117	-2.5%

Total	4,628	100.0%	4627	100.0%		

Survey data – family

Adult survey respondents were positive as regards the impact of projects on family circumstances and parenting, with the percentages judging the projects successful or very successful ranging from 79% for JLOs to 89% for Project Committee members, and only a handful judging them to be unsuccessful or very unsuccessful. JLOs were more cautious in their views than others, with only 19% choosing the 'very successful' option and 17% opting for 'neither successful nor unsuccessful'. The perceived impact is encouraging given that in some cases family circumstances may not lend themselves to change due to factors such as family breakdown and parental substance abuse and criminality. Several respondents referred to the challenges involved in addressing familial risks when the core work is with the young person and anticipated a more robust response through the planned expansion of family support. According to the survey of young people, 58% felt that they were getting on better with their family because of the project while the remainder (42%) felt there was no difference.

Table 34: Impact of project participation on family circumstances/parenting

Survey Respondents	Very unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Neither	Successful	Very successful	Total responses
YJWs	2.8%	0.9%	10.1%	53.2%	33.3%	**109**
JLOs	2.1%	2.1%	17.0%	59.6%	19.1%	**47**
Managers	2.4%	0.0%	9.5%	64.3%	23.8%	**42**
Project Committees	**0.0%**	**2.1%**	**8.5%**	**63.8%**	**25.5%**	**47**

Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses.

Overall, positive outcomes in respect of family circumstances/parenting were identified and these findings are reflected in the interviews carried out, findings from surveys and the YLS data analysis.

Impact of YDP on Education/Employment

Qualitative data – education/employment

It was highlighted that the needs of young people differ and, for some, enabling them to remain in school and complete their Leaving Certificate is the focus, while for others they would make arrangements for them to 'do the Safe Pass'. Several stakeholders identified positive educational and employment outcomes among young people and several examples were given of young people remaining in school despite inclinations to leave. Young people themselves gave examples of better educational outcomes with one young person who had been suspended in their first year of school noting that because of the project he was in 'third year now and I am doing really, really well; that's been one of the big changes'.

One young person who had left their project said:

> *'I wouldn't have stayed in education and that if it wasn't for this place. I wouldn't be a gentleman if it wasn't for them … They were motivating me to go work and, you know, not get the dole and just sit around and do something. So that helped a lot, really … be inspired to work instead of just sitting at home and doing nothing.' (CS5, FG, participant)*

The diversity of educational and employment outcomes was highlighted by one YJW who said:

> *'All different. Yeah. So like some of them will just want employment … we've had a girl leave and move on from the project, get a job down town in [name of department store] you know, doing really well for herself.' (CS2, individual interview, member of AGA)*

Being able to show potential employers that they had relevant experience was highlighted as important and the YJWs were able to refer young people to the 'Work to Learn' programme in a small number of areas which meant they were able to 'do things with building … just doing bits of everything, tiling, carpentry, block laying' while another young person was 'working in a garage down the road'.

Irrespective of the particular needs of the individual young person, it is clear that projects facilitate and enable young people to achieve some form of recognised qualification, including school-based qualifications such as Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate, QQI qualifications (such as Safe Pass), skills-based qualifications (such as driving theory tests), Youthreach and apprenticeships.

One YJW highlighted that a number of the young people avoided ending up in the criminal justice system because their educational or employment expectations changed by coming to the project. This YJW said:

> *'… a lot of young people have very low expectations. Yeah. 15 years ago … They didn't even feel that college was something that they could achieve. Yeah. So work and college was something that now they are doing it and I have young people coming back to me after ten, 15 years and say, I'm doing this now. Did you think I would? Right. But you remember when I was crazy?' (CS3, Individual interview, YJW)*

Skills-based qualifications such as the safe pass and the driver theory test are also a prerequisite for getting a job in some industries such as retail or construction. One JLO said:

> *'But I do think our biggest things is if they can get some kind of like make them employable. So whether that be doing your driving theory tests, which is for them to take is massive and they're at the moment those kids doing the bikes that I just mentioned like they all learn from a mechanic how to service a bike or how to do it. So maybe that might just get them in somewhere.' (CS2, individual interview, JLO)*

As highlighted earlier, several young people and YJWs spoke about the help provided in preparing CVs and in getting young people ready to look for jobs. One young person commented that 'when they showed us how to work and how to do CVs and all that, makes it ten times easier for when you want to go do it … and it really helped me out with that because I struggled. I didn't know how to even write a CV properly.' Another reflected that 'It's just for the things that you wouldn't think of putting on a CV, that wouldn't think are important for us and really just pointed out that I just had a job … Yeah. Like telling you that you've accomplished or something like a first aid course. Yeah, it taught me to put that down, and I never thought about it. Yeah.'

YLS data – education/employment

Risk levels relating to education and employment are assessed in the YLS under seven headings: disruptive classroom behaviour, disruptive behaviour on school property, low achievement,

problems with peers, problems with teachers, truancy, and unemployed/not seeking employment. The risk levels for education and employment range from 0-7 and within this zero is categorised low risk, 1-3 is considered moderate risk and 4-7 is considered as high risk. Education and employment represent high levels of risk for participants, with only one in ten considered low risk at enrolment and a substantial number considered high risk (42%).

Overall, there was a reduction in risk levels relating to education and employment. The findings show that 9.6% of participants were identified as having low risk in the area of education and employment at time of enrolment and this proportion doubled to 19.2% by the most recent assessment. The proportion assessed as having moderate risk also increased from 48.8% to 54.1%. There was a corresponding considerable decrease in the proportion of participants assessed as being at high risk, from 41.7% to 26.7% (Table 35). Movements within categories reflected these changes with one exception: within the moderate risk category (levels 1-3), the proportion at levels 1 and 2 increased while those at level 3 decreased, marking a further decrease in overall risk.

Table 35: Changes in risk levels relating to education and employment

Risk category	At enrolment (T1)		At most recent assessment (T2)		Change (T2-T1)	
	nN	%	n	%	n	% points
Low	443	9.6%	887	19.2	444	9.6%
Moderate	2,258	48.8%	2,504	54.2%	246	5.3%
High	1928	41.7%	1238	26.8%	-690	-14.9%
Total	4,629	100.0%	4,629	100.0%		

Survey data – education/employment

Impact on education and employment was perceived to be high. Percentages saying projects were successful or very successful ranged from 86% for JLOs to 93% for managers. The views of YJWs were very positive, with 92% saying they were successful and more opting for 'very successful' than 'successful'. This probably reflects the consistent and considerable efforts made by the project workers to reconnect participants with education, employment or training. According to the survey of young people, 46% felt that taking part in school or work was better because of the project, with 47% reporting no difference and 7% reporting a deterioration.

Table 36: Impact of project participation on education/employment

Survey respondents	Very unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Neither	Successful	Very successful	Total responses
YJWs	3.7%	1.8%	1.8%	44.0%	48.6%	**109**
JLOs	2.1%	0.0%	8.3%	56.3%	33.3%	**48**
Managers	2.3%	0.0%	4.7%	48.8%	44.2%	**43**
Project Committees	**0.0%**	**2.1%**	**2.1%**	**58.3%**	**37.5%**	**48**

Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses.

Overall, very positive outcomes in respect of education and employment were identified and these findings are reflected in interviews, surveys and YLS data.

Impact of YDPs on peer relations

Qualitative data – peer relations

In terms of achieving project outcomes, one YJW highlighted that 'If I was setting the outcome, it wouldn't be "Young person to have positive peers and not have negative peers". I'd be looking at my outcome as like a young person to attend to a drop in space where I know there's positive peers in that space.'

Changing friends was highlighted as being very difficult and one young person explained that 'since the robbing thing, my ma made me stop being friends with her so there was a big group of us and then all the people went to her side and left me on my own.'

Being able to continue with the same friend group while walking away from trouble was identified by one parent who said that her daughter 'knows that they're going to get into trouble and stuff. And she's learned. That she has to be clever about it'. This difficulty was echoed by a manager who believed from experience that 'you can't stop people hanging around with who they want to hang around with.' But, he added 'you can give them the confidence to know that certain things that they might think, like if they are in a situation where they can [say], 'look, I'm uncomfortable about doing a bit of trespassing or a bit of graffiti' ... We give them the tools to either stand up or if they don't feel confident enough to stand up against it, to walk away.'

A number of young people highlighted that they had 'gotten closer with the friends that are good for me not getting into trouble anymore', while a mother highlighted that although her son continued to see some of his peers, it was less often and it was not resulting in him getting into trouble.

This was also highlighted by another young person who noted that their 'mentality' about their friends had changed since coming to the project. This young person said: 'Look, if that person is doing some [criminal activity], don't follow them. There's no point in that. Let them do it. No point you get dragged down because your friends are just at it.'

The youth diversion projects provide opportunities for young people to develop new friendships as well as build and develop common understandings with their peers who also attend the project. Several young people spoke about 'gaining new friends' in the project and through activities they were involved in through the project. One young person said:

> *'People coming in there and stuff, like we'd be in there and then there's, you know, people from different groups and stuff ... We go into town to the [name of activity] and there's different groups in there. So you're always meeting new people. Yeah. Yeah.' (CS5, FG, participants)*

It is not always possible for young people to disconnect from the influence and impact of their peer group as highlighted by one mother. Her young person had been attending the project and doing well prior to COVID but had stopped as a result of the pandemic and 'got into a bad crowd that was slagging him basically so it wasn't cool to come in here.'

YLS data – peer relations

Risk levels relating to peer relations are assessed under four headings: some delinquent acquaintances, some delinquent friends, no/few positive acquaintances, and no/few positive friends. The risk levels range from 0-4, with 0-1 categorised as low risk, 2-3 as moderate risk and 4 as high risk. Peer relations represent high levels of risk for participants, with just under one in ten considered as low risk at enrolment and more considered as high risk than moderate.

The analysis of changes between T1 and T2 shows a modest improvement in risk levels. There was an increase in those assessed as having low risk (9% rising to 13%) and very slight decreases in those assessed as moderate (from 43% to 40%) and high (from 48% to 46), see Table 37. The direction of change was the same for each level of risk as for the category within which it falls.

Table 37: Changes in risk levels relating to peer relations

Risk category	At enrolment (T1)		At most recent assessment (T2)		Change (T2-T1)	
	n	%	n	%	n	% points
Low	427	9.2%	605	13.1%	178	3.8%
Moderate	1,981	42.8%	1,872	40.4%	-109	-2.4%
High	2,220	48.0%	2,151	46.5%	-69	-1.5%
Total	4,628	100.0%	4,628	100.0%		

Overall, positive outcomes in respect of peer relations were identified. These findings are reflected in interviews and YLS data.

Impact of YDP on substance abuse

Qualitative data – substance abuse

As highlighted at the outset, substance misuse is both widespread and normalised in society at large and young people coming into the projects are exposed, sometimes through their families and communities, to high levels of drug and alcohol use and their consequences. Aspirations by projects to reduce drug use are low and it was highlighted that 'it is hard for us to get direct outcomes' in the substance misuse and that 'soft outcomes' may be more feasible.

Two main approaches to achieving outcomes in managing substance misuse were identified and these were harm reduction and referral for a higher level of support.

Harm reduction can form a focus for YJWs and one individual noted that 'we couldn't combat their usage. So, we just needed to look at risk with them and see why they were doing it … We are looking at making sure they are safe when they are doing it.'

This approach was also adopted by another worker who recognised that 'they're not going to stop their drug taking' and spoke about giving young people opportunities to make small changes, suggesting to them for example that they 'don't smoke a joint before you go to school' observing that by reducing their use a little bit, things might be 'a little bit better in school'.

This was also identified in terms of alcohol misuse by another YJW who said:

'People will be drinking … let's get harm reduction piece in ... our outcome may not be to change the behaviour but somewhat reducing the risk.' (CS8, FG, YJWs)

A range of services were identified in respect of referral around young people with substance misuse problems and a number of interviewees noted that they refer young people for additional support 'to appropriate sources' in those situations. In one project, a 'drugs worker' was co-located in the building with the project and they 'would do work together, education and awareness …' and using 'some of the summer projects to get to know the young people' which 'made for an easy transition for people if they needed support about alcohol or drugs.'

Various levels of services were identified ranging from where a JLO can refer directly to a service for young people who have alcohol or drug misuse problems and they 'go down and speak to them about' their substance misuse problems and 'they try to wean them off'. Other services identified included residential services and counselling with the key focus on ensuring that

'each person that comes through is seen as an individual and they would have an individual care plan. So one person might be residential. Another person might just need to work within the community. Well, you know, so everyone is different.' (CS1, Individual interview, JLO)

There is significant diversity in the availability of services for young people in terms of substance misuse and one manager said:

'... in the urban areas where there's lots of services, it's really easy for a YDP to recognise they're not the experts in substance misuse … But there are the YDPs in more rural areas where they are literally the only service and you know that they're the one stop shop, there is nothing else.' (CS4, individual interview, manager)

While it was suggested that representatives from other organisations 'are slow to get involved' and 'just don't want to know' when 'you say Garda diversion or drug projects', a number of projects highlighted that they included membership from drug and alcohol services on their Project Committees and this was a mechanism through which connections could be made for the benefit of young people attending the project. Where substance misuse was identified as a problem in the community, it was noted that attempts were made to try and include a representative on the committee although it was highlighted that this could take time. One manager noted they had 'close ties' with a youth drug service while in another project it was highlighted that the engagement between the project and drug service which 'you would have expected it to happen from the very beginning' was only now 'beginning to happen'.

Some personnel highlighted that their relationships were not as close with substance misuse services as they would like and that 'COVID put a stop to us building that relationship'. While some consideration was being given in one project to having a drug worker to operate within the project itself, it was noted that this approach needed a deeper consideration in terms of 'productivity' and 'in the best use of everyone's time'.

YLS data – substance abuse

Risk levels relating to substance abuse are assessed under five headings: occasional drug use, chronic drug use, chronic alcohol use, substance abuse interferes with life, and substance abuse

linked to offence(s). The risk levels range from 0-5, with 0 categorised as low risk, 1-2 as moderate risk and 3-5 as high risk. Substance abuse represents high levels of risk for participants, with just under one in ten considered as low risk at enrolment and more considered as high risk than moderate.

The findings in respect of substance abuse show increases in moderate and high levels of risk and decreases in low levels of risk and thus are in contrast to all other areas of risk apart from prior and current offences and dispositions. At enrolment, 59% of participants were assessed as being at low risk and this was nine percentage points lower at the most recent assessment. The increases in the moderate and high levels of risk were 6 and 3 percentage points respectively, with increases between sub-scales ranging from 0.5 percentage points for risk level 5 to 3.6 for risk level 1 (Table 38).

A number of possible explanations for the increase in assessed risk levels can be offered, including that the projects have little impact on substance abuse which worsens due to prevailing influences, the projects cause a deterioration due to association with substance abusing participants, or the projects have a beneficial impact in terms of preventing a worse deterioration.

Table 38: Changes in risk levels relating to substance abuse

Risk category	At enrolment (T1)		At most recent assessment (T2)		Change (T2-T1)	
	n	%	n	%	n	% points
Low	2,733	59.0%	2,331	50.4%	-402	-8.7%
Moderate	1,271	27.5%	1,534	33.1%	263	5.7%
High	625	13.5%	764	16.5%	139	3.0%
Total	4,629	100.0%	4,629	100.0%		

Survey data – substance abuse

The perceived impact on substance abuse was more muted than for crime levels and seriousness of crime, but nevertheless majorities were of the view the projects were successful or very successful, ranging from 60% for JLOs to 70% for managers, and few considered them unsuccessful or very unsuccessful (ranging from 0%-8%). It is notable however that far fewer considered the projects very successful (ranging from 4%-7%) and substantial numbers thought the projects had little or no impact (ranging from 30%-34%). Managers were most optimistic and JLOs least optimistic.

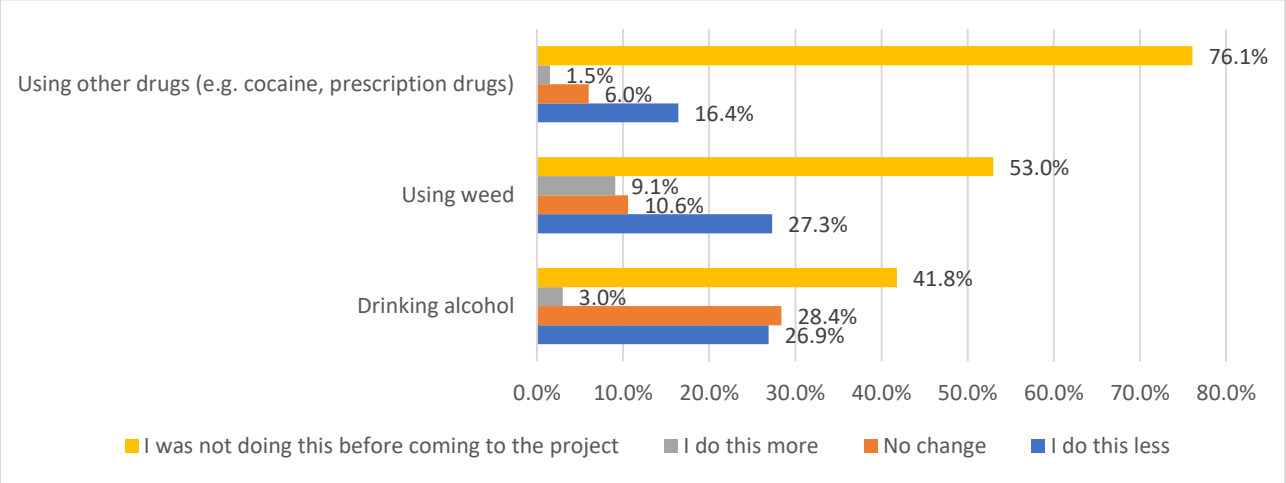
Table 39: Impact of project participation on substance abuse

Survey respondents	Very unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Neither	Successful	Very successful	Total responses
YJWs	2.8%	2.8%	33.3%	54.6%	6.5%	**108**
JLOs	0.0%	8.0%	32.0%	56.0%	4.0%	**50**
Managers	0.0%	0.0%	29.5%	65.9%	4.5%	**44**
Project Committees	**0.0%**	**2.3%**	**34.1%**	**56.8%**	**6.8%**	**44**

Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses.

The survey of young people showed reductions in levels of drinking alcohol, smoking weed and using other drugs because of involvement in the project. Over a quarter of all respondents (27%) reported lower alcohol consumption with a slightly higher proportion (28%) reporting no change and a small number reporting increased use (3%), while 42% said that they were not drinking alcohol prior to joining the project anyway. A similar percentage (27%) reported reduced use of weed, 11% no change and 9% increased use, with 53% not using weed prior to coming to the project. Over three-quarters of respondents said that they were not using other drugs prior to project participation while 22% reported reduced use or no change and 1% reported increased use. If those not involved in these behaviours prior to joining the project are excluded, the reductions are significant – 46% for alcohol use, 58% for using weed and 69% for using other drugs.

Figure 25: Participant self-reported changes in substance abuse



Overall, the findings arising from an analysis of interviews and survey data show that while a majority of stakeholders identify positive outcomes arising from the project in respect of substance abuse, these responses are more subdued compared with other areas. Findings from the YLS assessments identified an increase in risk scores for participants in respect of substance abuse.

Impact of YDP on leisure and recreation

Qualitative data – leisure and recreation

A core focus for the youth diversion projects is on providing young people with an alternative to 'hanging around' and on offering opportunities to engage in different types of activities either within the project, or by being connected with other organisations. Young people highlighted the links between how, and with whom, they spend their time as directly linked to their futures.

One mother identified a change in how one young person spent their time as a result of coming to the project saying that he was now going to training in a gym twice weekly. She noted that this kept him busy and away from 'the wrong people' where he might be getting into trouble. Other young people spoke about returning to activities in which they had been involved before getting into trouble, (e.g. boxing clubs, football, soccer) while others spoke about having developed a new hobby in an area where their interest had been sparked by the project (e.g. gardening, woodwork, beauty care, cooking).

In general, the focus on leisure and recreational activities was on the mechanisms through which the projects stimulated an interest in a particular area, facilitated attendance at the activity or on acknowledging that their busyness meant that they were no longer hanging around and getting into trouble.

YLS data – leisure and recreation

Risk levels relating to leisure and recreation are assessed in the projects under just three headings: limited organised activities, could make better use of time, and no personal interests. The risk levels range from 0-3, with 0 categorised as low risk, 1 as moderate risk and 2-3 as high risk. Leisure and recreation represent high levels of risk for participants, with just under one in ten considered as low risk at enrolment and just over half considered as high risk. The overall level of risk fell between enrolment and most recent assessment, with a decrease of five percentage points in the high-risk category and increases in the low and moderate categories of 2 and 3 percentage points respectively (Table 40). Within the high-risk category, the decrease in risk was primarily at the highest level – 3.

Table 40: Changes in risk levels relating to leisure and recreation

Risk category	At enrolment (T1)		At most recent assessment (T2)		Change T2-T1	
	n	%	n	%	n	% points
Low	423	9.1%	531	11.5%	108	2.3%
Moderate	1,820	39.4%	1,958	42.3%	138	3.0%
High	2,381	51.5%	2,135	46.2%	-246	-5.3%
Total	4,624	100.0%	4,624	100.0%		

Survey data – leisure and recreation

The perceived impact on increasing leisure and recreational opportunities was very high, as might be expected given that the projects provide opportunities directly as well as providing access to other sources of activity. Project Committee members were most positive, with 96% considering the projects to be successful or very successful, closely followed by YJWs (89%) and JLOs (84%). The views of managers were not sought on this aspect of project impact. It is a little surprising that 6% of YJWs felt that the projects were unsuccessful or very unsuccessful in increasing opportunities, unless they perhaps interpreted this question as involvement in activities outside the project (Table 41). The survey of young people showed a majority (57%) reporting an improvement in their situation as regards participation in activities such as sports and dance, with the remainder (43%) indicating no difference as a result of coming to the project.

Table 41: Impact of project participation on leisure/recreational opportunities

Survey	Very unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Neither	Successful	Very successful	Total responses
YJWs	4.6%	1.9%	4.6%	36.1%	52.8%	**108**
JLOs	0.0%	2.0%	10.2%	63.3%	24.5%	**49**
Project Committees	**0.0%**	**2.0%**	**2.0%**	**46.9%**	**49.0%**	**49**

Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses. Question not asked of managers.

Overall, the findings arising from an analysis of interviews, surveys and YLS data show that the YDPs have a positive impact on leisure/ ecreational opportunities.

Impact of YDP on personality/behaviour

Qualitative data – personality/behaviour

Many stakeholders highlighted changes in behaviour among the young people who attend and this ranged from getting more settled to not getting into trouble as much. One mother said that as a result of coming to the project 'the lads' behaviour kind of changed …They got more like more settled in and more settled down and stuff like that ... They were wild at the start … I have one, you know, there is like he's a bit of a trouble riser … He's like, he's come a long way.'

One young person in response to a question of whether 'you noticed any kind of changes in yourself?' responded:

> *'Yeah, yeah. I don't mess as much …. sometimes like when I was a bit younger, sometimes could have been with guards, sometimes could have been with parents, you know, and since I've been coming here I have been keeping out of trouble.' (CS2, FG, participant)*

Another young person explained that he had been suspended from school for two days following an incident with a teacher who had 'tried to take my phone'. He went on to say:

> *'And, well, since then, I haven't got suspended once after coming here ... They help you understand things from other people's perspective. Yeah. Like, one of the things said was, it's a rule not to have the phone in the school, and it's their job to follow the rule. And you just have to respect the knowledge that they are just doing their job … And from then on, no … once they asked for something, I'd give them a phone or whatever they asked me to do.' (CS3, FG, participant)*

Several young people identified not getting angry as much and of being able to manage their anger better when it did happen (e.g. 'If I ever get angry with them, from what I've learned, I know how to resolve it; I used to follow my emotions but now I talk about it and get over it'). One young person explained:

> *'Yeah, it was in school and at home I was getting in trouble. I had really bad anger issues and I wasn't focusing on school and I went from getting a distinction in skills all the way down to failing some classes. Right. And then recently there I got an award in school and for the whole year and every single class, I got a higher merit. So … since I started coming here … my temper is down, but my grades are up.' (CS3, FG, participant)*

A mother highlighted that her daughter, as a result of being able 'to thrash things through at the project', had developed in a very positive way saying:

> '*She's much calmer … because she was so frustrated it was coming off as confrontational at school and maybe even aggressive … But then when she was down here and learnt a bit more about communicating properly and self-esteem and things like that, that changed her behaviour in school which had the knock-on effects.' (CS1, individual interview, mother)*

YLS data – personality/behaviour

Risk levels relating to personality and behaviour are assessed under seven headings: inflated self-esteem, physically aggressive, tantrums, short attention span, poor frustration tolerance, inadequate guilt feelings, and verbally aggressive or impudent. The risk levels range from 0-7, with 0 categorised as low risk, 1-4 as moderate risk and 5-7 as high risk. Personality and behaviour represent significant levels of risk for participants, with just over 9% considered as low risk (i.e. no risk), more than two-thirds at moderate level (68%) and 22% assessed as high risk.

The overall level of risk fell between enrolment and most recent assessment, with changes very similar to those for leisure and recreation: a decrease of five percentage points in the high-risk category and increases in the low and moderate categories of 2 and 3 percentage points respectively (Table 42). The pattern of change within the moderate category showed a decrease in risk at levels 1 and 2, offsetting an increase at levels 3 and 4.

Table 42: Changes in risk levels relating to personality and behaviour

Risk category	At enrolment (T1)		At most recent assessment (T2)		Change (T2-T1)	
	n	%	n	%	n	% points
Low	429	9.3%	520	11.2%	91	2.0%
Moderate	3,164	68.4%	3,299	71.3%	135	2.9%
High	1,032	22.3%	806	17.4%	-226	-4.9%
Total	4,625	100.0%	4,625	100.0%		

Survey data – personality/behaviour

The perceived impact of the projects on increasing positive behaviours was higher than for all other variables, with percentages saying projects were successful or very successful ranging from 94% for Project Committee members to 98% for JLOs. Comparatively more JLOs rated the projects 'successful' rather than 'highly successful'. The survey of young people found that 71% saw an improvement in the way they think about or behave towards others, while 29% saw no difference. A related finding, as reported above, was that 68% of respondents felt their situation was better as regards 'getting in trouble' with their friends.

Table 43: Impact of project participation on personality and behaviour

Survey	Very unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Neither	Successful	Very successful	Total responses
YJWs	3.7%	0.9%	0.9%	49.5%	45.0%	**109**
JLOs	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	77.6%	20.4%	**49**
Managers	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%	52.3%	45.5%	**44**
Project Committees	**0.0%**	**2.0%**	**4.0%**	**54.0%**	**40.0%**	**50**

Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses.

Overall, the findings arising from an analysis of interviews, surveys and YLS data show that the YDPs have a positive impact on personality/behaviour opportunities.

Impact of YDP on attitudes/orientation

Qualitative data – attitudes/orientation

Changing attitudes was identified as a focus within the projects and examples given included an issue changing the attitude of young people, particularly boys in response to problems with the attitude 'to consent and attitude towards women'. Several comments were made about changes in attitudes that had taken place over time.

One of the big changes in attitudes relates to the way in which young people perceive the guards and changes in this area were identified in a number of projects. In one project, a community guard reported that the YJWs 'do big work' with the young people in inviting the guards over. This guard noted: 'So we're now going because we've been invited. So … we all have to be respectful. We play pool … So that's the outcome that I like with this.' A JLO also identified a change for the better with young people explaining 'I've had cases where the kids have come here, and then when I called back down to the house, you see the difference, because especially with the football'.

A young male in a group interview when asked 'would your attitude have changed towards the guards?' responded:

> *'Whatever that lady's name [the community guard] is you see her up there all the time. Yeah. Really up there all the time. So I think I know that that ... They're not as people make them out to be. They're definitely like normal people. Sometimes they come in here and play pool and talk, you know ... you respect them more … they actually show that they care about their community.' (CS3, FG, participant)*

Other examples were given of situations where guards met with young people in shops where they were working, or on the street, and they were able to have friendly conversations together. One mother whose son had completed his time in the project said that 'It was even a boost to [name of young person] that he had seen and talked to him as he was kind of like he needed acceptance kind of from them'.

YLS data – attitudes/orientation

Risk levels relating to attitudes and orientation are assessed under five headings: antisocial/pro-criminal attitudes, not seeking help, actively rejecting help, defies authority, and callous/little concern for others. The risk levels range from 0-5, with 0 categorised as low risk, 1-3 as moderate risk and 4-5 as high risk. A majority of participants (59%) were assessed at enrolment as low risk as regards attitudes and orientation, over a quarter as moderate risk (27%) and 14% assessed as high risk.

The overall level of risk for this category fell between enrolment and most recent assessment, with a decrease of five percentage points in the moderate-risk category and increases in the low and high categories of 4 and 1 percentage points respectively (Table 44). The increase in the high-risk category was at level 4 rather than level 5.

Table 44: Change in risk level relating to attitudes and behaviour

Risk category	At enrolment (T1)		At most recent assessment (T2)		Change (T2-T1)	
	n	%	n	%	n	% points
Low	1,201	26.0%	1,367	29.6%	166	3.6%
Moderate	3,088	66.8%	2,855	61.8%	-233	-5.0%
High	332	7.2%	396	8.6%	64	1.4%
Total	4,621	100.0%	4,618	100.0%		

Survey data – attitudes/orientation

The perceived impact of the projects on improving negative attitudes and orientation was strong. The percentages saying the projects were successful or very successful in achieving outcomes in this area ranged from 87% for YJWs and JLOs to 98% for managers, high but slightly lower than for improving behaviour. Managers' views as regards improving attitudes were the same as for improving behaviour, although proportionately fewer felt that they were 'very successful' as opposed to 'successful' (Table 45).

These high scores are in keeping with the improvements self-reported by young people, albeit more positive than the young people: 71% of young people reported improvements in the way they think about or behave towards others with 29% reporting no difference and none reporting a deterioration.

Table 45: Impact of project participation on attitudes/orientation

Survey	Very unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Neither	Successful	Very successful	Total responses
YJWs	3.7%	0.9%	8.3%	57.4%	29.6%	**108**
JLOs	0.0%	2.1%	10.6%	70.2%	17.0%	**47**
Managers	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	63.6%	34.1%	**44**
Project Committees	**0.0%**	**2.1%**	**6.4%**	**70.2%**	**21.3%**	**47**

Excludes 'don't know' and 'not relevant to our project' responses.

Overall, the findings arising from an analysis of interviews, surveys and YLS data show that the YDPs have a positive impact on attitudes/orientation.

Summary

This section has presented an analysis of outcomes arising from the YDPs based on multiple stakeholder views and multiple data sources. Garda data on levels of new offending by project participants was not available to the Evaluation Team and other more subjective measures based on interviews and surveys with key stakeholders have been used. Information arising from professional assessments of risk levels of participants at entry to the project and at the 'most recent assessment' using the YLS tool have also been considered here. While two assessments were available for fewer than half of participants who have enrolled in the projects, the findings are, nevertheless, an important data source in triangulating the findings from other sources and methods.

Interviewees highlighted the importance of both the maturation process in young people exiting criminal activities and the need to be realistic in expectations about what can be achieved. Survey findings, and interviews with key stakeholders, however, are very optimistic in terms of the extent to which the projects have a positive and direct impact on those who enrol in the project and there is coherence across both these data sources.

Interviewees referred to 'soft' outcomes throughout, noting that for some participants, getting them to connect with the project, respecting boundaries, developing better organisational skills, managing stress and anxiety are fundamental to the process of achieving more impactful outcomes such as attending education. Other 'soft' outcomes identified include gaining confidence, gaining empathy through understanding different perspectives and having hope for the future. These are also important steps on the journey to improving their life chances. For that reason, it is suggested that those necessary outcomes be referred to as scaffolding outcomes, rather than soft.

Interviewees and survey respondents were very positive about the successful impact of the YDPs across a range of areas. These areas are a reflection of the YLS assessment tool which includes: crime/dispositions, parenting/family circumstances, education/employment, recreation/leisure, peer relationships, attitudes/orientation, personality and behaviours and substance misuse. The data for the analysis of changes in risk between two YLS assessments is incomplete and this is a considerable limitation. Nevertheless, about half of participants are identified as having a decreasing level of risk, about one third an increase in their level and the remainder are assessed as having no change. In general, the changes in risk scores are small and those who are reported to have very low risk levels (9 or less) on engagement with the service show small increases in their risk scores at their 'most recent assessment'.

While almost all areas showed a reduction in the risk scores for participants, there were two exceptions – substance misuse and crime/dispositions. The increase in risk relating to substance misuse is coherent with the findings from other stakeholders, including young people where the impact of the project on this area is identified as being lower compared with other areas. The measurement of crime/dispositions in the YLS tool is almost exclusively based on past behaviours, and on that basis, it would be very difficult for the assessment to demonstrate a decrease in risk in this area.

Chapter 7. Synthesis of key findings, conclusions and recommendations

This section draws together the key issues arising in this evaluation followed by conclusions and recommendations. The evaluation is informed by multiple stakeholders. These include those involved in national support structures, such as the National Advisory Board, the DoJ, the Best Practice Development Team, members of the REPPP project and representatives of CBOs. The perspectives of YJWs, JLOs, managers of projects, project participants and family members have been collated. In a process of analysis, synthesis and triangulation of findings emerging from administrative, survey, interview and case study data, conclusions have been drawn about the effectiveness of the YDPs and recommendations made for future implementation.
The overall purpose of this evaluation is to generate policy-relevant knowledge concerning the structure, conduct and impacts of the Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs) and to consider issues relating to the governance, processes, outputs and short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. Key research questions that have been addressed in this evaluation are:

- How are the Youth Diversion Projects structured and what are the key inputs into the projects?
- How are these projects implemented – what are the main processes, actions and activities associated with their implementation?
- What changes for young people, their families and the broader community as a result of being involved in the GYDP?
- What works for whom in which circumstances; what are the mechanisms that operate; and, how does the context influence outcomes?
- What recommendations arise from the evaluation in terms of funding, governance, supports, synergies, coherence and balance between interventions and wider engagement?

The following section is structured around the issues arising under each of these and responds to the key questions set out in the Request for Tender.

Overall conclusion

- While it is not possible to determine definitively whether the projects are successful in reducing crime, the projects are performing well in many areas that have been shown to positively impact on reducing crime.

- In addition, while some recommendations for change are made, overall, the governance of the projects is good, levels of cooperation are high, the experience, qualification and satisfaction of staff is high, best practices in implementation are evident, and the feedback from participants and their families is positive.

- Areas for improvement relate to a need for greater clarity around governance functions and roles; adherence to best practices in child protection; improvements in equity of pay for YJWs and managers and in budgets between YDPs; better availability of YDPs at weekends; maximising the use of administrative data and other research to inform services; review of

interventions in respect of substance misuse and crime and an increased focus on the impact particularly victims of crime.

Findings and conclusions

Findings and conclusions in respect of the five key research questions addressed in this evaluation are now presented.

Q1. How are the Youth Diversion Projects structured, governed and resourced and what are the key inputs into the projects?

A detailed description and analysis of inputs and resources into the YDPs took place. Key areas addressed were the aim and objectives of the project, national and local level governance, budgetary resources, the profile and characteristics of managers, YJWs and JLOs, and the characteristics of YDPs and participants. Findings arising are now considered.

Rationale for YDP policy and practice trends and continued validity and relevance of the objectives

The aim and objectives of the YDPs are directly aligned with Irish Youth Justice policies, and in particular with the emphasis on diversion which is recognised as being 'at the core' of the Irish youth justice system. Preventing young people entering the criminal justice system is both rooted in scientific evidence and reflects other Government policies such as Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014) which identifies keeping young people safe and protected from harm as one of five outcomes to be achieved for all young people. Earlier intervention and prevention are seen as a transformational goal in achieving this outcome. In focusing on young people aged 12-18 years, the YDPs also recognise the importance of the maturation process in the trajectories of youth criminality, and in particular, the ways in which adolescent-limited offenders grow out of offending as developmental maturity is achieved and self-control improves. Ensuring communities, families and young people themselves are safe and supported throughout that period of time, however, is critical and while future wellbeing ('well becoming') is important, so too is current wellbeing so that their experience of adolescence is also positive.

An analysis of the objectives of the YDPs suggests a belief that reductions in the volume and severity of crime committed by young people is achieved by the projects through increasing young people's life chances rather than by directly addressing the criminal or anti-social behaviour itself. This is also reflected in the relatively small proportion of interventions which seek to address crime directly. Findings from surveys and interviews demonstrate that there is good coherence between stakeholders in their understandings of the purpose of the projects. Further, these understandings are coherent with the evidence emerging from the literature and from this evaluation about the individual, family, and community risks young people attending the projects experience. Arising from these objectives, and clearly evident in the analysis of interventions implemented through the YDPs, there is a focus on mitigating these risks and on building protective factors for young people which will last throughout their lives.

The interventions as set in the YDP annual plans are based on an assessment of the main risk areas identified by participants and in the local community of the individual YDPs. In responding to these

risks, the interventions focus on improving family circumstances and parenting; increasing educational/employment, and leisure/recreational opportunities; changing attitudes and behaviours of participants and reducing or preventing involvement in substance misuse. These interventions directly respond to identified risks and need and in doing so reflect both the objectives of the projects and their intent of diverting young people away from criminality.

It is concluded that practices within YDPs continue to be valid and relevant to their objectives and to the broader national policy objectives to be achieved in respect of young people who are at risk of criminal and antisocial behaviour.

Effectiveness of national and local governance of the YDPs

Governance of the YDPs at national level is well-structured and focused. The various structures all appear to have a relevant function, they are seen in a positive and supportive light by the projects at local level and there does seem to be clarity about their different functions. At local level it has been concluded that the governance framework should incorporate the following –

- Operational and delivery structures
- Oversight structures
- Structures to facilitate collaboration at an operational level between the CBOs and the Gardaí, which is a key relationship
- Structures to facilitate collaboration between a broader range of stakeholders who can contribute to positive outcomes for the YDPs
- Clear agreements and Terms of Reference and Operational Requirements for each of these structures and consistency between the various governance documents

Overall, it was noted that the governance of the projects at local level works well in practice. There is a good sense of support from the national structures, there is good cooperation and interaction between partners and there is a feeling of commitment and a willingness to engage overall. The projects seem to work well at an operational level, returns are made as required and there is no sense of concern or problems in this regard.

There are, however, a number of matters to be addressed, with, for example, the managers at project level having more reservations regarding the suitability of the Project Committees in the areas of overall governance, risk and financial management than the Project Committee Members themselves. In addition, there are inconsistencies in the various documents which set up the governance structure at project level, shared responsibilities without, in some cases, clarity as to where the division of responsibility and the final authority for decisions lie, mixed functions for some parts of the structure and lack of clarity as to the functions of certain structures amongst their members.

The situation is also complicated by the fact that the oversight body and the delivery body are separate. In many situations it is the Board or Committee of an organisation that provides the oversight and, while the Boards of the CBOs do have an oversight role, a similar role is also assigned to the Project Committee. In many cases the Project Committee also acts as a mechanism for operational collaboration which is not fully consistent with its oversight role.

It is concluded that governance of YDPs at national level works well and while a small number of recommendations are made, these relate more to strategy and operational matters than governance. While views about the function of the local level structures are positive, some overlap and inconsistencies have been identified in this evaluation and recommendations are made to respond to these.

Feasibility, and intentions, of YDPs to implement additional provisions as set out in the recent Youth Justice Strategy

The most recent Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027 identifies an intention to develop additional services in the YDP areas as well as to expand the number of areas with such projects. Stakeholders were generally very positive about the Youth Justice Strategy with its integrative and strategic function being particularly mentioned as important. Managers/coordinators and Project Committee members were asked to indicate the current and future intentions of the YDP regarding a range of provisions which are set out in the Youth Justice Strategy 2021–2027. These included –

- Early intervention
- Family and parenting support
- Working with harder-to-engage young people
- Mentoring for young people
- Restorative practices

On a positive note, very high proportions of the managers and Project Committee Members had intentions of implementing all of these new approaches. A large number of managers indicated that they were doing so already, ranging from a third for Early Intervention to three-quarters for Mentoring for Young People, with the majority of the remainder intending to implement the approaches within the next three years. Only small percentages (4% for Mentoring for Young People to 12% for Early Intervention) do not intend to implement these new approaches at all. Overall, the figures for Project Committee Members were even higher, with large numbers believing that the work is being done already. It is likely that these figures need to be treated with caution as the amount of work being carried out may not be to the extent envisaged by the Youth Justice Strategy.

In addition to the intention to provide the additional services, there was very high confidence (72% to over 90%) amongst both managers and Project Committee Members that these services would, in fact, be provided. Managers and Project Committee Members were also asked to rank the most important factors for the delivery of the new services. Not surprisingly, personnel and financial resources were the most highly-ranked factors overall. The provision of additional finances was seen as more important by managers than by the Project Committee Members. The Project Committee Members regarded training as being particularly important and, while it was also considered very important by the managers, finance was seen as being more so.

It is concluded, therefore, that there is a willingness, an appetite and, indeed, an expectation that the range of services offered by YDPs will be increased. Both the managers and the Project Committees are committed to this even if with slightly different priorities. The Youth Justice Strategy is seen as an empowering and integrative mechanism for future work, though it is also clear that additional financial and personnel resources will be needed.

Sufficiency and equitability of budget allocations and requests

Overall, the budgets submitted by the YDPs to the Department of Justice provide detailed information about the costs associated with each project and there is, as expected, significant variation in the budget requested by, and allocated to, individual YDPs.

An analysis of 97 budget files provided by the Department to the Evaluation Team shows that, on average, about three-quarters of the budget is allocated to pay costs and this is considered appropriate given the importance of personnel in the implementation of the projects. The percentage of the budget allocated to pay costs ranges, however, from 54.4% to 84.4% and this warrants further exploration.

The mean average pay for YJWs working full-time was €44,460, although this ranged from €33,221 to €76,564. The findings in respect of pay for managers show a mean average pay of €49,871 with a range from €41,423 to €65,848. These findings highlight an absence of a single pay scale in operation across the projects, which needs some consideration.

It is concluded that the relative allocation of funds to pay and non-pay costs presented in the budget files is appropriate given the nature of the work that takes place in YDPs. In some budgets the allocation to pay costs is considerably lower (as low as 54% of the budget) or considerably higher (as high as 84%), which warrants further review. It is also concluded that some consideration needs to be given to greater equity in salary scales and, if possible, the introduction of some form of standardised approach.

It is also concluded that, understandably, all projects are not operating from the same budget base. Some projects have their own transport while in other projects YJWs use their own cars to provide transport for participants. Some projects have premises with very high specifications (e.g. in terms of space, warmth, facilities) while others have no premises at all. Some projects have greater disposable funding that can be allocated where crisis situations arise and there is a need to purchase additional services or products. These issues are also highlighted later in this section.

Alignment of characteristics and profile of project personnel with requirements to effectively manage and implement YDPs

The demographic and occupational profiles and the perceptions of project managers, YJWs and Juvenile Liaison Officers have been considered in this evaluation. Overall, the survey findings show that personnel involved in the YDPs are experienced and well-qualified and there are high levels of stability, including an intention of personnel to remain in their current jobs.

About 60% of managers identify as female and almost two thirds are aged between 30 and 50 years. Managers have high levels of experience, with 86% having at least six years' experience in the sector, 75% having that level of experience in their organisation and 57% having that level of experience in their current roles. This is a positive situation, as it means that experienced people are being retained and their corporate and operational knowledge is available to the organisations. Almost 80% hold a post-graduate qualification suggesting a very highly qualified workforce. Managers report high levels of intention to stay in their current job with more than three-quarters ('definitely stay' 58%; 'probably stay' 20%) indicating they intend to stay for the next two years.

Similar to managers, there are high levels of well-experienced and highly-qualified YJWs working within the YPDs. About two-thirds identify as female (64%; n = 70) and about two-thirds are aged between 21 and 40 years. Between 60% and 70% have at least three years' experience in the sector (70%), in their current organisation (72%) and their current role (60%). About one-third of survey respondents (31%) report holding a post-graduate degree (Masters, Doctorate) and a further quarter (24%) report holding a post-graduate diploma. The availability of the MA degree under the REPPP programme was identified as a welcome development it was reported that some YJWs were in the process of completed, or had already completed this programme. There are also very high levels of overall job satisfaction among YJWs, particularly in respect of the level of support from managers (86% satisfied or very satisfied), the opportunities for training (86% satisfied or very satisfied) and the quality of service provided to service users (97% satisfied or very satisfied). Two issues to be considered relate to the opportunities for promotion (31% unsatisfied and 16% highly unsatisfied) and access to professional supervision (17% unsatisfied and 30% highly unsatisfied.

Two-thirds of YJWs have permanent full-time contracts, while under one-third have fixed-term full-time contracts. Very small numbers are in part-time contracts. This is not an unusual pattern though it would be worthwhile investigating the nature of the fixed-term contracts. While there are high levels of intention to stay in their current job for the next two years, there are also high levels of uncertainty about this with just over half reporting they will probably stay (36%) or probably leave (19%). Given the importance of the professional relationships between YJWs and participants, this warrants some consideration.

Juvenile Liaison Officers are even more experienced, with 100% of survey respondents having six years or more experience in the Garda Síochána, 70% as a Juvenile Liaison officer and 66% in their current role. This is very much a positive situation, as it means that experienced Gardaí who know and are known in the community are in post and can build up a knowledge of the area, develop good relationships with the projects and the community and be a positive presence for all.

Overall, it is concluded that the profile of the personnel available to the project both in the Garda Siochána *and the CBOs is high, that they are well distributed in terms of age and sex, that they are generally reasonably well-qualified. YJWs are very satisfied with their working conditions overall although about one-third are on fixed-term contracts which may give rise to some uncertainty. There is a good deal of stability likely in the workforce over the next few years. The findings also point to a structure that facilitates equality which is evident in the equal distribution of the age and gender profile of managers and YJWs. In addition, the age profile of the YJWs is well spread, while the somewhat older age-profile of managers is as would be expected.*

Diversity and complexity in the profile and characteristics of project participants requiring diverse and multiple responses

There is wide variation in the individual and family circumstances of participants in the YDPs. There is considerable diversity in how young people grow and develop and manage the changes arising during the period of adolescence and, understandably, this is reflected in the participants who attend the projects. While all participants need some supports during this time of immense change, some young people have additional needs arising from learning difficulties, ADHD or mental health

challenges. Some participants live in families that are responsive to their needs and supportive of their engagement with the project. Other participants, however, live in families where there are complex needs due to substance misuse, criminal involvement or condoning attitudes, mental health problems, poverty, homelessness or domestic conflict and where family life may be chaotic. Particular concerns were raised about the environment for young people in residential care.

An analysis of the ESF database shows that over the lifetime of the YDPs, about three-quarters of the 11,006 participants have been male, one-fifth from a 'foreign minority background' and 7.6% reported as having a disability. About half have been identified as having 'other disadvantage'. While a very small proportion of participants are in employment, this is expected given their age profile.

In conclusion, the diversity identified in respect of the individual and family circumstances of project participants is as expected, although the proportion of participants who report being from a foreign minority background is very high relative to the overall youth population in Ireland. Given the diversity, YDPs may need to have both the autonomy and budgets to provide services that would ordinarily be provided by families. The information collected and recorded about the particular circumstances of project participants is limited, and very little information at an aggregate level appears to be returned to the projects. Particular issues were raised in respect of young people in the care of the State who are in Residential Care Homes.

Diversity and complexity of the community context for YDPs and their impact on project implementation

The communities within which youth diversion projects are based are diverse, geographically distributed and the catchment areas vary considerably in population size. Intergenerational criminality and unemployment were all identified as problematic and it was highlighted that some projects are based in areas where families are intertwined and living there for many generations. Other projects are based in new and diverse communities where there may be additional challenges, particularly in terms of culture or language. It was reported that substance misuse is a feature of every community and its use is normalised. Some communities were reported to be unwelcoming of young people and it was noted that recreational facilities for teenagers in many communities are limited.

Survey findings show that a majority of managers (62%), YJWs (64%) and JLOs (52%) report their project is based in an area that experiences high levels of serious crime. While the percentages reporting high levels of youth crime were lower (between 46% and 52%) they were, nevertheless, considerable. Arising from the community context within which the projects are based, a substantial proportion of managers (59%) and YJWs (68%) agreed or strongly agreed that young people attending the projects experience intimidation by groups/individuals involved in crime. The perception of JLOs with regard to the issue was somewhat different, however, with only (31%) agreeing or strongly agreeing. The analysis also shows that staff are not perceived to experience the same intimidation, with considerably lower percentages indicating that they do.

Data compiled from the 2021 annual project plans show that there is wide variation in the population size and catchment area of projects. While population size ranges from 1,963 to 218,018, the mean average population size was 31,305. These figures exclude one of the projects that

operates at a regional level and is an outlier in that regard. Survey findings show that the vast majority of YDPs are in existence for more than 10 years, are based in cities or towns and about two-thirds are integrated with universal youth services. Two issues identified as challenging were not having a specific premises to implement the project (about 16%) and transport problems (up to 40% depending on stakeholder responding).

On the basis of this data, it is concluded that, in general, projects are located in areas where they are likely to have the greatest impact, given the prevalence of crime. It is also concluded that there is not, at present, any significant or widespread issue regarding the extent to which YJWs are intimidated. However, there does seem to be an issue for participants in a significant number of projects and this is a matter to which some thought might be given.

Q2. How are these projects implemented – what are the main processes, actions and activities associated with their implementation?

A detailed consideration and analysis of four main elements relating to the process of delivery in YDPs was carried out and these are: the methodologies adopted by key personnel; pathways through the YDPs including referral, engagement and disengagement; the methodologies adopted by key personnel; and interventions used.

Effectiveness and appropriateness of participant pathways through YDPs

There are two clearly defined entry routes into the YDPs and these are primary referrals (of those who have been formally cautioned by a JLO and accept responsibility for the crime they commited) and secondary referrals (of those who are identified as being at risk of criminal behaviours but have not been referred through the Youth Diversion Programme). An analysis of the APR data shows that just over half (54%) of participants (n = 6,217) were referred through the Youth Diversion Programme, although a slightly higher proportion (62%; n = 7,105) were identified as 'primary referrals'. Interviews explained that the split between primary and secondary referrals differs depending on the circumstances and resources of the project. There is some agreement, however, that primary referrals are prioritised.

All participants approved by Referral Assessment Committees 'are subject to the YLS/CMI SV screening being completed. Once admitted to the YDP, the process of completing the YLS/CMI 2.0 begins. Two versions of the YLS/CMI are used. The YLS screening tool is used as a mechanism for quantifying risk and identifying particular areas of concern and 90% of respondents to the survey of managers agreed that decisions on the suitability of new referrals to the project are informed by the YLS. The use of a common tool is positive as it allows for consistency within projects in the criteria for acceptance into the YDP. Each project has a Referral Assessment Committee which, according to the findings from the survey of managers, works well (90.5%) and where YJWs and JLOs are equal partners (90.5%). Commentary from the survey supports this noting 'professional and mutually respectful working relationship' and 'parity of esteem between participants'.

It is concluded that the operation of a Referral Assessment Committee, along with a standardised assessment tool, is a helpful approach since it allows for discussion around individual referrals and possible responses from the YDP.

Interviewees highlighted that engagement in the YDPs is '100%' voluntary and there is widespread support for that view, with interviewees noting that it would not be feasible to work with participants if they were forced to come. It was also reported in interviews with JLOs and YJWs, that at the point of referral to the YDP, there may be a need to 'sell' the YDP to both young people and their families as there may be a lack of knowledge, or suspicion about the purpose of, and activities that take place there. A need to 'sell' the YDP is also supported by the findings from the survey of young persons, which show that less than two-thirds (60%) of respondents indicated they were 'happy' about coming to the project 'at the beginning'. While the majority of the remainder of the survey respondents indicated they were neither 'happy' nor 'not happy', 7% indicated they were unhappy. These findings suggest that while most young people engage voluntarily with the YDPs, this is not universal, a finding borne out in the interviews. A second issue, which is particularly relevant in the context of additional services being implemented through the YDPs, relates to the fact that voluntary engagement can be very challenging in respect of young people who are hard-to-reach. It was suggested that a more nuanced approach might be justified in circumstances where it is in the young person's best interests to engage even when they do not want to. In doing so, however, the voluntary nature of the continued participation by young people in the projects should not be compromised.

It is concluded that voluntary participant engagement with the project is likely to be appropriate for most, and that such an approach should continue. It is also suggested, however, that a robust discussion take place about whether the voluntary nature of engagement is in the best interests of the young person in all circumstances or whether modified approaches might be adopted in certain circumstances.

An analysis of the ESF datafile shows that the average length of time spent in YDPs varies considerably, with a range of 0-138.6 months. The mean average length of time spent in the project was calculated at 21.8 months for participants who had completed their involvement with the project by December 2020.

It is concluded that variation in the length of time young people are involved in the YDPs is to be expected. Given the complexity of the work that takes place and the often intractable issues to be dealt with, a short period of engagement in a YDP is, however, unlikely to have a significant impact.

Disengagement from the YDPs can be either planned or unplanned and an analysis of the ESF file shows that about two-thirds of participants (62%) disengage in a planned way. Once young people are 18 years of age, they are no longer eligible to take part in YDPs. About 86% of managers agreed or strongly agreed that 'ongoing progress and potential exit strategies for participants leaving the project are informed by the YLS tool' suggesting preparations and considerations take place prior to exiting. Interview data, however, highlights continued interactions taking place between YJWs and individuals who have left the YDP but who continue to need some support (e.g. in making a job application, filling up forms or in personal issues arising in their lives).

There is little empirical data about those who disengage in an unplanned way although interviewees spoke about following up with the young person and 'doing everything they could' to get them to

return, suggesting it may not always be clear when the young person has completely disengaged from the YDP. As noted earlier, there are high levels of intimidation of young people attending the YDPs and an example was given by one grandparent of how this had impacted on her grandchild's involvement in the YDP.

It is concluded that while a majority of young people exit the projects in a planned way, a sizable minority of young people do not, and the circumstances, influences and rationales for this warrant further consideration.

Appropriateness and perceived usefulness of approaches adopted by YJWs in the YDPs

While the work of all personnel working in YDPs is likely to be underpinned by an ethos of supporting and helping young people, it was evident from interviewees with key stakeholders that many different philosophical positions can be taken. These include, 'trauma-informed', 'youth work', 'welfare', 'youth justice' and 'strengths-based' approaches, among others.

It is concluded that there are many different understandings informing and underpinning the work of YDP personnel and this can result in different focuses, methodologies and emphases. Some consideration needs to be given to adopting a more should be given to the development of a more standardised theoretical framework. .

A recently published study by Fullerton et al (2021) highlights the central nature of the relationships between young people and YJWs in achieving positive outcomes through the YDP. The findings from this evaluation endorse these views and many stakeholders spoke about the importance of that relationship and its fundamental positioning in the work that takes place. Further, it is noted that almost all respondents to the survey of participants (95%; n = 71) indicated they got on well with their YJW and about three-quarters of respondents indicated they would be unlikely or very unlikely to come to the project if they did not get on.

The relationship between JLOs and YJWs is also critical in the functioning of the projects, and in interviews and surveys, almost universal good relationships were reported by both professional groups. In addition, very high levels of support from managers were reported by YJWs.

It is concluded that the almost universal good relationships that exist between JLOs and YJWs are a very positive finding and suggest respect, understanding and valuing of the particular contributions made by each to the work of the other. It is also concluded that while poor relationships are rare, YDPs are unlikely to be successfully implemented in such circumstances. .

The key question of effectiveness of interagency collaboration and cooperation was considered in this evaluation. Survey findings from JLOs and YJWs show that while relationships between the project and 'local communities', 'educational organisations' and 'organisations dealing with substance abuse' were identified as 'good' or 'very good' by over 80% of YJWs and JLOs, considerably lower percentages did so in respect of project relationships with mental health services and organisations dealing with job placements.

Some differences, however, are identified in the extent to which JLOs and YJWs consider interagency activities relating to individual participants and preventive work in the community to be 'extremely useful' and JLOs are much less likely to consider them to be so. The evidence suggests that these types of activities are important, that they can open up opportunities for young people and the project, and that they can have a long-term impact, particularly in supporting young people in education and employment and in engaging in constructive recreational and leisure activities.

In conclusion, while a high proportion of YJWs and JLOs identify positive relationships with local communities, educational organisations and those dealing with substance abuse, a lower proportion identify positive relationships in relation to mental health services and organisations dealing with job placements. Both these types of organisations have an important role in providing supports for YDP participants and a more formalised approach may need to be adopted. Further, while there is good agreement between JLOs and YJWs on a number of matters, some consideration needs to be given to the causes of the differences of perception of the value of community and interagency activities.

One-to-one work and group work are features of how the YDP services are delivered. Over half of respondents (55%) to the survey of young people indicated they had met in a group with their YJW and 43% indicated they met on their own or had a telephone or text conversation with the YDP. About 80% of YDPs report doing one-to-one work with participants in their project every day or almost every day in a typical week and all indicated this approach was 'extremely useful' (94.5%) or 'fairly useful' (5.5%). Although about two-thirds of YJWs indicate that group work is 'extremely useful' and a further 26% indicate it is 'fairly useful', just under half (46%) report doing group work almost or every day and about one-third do so 'occasionally' or less frequently.

Interviews at case study sites highlighted some key areas of importance in undertaking group work, including providing opportunities for young people to listen to their peers, and be listened to by them; and to be able to share their opinion in a safe space, where they can set the agenda, and where they can speak honestly without interruption.

It is concluded that both one-to-one work and group work are important methodologies for working with YDPs and there is good agreement that both are useful. While two-thirds of YJWs indicate group work is extremely useful, less than half carry out such work on a regular basis and this suggests there may be organisational or structural barriers to doing group work other than YJW preferences.

The availability of the YDP to participants varies between projects and findings from the survey of YJWs show that about three-quarters (73%) 'usually' work during the daytime (between 9am and 5pm) and 41% usually work during the evening time (from 6pm-10pm) and a further 43% do so sometimes. Less than 1% usually work on Saturday or Sunday and 92% occasionally or never do so. While a similar proportion of JLOs work during the day, a higher proportion report usually working in the evening time and more than half (56%) of JLO survey respondents usually work weekends.

It is concluded that it is very beneficial that JLOs and YJWs overlap in their working time, during the day and evening time where they can build relationships, exchange information and engage with each other around specific individuals. It is suggested however, that the absence of a YJW weekend

service is a gap that needs to be addressed, given the increased likelihood of young people engaging in antisocial or criminal behaviours during that time.

Variations in interventions across YDPs

Interventions that take place in YDPs were analysed in two ways. First, a common elements analysis took place in respect of annual YDP plans received (n = 99). These plans are consistent and comprehensive and their logic model structure allows for a clear understanding of the rationales for, the focus of, and the extent to which key interventions are proposed for implementation. Specifically, these plans are structured around a logic model which responds to project participant and local community needs, and interventions are based on the identified and prioritised needs of project participants and local communities. The structuring of the interventions around the eight specific areas of the YLS/CMI 2.0 allows for clear links to be made between identified needs using the YLS assessment tool and responses.

It is concluded that the evidence around annual plans makes clear the extensive thought, planning and effort which have gone into their development, and further, it is evident from the consistency and comprehensiveness of these plans that the national supports in place for YDPs around this area are effective and working well.

A detailed analysis of the focus and number of interventions in each of the eight YLS areas of focus, and by individual YDPs, was carried out as part of this evaluation. The findings show extensive variation across projects in number, focus, and types of intervention and the proportion of YDPs intending to deliver one or more interventions across YLS areas. This variation ranges from 16% to 90% of YDPs identifying interventions in a particular area. The upper range limits were as follows: education/ employment (90%), leisure/recreation (82%), substance abuse (78%), family (74%), personality (69%), attitudes (59%), peer relationships (52.5%) and offences/dispositions (16%).

In addition to variation in number and range, there is also variation in the specific interventions delivered. In respect of education, for example, interventions identified in project plans include project supports (41 plans), specific programmes (36 plans), interagency engagement (31 plans), education and other awards (23 plans), individual supports (20 plans) and referral to others (18 plans). Some individual YDPs include interventions across the YLS spectrum and include at least one intervention in most areas. Other YDPs adopt a more focused approach, honing in on a small number of specific YLS areas. One project, for instance, presents six types of interventions in response to education/employment needs, five each responding to leisure/recreation and crime needs, one each in response to substance abuse and family needs and none responding to peer relations, attitudes, or personality behaviours. In contrast, another YDP project plan identifies interventions in respect of three areas (substance abuse, family and personality) but none in any other area. Only 16 YDP plans present specific interventions in response to crime, with few if any focusing on victim impacts.

Survey findings confirm this wide variation. Almost half (45.5%) of YJW respondents reported spending time every day or almost every day on ‘targeted initiatives’, 36% on ‘interagency activities relating to individual participants’, 34% on mentoring, 28% on ‘formal programmes’ and 28% on family support. Only three respondents indicated they spent time every day or almost every day on

'Work To Learn' (2.9%; n = 3) or 'i-scoil' (2.8%; n = 3), suggesting these programmes are not in widespread use. These findings are reflected in the extent to which these specific interventions are considered useful by JLOs and YJWs, with family support, targeted initiatives and mentoring considered 'extremely useful' by more than half of both professional groups.

It is concluded that there is extensive variation across projects in the types of interventions, their number, delivery, focus and in perceptions of their usefulness. There is, however, a clear link in the annual plans between local and participant needs identified and the interventions proposed, suggesting that interventions are likely to be in response to the diverse and complex needs of individuals, families and local communities. Tailoring responses to specific needs is an important element of the work of YJWs and for that reason, the variation identified is a positive finding.

The low proportion of YDPs identifying specific interventions in respect of crime is counter-intuitive in a programme ultimately focused on reducing the level and severity of criminal activity. This finding, however, is coherent with the objectives identified which recognise and acknowledge the importance of achieving reductions in crime through increasing the life chances of young people. Nevertheless, a review of the specific programmes currently in place in 16 projects, including any victim awareness component, could provide some useful information that may be generalisable to other projects.

Findings from the survey of YJWs and managers of projects show that both spend a substantial amount of time on administrative work. Over 90% of YJWs reported carrying out administrative work for a substantial amount of the time (28%), almost every day (32%) or every day (33%). Almost half of managers report spending at least a half-day weekly on administrative work relating to the requirements of the Department of Justice (46.7%), just over one in ten (11%) report doing so in respect of the Project Committee and 17% report this in respect of the Referral Assessment Committee. Managers also carry out administrative work relating to the requirements of others, including their CBO and other oversight bodies (e.g. the Charities Regulator). This is a substantial resource allocated to administrative work.

It is concluded that a substantial resource is allocated to the administrative work associated with the work of the YDPs and this is evident in the volume and good quality of the administrative data made available to the Evaluation Team for analysis. While the data collated at project level may be used to inform governance, implementation and practice, it is evident that the analysis and use of the aggregated data is limited. No published data arising from the administrative datasets was identified during the course of this evaluation.

About 30% of YJW survey respondents indicated they spent time on formal programmes (e.g. Life of Choices) every day or almost every day and a further 23% indicated they spent a substantial amount of time on this. Analysis of interview data, however, shows that many programmes are not delivered as complete programmes from 'start to finish' but rather parts of the programme are used to respond to particular issues arising. This may or may not be in line with the intentions of the programme developers.

It is concluded that some consideration may need to be given to fidelity in named programme implementation (e.g. the Life of Choices).

Q3. What works for whom in which circumstances; what are the mechanisms that operate; and, how does the context influence outcomes?

A realist evaluation was carried out to identifying what works, for whom and in what circumstances. This approach results in the development of CMOs (context, mechanisms and outcomes) and in this evaluation five CMOs, emerging from an analysis of data from case studies, were identified as follows: creating an environment where participants choose to engage; assessing and reassessing; shaping an alternative life, now and in the future; facilitating, enabling and supporting an alternative life; and, supporting and enabling families and communities to respond to the needs of young people.

The findings from this show that young people engage and remain involved in the project, where they develop good relationships with others in the YDP; where they have a safe and welcoming space; where they are nourished, listened to, and can listen to others; where they can choose to share problems and experiences; where they can be with their peers; and where they can have fun.

Through formal and informal assessment and reassessment, their needs and risks are identified, tailored responses are put in place and problems are addressed as well as prevented from escalating.

An alternative life, now and in the future, is shaped through role modelling; opportunities to explore alternatives, achieve successes and engage in a positive way with adults; as well as through being challenged on their behaviours and attitudes. Through this, participants develop an awareness that things can be different and their future can change. Young people also develop a greater awareness of other perspectives and the impact of their behaviour on others, leading them to be more empathetic.

Young people are facilitated, enabled and supported to achieve an alternative life through the projects providing practice support, advocacy and referral; by their responding when needed; and by their encouraging, advising and guiding, thereby giving participants confidence to achieve and hope for the future.

Finally, engagement between personnel involved in the project and families and communities, leads to better understandings of the needs of young people and how to respond to them.

It is concluded that in YDPs where these CMOs are in place, participants are likely to succeed and where they are not in place, participants are not. Certain provisions are required to maximise successful outcomes. These include a specific premises where participants can feel they belong; availability of, and access to, experienced and highly skilled personnel; and a range of options that can be employed in identifying and meeting the needs of participants in a tailored way.

Q4. What changes for young people, their families and the broader community as a result of being involved in the YDP?

The Evaluation Team sought Garda data on levels of new offending by individual project participants and made practical proposals as to how this could be achieved without compromising privacy. The data could not be made available even in anonymised form. The effectiveness of the projects as

regards crime reduction can never be clearly established without reference to official, objective data at an individual and aggregate level.

In the absence of Garda data, the Evaluation Team relied on interviews, surveys and YLS risk assessment data as proximate, subjective measures. The limitations of these methods (such as selection or response bias in surveys and interviews and low level of availability of second YLS assessments) are described elsewhere in this report and should be borne in mind in interpreting the findings.

Overall perceptions of outcomes achieved and the impact of the YDPs

The surveys of YJWs, JLOs, project managers and Project Committee members showed very positive results. Percentages reporting that projects were successful or very successful in achieving outcomes ranged from 79% to 98% for 11 of the 12 areas on which information was sought. The exception was impact on substance abuse where the range was 60%-70%, still a large majority. These positive results were supported by results from the survey of young people. Of those who had engaged in criminal or antisocial behaviour before, 72% said that they were less involved now and attributed this to their participation in their project. As regards substance abuse, 58% said that they were now less involved in using weed. The largest percentages reporting improvements were in respect of the way the young people think about or behave towards others (71%), their hopes for the future (71%), their happiness (70%) and getting into trouble with friends (68%).

It is concluded from surveys carried out that perceptions of YJWs, JLOs, project managers and Project Committee members about the impact of the YDPs are very positive and high proportions of respondents are of the view that YDPs are successful in achieving positive outcomes for young people attending.

Overall outcomes identified through professional assessments using the YLS tool

The YLS/CMI 2.0 used by YJWs and JLOs as an assessment tool and the APR datasets received by the Evaluation Team from the Department include individual-level data on participants at the time of entry to the projects and at the 'most recent' assessment.

From a performance measurement perspective, the YLS risk data suffers a number of limitations: change could not be measured for a majority of participants because no second assessment was available; some crime-related risk measures are historic and static; it is plausible also as has been suggested by some respondents, that some risk levels increase as staff get to know more about their clients. The analysis for this evaluation looks at changes in YLS scores between enrolment and 'the most recent' assessment. Projects differed significantly as regards the percentage of participants who had at least two assessments, ranging from zero to 94%. It is difficult to explain such divergences and there is evidently scope for projects to carry out a greater number of second assessments.

It is concluded that while the YLS/CMI 2.0 tool is designed to assess risk and need, it can also provide a measure of progress and impact. A greater number of recorded follow-up assessments can ensure updated risk and need profiles of participants as well as improving the overall assessment of impact.

The analysis showed that about half of participants had decreased their overall risk score, about one-third had increased their overall risk score, and about one-sixth were unchanged. The maximum change in risk score across all eight areas measured is 42 for any individual. The mean risk score at first assessment was 16.1 and at the most recent assessment was 14.8, signifying that overall risk decreased. The finding of lower risk may be a reliable indication of impact on those who engage long enough for a second assessment to be carried out but is unlikely to reflect risk patterns for those who have unplanned disengagements.

It is concluded that while the evidence of strong positive impact identified through surveys is not borne out entirely by the results of the analysis of YLS risk scores, a number of positive findings have nevertheless been recorded.

Some individuals experienced major change: the range of changes in risk scores was from minus-29 to plus-29. This provides an indication that projects work very well for some but not necessarily for others. The extent of change overall was primarily in a range of 1-10 points.

Actual individual risk scores ranged from 1-37. It is of note that in the lower risk range, percentages at enrolment were lower than at 'most recent' assessment, higher in the mid-range and broadly the same in the higher range, reflecting the overall decrease in risk.

There were substantial differences between projects as regards levels of change achieved. The range of percentages of participants whose risk decreased was 0% to 90% and for those whose risk increased, 6% to 88%. Nineteen projects showed decreases in risk for over 70% of their participants while 16 projects showed decreases for 30% or less.

It is concluded that reasons for the differences between projects in the percentages of participants whose risk increased or decreased need to be explored further.

Changes in overall risk level varied somewhat according to ethnicity, type of referral, continuity of engagement, engagement status, and age. The overall risk levels were higher for primary referrals compared with secondary referrals at entry to the YDP (mean average 16.9 and 14.8 respectively) and this may have impacted on the lower levels of change identified in secondary referrals.

It is concluded that the findings would seem to endorse the main focus of the projects on primary referrals and again suggest a need for a more detailed consideration of the particular areas of risk, needs arising and potential interventions for low-risk/secondary referrals.

The findings also show the value of efforts made by project staff to keep participants involved and underline the importance of projects being attractive, welcoming, respectful and safe places for them. As regards age, the percentage showing lower risk rose progressively by age category, with two-thirds of the small number of young adults showing lower risk levels at most recent assessment and 40% of the youngest category recording increased risk.

These findings also seem to support the desirability of engaging with young people earlier, while tempering expectations of immediate lowering of risk and highlighting the need for approaches that are customised to the younger age cohort.

Impact of YDPs on specific areas of risk and need identified

As regards the eight categories of risk assessed, risk was lower at the most recent assessment than at enrolment for six of the eight. Reductions were greatest in respect of education and employment. The categories where risk was higher at the most recent assessment were offending and substance abuse.

The offending category focuses almost exclusively on historic data relevant to serious offending (e.g. prior convictions, prior probation, prior custody) and could be said to be largely irrelevant to the projects, where a serious offending record would effectively rule out referral to the Diversion Programme and YDPs. In fact, 96% of participants were assessed at enrolment as low risk, meaning they did not register a score under any of the offending sub-headings. The percentage fell to 92% at the most recent assessment. Any future review of the validity and reliability of the YLS tool for Irish young people who are diverted from criminal prosecution should take account of this reality. The substance abuse category was also anomalous, with a decrease of nine percentage points at the low-risk level and increases at both the moderate-risk and high-risk levels.

It is concluded that the YLS tool is not a valid tool for measuring risk/need levels of prior and current offences/dispositions in YDP participants whose calculated risk levels in this area are very low. In the absence of Garda data, no suitable outcome measure of antisocial and criminal behaviour was available to the Evaluation Team. Consequently, it is not possible to provide an objective empirical assessment of whether the overall aim of reducing crime was achieved.

Expectations of the projects

Many stakeholders noted that the amount of time young people spend in the project is a relatively short part of their daily lives and there is a need to be 'realistic about what can be achieved'. Others mentioned that it doesn't work for everyone and that it can be a slow process. It was noted too that for some participants, success was seen as getting them (participants) through the door and engaging them in the project: the level of need varied and small steps were required and should be regarded positively in many cases.

It is concluded that the complexity and diversity of risk and need of participants, their families and communities, means that there is a need to be realistic about what constitutes success together with a recognition of the value of 'small successes' achieved.

Scaffolding outcomes

It was frequently noted by interviewees that a number of 'soft outcomes' are often a necessary step or by-product in the young person's journey towards a more productive and fulfilling life. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of developing interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, establishing good relationships, building empathy, or strengthening self-confidence. Key intermediate outcomes include engaging with the project, understanding boundaries and rules,

gaining confidence, improving communication and organisational skills, dealing with conflict, stress and anxiety, understanding different perspectives and having hope for the future.

Several YJWs spoke about the lack of boundaries that some young people had and noted that in some projects a considerable amount of work went into setting boundaries and getting participants to a point where they understood what behaviour was acceptable and what was not. Another YJW also spoke about the importance of adopting a participative approach to setting rules.

Self-confidence of participants is not measured on their joining and leaving the projects, but anecdotal evidence is that it can be low for many participants at the start and hinder their development. The adult surveys showed very high levels of belief that projects are successful in improving participant self-confidence, with percentages considering the projects successful or very successful ranging from 93% to 98%. Young people themselves reported their confidence was better because of the project (61%) or that there was no difference (39%).

The adult surveys showed significant majorities (84% to 87%) who thought the projects were successful or very successful in increasing participant hopefulness for the future. A majority of young people also reported increases in hopes for the future (71%) and happiness (70%). Several young people highlighted that they were more optimistic about their future and about their life ambitions and attributed this to taking part in the projects. The projects also reassured them that being in trouble in the past did not mean they would inevitably be in trouble in the future. Hopefulness of participants is not measured at project entry and exit.

It is concluded that scaffolding outcomes, such as respecting boundaries, managing anxiety and stress, developing confidence and having hope for the future, may be necessary steps for some participants to achieve reductions in their level of risk in areas recorded on the YLS tool. These outcomes should be acknowledged, valued and measured.

Crime rates and crime seriousness

Significant majorities of all adult groups surveyed (82%-96%) believe that the projects are successful or very successful in reducing crime. A similar picture emerges from the survey data as regards reducing the seriousness of crime. A majority (61%) of young people said that were less involved in criminal or antisocial behaviour than previously, 22% reported no change and 15% said that they were ‘not doing this before coming to the project’. These survey indications of project effectiveness cannot be borne out by evidence from YLS data because initial levels are low and most scores are historic and not amenable to change. The modest increase in assessed level of risk (4%) has to be interpreted in this context.

Most interviewees were doubtful that progress by individuals would translate into wider trends. Nevertheless, some Garda interviewees referred to wider manifestations of reduced crime, including one who referred to a ‘dramatic’ cut in the number of JLO referrals and a reduction in youth crime of ‘maybe 30%-40%’ and an Inspector who referred to a significant reduction in incidents at Halloween due to projects offering alternative activities.

It is concluded that while there may be decreases in the levels of crime among YDP participants, it has not been possible to objectively measure this in this evaluation due to the absence of a valid objective data source.

Family circumstances and parenting

YLS data showed high initial levels of risk under family circumstances and parenting, with over half of participants (53%) at moderate or high levels of risk when assessed at enrolment. This fell to 46% at the most recent assessment. Adult survey respondents were very positive as regards impact of projects in this area, with the percentages judging the projects successful or very successful ranging from 79% to 89%. The survey of young people also showed positive views: 58% felt that they were getting on better with their family because of the project while the remainder (42%) felt there was no difference.

It is concluded that there are decreases in the level of risk/need of project participants in respect of family circumstances and parenting.

Education/Employment

YLS risk assessments showed a substantial reduction in risk levels relating to education and employment. This area represents high levels of assessed risk for participants, with only one in ten considered low risk at enrolment and a substantial number considered high risk (42%). At second assessment the proportion deemed to be low risk almost doubled and the proportion at high risk fell significantly to 27%. The surveys were even more positive, with percentages of adults saying projects were successful or very successful ranging from 86% to 93%. According to the survey of young people, 46% felt that taking part in school or work was better because of the project, with 47% reporting no difference and 7% reporting a deterioration.

It is concluded that there are decreases in the level of risk/need of project participants in respect of education/employment and the proportion of participants achieving a decrease in this area is higher than other areas examined.

Peer Relations

Peer relations also represent high levels of risk for participants and are difficult to change in many cases. The analysis showed a modest improvement in risk levels. There was acknowledgement of the key role of projects in providing increased access to positive peers and opportunities to make new friends, as well as equipping young people with skills and confidence to walk away from trouble. Any risk of being influenced in the projects by negative peers appears small and more than offset by other positive influences.

It is concluded that there are decreases in the level of risk/need of project participants in respect of peer relations.

Substance abuse

Substance abuse represents a high level of risk for participants and stands out as the area of least success in the projects. Performance as measured by changes in YLS scores is in contrast to all other

areas of risk apart from crime. The YLS findings show increases in moderate and high levels of risk and decreases in low levels of risk. At enrolment, 59% of participants were assessed as being at low risk and this was nine percentage points lower at the most recent assessment. The surveys on the other hand were more positive, with majorities of the view that the projects were successful or very successful ranging from 60% to 70%, albeit with substantial numbers thinking the projects had little or no impact (30%-34%). The survey of young people showed reductions in levels of drinking alcohol, smoking weed and using other drugs because of involvement in the project.

While the surveys suggest some positive impact, the YLS data showed a deterioration. A number of possible explanations for the increase in assessed risk levels can be offered, including that risk scores increase as the assessors get to know their clients better, that the projects have little impact on substance abuse which worsens due to prevailing societal influences, that the projects cause a deterioration due to association with substance abusing participants, or that the projects have a beneficial impact in terms of preventing a worse deterioration.

The interview evidence shows some acceptance on the part of project staff that scope for change is limited, with an emphasis on harm reduction and making small changes rather than eliminating use. A number noted that YJWs were not experts in the substance abuse area, suggesting value in developing relevant staff knowledge and skills.

It is concluded that the YLS findings in relation to substance misuse show increases in moderate and high levels of risk and decreases in low levels of risk. These findings suggest a need for consideration of whether and how projects might achieve greater impact, through developing new interventions and ways of working. It could be useful for projects to share experience and develop staff expertise in this area. However, it is also recognised that this is also an endemic societal issue and the capacity of projects to achieve significant outcomes should not be overestimated.

Leisure and recreation

Leisure and recreation also represent high areas of risk for participants and the overall level of risk was lower at the most recent assessment, with a decrease of five percentage points in the high-risk category. The surveys suggest strong impact of the projects in this area, with percentages of those considering them to be successful or very successful ranging from 84% to 96%. A majority of young people (57%) reported an improvement in their situation as regards participation, with the remainder (43%) indicating no difference.

It is concluded that there are decreases in the level of risk/need of project participants in respect of leisure and recreation.

Personality/Behaviour

According to the YLS assessments, just over 9% of those assessed were considered as low risk at enrolment, 68% at moderate level and 22% at high-risk level. The factors assessed include physical and verbal aggression, tantrums, poor remorse and short attention span. The overall level of risk fell between enrolment and most recent assessment, with a decrease of five percentage points in the high-risk category. The surveys were significantly more positive. The perceived impact of the projects on increasing positive behaviours was higher than for all other variables, with the

percentages saying projects were successful or very successful ranging from 94% to 98%. The survey of young people found that 71% saw an improvement in the way they think about or behave towards others. It might be expected that this high level of perceived achievement shown in the surveys would translate into a greater reduction of assessed risk.

It is concluded that there are decreases in the level of risk/need of project participants in respect of personality and behaviours.

Attitudes/orientation

Surprisingly perhaps, YLS assessments suggest that this is not a particularly high area of risk for projects participants, with a majority (59%) assessed at enrolment as low-risk. Nevertheless, progress was achieved, and the overall level of risk fell between enrolment and most recent assessment. According to the surveys, the perceived impact of the projects was strong. The percentages of adult respondents saying the projects were successful or very successful ranged from 87% to 98%. These high scores were largely mirrored in responses by young people, 71% of whom reported improvements in the way they think about or behave towards others.

Changing attitudes was identified in the interviews as a focus within the projects, acknowledging that change did not happen quickly. Several interviewees felt that the projects were effective in developing empathy by dint of the young people talking things through, being listened to by others, and being challenged through exposure to multiple perspectives. They also developed interpersonal skills and learned skills such as mediation, conflict resolution and other ways to resolve issues.

One of the big changes in attitudes related to the way in which young people perceived members of the Gardaí. Positive changes were commented on by both Gardaí and young people. The involvement of Community Gardaí in project activities was seen as pivotal in this regard.

It is concluded that there are decreases in the level of risk/need of project participants in respect of attitudes and orientation.

It is concluded in summary that the following outcomes measured through the YLS assessment tool show mainly positive findings through decreases in participants' risk levels relating to education/ employment; family circumstances/parenting, peer relations; leisure/recreation; personality/ behaviour and attitudes/orientation.

The largest decrease in risk level is identified in respect of education/employment and this is coherent with the aims of the ESF funding programme, and with the high proportion of projects who provide interventions directly related to this area.

Q5. What recommendations arise from the evaluation

Recommendations for improvements in governance

1. *That the current SLA arrangement between the Department and the CBOs be continued but that the SLA be reviewed to ensure that the responsibilities of the CBO are clear and distinct from those of the Project Committee.*

2. *That the Project Committee be slightly re-aligned as an oversight body with responsibility for approval but not the development of the Annual Plan; for approving financial and other returns but not for making them; for ensuring that monitoring and review is carried out but not for doing it; and so on. The membership of the Project Committee should be reconsidered in this light and financial, legal, strategic and other skills should be sought as well as membership from functional areas.*

3. *That the responses available to the Project Committee in the event of issues being identified through its oversight function are clearly outlined.*

4. *That the role of the Chair of the Project Committee be reviewed while remaining with the Gardaí, that all of the functions of the Chair are consolidated into one part of the Operational Requirements and that any function which is properly that of the CBO is removed.*

5. *That responsibility for the preparation of the Annual Plan clearly lie with the CBO but that the process of preparation require consultation with others particularly the Gardaí.*

6. *That the CBO be given a clear responsibility of keeping the Project Committee informed of any relevant matters which might impact on its remit.*

7. *That the Together Stronger document be reviewed to ensure that it is consistent with other governance documents, recognising that it is a clear statement of how the Referral Assessment Committee is structured and operates and recognising that this is the principal mechanism for operational collaboration between the CBO and the Gardaí.*

8. *That consideration be given to the establishment of a structure to facilitate operational collaboration. This could be achieved by expanding the Referral Assessment Committee for some of its functions (it already has the option of inviting others to specific meetings), by the establishment of a sub-committee of the Project Committee or by the establishment of a new structure.*

9. *That consideration be given to a stated role for Community Gardaí and where this could be reflected. A possible mechanism would be through the SLA and the Operational Requirements document.*

10. *That consideration be given to the establishment of peer networks for managers and YJWs as learning and support mechanisms but without any specific decision-making or advocacy role.*

11. *That where amalgamation of projects take place, individual YDPs continue to have local level governance structures as well as the flexibility, autonomy and budget to respond to the specific community and participant needs arising in their catchment area.*

Recommendations in respect of resourcing of YDPs

12. *That a review be undertaken of terms and conditions for personnel working in YDPs, taking account of pay scales, working hours per week, types of contract, and a potential expansion of*

the projects to include weekend work; and that all efforts be made to ensure differences in terms and conditions between personnel working in YDPs are minimised.

13. *That consideration be given to ways in which YDPs can be made available at weekends and an appropriate budget allocated to ensuring this can take place.*

14. *It is acknowledged that additional funding can be requested by the YDPs through their annual budget submission and additional funding may be made available and disbursed at other times by the DoJ. While recognising the challenges arising in ensuring value for money, it is recommended that a ring-fenced budget be made available to support the acquisition and fitting out of a suitable premises for those projects that are currently without one; that ongoing capital funding be made available to support the creation of environments within project premises so that they are welcoming for young people and fit for purpose for the management and delivery of YDPs.*

15. *That funding be made available on an ongoing basis to ensure that YDPs can provide additional services, supports or equipment that are deemed necessary for participants to achieve better outcomes but cannot be provided by their families.*

16. *That a consultative process be put in place to identify the added resources required by the YDPs to provide the additional services envisaged in the Youth Justice Strategy and that these resources be made available to the YDPs on application and in a timely manner.*

Recommendations in respect of personnel

17. *That consideration be given by CBOs to mechanisms through which opportunities for advancement might be provided for YJWs; that where numbers are small and the structure is flat, this might take the form of posts of responsibility for specific aspects of the project and recognition of advanced status after a certain amount of experience or additional qualifications have been obtained.*

18. *That a review of Manager titles be carried out in conjunction with the CBOs to consider whether a common set of designations can be agreed which will properly reflect the role of different personnel and that the agreed system be presented to and adopted by all parties.*

19. *That consideration be given to the development, in collaboration with the Higher Education Sector, of a specialist Youth Justice post-graduate programme open to Gardaí and YJWs so that a shared body of knowledge and philosophical perspective can be developed by key members of the project operational teams.*

20. *That the provision of professional supervision for all YJWs be included as a requirement in future SLAs and that consideration be given as to whether such supervision should be mandatory.*

21. *That a review of potential safety issues arising from project personnel using their own cars to provide transport to project participants should take place, and policy and practices developed that take account of the welfare of both personnel and participants.*

22. *That issues relating to the non-mandatory nature of engagement with projects by participants be considered and recommendations made in respect of any particular groups where challenges to engagement arise.*

23. *That the work carried out in support of the projects by the Best Practice Development Team and REPPP continue.*

Recommendations in respect of the implementation of YDPs

24. *That a needs analysis of communities and youth crime rates in areas where YDPs are not currently available be undertaken and projects established in those areas where needs are identified.*

25. *That consideration be given as to ways in which intimidation of participants by groups and individuals involved in criminal behaviour might be addressed and that interventions and resources be provided where this is identified as a significant issue.*

26. *That a review of relevant interventions relating to crime, with a particular focus on victims, be undertaken and recommendations made for implementation across projects.*

27. *That the high proportion of foreign/minority participants in projects be recognised and that consideration be given to the extent to which implementation of the YDPs are culturally appropriate.*

28. *That a review of the role of YDPs with young people in residential care homes be carried out and liaison with other agencies and sectors takes place to ensure a coherent and appropriate response to need is developed.*

29. *That consideration be given to the development of more formalised relationships with key statutory organisations that provide mental health services and with those responsible for employment.*

30. *That structural or organisational barriers to carrying out group work be identified at project level and solutions developed to ensure this type of method can be applied within every YDP.*

Recommendations in respect of outcomes and impacts

31. *That positive outcomes arising from the work of the YDPs, as measured through reductions in risk, particularly in respect of education/employment, should be acknowledged and recognised.*

32. *That where young people identified with low risk levels (including secondary participants and younger age groups) are involved in projects, interventions, methodologies and implementation are appropriate for this group and that a similar approach be adopted in respect of hard-to-reach participants.*

33. *That, in light of the finding that outcomes relating to substance abuse are less successful compared to other outcome areas and that an urgent and comprehensive response is needed, a review of the role of the projects in this area be carried out and a focused plan developed.*

34. *That realistic expectations about the potential of the YDPs be acknowledged given the limited amount of time and level of contact between the YDPs and participants.*

35. *That expectations include the recognition of the benefits of participants achieving what can be understood as 'scaffolding outcomes' which are necessary to improving life chances: respecting*

boundaries; being able to manage conflict, stress and anxiety; and developing empathy, confidence, and hope for lives now and in the future.

36. *That reasons for the considerable differences between the perceptions of the impact of the YDPs as reported by stakeholders and the changes in risk as recorded in the YLS reassessments, be explored further.*

Recommendations in respect of further research and data development

37. *That the valuable work taking place in the creation of evidence to support the implementation of the YDPs should continue and consideration be given to the research needs identified in this evaluation.*

38. *That, building on the rich description of the YDPs and analysis of different data sources provided in this evaluation, consideration be given to carrying out a more comprehensive analysis of the administrative databases using inferential techniques.*

39. *That ways be found to access and analyse Garda PULSE data relating to individual YDP participants, without compromising privacy and confidentiality, with a particular focus on the trajectories of those who remain engaged in the projects, disengage in a planned way and disengage in an unplanned way.*

40. *That analysis of Garda aggregate PULSE data in respect of young people according to YDP catchment areas be carried out annually and trends noted.*

41. *That the YLS tool be reviewed for construct validity with YDP participants and particularly for its sensitivity in identifying risk/need in respect of crime and offences and in identifying participants who have relatively low levels of risk.*
42. *That a review be carried out of measures capable of identifying risk, need and progress in areas described in this evaluation as 'scaffolding outcomes' , and these measures be introduced as a mechanism for identifying, recognising and valuing what are referred to by stakeholders as 'small successes'.*

43. *That a review be carried out of the reasons for the relatively small number of follow-up YLS assessments, and measures be introduced to increase the number of follow-up assessments, to ensure updated risk and need profiles of participants and provide an improved basis for measuring progress and overall impact.*

44. *That consideration be given to recording YLS assessments on the APR file .*

45. *That all projects be issued with a unique identifier to be used in all administrative data sets and that this unique identifier be consistent with best practice in naming conventions.*

46. *That a set of benchmarking indicators be developed to provide ongoing, up-to-date and relevant information about the projects, based on the current administrative data sources.*

47. *That a programme of secondary data analysis be implemented in respect of the administrative data currently submitted by projects to the Department and results and other learning be shared with YDPs to inform governance, practice and development.*

48. *That analysis be carried out of differences between projects in the percentages of participants whose risk increased or decreased and of the causes of these differences and results shared with YDPs.*

49. *That the potential to strengthen and expand interventions with young people that focus specifically on reducing crime be explored.*

50. *That a review be undertaken of the most commonly used programmes within YDPs and issues of programme fidelity, implementation, and effectiveness considered.*

51. *That research be carried out on the trajectories of young people who are referred to the projects, but who do not attend, using Garda PULSE data and other sources.*

52. *That research be carried out with, and about, young people who disengage in an unplanned way from the YDPs.*

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