An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027:

Implementation Statement for 2023

1. Background to Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027

In April of 2021, the Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027 was launched by the Minister of State for the Department of Justice. Preceded by the Youth Justice Strategy 2008 and the Youth Justice Action Plan 2014-2018, the Strategy was designed to provide a developmental framework to address previously identified challenges and new and emerging issues faced by children, young people and families in contact with the Criminal Justice System in Ireland.

Development of the Strategy was guided by an expert Steering Group, which was first convened in 2019 and informed by a public consultation process and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders working in the youth justice sector.

One of the Strategy's three thematic objectives is to provide effective governance, monitoring and support for policy implementation and continuing evidence-informed development of practice and programmes. This Implementation Statement therefore aims to provide key updates on progress made by the Department and partner agencies in 2023 to carry forward the many objectives and actions set out by the Strategy. It also builds on updates provided by the two previous Implementation Statements for 2021 and 2022.

2. Governance, Oversight and Consultation

Strategic Objective 1.1

The dedicated governance, oversight and consultation structure set out in Appendix 2 of the Youth Justice Strategy was maintained during 2023 to further steer and support the implementation of the Strategy.

Both the Youth Justice Governance and Strategy Group (YJGSG) and the Youth Justice Oversight Group (YJOG), which are responsible for coordinating work being done across Departments and key agencies involved in the delivery of the Strategy, met three times in 2023.

Topics discussed by these groups in the context of the Youth Justice Strategy included:

- Results of the Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs) Evaluation, commissioned in 2022 and published in 2023.
- Provision and expansion of early intervention and family support services offered by YDPs.
- Strengthening relationships between youth workers and young people.
- Youth homelessness (linked to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's Youth Homelessness Strategy).

- Children and young people with State care experience and the criminal justice system.
- Joint commissioning of new youth justice services in six pilot areas identified through a service mapping exercise.
- Issues with access to speech and language therapies and their impact on children potentially involved in the criminal justice system.
- The establishment of the new YDP Research & Development Team (an amalgamation of the Best Practice Development Team (BPDT) and the Action Research Project team (ARP)) under the management of REPPP (Research Evidence into Policy Programmes and Practice).
- Examining the possible option of extending diversion opportunities to 18 to 24 year-olds.
- Access to university for people with experience of the criminal justice system (linked to the Department of Further and Higher Education's National Access Plan 2022-2028).
- Development of the successor National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028 by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

The Youth Justice Advisory Group (YJAG) also reconvened for two meetings in July and September of 2023. Some of the matters discussed in these meetings included:

- Judicial responses and the provision of additional wrap-around supports for vulnerable children and young people, including:
    - Members of the 'harder-to-reach' cohort.
    - Disabled and neuro-diverse children and young people.
    - Children and young people with mental health or substance misuse issues.
    - Members of different minority groups, such as the Traveller and Roma communities.
    - Children and young people with State care experience.
    - Members of families with histories of criminality, substance misuse, or mental illness.
    - Members of communities living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

- School-avoidant children and young people.
- Children and young people involved in or being targeted by criminal networks.

- Capacity building and training for YDPs to bridge the gap between the harder-to-reach cohort and support services.
- Impact of negative experiences with service providers on children and young people.
- Training in speech and language therapies for youth workers.
- Increased provision of Intermediaries to help children and young people with additional communication needs.

Finally, the North/South Youth Justice Project Advisory Group met twice in April and October of 2023. Items of note which were discussed at these meetings included:

- Sharing of learnings from the evaluation of Extern's Bail Supervision Scheme.
- Updates from the all island 'Stable Lives Safer Streets' policy research hub (membership comprised of REPPP/ University of Limerick (UL), Queens University and the Centre for Effective Services).
- Progress made on the review and recommended amendments of the Children Act 2001.
- New projects being implemented by Oberstown Detention Campus.
- Completion and launch of Oberstown's Annual Report for 2022 to 2026.
- Results of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre's visit to Oberstown (NI).
- Updates on the ASPIRE programme, which provides diversion services to young men at risk of offending in paramilitary organisations (NI).
- Issues faced by social care workers upon registration and providing cross-border services (NI).
- Continued impact of Covid-19.

Alongside chairing and sitting on the above groups, the Department of Justice and the Youth Strategy Governance, Oversight and Consultative structures oversaw the development and progression of a number of initiatives during 2023.

a) Establishing four new Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs)

2.9.2 – *Expand the existing [YDP] network to achieve full availability of youth diversion projects throughout the State within 2 years.*

In 2022, REPPP conducted a review of the national geographical spread of YDPs and identified six locations where new projects could be based, as well as the need to expand the catchment areas of certain existing YDPs to allow for enhanced service provision.

Four of the six sites identified were launched in 2023 and were:

- South Monaghan;
- Claremorris and district;
- South and East Wicklow and;
- West County Cork.

These 4 new YDPs have the wider mandate for YDPs as reflected in the Youth Justice Strategy and will:

- Undertake early intervention work with younger children who are identified as being on a trajectory to later involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour;
- Provide family support for the families of participants;
- Support schools to retain YDP participants in the education system and;
- Work with harder-to-reach young people on an outreach basis.

The Department has met with the successful applicants to discuss their work plans and to prepare for the rolling out of their services. Discussions have included expanding services available, releasing of additional funds to enable same, the taking on of extra staff with specific roles (e.g. early intervention worker) and input into interview/application process for new staff. The new YPDs began rollout in Q1/2 of 2024.

The two additional areas identified (Thurles and surrounding towns in North Tipperary and East Clare) are being developed as part of the Department's joint commissioning initiative through 2024, as will be explained in part c).

b) Results of the Evaluation of YDPs

Strategic Objective 2.9

In 2022, the Department commissioned an external evaluation of the YDPs, which was published in June 2023. The evaluation found that YDPs that are likely to work best:

- Are embedded in their community, respond to local needs, involve local stakeholders in project governance and adhere to best practices in service governance and implementation.
- Are delivered by experienced and well-educated personnel.
- Build and maintain good relationships between all relevant stakeholders.
- Are available when needed and are easy to access by participants.
- Are adequately resourced to provide tailored processes and activities in response to participant needs.
- Recognise the importance of providing an accessible service that young people want to engage with; carry out formal and informal assessments and reassessments, enable the creation of an alternative vision for the young people's future, facilitate, enable and support the achievement of this vision and support and enable families and communities to support young people better.

The evaluation concluded that YDPs are performing well in many areas that are known to impact positively on reducing crime and reoffending. The report noted the very positive work ongoing in the YDPs already, including the strong governance and high levels of engagement from participants and their families. Positive findings relating to key inputs included that;

- The aim and objectives of the YDPs are directly aligned with Irish Youth Justice policies and in particular with the emphasis on diversion.
- Governance of the YDPs at national level is well-structured and focused.
- The governance of the projects at local level works well in practice with good commitment, cooperation and interaction between partners.
- Managers report high levels of support through the work of the national structures which are in place.
- There is a willingness and commitment to expand services offered by YDPs.
- There is buy in and confidence of the Youth Justice Strategy.

- The overall split of funds between pay and non-pay costs presented in the budget files is appropriate.
- The profile of the personnel available to the projects is positive and well-distributed and promotes equality, with evidence of high satisfaction of Youth Justice Workers (YJWs) and their working conditions overall.
- There is considerable diversity in participant and family circumstances in the projects.
- Projects in general are located in areas where they are likely to have the greatest impact, given the prevalence of crime in those areas.

Several areas for improvement were also identified, including better availability of YDPs at weekends and maximising the use of administrative data and other research to inform services. The main recommendations were made in the following areas:

- Some improvements in local governance, particularly with reference to clarity of functions and consistency between documents;
- Resourcing of YDPs to allow for future added focuses and a greater degree of equality;
- Personnel with particular regard to training, supervision, promotion and pay equality;
- Implementation of YDPs with regard to intimidation, new projects, substance misuse, crime, victims, foreign nationals and mental health and employment services.
- Outcomes and impacts with regard to realistic expectations, acknowledgement of scaffolding achievements and the use of a valid performance measurement tool.
- Further research and data development to ensure tools used are valid and reliable for the population, improve data collection, make better use of available data and gain access to Garda PULSE data.

The Department is currently considering the recommendations of the evaluation to better align work being done to the needs of the YDP network and effectively address those areas requiring improvement.

c) Joint Commissioning

2.1.1 – *We will work collectively to identify best practices for collaborative service delivery, based on the "no wrong door" principle, emphasising child-centred wrap-around services.*

During 2022 and 2023, the Department and REPPP examined the trialling of a collaborative approach to commissioning of relevant services in collaboration other Departments and agencies. The intention is to agree an approach to joint commissioning of relevant services in a number of pilot areas, on the basis of an agreed assessment of local needs, an agreed framework for allocation of central funding to meet those needs and an approved set of mutual agreements at local level to deliver services in a cohesive and integrated way. The identified areas are:

- Thurles and surrounding towns in North Tipperary (as new YDP, see previous);
- East Clare (as new YDP);
- Limerick City/County;
- Longford;
- Ballyfermot/Cherry Orchard (Dublin City) and;
- Cavan or Monaghan.

This approach aims to enhance communication and collaboration between agencies based on the best interest of children and young people and the "no wrong door" principle. The "no wrong door" principle advocates for the provision of child-centred, wrap-around services over traditional ones. The two final YDPs necessary for full national coverage will be delivered through this initiative.

The Department has conducted two phases of consultations over the last six months with youth service providers and An Garda Síochána to determine their level of interest in being part of such a trial; this has been met with an enthusiastic response and buy-in. The next phase involves two local mapping exercises which have already commenced. The first, which is nearing completion, is to map out what services already exist in each of the areas and the funding they receive. The second aims to identify the location of the prolific offending young people who have very complex needs in each of the areas.

Following these mapping exercises, the next step will be to trial how the services will work together to address the needs of these prolific offending young people. This work will be led by REPPP.

d) 18-24 Year Old Diversion

2.6.3 – *We will examine that necessary steps to establish a diversion process for those aged 18-24, aligned with the development of the Health Diversion approach and relevant community supports (see 2.9.5) and with due regard to issues concerning categories of offences, any legal constraints and with a view to developing initial pilot approaches.*

A discussion document for public consultation on diversion paths for young adults aged 18-24 was published in November 2022. The Department of Justice were seeking opinions on appropriate diversion processes for young adults of the ages 18 to 24 who come into contact with the criminal justice system. Before the deadline of 17th January 2023, the Department of Justice received eight written submissions and sixty-two responses to the public survey.

Following this, the Department held two separate Open Policy Forums with members of An Garda Síochána and youth justice practitioners in November 2023 to gather their views on the matter. Answers to the discussion questions posed during the forums were recorded by five note-takers at both sessions.

From the responses gathered, it is clear that this is a sensitive and complex issue which will require continued engagement with stakeholders. A final consultation on this matter is due to take place before the end of 2024, after which a policy proposal will be prepared for consideration.

e) Review and Amendment of the Children Act 2001

Strategic Objective 1.7

The Children Act 2001 places specific emphasis on the treatment of children aged between 12 and 18, with a view to diverting them away from crime and, as far as possible, from the Criminal Justice System. This attitude represents a move away from a focus on retribution and deterrence towards a more rehabilitative and welfare-based system. Throughout 2022 and 2023, the Department drafted a comprehensive review of the Act to determine which, if any, of its provisions have not operated in the manner as they were intended by legislators. Some of these amendments are being incorporated into the Child Care (Amendment) Bill 2023, while others which will be more challenging and take longer to implement are to be discussed further through the Youth Strategy Governance, Oversight and Consultative structures.

f) Youth Diversion Projects Annual Conference 2023

The Youth Diversion Projects Annual Conference was once again hosted by the Department of Justice in the Croke Park Conference Centre on 7 November 2023. The full-day event was exceptionally well-attended with close to 500 delegates present. The theme of 2023's conference was 'New Pathways through Ireland' and centred on the implementation of the Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027.

Attendees included staff from Youth Diversion Projects located nationwide, members of An Garda Síochána, panellists, moderators, members of the event planning team, officials from various government Departments and even some YDP participants. The first half of the Conference consisted of addresses made by Minister of State James Browne and Principal of Youth Justice Policy Deaglán Ó Briain, which were then followed by presentations from expert speakers in the Youth Work Sector (EPIC, child advocacy and Centric Community Research, community engagement) and a number of YDP youth workers and participants who had engaged in pro-social, community-based activities. There were also five workshops, each one focusing on alternative pathways to youth diversion, held during the second half of the day.

g) Provision of Financial Support for Gaisce – The President's Award

Gaisce is a proven positive self-development programme for young people in Ireland. It aims to empower and encourage young individuals to set and achieve personal goals, challenge themselves and make a positive impact on their communities. The programme very often opens up the potential of new pathways and can transform the lives of young people, particularly those who are marginalised or at risk. Gaisce is open to all young people aged 14-25.

The Gaisce programme provides young people in diversion programmes with a structured framework for personal development, a sense of purpose and a positive way to redirect their energy and focus. It can help them build valuable life skills, improve their self-esteem and contribute positively to their communities, ultimately reducing the risk of engaging in negative behaviours.

At the 2023 YDP Annual Conference, the Minister of State announced that the Department would support the cost of registrations for Gaisce Awards from 2024 onwards through established Department of Justice funding administration.

3. REPPP Project

Strategic Objective 1.2

In 2023, the REPPP Project built on the work commenced in 2021 and 2022. New projects in key policy areas also commenced, as outlined in greater detail below. Updates on REPPP's ongoing and planned projects were presented to the Youth Justice Oversight Group (20th September 2023), the Youth Justice Advisory Group (26th September 2023) and the Youth Justice Governance and Strategy Group (16th October 2023). The REPPP Advisory Group met in July 2023.

a) Greentown

The Greentown Initiative, first established in 2021 with the support of the Department of Justice and An Garda Síochána, aims to provide support to children, families and communities around the country that are most likely to be targeted and impacted by crime networks. Implemented by community-based organisations in 2 locations (Whitetown and Yellowtown) and overseen by a multi-agency advisory group, the Greentown Programme comprises of 4 inter-connected pillars:

- Network Disruption
- Community Efficacy Programme
- Intensive Family Programme
- Pro-Social Opportunities Programme

An important practical barrier was overcome in 2023 when a data sharing protocol was agreed between key statutory partners, the service providers in Whitetown and Yellowtown and REPPP. The successful development of this protocol ensured that the programme could be closely targeted at the most vulnerable individuals and the programme as a whole can be accurately evaluated. In 2023, An Garda Siochana hosted two network disruption workshops to identify potential solutions to challenges to this pillar.

An Interim report completed by REPPP in July 2023 found that the Greentown programme was showing promising results. The report recommended continuing the trial to its intended end date (December 2026) and noted that progress needed to be made in the area of Network Disruption. A formal framework for the evaluation of the Programme is currently being developed by REPPP. In 2023, the University of Limerick was awarded €1.3 million by the Higher Education Authority in recognition of the *research impact* of the Greentown initiative.

The Department of Justice has linked with the Ministry for Justice in the Netherlands (NL), which is developing a similar programme to Greentown in their local neighbourhoods where young people are being drawn into crime networks.

b) Local Leadership Programme (LLP)

The Local Leadership Programme (*Grappling with Wicked Problems*) brings together professionals working in public service organisations or bodies who can bring energy, leadership and influence to tackling 'wicked' or complex problems. The aim of the LLP is to bring about tangible improvements for service users and local communities, by enhancing the capacity of professionals working in, managing, funding or supporting public service organisations to tackle complex, multi-layered problems.

3 LLPs took place in 2023:

- **Balbriggan LLP** (continued from 2022): This LLP explored the relationship between young black Irish people and An Garda Siochana. Findings from consultations with young people were presented to members of the local community, youth workers, Garda members and young people from the black and Asian community.
- **Wexford LLP:** The Wexford LLP addressed two core issues:
    - Developing sustainable tenancies in Approved Housing Bodies.
    - Building a safer community in a local housing estate.
- **Longford LLP:** The Longford LLP tackled 3 complex issues:
    - Young people and illicit drug use.
    - Representation of the Traveller Community.
    - Anti-social behaviour and community efficacy in a specific housing estate.

A Report on the LLP is currently being developed for publication.

4. Youth Diversion Project Development

Strategic Objectives 2.8 and 2.9

The 99 YDPs currently funded by the Department of Justice are the main service through which vulnerable children and young people who have been, or are at risk of becoming, involved in anti-social and/or criminal activity can avail of the services and supports they need to facilitate their desistance from such behaviour. The vital role they play in the successful delivery of the Strategy, therefore, cannot be overlooked.

In 2023, the YDP Research and Development Team (YDP R&D team) was established under the management of REPPP. This is an amalgamation of the YDP Best Practice Development Team (BPDT) members and the Research Fellows in Youth Justice from the former Action Research Project (ARP) in REPPP.

The purpose of the R&D team is to improve outcomes for children, young people and families connected to the YDP network, by supporting the development and implementation of practice, based on local and international evidence. In partnership with YDPs and other stakeholders, the role of the R&D team is to generate new research, utilise practice wisdom, provide training and build capacity, with the aim of reducing youth offending and supporting and sustaining safer communities. Going forward the combined team will service the support needs of the network as outlined in Key Action 1.2.2: "*(f) Support the ongoing development of effective practices in Diversion Projects, including through action research and the dedicated Best Practice Development Team working together."*

The following research activities were coordinated by the R&D Team in 2023:

- ***Implementing the Relationship Model*** – The relationship study report was drafted and the accompanying training material developed for dissemination in 2024.
- ***The Relationships Project Mastery Group*** – The Group, comprising of 14 practitioners from 8 organisations, facilitated by REPPP, are supported to share the relationship research as practice experts nationwide.
- ***Scramblers Initiative*** – Interviews were held with representatives of the Department of Justice-funded Scramblers Projects. The purpose of these interviews is to produce an internal implementation report on the Scramblers Initiative in 2024.
- ***MA Support*** – 15 Department of Justice-funded students, supervised by REPPP staff, successfully completed the MA in Human Rights and Criminal Justice in 2023 in UL (2021-2023 cohort). 16 new students joined the 2023-2025 MA cohort.

Additional Specialised Programmes

a) Data Study Project (*Youth Diversion Whole of System Reporting Project*)

The Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027 aims to maximise the use of data and research to inform youth justice policy. To support these objectives, REPPP is developing a Whole of System Report (WSR) to demonstrate the value of a detailed analysis of de-identified project-level data from Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs). Administrative data routinely collected throughout the Youth Justice system provides the capacity to examine the pattern of youth offending, the young people who enter the justice system (Youth Diversion Programme) and how the state responds to offending by young people (YDPs).

In 2023, the Department of Justice made available a sample of Annual Performance Reports from the 106 Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs) for the years 2016-2023 and Annual Plan Reports from the YDPs for the years 2017-2023. The REPPP Team developed and tested code (in Python) to extract data from the Annual Plans and Reports and to automatically remove identifying information. It is now working on a Proof-of-Concept report outlining how a Data Science Approach can be used for the detailed examination of narrative data and historic records.

b) Bail Supervision Scheme

The Bail Supervision Scheme is being implemented in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. An Impact Evaluation will take place commencing mid 2024 following 12 months of full operations in all locations.

c) 'No Wrong Door' Project (NWD)

6 locations have been selected for the No Wrong Door project: Limerick City, Clare, North Tipperary, Cavan/Monaghan, Ballyfermot/Cherry Orchard and Longford/Westmeath.

A methodological framework for the study was co-designed with Limerick NWD Research Oversight Group hosted by Limerick City and County Council Office of Regeneration. The framework will be used as the standard for undertaking the studies in the other 5 NWD locations.

REPPP will baseline the experiences of front-line workers and young people with complex needs against an international standard for NWD developed from an international systematic review. The framework also intends to support the 'Joint Commissioning' actions in the Youth Justice strategy.

d) Implementation of the YJ Strategy 2021-2027 Study

A study entitled, "*How can a Published Strategy Better Contribute to the Implementation of Youth Justice policy intentions? A Case Study of the Irish Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027*" was agreed with key stakeholders. It will aim to establish the degree to which the Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027 has been implemented in its second year among a specific group of stakeholders in a sample of 5 geographical locations.

e) 'Stable Lives Safer Streets' Research Hub

Funded under the Higher Education Authority (HEA) North South Initiative, researchers from REPPP, Queens University Belfast and The Centre for Effective Services are collaborating to deliver the following work packages as part of this initiative:

- Consolidating existing research on Youth Justice
- Responding to emerging Youth Justice Policy Priorities
- Developing a pragmatic self-report standardised Measurement Tool
- Translation and implementation of evidence informed policy into practice.
- Developing a Multi-stakeholder Implementation Model.

The Hub will provide evidence about accessible, practical approaches to understanding and responding to youth crime, criminal exploitation and community safety and will enable a sustainable cross-border approach for evidence building and its use in developing good policy and practice.

5. Youth Justice Strategy – Ongoing Service Development Objectives

In the third year of implementation of the Strategy, the work of important existing programmes continued. These are covered by the Ongoing Service Development Objectives which are listed on page 43 of the Strategy and relate primarily to the work of An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service and the operation of Oberstown Children Detention Campus. Information on the ongoing implementation of these objectives and related actions is given below.

Garda Youth Diversion Programme – Development and Practice (3 Objectives)

2.4.1 – *An Garda Síochána will mandate a strong central resource within An Garda Síochána, to:*

Oversee the operation of the Garda Diversion Programme.

Design Garda policies and procedures for Diversion of children and young people from offending.

Inform Garda practice and procedures to incentivise, as far as possible, positive interaction between Gardaí and young people.

Drive the design of Garda training and best practices, on age appropriate interaction with children and young people, including the use of general policing powers and, with regard to disadvantage and diversity issues, people, including in relation to Schools Programmes and Community Policing generally.

Guide the ongoing development of community initiatives such as the Garda Schools Programmes and Community Policing generally.

2.5.1 – *An Garda Síochána will implement the recommendations arising from the 2019 Garda Youth Referral Examination Report and equip the Garda National Bureau of Youth Diversion to ensure:*

Efficient decision making on cases referred to it.

Ready access to specialist legal or other professional resources.

Access to appropriate IT or other technical supports.

Consistent application of decision making policies.

Transparent decision making and communication with those who are the subject of referral for Diversion.

2.7.1 – *Ensure centralised Garda oversight of cases and that all appropriate actions are taken to a conclusion, in line with procedures, including implementation of the recommendations from the 2019 Garda Youth Referral Examination Report.*

Implementation by An Garda Síochána in 2023

Dedicated governance structures are in place for the operation of the Garda National Youth Diversion Bureau (GNYDB) and activity under the Diversion Programme is detailed in the reports of the Monitoring Committee appointed under Section 44 of the Children Act 2001.

The GNYDB provides a central office, led by a Principal Officer, which considers the applicability of Diversion measures for all youth crime incidents, operating in accordance with Part 4 of the Children Act 2001. Decisions on whether or not to admit a child or young person to the Diversion Programme are made by the Director, who is a Superintendent within the GNYDB. Almost 16,000 crime incidents were processed by the GNYDB in 2023.

Implementation of Objectives 2.4.1, 2.5.1 and 2.7.1 is supported by practice guidelines developed by the GNYDB which cover various aspects of the assessment, monitoring and processing of cases which are referred for consideration for admission to the Diversion Programme, as well as key functions such as the administration of cautions and supervision by Juvenile Liaison Officers.

A range of initiatives by the GNYDB were conducted and continued in 2023 including:

a) The Greentown Programme

This programme intends to achieve its objectives by operating four contributory interventions in parallel in the two Trial Sites. Three of the interventions- Community Efficacy, Intensive Family Support and Pro-Social Opportunities- have been developed over the last two years and can be considered reasonably fully operational. While disrupting criminal networks has always been a focus for An Garda Síochána, work is now underway to develop specific strategies for interrupting the relationships between lower status members of the criminal networks who are 'grooming' children to commit crimes such as holding, transporting and sale of drugs.

The development of the Network Disruption intervention is at an advanced stage. GNYDB has coordinated two workshops with local Gardaí and relevant National Units where ideas and best practice in terms of Network Disruption were discussed. Meetings between GNCEB and local community policing teams are currently being arranged in order to develop a module for the Schools Programme which can be tailored to the needs of the communities in each Trial Site.

b) Youth Joint Agency Response to Crime

On behalf of An Garda Síochána, the Garda Youth Diversion Bureau has oversight for the Youth Joint Agency Response to Crime (Y-JARC). In 2023, the GNYDB, in cooperation with the Probation Service, reviewed the current Y-JARC Initiatives which involved the review itself, approval of Standard Operating Procedures and Governance and development of the additional Dublin North Central Y-JARC Initiative.

c) Bail Support Supervision Scheme

On behalf of An Garda Síochána, the Garda Youth Diversion Bureau has oversight for the Bail Support Supervision Scheme. In 2023, the GNYDB engaged with the Department of Justice to conduct a review of the processes and procedures of this scheme, which is due for completion in 2024.

d) Youth Diversion Late Night Football Leagues (LNLs)

The Late Night Leagues (LNLs) is a community youth diversion and engagement initiative used as an opportunity for An Garda Síochána to build better relationships with young people in specific areas. This initiative from An Garda Síochána (AGS) and the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) in partnership with external agencies is aimed at encouraging young people to participate in meaningful activities, thus reducing youth crime and anti-social behavior (ASB).

In 2023, the Garda Youth Diversion Bureau, in cooperation with the FAI, piloted the Youth Diversion Late Night Leagues. By partnering with the community, Youth Diversion Projects, Probation Projects and other Youth related engagement and Youth Diversion Projects and the FAI, Juvenile Liaison Gardaí and Community Gardaí increase the chances of success of this initiative for long-term sustainable solutions in communities. Problem-solving means using the LNLs as a tool to tackle youth crime and anti-social behaviour by running the league at peak times and days, usually Friday and Saturday nights.

Local at-risk youth were selected within Districts/Divisions where they were referred to the Garda Youth Diversion Programme and where there were Youth Diversion Projects, Probation Projects, or another relevant Youth Project. Partners were identified at a local level which included Youth Diversion Projects, Probation Projects, youth groups, alternative education projects/Youth Reach and other relevant groups engaging with young people in that particular area.

GNYDB continued to promote the Diversion and the Garda Diversion Programme throughout the organisation by undertaking the following activities in 2023:

- Continuing to work with the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC) to develop a training seminar for PAF administrators.
- Continuing to engage with the Garda College to deliver presentations to newly promoted Sergeants and Inspectors on their role in the Diversion Programme. Presentations were delivered to all newly promoted Sergeants and Inspectors in 2023.
- Providing Restorative Justice Refresher and Mediation Skills training to all newly appointed Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers.
- Increasing the use of Restorative Justice and involving the victim as part of the caution process under the Diversion Programme.
- Working closely with the Department of Justice to support the work of Research Matters Ltd, who have conducted an evaluation of YDPs.
- Continuing to contribute to the Youth Justice Strategy 2021 – 2027 during 2023 by focusing on actions requiring engagement from An Garda Síochána at all levels. The GNYDB is represented at the YJGSG and YJOG.
- Supporting the development of the Department of Justice's National Youth Diversion Projects Conference 2023 at both the planning and facilitating stages.
- Collaborating closely with the Department of Justice, community-based organisations and Garda management locally in the development and expansion of the YDP network, thus supporting the Department of Justice's targets within the Youth Justice Strategy of full YDP coverage by the end of 2023.
- Continuing to review and eventually publishing the new Operational Requirements for YDPs to take account of developments in YDPs as a consequence of Department of Justice investment in-line with commitments in the Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027. The new Operational Requirements will include guidance on Early Intervention, Hard to Reach Young People and Family Support.
- Together Stronger workshops focused on guidelines for effective partnership between Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers and YDPs. These workshops were delivered by GNYDB and the YDP R&D Team.

- Developing support for YDP Community Based Organisation Representatives (CBORs) and Garda Committee Chairpersons alongside the YDP R&D Team, which relates to the operations of the YDP Project Committee.
- Continuing to implement recommendations from the 2019 Garda Youth Referral Examination Report and meet service development objectives to support efficient and transparent decision-making with regard to the Youth Diversion Programme and further develop community initiatives to encourage positive interaction between Gardaí and young people across the whole of An Garda Síochana.

<u>Young Person's Probation Support for Young People (5 Objectives)</u>

1.3.2 – *We will engage with Departments and Agencies in Northern Ireland to enhance cooperation and share evidence of effective approaches, including in relation to early intervention and diversion as well as policing, probation and criminal justice systems.*

Probation Service

The Probation Service, Young Persons Probation (YPP), has engaged with the Youth Justice Agency with the purpose of sharing practices and strengthening effective approaches to young people before the courts. Key areas of focus within these cross border meetings has been children in care whom are coming in contact with the justice system and models of practice for working with this group. Counterparts in Northern Ireland are also attempting to develop a response to increased numbers of unaccompanied minors entering the justice system. Moving towards best practice alignment, with consideration of local contexts, policies and governance will be a focus in 2024.

1.9.3 – *We will continue to support and resource the deployment of suitably qualified Probation Officers to engage effectively with children and young people before the courts and those under Probation Service Orders in Oberstown and in the community.*

Probation Service

The Probation Service works within the framework of the Youth Justice Strategy 2021- 2027 to maximise opportunities to promote positive behavioural change through the development

and delivery of opportunities for vulnerable children at risk or already engaged in the criminal justice system.

YPP is an Operational Region of the Probation Service with a national footprint. The YPP Region is resourced by four dedicated YPP teams, located in areas identified as best supporting the demands and needs for our work with children – Dublin North, Dublin South, Limerick/Clare and Cork. There are 17 Probation Officers, Social Work trained, in addition to a dedicated Probation Officer within regional teams to meet the needs of young people. YPP worked with circa 700 children and young people in 2023.

In 2023, YPP saw a significant increase in the numbers of young people coming before the courts on sexual offences. In order to better assess and inform the courts in relation to sexual offending all YPP Probation Officers were trained in the use of the AIM 3, a risk assessment tool for young people who sexually offend. This will allow for a more specialist response to assessing and intervening with young people before the courts on such charges.

2.7.2 – *Establish clear interagency procedures, working with community partners and appropriate assistance from the Probation Service, to address the situation of children and young people involved in offending behaviour, especially those unsuitable for Diversion, incorporating pilot project and programme initiatives and including (as appropriate in each case)*:

d) Development and adaptation of Community Supervision approaches including Probation Supervision, Y-JARC and Bail Supervision, working to address individual circumstances, including appropriate measures for those aged 18 – 24 years, aligned with development of the Adult Caution Scheme and other relevant systems and provisions.

Probation Service

In 2023, alongside colleagues in An Garda Síochana, statutory bodies and community based organisations, an additional Y-JARC was developed for Dublin's north inner city. The development of the additional Y-JARC was in response to a high profile incident in which it became evident that young people whom were offending at a level of significant risk to others, were not being afforded an effective inter-agency response. This will be led by the Probation Service and An Garda Síochana and will work with a group of children who are identified as most at risk and whom are causing most harm.

Y-JARCs nationally were reviewed in 2023, with a focus on delivering a more streamlined response with value given to localised needs and practices. The Standard Operating Procedures were reviewed by all agencies involved and amended to reflect a less centralised hierarchical delivery of service. In addition and in acknowledging the changing nature of offending needs, Y-JARCs nationally now accept referrals of young people from the age of 12.

YPP also works closely with the Bail Supervision service and the Greentown sites in responding to young people who may be known to all services.

YPP - Assessment and Supervision

The work of YPP generally comes through the Children Court (District Court level). In recent years, there has been an increase in young people before the Circuit and High Courts, with ten children sentenced through the Central Criminal Court in 2023.

Once referrals are received from the Courts, the Probation Officer builds a relationship with the child and with their family/primary caregivers. The Probation Officer consults with other key agencies including the child's education provider and, where relevant, Tusla. A comprehensive assessment of needs, risks and social context is completed and returned to the court with recommendations made around how needs might be met and risks addressed. If the court deem it appropriate and depending on the sanction imposed, the Probation Officer may be assigned a supervisory role with the young person.

The Probation Officers' role will be to develop, with the young person, an intervention and support plan targeting the areas of offending related to the charges and work with the young person, their family and wider network to ensuring desistence from further offending behaviour.

Addiction Support and Mental Health Services

Probation Officers use a child-centred approach, focusing on the ability of the child to change and to make better choices. The Probation Officer analyses the child's offending behaviour in the context of their offending, while identifying risk factors for further offending by applying the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI). This is a specific tool, used across the Youth Justice system, to assess risk, needs and gauge appropriate levels of intervention.

In keeping with the ethos of the Children Act 2001, every child/young person that the Probation Service work with is afforded the opportunity for engagement at the lowest level of intervention possible to keep them and the community safe. Probation Officers supervise young people as directed by the courts, including making referrals to appropriate services to help address their risks and needs.

2023 Activity

In 2023:

- 700 court referrals were made to the Probation Service for young people.
- 614 Pre-sanction Reports were prepared by the Probation Service for the courts.
- 619 young people were supervised by the Probation Service in the community.
- 52 reports were requested to consider Community Service, a significant increase on previous years.

Probation Service support for Diversion measures

The Probation Service supports young persons and their families in their own communities, whilst at the same time holding them to account to accept responsibility for their offending behaviour and the consequences of it. The Service funds sixteen Community Based Organisations (CBOs) that work directly with young people. Probation Officers make direct referrals to these CBOs and services include education and training, respite, counselling, mentoring and outdoor pursuits. Annually, approximately 400 young people avail of support from Probation funded CBOs.

The Probation Service has strong links with the Garda Diversion Programme, working closely with Juvenile Liaison Officers and Garda Case Managers. Probation Officers have ongoing engagement with YDPs funded by the Department of Justice. A number of Probation Service funded CBOs and YDPs work collaboratively, at times accepting referrals from one to the other, on a case by case basis, where it is the view that the needs of a particular service user may be more appropriately met by the alternate project.

The Probation Service assisted in the expansion of the Bail Supervision Scheme to Limerick and Cork and work collaboratively with the Scheme on certain cases.

2.12.1 – *We will align, as far as possible, national policies on Children in Detention and in State Care, within "Better Outcomes Brighter Futures -The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 -2020," and successor frameworks.*

2.14.1 – *We will pursue enhanced, timely and effective services in preparing children (under 18) for their safe return to the community.*

Probation Service

As part of its work, the YPP provides an in-reach service to Oberstown Children Detention Campus two days per week. There is a dedicated YPP Probation Officer in this role, holding both detention and community cases. This Probation Officer also co-facilitates offence-

focused programmes with young people in detention as well as completing individual work with children in detention. In 2023, the Probation Service, along with colleagues in Oberstown and Tusla (NIAPP and ACTS), developed a group work response to young people detained for sexual offences. This ensures that young people detained are not disadvantaged in their access to specialist treatment and rehabilitation which would otherwise have been available in the community.

The Probation Service and Oberstown have an agreed protocol, specific to Probation Officers and staff in Oberstown, to ensure the effective management and thorough care of children and young persons.

YPP Specialist Support

Work with young people who have sexually harmed: Currently, four Probation Officers are seconded one day per week to work with the National Inter Agency Prevention Programme (NIAPP). These Probation Officers co-facilitate treatment programmes with NIAPP for young people who have exhibited sexually harmful behaviour or sexually offended in Cork, South Dublin, North Dublin and Oberstown. A similar inter-agency response was being developed for Limerick in the last quarter of 2023 and is envisaged to become operational in May 2024.

Restorative Justice

2023 has seen a marked increase in the number of referrals coming from the courts for consideration of a restorative justice intervention. Instances where the Court orders a Restorative Conference, a restorative approach or where there is a restorative element to the case report, the Probation Officer usually develops a bespoke plan with the child, family and relevant parties. The progress/outcome is reported to the court in the Pre-sanction Report and recommendations can be made to the court, if appropriate.

Community Service

The courts have increased the number of referrals for Community Service assessments in the latter half of 2023. In response to this increased demand, YPP, in collaboration with CBOs, has developed pathways for young people on community service orders. While there is broad agreement around CS orders and how they are delivered, each young person is considered individually and offered a bespoke program to complete their community service order.

Training for Youth Diversion Projects (1 Objective)

1.9.4 - *We will continue to support the provision of training for Youth Justice Workers to support them to engage effectively with the children and young people they work with.*

The following training and capacity building was provided by the YDP R&D Team in 2023:

a) Restorative Practices:

- Seven bespoke trainings (three and a half days per training) with 71 practitioners.
- Three one-day refresher workshops with 21 practitioners.
- Four one-day Line Manager Workshops with 35 managers.

b) YLS/CMI (Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory) 2.0 (Risk Assessment Tool):

- Six YLS screening version trainings (half day) took place with 75 practitioners.
- Seven YLS/CMI 2.0 trainings (two days) with 87 practitioners.
- One CBO/Line manager workshop with 11 managers.
- For quality assurance purposes, a YLS/CMI interrater reliability study took place to measure the level of consistency of the risk/need assessment tool across the YDP network.

c) Foróige's A Life of Choices Programme:

- One training (two days) took place with 20 participants in attendance.

d) Motivational Interviewing:

- Three introduction level (two days) training sessions took place with 40 practitioners.
- One Intermediate level (two days) training session took place with 4 practitioners.
- Two skills development (one day) training sessions took place with 25 practitioners.

- One day training was provided for 5 practitioners on the Motivational Interviewing Support/Training Team.

e) Early Intervention:

- Consultations took place with 35 youth justice practitioners to review the Early Intervention Guidelines.
- One EARL-V3 (Early Assessment Risk List 3) Screening Version training (Risk Assessment Tool), for those who already received the EARL-V3 training, took place with 20 practitioners.
- Two EARL-V3 training sessions took place with 40 practitioners.

f) Together Stronger:

- Two Together Stronger events for Youth Justice Workers and Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers took place with 63 practitioners.

g) Planning for Success:

- 25 YDPs received individual one-to-one sessions to support projects to prepare for the completion of the YDP Annual Plan.

Detention – DCEDIY/Oberstown (2 Objectives)

2.11.2 – *We will continue to build on the existing Oberstown Children's Rights Framework to describe for each individual case, intended outcomes, the services/support required to help achieve those outcomes and the methodology for measuring what is achieved, from a period in Detention and from Post-Detention support.*

Actions taken in 2023:

In 2023, the Oberstown Campus has, as part of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, been involved with the European funded 'Giving Back Project'. The overall objective is to contribute to designing and implementing structural youth participation based methods in training professionals working in youth detention at national level in the Netherlands and Ireland and stimulate child-centered learning among European states. A number of young people in Oberstown have now been trained and two are now members of the Youthlab.

Other key aims of the 'Giving Back Project' include:

- Increasing understanding of promising and proven practices in Europe of youth-participation based training methods;
- Increasing child friendly communication and participation skills of professionals working inside youth prisons; and
- Strengthening knowledge and expertise of European training academy representatives by starting a learning process connecting professionals, young people and civil society from different countries and by presenting an analysis of identified promising practices and an analysis of lessons learned from the pilot Youthlab projects.

2.13.1 – *In relation to transitions from Oberstown to the prison system, we will build on existing procedures and practices and assess any gaps, including with regard to appropriate continuity of work done in Oberstown and develop appropriate recommendations and measures to address these.*

Actions taken in 2023:

Ongoing work is continuing with the Irish Prison Service (IPS) on engaging earlier with the Campus to ensure that the young people get as much information as possible, as early as possible, on the type of regime that exists in the prison into which they will transition. There is now greater awareness among IPS staff of the vulnerabilities of the young people and they have been very supportive in determining which prison is best suited to the individual

circumstances of each person who is subject to transfer. The information that is required is captured in a ‘handover’ document prepared by the Young Persons Unit and shared at the Placement Planning Meeting.