

Executive summary

Designing effective local responses to youth crime



Irish Youth Justice Service

Seirbhís na hÉireann um Cheartas i leith an Aosa Óig



Designing effective local responses to youth crime

A baseline analysis of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects

In a recent Garda survey, members of the public rated youth crime a major national problem [76%], secondary only to drug related and violent crime. Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) are one of the measures in place to help reduce youth crime. This report is the first part of an improvement programme for GYDPs, as envisaged by the National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010. The report was undertaken to provide an account of youth crime as it occurs in local areas and to analyse how GYDPs intend to impact upon youth offending. The report aims to help secure better outcomes for young people engaged with GYDPs and to make a corresponding impact on youth crime.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

The 100 GYDPs are community based, multi-agency crime prevention initiatives. Projects seek to challenge anti-social and/or criminal behaviour and provide activities to facilitate personal development, encourage civic responsibility and work towards improving long-term employability prospects of participants.

Projects are funded by the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) and administered through the Garda Office for Children and Youth Affairs. Projects are staffed and managed by youth organisations and local management companies. The first two GYDPs opened in Dublin in 1991 and have expanded to many local communities across the country in the intervening years.

The Baseline Analysis

The baseline analysis involved visits to 96 of the 100 projects currently in existence. The site visits and group interviews took place between March and July 2008.

The objective of the exercise was to gain an understanding of youth crime in each locality and what each project believed it could do to reduce offending.

Interviews covered the following issues:

- Size of catchment area
- Basic list of offences committed by young people
- Patterns of youth crime in the area
- Profiles of young people committing the offences
- Improvements that the project is trying to make to change the situation
- The project's logic for seeking these improvements

Findings

Offences committed by young people in project catchment areas

Garda statistics indicate that alcohol related offences are the largest category of offences committed by young people, accounting for a fifth of youth crime. Alcohol and public order crime is emphasised in

Designing effective local responses to youth crime

A baseline analysis of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects

this report because of its prevalence, although the full report identifies a more comprehensive analysis of youth offending. Of the 96 GYDPs visited, 85% named alcohol related crime first on the list of offences committed in their area. A clear pattern emerged from the interviews of offences which occur during episodes of alcohol consumption; typically public order and criminal damage. Taking into account these offences where alcohol is a critical factor, the figure rises to almost half of all recorded youth crime.

There appear to be a number of features relating to alcohol intake by young people which differentiate how and when offences are committed. Some of these features are *temporal*, that is determined by time and frequency, some are *situational*, that is the opportunity to secure and consume alcohol and some are *influenced by the young person's individual circumstances*, that is the degree to which a young person's social environment prohibits, permits or encourages alcohol use.

For example, in all project areas alcohol related offending is characterized by three related peaks of activity:

- A spike in activity at weekends
- Increases in alcohol and public order crime during summer months
- A higher frequency of alcohol and public order crime at calendar events (eg. Halloween, completion of school exams, St Patrick's Day).

The individual circumstances of young people engaged with GYDPs

Research studies on risk factors relating to youth crime identify a number of features which can increase or decrease the likelihood of offending. It is argued that risks occur in the following dimensions of a young person's life:

- 1) Individual risks
- 2) Risks associated with family
- 3) Risks associated with school performance
- 4) Risks associated with the neighbourhood that a young person lives in.

These features are present in the lives of many of the young people attending GYDPs.

Profiling alcohol and public order crime

During the study, certain recurring features relating to *alcohol and public order crime* emerged. As a starting point for local discussion, these features have been grouped into three illustrative profiles. Each profile is a general hypothesis about how alcohol related crime occurs in particular locations. All three profiles, which are progressively more complex, can co-exist in a single project location.

The three profiles are:

- 1) Young people who commit these offences on an ad hoc basis.
- 2) Young people who offend in groups, more regularly.
- 3) Young people whose circumstances lead them to offend more persistently.

Designing effective local responses to youth crime

A baseline analysis of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects

The three profiles show the differing and complex challenges facing projects in different areas. It is therefore important that local context is taken into account when developing programmes to deal with the varying challenges. Equally, local solutions must take account of international research and evidence-based best practice.

The improvement intended by a local GYDP may fit only part of a plan to reduce youth crime within a particular locality. However this contribution should be clear, measurable and either *break the chain* of a particular sequence of events leading to a criminal act or *reduce risks* implicit in the young person's circumstances which increase their chances of becoming involved in criminal acts.

The baseline analysis demonstrates the need to consider service provision in the context of high quality local data relating to youth crime, research evidence and practice wisdom. A local GYDP is best positioned to analyse local circumstances, develop its rationale, deploy its own resources and negotiate its own path to improvement of outcomes for young people.

Next Steps

- 1) Ensure that each project has taken account of local youth crime and local youth crime patterns when designing its interventions.
- 2) The establishment of 5 trial sites to develop best practice techniques for dissemination across all 100 GYDPs.
- 3) Develop the potential of all GYDPs by sharing best practice and delivering focused training.

In recognition that GYDPs will provide only part of the response necessary to reduce youth crime, the IYJS will ensure ongoing consultation with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to promote better local partnerships. More directly, the IYJS is committed to providing developmental support to secure improvements in consultation with the key stakeholders responsible for GYDPs.

These steps represent an agenda for change and provide for a robust strategy in responding to the complex challenge of designing effective local responses to youth crime.

To download a copy of the full report
**Designing effective local responses to
youth crime** please visit www.iyjs.ie

