



**IPRT**  
Irish Penal Reform Trust

From Justice to Welfare:

# **The Case for Investment in Prevention and Early Intervention**

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The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) is Ireland's leading non-governmental organisation campaigning for the rights of everyone in the penal system, with prison as a last resort. IPRT is committed to reducing imprisonment and the progressive reform of the penal system based on evidence-led policies. IPRT works to achieve its goals through research, raising awareness, building alliances and growing our organisation.

Barnardos' vision is an Ireland where childhood is valued and all children and young people are cherished equally. Barnardos' mission is to challenge and support families, communities, society and government to make Ireland the best place in the world to be a child, focusing specifically on children and young people whose well-being is under threat. Barnardos has over 42 projects working directly with children and families throughout the country.

IAYPIC is an independent association that works with children and young people who are currently in care or have experience of living in care. IAYPIC's mission is to: advocate at a national and local level for the rights of young people with care experience; organise and amplify the voices of young people with care experience; and to base our advocacy on meaningful engagement with young people, documented data and commissioned research.

This report is based on a literature review, commissioned by IPRT, Barnardos and IAYPIC and carried out in late 2009 and early 2010 by Candy Murphy, CMAAdvice Ltd. The three commissioning organisations are responsible for the content of the report.

The commissioning of this literature review was the first stage in a joint programme of work for our three organisations which seeks to illustrate the potential for the policies and practices of prevention and early intervention identified in this report.

The literature review provided a platform for our three organisations to develop a joint Position Paper, *Shifting Focus: From Criminal Justice to Social Justice* (published September 2010) and for a joint conference hosted by the three organisations on September 23rd 2010 in Dublin.

For more information about all aspects of the project, please visit: [www.iprt.ie/shifting-focus](http://www.iprt.ie/shifting-focus)



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## Foreword

Crime cannot be viewed as a social problem in isolation from deeper social and economic issues. Understanding and responding to offending behaviour is a complex issue. There is no one 'cause' and no single solution; consequently one-dimensional approaches are unlikely to produce results.

The Irish criminal justice system is spending increasing and wasteful amounts of scarce resources with poor results in reducing crime, when modest investments in under-resourced communities would have greater positive effects in reducing offending, as well as producing wider social benefits.

What Ireland needs now is long-term vision and radical and fresh thinking about this issue. We need to heed what the evidence is telling us and take a coordinated approach to tackling social exclusion. In particular, emphasis needs to shift from an almost exclusively punitive reaction to crime to one that is preventive, progressive and ultimately more effective.

The review of the literature presented here makes a strong case for making the shift in resources from criminal justice to social justice, thereby creating better communities and a safer society for all. We would like to thank the author of this report, Candy Murphy, and her team for all their work in compiling this report, which we believe provides a solid basis for our future work in this area.

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## Executive Summary

For the small but significant number of children who come into contact with the criminal justice system, it can too easily become the defining event in their young lives. The repercussions of contact with the criminal justice system extend beyond the individual, to societal-wide implications in terms of the structure of communities and the financial costs borne by the State.

We know that a criminal justice system based around punishment is an ineffective and costly way to deal with offending behaviour that is often rooted in identified social problems. Approaches to crime that are centred on prevention and early intervention seek instead to build protective factors, reducing the potential negative impacts on a child's development of unfavourable external circumstances, thereby playing a role in reducing crime and criminality. **The prioritisation of prevention and early intervention requires not only a shift in resources, but also a fundamental sea change in how society thinks about the concept of justice.**

Ultimately, this report champions the possibility of reducing crime - and the costs of crime - through prevention and early intervention, and a redistribution of resources to tackle the root causes of crime.

### Pathways

It is well established that offenders are disproportionately affected by a range of issues. Poverty, unemployment, poor mental health, educational disadvantage, addictions, inadequate family support and experience of residential care and homelessness are all more prevalent among those in the prison system than the general population. For many, these problems are strongly linked and inter-dependent and they frequently relate, directly or indirectly, to their offending.

Prevention and early intervention can bolster the protective factors in children's lives. Protective factors are those which can alter the trajectory of a child's life, and shield a child from adverse circumstances. Once children become embroiled with the criminal justice system, it becomes difficult to undo damage and disentangle them; it is therefore of critical importance that preventive interventions form part of an over-arching social, rather than criminal justice, policy. Such an approach minimises the harmful effects of contact with the criminal justice system, and lessens the possibility of net-widening and labelling. It must be understood that risk factors are not a deterministic means of forecasting which children will go on to commit crimes, rather they work in an inter-related and cumulative fashion.

Understanding the 'pathways' into crime, and the cumulative effect and interplay of risk and protective factors, can show us how interventions can be most effectively targeted.

### Social and Economic Case

The evaluation of various early intervention and prevention schemes means that such programmes now carry substantial evidential weight. Evaluations taking into account effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses have shown which programmes are most effective, and lead the way for the implementation of such programmes in Ireland.

Human capital arguments highlight what can be lost by neglecting large numbers of a generation, and promote the positive benefits of involving ‘at risk’ children in society. By intervening at an early stage, human capital can be shored up and the cumulative negative effects avoided. Children carry into adulthood their experiences of childhood; exponential benefits can be reaped by intervening early in a child’s life.

Interventions and preventions also have demonstrably positive effects on family life, as experienced by both children and their parents, including lower parental stress, the development of better relationships between parent and child, and equipping parents with the skills they need.

The evaluations demonstrate improvements in indicators as varied as education, health, emotional well-being, employment prospects, and the likelihood of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. These improvements, in turn, carry huge cost savings, as less demand is placed on services such as health care and the demand for social welfare payments drops. Conversely, the improvement of employment opportunities returns an increase in revenue to the State through tax payments. Similarly, reduced contact with the criminal justice system for participants of intervention programmes, results in cost savings for the justice and prison systems.

However, it must be reiterated that targeted interventions must be accompanied by broad-scale measures aimed at tackling social inequality. The research also suggests that interventions should take the child as one factor in a complex nexus which also involves parents, schools and communities.

Finally, this report highlights the danger of using established risk factors as deterministic markers which stigmatise some children, risking the over-handling of children simply because of their social class and geographical location.

## **Conclusion**

In Ireland, our discourse remains mired in a fire-fighting approach to crime and justice that sees resources applied at the crisis-end of the issue. This report sets out the case for a crime reduction strategy founded on investment in communities, families and schools. The report calls for social justice to be prioritised in order to break the cycle of offending which afflicts so many of our families and communities. Ultimately, it calls for a shift in policy to long-term and evidence-led approaches to the complex social problems associated with crime – a shift that requires political imagination, but one that promises profound economic and social dividends.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This study examines the role of early intervention and prevention in reducing crime and criminality, drawing on national and international literature. It begins by reviewing the available literature on the characteristics of those involved in crime and spells out the known risk and protective factors in relation to criminality. It then draws out the key findings from the literature on the effectiveness and impact of early intervention and prevention on reducing criminality internationally to inform a wide ranging debate on this important topic in Ireland.

In this section we begin by looking at the government's existing commitments to supporting an early intervention approach to crime prevention and then briefly review the numbers of young people involved in crime in Ireland in order to set the context for the rest of the report.

## 1.2 Definitions of Early Intervention

Karoly et al (2005) in a major review of the literature on early intervention and risk, define early interventions as follows:

*Early childhood interventions are designed to provide a protective influence to compensate for the risk factors that potentially compromise healthy child development in the years before school entry.*

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (now the Department for Education) (2010), building on earlier work by the UK Policy Review of Children and Young People, gave the following definition:

*Early intervention means intervening as soon as possible to tackle problems that have already emerged for children and young people.*

While the focus of this study is the role of early intervention in preventing crime and criminality, it must be recognised that the growing attention of policy makers and others on early intervention takes place in a much wider context. Early intervention in general aims to ensure that all children are given an optimal start in life through the provision of supports to children and their families, based on their needs, as well as to the wider community, across a range of policy areas - education, health, family and child policy - all aimed at ensuring more equal outcomes for children. Such an approach is informed by a growing recognition of the benefits of early interventions for the children, families and communities involved, as well as for the wider economy and society. It is based on increasing appreciation of the importance of coordinated and integrated supports for children and their families if the benefits of early intervention are to be fully realised. Early interventions cover programmes aimed at improving literacy, improving mental and physical health, increasing children's readiness for school, increasing pro-social behaviour, and providing early childhood care and education and involve working with young children, their families, schools and local communities.



The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF, 2005) in a review of the international literature found strong evidence of the effectiveness of quality early childhood education programmes for disadvantaged children. The NESF emphasised how differences in cognitive ability emerge very early in life and the importance of resources being in place to address these gaps:

*Ability gaps open up early and persist. This is true for many other measures of verbal and mathematical ability. The ability that drives schooling participation is shaped early in life. The available evidence indicates that cognitive ability is relatively more adaptable early in the life cycle (see Heckman, 1995). Having access to more and higher-quality resources that contribute to improving cognitive ability early in life affects skill acquisition later in life.*

### **1.3 Early Intervention and Crime Prevention**

The National Crime Council has emphasised the importance of early intervention in crime prevention stating that, 'Early intervention should be a fundamental principal and a key target of all crime prevention strategies' (National Crime Council, 2002). The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (now the Department for Justice and Law Reform) has called for an increased emphasis to be placed on preventative measures and early interventions 'which should form a key component of any youth justice system' (Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, 2008).

The National Crime Council also referred to how early intervention has been found to have positive impacts across a range of social policy areas of which criminality is but one:

*It is widely recognised that those factors which predispose a young person to being "at risk" of future criminality, are the same factors which predispose a child or young person to being labelled as 'at risk' of future teenage parenting, early school leaving or anti-social behaviour. Thus, it is recognised that intervention programmes in any of these specific areas, will benefit all. (National Crime Council, 2002)*

### **1.4 Defining Early Intervention in the Context of Crime Prevention**

As stated above, the prevention of crime is only one of many reasons for investing in early intervention to support children and their families. Similarly, crime prevention has many dimensions, only one of which is focused on early intervention. The National Crime Council (2002) defined three levels of crime prevention as follows:

- Primary Prevention aims to reduce the *opportunities* for committing crime;
- Secondary Prevention targets those 'at risk' of criminality; and
- Tertiary Prevention treats known offenders.

This study focuses on 'secondary prevention' aimed at preventing those who are vulnerable to or 'at risk' of embarking on a criminal career, while recognising that a coordinated approach on each of the different levels is required. The Council states:

*Early intervention should be a fundamental principal and a key target of all crime prevention strategies. Those who work closely with families and young children (e.g. health workers, family support workers and teachers) are able to identify those who are prone to significant problems from a very young age. This knowledge should be shared and acted upon to develop preventative interventions with these families and children. If targeted interventions are made at a very young age, they are more likely to be successful and have a longer lasting effect.*

They go on to highlight how there are projects in many spheres – education, training and employment, recreational development, personal development, family support, parenting, health promotion and community development – that may all have benefits in terms of future crime prevention while not actually being labelled as such. They refer also to how, in other jurisdictions, programmes in early education and parenting skills have been developed with the specific aim of future crime prevention (National Crime Council, 2002).

The Crime Council reports that there is “*some unease*” generally about labelling a project as having a ‘crime prevention’ focus and of the stigma that a “*crime prevention*” focus places on the participants and the area and the unwillingness of some to participate lest they be labelled as troublemakers’ (National Crime Council October, 2002).

However, a study by the Department of Justice states that ‘*It is recognised that in relation to the wider issue of crime prevention, early intervention is necessary in helping to prevent crime*’ (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2008).

## **1.5 Early Intervention and Policy**

An ‘early intervention’ approach is recognised internationally as requiring a fundamental shift in how policy is designed and implemented across the board. For example, the Scottish government has outlined how a policy based on early intervention will mean fundamental changes in the way that policymakers and practitioners, both at national and local level, think and act; moving away from a focus on ‘picking up the pieces’ after something has happened, towards prevention, becoming better at early identification of those individuals who are at risk and taking steps to address that risk (The Scottish Government, 2008b). They go on to say that this approach will aim to address the root causes of social problems, including underlying issues such as poverty and inequality, and will be only fully effective in the longer term.

This Scottish approach illustrates the complexity of early intervention. Overall this approach involves shifting the focus from service provision as the vehicle for delivery of outcomes to one which is based on building the capacity of individuals, families and communities to secure their own outcomes and to address the external barriers which they may face, making use of high quality, accessible public services as required.

## **1.6 Existing Policy Approaches to Intervention**

The Agreed Programme for Government 2007-2012 (Department of the Taoiseach, 2007) states that early intervention to improve literacy and numeracy skills in disadvantaged areas and to expand pre-school provision around the country to ensure early intervention is available will be prioritised during the period of the government. This Programme commits the government to tackling childhood disadvantage, stating that early intervention is the key to improving the lives of children and their

families in severely disadvantaged areas through supporting families and parents and establishing local programmes to help parents, including parenting classes for those whose children have been identified as most at risk of future anti-social behaviour.

The Programme for Government also commits the government to build on the experience of '*ground-breaking initiatives for disadvantaged children, such as those undertaken with Atlantic Philanthropies under the Early Intervention and Prevention Programme*' by applying the lessons learnt from these projects, in a targeted way, to economically and socially disadvantaged communities across the country and to bring together statutory and voluntary agencies in a collaborative approach to the delivery of services with the engagement of communities.

This approach is also evident in the National Development Plan 2007–2013 (National Development Plan, 2007), which highlights how social inclusion is critically important to addressing crime and promoting a safer environment. Specifically it refers to the Young People's Facilities Services Fund (YPFSSF), which will continue to target 10 to 21 year-olds who are 'at risk' due to factors including family circumstances, educational disadvantage or involvement in crime or substance misuse. Some €49.6 billion has been provided under the social inclusion priority of the Plan for the period up to 2013 for priority investment programmes, such as pre-school education for children, greater support for lone parents, the long-term unemployed and for people with disabilities in securing access to employment, for older people in relation to community care services, and for communities in providing housing, health services and strategies to assist newcomers to integrate in Irish society.

Measures to tackle childhood disadvantage will focus on the provision of child income supports and the accelerated establishment of Children's Services Committees in each county so that all the statutory agencies work together in a strategic way and use resources more efficiently for the benefit of children.

The Plan states that it will also provide for a system of parental responsibility for criminal damage and costs incurred by victims of their children's anti-social behaviour as well as a 'Parents Plus' approach to support families and parents and establish local programmes to help parents, including parenting classes for those whose children have been identified as most at risk of future anti-social behaviour.

These statements follow on from the National Development Plan, 2000-2006 (National Development Plan, 2000) which acknowledged the underlying causes of crime:

*Research into the causal factors of crime conclusively demonstrate that offenders, both male and female, generally come from the most disadvantaged groups in society and, typically, that they are unemployed, unqualified, addicted and likely to re-offend. The label of having been in prison becomes a further layer of disadvantage in the community, as employers are less likely to employ someone who has been to prison. Offenders, therefore, experience multiple disadvantages which accumulate leading to economic and social exclusion and to an extreme form of marginalisation from the labour market.*

## **1.7 Legal Commitments to Children**

A numbers of pieces of legislation - national and international - and related strategies reinforce these policy commitments. These are briefly summarised below.

## **The Children Act, 2001**

The Children Act, 2001, introduced a statutory obligation for an interagency response to children 'at risk' from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education and Science. The Act emphasises the important role of early intervention and diversion from the criminal justice system. The National Crime Council (2002) noted that, '*The Act is very progressive and when fully implemented will make a huge difference to the way that "at risk" children and young people are dealt with*'. However the Council went on to emphasise the need for adequate funding to develop the promised structures (National Crime Council, 2002).

It is interesting to note that the government recognised a new approach was required within the context of the Children Act, 2001, one which would '*provide Ireland with a twin-track child welfare and justice approach which focuses on preventing offending behaviour, diversion from crime and rehabilitation*' (Smith, 2008).

## **The National Children's Strategy**

The National Children's Strategy also asserts the need to re-orientate supports and services for children in order to:

- Provide a strong community-based response;
- Renew the emphasis on prevention and early intervention;
- Ensure integration and ease of access to supports and services.

The Strategy reiterated the need for additional supports for children educationally, socially and economically, while highlighting again the need for integration of local service provision for children and families (Department of Health and Children, 2000).

## **National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010**

The National Youth Justice Strategy covers the years 2008 to 2010 and deals with children who have already had some contact with the criminal justice system. However, in consultations on the strategy the importance of prevention and intervention, in particular for families and communities at risk, emerged. Building on this, the Youth Justice Strategy goes on to state that early intervention aimed at meeting the welfare and educational needs of children by all the key stakeholders is essential to protect children from involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour. The report concludes by stating that:

*The OMC has a pivotal role in bringing together strategically those bodies working with children, especially children at risk so that early intervention can be effective in preventing their possible progression into the criminal justice system.* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2008)

## **International Conventions**

A number of international conventions also place an onus on the State to ensure real alternatives to detention for children at risk. The most significant of these is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The UN CRC includes the principle of non-discrimination (Article 2), the right to life and development (Article 6), and the right of the child to express his/her views and have them given due consideration in matters that concern the child (Article 12).

In its General Comment No. 10, the Committee on the Rights of the Child stated that all children in conflict with the law have to be treated equally. Any potential discrimination, they highlighted, has the potential to impact negatively, particularly on the more vulnerable groups of children, such as street children, children belonging to racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, indigenous children, girls, children with disabilities and children who are repeatedly in conflict with the law (Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2009).

## **1.8 Critiques of Irish Youth Justice Policy**

Despite the commitments outlined above and the recognition at policy level of the role of early intervention and prevention, a number of serious concerns remain. A number of studies express frustration at the slow pace at which the Children Act is being implemented (Seymour, 2005). Seymour contends that the traditional reactionary, as opposed to preventative, response to crime in the Republic of Ireland has resulted in a heavily resourced prison system to the detriment of community-based strategic crime prevention initiatives. She concludes that the extent to which resources will be invested in crime prevention initiatives in the future will be central to supporting the changes that are underway with the Children Act 2001 (Seymour, 2005).

The National Crime Council (2003) calls for a locally based partnership approach to crime prevention that would provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach to crime prevention at a local level and would focus on the needs of 'at risk' families, children and young people, including the needs of the families and children of prisoners and ex-prisoners and including a locally based crime prevention plan, introducing a shared vision among the agencies. The Council also refers to the difficulties involved in engaging with those most in need of support, stating that the most vulnerable and the most difficult young people often fall through the system and innovative responses to engaging young people must be explored.

## **1.9 Statistics on Young People and Crime**

The Youth Service Review (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2006) brought together available data on youth crime and summarised the overall situation as follows:

- For the previous three years, the number of recorded offences committed annually by young offenders remained stable at approximately 20,000;
- The vast majority of offences are committed by young males aged 14 to 17;
- Young offenders account for approximately 3.5% of the total population of 10 - 17 year-olds;
- The top five offences remain: drink related offences, theft, criminal damage, public order and traffic related offences;
- In excess of two thirds of all young offenders are dealt with by means of formal/informal caution.

However, the report also concludes that there are serious gaps in the data on youth justice and historical weaknesses and inconsistencies in information gathering, which are having serious negative effects on policy and service development.

More up-to-date statistics on the Irish prison population indicate the following:

- *In 2008, 1% of prisoners were aged 15 - 17 and a further 10% were aged 18 to '≤ 21' (Irish Prison Service, 2008);*
- *The number of persons in custody in 2008 was 3,695, an increase of 11% on the 2007 figures, while more up-to-date data indicates that this rose to over 4,000 in December 2009 (Irish Prison Service, 2008 and IPRT website);*
- *The average cost of retaining a prisoner was over €92,000 in 2008 while the average cost of holding a person in a detention centre was €330,263 (Irish Prison Service, 2008).*

### **International Comparisons of Prison Populations**

- *1.7% of prisoners in Ireland are under 18 (2007) compared to 2.2% in England and Wales (2009) and 0% in Sweden (2009);*
- *3.5% are female in Ireland (2007) compared to 4.9% in England and Wales (2010) and 5% in Sweden (2009);*
- *There are 85 prisoners per 100,000 population in Ireland compared to 152 in England and Wales and 74 in Sweden (King's College London, 2010).*

These figures indicate that, while Ireland's overall use of imprisonment is similar to Sweden, the situation in Ireland, in terms of the percentage of young prisoners and levels of population in prison, is similar to that in England and Wales.

### **Children in the Criminal Justice System**

Key statistics on children involved in the Juvenile Diversion Programme indicate that:

- The total number of incidents referred to the Diversion Programme during 2008 was 27,422. This is a decrease of 431 (1.57%) on the 2007 figure;
- The total number of individual children referred to the Programme was 21,412. This is a decrease of 529 (2.41%) on the 2007 total of 21,941;
- 15,754 (74%) children were admitted to the Diversion Programme. This equates to 73.58% of the total number of children referred;
- 11,796 (55.09%) received an informal caution and 3,958 (18.48%) received a formal caution. These figures compare with 56.9% and 19.45% respectively for 2007;
- 575 (3%) children had a decision in their case pending;

- 1,666 (8%) children required no further action, 3,417 (16%) children were considered not suitable for inclusion in the Programme. This compares to 14.6% in 2007. There was no significant change in the types of offences for which children were referred to the Programme;
- Alcohol related offences (19.8%), road traffic offences (15%) and theft (15%) constitute the three main categories of offence for which children were referred;
- There were 2,147 referrals from the Fixed Charge Penalty System;
- The Garda programme of restorative justice continues to evolve with Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs) facilitating 422 restorative events, an increase of 44 cases from 2007. (An Garda Síochána, 2008b)

The table below outlines the age profile of children referred to the Diversion Programme.

Age (years)	Per cent 2007*	Per cent 2008*
17	35	35
16	22	24
15	19	18
14	13	12
13	7	7
12	3	3
Under 12	.33	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Figures are rounded to the nearest percentage point

Table 1.1 Age profile of children referred to the Diversion Programme (CSO, 2009)

The statistics indicate that approximately 5% of the youth population overall was referred to the Garda Diversion Programme as a consequence of offending. The commentary on the statistics stated that, even if extra significance is given to the likelihood that most Garda Youth Diversion Projects are located in higher crime areas, the number of such young people is unlikely to exceed 250-305 in any one project location (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2009).

However, these figures also indicate that a significant and fairly constant number of children are involved in the criminal justice system - around 23,000. While this represents a small number of the total population in these age groups, for the young people concerned they are already on a road that they may find difficult to fully leave.

It should be noted also that statistics on those involved in crime remain patchy. For instance Young, et al (2001) note an irregular pattern of juvenile crime between 1950 and 1998 and speculate that it may reflect recording practices and/or prosecution decisions rather than real increases or decreases. The dearth of Irish evidence-based research, especially in relation to young offenders, has also been highlighted. For example, Hayes and O'Reilly (2007) note a dearth of quality evidence-based research relating to young people with offending issues. The National Crime Council emphasises how the lack of an adequate knowledge base is common throughout the Irish criminal justice system.

*Criminal justice policy making in Ireland has been seriously retarded by the lack of an adequate knowledge base... The method of operation of the criminal justice system has been determined more by immediate demands and concerns than by a sense of strategic vision. Intuition and expediency have too often taken the place of evidence and principle. (National Crime Council October, 2002)*

## **1.10 Comment**

There is a growing recognition at policy level of the importance of early intervention in improving outcomes for children. This is reflected in criminal justice policy where the benefits of early intervention and prevention in reducing criminality in Irish society to the benefits of the individuals and families involved and of the wider community is increasingly acknowledged. We have also shown that early intervention has a much wider focus than crime prevention and that crime prevention itself involves more than early intervention, covering diversion and so called 'primary prevention' strategies. In the meantime, a small but significant number of children continue to appear in the Irish criminal justice system.

Questions thus remain as to what extent the policy commitments on early intervention are in fact being implemented, and whether there is a clear and agreed understanding of what constitutes early intervention in a crime reduction context. To support a better understanding of the issues involved and of what constitutes effective early intervention responses, the remainder of this study reviews the available evidence nationally and internationally on characteristics and risk factors of young offenders. It then goes on to present and critique the available research on effective early interventions and recommends how this area could be developed in an Irish context.



## 2. Characteristics of Young Offenders, Risk and Protective Factors and Pathways into and out of Crime

### 2.1 Introduction

In this section of the report we examine the available evidence on the existence of common characteristics among those in the criminal justice system. We then go on to spell out the risks that have been identified in the literature as predictors of criminality among young people and the complementary preventative factors. The purpose of identifying these factors is to enable early interventions aimed at breaking the cycle of criminality to be more effectively targeted at those 'at risk' while reinforcing known protective or resiliency factors.

However, it is important to use language carefully in order not to label individuals, families and communities. The Crime Council highlighted the dangers of labels like 'disadvantage', which can bring resources to the area but can also stigmatise and further alienate and prejudice those living in such areas from the wider community (National Crime Council, 2002).

### 2.2 Characteristics of Those Involved in Crime - Irish Research

A small but significant number of Irish studies highlight the multiplicity of common characteristics that young offenders in Ireland demonstrate. For instance, Hayes and O'Reilly carried out a study comparing young offenders with a 'mental health' group and a control group<sup>1</sup>, involving a study of 80 young people. They found that family involvement with crime, and poor academic attainment, were positively associated with young people's experience of being in detention schools (Hayes & O'Reilly, 2007). Ninety per cent of the offender groups had a family member involved in crime and 96% had been suspended from school compared to 7% of the control group.

Studies profiling offenders in Irish prisons show a similar picture. O'Mahony (1997) found that in a sample of the prisoners (n=108) in Mountjoy Prison in 1996, 80% (86 prisoners) had left school before the age of 16 years, with only 7.4% (eight prisoners) staying at school beyond the age of 16 years. None of the prisoners in the sample had attended third level education. One third of the prisoners had never attended school higher than primary school or special school level, and only one quarter of the prisoners had ever taken a public examination, some of whom had completed their examinations in prison. In addition to these findings, the study also reported that 63% of the sample claimed that they had truanted regularly from school (O'Mahony, 1997).

More recent research conducted in Wheatfield Prison in West Dublin found that 2.4% of those detained had never attended school, 36.3% attended first year in second level (typically for a few weeks), 12.9% attended second year in second level (typically not completed). Only 16.1% sat the Junior Certificate, with 4.8% having sat the Leaving Certificate (Education & Living, The Irish Times, 21 May, 2002) (Reported in the Crime Council Report, 2002).

O'Mahony commenting on research for the Juvenile Justice Review on 84 children attending the Dublin Children Court summarised the findings as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Thirty young offenders were studied. These were adult males residing in a number of juvenile detention schools in Ireland. The 'mental health' group were 20 teenage boys waiting for, or in the early stages of assessment with an adolescent psychiatry service in the HSE South. The control group were 30 teenage boys in the general community who did not have offending or mental health problems.

*The 84 children aged from 10 to 17 came from relatively large (possibly still incomplete) families with an average of 4.6 children, more than twice the national average. Thirty percent of the total had suffered the loss of one or both parents either permanently or for long periods and only half of the children presently had two married parents in the home. Thirty-six percent of the children lived with the mother alone. On a rough estimate, 80% of the children lived in local authority housing. Only a third of fathers, in families where there were fathers present, were in full-time employment. For over a quarter of the children parental abuse of alcohol was recorded and for more than one in ten, parental drug abuse. Ten percent of the children came from homes where there was a record of domestic violence and 17% of them were known to have been victims of physical abuse. Unsurprisingly but most significantly, twenty five percent of the children had left school before the age of 14, 85% before the age of 16 and 90% were currently out of school. Also about 30% had at some time been suspended or expelled from school. In a third of cases, the Probation and Welfare Officer had recorded a considered opinion that there was poor or inadequate parental supervision of the child. In almost 40% of cases, another member of the child's family was known to have offended.*

*About half the children were involved in substance abuse of any form (i.e. including alcohol and tobacco) and about one in three (26 children) in drug abuse. Twenty of the 26 were described as having a serious problem and 18 of the twenty had an involvement with heroin. Only 5 of these more serious drug abusers had attended a detoxification programme. However, it was noted that 35 children out of the 84 had had some contact with Health Board psychological services and that a further 34 had been in contact with other agencies such as drug treatment centres and private counselling services. (O'Mahony, 2001)*

O'Mahony comparing the results of the two studies concludes that the results were 'stunning' and give 'compelling evidence of an utterly defective social system'.

A further study of the Children Court published in 2007 (Carroll et al, 2007) reinforces these findings and indicates that things have not changed significantly in the intervening period. The study is based on a detailed examination of Court files and information from a range of agencies in relation to a sample of 400 young people with cases completed in the Children Court in 2004. The Court areas examined were the Dublin Children Court, the Regional Cities (Cork, Limerick and Galway Children Courts) and selected Urban Courts (Athlone, Clonmel, Dundalk, Letterkenny and Wexford Children Courts). Building on the earlier research, this study was the first piece of empirical research which provides nationwide statistics on the circumstances of young offenders, their backgrounds, education, offending trends and passage through the Court system. The authors identified certain common characteristics in young people appearing before the Children Court:

- Predominately male (90%);
- Lived in specific and recurring disadvantaged localities;
- Did not live with both their parents;
- Were not in full-time mainstream education and had no engagement with mainstream education;
- Ninety of the young people (22.5%) were from minority groups (for the purposes of this research females, young people in HSE care, young people from the Traveller Community and young people of ethnic origins other than Irish were classified as minorities) (Carroll et al, 2007).

Carroll et al (2007), in reviewing all the studies outlined above, conclude that young people who become persistent offenders experience a range of disadvantages including low levels of education and difficult family circumstances

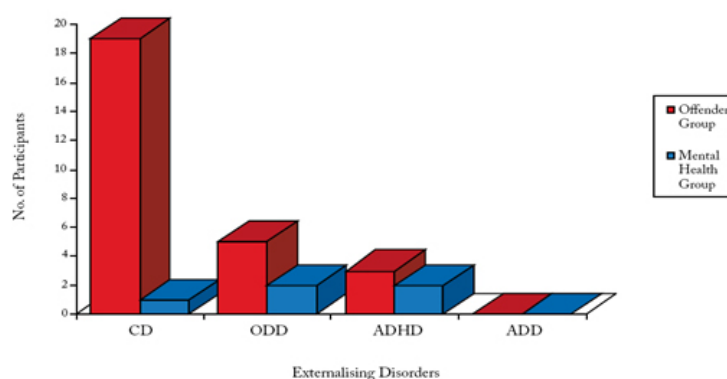
Other research shows that unemployment is both a risk factor for crime and a consequence of a criminal record, thus perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage, although little up-to-date research is available in this area (O'Mahony, 1997).

This analysis shows that the overwhelming majority of offenders are male, have limited or no educational qualifications and come from families with a history of criminality and other difficulties. However, Quinlan shows that female offenders, while much lower in numbers, exhibit similar characteristics to their male counterparts, stating that research carried out into the background of women in prison in Ireland revealed that poverty, family breakdown, housing insecurity, educational disadvantage and mental ill health were common characteristics (Quinlan, 2003). Hayes and O'Reilly also found that approximately one fifth of juvenile offenders in detention in Ireland can be expected to have IQ scores in the intellectual disability range (Hayes and O'Reilly, 2007).

## Behavioural Difficulties

Hayes and O'Reilly (2007) also found that 37% of the young offenders group met diagnostic criteria for internalising disorders: Separation Anxiety Disorder, Transient Motor Tic Disorder and Generalised Anxiety Disorder. Most interestingly, they also found that a far higher percentage, 67.9%, of the youth offender group, met diagnostic criteria for an externalising disorder than those in the mental health group, as Figure 2.1 illustrates. In particular, the graph shows the very high percentage of offenders exhibiting Conduct Disorder compared to the mental health group.

Externalising Disorders in the Offender and Mental Health Group.



Note: CD = Conduct Disorder; ODD = Oppositional Defiant Disorder; ADHD = Attention Deficit Disorder; ADD = Attention Deficit Disorder.

Figure 2.1 Externalising Disorders in the Offender and Mental Health Group (Hayes & O'Reilly, 2007)

Hayes and O'Reilly also found that in comparison to non-offenders, young offenders had a decreased ability to perceive and manage emotions. This led the authors to speculate that a similar but reduced rate of Emotional Intelligence in offender and mental health groups is consistent with the existence of mental health problems in both groups.

## **Alcohol and Drug Use**

The relationship between alcohol and drug use and criminal activity has proven to be a complex area of research but there are links between the two. A study by the Garda Research Unit in 1997 estimated that 66% of all crime in Dublin and over 80% of burglaries and larcenies from the person and from unattended vehicles were drug-related (National Crime Council, 2002).

Hayes and O'Reilly found that significantly higher numbers in the youth offender group they studied met diagnostic criteria for a substance related disorder; 66% of the youth offenders compared to 10% for the mental health group, while one fifth of the youth offender participants displayed suicidal ideation at the time of data collection (Hayes and O'Reilly, 2007).

## **Socio-Economic Background**

O'Donnell et al (2007) found that in the most deprived areas of the country there were 145.9 prisoners per 10,000 of the populations in comparison to 6.3 in the least deprived areas. These differences were found across the full range of criminal activities. The authors comment on the magnitude of the disparity and state that it *'demonstrates unequivocally that it is the areas already marked by serious disadvantage that must bear the brunt of the social problems that accompany released prisoners'*. This study also demonstrates that areas characterised by deprivation, particularly if they are located in a city, experience by far the greatest challenge in terms of accommodating released prisoners (O'Donnell et al, 2007).

In a recent study carried out by the Drug Misuse Research Division of the Health Research Board, the majority of drug users reported low educational achievement. Furthermore, their work histories were generally characterised by long periods of unemployment (Irish Association for the Study of Delinquency Conference, 2001).

## **Interaction of the Family and the Socio-Economic Environment**

O'Mahony discusses the relationship between family characteristics and the wider environment in which the family lives stating that *'while the influence of the family is absolutely critical, so is the social environment beyond the family as it provides the context in which the family must "struggle to exist"*. He concludes that conditions of poverty, poor housing, chronic unemployment, under-education and socio-cultural disadvantage can be seen to be *'actively criminogenic and to foster whole communities that tolerate or even encourage offending'* (O'Mahony, 2001).

O'Mahony goes on to point out the need to look at the wider and structural inequalities in Irish society which create conditions where crime is more likely, referring to how the personal experience of inequality and injustice can create alienated, frustrated and angry people (O'Mahony, 2001).

The dangers of blaming parents are also highlighted by O'Mahony when commenting on the Children Act 2001 stating that *'the many neglectful, incompetent and irresponsible parents are, themselves, very often part of the cycle of disadvantage and their weaknesses reflect the social conditions imposed on them in their own upbringing, their own background of deprivation and disadvantage, as much as their own moral frailty. Poverty and disadvantage often prevent parents from parenting in the way they want to parent'* (O'Mahony, 2001).

## 2.3 International Research

Similar characteristics have been found internationally. For example, in England and Wales examined levels and trends in youth offending, anti-social behaviour and victimisation among young people aged from 10 to 25 living in the general household population (Wilson et al, 2006). (The survey did not cover young people living in institutions, including prisons, or the homeless, and therefore excluded some high offending groups.) The following characteristics were found among those involved in crime:

- 10-15 year-olds were mostly associated with offences such as anti-social behaviour; being drunk once a month or more; having friends/siblings in trouble with the police; and taking drugs. Similar factors were found for serious and frequent offending;
- 16-25 year-olds were mainly associated with offences such as being a victim of personal crime; committing anti-social behaviour; taking drugs; having friends/siblings in trouble with the police; and being more likely to agree criminal acts are OK.

UK research also illustrates that 80% of crimes in the UK were committed by those who had some form of conduct problem in early life/adolescence (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2009). This study also found that a high proportion of those who have the most serious conduct problems during childhood will go on to become involved in criminal activity (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2009). They identified the cumulative effect of these factors with the likelihood of conduct disorder rises progressively as an individual is subject to an increasing number of adverse influences in early life (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2009).

Chitsabesan et al also found that young offenders are likely to have been excluded from school, either temporarily or permanently, and they cite research indicating significant discrepancies in verbal and performance IQ scores among young offenders (Chitsabesan et al, 2007).

## 2.4 Children in Care

There is very limited research available on children in care and involvement with the criminal justice system in Ireland. However, the Centre for Social Justice in the UK (Centre for Social Justice, 2008) found that of 11,672 under 21 year-olds in contact with the criminal justice system, 5,719 (49%) have a background in care. Furthermore, of 2,350 children in prison in England and Wales, 30% have been in care, and 71% were classified as 'children in need' before they entered custody (they had been involved with, or were receiving support from social services). Children aged 10-17 who have been in care for more than one year were found to be more than twice as likely to be involved with the police. The authors also referred to a Social Exclusion Unit report which identified the following social characteristics of the general population compared to the prison population:

- Taken into care as a child: 2% of general population; 27% of prison population;
- Ran away as a child: 11% of general population; 47% male and 50% of female prison population;
- Suffering two or more mental disorders: 5% men and 2% women of the general population; 72% of men and 71% women of the prison population.

They concluded that local authorities are failing in their responsibilities to prevent children in care becoming involved in criminality. They also found that once children in care are involved with the criminal justice system, it is difficult to disentangle them from it. They suggest that there are '*perverse financial incentives*' which make it cheaper for a Local Authority for an offending child in care to be imprisoned. They note that in the long term, this approach has disastrous consequences for the young people concerned and for society in general.

Another report (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009) found that 'looked-after' children are in general more likely to have been exposed to the risk factors associated with youth offending, such as lack of parental support and poor attendance at school, and can exhibit challenging behaviour as a reaction to the circumstances that led to them becoming looked after. They went on to report that the very nature of residential care was part of the problem and that the difference between looked-after children and others is not necessarily in their behaviour, but in institutional responses to that behaviour.

This study also looked at how looked-after children are neglected when they are in custody, reporting evidence that some authorities do not actively continue their parenting role even with children on care orders '*who enter the secure estate, despite already having a statutory responsibility to do so*' and that the care and youth justice systems do not work well together.

Stein and Munro (2008), examining young people's transitions from care to adulthood, collated research evidence from 16 participating countries. They found that care leavers are generally more likely to have poorer educational qualifications, be younger parents, be homeless and have higher levels of offending behaviour and mental health problems.

Eurochild (2010) recently reinforced these findings, stating that there is clear evidence that children who have been in care, and in particular in residential care, settings are more likely to end up homeless; to commit crimes; to have children before the age of 20 themselves; and to have their own children taken into care. They highlight their finding that the transition to independent living is noted by many as a particularly sensitive period of change for the young person, when high quality, individualised preparation and on-going support is crucial for the individual to become independent.

The Irish respondent to the Eurochild survey reported that there is a serious lack of research in this area and that while the representative ratio of prisoners with care experience is supposedly high compared with the general prison population, the lack of confirmed research exploring this limits this discussion.

## **2.5 Summary**

This review of the characteristics of those involved in crime clearly shows that many such characteristics are common across countries and over time. These factors include gender, behavioural problems especially conflict disorder, low educational qualifications and intelligence rates, poor family support, socio-economic disadvantage and geographical location. These factors are found to be exacerbated by experience in care and by alcohol and drug abuse. Many of the commentators criticise the lack of coherent analysis of these factors and the inadequate attention paid to their implications by those involved in forming youth justice policy. The research also indicates how a number of these factors can come together to increase the risk of involvement in crime and this is explored further below.

## 2.6 Risk Factors

A number of both Irish and international studies have aimed to use what we know about the characteristics of those involved with crime to help identify specific risk factors which may enable the identification of young persons more likely to engage in criminal activity and thus to allow interventions to be targeted at those identified as 'at risk'. As indicated above, the literature indicates that youth criminal behaviour does not happen randomly but is the result of complex adverse events. Kiro writes that *'The relationship between adversity and outcome is complex and that negative outcomes are the result of exposure to multiple risk factors'* (Kiro, 2009).

## 2.7 Identifying Risk Factors - Irish research

The National Crime Council (2002) refers to the importance of identifying risk factors, stating that *'If we are able to identify risk factors, and consequently target those who exhibit these factors, it may be possible to intervene and prevent the onset or continuation of a criminal career.'* However, they also acknowledge that not all those who exhibit these attributes or all young people who come from such backgrounds will offend in the future.

The risk factors identified by the National Crime Council (2002) drawing on the characteristics identified above and from a review of the international literature are as follows:

### NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY FACTORS

- Community disorganisation and physical deterioration;
- High levels of mobility and lack of attachments to the community;
- Local authority or rented housing;
- High proportion of single parent families;
- Higher than average percentages of young people in the population;
- Poor levels of service provision in the local area.

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION AS MEASURED BY:

- Low family income/consistent poverty;
- Parents long-term unemployed;
- Poor housing;
- Large family;
- Single parent family.

### FAMILY BACKGROUND/PARENTING

- Poor parenting skills – erratic or harsh discipline;
- Lack of parental control, supervision and monitoring;



- Poor or disruptive attachments with the child;
- Parental conflict;
- Family breakdown/family dysfunction;
- Criminal, anti-social and/or alcoholic parent/s.

#### INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- Children who are hyperactive and impulsive;
- Lower than average IQ scores;
- Mental and/or physical health problems;
- Low self esteem.

#### ACADEMIC AND SCHOOL FACTORS

- Poor academic performance in primary school;
- Disruptive and aggressive behaviour, including bullying;
- Lack of concentration and motivation;
- Poor school attendance;
- School disorganisation and lack of discipline;
- Early school leaving.

Taken from National Crime Council (2002)

## 2.8 Risk Factors - International Analysis

A number of international studies have involved carrying out systematic reviews aimed at identifying the known risk factors. A recent such study by Thomas et al (2008), which included 57 different systematic international reviews identified the following common risk factors:

### Family

Poor parental supervision and discipline; Family conflict (including physical and sexual abuse); Family history of problem behaviour (including poor mental health); Parental involvement/attitudes condoning problem behaviour; Low income and poor housing (including family structure and size); Experience of authority care.

### School

Low achievement beginning in primary school; Aggressive behaviour, including bullying; Lack of commitment (including truancy); School exclusions; School disorganisation.



## Community

Community disorganisation and neglect (including lack of suitable leisure facilities); Availability of drugs; Disadvantaged neighbourhoods; High turnover and lack of neighbourhood attachment.

## Individual and peer

Alienation and lack of social commitment; Personal attitudes that condone problem behaviour; Early involvement in problem behaviour; Friends involved in problem behaviour; Cognitive function and mental health; Gender; Age; Ethnic background.

Taken from Thomas et al (2008)

Thomas et al (2008), in a report providing information to policy makers working on Targeted Youth Support (TYS) in the UK<sup>2</sup>, highlighted the following risk factors from the literature: having a family history of problem behaviour, weak family attachment, low levels of educational attainment and disliking school, 'boys hanging around' public places, and being a bully. However, they concluded that low achievement in school was the most significant risk factor. Thomas et al found that demographic characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity were also associated with higher levels of risk.

Kilkelly (2006) summarises the international research on risk factors as follows:

*In summary then, young people at risk of offending often come from families that have experienced breakdown or trauma and who live in disadvantaged, mainly urban areas; they are early school-leavers, have low self esteem, a learning or other disability, and/or alcohol or drug addiction. Many of them have lived out of home or been in care, and have weak attachment to family and strong affiliation with delinquent peers. While many children suffer these difficulties and do not offend, the fact that risk factors tend to converge means that those most likely to offend are those who have experienced multiple disadvantage. Research shows that the greater the number of factors experienced, the greater the incidence of offending.*

Notwithstanding the cumulative effect of risk, several studies note that some individual risk factors are more predictive of unfavourable outcomes. For example, child abuse and neglect are proven to 'carry special weight' in predicting delinquency (Homel et al, 1999). A number of studies have identified parenting as the single most powerful influence on the emotional and behavioural development of children (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2009). De Zulueta also points to the importance of parental attachment from birth. She presents evidence that the lack of a positive attachment can result in deep trauma which can manifest itself in extremely violent behaviour in later life. She concludes that early intervention is required but must be rooted in wider social care not derived from the youth justice system (Blyth and Soloman, 2006).

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2 An initiative aimed at vulnerable young people and involves ensuring that agencies work together to meet young people's needs in the UK

## 2.9 Summary

In summary, the literature shows a large number of common inter-related risks which are likely to increase the risk of offending behaviour. These can be grouped under individual, family, educational and community/neighbourhood and socio economic factors. Parental attachment has been found to be particularly important and again points to the need for early intervention. However, as has been shown above, not all those who experience some or even most of these factors come to the attention of the criminal justice system. This analysis is not a form of determinism. These risk factors can and are mediated by preventative or protective factors which can also be identified and it is to these that we shall now turn.

## 2.10 Preventative or Protective Factors

Protective factors are typically regarded as factors that (i) reduce the impact of an unavoidable negative event, (ii) help individuals avoid or resist temptations to break the law, (iii) reduce the chances that people will start on a path likely to lead to breaches of the law, and/or (iv) promote an alternate pathway (Hommel et al, 1999).

A study in 2008 (Thomas et al), based on a study of 57 different systematic international reviews, identified the principal protective factors as:

- Strong bonds with family, friends, teachers;
- Healthy standards set by parent, teachers and community leaders;
- Opportunities for involvement in families, school and community;
- Social and learning skills to enable participation;
- Recognition and praise for positive behaviour.

Taken from Thomas et al (2008)

A Scottish report on early intervention points to parenting as the key protective factor among potentially high risk groups. Parent intervention programmes which have been found to be successful include: intensive home visiting programmes, parent training/parenting skills programmes, cognitive/knowledge development programmes and programmes to tackle mental health amongst parents (Scottish Government, 2008a). The report highlights the challenges involved in this area as follows:

- Effectively engaging parents, yet those parents most in need are often the least likely to access services;
- Successfully combining both targeted and universal interventions, and the creation of a continuum of support, which is likely to be most effective and cost effective means of supporting parents;
- An emphasis on minimum levels of intervention, as well as voluntary, rather than compulsory, engagement.

Hidden strengths within the individual may also act as protectors, although the research on resilience is still under-developed. An Irish study argues, however, that it is logical to assume that a young person's ability to negotiate risks and to develop competence to assume control over their actions will *'improve the chances of the young person not being corralled into circumstances where they offend'* (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2009). The IYJS also highlighted how dynamic relationships formed between adults and young people are beneficial in developing *'self worth, securing opportunities and a capacity for reflection and self efficacy'* (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2009).

## 2.11 Resilience Factors

Kiro (2009) points to the key factors that enhance the resiliency of children exposed to risk:

*Resilient children were found to have an easy temperament, high self-esteem, an internal locus of control and a sense of autonomy. They had a supportive family environment and a supportive person or agency outside the family (Brown & Rhodes, 1991; Compas, 1987; Garmezy, 1994). More recently an international research project across ten communities in seven different countries has identified the importance of cultural connection (Ungar, 2003, 2005). The most resilient children and young people have access to all four components but any one can make a difference.*

Kiro concludes that resilience is not an isolated individual characteristic and points to the importance of attachment as a key factor in influencing whether children exposed to risk factors actually fare badly and that those with a history of disorganised attachment are the most vulnerable (Kiro, 2009).

The cumulative effect of protective and resiliency factors is emphasised in a study by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales which confirms *'that the evidence on protective factors indicates that many variables are related to resisting and desisting from crime; it is the accumulation of many such factors that provides most protection to a young person and promotes resilience'* (Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, 2005).

However, the authors explain how knowledge of protective factors is only a first step. We still do not adequately understand how policies aimed at strengthening protective factors actually impact on risk. There is no research to indicate whether protective factors that are *'artificially created by an intervention have the same impact on a young person as naturally occurring factors'* (Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, 2005).

## 2.12 Pathways

Developmental approaches emphasise the importance of understanding 'pathways' that lead to 'antisocial' or offending behaviour and of intervening in a timely manner to reinforce positive pathways and thus to counteract possible negative pathways (Homel et al, 1999). Pathway analysis therefore helps to indicate when and where an intervention might most effectively occur. Figure 2.2 illustrates how such a pathway can commence at babyhood:

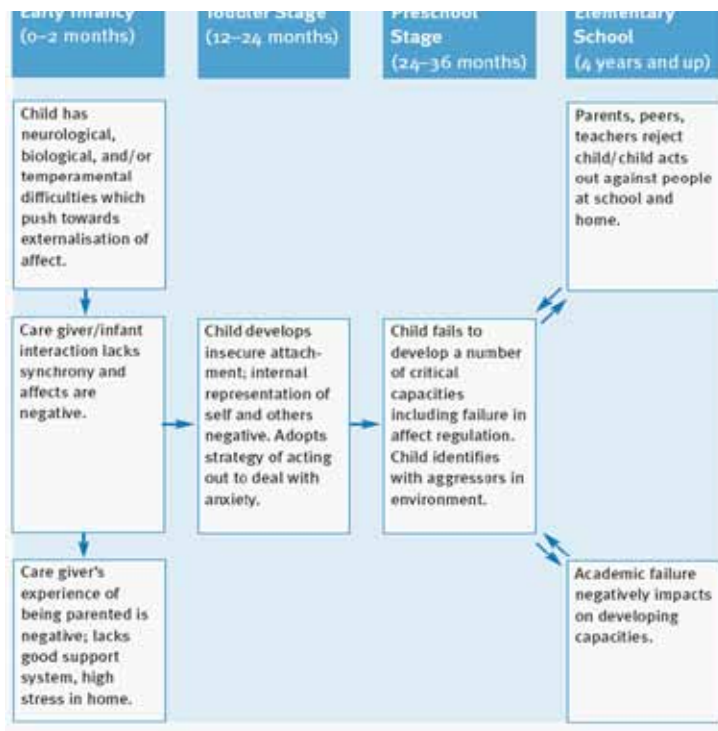


Figure 2.2 Example of a Pathway Analysis (Hemel, 1999)

The ways in which positive factors and related interventions can break the cycle of risk are illustrated in the following diagram from a Scottish study:

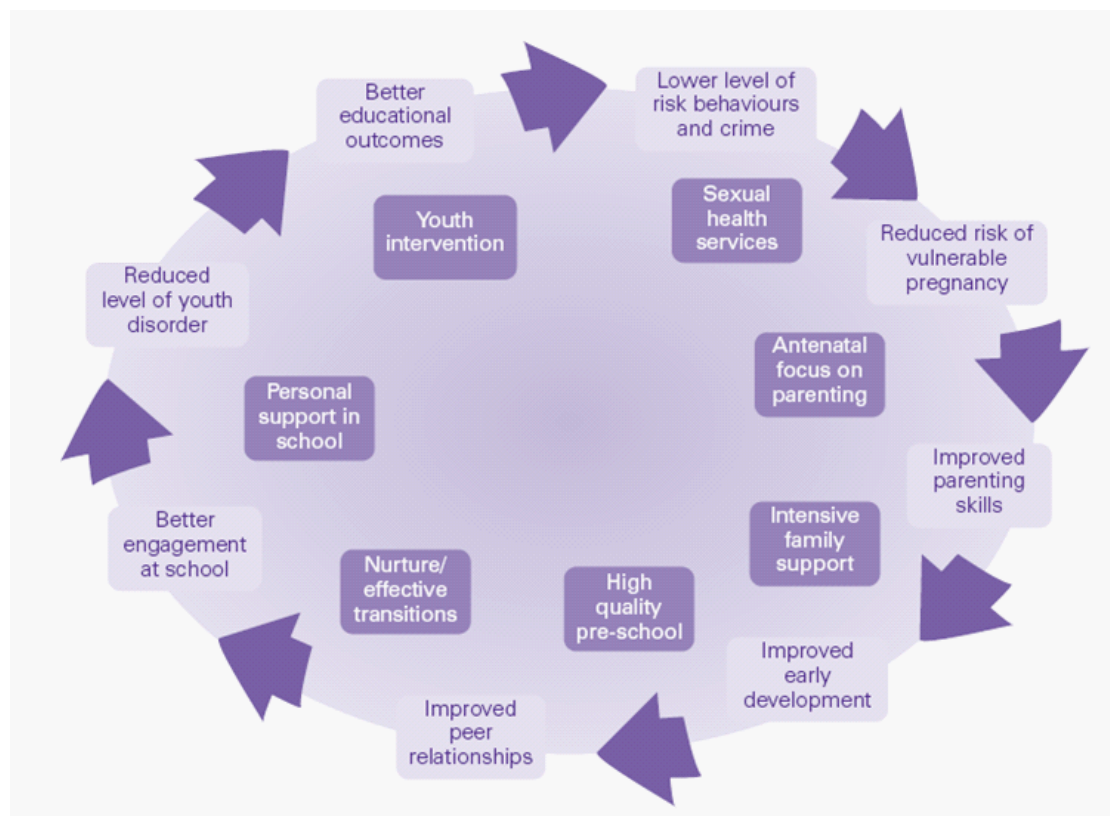


Figure 2.3 Cycles of Risk and Prevention (The Scottish Government, 2008a)

This diagram illustrates the multiple possible risks and prevention 'moments' in an individual's life while Figure 2.4 below illustrates how early interventions can operate effectively along different stages of the pathway to counteract the different risks (Homel et al, 1999).

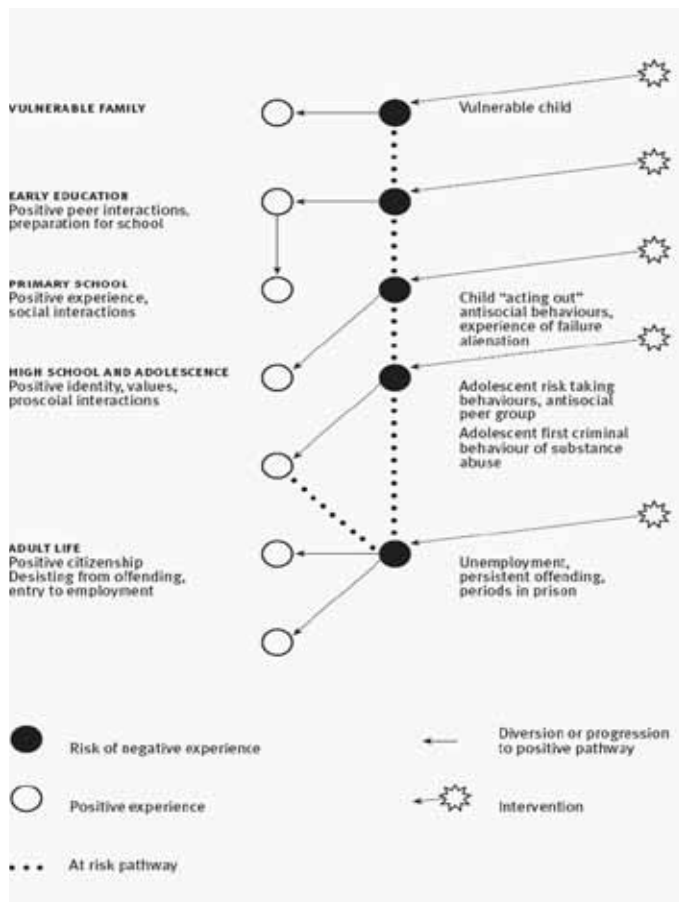


Figure 2.4 Descriptions of Early Intervention Programmes in Australia (Homel et al, 1999)

This pathways approach demonstrates how either a positive or a negative cycle of events can have cumulative effects on either counteracting or reinforcing identified risk factors, starting with early interventions with the child and their parent and progressing into schools and communities. This approach highlights the need for and the benefits of integrated cross-agency interventions in developing virtuous pathways for young people 'at risk' starting at a very young age and working with the child, parent and school environment.

### 2.13 Ensuring that Targeting is not Misused

While this analysis indicates the benefits of early identification of those 'at risk' and of developing effective pathways away from offending, the potential risks of targeting must also be recognised. Reference has been made earlier to the danger of stigmatising those who are targeted by such a risk analysis be they individuals, families or communities. McAra and McVie (2007) have taken this proposition further by suggesting that early contact with the youth justice system may result in an enhanced, rather than a diminished, offending risk, *'Taken to its extremes the research would suggest (in a manner similar to labelling theory) that contact with the youth justice system is inherently criminogenic'*.

McAra and McVie (2007) report on their analyses of a cohort of young people involved in a longitudinal programme of research on pathways into and out of offending (the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime), and conclude that the findings *'suggest that police beat officers discriminate against certain categories of youngsters: in particular, boys and disadvantaged children'* (McAra and McVie, 2007).

They went on to say that *'much the strongest predictor of being charged is having previous police charges. Children who reported they had been charged in previous years were over seven times more likely to be charged at age 15 than were children with no such history'*, which demonstrates the serious difficulties for a young person in disentangling themselves from the criminal justice system once they have come in contact with it initially.

They also found that family structure appeared to be a key driving force behind the referral process. Children who were not currently living in a two-parent family were almost twice as likely to be referred to an officer as those living with both parents.

The implications of this finding, according to McAra and McVie, are that the most effective way of reducing offending is *'minimal intervention and maximum diversion'*; and that *'doing less rather than more in individual cases may mitigate against the potential damage that system contact brings'* (McAra and McVie, 2007).

They go so far as to conclude that:

*targeted early interventions strategies far from diminishing the number of offence referrals are likely to widen the net of potential recipients even further. Greater numbers of children will have been identified as at risk ... thereby swelling rather than diminishing the number of youngsters retained in the system until their 16th or even 18th birthday.*

Solomon and Blyth (2006) return to this theme, asking *'Are targeted services and programmes impacting directly on the trajectory of deprivation and crime or are they simply drawing more children and young people unnecessarily into the criminal justice system?'*

They point out that the UK government's early intervention approach is based on a range of assumptions that need to be questioned. These assumptions are that:

- Risk factors can be clearly identified, thereby justifying intervention from a very early age, and that intervention can and does work;
- Targeted intervention is preferred to universal measures;
- Coercive engagement based on tough sanctions for non-compliance is necessary in order to change problem behaviour.

They point out the complexity of intergenerational problems resulting in a cycle of deprivation with the children of prisoners more likely to be drawn into the youth justice system (Solomon and Blyth, 2006).

Goldson in the same report also states that:

*Ultimately early intervention and custodial detention are inextricably linked along a continuum that has no legitimate claim to criminological rationality. (Goldson, cited in Blyth and Solomon, 2006)*

Blyth and Solomon also suggest that the UK is out of step with other European countries which have chosen to use social policy as a means of crime prevention rather than targeting children and families through the criminal justice system. They end by saying:

*The outlook for early intervention may be more promising but the evidence will need to be gathered and the data examined to ensure that services are truly effective in engaging children, young people and their families and most important that they contribute to a reduction and not an increase in the numbers of children and young people caught up in the youth justice system.*

In developing early interventions based on an understanding of risk factors and pathways to crime, it is vital that such interventions are carefully monitored to ensure that they reduce rather than increase the likelihood of children 'at risk' becoming part of the criminal justice system. This in turn suggests that the development of effective interventions for young people potentially 'at risk' must be firmly placed in the social policy rather than the criminal justice sphere.

## **2.14 Summary**

This literature review of the characteristics of young people involved in the criminal justice system, provides strong evidence that there are certain identifiable characteristics that are associated with young people likely to offend. In summary, the factors found from Irish studies can be grouped under the following headings:

- Gender: males are found to be much likelier to offend but females that offend have a similar background of poverty, family breakdown, educational disadvantage and mental ill health;
- Geographical location: young people from socio-economically disadvantaged areas are more likely to offend;
- Education: poor education attainment is strongly linked with offending as is poor school attendance, truancy and lower IQ scores;
- Behavioural difficulties: offenders were found to have a range of behavioural disorders, especially relating to conduct disorders;
- Substance abuse: abuse of alcohol and tobacco along with other illegal drugs is common among the young offender population;
- Family background: a significant number of young people before the courts are living in one-parent families and come from families where there is a history of offending, substance abuse and domestic violence and inadequate parental supervision;
- Socio-economic disadvantage: creating a cycle of disadvantage within which parents have often been exposed to the same risk factors as their children;
- Minority groups: more likely to be from a minority group, including children in care.



These findings reveal a failure of our systems to adequately support children and families to address a range of disadvantages and to overcome identifiable difficulties within families and within wider services, especially education. The interaction of family conditions and wider poor social and economic environments is highlighted in the literature, as is the increased difficulty of being effective parents in disadvantaged material conditions, with parents themselves often being part of a cycle of disadvantage.

Very similar findings are revealed internationally - absence from school, substance misuse, family involvement with crime, conduct disorders and weak parenting skills.

These risks are strongly exacerbated by a young life spent in care - though there is very limited information available nationally, international evidence indicates those with history of care have a significantly greater likelihood of being in prison. While this reflects the increased likelihood that those in care will be exposed to the factors outlined above, studies in the UK suggest that this situation is exacerbated by the attitude of state officials and the courts to young people from a care background.

Risk assessments of the individuals, families and communities concerned reveal a variety of inter-related risk factors which increase the likelihood of young people coming into contact with the criminal justice system. However, protective factors, which also have a cumulative effect, may reduce the likelihood of such outcomes. While such factors are cumulative, the key protective factors have been found to relate to parental attachment and a supportive family environment.

The literature indicates strong support for integrated responses to young people 'at risk' at identifiable stages on the pathway to offending.

Overall the research highlights the complexity and interrelationships of the different 'risk' and 'protective' or 'resiliency' factors identified, and the need for a multi-agency and holistic response, rooted in social policy, in assessing and addressing these factors with the overall aim of minimising engagement with the criminal justice system. The next chapter looks at the available evidence on whether early interventions aimed at addressing the known risk factors have been effective in reducing criminality.



## 3. The Social and Economic Case for Intervention

### 3.1 Introduction

The analysis of risk and protective factors in the previous section has shown how a range of factors can be linked with increased risk of a young person becoming involved with the criminal justice system. These include individual, family and wider social and community factors, especially education. The findings have also shown how parental attachment and effective parenting can improve resiliency and help break the cycle, or avert children away from the path which can lead to criminality. This has been demonstrated in the pathways analysis outlined in the previous section, which shows how early interventions with young children and their families can create a virtuous circle of ongoing education and ultimately lead to reduced criminal activity.

In this section we review the available studies on what types of interventions are most effective in reducing the identified risk factors and reinforcing the known resiliency factors. Robust evaluations of interventions tend to have taken place in the US and, to a limited extent, in the UK. However, such evaluations are in their infancy elsewhere in Europe, including Ireland. We therefore focus primarily on the US literature in this section, drawing on other research and evaluations where possible. In evaluating early interventions, the focus is on research and evaluations that are based on experimental or strongly quasi-experimental methodologies. The use of random assignment and control groups guarantees internal, or causal, validity, and allows researchers to test the strength of variables.

### 3.2 The Importance of Early Intervention – Human Capital Argument

A number of experts in this area have identified the human capital benefits of early interventions. Such an analysis thus focuses on what these children can contribute to society, or what contribution can be lost by society, in both the short- and long-term, rather than on a child-centred or human rights perspective.

According to Chevalier et al (2006), there are three reasons for intervening early in children's development:

- Human capital is more malleable at a younger age;
- Human capital acquisition is a cumulative process, and early intervention impacts positively on future accumulation;
- By investing early, the benefits are enjoyed over a longer period of time, increasing the return (Chevalier et al, 2006).

Summarising their findings, Chevalier et al (2006) report:

*Although remedial policies may be politically desirable there is a case that they may not be the most efficient or cost-effective, thus economists have increasingly put forward the case for early intervention. A central conclusion of a vast body of research summarised and extended in, for example, Carneiro and Heckman (2003), is that in most countries efficiency in public spending would be enhanced if human capital investment were directed more toward the young and away from older and less skilled people for whom human capital is a poor investment.*

A central argument, therefore, is that later interventions of a remedial nature are involved in coping with the problem, rather than moving towards lasting solutions, and that solutions can only be found if interventions to address risk factors are addressed early in a child's life. The earlier this occurs, the higher the economic benefits that will accrue from such interventions

The following sections look at findings on the impact of such early interventions.

### **3.3 Early Intervention in the Family and with Parents**

The previous section has emphasised the importance of working with families and of supporting parents in addressing identified risk factors. Heckman (2007) emphasises the benefits derived from interventions with the family and of voluntary involvement of family members in early education:

*American society has experimented with voluntary enriched family supplementation programs, which offer children from disadvantaged environments some of the cognitive and emotional stimulation and enrichment given by more advantaged families. Children who received these enriched environments were followed into adulthood. Comparing their social and economic outcomes to those of similar children denied access to these environments by randomization, one finds that the treated children perform better at school, are less likely to drop out of school, and are more likely to graduate high school and to attend college. The treated children are less likely to be teenage mothers and foster a new generation of deprived children. They are less likely to be on welfare and less likely to smoke or use drugs. (Heckman, 2007)*

Chevalier et al (2006) conclude that the evidence also shows that successful interventions affected both children and parents by encouraging long-term improvements in the home environment that carried over to the child long after the programme had terminated. Parents, they found, also improved their education, skills and labour force activity and reduced their dependency on welfare. They conclude, therefore, that the most successful interventions work with parents, with knock-on benefits for the parents themselves. They also found substantial improvements in the children's social attachment leading to 'a reduction in criminal activity and generally a less risky behaviour' (Chevalier et al, 2006).

### **3.4 Education, Early Learning and Family Involvement**

As well as working with parents and children, Heckman's (2007) work shows how successful interventions involve parents in educational programmes and combine education and family involvement through creating valuable interactions leading to improved outcomes for the child. Conventional school-based policies, according to Heckman, start too late in a child's life to effectively remedy early deficits, although they can do some good. The best way to improve schools is to improve the early environments of the children sent to them. This is because:

*Schooling comes too late in the life cycle of the child to be the main locus of remediation for the disadvantaged. Parental environments play a crucial part in shaping the lives of children. Later remediation of early deficits is costly, and often prohibitively so. Remedial schooling, public sector job training programs, and second chance GED programs are largely ineffective at current levels of funding. While these programs can be improved, and do help a few, they are not cost-effective when compared with alternative policies. (Heckman, 2007)*

The benefits of very early interventions are emphasised, in supporting the non-cognitive ability of children and in closing the gaps that can emerge at a very young age between children from different socio-economic groups (Chevalier et al, 2006).

Overall Heckman states that '*Early interventions promote schooling, reduce crime, foster workforce productivity and reduce teenage pregnancy*' (Heckman, 2008).

### **Family-Based Support for Early Learning**

The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) in the UK has also reviewed interventions aimed at improving children's attainment through a better quality of family-based support for early learning (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

They concluded that programmes that target two or more child/family outcomes (such as behaviour and literacy) may be particularly cost-effective. They go on to say that while the evidential basis of other findings was weaker, the literature also suggests that the role of pre-school provision should be extended to accept a parent partnership role that includes the provision of parenting support in development of the early learning environment. They also highlighted the importance of '*auditing local needs and targeting socio economically disadvantaged groups*'.

In their scoping study, the C4EO reviewed a number of interventions in the UK. For example, the Oxfordshire Pre-school Parental Education Programme (PEEP) evaluation (Evangelou and Sylva, 2003) found that disadvantaged children participating in this programme made significantly more progress than a matched comparison group over the course of two years (from age three to five) under the following measures: verbal comprehension, vocabulary, concepts about print, numeracy and cognitive and physical competence.

They also found that different aspects of quality were found to be associated with different aspects of behaviour. Increased self-regulation was found to be associated with academic aspects of quality pre-school, while increased pro-social behaviour and decreased hyperactivity were associated with caring and emotional relationship aspects of pre-school quality (Coghlan et al, 2009).

McGilloway et al (2009) have evaluated the Incredible Years BASIC Preschool/Early School Years Parent Training (IYP) programme as an intervention for Irish children (aged approximately three to seven years) with emotional and behavioural difficulties<sup>3</sup>. They found statistically significant improvements in child behaviour, parenting competencies and well-being six months later for the IYP group only.

When McGilloway et al combined the results of the cost-effectiveness analysis with estimates of the long-run potential gains to society (as valued using Irish data), they estimated that:

*the net present value of the IYP programme, (i.e. the return over and above the initial cost outlay and taking into account the fact that many of the gains may not be realised until some time in the future), to be approximately €4,599 per child which compares favourably with alternative early childhood intervention programmes.*

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<sup>3</sup> A total of 149 parents with children with persistent conduct problems (as indicated by scores on the Eyberg Child Behaviour Inventory [ECBI]) were included in the evaluation and had been referred by local organisations and health services. Participants were randomly allocated on a 2:1 ratio to receive the IYP intervention (n=103), or to a waiting list control (n=46) group.

The authors also state that the results showed a decline in service use in the intervention group, as well as '*significant long-run benefits that compare favourably to popular alternative programmes*'. McGilloway et al conclude overall that the IYP programme offers '*a potentially very cost-effective service/policy option in terms of reducing long term inequalities, when compared to other more intensive (and costly) alternatives*'.

Interestingly, they conclude that while there is some evidence to suggest that parenting programmes can reduce the intensity of child problem behaviour at a relatively low cost, they comment that there have been relatively few cost-effectiveness analyses of early intervention programmes.

### **3.5 Early Intervention and Crime Prevention**

The above studies demonstrate the positive effects of early interventions involving families, and how such interventions can impact later life, encompassing the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system. However, a number of studies look specifically at how such interventions impact on crime. Heckman (2007), when looking specifically at the effect of early intervention on crime, found that:

*It is now well established that education reduces crime. Risk factors promoting crime include poor family backgrounds, which also promote high school drop-out. Poorly educated teenage mothers in low-income families are much more likely to produce children who participate in crime. Although analysts do not agree on which specific aspects of adverse family environments most affect crime, they all agree that there is a strong empirical relationship between early adverse environments and child participation in crime late on in life.*

Carneiro and Heckman (2003) compare strategies for reducing crime and conclude that investing in capabilities is cheaper than reducing incentives for potential criminals to commit crime by hiring more police. They found that programmes that promote non-cognitive skills and that concentrate relatively more investment in the earlier stages of childhood will be the most effective ones for fighting crime.

Heckman (2009), in his most recent study, emphasises that different interventions have different outcomes. In relation to the desired outcome of reducing crime he states that:

*Crime is more intensive in non-cognitive skill than educational attainment, which depends much more strongly on cognitive skills. Because compensation for adversity in non-cognitive skills is less costly in the second period than in the first period, while the opposite is true for cognitive skills, it is optimal to weight first-period and second-period investments in the directions indicated in the figure. These simulations suggest that the timing and level of optimal interventions for disadvantaged children depend on the conditions of disadvantage and the nature of desired outcomes. Targeted strategies are likely to be effective, especially so if different targets weight cognitive and non-cognitive traits differently.*

### 3.6 Early Intervention and Conduct Disorder

The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (2009) looked at interventions for children of an older age (seven years) with the aim of addressing conduct disorders. They concluded that programmes based on prevention and early intervention are possible, as much is now known about the risk and protective factors associated with childhood conduct problems, and many of these factors, particularly those associated with family relationships such as parenting style, can be influenced by well-designed interventions.

The report (2009) goes on to state that knowledge of risk factors can help identify children at high risk of developing serious conduct problems which can inform the targeting of preventive efforts at this group. They report on a Canadian programme (Boisjoli et al, 2007, cited in Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2009: 9) that provides some evidence on the effectiveness of a broad-based intervention providing family support and other services for a group of seven to nine year-olds exhibiting conduct disorder. The report showed that a *'follow-up at age 24 found that only 22% of those in the intervention group had a criminal record compared with 33% in a matched control group'*.

In relation to the UK, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2006, cited in Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2009: 10) indicates that the costs of parenting programmes are of the order of £600-£900 per child for group-based programmes and up to £4,000 per child for individual home-based programmes (where the latter are recommended only for complex cases or when there are particular difficulties in engaging the family).

They state that:

*Set against these figures, the potential benefits of intervention can be represented by the estimated lifetime costs of conduct problems given earlier, as in principle all these costs could be saved by effective intervention and every cost saved is a benefit gained. Potential benefits are thus £225,000 per case for conduct disorder (including £160,000 in reduced offending) and £75,000 per case for sub-threshold conduct problems (including £45,000 in reduced offending).*

They give a specific example of an individual home-based parenting programme for children with conduct disorder costing £4,000 per child which needs to bring about a reduction in subsequent offending of only 2.5% to cover its costs. Moreover, the required success rate is even lower if other, non-crime benefits are also taken into account.

They conclude that:

*The published evidence on effectiveness leaves little doubt that success rates of this modest order can readily be achieved. For example, it was shown earlier that, across a range of family based programmes, subsequent offending is reduced by an average of around 30% – more than ten times the rate needed. A margin of this magnitude implies that the underlying case for investment in these programmes is extremely robust. Using just 1% of the annual law and order budget would be sufficient to fund a comprehensive programme of pre-school support for 30% of all children born each year.*

Finally stating that, ‘*Treat young people rather than punish them; it is more effective*’ (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2006, cited in Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health).

These findings indicate that interventions aimed at addressing conduct disorders can also be cost effective. However, as the following example shows, they also demonstrate the difficulties of effective targeting. On Track (France et al, 2004) is an early intervention and prevention programme that was initiated under the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme. The Home Office selected 24 deprived and high-crime areas to develop community-based pilot projects. These were to be located within small geographical areas and had to target children who were ‘at risk’ of becoming future offenders. They concluded that:

*When it comes to targeting children and families with risk factors, the evidence is that local professionals had difficulties using this as a criterion. Finding ways of targeting resources has historically been fraught with problems, especially around questions of finding ways of avoiding stigma. It is reasonable to conclude that projects have found it difficult to move away from a “needs based” approach to targeting although many have tried to develop systems that recognise the interrelationship between risk and need.* (France et al, 2004)

This highlights the complexities of effective targeting and also hints at the difficulties involved in engaging families in such programmes. However, there is very little information in the literature on how best to engage families reluctant to participate in such programmes<sup>4</sup>.

The estimated effects of increasing high school completion rates by 1% are shown in the table below.

	Estimated Change In Crime	Social Benefits
<b>Violent Crimes:</b>		
Murder	-373	\$1,457,179,565
Rape	1,559	-\$179,450,969
Robbery	918	-\$11,116,176
Assault	-37,135	\$475,045,373
<b>Property Crimes:</b>		
Burglary	-9,467	\$12,052,009
Larceny/Theft	-35,105	\$8,958,962
Motor Vehicle Theft	-14,238	\$22,869,192
Arson	-469	\$23,637,635
<b>Totals</b>	<b>-94,310</b>	<b>\$1,809,175,590</b>

Notes: Victim costs and property losses taken from Table 2 of Miller *et al.* (1996). Incarceration costs per crime equal the incarceration cost per inmate, \$17,027 (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999), multiplied by the incarceration rate (U.S. Department of Justice, 1994). Total costs are calculated as the sum of victim costs and incarceration costs less 80% of the property loss (already included in victim costs) for all crimes except arson. Total costs for arson are the sum of victim costs and incarceration costs since there is no transfer of property between victim and criminal. Estimated changes in crimes adjust the arrest effect by the number of crimes per arrest. The social benefit is the estimated change in crimes times the total cost per crime. All dollar figures are adjusted to \$2004 using the CPI. Source: Lochner and Moretti (2004).

Table 3.2 Estimated Social Benefits of Increasing High School Completion Rates by 1% (Adapted Heckman, 2007)

<sup>4</sup> It is expected that early years interventions currently being run in Darndale, West Tallaght and Ballymun (all in Dublin) will provide important information on this issue in an Irish context in the near future.

### 3.8 Meta Analysis of a Range of Interventions and their Impact on Reducing Crime

A number of recent studies have carried out meta-analyses of the available cost-benefit studies and their findings are summarised below.

#### A Review of 20 US Studies

Karoly et al (2005) rigorously reviewed 20 US early interventions<sup>5</sup>. They examined the following benefits: cognition and academic achievement, behavioural and emotional competencies, educational progression and attainment, child maltreatment, health, delinquency and crime, social welfare programme use, and labour market success. They found that early childhood interventions can generate benefits that exceed the initial programme costs. Such interventions include home visiting/parent education programmes and centre-based early childhood education programmes, including home visiting or parent education, and, they found favourable returns for both large- and small-scale programmes.

They go on to point out that the evidence on the economic returns from investing in early childhood interventions is particularly strong for programmes that have long-term follow-up of programme participants because they allow measurement at older ages of such outcomes as educational attainment, delinquency and crime and earnings.

Karoly et al (2005) spell out the potential spillover<sup>6</sup> effects of these early interventions. These include reduced child maltreatment, reduced teen pregnancies and increased college attendance, lower costs to the child welfare system, more years spent in post primary education and increased life-time earnings with a corresponding increase in tax revenue to government. They also demonstrate the benefits in terms of reduced crime and contact with the criminal justice system. These benefits affect children, parents and descendants with benefits to government and society.

Karoly et al (2005), looking at the cost-benefits of a number of these programmes, qualifying the results for comparability and measurement, found the following (based on 2003 values):

Program	Type	Age at Last Follow-Up	Program Costs per Child (\$)	Distribution of Benefits per Child (\$)			Total Benefits to Society per Child (\$)	Net Benefits to Society per Child (\$)	Benefit-Cost Ratio
				Participants	Savings to Government	Rest of Society			
Follow-Up During Elementary School Years									
CCDP	Combo	5	37,388	91	-101	0	-9	-37,397	—
HIPPY USA	HV/PE	6	1,681	1,940	485	607	3,032	1,351	1.80
IHDP	Combo	8	49,021	0	0	0	0	-49,021	—
Follow-Up During Secondary School Years									
NFP—higher-risk sample	HV/PE	15	7,271	1,277	32,447	7,695	41,419	34,148	5.70
NFP—lower-risk sample	HV/PE	15	7,271	2,051	5,095	2,005	9,151	1,880	1.26
NFP—full sample	HV/PE	15	9,118	2,674	9,548	14,075	26,298	17,180	2.88
HV for at-risk mothers and children (meta-analysis)	HV/PE	Varies	4,892	6,194	1,815	2,960	10,969	6,077	2.24

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix for details.

<sup>6</sup> Many of these spillovers may generate public benefits in terms of less reliance on welfare, increased revenue through taxation, or individual benefits for those not directly involved in the programme (Karoly et al, 2005).



Program	Type	Age at Last Follow-Up	Program Costs per Child (\$)	Distribution of Benefits per Child (\$)			Total Benefits to Society per Child (\$)	Net Benefits to Society per Child (\$)	Benefit-Cost Ratio
				Participants	Savings to Government	Rest of Society			
Follow-Up to Early Adulthood									
Abecedarian	Combo	21	42,871	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	138,635	95,764	3.23
Chicago CPC	Combo	21	6,913	22,715	19,985	6,637	49,337	42,424	7.14
Perry Preschool (excluding intangible crime costs)	Combo	27	14,830	22,599	37,724	16,104	76,426	61,595	5.15
Perry Preschool (including intangible crime costs)	Combo	27	14,830	23,486		106,136	129,622	114,792	8.74
ECE for low-income three- and four-year-olds (meta-analysis)	Combo	Varies	6,681	6,036	4,329	5,377	15,742	9,061	2.36

Table 3.3 Cost-Benefit Results of Selected Early Childhood Intervention Programmes (Adapted from Karoly et al, 2005)

These tables show the level of benefits that can be achieved when the participants are followed-up over the long term and into adulthood. For example, the Perry Preschool programme findings show that at age 27 total net benefits to society per child are over \$100,000, with a benefit cost ratio of 8 to 1.

In looking at the key factors associated with better outcomes for children, while there is a very limited evidence base, Karoly et al (2005) point to factors such as better-trained caregivers, smaller child-to-staff ratios, and greater intensity of services. They go on to caution that:

*In some cases, the favorable effects found for small-scale model programs may be attenuated when programs operate on a larger scale. The economic payoff may also be smaller when programs serve a broader population that does not stand to benefit to the same extent as more disadvantaged children served in targeted programs.*

Karoly et al (2005) point out the importance of rigorous evaluation stating that, unless this occurs, programmes may actually be ineffective, for example if they invest too few resources or use resources in an ineffective manner. They also reiterate the proviso that such programmes will never be able to fully compensate for the economic and social disadvantage that some children born into American society experience.

Farrington and Welsh (2005) summarised the main findings of leading scientific evidence on what works best in preventing crime. Systematic reviews (incorporating meta-analytic techniques) of high-quality research evidence were carried out by the authors. Their main findings in relation to what works for 'at risk' children were that early parent training for families found mixed results in their effectiveness in preventing child behaviour problems. They advised caution in interpreting these results, due to the limited number of high-quality studies and the modest effect sizes in the studies that found beneficial effect. However, they go on to say that: '*The good news from these reviews is that most of the interventions are effective in preventing crime, and in many cases, produce sizeable effects*'.

They also highlight the difficulties of getting these findings translated into policy and the need to overcome some of the political barriers in order to get more of what works in preventing crime



into policy and practice. They conclude 'a great deal of work needs to be done – by researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and politicians – to achieve the well intentioned, yet lofty, goal of using the highest quality scientific evidence in the development of public policy and practice for the prevention of crime' (Farrington and Welsh, 2005).

In an earlier report, Farrington and Welsh (2002) also concluded that more research is needed to help identify the 'active ingredients' of successful family-based prevention programmes and that more work needs to be done to 'disentangle the different elements of successful programs'.

They conclude that:

*The bottom line is that existing evidence suggests that family-based prevention programs are effective in reducing offending. Hence, more of these types of programs should be implemented and evaluated.*

These evaluations again demonstrate the complexity of evaluating impacts of early interventions and show once again that not all interventions have been found to be effective. This again points to the need for rigorous evaluation of all such interventions.

### 3.9 Examples of Evaluated Interventions

The results of various evaluated US intervention programmes are presented below.

In the Perry Preschool Programme, disadvantaged children with below-average IQ scores (average IQ=80) in Ypsilanti, an urban area of extreme deprivation in Michigan, received intensive treatment at ages four to five. The treatment involved a daily 150 minute classroom session on weekday mornings and a weekly 90 minute home visit by the teacher on weekday afternoons to involve the mother in the educational process. After 30 weeks the treatment was discontinued, and the children were followed over their life cycle. Evidence on the treatment group, members of whom are now approximately 35 years-old, indicates that those enrolled in the programme have higher earnings and also lower levels of teenage motherhood, criminal behaviour and drug abuse in their late twenties than did comparable children randomised out of the programme. The table below illustrates that the number of arrests is halved for programme participants compared to the control group (Barnett, 2006).

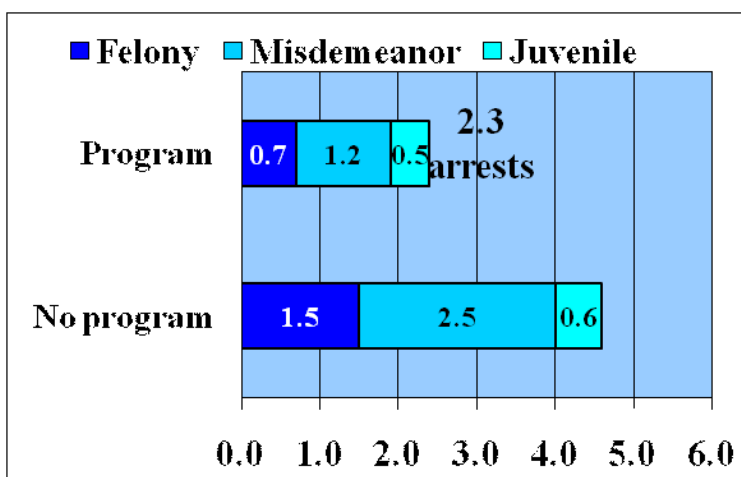


Table 3.4 Arrests per person by age 27 adapted Barnett (2006)

Carneiro and Heckman (2003), reporting on this programme state that the reported benefit-cost ratios for the programme are substantial. Measured at age 27, the programme returns \$5.70 for every dollar spent. When returns are projected for the remainder of the lives of programme participants, the return on the dollar rises to \$8.70 (Carneiro and Heckman, 2003).

Interestingly they found that a substantial fraction (65%) of the return to the programme has been attributed to reductions in crime.

The Syracuse Preschool Programme, which also provided family development support for disadvantaged children, involved a much longer intervention; it provided prenatal care of mothers and ran through to age five of the children's lives. Reductions in problems with probation and criminal offences ten years later were as large as 70% among children randomly assigned to the programme.

The Abecedarian Project, on which Carneiro and Heckman (2003) report, focused on children born to families scoring high on a High Risk Index (the index consisting of measures such as parental education, family income, absence of father from home, use of welfare, family member who sought counselling/community support among others), thus the familial situation, rather than the individual child characteristics, was the focus. They report that this intensive intervention, all day and year round, began as early as three months in an early childhood development centre. It included a small children-to-teacher ratio and home visits by a home-school teacher involving both parent and child activities. For the children, this early intervention led to improvement in their adult cognitive ability and educational attainment (doubling the probability of having attended college) as well as reduced adult high-risk behaviour (including smoking). Furthermore, the mothers (76% of the children lived in a single-parent or multigenerational household) also benefited from the intervention, resulting in an increase in their education and participation in the labour force. In summation, Masse and Barnett (2002) calculate that for each dollar spent, four dollars are gained.

The Chicago Child-Parent Centre Program (CPC) in the Chicago Public School System caters for disadvantaged families and involves family support, pre-school activities but also primary school intervention, almost all among African American children. The programme provided intensive instruction in reading and math from pre-school through to third grade, combined with frequent educational field trips. The children's parents received job skills training, parenting skills training, educational classes and social services. They also volunteered in their children's classrooms, assisted with field trips and attended parenting support groups.

Reynolds et al (2002) followed the children from ages three or four through to age 24 to assess the possible benefits of the CPC programme in terms of the children's educational achievement, need for remedial education, involvement with the child welfare and foster care system, economic status, involvement with the criminal justice system, health status and mental health.

Reynolds et al (2002) followed a group of 1,539 low-income children in the programme. Roughly 1,000 children in the study were enrolled in the CPC programme at ages three or four while 500 were enrolled in the comparison group, which was made up of children in alternative early childhood education programmes. Children in the CPC group were matched to children in the comparison group of similar age and background. The study began following the children in 1985 and 1986. Families moved into and out of the area during the time the study took place, so not all children completed all components of the CPC programme. The children in the study were 93% African American and 7% Hispanic.

The study found that because the study did not assign children randomly to the two groups, it could not conclusively prove that the CPC programme caused the gains observed in its graduates. However, the study results '*strongly suggest*' that the programme produced lasting benefits, even for children who completed only part of the programme. By age 24, for example, children who participated only in the preschool programme had lower rates of depression, lower rates of violent crime and incarceration, were more likely to attend college for four years, and were more likely to have health insurance than children who did not participate in the preschool programme. However, graduates of both the preschool and school age components of the CPC programme were more likely to attend college and to be employed full time, and less likely to receive public assistance or to have a disability than those who participated in other programmes. Children who participated in only the school age component of the CPC programme also showed benefits in adult life. By age 24, these children had lower rates of disability and were less likely to receive public assistance. Reynolds et al (2002) comment on the directing of attention to the whole family, and remark that the study is the first to show that '*large-scale established programs run by schools can have enduring effects into adulthood across a range of outcomes.*'

Overall, Reynolds et al (2002) estimated that the pre-school intervention is associated with better educational outcomes and lower crime, especially for boys. The return to this initiative was estimated to be \$7.10. They discuss why this programme is so important and why it is so effective:

*The CPC program differs from (other) programs in several respects, however. Like the Head Start program, the Child-Parent Centers provide comprehensive services, including intensive family support activities, health and social services, and center-based preschool education. The other programs targeted early education or health services with less emphasis on family and social services. In contrast to model programs, the Child-Parent Centers also are established, federally financed programs in different sites within existing educational and social agencies... Consequently, compared with other programs, the generalizability of findings from the school-based CPC program to contemporary state and local programs is high.*

In looking at why such programmes are effective they conclude that this is due in large part to the fact that as public school teachers, staff members are relatively well-paid, have at least bachelor's degrees with certification in early childhood education, and participate in ongoing professional development activities. The second mechanism that explains the long-term effects of intervention is found to be family support behaviour. Because the programme encourages parental involvement in children's education, this greater level of involvement continues after the end of the programme and helps to maintain the learning gains experienced during the programme. Also, children who participate in the CPC programme are found to be more likely to attend elementary schools of higher quality and are less likely to change schools. They also emphasise that the programme promotes school readiness among participants enhances early school performance, culminating in higher educational attainment and lower rates of crime.

Below we summarise the dollar benefits of the three stages of the CPC programme.

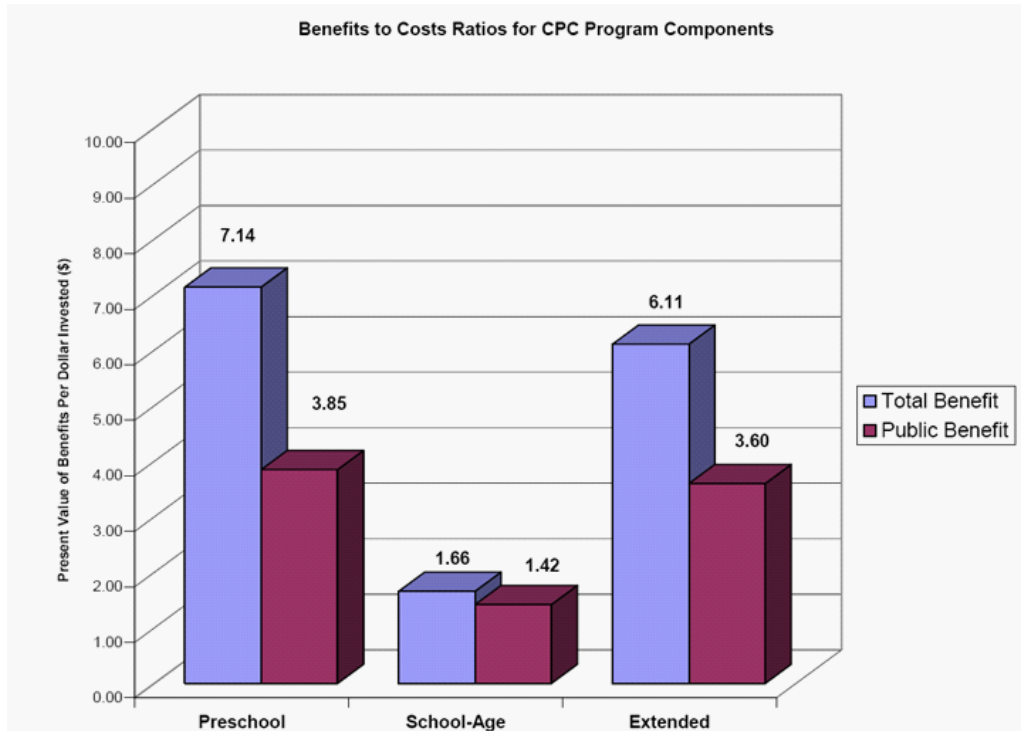


Table 3.5 Benefits to Cost Ratios for Three Measures of CPC Programme Participation (Adapted Reynolds et al, 2002)

Barnett (2006) gave the following results on the CPC programme.

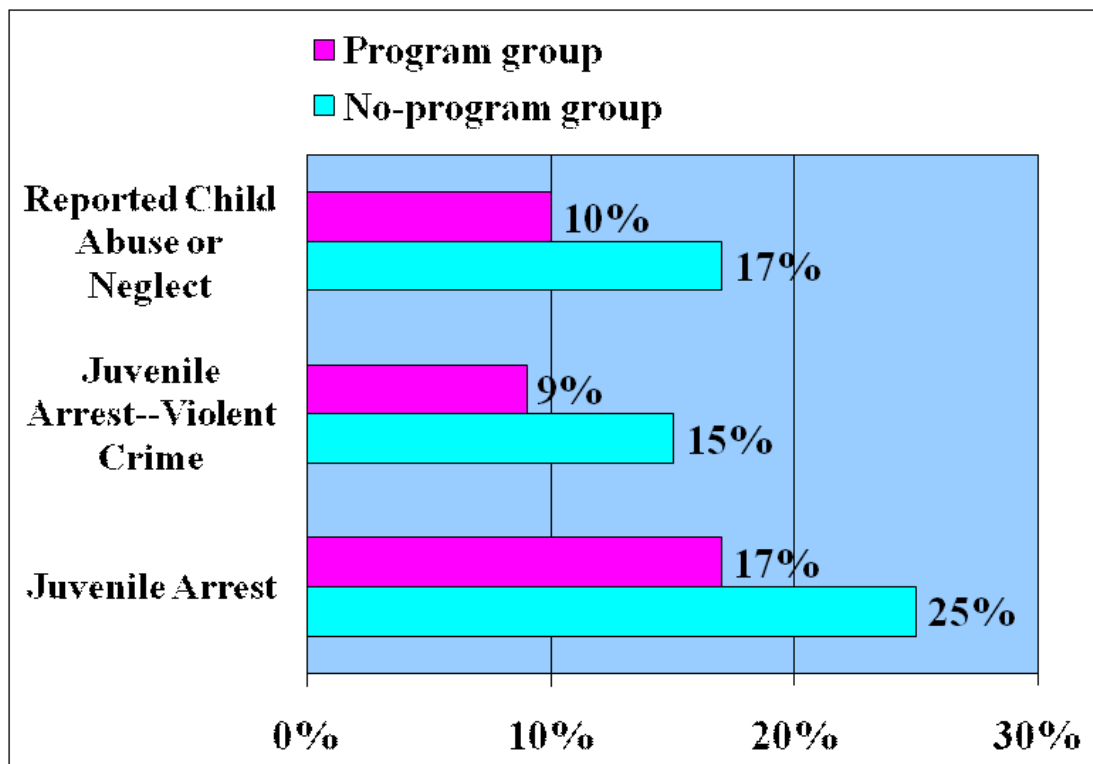


Table 3.6 CPC Social Benefits (Adapted from Barnett, 2006)

This analysis shows the impact of the CPC programme in reducing crime rates as well as in achieving other positive impacts resulting in very strong and quantifiable benefits to society.

Early Head Start is a large intervention targeting children in disadvantaged communities. The US programme was subject to a large randomised trial based on 3,000 children but is much less well funded than the above programmes. The intervention starts from birth to age three and includes centre-based activities as well as visits to the parents, for a cost in 1999 of \$5,400 per child –or half the cost of the experimental interventions.

Carneiro (2007) evaluated Head start to assess whether more universal (and less well funded) programs such as Head start in the US, or Sure Start in the UK, can be equally successful. The focus of his paper was on behavioural outcomes, namely: grade repetition, enrolment in special education, smoking, behavioural problems and being overweight at ages 12-13; and depression, high school enrolment, criminal sentences, smoking, and overweight at ages 16-17. The research found that Head Start decreases behavioural problems, probability of grade retention, special education attendance and obesity at ages 12 to 13, and depression, criminal behaviour, and obesity at ages 16-17.

A Final Report has been prepared for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Puma et al, 2010). This study was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 84 grantee/delegate agencies and included nearly 5,000 newly entering, eligible three- and four-year-old children who were randomly assigned to either: (i) a Head Start group that had access to Head Start programme services or (ii) a control group that did not have access to Head Start, but could enrol in other early childhood programmes or non-Head Start services selected by their parents. Data collection began in fall 2002 and continued through 2006, following children from programme application through the spring of their 1st grade year.

The key findings were: participation on the programme had a positive impact on children's preschool experience and on school readiness. However, the advantages children gained during their Head Start and age four years yielded only a few statistically significant differences in outcomes at the end of 1st grade for the sample as a whole. In terms of parenting outcomes there were positive impacts on use of time-out and authoritarian parenting at the end of 1st grade and on spanking and time out in kindergarten.

The authors highlighted the importance of respecting children and individualising services as needed based on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In terms of children most 'at risk' the findings are less clear. The authors state that the subgroup findings do not present a consistent picture of favourable impacts for groups that have traditionally been emphasized as higher risk. While the children from higher risk households benefited in the three-year-old group, there were no differences in impacts by household risk for the four-year-olds. This evaluation illustrates the benefits of such an early intervention but also indicates the complexity of such intentions and how they impact on groups at different levels of risk.

### **3.10 An EU Review of the Cost-Benefits of Crime Prevention**

A review of costs-benefit analyses in crime prevention in the EU member states (Van Soomeren and Wever, 2005b) highlights the limited extent to which such an approach is part of the policy development process across EU countries. This review concluded that: *'the existing body of knowledge is almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon, dominated by research and practice in the USA, Canada and Australia. Of the EU member states only the UK is beginning to develop a noteworthy body of knowledge while countries like Finland, the Netherlands and Germany have begun to introduce evaluation policies that look at monetary aspects. As such these latter countries are taking their first steps towards putting cost-benefit analysis into practice.'* Having consulted with many known experts in the field they concluded that there are no clear policies or thorough studies in Europe on cost-benefit analysis in crime prevention.

Despite some research emanating from the EU, it is clear the bulk of research still hails from the US.

### **3.11 Example of a Cost benefit Analysis of Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes aimed at Reducing Crime and Criminal Justice Costs**

In 2003, the Washington State Legislature commissioned a report to discover if interventions in the criminal justice system were working. The authors of the study (Drake et al, 2009) quantified the scientific research literature on 545 comparison-group evaluations of adult corrections, juvenile corrections, and prevention programmes addressing seven outcomes - crime, substance abuse, educational outcomes, teen pregnancy, teenage suicide attempts, child abuse or neglect, and domestic violence, with the aim of determining if there is credible evidence that such programmes work. Only studies that met rigorous evaluation criteria were included in the full analysis and in these cases rigorous mathematical models were used to calculate effects.

In a summary of its findings, the authors concluded that *'some prevention and early intervention programs for youth yield a positive cost-benefit.'* They go on to state that *'there is credible evidence that certain well implemented programs can achieve significantly more benefits than costs.'* They warn that *'the overall lesson from our evidence based review is that public policy makers need to be smart investors: some programs work, some programs do not, and careful analysis is needed to inform policy decisions'* (Drake et al, 2009).

While the authors looked at programmes for people in the adult and youth offender system they also looked at a number of crime prevention programmes. The results of these studies in relation to the effect on crime outcomes of the early intervention programmes were as follows:

Type of Programme	Effect on Crime Outcome and the Number of Evidence-Based Studies on Which the Estimate is Based (in Parentheses)	Benefits to Crime Victims (of the Reduction in Crime)	Benefits to Taxpayers (of the Reduction in Crime)	Costs (Marginal Programme Cost, Compared to the Cost of Alternative)	Benefits (Total) Minus costs (per participant)
Pre-kindergarten education for low-income 3- and 4-year-olds	-16.8% (8)	\$9,882	\$5,579	\$612	\$14,848
Nurse family partnership: children	-15.7% (1)	\$8,515	\$4,808	\$756	\$12,567
Nurse family partnership: mothers	-38.2% (1)	\$8,093	\$5,676	\$5,580	\$8,189
Guiding good choices	-7.2% (1)	\$959	\$1,627	n/e	n/e
High school graduation	-21.1% (1)	\$3,647	\$5,915	n/e	n/e
Parent-child interaction therapy	-5.1% (1)	\$1,793	\$994	n/e	n/e
Seattle social development project	-15.7% (1)	\$1,793	\$3,652	n/e	n/e

Table 3.7 Reducing Crime with evidence based options: what works and analysis of benefits and costs (Drake et al, 2009) (n/e=not estimated at this time)

The authors conclude that 'Early childhood education for low income 3- and 4-year-olds and some youth development programs provide very attractive returns on investment.'

In explaining the table, the authors give the example of the prevention programme, Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), 'which provides intensive visitation by nurses to low-income, at-risk women bearing their first child; the nurses continue to visit the home for two years after birth... Our analysis of the NFP studies indicates that the program has a large effect on the future criminality of the mothers who participate in the program, reducing crime outcomes by 38.2%. NFP also reduces the future crime levels of the youth by 15.7% compared with similar youth who did not participate in the NFP program' (Drake et al, 2009)

This analysis looking specifically at the impact of early interventions on crime indicates that such programmes can have real benefits in terms of reduced crime rates. For instance it shows that the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) reduces crime rates by over a third. However it also emphasises the need to evaluate all such programmes thoroughly to find out whether or not they are effective.

### **3.12 Making the Economic Case for the Transition to Early Intervention and Prevention**

The cost-benefit studies described here have shown that early intervention, as well as providing very positive benefits to children and their families exposed to a range of risks, can have important wider social economic benefits through reduced services costs and through increases in human investment potential. A limited number of studies have calculated the financial benefits of this approach, especially when looked at over a longer period of time well into adulthood for the children concerned. A number of other studies have also looked at the cost of transition to this type of early intervention environment. For example, the New Economics Foundation (NEF, 2009), an independent UK think-tank, in cooperation with the charity Action for Children, looked at the economic case for making the transition from cure to prevention in terms of shifting investment '*from picking up the pieces to early intervention and prevention*'. Their proposed approach involves a more complex, positive and participative approach than outlined in the UK government plans in this area.

The NEF approach is based on combining a targeted approach for those 'at risk' with universal support for families to reduce the current high costs involved in addressing social problems such as crime, mental health and family breakdown. The NEF found that the cost to the UK economy of continuing to address current levels of social problems will amount to almost £4 trillion over a 20 year period. This includes addressing problems such as crime, mental ill health, family breakdown, drug abuse and obesity. They concluded that investing in a dual investment package, including targeted interventions and universal childcare and paid parental leave, could help address as much as £1.5 trillion worth of the cost of these social problems.

Referring to these figures, The Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) stated that:

*So in the longer term early intervention can yield really significant savings. Even in the short and medium term, by picking up children's emerging difficulties quickly and responding to them, some children can begin to get the help they need sooner and be protected from experiencing really devastating harm later on.*

The NEF argue that by getting the type and timing of investment right, and by addressing the psycho-social dimensions of children's lives, economic and social benefits are generated for a range of stakeholders. They estimated the financial benefits as follows:

*For every £1 invested annually in Action for Children's targeted services designed to catch problems early and prevent problems from reoccurring, society benefits by between £7.60 and £9.20. This social value can be generated, for example, through improved family relationships... For every £1 invested in an Action for Children children's centre, a forecast social return to society of £4.60 is expected to be generated. Benefits are forecast to accrue to a range of stakeholders including children, parents, community, and the state.*



This, they said, would leave the UK in a similar position to European nations such as Finland, Sweden and Denmark which have the best social outcomes. They also highlight the importance of seeing the participants on early interventions and their families as *'active partners'* rather than the recipient of *'what is deemed by others as good for them'*. This contrasts with an *'approach which is becoming more common in the UK of targeting families and making participation on programmes compulsory.'*

NEF (2009) also highlight how, if we are to make these improvements permanent, structural change is needed to allow a more holistic approach to children's services along the lines of the most successful European countries, including access to universal high-quality childcare and properly funded parental leave, coupled with support services and delivery models that have been shown to work.

The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes and Young People's Services (Coghlan et al, 2009) carried out a study to see if there is evidence to support specific strategies that help children from all backgrounds and with diverse characteristics to access the curriculum. They concluded that the few studies that have considered socio-economic mix have found that it is preferable not to segregate low-income families.

### **3.13 The Need for Caution**

In reviewing the available evidence on the cost effectiveness of early interventions in preventing crime and in developing positive pathways for individuals and families 'at risk', the need to take a cautious approach has been highlighted by a number of sources. In particular, the benefits of basing programmes on the needs of the individuals concerned and of involving participants in their design has been highlighted. Also, the need to ensure that programme evaluations are comprehensive and robust has been highlighted. For example, McCord (2003) cautioned against evaluations that do not report all outcomes:

*Evidence about adverse effects from social programs is hard to find in part because of a strong bias against reporting adverse effects of social programs. Authors of studies that fail to produce evidence of beneficial outcomes sometimes do not bother to submit their reports for publication. But also, those who do submit for publication tend to receive delays or rejections attributable to the unpalatable message they convey.*

McCord also recommends a greater focus on positive behaviour such as improved levels of health, safety, enjoyment, achievement, economic and social well-being as opposed to *'strategies of exclusion and criminalisation'*, emphasising the need to broaden the risk-based focus on offending into *'a welfare and needs-based examination of wider issues related to social exclusion/inclusion and service provision/availability by creating a "listening culture" where young people can voice their views and be listened to at any time'*.

He criticises approaches whereby *'risk factors are applied universally (as if equally salient and meaningful to all groups of young people in all local areas)'*, yet subsequent interventions are targeted at 'at risk' sub-groups. He suggests that an expansion *'of the traditionally-narrow risk-based perspective is compatible with more inclusionary, rights-based methods of working with young people and offers a counterbalance to the much-maligned deficit model that underpins the (often) deleterious application of early intervention'* (McCord, 2003).

Sansfacon (2004) also cautions against an over-reliance on child- and parent- focused interventions at the expense of an understanding of wider socio-economic factors at work in society. He asks of the individuals and families that present these risk factors, why ultimately they are “*always the same*” – *and the same as maybe fifty years ago save for some changes brought about by increased migration*’.

He goes on to say that community-based interventions aimed at enhancing social capital as a way to prevent offending behaviour, victimisation and insecurity are missing from such evaluations and are needed to counteract *‘the atomistic, individual-centered crime reduction models.’*

Sansfacon (2004) feels that cost-benefit analysis, however, is to be encouraged if for no other reason than:

*Ultimately, one of the most valuable contributions of benefit-cost studies lies in their re-integrating albeit by the back door, some degree of complexity to crime and delinquency. When one attempts to identify, break down into measurable units and identify proper indicators to measure the costs of crime, one is forced to think about how crime is defined (why focus only on street crime?), what is excluded (are “incivilities” part of crime?), who is excluded (are the lost lives of young delinquents discounted?), whose costs are taken into consideration.*

He goes on to say that:

*There are three main reasons why empirical CBAs are so few in number. First, crime prevention is an emerging area of research. Second, many programs, decision makers (and researchers) adhere to the notion that, where there are positive programmatic outcomes, logic dictates that the benefits truly outweigh the costs (and you just know it). Third, it is sometimes difficult and expensive, in relative terms, to do a comprehensive CBA of crime prevention that includes quantification of the whole range of costs and benefits. (Sansfacon, 2004)*

This analysis presents some cautionary advice on developing and implementing effective and positive crime prevention policies. It points to the need for highly robust evaluations if ‘false positives’ are to be avoided. It recommends a participative approach with the children and families involved, and calls for quantitative evaluations to be complemented with qualitative studies of how the programmes are experienced by the participants. It again emphasises the difficulties involved in effective targeting and the need to develop the methodology used in a way that is sensitive to individual circumstances and meets individual needs. It also points to the need to also include more positive approaches to disadvantaged communities which aim to build the social capital of such communities.

### **3.14 Placing Early Intervention within Social Policy**

A number of studies have suggested that the type of crime prevention interventions discussed here should be developed as an integral part of social policy rather than as part of the criminal justice system. It is interesting in this context to look at a National Crime Prevention Council of Canada study (1996) that discussed this issue, which found that:

*The evidence is conclusive that the most effective way to prevent crime is to ensure healthier children, stronger families, better schools and more cohesive communities. Crime prevention through social development is a sound investment. The dividends include less violence, safer communities and significant cost savings in the criminal. A more effective strategy for preventing crime includes social development programs that strengthen individuals, families and communities.*

The arguments made here seem particularly relevant to the current discourse and demonstrate how arguments in favour of the type of crime prevention policy reviewed here, or indeed of evidence to support such changes in policy, are not new. What is most needed, it would appear, is the commitment to act on this knowledge in an integrated and comprehensive way with a strong focus on social inclusion objectives and related actions.

### **3.15 Other Issues Arising from the Literature**

#### **Need for More Integrated Service Provision**

Many of the studies available in the literature highlight the importance of integrated service provision. Kiro (2009) found that: *'Many of the children at risk for negative outcomes fall into the gaps that exist between education, health and welfare. Service provision varies with location and children outside of main centres face additional barriers. Provision of home visiting services such as Family Start have much to offer but more intensive services with the capacity to provide in-home support and education are also needed.'*

However, the introduction of integrated responses to crime is not simple:

*A multi-agency group tackling juvenile crime must, therefore, consider itself as a management team, continuously monitoring patterns and looking for changes in local juvenile behaviour; deciding when and in what form intervention can occur; providing advice to people and organisations creating new conditions; and finding ways of influencing the fashions and trends to which juveniles, specifically local juveniles, are attracted. Preventing juvenile crime thus becomes the intended effect of a management process, rather than a matter of confronting it as though it were a single phenomenon to be vanquished once and for all. (Cooper, 1989)*

Prevention requires collaboration between all relevant government departments; there must be greater pooling of resources among these departments and greater integration of services, to address the root causes of crime.

#### **Need for a Long-Term Approach**

Having reviewed the US cost-benefit literature for prevention, Chisholm (2000) concluded by emphasising the need for a long-term approach stating that *'for something as important and costly as crime, all types of governments should be guided by the long-term social costs and benefits of alternative crime prevention programs.'*

## Targeting

The targeting of individuals or families for intervention is not without its problems. Families identified as high risk may be unwilling to engage with support services because of a fear of stigmatisation (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2009). Homel et al mirror this concern pointing out that aiming to recruit parents into programmes with labels such as 'Child Abuse Prevention' are unlikely to be effective (Homel et al, 1999).

Interventions must be targeted correctly and specifically, because '*an intervention which works for one group of young people may have no comparable effect on another*' (Thomas et al, 2008).

However, there is little if anything specifically reported in the literature evaluating different approaches aimed at involving those most reluctant to participate in such programmes.

### 3.16 Key Findings

The key findings from this review of the social and economic impact of early intervention and prevention are as follows.

Available studies emphasise that early interventions with young children and their parents can be effective in preventing crime. They highlight the particular benefits of interventions that involve both children and families as part of a pathways approach that addresses the risk factors that arise early in a child's life and that have knock on benefits in terms of future schooling and resulting impacts on reductions in criminal activity and involvement with the criminal justice system. They emphasise that for early intervention programmes to be effective, they need to be delivered within the family and social context, and in step with the child's development, actively involving parents.

Evaluations in this area look at a wide range of impacts, including cognitive and non-cognitive skill development and academic achievement, behavioural and emotional competencies, educational progression and attainment, child maltreatment, health, delinquency and crime, social welfare programme use, and labour market success.

However, few studies are long-term enough to actually measure the cost savings and benefits of such programmes on reducing crime. The limited numbers of studies that specifically measure the impact of such interventions on reductions in crime indicate that such benefits do occur and that the interventions involved have significant and quantifiable benefits for the individuals concerned, their families, their communities and for society in general.

The Child-Parent Centers in particular, which provide comprehensive services, including intensive family support activities, health and social services, and centre-based pre-school education which are established, federally-financed programmes in different sites within existing educational and social agencies, have been shown to be effective in reducing crime and in achieving a range of other outcomes for children and families 'at risk'. This study shows how early pre-school interventions can enhance early school performance, culminating in higher educational attainment and lower rates of crime

It is particularly important to note that some of the larger interventions that move out from small scaled interventions, such as Head Start and Incredible Years, can also have positive effects if

adequately resourced. Head Start was found to have decreased behavioural problems, probability of grade retention, special education attendance and obesity at ages 12-13, and depression, criminal behaviour, and obesity at ages 16-17.

The analysis suggests that the timing and level of optimal interventions for disadvantaged children depend on the conditions of disadvantage and the nature of desired outcomes, and that programmes that promote non-cognitive skills and that concentrate relatively more investment in the earlier stages of childhood and work with children and families will be the most effective ones for fighting crime.

The US evidence suggests that the economic returns from investing in early childhood interventions are particularly strong for programmes that (i) have long-term follow-ups of programme participants (ii) measure a broad array of outcomes, and (iii) serve a more targeted population, and that this effect is most strongly felt in relation to reductions in crime. However, it is worth noting that the arguments for such benefits are largely based on a human capital argument rather than on a child outcomes or human rights perspective.

Such interventions take place within a wider policy agenda and in this context it is interesting to look at how such policy is developing in the UK in particular. In the UK a central element of crime prevention policy is a level of coercion for families identified as most 'at risk' of criminal activity. Such an approach is at variance with the view of many experts that participation in such programmes should be participatory and positive with minimal stigma involved.

A number of commentators have focused on the need to balance such targeted interventions with universal programmes that address disadvantage, recognising that targeted programmes will never be able to fully compensate for the economic and social disadvantage that some children experience. They have also shown the difficulties involved in effective targeting of those most 'at risk' and suggest that such approaches must also take into account individual need and preferences.

Furthermore, some of the studies question cost-benefit studies while others emphasise the importance of well resourced cost-benefit analysis studies in this area and the need for control groups to ensure that results are accurately measuring the impact of the interventions in place.

A number of commentators emphasise the need to balance quantitative cost-benefit studies with qualitative studies that actively involve participants and ascertain their views on the programmes they are involved in and on the need to place such interventions in the centre of social policy rather than within criminal justice policy. Targeting of interventions could then be represented as sensitive and responsive to expressed need, thus limiting the stigmatising effect of such interventions.

The need for integrated responses to crime is clear from the studies reviewed here involving a range of government departments and agencies.

In common with Irish studies, internationally based studies call for further research both into the causes of juvenile crime and the responses offered. For instance, the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales found that further research is needed on the relationship between risk factors and the influence of protective factors on different sub groups, and calls for more rigorous evaluation studies (Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, 2005).

Overall, the number of long-term comprehensive evaluations of early interventions and their impact on crime is very limited, largely occurring in the US. However the findings we do have, both of long-term and short-term impacts do indicate that such interventions can be effective. While limited, such studies do provide sufficient evidence to pursue this approach much more comprehensively in an Irish context. They also point to the need to complement such an approach with rigorous and well-resourced evaluations of the impact of the early interventions on reducing the known risk factors for young people's involvement with the criminal justice system. The findings in this study also indicate that the targeting involved in such an approach can be problematic and must be very carefully managed, especially to avoid stigmatisation, and that this is best done where early interventions are clearly linked in with broader social policy objectives.

## 4. Conclusions

In this section we present the key conclusions from the study and make a number of recommendations for Irish early intervention and crime prevention policy.

### Background

The study has shown that a small but significant number of children are in contact with the criminal justice system in Ireland. For these children, such involvement is likely to have long-term negative impacts for them, their families and for society as a whole.

A number of recent statements on crime policy in Ireland have recommended that crime prevention policy should focus more on early intervention in recognition that such approaches have been proven to be effective internationally, while recent policy statements have indicated that Ireland is increasingly moving in this direction.

This trend reflects the growing evidence that those who come into contact with the criminal justice system have many common characteristics. They tend to be young, male and to come from clearly identifiable areas. They tend to have low educational levels, poor parenting supports and a strong family involvement with crime. These characteristics have remained over time and can be seen in both the Children's Court and in the profile of those involved in various diversion programmes. Such factors have been found to be strongly exacerbated for children in care, with international research showing that the risk of such children becoming involved in the criminal justice system is significantly higher for a variety of reasons, relating not only to their own background but also to how they are treated by the authorities.

### Risk and Protective Factors

There is a growing body of evidence identifying both risk and protective factors among young people likely to come to the attention of the criminal justice system. By identifying such factors it is possible to develop interventions to reduce such risks and enhance protective factors. Risk factors across both Irish and international literature have been found to relate to gender, behavioural tendencies, family characteristics, education and socio-economic environment. Many studies point to the importance of early attachment and positive parenting experiences as creating resilience and establishing protective factors.

### Pathways Analysis

Pathways analysis shows how risk and protective factors can be mutually reinforcing and can create either a vicious or a virtuous cycle in a young person's life, either increasing or reducing the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system. This analysis leads many commentators to highlight how early interventions that intervene on the first element of the pathway can be most effective in ensuring that young people 'at risk' are able to move on to more positive pathways. This has encouraged the introduction of a number of early interventions at pre-school level involving young people and their parents.

## **Evaluating Effective Interventions**

A number of evaluations, particularly in the US, have shown the cost-benefits of such early interventions and have demonstrated specifically how they reduced crime rates among participants compared to non-participants with resulting and quantifiable benefits to the individuals concerned, their families and wider society.

These studies have consistently shown how early intervention with pre-school children and their parents are most cost effective and can form the basis for a range of positive effects in the young people's lives including increased school retention, reduced anti-social behaviour, improved employment prospects, as well as reducing reduction in criminal activity. Those interventions that involve long-term follow-up have been found to produce the highest cost savings and are particularly important in pinpointing crime reduction impacts.

The difficulties of effectively targeting those 'at risk' have also been highlighted in the literature, as have the potential dangers of stigmatising those so targeted. This is particularly relevant in the context of compulsory participation for those deemed most 'at risk', a growing focus in the UK. There is little evidence in the international literature on how best to involve families that are reluctant to become involved in such interventions. Furthermore, some commentators have expressed concern about the possible dangers of early interventions that bring young people to the attention of the criminal justice system, stating that such contact can result in such young people effectively becoming a target for police attention.

A number of studies have called for a cost-benefit approach to be complemented by a more qualitative and participative research approach actively involving the young people and the families concerned. There are also calls for targeted interventions to be complemented by universal programmes aimed at addressing social inclusion policy objectives in recognition that targeted programmes alone can never fully overcome socio-economic disadvantage.

Cost-benefit analyses involving long-term follow-up and control groups are rare internationally and very little research has been done on this area in Ireland to date. However, the studies that have been done indicate that this is a fruitful field of enquiry which needs to be developed sensitively, backed up with adequate resources and expertise in order to properly inform the development and implementation of early intervention initiatives, ideally as a key element of social policy, in Ireland.

## **Irish Policy and Practice**

The expressed commitment to early intervention in the context of crime prevention in Ireland must to be backed up by more concerted action on the part of government departments and agencies. There is now enough evidence in the literature to support an expansion of early interventions for young people, their families and communities 'at risk'. This literature review indicates that such interventions should combine broad-stroke interventions with more locally targeted specialist interventions in areas where particular risks have been identified. However, it also shows that there is a need for greater clarity on what constitutes 'early intervention' and how it differs from 'diversion' and strategies aimed at reducing 'the opportunities for crime'.

The research described here suggests that an effective early intervention strategy needs to address the wide range of personal, family, community and socio-economic factors that create the environment where risks of crime are greatly intensified. The international literature, although



limited, gives clear guidance on how best this can be done, and these findings should now be used to guide an early intervention strategy and related actions as a key element of Irish social and justice policy.

The review also shows that such targeting is not without its own dangers and must be done sensitively in cooperation with family support organisations, thus minimising stigma and maximising voluntary participation. It must be clearly focused on ensuring positive outcomes for children and on ensuring that real needs are identified and met. It must be complemented with universal programmes and wider social policies aimed at reducing disadvantage and improving outcomes for children, especially children from disadvantaged and ‘at risk’ backgrounds. It indicates that such an approach can benefit most from being child-centred and being a key element of an integrated early year’s strategy for children (see Department for Children, Youth and Families (2010) for an exposition of a child-centred approach to early intervention and prevention).

The findings also indicate that resources should be put in place to allow comprehensive evaluations to be carried out of any interventions so introduced, involving control groups where possible, and should include long-term follow up of participants to ensure that full and accurate benefits are captured.

The evidence shows the potential benefits of using a cost-benefit approach to evaluating such initiatives; this approach should be used to a greater extent in Ireland, building on best international practice. Evidence available internationally indicates the type of savings that can be made. For example, the NEF (2009) estimated that for every £1 invested annually in Action for Children’s targeted services (designed to catch problems early and prevent problems from reoccurring) society benefits by between £7.60 and £9.20. A number of US studies have shown the significant returns that can arise, especially in the longer term, through early interventions for children ‘at risk’ and how such returns can emerge from a relatively small change in the life experience of the young people concerned. The costs of such interventions can be placed in the context of the stated annual cost of a place in a detention centre in Ireland of €330,263 (Irish Prison Service, 2008)<sup>7</sup>.

Such an approach, however, should also be complemented by more qualitative needs-based studies that actively involve participants and their families. The possibility of linking in with the longitudinal study on children (Growing Up in Ireland, [www.growingup.ie](http://www.growingup.ie)) should be explored, as should the findings and knowledge emerging from local early intervention projects being investigated by the Centre for Effective Services, such as those located in Ballymun, Tallaght West and Darndale.

**Based on this literature review, the Irish Penal Reform Trust, Barnardos and IAYPIC have created a Position Paper which concisely presents the links between social injustice and crime, and sets forth our calls for action.**

**Please visit [iprt.ie/shifting-focus](http://iprt.ie/shifting-focus) to read our Position Paper: ‘Shifting Focus: From Criminal Justice to Social Justice – Building Better and Safer Communities’ and learn more about the campaign.**

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<sup>7</sup> The New Economics Foundation (2009) estimated that the cost of holding a person in a Young Offender Institution (YOI) in the UK is £100,000 a year, if you include the impact of custody on crime and unemployment it shows that the costs and benefits add up to at least a further £40,000 of expenses to the state. This estimate includes the public benefits of reduced crime while a person is serving their sentence.

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## Appendix Description of Early Interventions Evaluated in the Literature

Program	Description	Citations
<b>Programs with a Strong Evidence Base</b>		
Carolina Abecedarian Project	<p>The Carolina Abecedarian Project was a comprehensive early education program for young children at risk for developmental delays and school failure. The program operated in a single site in North Carolina between 1972 and 1985, and it involved both a preschool component and a school-age component. Children entered the program from infancy up to 6 months of age. The preschool program offered a full-day, year-round, center-based stimulating and structured environment, along with nutritional supplements, pediatric care, and social work services.</p> <p><a href="http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/">http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/</a></p>	<p>Ramey and Campbell (1984)</p> <p>Campbell and Ramey (1994)</p> <p>Ramey and Campbell (1994)</p> <p>Campbell and Ramey (1995)</p> <p>Campbell et al. (2002)</p>
Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC)	<p>The Chicago CPC program has been providing center-based preschool education to disadvantaged children in high-poverty Chicago neighborhoods since 1967. The centers operate during the school year through the Chicago public school system and are located in public elementary schools. The preschool provides a structured part-day program for children ages 3 and 4 that emphasizes a child-centered, individualized approach to social and cognitive development. The centers also require regular parental participation. Related program services continue after kindergarten entry and through grades 1, 2, or 3.</p> <p><a href="http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/Program.htm">http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/Program.htm</a></p>	<p>Reynolds (1994)</p> <p>Reynolds (1995)</p> <p>Reynolds and Temple (1995)</p> <p>Reynolds (1997)</p> <p>Reynolds, Chang, and Temple (1997)</p> <p>Reynolds and Temple (1998)</p> <p>Reynolds (2000)</p> <p>Reynolds et al. (2001)</p> <p>Reynolds et al. (2002)</p>
Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP)	<p>The CCDP aimed to enhance child development and help low-income families to achieve economic self-sufficiency. The program initially began in 1988 with 22 sites that operated for five years; two more sites started in 1990. The program was designed to serve families from as early as the prenatal period through age 5, although in practice wide variation in implementation length was observed between sites. CCDP projects were designed to build upon existing service delivery networks and relied on case managers to coordinate the service needs of a group of families. Case managers provided some services directly (e.g., counseling, life skills</p>	<p>St. Pierre et al. (1997)</p>

Table A Key Dimensions of Selected Early Intervention Childhood Programmes (Adapted from Karoly et al, 2005)

Program	Description	Citations
	training), and provided access to other services such as immunizations, childcare, and prenatal care through referrals and brokered arrangements.	
DARE to be You	DARE to be You is a multilevel prevention program, operating in several sites in Colorado, that targets parents of two- to five-year-olds in high-risk families. The center-based program focuses on parenting skills, and the aspects that contribute to youth's resiliency to substance abuse later in life, such as parents' self efficacy, effective child rearing, social support, problem-solving skills, and children's developmental attainments. The program offers 15 to 18 hours of parent training workshops and concurrent children's programs, preferably in a 10- to 12-week period. Other program elements include training for child care providers and training for social service agency workers who work with families.  <a href="http://www.coopext.colostate.edu/DTBY/index.html">http://www.coopext.colostate.edu/DTBY/index.html</a>	Miller-Heyl, MacPhee, and Fritz (1998)
Early Training Project (ETP)	The ETP was a demonstration project that served a cohort of children born in 1958. The program, implemented in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, was designed to improve the educability of young children from low-income homes. The program consisted of a ten-week summer preschool program for the two or three summers prior to first grade, and weekly home visits during the remainder of the year.	Gray and Klaus (1970) Gray and Ramsey (1982) Gray, Ramsey, and Klaus (1982) Lazar and Darlington (1982)
Head Start	Head Start is a federally funded community-based preschool program initiated in the 1960s with an overall goal of increasing the school readiness of eligible young children ages 3 to 5 in low-income families. Head Start preschools, operating either part- or full-day, provide a range of services, including early childhood education, nutrition and health services, and parent education and involvement. There is no single Head Start program model and programs exist in all 50 states.  <a href="http://www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/">http://www2.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/</a>	Currie and Thomas (1995) Currie and Thomas (1999) Aughinbaugh (2001) Garces, Thomas, and Currie (2002) Abbott-Shim, Lambert, and McCarty (2003)

Table A (cont'd) Key Dimensions of Selected Early Intervention Childhood Programmes (Adapted from Karoly et al, 2005)

Program	Description	Citations
High/Scope Perry Preschool Project	The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project was a center-based early childhood education program designed to promote children's intellectual, social, and emotional learning and development. The program was conducted from 1962 to 1967 in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and targeted three- and four-year-old African-American children who were living in poverty and had low IQ scores. The school-year program emphasized learning through active and direct child-initiated experiences rather than through directed teaching. Teachers conducted part-day, daily classroom sessions for children and weekly home visits. <a href="http://www.highscope.org">http://www.highscope.org</a>	Weikart, Bond, and McNeil (1978) Schweinhart and Weikart (1980) Berrueta-Clement et al. (1984) Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart (1993) Schweinhart (2004) Schweinhart et al. (2005)
HIPPY (Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters) USA	HIPPY is a two-year parent involvement program that offers home-based early childhood education for three-, four-, and five-year-old children. The program targets parents with limited formal education from economically disadvantaged families. HIPPY helps parents enhance their children's school readiness, through the use of a structured curriculum and books and materials designed to strengthen children's cognitive skills, early literacy skills, social/emotional development, and physical development. The program is designed so that mothers deliver the HIPPY lessons to their children daily, with support in the form of biweekly home visits from a paraprofessional and biweekly group meetings with paraprofessionals and other parents. HIPPY is an international program that started in Israel in 1969 and has been in operation in the U.S. since 1984 with programs in 26 states. <a href="http://www.hippyusa.org">http://www.hippyusa.org</a>	Baker, Piotrkowski, Brook-Gunn, (1998)
Houston Parent-Child Development Center (PCDC)	The Houston PCDC was a two-year parent-child education program for children ages 1 to 3, whose goal was preventing behavior problems in young children. The program was implemented from 1970 to 1972 and targeted low-income Mexican American families that lived in Houston barrios. The first year of the program involved biweekly home visits to the mother and child by paraprofessional educators,	Johnson et al. (1974) Johnson and Breckenridge (1982) Johnson and Walker (1991)

Table A (cont'd) Key Dimensions of Selected Early Intervention Childhood Programmes (Adapted from Karoly et al, 2005)

