

BUILDING BRIDGES

An Evaluation and Social Return on Investment Study
of the Le Chéile Restorative Justice Project in Limerick

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2015



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We would also like to thank Quality Matters who carried out the research. A special thanks goes to all the young people, victims, family members and professionals who contributed to this study.

Finally we would like to thank all our staff, our volunteers and the Limerick Young Persons Probation team whose dedication and commitment have made the project a huge success. Thank you for being so open to restorative justice and believing in the vision from the start.

AUTHORS

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FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce this evaluation of the Le Chéile Restorative Justice Project, Ireland's first and only non-statutory youth restorative justice service. The Project is a partnership between Le Chéile and Young Persons Probation and aims to contribute to the development of social cohesion and harmony within communities in Limerick and surrounding areas by reducing the incidence of youth crime and anti-social behaviour, reducing fear of crime and promoting community safety.

Quality Matters, the evaluators consulted with young people, parents, victims of crime, community leaders and professionals with an interest in this work. I am delighted that the evaluation concluded that each grouping had very positive engagement with the Project and noted Le Chéile's high levels of professionalism throughout.

Overall, victims found restorative justice to be more inclusive, respectful and a more meaningful approach than traditional criminal justice systems. Young people reported positive outcomes such as increased levels of empathy, improved family relationships and a reduction in criminal behaviour. Parents noted that they developed a greater understanding of what was going on for their children and significant changes in their child's behaviour which contributed to reduced levels of stress and conflict in the home.

The evaluation found that the multi-agency approach employed by the Project has proven very successful. The project works very closely with Young Persons Probation,

An Garda Síochána, as well as a range of community agencies and was highly praised for assisting in the embedding of restorative justice in Limerick City.

One of the headline findings of the evaluation is that every €1 invested in the Le Chéile Restorative Justice project provides approximately €2.80 in social value. This evaluation provides evidence that Restorative Justice provides an economic as well as a social and community return on investment.

I commend the staff and volunteers who have contributed vision, commitment and best practice to ensuring the success of this project. The future is bright for Restorative Justice in Ireland and Le Chéile is proud to be a lead agency in demonstrating and practicing Restorative Justice in the Youth Justice Sector.

Anne Conroy
CEO, Le Chéile

1 INTRODUCTION

The Le Chéile Restorative Justice Project (‘the Project’) is Ireland’s first and only non-statutory youth restorative justice service. This innovative Project, based upon the well-evidenced principles and practices of restorative justice, opened its doors to young people in late 2010.

The Project is housed under the governance of Le Chéile Mentoring and Youth Justice Support Services and is based in Limerick city centre. It is closely aligned with and works alongside Limerick Young Persons Probation (YPP) having been established specifically to dovetail with existing statutory service provision, vis-à-vis YPP. The Project is also embedded within a broader range of services providing restorative practice initiatives across the city, across justice, education and community and voluntary services.

The Project’s primary focus is on providing a range of restorative justice interventions to young people from the Limerick area, who have been involved in crime and are being worked with by the Probation Service. In addition to this, the Project’s staff provide accredited training in restorative practices to professionals including Gardaí and staff of community-based services.

“ IT’S NOT ABOUT COACHING PEOPLE... THE QUESTIONS ARE SCRIPTED, BUT THE ANSWERS ARE NOT.”
Professional Interviewee 8

After almost four years in operation, and following a positive internal evaluation, Le Chéile put out an open call for researchers or research agencies to tender for the provision of an external evaluation. This review was commissioned by Le Chéile in March of 2014 and conducted by the independent research charity Quality Matters, over an eleven month period.

The research methodology employed a staged approach. Firstly, a review of literature was conducted, covering legislation and policy context, international standards, and evidence of ‘what works’ in restorative justice with children and young people. Additional research was also conducted to support the Social Return on Investment forecast. The main literature review provided the context for the evaluation as well as the basis for the formulation of evaluation questions. Next, a stakeholder mapping exercise was undertaken to select interviewees who together could provide as broad as possible view of the work of the Project and its effectiveness.

TABLE 1: LE CHÉILE INTERVENTIONS BY MCCOLD & WACHTEL TYPOLOGY

Model of Intervention	Type
Restorative Conference	Fully Restorative
Victim Impact Panel	Mostly Restorative
Victim Empathy Programme	Partly Restorative
Victim Offender/Mediation	Mostly Restorative
Reparation	Mostly Restorative

Qualitative interviews and focus groups were then held with a range of stakeholders including children and young people, members of their families, the victims, representatives of criminal justice agencies and other professionals, including from ‘reparation host agencies’. A review of quantitative and qualitative data held by Le Chéile was also conducted as part of the research.

In order to achieve its goals and objectives in the direct work with children and young people, the Le Chéile Restorative Justice Project, under the guidance of YPP, identified and developed a toolkit of interventions for working with young people restoratively. These interventions range in intensity, alignment with traditional restorative practices and in resource requirements.

FIGURE 1: MCCOLD & WACHTEL'S TYPOLOGY OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES (2002)



These five interventions are reviewed here, against McCold & Wachtel's (2002) typology of restorative practices, with results of this review presented in Figure 1 and Table 1 above, and are described in more detail

in the sections that follow. They are: Victim Empathy Programme; Victim Impact Panels; Victim Offender Mediation; Restorative Conferencing and Reparation.

2 MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 FINDINGS REGARDING YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people reported very positive experiences of engagement with the Le Chéile Restorative Justice Project. Those who participated in this study reported being appropriately prepared for what was going to happen during the restorative intervention, although some young people would have wanted a bit more information about the possible outcomes of the meetings.

“IT WAS A BIG DEAL. IT’S HARD TO TALK ABOUT THAT KIND OF STUFF, TALKING ABOUT IT MAKES YOU REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED AND THAT’S NOT ALWAYS NICE.”

Young Person 3

Young people reported that they were able to ask questions and that they were listened to by the Project workers, with their views considered throughout the process. They felt respected and well supported by staff, who helped put nervous feelings about the process at ease. Young people found the experience of the Project emotional – especially when having to meet victims face-to-face – but felt it not to be intimidating. Only one of the young people interviewed stated that they thought the Project wasn’t really for them, but even this person said they would recommend it to friends or siblings.

“THEY HAVE BEEN LOVELY, DOWN TO EARTH AND WOULD DO ANYTHING FOR YOU. [...] I DIDN’T KNOW PEOPLE WOULD BE SO HELPFUL.”

Young Person 2

In terms of outcomes, young people reported that the Project has had a positive, and in some cases profound, impact on their lives. Young people reported increased levels of empathy towards victims of crime and family members (which was supported and shown to be statistically significant by quantitative data recorded by the Project); improved family relationships; decreased substance use; increased pro-social peer relationships and an overall reduction in their involvement in criminal behaviour and level of engagement with criminal justice agencies.

2.2 FINDINGS REGARDING VICTIMS

Achieving high levels of victim participation has been noted as a common challenge among restorative justice projects. The findings of this evaluation are no different; however, it is noted that the Project has taken steps to promote victim participation as well as putting in place processes, such as Victim Impact Panels, which support the provision of restorative interventions even where there is no participation from direct victims of a particular offence committed by the young person.

“IT WAS THE MOST PROFOUND EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE... I WAS A VICTIM RELAYING MY STORY.”

Victim Participant 1

Those victims who participated in restorative interventions, or who took part as victim proxies (representing the victim perspective in a Victim Impact Panel), found Restorative Justice to be a more inclusive, respectful and meaningful approach than the traditional criminal justice process and generally reported a very positive experience of their engagement with the Project.

“I WOULD RECOMMEND IT, [LE CHÉILE STAFF] TAKE YOU BY THE HAND, YOU’RE NOT ON YOUR OWN ANYMORE.”

Victim Participant 3

Half of those interviewed took part in Victim Impact Panels as proxy victims to explain to young people the impact of offending on the lives of those affected by their behaviour. They praised their preparation for these panels and commented on the professional approach by Le Chéile staff in the sessions. Some victim interviewees noted the importance of victim participation and wanted to see more engagement with the Project from those affected by crime. Victims reported decreased fear of crime and associated anxiety after participating in restorative interventions as well as noting a sense of ‘closure’ with regard to their experience of victimisation.

2.3 FINDINGS REGARDING PARENTS

Parents of the young people involved with Le Chéile all described very positive experiences of the Project, which they felt was respectful and inclusive of them as family members.

“ I DIDN'T EVEN REALISE I NEEDED SO MUCH HELP WITH MY OWN SON AT THE TIME, IT HELPED EVERYONE, THERE WAS SO MUCH TROUBLE IN THE HOUSE OVER WHAT HE WAS DOING.”

Family Member 3

Parents reported positive changes for themselves, such as greater understanding of what was going on for their children, often linked with improvements in their parenting skills and approaches. An outcome of this was parents reporting lower levels of stress or anxiety. Parents also reported learning more about issues such as the reasons for offending and the nature of addiction.

It was reported that this information helped them to deal with and respond to challenging behaviours rather than reacting out of frustration. The second main benefit cited by parents was the change in behaviour of their children. This was seen as reducing stress and conflict within the home, often having a further impact upon other family members such as siblings.

“ [THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROJECT] IS BRILLIANT. IT REALLY MAKES THEM SEE WHAT THEY HAVE DONE. IT MAKES THEM THINK, I THINK IT IS A VERY GOOD PROGRAMME.”

Family Member 3

2.4 FINDINGS REGARDING INTERAGENCY WORKING

The multi-agency approach employed by the Project has proven very successful. The Project is embedded within the youth justice network of service providers in Limerick and works in parallel to the Limerick Young Persons Probation (YPP). From the Probation Service point of view, the Project has been core to their ability to provide a range of restorative interventions in addition to family conferencing, available under the Children Act 2001.

“ IT'S A TOOL AND WAY OF WORKING THAT WE USE ALL THE TIME AND IT'S REALLY USEFUL. OUR OLD FORM OF MEDIATION WAS NOT AS SUCCESSFUL.”

PEOPLE WHO CAUSED HARM PREVIOUSLY LEFT THE PROJECT OR ENDED UP BEING SANCTIONED IN A WAY WHICH RESULTED IN THEM BEING PUSHED TO THE OUTSIDE OF THE GROUP OR SERVICE, NOW THEY ADDRESS THEIR BEHAVIOUR AND WE MAINTAIN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM.”

Professional Interviewee 13

Thanks to this range of interventions, the work with young people has been able to take a more developmental approach and the models applied in the Project are more flexible and fit for purpose for working with, in particular, children and young people involved in persistent offending.

The broader impact of the Project was also evident, including through the provision of highly praised training to An Garda Síochána's Victim Liaison Officers which they were then able to utilise not only in their direct involvement with the Project but also in the course of their day-to-day duties.

2 MAIN FINDINGS



“THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROJECT MAY BE THE FIRST TIME THAT... SOMEBODY SAT DOWN AND LET THEM GO THROUGH THE QUESTIONNAIRE THAT GIVES THEM AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW SOMEBODY, HOW THE GUY THAT THEY ROBBED FELT. IT MAY BE THE FIRST TIME THEY GOT AN UNDERSTANDING OF THAT AND THAT'S A HUGE LEARNING FOR THEM”.

YPP Officer 2

2.5 FINDINGS REGARDING THE SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT ANALYSIS

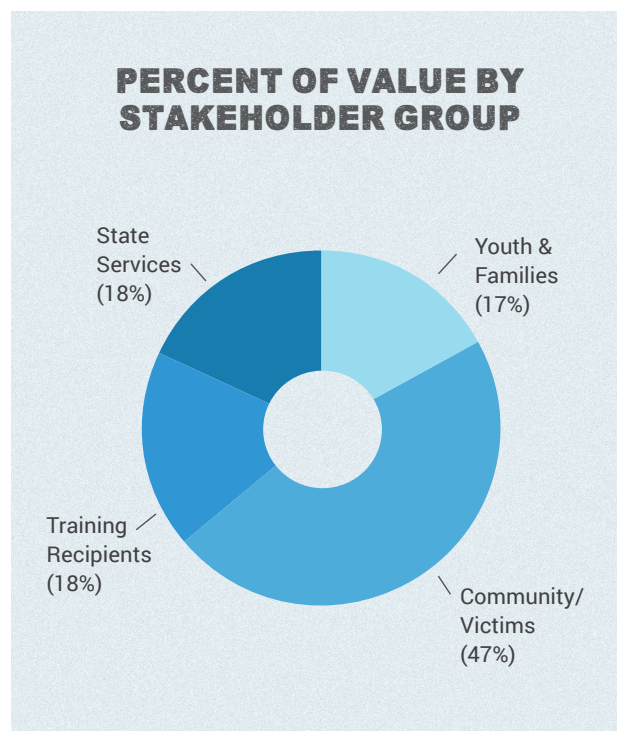
The Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis, which was undertaken as part of this evaluation, found the Project to be very worthwhile from a value for money perspective.

FOR EVERY €1 INVESTED IN THE LE CHÉILE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAMME THIS RETURNS APPROXIMATELY €2.80 IN SOCIAL VALUE.

This SROI found the following proportional division of value across the various stakeholder groups; this is presented in the graph to the right:

The SROI indicates the best way for Le Chéile to increase the social value of the programme is continue working with an increased number of young people. At the time of finishing the SROI, the project was working with a caseload approximately 20% greater than the average number over the period of the SROI. This is due to the fact that in the initial years substantial time was spent on project set-up and consolidation of the model.

If the SROI map is completed using the current figures for youth engagement, it would show an increased return of over €3.50. This highlights the potential if the service were to further expand its work and the positive impact this will have on the social value it generates.



“ I USED TO BE AFRAID EVERY TIME THERE WAS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR THAT IT WOULD BE THE GUARDS. EVERY TIME I WOULD BE OUT WALKING I WOULD BE PULLED OVER BY THE GUARDS. NOT ANY MORE, NOW THEY LEAVE ME ALONE COS THEY KNOW I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING.”

Young Person 5

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

From inception, Le Chéile has been very ambitious not only in providing needs-based, child-centred interventions for young people and their families, but also in creating a positive impact for victims and the wider community. The organisation has been and continues to be a key part of the interagency response promoting a wider culture of restorative practices within and beyond the criminal justice sector in Limerick City. In the four years since its establishment, Le Chéile's Restorative Justice Project developed effective relationships with statutory and voluntary organisations in the region, which means, for example, that they can call on partner organisations to support reparation work with young people and refer to other services if needed.

The evidence collected in the course of the evaluation indicates that the Project is fulfilling its original objectives. While some of the processes may need some fine-tuning, the Project proved itself to be reflective and committed to its own development through learning from its own practice and through taking advice and direction from Project partners.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Project should continue to provide restorative justice interventions to young people in Limerick through continued alignment with the Probation Service Restorative Justice Strategy.

Specifically, the Restorative Justice Strategy (Probation Service, 2013), in goal 2, identifies a need to "Continue to build capacity and capability in the development and delivery of Restorative Justice projects/ programmes", with specifically named action being to "Explore the opportunities for further development of Restorative Justice projects/programmes nationally as well as for specific categories of offenders including young people, adult offenders who have hurt people and members of the travelling community".

RECOMMENDATION 2

Each outcome of the Project, especially those for young people and victims, should have a corresponding indicator or a set of indicators which would allow the Project to review its effectiveness against each of these outcomes.

This should be integrated as part of the existing processes such as the initial agreement meeting and the case closure meeting. In relation to recidivism, the Project may wish to explore agreeing a process with funders and statutory partners (Gardaí and the Probation Service) to review levels of recidivism, giving due consideration to data protection implications.

Any such review of recidivism should take account not just of levels of re-offending but also severity and intensity of offending over specific timeframes. Outcome information should also be gathered for the provision of training as well as victim and family engagement in restorative processes.

It is important to note that information on ancillary benefits to service users, while important to record, should not become targets or Key Performance Indicators.

RECOMMENDATION 3

One central data management system, such as a Client Relationship Management (CRM) system, should be introduced to allow for systematic collection and utilisation of the information gathered by the Project.

The continued use of validated tools such as the Victim Empathy Scale, which provides rich client outcome data, is also recommended. This will allow the already considerable and consistent amount of information recorded to be better utilised by Le Chéile for review and strategic purposes. Outcome indicator tools should be considered for each key outcome for young people, such as desistance from crime, educational outcomes as well as peer and family relationships. Where outcomes are identified for other stakeholders, such as victims, family members or the community, the project should consider how best to also capture this impact.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Le Chéile should use feedback from children and young people to fine-tune its processes and consider if there are any points of the process where more information could be made available to young people, particularly if there is any delay in their case.

In line with international standards the principle of voluntary participation should be reiterated to young people at agreed points throughout the process, recognising the difference between mandatory Probation engagement and voluntary participation in the Restorative Justice Project. The Project should continue the process of case closure meetings, which promote all parties finishing the restorative process with agreement and clarity.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Le Chéile should embed a system to regularly analyse information regarding victim engagement, continue to promote victim engagement and understand what works for victims.

This can be done as part of the introduction of the new data management system. This should also include the use of an agreed victim participation strategy, containing all good practice for engaging victims as outlined in this report. Victim engagement should continue to be reviewed on a systematic basis, in conjunction with both statutory partners as well as victim support organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Le Chéile should consider the continued need to raise the profile of restorative justice to the general public in Limerick, with a view to increasing victim participation in the longer term.

This work should be undertaken in conjunction with other providers, particularly victim support services. This may include the use of additional information formats, such as social media, video and online content, which explain the restorative justice processes to victims and which they can be directed towards following initial contacts with the Victim Liaison Officers working with the Project. As a method of profile and awareness raising the project should continue to organise the annual Restorative Justice conference.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Le Chéile should use the findings of this evaluation to support and continue the agreement and formal adopting of written interagency protocols, agreed and signed by all agencies involved, including but not limited to: Le Chéile, the Probation Service, An Garda Síochána, reparation host agencies, victim support services and any other identified organisations.

This protocol should detail the existing and emerging procedures such as referral routes and criteria, working arrangements between staff and management, complaints mechanisms, gaps and blocks, procedures and roles and responsibilities of all parties. Agreement should be sought with victim support services to ensure clear processes and delineation of roles and responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Le Chéile should advocate and, in partnership with the Probation Service, explore the potential for undertaking work with vulnerable young adults (over the age of 18) involved in the criminal justice system.

The Restorative Justice Project has shown promising outcomes for young people, which would likely be of similar benefit for young adults. The expansion of age limit is in line with internal Probation Service strategy documents. Subject to appropriate resourcing, there is no reason why this Project could not provide interventions to young adults over the age of 18.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Explore the potential for the Le Chéile Restorative Justice Project to work with pre-sentence young people, working in partnership with the Gardaí, supporting and complementing existing processes such as case management protocols.

A cohort of young people was identified who may not be suitable for diversionary measures available to the Gardaí and/or are awaiting sentence. While these young people may be considered for referral from Probation after sentence, there may be potential for dovetailing with existing Garda processes such as case management to provide restorative interventions such as victim empathy programmes at an earlier stage or pre-sentence young offenders who are not engaging with a Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO).

RECOMMENDATION 10

Any expansion of this effective model must be supported with appropriate resources such as core funding.

The model has demonstrated value for money of at least €2.80 for every €1. As of 2014 the project is working at an increased capacity which is estimated to provide a return of €3.50 for every €1 invested. The lack of core funding, and inability to offer permanent or long term contracts may hamper the Project's ability to retain suitably qualified staff and sustain and/or expand its work in the future.

RECOMMENDATION 11

A review should be undertaken by Le Chéile in partnership with the Gardaí in relation to the potential cost benefit of making IIRP training available to Gardaí across the Limerick division.

This training provided by Le Chéile has been credited with promoting awareness of restorative practices among members of the Gardaí who would otherwise not have access to this training, as well as promoting restorative practices. Any review should consider the benefits of external training to Gardaí in relation to highlighting alternative models of work, from qualified IIRP trainers with a restorative perspective and approach. This could include training of more Victim Liaison Officers, as well as Community Gardaí.

RECOMMENDATION 12

The structural and procedural model developed by the Le Chéile Restorative Justice Project, including the innovative use of Victim Impact Panels, has demonstrated its effectiveness and is primed for replication in regions with similar existing interagency structures, specifically where existing relationships and working arrangements exist between Le Chéile and the Young Persons Probation Service.

The existing network and infrastructure of Le Chéile Mentoring Services across the country provide an ideal launch pad for such roll out. Additionally, the relatively recent establishment of a network of Children's Services Committees across the country may provide an opportunity for replication of the interagency working processes developed by the Le Chéile Restorative Justice Project in Limerick.



For more information please contact:

Le Chéile Restorative Justice Project

Address: Unit 1, Youthspace, Fulflex,
Galvone Industrial Estate,
Southill, Limerick.

Website: www.lecheile.ie

Phone: 0870678336

Email: info@lecheile.ie

The full report and Social Return on
Investment Impact Map can be downloaded
from our website www.lecheile.ie

Written by:

