



REDUCING YOUTH CRIME IN IRELAND

AN EVALUATION OF
LE CHÉILE MENTORING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



le chéile

Mentoring & Youth Justice
Support Services

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Irish Youth Justice Service
Sierbhís na hÉireann um Cheartas i leith an Aosa Óig

FOREWORD

“Reducing Youth Crime in Ireland” is a significant piece of research as it quantifies the impact of mentoring in significantly reducing reoffending and in delivering positive economic and social benefits. This research confirms what we have known from experience, that Le Chéile mentoring is making a positive difference for young people, their parents and society overall.

Critically, this report shows that Le Chéile mentoring reduces offending behaviour. This is a significant finding, with young people reducing their offending behaviour by an average of 28%. This contributes to reducing the economic and social impact of crime. The evaluation found that for every €1 the government and EU invests in Le Chéile, there is an impressive return of €4.35.

What is interesting is the range of outcome areas where mentoring has a positive impact. This evaluation quantifies for the first time positive impacts on soft skills areas such as communication skills and self-confidence, which are fundamental skills to empower our young people to progress to a better future.

Le Chéile’s mentoring service is innovative internationally, in that parents or carers of young people who offend also have an option of parent mentoring. The report shows significant positive impacts on improving parenting skills, self-confidence and child-parent relationships. This confirms our belief that it is vital to work with the family, as well as the young person, to support positive change.

We are delighted to see the role of volunteer mentors, supported by Le Chéile staff, highlighted as a key strength. Volunteers work tirelessly for their mentees, giving 3,678 hours of mentoring in 2015. Mentees view our mentors as impartial, outside the system and are trusted because they willingly give their own time to young people on a voluntary basis. I want to pay tribute to the hundreds of volunteers who have played their part in supporting young people and their parents/carers since Le Chéile began in 2005.

The partnership between Le Chéile and the Probation Service, professional working relationships, co-location and a shared commitment to the well-being of the young people, provide the foundation for the effectiveness of the mentoring service.

Given the significant benefits of Le Chéile mentoring and in the interests of equal access to services nationally, the evaluation recommends that additional resources should be provided to allow expansion of Le Chéile services to areas of the country that are not currently served. Le Chéile fully supports this recommendation and is committed to working with the Probation Service, the Irish Youth Justice Service and other partners to achieve greater access.

The decreasing number of young people on probation, coupled with increased funding of youth justice services by the EU, provides an ideal opportunity to ensure that all young people in the justice system who would benefit from mentoring, will have access to mentoring when and where they need it.

Anne Conroy
CEO, Le Chéile

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE EVALUATION

Le Chéile mentoring reduces youth offending, with an average reduction of young people's offending by 28%

For young people, the biggest overall gains were made in the areas of:

- Self-confidence
- Hopefulness
- Communications
- Engagement in positive activities

For parents, mentoring made significant positive impacts in:

- Improved self-confidence
- Ability to manage stress
- Improved parenting skills
- Better relationships with their child

The central role of volunteer mentors, supported by Le Chéile staff, was found to be an important strength of Le Chéile Mentoring for both young people and parents.

The evaluation concluded that every €1 spent on mentoring young people and their parents or carers returns €4.35 in social value. This represents a significant return on investment and is clear evidence that mentoring of young people who offend makes both social and economic sense.

“There was nothing here for me....
I would wake up at four or five o'clock in
the day... Now I will try to do something
with my life”.

Youth Mentee

ABOUT LE CHÉILE

“FOR EVERY YOUNG PERSON AT RISK —
THE RIGHT SUPPORTS AT THE RIGHT TIME,
TO MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR LIVES.”

Le Chéile's Vision

Le Chéile Mentoring and Youth Justice Support Services was established in 2005 to provide a mentoring service to young people aged 12–18 years referred by the Courts to the Probation Service. The mentoring service gives effect to the Mentor (Family Support) Order of the Children Act 2001. However, it is rare for Le Chéile's young clients to be subject to such Orders – instead they are almost invariably on a Probation Bond with mentoring as one of its conditions.

Le Chéile operates in eight regions nationally and provides an integrated service for young people and their families that includes mentoring, family support and restorative justice services. The mentoring now includes young people up to age 22 as well as parents or carers of young people who offend. The family support service includes parenting programmes and customised interventions to meet individual families' needs. A restorative justice service operates in Limerick and has been shown through independent evaluation to provide significant benefits for young people, their families and victims of crime and a return in social value of €2.92 for every €1 spent (Quigley et al, 2014).

Le Chéile works in partnership with the Probation Service to reduce youth offending behaviour in the community. Le Chéile is funded by the Irish Youth Justice Service through the Probation Service, as part of Ireland's European Structural and Investment Funds Programme 2014–2020, which is co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union.

“A Le Chéile mentor does not focus on the negative behaviours of the young person and this can be a ‘breath of fresh air’ for the young person.”

Probation Officer

MENTORING

Le Chéile describes youth mentoring as “a one-to-one relationship-based support which provides a positive role model to a young person.” Those providing support are called mentors; those receiving support are called mentees. Key underlying objectives are for young people to reduce their offending behaviour and achieve their full potential as individuals. Le Chéile mentors are volunteers from local communities. Mentors act as a positive role model, advisor and friendly support.

Parent mentoring offers support, a listening ear and help in managing their child’s offending behaviour. In 2015 Le Chéile became the first mentoring service in the Republic of Ireland to be accredited by the UK Mentoring and Befriending Foundation as meeting its quality assurance requirements. A pilot programme of mentoring in detention was initiated in 2015 with seed funding from the Loreto Fund. According to Le Chéile’s annual report, 152 young people aged 12 to 21 were mentored in 2015, as well as 49 parent mentees.

“That was all [Mentor]: me going back to education; he broke his back trying to get me in places”.

Youth Mentee

POLICY CONTEXT

The policy context of mentoring can be seen in the Government’s programme for government, the national policy framework for children and young people 2014–2020 (Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures) and the Youth Justice Action Plan 2014–2018 (Tackling Youth Crime), with mentoring clearly relevant to many of the areas of action identified. International experience provides evidence of positive impacts of mentoring of at-risk young people as regards factors such as educational, behavioural and psychosocial performance, but mixed results as regards reduced re-offending: some authoritative studies described results as ‘promising’ or positive but modest, but others failed to find convincing evidence. A number of studies found that effects were stronger where best practice was followed and mentoring relationships were strong.

THE MENTORING EVALUATION

Le Chéile is committed to using programmes and approaches that have been proved to result in better outcomes for children and young people, consistent with government policy. After a public tender process, it commissioned this independent evaluation in December 2015. The evaluation methodology was multi-faceted and multi-phased. A literature review covered the policy and justice context in Ireland, international experience and best practice in mentoring, and social valuation of benefits from mentoring. The literature review was important in refining the evaluation focus and framing research questions.

A review of Le Chéile quantitative and qualitative information was also carried out. A stakeholder analysis identified key groups to be included in the evaluation of process and outcomes. The primary focus of the evaluation field-work was on two regions that included urban and rural locations. The two Le Chéile co-ordinators there were key contributors and a detailed analysis of selected case files was carried out. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a selection of stakeholders, notably mentees, parents of mentees, mentors and Probation Service staff. Focus groups were conducted in the regions with mentees, mentors and Probation Service staff and nationally with Le Chéile co-ordinators, Le Chéile management and a senior stakeholders group. A survey of mentees, mentors and co-ordinators in six regions was conducted to broaden the qualitative evidence base and provide quantitative data to allow calculation of the social return on investment.

“It’s about forming a relationship with a person and then hopefully open up to them about things. Sometimes with young people it’s about being able to verbalise things as well. They may understand that they are feeling sad, upset or angry but they do have difficulty in verbalising that ... they might be able to verbalise it to a person they can trust.”

Probation Officer, on youth mentoring

PROFILE OF YOUTH MENTEES

Young person mentees come from a variety of backgrounds. The outstanding common feature is of course that they have committed an offence and appeared before the courts. This marks Le Chéile mentees as different from mentees under other programmes in Ireland and internationally. The mentees share many features found among young offenders generally, for example, impulsivity, indifferent attitudes to offending, peer group enforcement, poor school attendance, poor supervision and minimising attitudes by parents, and alcohol and drug use, as identified by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013:8). Many mentees also exhibit other features associated with offending such as anti-social attitudes, low empathy, poor emotional literacy, limited ability to manage anger or aggression, mental health issues and learning difficulties (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2011:22)

Other commonly observed factors emerging in this evaluation were the absence of a positive male role model in many mentees' lives, poor communication skills, a lack of engagement in structured activity, low self-esteem and self-confidence and lack of hope or direction for the future. Relationships with parents, other family members, peers and persons in authority were also problematic for many young person mentees.

“I liked a lot about him. He would listen; was always there; reliable, a good friend and good support, a good help. He was just a great person, to be honest.”

Youth Mentee, talking about his mentor

FINDINGS



FINDING 1: THE IMPACT OF MENTORING

MENTORING HAS SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE IMPACTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ENGAGE WITH THE SERVICE, WITH GAINS MADE IN THE AREAS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE, HOPEFULNESS, COMMUNICATIONS, ENGAGEMENT IN ACTIVITIES AND, CRUCIALLY, OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR.

“I was very much inside myself, depressed, feeling so bad about what I had done. It helped me to like myself again. It lifted me to a better place. I was sorry about what I had done, but I learned to accept it.”

Youth Mentee

Youth Mentoring

The majority of young person mentees experienced some improvement and for many the changes were substantial and significant.

For young person mentees, key benefits include:

- reductions in offending behaviour;
- reductions in alcohol and drug use;
- improved self-confidence, hopefulness and happiness;
- greater involvement in activities outside the home;
- greater involvement or re-engagement in education, work and training;
- improved communication skills;
- moving away from negative peers, and
- improved relationships with parents, other family members, and persons in authority.

The biggest overall gains were made in the areas of self-confidence, hopefulness, communications, engagement in activities and – crucially – offending behaviour.

The reduction in offending behaviour is a significant finding given limited and tentative international experience and the offender profile of Le Chéile mentees.

Not all mentees experienced improvement in all areas since many did not have significant problems to begin with (for example, they enjoyed good family relationships or did not have substance abuse problems) but mentoring was credited even in such instances with keeping things on an even keel or minimising deterioration. While recognising the contribution of other interventions, the attribution to mentoring was high.

“[Mentoring gives] that stability of meeting that person every week and having somebody that they can go and meet and talk to.”

Probation Officer

Parent Mentoring

For parent mentees, mentoring has significant positive impacts in terms of:

- improved self-confidence and self-esteem, emotional well-being, hopefulness;
- ability to manage stress;
- improved parenting skills;
- better relationships with their child and other family members, and
- greater involvement in activities outside the home.

The most significant benefits for parent mentees were in the areas of self-confidence and emotional well-being. Parents identified having a space for themselves and having someone to talk to as critical elements of mentoring. Parental well-being and support are seen as important for parents in their own right and as prerequisites for working constructively with young people in their care.

“It was a lifeline; I don’t know how we’d have managed without them.”

Parent mentee, on mentoring

FINDING 2:

SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

LE CHÉILE MENTORING GIVES A SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT OF €4.35 FOR EVERY €1 INVESTED

The total value of Le Chéile's mentoring service in 2015 is calculated at €4,755,614 and costs at €1,093,647, giving a social return on investment of €4.35. **In other words, every €1 spent on Le Chéile mentoring returns €4.35 in social value.** This represents a significant return on investment. The Social Return on Investment provides a framework for taking account of a wider range of impacts of actions and activities than is normally captured in traditional cost-benefit analysis. It includes social and environmental costs and benefits as well as economic costs and benefits. Some of the positive impacts of mentoring are building blocks towards achieving final outcomes, while others have intrinsic value of their own as well as contributing to final outcomes. The Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculation excludes intermediary benefits where appropriate to avoid double-counting.

“[My Mentor] made me realise that I’m something, I’m not worth nothing.... [My Mentor] told me not to be throwing my life away, that I was worth something at the end of the day ... I just thought there was nothing in life for me.”

Youth Mentee

FINDING 3:

THE MENTORING MODEL

THE CURRENT MODEL OF MENTORING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS IS ROBUST AND FIT FOR PURPOSE

“The unhurried aspect of dedicated time is what makes mentoring work.”

Probation Officer

Joint participation in enjoyable activities at the start of mentoring was seen as critical to relationship-building and laying the foundation for subsequent change. **A striking feature and key strength of Le Chéile mentoring is the extremely positive relationship between mentor and mentee.**

Key stages are:

- the initial mentee meeting with the co-ordinator;
- matching of clients and mentors;
- relationship building;
- goal-setting phrase;
- ongoing reviews, and
- closures.

Although possible areas for minor improvement are identified in the report, the current model works well for youth and parent mentees.

Other key strengths include:

- co-ordinator relationships with offender, families and mentors;
- flexibility in arrangements;
- persistence and perseverance;
- the volunteer nature of mentors;
- being non-judgemental, supportive and challenging;
- the focus on the mentee, and
- partnership with the Probation Service.

“I was talking to him and wasn’t revealing too much at once, but he was listening and it was the first time I met someone who listened, [was] genuinely listening and didn’t just want me to tell them something they wanted to hear. Straight away we clicked.”

Youth Mentee

FINDING 4: THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEER MENTORS

THE FACT THAT MENTORS ARE VOLUNTEERS IS A KEY STRENGTH
OF THE LE CHÉILE MODEL

“They’ve given up their free time to do that so ... they’re interested in helping the young person and that young person feels that. All the young people that I would have [met would] only have positive things to say about their Mentor.”

Probation Officer

The vital role of volunteers in delivering mentoring was stressed throughout the evaluation. **The fact that mentors are volunteers was highlighted repeatedly in the evaluation as a key strength of the Le Chéile model.** Mentees themselves appreciated that someone would be interested enough in them to give of their own time. They highlighted as a strong point the fact that mentors were not professionals, noting that this was a big selling point for mentoring. This helped strengthen the mentoring relationship and was cited as a factor in mentees turning up for sessions, often at critical stages. Le Chéile devotes considerable energy to supporting volunteers, and mentors spoke highly of this, consistent with the very high levels of satisfaction revealed in the annual volunteer surveys as regards induction training, on-going training, group supervision, on-going support and overall experience of mentoring.

“We clicked and I liked that I could be honest with her and she would tell me the answer whether I wanted to hear it or not. She didn’t beat about the bush but was nice about it.”

Youth Mentee

FINDING 5:

AREAS OF UNMET NEED

OFFENDING BY YOUNG PEOPLE IS NOT CONFINED TO THE EXISTING REGIONS AND IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT SIMILAR NEED ARISES ELSEWHERE

Fieldwork for the evaluation focused, in particular, on two regions, though the experience of the other six regions was taken into account, primarily through co-ordinator focus groups and surveys. All regions are subject to the national performance targets of having an average of ten young person mentee and five parent mentee cases open at any one time. This takes account of other Le Chéile services such as family support programmes and restorative justice. The profile of cases and case mix varies between regions, with some regions operating waiting lists for mentoring. In rural areas it was felt that potential cases might not be referred because of anticipated practical difficulties of access to mentors and activities, which suggests an element of unmet need even in existing regions. However, offending by young people is not confined to the existing regions and it seems likely that similar need arises elsewhere.

No mentoring service is currently available in the North West and West, for example, and may be scarcely available in some other counties or parts of counties. **It seems unfair that the clear and substantial benefits of mentoring should be denied to youth offenders, their families and communities by dint of geographical location – notwithstanding logistical challenges in reaching more isolated cases.**

“[we] connected very well, he was a very nice man, very easy to talk to and was not too strict.”

Youth Mentee

FINDING 6: THE CASE FOR EARLY INTERVENTION

A NUMBER OF MENTEES AND THEIR PARENTS COMMENTED THAT THEY WOULD HAVE BENEFITTED FROM EARLIER ACCESS TO MENTORING

The vast majority of young person referrals to Le Chéile originate in the Probation Service, with a handful of referrals from the Garda Síochána's Juvenile Liaison Officers in two regions. A number of mentees and their parents commented that they would have benefitted from earlier access to mentoring. This was recognition of the value of mentoring to them but also an acknowledgement of hardship that might have been avoided by an earlier intervention of mentoring. Mentoring sometimes seemed like a service of last resort, when other interventions failed. While some mentees might not be ready to engage fully at a younger age, mentoring of some young people after they had got involved in offending and had gone through the court system was too late. This may be reflected in the fact that about a quarter of cases referred in 2015 never commenced or terminated early and an unknown number are deemed unsuitable by the Probation Service to begin with.

Two possible points of intervention were identified:

- (i) when school attendance became a problem or when family support services became involved and**
- (ii) when the young people came to the attention of the Gardaí and their cases were processed under the Diversion Programme.**

Several mentors and co-ordinators also made a case for mentoring for older age cohorts, up to age 25.

“I wish I had gotten a [Mentor] when I was much younger and maybe I would never have ended up in trouble at all.”

Youth Mentee

FINDING 7: MENTEES FROM CARE BACKGROUNDS

MENTORING WAS SEEN AS HAVING A VALUABLE ROLE IN PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM CARE BACKGROUNDS

A number of cases examined as part of the evaluation involved young people from care backgrounds. **The Mentors' focus group noted a significant difference in cases involving young people from such backgrounds with those young people typically exhibiting a lot of self-criticism and complexity, against a back-story of rejection.** They argued for specific consideration to ensure an effective service for this vulnerable group. The mentors also referred to scheduling and difficulties in accessing children in care which had caused frustration and which they felt were avoidable.

From the mentees' view, one mentee said that if she had had something like mentoring when she was in care, she might not have ended up in trouble. She thought that it would be beneficial if mentoring was available for young people in care independent of Tusla and accessible on a voluntary basis. **Regarding young people in care, mentoring was seen as having a valuable role in providing support during care and transition from care.** There was evidence in other cases of difficulty of staying in touch with young people who changed addresses during the period of State care, either with foster carers or in residential care or both.

"If I had something like this when I was in care, I'm not saying that it would have worked but I might not have ended up in trouble... I just think if they had something outside the HSE for kids or teenagers when they are in care and make it a voluntary thing."

Youth Mentee

FINDING 8: MENTORING IN DETENTION

MENTEES AND THEIR FAMILIES APPRECIATED THE SUPPORT DURING DETENTION, AND MENTORS COMMENTED THAT IT STRENGTHENED THE BASIS FOR MENTORING AFTER RELEASE

Experience with mentoring in detention, whether in Oberstown or one of the prisons, has been broadly positive. Mentoring can be a continuation of mentoring started in the community or be initiated in detention. **Mentees and their families appreciated the support at a difficult time and mentors commented that it strengthened the basis for mentoring after release.** It was not always logistically possible to arrange mentoring in detention and transfers between prisons at short notice also could frustrate attempts to visit. Practical challenges arose in respect of travel and access, suitability of facilities and inability to participate in an activity together. Travel to Oberstown, from rural areas in particular, raised issues of time and cost. Individual experiences showed that the limitations identified were not insurmountable barriers. A pilot programme of mentoring initiated while in Oberstown commenced in late 2015, and it is not possible yet to draw conclusions.

“Now I don’t offend at all. ... I could have seen myself going back down without a support in place”

Youth Mentee

FINDING 9: REFERRALS

CO-ORDINATORS IDENTIFIED POTENTIAL FOR MENTORING IN CASES SEEN AS CHALLENGING OR WHERE REFERRALS TO OTHER SERVICES HAD FAILED

The Probation Service made 141 new referrals to Le Chéile in 2015, made up of 108 young people and 33 parents. Most young person mentees are subject to probation bonds, with mentoring as a condition. Reference was made to mentoring being part of community service orders in a small number of cases. The evaluation highlighted variations in referral rates across and within regions. While Probation Officers are case managers for their clients and have discretion in referring them to whatever service they consider the most appropriate to their needs, co-ordinators have identified potential for mentoring in a greater number of cases, including cases seen as challenging or where referrals to other services had failed. It was felt that updated referral criteria or guidelines may be of use to Probation Officers, while reaffirming the flexibility of mentoring so that categories of offence or offender are not automatically ruled out.

“Sometimes the most challenging cases with the most difficult to engage [young people] turn out to be the best cases”.

Manager, Le Chéile

FINDING 10: CLOSURE STAGE

AN INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PERSON'S NEED MAY REQUIRE AN EXTENSION OF THE MENTORING DURATION BEYOND THE PROBATION BOND

“Mentoring can stay in place until 21 which is really positive because at that age they would have gone through a lot of difficulties and challenges. ... [with] practical things such as housing, training and money and jobs.”

Probation Officer

The length of the young person's probation supervision determines the duration of mentoring, with mentoring ending when their probation ends. In a small number of cases, it is beneficial for the young person to continue mentoring beyond this point because of continuing need. **Examples of needs identified in the evaluation included: transition from care, imminent Leaving Certificate results, recent bereavement, particularly difficult personal circumstances and progression from addiction.**

Mentoring beyond the originally agreed period generally requires that the young person be put on voluntary probation, but this could be limited for reasons unrelated to mentoring and the individuals' need for support. The impact could be exacerbated if the ending of mentoring coincided with the withdrawal of other services. Co-ordinators and mentors called for greater flexibility, mainly for short extended periods. Given that parent mentoring is usually without any legal requirement, this suggests scope for greater flexibility for young people. Extensions would need to be short to ensure that other young people would not be deprived of mentoring opportunities.

“I did get into college with mentoring – they helped me do that.”

Youth Mentee

FINDING 11: PARENT MENTORING

PARENTS WHO ARE MENTORED ARE BETTER PLACED TO DEAL WITH THE CHILD WHO IS IN TROUBLE AND TO RESTORE AND DEVELOP A HEALTHIER HOME ENVIRONMENT FOR THEMSELVES AND ANY SIBLINGS

“The role of parent mentoring is to ensure that there is an environment good enough where a child can actually strive for better.”

Probation Officer

Parent mentees do not necessarily have a child who is mentored, although they always have a child who is subject to Probation Service supervision. Nationally, parent mentees seem just as likely as not to have a child mentored. **Benefits of mentoring accrue regardless and the parent is better placed to deal with the child who is in trouble and to restore and develop a healthier home environment for themselves and any siblings.** Much anecdotal evidence emerged from Probation Officers, co-ordinators and mentors that mentoring works best where parents are supportive and pro-active. Many parents and their children benefit from involvement in family support and parenting programmes which can supplement mentoring.

“Oh she’s lovely, she’s been great, a great listening ear ... we have a lot in common, she wasn’t just anybody, she had children and experience and life skills and that was evident.”

Parent Mentee, on Parent Mentor

FINDING 12: PUBLIC PROFILE

THE NEED TO PROMOTE THE MENTORING SERVICE

“Now I have plans for the future, [for] all my kids.”

Parent Mentee

Le Chéile is conscious of the need to promote the mentoring service and is very active in doing so. A number of co-ordinators and mentors suggested a revamp of promotional material, seeing a need for greater use of social media and radio to explain what Le Chéile mentoring is. This might help address any gender imbalance among mentors: **a shortage of younger male mentors** was mentioned in some regions although this was not always perceived as a problem.

“very good people, who never lost faith in him, were not judging him and could see beyond the trouble, could see the goodness in him ... they are there for the kids”.

Parent, on Youth Mentoring

FINDING 13:

THE PARTNERSHIP WITH PROBATION

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CO-ORDINATORS AND PROBATION OFFICERS IS RECOGNISED AS IMPORTANT, NOT LEAST IN GENERATING REFERRALS, AND WAS GENERALLY REGARDED AS POSITIVE AND PROFESSIONAL

Where it existed, co-location of offices helped build and maintain good relationships and collaboration. Co-ordinators understood clearly that Probation Officers were case managers for their clients and needed to be kept informed of their progress in mentoring. Opinion was somewhat divided among Probation Officers, co-ordinators and mentors about the extent to which Probation Officers should be involved in mentoring review meetings with different approaches discussed. Considerations included the benefits of contributing relevant case information, hearing first-hand of client progress and giving encouragement, whereas there may also be a possibility of the client being more reticent in a formal setting, and a focus on goals rather than the relationship.

“It’s good for young people to move away from the community for an hour or two or so into a different setting.”

Probation Officer

FINDING 14:

INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND CASE TRACKING

THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE REFERRAL INFORMATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO FUNDERS WAS RECOGNISED BUT SOME SUGGESTED A REVIEW TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION TAKEN FROM MENTEES

A number of co-ordinators and mentors commented that the administrative system was getting tighter and less flexible and that paperwork was becoming more onerous. A number of initiatives have been introduced in recent times, including the introduction of tablets for use in client reviews to make reviews more user friendly for young people.

Co-ordinators and mentors also queried the level and type of information sought from mentees at reviews. The new measurement tool was seen as an improvement over the previous tool. They pointed out nevertheless that the review was primarily about meeting with the mentee to review progress to date and identify future steps. Le Chéile currently is looking at improving existing information management systems and integrating different information requirements.

“They’re not there for themselves and to have their paperwork correct at the end of the month. They’re there to help me. They had my best interests at heart and wanted the best thing for me”.

Youth Mentee

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATION 1:

SERVICE EXPANSION

LE CHÉILE SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE RESOURCED TO PROVIDE MENTORING SERVICES IN EXISTING REGIONS TO BOTH YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS AS MENTORING MAKES SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES TO THE LIVES OF MENTEES, DELIVERS BENEFITS FOR WIDER SOCIETY AND PROVIDES EXCELLENT VALUE FOR MONEY.

Given the high social return on investment from mentoring and in the interests of equal access to services nationally, additional resources should be provided to allow expansion of Le Chéile services to areas of the country that are not currently served. Consideration should also be given to building capacity to deliver mentoring to greater numbers in existing regions where there is unmet or latent demand.

“It’s the fact that it’s persistent when other services may have come and left ... and being there in very difficult times.”

Parent Mentee

RECOMMENDATION 2:

MENTORING MODEL

The current model of mentoring for young people and parents is robust and fit for purpose and should be retained. Key stages are the initial meetings with co-ordinators, matching clients and mentors, regular mentoring sessions, on-going reviews, relationship-building and goal-setting phases and closures.

Key strengths include:

- co-ordinator relationships with offender, families and mentors;
- flexibility in arrangements; persistence and perseverance;
- the volunteer nature of mentors;
- being non-judgemental, supportive and challenging;
- the focus on the mentee, and
- partnership with Probation Service.

These should continue to be nurtured and best practice identified and shared.

“You use your life experience really ... they’re all individuals and individual scenarios.”

Mentor

RECOMMENDATION 3: EARLY INTERVENTION

Given the benefits associated with early intervention, consideration should be given to providing mentoring to offending or 'at risk' young people before they become involved in serious or recidivist offending. This could involve Le Chéile accepting referrals from sources such as Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers (in an expansion of the current practice) and Tusla (the Child and Family Agency). Experience with such early intervention should be monitored closely and reviewed.

"They would be asking me to go drinking but I would say no, I have to go and meet my mentor, like."

Youth Mentee

RECOMMENDATION 4: VOLUNTEER MENTORS

The input of volunteers is critical to the success of mentoring and is widely recognised: Le Chéile support for volunteers in the form of on-going supervision, training and conferences, is highly valued and should be maintained and developed. Experiences should continue to be reviewed on an on-going basis and best practice should be identified and shared across regions. Le Chéile's policy and procedures manual should continue to be reviewed and updated regularly.

"Le Chéile recognises and supports its volunteers better than any other organisation I have worked [with]. I think this is evident by the enthusiasm and commitment it receives from its volunteers."

Mentor

RECOMMENDATION 5: MENTEES FROM CARE BACKGROUNDS

A review should be carried out of the mentoring needs of young people from care backgrounds and Le Chéile's flexibility to adapt its response to meet those additional needs. This may entail specialised provision of mentoring for young people in care.

“There are a lot of agencies coming in and out of their life. That stability of the person meeting them every week... saying we will go for lunch and just have a chat about everything, I think that's what works well really. They don't feel under pressure to be answering questions.”

Probation Officer

RECOMMENDATION 6: MENTORING IN DETENTION

Experience to date with mentoring in detention has been broadly positive and the new funded programme to develop mentoring in detention settings can be expected to make a further positive impact. The experiences and challenges documented in this report should be taken into account in developing the programme.

“A different young man from going around with his head between his knees to now holding his head back up again ... wouldn't be where he is today without them, just would not be”.

Parent of Youth Mentee

RECOMMENDATION 7: REFERRAL CRITERIA

Le Chéile and the Probation Service should review existing referral criteria and encourage higher and more consistent referral rates across Probation regions and staff. Referrals should continue to take account of the needs and suitability of mentees and the availability of other services, as well as the safety of mentors. While referral of young people with increased level of need could entail a greater risk of early termination, they would at least have the opportunity to engage. Probation Officers are key gatekeepers to the service, and ways to maximise take-up should be examined in partnership with the Probation Service. Consideration should also be given to expanding the service to young adults up to age 25, in line with emerging European Union norms.

“[Mentoring] was giving me lots of thoughts about what to do with my future.”

Youth Mentee

RECOMMENDATION 8: CLOSURE STAGE

Mentoring currently ends with the expiry of a probation bond or probation supervision. Some flexibility may need to be applied to prolong mentoring to avoid ending support where there are ongoing needs or upcoming significant life events (such as exam results or leaving home). Consideration should be given to continuation mentoring on a voluntary basis in those circumstances for a short fixed period, with the agreement of the Probation Service.

“I’ve learned things that have helped with my own children but also with my grandchildren. I’m much calmer now. It was great to have the mentor to confide in.”

Parent Mentee

RECOMMENDATION 9: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

In the light of evidence that the impact of mentoring on young people is greater if their parents are involved proactively, ways to encourage their involvement should be developed, through their participation in parent mentoring, family programmes or other parenting and communication courses or otherwise. Given the evidence of benefits directly to parents and indirectly to their children, the participation of parents in parent mentoring even where their child is not a mentee should continue.

“It helps [Parents] to stay strong in relation to continuing to parent the child”

Probation Officer

RECOMMENDATION 10: PUBLIC PROFILE

Given its success, the profile of mentoring should be raised with a view to promoting client referral and take-up, volunteer recruitment, greater understanding by the public and increased funding. Promotional material about mentoring should be reviewed so as to make it attractive to target groups such as younger male volunteers.

“I had been a volunteer with many services but Le Chéile is by far the best”

Mentor

RECOMMENDATION 11: CASE REVIEWS

The structure and format of case reviews should be reviewed to create a standard, consistent approach. The review should take account of experiences to date and incorporate the views of co-ordinators, mentors, Probation Officers, as well as senior managers. The review should consider, among other things, how to promote and protect the ethos and process of mentoring while accommodating the case monitoring and review needs of referring agencies.

“If you’re looking at an interest it might build their self-esteem and then in turn, reduce the risk of re-offending.”

Probation Officer

RECOMMENDATION 12: INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND CASE TRACKING

Le Chéile’s data systems should be reviewed, building on work underway in 2016. Initiatives to reduce the administrative burden on mentors and co-ordinators (such as the introduction of tablets for use in client reviews) should be developed further. An appropriate balance should be sought between the need to take account of mentee capacities to provide information and the need for accountability and measurement.

“I had no plans for the future, nothing like that. I was stuck in a rut. I was getting worse but now I’m working full time, I’m in private rented accommodation that I sourced myself. I have plans for the future. I can see one.”

Youth Mentee

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NOTES

Social Return on Investment Analysis

The full report, available from Le Chéile, was certified by Social Value International as satisfying the requirements of their report assurance process and being consistent with the principles of Social Value.



Le Chéile Mentoring & Youth Justice Support Services is an approved provider of Mentoring under the Mentoring & Befriending Foundation UK.

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