



How are young people participating in Garda Youth Diversion Projects responding to the Covid-19 public health measures? – A local to national qualitative profile: Report 1

This study is an initiative of the Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) project and is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Justice and Equality



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About this Report

This research has been conducted by the Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) project, based in the School of Law, University of Limerick. The Report is designed for rapid assessment by policy makers. For ease of review, summary information is found at the front of the report. Detailed analyses, findings and methodology can be found in the main body of the report.

About the Study

This report presents findings from surveys (n=113) completed by Youth Justice Workers (YJWs) about the Government's Covid-19 public health measures introduced on March 12th and young people participating in Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs).¹ In this report, we provide a descriptive overview (based on YJW observations and their local enquiries) of young people's compliance with the measures and how Covid-19 and the restrictions have impacted their lives. The Survey's questions asked YJWs about (1) young people in their GYDP and compliance with the Covid-19 public health measures, (2) the observed impacts for young people's, particularly in terms of their behaviours since the measures were introduced, (3) how Covid-19 and the restrictions have affected GYDP work practices, and (4) the requirements for frontline work with young people in GYDPs arising from Covid-19.²

How did we do this?

- The survey accesses the expert knowledge of youth justice professionals about young people's behaviour in local communities across Ireland.
- The online survey was delivered to 104 locally based GYDPs funded by the Department of Justice and Equality. GYDPs are located in communities across Ireland (see illustration).
- For over ten years, each GYDP has undertaken a local profile of youth crime as part of its yearly planning process and, consequently, has built up considerable expertise in quantitative and qualitative mapping of local youth crime patterns and trends. This survey shifts the focus from crime analyses to Covid-19 compliance and young people in GYDPs.
- Survey questionnaires were completed by nominated GYDP staff members. The staff member consulted with colleagues, local Gardaí, other community services, and young people and their parents/caregiver where appropriate and possible, in order to report on young people's behaviour in the locality and the impacts of Covid-19 for young people and for ongoing GYDP practice.



Garda Youth Diversion Project Locations

¹ Appendix A provides a description of GYDPs in Ireland and provides the methodology used in the study.

² Appendix B reproduces the survey administered with YJWs.



- The Survey significantly benefited from the proactive support of youth organisations providing GYDP services, as indicated by a **97% response rate**.
- The Survey was made possible by funders [the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs] agreeing to research and practice development resources being re-purposed to assist with the Covid-19 efforts. Ethical clearance was expedited by the AHSS Research Ethics Committee (REC) at the University of Limerick.

Survey Population

Youth Justice Workers (YJWs) answered questions about young people participating in GYDPs in relation to the Covid-19 public health measures and how GYDP work practices were been affected.

Young people who are the primary focus of the survey:

- Are a targeted group of who are participating in GYDPs and have been involved in youth offending.
- Are generally those who have been cautioned for a criminal offence. At least one third of youth offending could be described as occurring in public spaces.³
- Represent a very small proportion (approximately 1/1000) of all young people in Ireland.⁴ However, it is a population of young people that is reasonably consistent across survey locations. There were 3,604 young people engaged in GYDPs in Ireland in 2019.

Recognising that each local project may have different levels of knowledge about young people in the local area, Survey 1 respondents could decide on prescribed populations of youth to report on. Nearly all respondents reported on the population of **young people engaged with their GYDP** (95%) with a significant proportion of projects also including **young people known in some capacity to the GYDP** (64%) in their reported answers. A smaller number of respondents (18%) reported on **most young people in the locality** covered by the GYDP. The study can be described as a multi-site qualitative survey. Survey 1 opened on 23rd April and closed on 28th April. While this study (Survey 1) highlights general patterns to inform policy at national level, it is intended that subsequent surveys will examine local profiles in more detail.

Summary Findings

Compliance with the Covid-19 public health measures

Most young people participating in GYDPs are reported by YJWs to have been Covid-19 compliant.

- YJWs indicated that, based on the information available to them, young people in their GYDP are to varying degrees complying with the Government's Covid-19 restrictions. They reported that overall most young people in GYDPs have been Covid-19 compliant, however, a minority of young people in GYDPs and former Project participants are engaging in non-compliant behaviours.

³ Offending in public spaces is highlighted due to potential conflicts with Covid-19 instructions regarding social distancing

⁴ This is not a precise match but a reasonable indicator. The numbers of secondary school children in Ireland [Census 2016] was 371,588 <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2017/census2016profile3-anageprofileofireland/>



- It was YJWs' informed view that most non-compliant behaviours by young people in GYDPs were of a low level in their project area. Incidents of non-compliance were typically described by YJWs (in 85 of 113 surveys) as involving small numbers; for example, 'some young people', 'a small minority', 'one or two', 'a handful'.
- Survey findings indicate different levels of compliance and non-compliance with the restrictions. According to YJWs, young people were more likely to comply with restrictions in relation to keeping the 2km distance restriction and less likely to practice social distancing and to not meet in groups in public areas.
- Non-compliant behaviour ranged from 'meeting with friends', 'playing football with friends', 'meeting friends for a cycle' and 'hanging-out with friends at the shops', to more serious breaches of the restrictions that include travelling to other towns, counties and cities for socialising and in attempts to source illegal drugs, and meeting extended family.
- Non-compliance by a minority of young people appears to be associated with more serious breaches, including drug and alcohol misuse.
- There is some evidence to indicate that when restrictions first came into place young people appeared to socialise as they had done prior to the Covid-19 requirements. However, a majority made moderate changes to their behaviour in the period afterwards.

Lifestyle changes and coping behaviours

- Covid-19 health measures have had a significant impact on young people's lifestyles, in particular in relation to reliance on social media and gaming to keep connections with friends and to engage in recreation (for those young people who have access to technology). The lifestyle changes also have impacted daily routines with much online activity taking place at night time. According to YJWs, their experience of attempting to engage with young people has been made more difficult because daytime routines have been affected by young people's altered sleep patterns.
- Some YJWs report young people are building stronger bonds with family, while others highlight elevated levels of stress and strain for parents/carers and for young people. A number of coping strategies have been identified, including staying away from home.
- There are some examples of adult influence on young people's non-compliant behaviour, by family members and in some community settings.
- A number of YJWs reported that significant changes to young people's social situations has negatively affected their mental health.

Pro-social behaviour

Some young people participating in GYDPs have engaged in pro-social and altruistic behaviour.

- Despite reports of non-compliance in most GYDP locations, most young people engaged by GYDPs were reported by YJWs as adhering to the Covid-19 restrictions.
- Notwithstanding the practical difficulties presented by Covid-19, over half of YJWs reported that they were aware of young people engaged in pro-social activity.
- Pro-social activity included examples which could be described as 'self-care' (education, physical and mental health) and altruistic behaviour *within family* (e.g. looking after younger siblings) but also *external to family* (e.g. checking-in on and doing jobs for senior citizens, litter picking, and fundraising).



Challenges for GYDP engagement with young people

The Covid-19 public health measures have raised many practical problems for a type of intervention which is essentially relationship-based. GYDPs have been imaginative in their attempts to sustain engagement with young people but still face considerable challenges.

- Covid-19 has inevitably raised challenges for youth professionals engaging with young people given that interventions are necessarily relationship-based. Challenging anti-social behaviour and promoting pro-social behaviour benefits from the physical presence of both the youth professional and the young person.
- GYDPs have nonetheless retained remote contacts with young people imaginatively, using a wide variety of online and media platforms. Many YJWs highlighted the need for improvement / updating in policy and guidance where such engagements are the norm.
- YJWs generally reported an increase in contact (in some examples more constructive) with the parents/carers of young people, providing them, for example, with support and guidance for managing young people's behaviour. GYDP engagement also has been combined with practical assistance, for example, dropping off essential supplies.
- YJWs reported being available to young people (via social media) outside normal working hours, including evenings and weekends. They also reported that young people had welcomed the continuity of contact during the crisis.
- YJWs highlighted a number of discrete areas that would help to improve their effectiveness and efficiency during the pandemic. A detailed account of these requests is available in the full survey report. Below are representative examples:
 - Technological support: GYDP access to IT equipment and communication tools, preferably approved by the funder, to engage young people. Recognition that young people and families may need practical support to secure similar access to technology
 - Financial Pressure: Some families are dealing with increased household costs (e.g. food, cleaning essentials, and other basic needs).
 - Recreation/health: e.g. the purchase of games for families and sanitization equipment.
 - Tools, training, guidance for: education, mental health, parent and family support, and other resources and services that can be accessed remotely.
 - Funder support: budget security, return to work guidance including cleaning protocols and safe practice* (* it was noted that this would benefit from staff involvement in planning)
 - Targeted re-engagement with particularly vulnerable young people. Some respondents highlighted the limitations of remote working with particularly vulnerable young people and requested Covid-19 compliant solutions / guidance to re-engage.

Study Limitations

There are limitations to this study. First, the survey is based on accounts of young people's behaviour observed by or reported to YJWs who were sole survey respondents. Second, the survey population refers to a very small proportion of young people in Ireland and within individual communities. However, the population referred to is reasonably consistent across the localities reported on, involving young people referred to GYDPs for youth crime / anti-social behaviour reasons. Respondents are specialised youth professionals working in a national programme that has developed expertise over a 10 year period assessing local youth behaviours for the purpose of



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building annual youth crime profiles. Given these limitations, the study intends to offer policy-makers an approximation of compliance behaviour amongst the survey population.

Research Team

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Design Support: Kayleigh Canning, Edel Kelly, Niamh Skelly [GYDP Best Practice Development Team]

The following Youth Organisations ensured a 97 percent response rate for the survey

Bradóg, BRÚ Ltd, Cabra For Youth, Cherry Orchard Equine Centre, CLAY Ltd, Crann Support Group, Crosscare, Donnycarney Youth Project, Extern, Fab Community Development Ltd, Foroige, Coxes Demesne, Kilmore West Youth Project, Moyross Youth Academy, Muirhevnamor Community Youth Service, North Tipperary Leader Partnership, SICCCA, Sphere 17 Regional Youth Service, SWAN Youth Service, Youth New Ross, Youth Work Ireland.



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Results

Profile of survey respondents

Ninety-seven percent of youth justice workers (YJWs) contacted responded to the survey. The respondents represented 104 projects including Foróige (35%), Youth Work Ireland (34%), Crosscare (10%), Extern (3%), and independent community-based organisations (18%). YJWs were provided with the survey questions in advance of completing the questionnaire, allowing time before completion for them to consult with colleagues within their project/service (95%), local Gardaí (77%), other community services (70%), local teachers (2%), and young people (97%) and their parents/caregiver (91%) (See Figure 1).

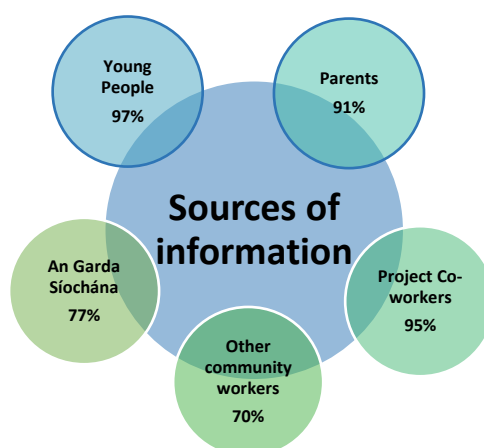


Figure 1: Percentage of YJWs who consulted colleagues, young people and their parents before completing the survey

Almost all YJWs (95%) felt they had a reasonable knowledge of the young people referred to the project. This reduced to 65% for the wider GYDP community (past referrals, their siblings and peers), and 18% for most young people in the community (see Figure 2).

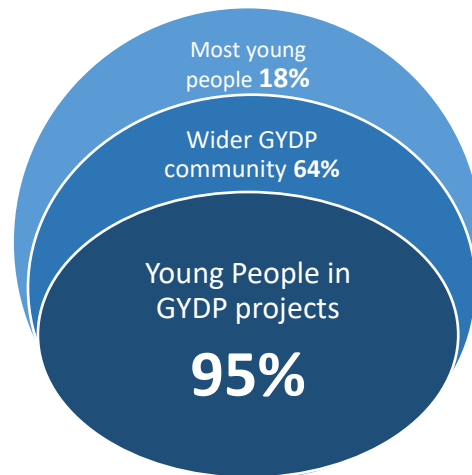


Figure 2: The percentage of youth justice workers who felt they had a reasonable knowledge of the various cohorts of young people in their community

Compliance with the Covid-19 related restrictions

Survey findings indicate that young people in GYDP are to varying degrees complying with the Government's Covid-19 restrictions. For example, YJWs responses to survey questions indicate that young people were more likely to comply with restrictions in relation to keeping the 2km distance restriction and less likely to practice social distancing and not to meet in groups. YJWs reported that most young people have been Covid-19 compliant and actively engaged in maintaining governmental restrictions. However, they also report that a minority of young people participating in GYDP and former Project participants are consistently engaging in non-compliant behaviours.

YJWs described, based on the information available to them, non-compliant behaviours by young people in GYDPs in small numbers. In a majority of responses (85 of 113 surveys), when describing the level non-compliance by young people in their project and/or catchment area, they used phrases indicating small amounts, for example, 'some young people', 'a small minority', 'one or two', 'a handful',

"...a majority of the YP I work with are complying with the restrictions"

"...a small number of our referrals were consistently disregarding the social distancing guidelines"

"...there is a small minority of young people who are totally noncompliant"

Most reports by YJWs of young people's non-compliant behaviour concern observations of small groups (82 references recorded). YJWs reported that non-compliant behaviour have ranged from *'meeting with friends'*, *'playing football with friends'*, *'meeting friends for a cycle'* and *'hanging-out with friends at the shops'*, to more serious breaches of the restrictions that include travelling to other towns, counties and cities for socialising and in attempts to source illegal drugs, and meeting extended family. For example:

"Young people in small rural towns still going outside and meeting their friends, although this is not with all of our young people, only a small number of them"

"Non-compliant would be some y/p meeting with meeting up with friends for walks etc. does not seem to be large gatherings, only meeting one friend and keeping social distance"

"These young people are traveling freely to Dublin city on a regular basis...Some of the trips are for social outing and some are to acquire illegal drug"

Small versus large groups

The nature and extent of young people's non-compliance varies. A majority of YJWs indicated that the young people they work with were *'moderately compliant'* with the Covid-19 restrictions, as one put it. Based on their own practice and local consultations, they reported that young people are, in many instances, going out in the evenings and at night to socialise with peers locally in small groups, *'on the green'* or in the *'estate'*.

"...we're seeing smaller groups of young people than usual for example before restrictions a group of 6/7 peers would be together but during restrictions there were only 3 in the group"

However, instances of large groups congregating also were reported, but only in a minority of cases (13 references).

"Young people have travelled to other towns/counties for parties. Staff have witnessed groups of 3 to 6 YP congregating on corners, car parks, outside fast food venues (awaiting pickup), and not practising social distancing"

"Gardaí and other youth services have reported mass gatherings in unused premises"

"...local service providers and the project youth justice workers have reported observing project participants congregating in large groups (more than 4, up to 15) at the local shops and in green areas"

Congregating young people and change in compliance overtime

Congregating locally with peers, on greens and in parks, inside homes, and gardens and sheds, are the most common non-compliant behaviours by young people reported. According to YJWs' observations, and feedback from Gardaí, other community workers, parents, and young people themselves, groups are smaller than pre-Covid-19 norms and social distancing in most interactions generally is not practiced. One YJW wrote that young people from his project are '*out and about*' and they practice social distancing '*to different degrees depending if it's a girlfriend, close friend, stranger*'. Also, several report that young people are leaving their locality to meet with their partner (girlfriend) or stay with extended family (also sleepovers and parties reported).

"...some young people still meeting up within the local estate and hanging about the streets and going into each other's homes - young people together in cars, hanging out in groups, not at home and not social distancing"

"On occasions young people will have peers and wider family relations round to their houses to socialise – console gaming sessions, playing sports, etc."

"...parties that are attended by young people in the locality. These parties involve alcohol consumption and a disregard for the social distancing or lockdown rules"

A recurring theme in answers is the tendency for non-compliance by a minority of young people to be associated with at-risk behaviour including drug and alcohol misuse. According to YJW's survey answers, a minority cohort of young people are disregarding the restrictions completely and meeting in groups and engaging in antisocial behaviour and substance misuse. Some YJWs report that most young people meet while staying in their community (inside the 2 KM restriction). YJWs also indicated that some young people are refusing to remain at home and congregate in groups and in the homes of peers where '*social distancing is virtually non-existent*', as one YJW put it. Several YJWs report that the travel restrictions have made it increasingly difficult for young people with addiction problems to source drugs.

"...those that are totally non-compliant, i.e. meeting in groups, no social distancing, attending house parties, of those that are travelling more than 2km away a high percentage are doing so to commit crime e.g. car crime"

"...there are a small number of young people from the town who regularly meet up in groups, in particular those involved in taking drugs"

"Young people are leaving their home to go out and get drugs. A small number of our young people with serious drug habits are failing to comply or recognise the seriousness of situation"

Survey answers indicate that in the early phase of the restrictions, many young people socialised as normal, and over time this has reduced for most. However, a minority of young people are reported by YJWs as having continued to meet friends and as ignoring the restrictions. One YJW commented that some 'young people think that the rules don't apply to them'. YJWs also report that as the restrictions have prolonged, young people's resolve to abide by the regulations has diminished and compliance is decreasing.

"Non-compliant behaviour was observed week 1 and 2 of when schools closed. Many young people did not understand terms of social distancing and struggled to refrain from doing their usual activities of going out with friend, etc."

"Young people are struggling with lack of routine now and are bored, so are going out again with their peers"

"Initially young people were not compliant, then with lockdown they increased compliance, and as lockdown has continued compliance is decreasing"

Local and personal factors

Where a young person lives, their home situation, and the level of parental supervision are important factors influencing their compliance with Covid-19 regulations. YJWs report that the chaotic nature of homes in which some young people live results in them having to stay away from their home. Moreover, young people are reported to be structuring their time to best 'fit' with their home situation. According to several YJWs, some young people are living in home environments that are 'very challenging' and so employ various strategies to cope and to avoid conflict in the home. These may include staying in contact with friends, both online or in person, staying up all night, and sleeping in daytime to avoid contact with others.

"We have young people staying up all night and sleeping all day because it's the best way to avoid conflict in the house. This is one of the many contributing

factors of why some young people are becoming annoyed with the situation. There is no space for them to avoid households that are unhealthy"

"Some young people need to get out of house they live in because of chaos in the house. Some seem to be meeting with other relatives that do not live in same house"

"Home situations may be very challenging and it's very difficult for them to stay at home. There are some young people in situations where to cope or to manage, they need to get out of the house and or relate to friends"

The capacity to comply with the restrictions is weakened for some young people because of the nature of their home life and their location. YJWs report that in some homes and on some estates, young people are living in close proximity to friends and extended families and tend mix without heeding the restrictions, both inside and outside homes. In addition, adult non-compliance in terms of socialising with neighbours, visiting relatives, and family events (including parties, BBQs in gardens, and attending funerals) were identified by YJWs as impacting young people's capacity to adhere to the restrictions.

"...in 3 local authority housing areas there are families whose relatives all live close by. None of the adults or young people (of all ages) comply with any of the restrictions imposed"

"Families have reported having sleepovers with other kids and drinking parties with neighbours"

Also influencing compliance with the restrictions, according to several YJWs, is that young people live in homes and within communities that traditionally may have non-conformist and antagonistic relations with the authorities.

"Most of them come from difficult family and community backgrounds and noncompliance with authority is a way of life"

The role of parents in helping young people comply with the restrictions was identified. YJWs noted that parents, in many instances, are an important and perhaps the only factor keeping young people at home. However, they do report that some parents are experiencing difficulties ensuring their children abide by the Covid-19 regulations. According to one YJW, parents have reported that '*young people are leaving home for hours on end and they don't know where they are*'. Others record that parents are unable and/or frightened to challenge their children about their non-

complying behaviours. A number of YJWs have suggested that parents are trying to encourage compliance among children and this is causing conflict within the family home. One reported that a *'parent would be aware [of non-compliance by children] but would not say anything as this may cause conflict in the house'*. In contrast, some young people have reported to several YJWs that their parents are allowing them to go out.

"...it is becoming increasingly clear that their willingness to abide by the restrictions largely depends on their parents input; many parents are very strict in their approach, others are more lax; and this is reflected in the young people's attitude and levels of adherence"

"Parents are struggling to keep young people in, type of housing and estate has huge impact on restrictions, young people are gathering in gardens/ parks/ Shops, house parties / street parties are increasing"

Intervention by the Gardaí

According to the answers provided by YJWs, Garda members have had to intervene to ensure young people's compliance. A small number of young people and adults are reported to have been arrested for breaching the restrictions. Garda interventions were recorded by a total of 14 YJWs and they included young people being stopped and searched, young people on bicycles chased by Gardaí, a Garda car chase and young people being arrested for being outside of the 2km limit while meeting up with others. There were six reports of instances where Gardaí were called to disperse gangs of congregating youth. Six more serious incidents reported included threatening behaviours towards Gardaí (spitting, coughing in their directions), for example, one young person arrested for coughing at a Garda and another for spitting at a Garda when asked to go home.

However, YJWs also highlighted instances where Gardaí have reported to them that a majority of young people engaging in GYDPs are not coming to their attention in regard to non-compliance with the restrictions. In addition, several report that Gardaí have indicated to them that there are no reports of any criminal or anti-social behaviour by young people in their groups other than minor breaches of the Covid-19 regulations. Other issues reported were young people using motorbikes and quad bikes in areas and young people involved in feuding.

Lifestyle changes / impacts of Covid-19 restrictions

The Covid-19 restrictions have produced enormous changes in everyone's lives. According to YJWs, the restrictions have impacted the lives of young people they work with in a variety of ways. Significant change in how young people use their time and structure their day and night is highlighted. Young people are identified as spending much of their time using social media and online technologies including phones, TV streaming and gaming sites, particularly at night-time. YJWs note that the requirement for young people to stay home has resulted in them spending much of their night online, with daytime for many a time for sleep. For some night-time is a 'quiet time', one they can take advantage of to communicate and socialise online, in what are busy and perhaps chaotic households. However, YJWs highlight that their tendency to sleep during the day has restricted their engagement with the Project. For example:

"...they're tired and not fully focused on the conversation with workers or simply not motivated or bothered to engage"

"...many of the project participants are staying up late at night, playing computer games and using their phones. This is resulting in many young people staying in bed for most of the day"

According to YJWs, the restrictions have had several impacts in the home lives of young people in their Project and/or area. Some report that the restrictions have provided opportunities for some families to build stronger connections. As one comments, several families he/she is working with have been afforded the 'space to spend quality family time together' including having meals together and engaging in family activities at home, events not occurring before the Pandemic.

"Some young people are building different connections with their families and bonding in a way they wouldn't have before"

For other families the restrictions have led to certain amounts of tension and stress for both parents and young people as they navigate their increased close proximity. Young people spending much of their day asleep has caused strained relations between parents/caregivers, according to YJWs. YJWs from various Projects have

noted that many young people are not engaging with home-schooling or completing their academic work. This they believe is connected to the changing structure of their day since the restrictions were introduced, a lack of parental supervision in regards to school work, and an attitude that being '*out of school is an extra holiday*' as one YJW described.

Mental health concerns

The effects of the Covid-19 restrictions on the mental health of young people is a significant issue identified by YJWs. Many highlight that the sudden changes in young people's lives are likely to impact on their wellbeing and their capacity to cope during the pandemic and afterwards. These 'impacts' identified by YJWs include:

- Staying up all night and sleeping all day;
- Personal and social isolation;
- Stress/conflict at home;
- Restricted access to family members;
- Fear of catching Covid-19;
- Increased substance and alcohol misuse;
- Concerns for the future and the loss of employment; and
- The challenges posed with sitting state examinations in the current situation.

YJWs also point out that the young people and families they work with are at serious risk and extremely vulnerable at this time and require intensive supports going forward. One commented that they felt that '*the more prolonged the lockdown, the more pronounced these youth mental health issues will become*'. Another highlighted the importance of providing continued support during this time and writing that '*having a presence in communities, being seen and that young people know you're still available to them*'. Others commented:

"Our project has a wide range of young people with complex issues. Most of them are living in a world of fending for themselves is their main concern. From food to somewhere to sleep, drug use and staying under the radar from authority is what can consume the day. Our daily challenge is to support YP with ongoing issues, such as suicidal thoughts or depression. For some their level of criminality has decreased but mental health issues has increased"

“The whole Traveller community and livelihood has been turned upside down in terms of making a living; weddings; funerals; communions; confirmations and social gatherings. This will have a significant impact on their mental health”

Young people's engagement in pro-social and/or altruistic behaviour during the COVID-19 restrictions

YJWs reported that many young people were engaged in prosocial or altruistic behaviour. In general, young people were engaging in their GYDP programme, according to YJWs, and there were some references to continued engagement with schoolwork. YJWs also reported that many young people were engaged in self-care activities, for example, maintaining social connections through social media, exercise and developing new skills (e.g. learning to play musical instrument, barbering) and engaging in online challenges (e.g. exercise/quizzes). Two YJW's reported that young people had taken work opportunities in local shops. One YJW wrote about how young people were *'supporting and encouraging'* each other with school/project work, while another reported incidents of peer surveillance were occurring, for example:

“A small number of YP have expressed condemnation towards their peers whom do not completely adhere to restrictions”

YJWs described how Covid-19 restrictions and age placed barriers on young people's ability to volunteer for pro-social and altruistic behaviour outside the home. However, they reported that many young people were engaged in additional household chores (from preparing meals to construction work) and engaged in caring duties for their younger siblings and helping their grandparents. Several YJWs reported examples of young people's empathy and compassion in their concern for more vulnerable family members. These caring duties were seen as strengthening the young person's relationships within the family unit. For example, young people have:

“...been spending more time with siblings and teaching them GYM exercises and physical fitness routines. This has seen some sibling's ties strengthen during Covid-19”

However, there were also two reports of increased conflict (e.g. aggressive behaviour by a young person) within the home.

Despite barriers, YJWs reported how a small number of young people were involved in altruistic acts towards senior citizens (checking on, shopping for, mowing the lawn, and dog walking) and the community, for example, picking up litter, child care for health care workers, meals on wheels and raising money for charity.

How Garda Youth Diversion Projects have adapted to Covid-19 demands and the challenges that have arisen

Almost all projects are remote working (from home) and contact with colleagues, young people, families and other agencies is primarily by phone or through digital media (e.g. phone calls, text, WhatsApp messenger, social media – Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, gaming, video calls, conferencing). Some postal contact was also reported. Examples of engagement with young people include individual check-ins, programme and group work activities online (e.g. art projects, fitness sessions, quizzes, weekly group work meetings, virtual group drop-in, and online challenges). Some YJWs reported having had to learn how to use some new online platforms in order to engage fully with young people and colleagues.

How and what projects are doing now, issues arising and levels of engagement

Projects reported that their work is still being guided by their existing operational plans and individual case management plans where possible (and the intent remains the same) but with staff needing to adapt and become more creative. One project noted that *'there is a difficulty in managing certain aspects of the relationship such as challenging (a young person's behaviour or attitude) over the phone'*. YJWs indicated that as time passes they have to devise new ways to incentivise and motivate young people to engage and stay interested. Some of the programmes that projects are trying out in order to keep young people engaged include Gaisce at Home; Work to Learn; Driver Theory; Badge Wallet; and competitions with prizes at the end of each week.

Issues relating to the safe and approved use of social media and other communication tools when engaging with young people remotely was highlighted by some projects. One organisation updated their online policy in order to facilitate Zoom conferencing with young people. Another project indicated that they had to write policies regarding working online before they commenced with new ways of engaging with young people. Some projects set up Facebook pages, however, one such project noted that this would have been a difficulty in the past *'because of anonymity and privacy for young people'*.

Projects reported mixed experiences of remote working, particularly in relation to levels of engagement with young people. The mobile phone (calls or text) emerged as the prevalent medium for communicating with project participants (and their families). Some projects indicated that *'young people have adapted to the change in most instances'* and *'engagement is still as high as it was'*. For others, levels of engagement have changed depending on young people's willingness to engage remotely. Some young people have received *'more than usual contact'* while others have a *'lack of interest in digital youth work practices'*.

Some projects noted that it is sometimes difficult to get a response from young people on the phone. One project stated that interaction was minimal and that *'male participants in particular don't like to talk over the phone'*. Difficulties contacting young people directly has in some cases resulted in increased contact with parents/families as a means of checking on how the young person is doing. *'We have found it a lot easier to contact/engage with parents as opposed to young people themselves'*. One project made the point that GYDP participants can be difficult to engage even *'when things are normal'* but that there were additional barriers due to lack of face-to-face contact.

"...restricted access to the project premises is certainly the biggest change in practice. The physical non- presence in the community and the 1:1 face to face interventions has created a divide between the project and its participants"

Family support and engaging with young people and families

The majority of projects (72 of 113 surveys) reported more and/or better engagement with parents/caregivers and in some instances increased links with siblings. The projects described an increase in communication with families, with staff offering support, dropping essential supplies, sharing activity ideas, checking in, providing support and guidance for managing young people's behaviours at home and signposting or referring to other agencies. One project has established '*a parental forum group online which will be an essential support*' they feel. Another project set up a Facebook page for parents noting that it '*isn't great for engaging young people but their parents use it more so we are using that also*'.

Tailoring supports to young people in new, adaptive and individualised ways

YJWs are endeavouring to maintain relationships with individual young people in new ways including:

- Supporting young people with school work/grinds;
- Brief interventions addressing mental health and other emerging issues;
- Signposting or referring to other appropriate services;
- Explaining and reinforcing government restrictions; and
- Completing online tasks with young people over the phone/digital media and setting new challenges for them.

Face-to-face work has stopped except in very limited socially distant work with young people. In particular, this has included dropping items by the home to check-in and engaging in socially distant paired walks. Some projects stated that they have received permission to continue to go to the office one day a week to meet young people one-to-one at a distance. A number projects noted that the young people are getting more weekly contact in the form of calls, texts and engagement online. YJWs also reported being more accessible to young people outside of normal working hours including during the evenings and at weekends.

[We] "*...run a much later on call service as many young people in our project and in the wider community are asleep all day and awake all night*"

"...some young people have been notably more appreciative of the help they are receiving, maybe because in times of a crisis, they are realising we are still there for them and still care"

Interagency collaboration and cooperation: internally and externally

Projects indicated that links with external agencies were positive and a significant number reported increased cooperation and interagency collaboration. One project, however, reported decreased contact with other services. While projects spoke of interagency cooperation, the issue of referrals only came up a few times. One project noted that *'the receipt and engagement of new referrals has been hugely affected and largely on hold'*, while another project outlined how referrals were still taking place.

"We are accepting referrals with consent reached over the phone followed by consent forms being sent out in the post to be sent back"

YJWs also referred to increased cooperation with colleagues within organisations, combining resources to offer supports, information packs and idea sharing.

What practical supports do Garda Youth Diversion Projects need to be as effective and efficient as possible during Covid-19?

Many projects requested technology equipment to engage young people/families. The most requested were devices such as mobile phones, laptops, PlayStations, and other technical devices, access to internet/Wi-Fi in the home, or sim cards with credit. Many YJWs emphasised that young people and their families do not have the devices or the connectivity to engage with GYDP's by remote. As one YJW wrote:

"Lack of devices and lack of access to Wi-Fi has been a huge challenge. YP usually use our project for online access. Lots of young people do not have Wi-Fi in homes and rely on hotspots (encouraging breaking isolation guidance) or pay as you go credit for access. Many have phones with no sims so can use messenger but reliant on internet to communicate"

Some projects described families' limited knowledge of apps or technology as a barrier and one they could use support with. A small number of projects requested funding for home equipment to facilitate YJWs work remotely, and purchase of additional features on apps like Kahoot or Zoom.

Many projects spoke about the financial pressures on young people and families, and difficulties meeting their basic needs. As one project wrote, *'some families are dealing with increased food costs where their kids normally eat breakfast and lunch at their DEIS schools'*. Many YJWs requested resources that would give GYDP's the ability to support these struggling families. This included dedicated resources for care packages/groceries, the ability to provide food drops/meal vouchers, basic cleaning essentials and hand sanitiser. YJWs described how all these items would alleviate financial stress. One project requested *'a mechanism to support families struggling financially, perhaps the redistribution of school lunches scheme to elevate some of the burden'*.

Other requests included funding for the purchase of board games, jigsaws, and other bonding resources for families. YJWs also requested sports equipment, art materials, musical instruments, and other items for young people based on their individual interests and needs. Some projects asked for protective gear for outreach work (e.g. PPE / masks, gloves and hand sanitiser).

Some projects requested support with parental, family and community connections. Support of parents to encourage young people to communicate with YJWs was identified. For example: *'...in some cases better support and communication from parents, i.e. when we set challenges, tasks or programmes for the young person that the parents encourage them to complete them'*. Some projects thought information packs, behaviour management advice, and mental health support would be helpful to parents. Two YJW's requested support that would enable them to have a physical presence in the community. Support with collaboration between services to address the needs of vulnerable families and young people was also requested. For example, one felt that *'interagency approaches so young people and families receive suitable supports necessary to their situation'* were required. Better collaboration with schools was identified several times.

Many projects requested resources for carrying out youth justice work, and to support young people's mental health and education. Some projects asked for the availability of more online resources and programmes to use with young people, packages for young people to work through, and online gaming resources. There were also requests for better access to services for young people (both online and offline), particularly regarding mental health, *'increased access to mental health supports for young people especially during out of hours'*, for example. Access to online counselling for young people was identified by some YJWs, as were *'short courses for them to engage with so that they can have some qualifications at the end of this'*.

It was apparent that *'a lot of time and resources'* were being spent on *'looking into new ways of working'*. One idea to address this was to create a *'directory of resources which are available on line'*, as it *'can be very time consuming researching'*. YJWs requested training in online tools and digital youth work. They also requested online versions of popular training programmes, e.g. Life of Choices and Motivational Interviewing. Some projects also asked for some way for GYDP colleagues to share ideas, activities and creative approaches with each other, for example, as one commented a *'resource compiling other projects ideas and the creative approaches used to engage the young people'*, a *'community of practice'*, or a *'sharing resources forum'*.

Projects requested more communication from the Department of Justice and Equality, particularly about plans and budgets. The beginning of safe and feasible *'return to work guidelines'* for staff would be very useful: *'a solid plan of return, e.g. cleaning obligations, limiting YP access to GYDP, redeployment'*. Clarity regarding *'the (new) normal'* was requested to ease fears, stop widespread ignoring of regulations and address the spread of misinformation. To combat YJW uncertainty, it was suggested that staff should be involved in the planning phase. Several projects were concerned about the budget implications for GYDP's. One project mentioned that *'restrictions in relation to spending project budget on Covid related purposes needs to be looked at'*.

Projects also asked for support and guidance *'to engage high risk YP during the pandemic and/or a YP in crisis'* and awareness training initiatives to improve compliance if restrictions continue. One project requested feedback on how other GYDP's are *'finding the engagement of harder to reach young people and how they're responding to this'*. Regarding technology, *'it would be good to have an endorsed medium of communication to use with the young people, with guidelines regarding GDPR, as privacy and confidentiality are major issues when not meeting in person'*. For example, pilot sites programmes offering support to 8 to 11 year olds requested clarification *'on digitally working with young people under the age of digital consent'*. There also was a request (as highlighted previously) for *'support in getting message out that all youth justice workers are working and available to support young people and their parents'*.

Finally, several projects emphasised how crucial face-to-face engagement is for the young person. Many felt that online and phone engagement is not having enough impact. There were requests for support in re-commencing street work and outreach. As one project described it:

"We feel we might be able to improve our services if there was an official document issued to youth justice workers classing us as 'essential workers'. It would give youth justice workers the ability to go to their respective projects and meet with young people outside the project (keeping 2 metres apart) to engage the young people further. We feel that call has to come from IYJS"⁵

Requests for in-person engagement were made with a view to effectively maintaining connections to and work with the young person, addressing non-compliance with Covid-19 restrictions, and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable young people. As one respondent wrote:

"The conundrum is those most in need at present are the ones most non-compliant with guidelines, which brings associated risks in having contact, but would benefit hugely from occupation as they don't possess the self-management skills to self-direct and engage with available online opportunities along with the boredom with current restrictions which is fuelling drug and alcohol consumption"

⁵ Irish Youth Justice Service

Appendices

Appendix A: Methods

Assumptions

Garda Youth Diversion Projects are specialist youth interventions based in local communities in Ireland. The projects are staffed by youth professionals who build relationships with youth referred for offending behaviour with the objective of reducing anti-social behaviour and increasing pro-social behaviour. Each Garda Youth Diversion project is well networked in its locality and as part of its governance structure reports to a local advisory committee made up of local agencies (including An Garda Síochána) and community organisations. Since 2010, each Garda Youth Diversion Project submits a local youth crime analysis as part of its annual planning process for the Department of Justice and Equality. The youth crime analysis combines PULSE statistical data with local intelligences from agencies and community organisations and the youth professional's own observations to produce nuanced quantitative and qualitative accounts. The Covid-19 study builds on this local programme wisdom and switches focus to compliance and non-compliance behaviour.

While young people engaged by Garda Youth Diversion Projects are a very small minority of the youth population, they are a reasonably consistent sample spread across local communities in Ireland. Much youth offending is by its nature overt and public, combinations of alcohol related crime, public order crime, criminal damage and assault account for approximately one third of all detected youth crime. The key assumption therefore is that skilled observers of youth behaviour in a large number of communities can provide an approximate bellwether.

The survey design capitalises on the skills developed for annual planning, asking youth professionals to use the available evidence to make sense of local compliance. The survey was designed by the REPPP team with input from the Garda Youth Diversion Project Best Practice Team and was trialled with a group of youth professional volunteers. A PDF version of the survey was issued to the Garda

Youth Diversion Project respondents prior to the actual survey being issued to assist them in the collation of local evidence to complete the survey.

How we collected the data

Youth justice workers (YJWs) representing 104 of the 105 Garda Youth Diversion Project and 13 sub-project (117 projects) throughout the country volunteered to be local respondents. Using the PDF copy of the survey questions, YJWs consulted with young people and their families, co-workers and their network of professionals (both statutory and non-statutory) who work with young people and their families in the community. YJWs then used this information to complete the on-line survey distributed through Qualtrics survey software. The survey (see Appendix B) consisted of questions on demographics, compliance with COVID-19 related restrictions, engagement in pro-social and altruistic behaviours, changes in work practices and additional resources they felt would benefit YJWs to meet young people's needs. Given that the first survey was essentially a scoping exercise respondents were provided with an open text box to provide any further information they felt may be relevant.

How we analysed the data

The text data for the first 38 responses for all five questions were downloaded. For each of the five questions, two researchers (first and second coders) per question took responsibility for coding the data from each. Independently the first and second coders identified substantive points⁶ in the data. Both coders collaborated to develop clearly defined themes. Themes were presented to the research team (PI and four researchers). Themes and definitions were clarified based on the team discussion. The first coders proceeded to code the subsequent data (responses 39 to 113) and synthesise the data into a summary of findings. The second coder then checked the coding to ensure congruence between the summary findings and the coded data. The first coder then presented their findings to the research team. Crossover between data and themes were discussed. The first coder finalised their summaries

⁶ Coding the points considered to be of value and importance (Holton, 2007). The coding process and its challenges. In A. Bryant, & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*. (pp. 265-289). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

and all summaries were synthesised. The quantitative information (from the six point scales) was dichotomised (compliance/non-compliance and engagement/non-engagement) and incorporated into the findings

Appendix B: Survey

How are young people responding to the Covid-19 threat? – A local to national qualitative profile

Section 1: General

1. Project Name

2. Having read the questions in the PDF file, can you identify the **sources of information** that will inform your responses, select all that apply

Conversations with young people

- Conversations with young people's parents/caregiver
- Conversations with members of An Garda Síochána
- Conversations with co-workers in your project
- Conversations with other community workers/professionals in your area
- Others (please specify)

3. What group of local young people do you feel you have reasonable knowledge of and will be referring to in your responses, select all that apply

- young people currently referred to GYDP
- a wider group of young people in the community known to GYDP through its work (siblings, peers, past referrals)
- most young people in the community
- Other (please specify)

Section 2: About the young people

4. From the information that is available to you, to what extent have the young people in your area been compliant with the Covid-19 related restrictions?

	Totally non-compliant	Moderately non-compliant	Slightly non-compliant	Slightly compliant	Moderately compliant	Totally compliant
Staying at home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social distancing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not meeting in groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Keeping the 2 km distance restrictions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other non-compliance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you selected 'other' please specify

b. If your team has observed non-compliant behaviour in regards to any of the restrictions, please provide details in 100 words or less and using examples

5. From the information that is available to you, to what extent have young people in your area been **engaged** in pro-social and/or altruistic behaviour during the COVID_19 pandemic?

- ☐ Totally non-engaged
- ☐ Moderately non-engaged
- ☐ Slightly non-engaged
- ☐ Slightly engaged
- ☐ Moderately engaged
- ☐ Totally engaged

b. If your team has observed young people in your area **engaging** in pro-social and/or altruistic behaviour, please provide details in 100 words or less and using examples

Section 3: About your GYDP

6. What if anything is your project doing differently?

- a. Can you describe in 100 words or less how your project has changed its practice with young people since the introduction of the Covid-19 restrictions
- b. Accepting the necessary limitations, can you describe in 100 words or less any support(s)/resources you think would help your project to further support young people during the Covid-19 pandemic

Section 4: Anything else

7. Finally, this box is an opportunity for you to share anything you think may be important that the survey may not have covered