



# Report of Proceedings

## A Garda Youth Diversion Projects Annual Conference 2019



This report of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects Annual Conference 2019 was prepared for the Department of Justice and Equality by conference rapporteur Dr Annabel Egan, Independent Consultant.

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## Introduction

The 2019 Garda Youth Diversion Projects Annual Conference took place in the Croke Park Conference Centre on 6 November.

The event was attended by over 300 delegates from all over the country including Youth Justice Workers, Members of An Garda Síochána, Action Research Project, Department of Justice and Equality, Department of Children and Youth Affairs and other relevant organisations.

The conference offered delegates an opportunity to reflect on their own practice and experience, to learn from each other and to contribute to the development of the Garda Youth Diversion Programme as well as the future direction of youth justice policy in Ireland.

The conference opening address was delivered by Minister of State David Stanton.

This was followed by a comprehensive update from the Department of Justice and Equality delivered by Deaglán Ó Briain, Principal, Criminal Policy and Community Safety.

The first guest speaker to address the conference in the morning was Noeline Blackwell. Noeline Blackwell is a human rights lawyer and CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. She has previously worked as the Director of FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) and as a solicitor in private practice. She was a member of the Commission on the Future of Policing. She currently sits on the boards of the Immigrant Council of Ireland and Front Line Defenders.

Her address was followed by presentations delivered by Chief Superintendent Collette Quinn, Director of the Youth Diversion Programme, the Action Research Project team in the University of Limerick and the Best Practice Development Team in the Department of Justice and Equality.

In the afternoon, delegates were divided into small groups of up to 15 to 20 persons to engage in facilitated discussion of a total of nine topics that were identified by the Department as of particular relevance/interest to delegates on the basis of the results of a pre-conference survey. These topics were (in alphabetical order):

- Action Research Project
- Early Intervention Pilot Initiative
- Family Support
- Managing Trauma
- Self-care
- Specialist Project Evaluation
- Supporting the role of the Gardaí in GYDPs
- Work to Learn
- Youth Justice Strategy

Delegates were also invited to identify areas where there was a clear need for additional training in their sector and make suggestions as to how these needs might best be met by contributing their views to a Training Needs Wall of Ideas throughout the day.

The conference concluded on a high with a guest presentation from Pat Divily on the topic of self-care. Pat Divily is an author, speaker and high-performance coach who is passionate about helping people reach new levels of purpose and fulfillment through movement and mindset.

This report summarises each of the presentations delivered on the day and presents the main points raised in the afternoon discussions with a particular focus on any recommendations made. The feedback and suggestions contributed by delegates on the Training Needs Wall of Ideas are synthesised in section 10. Section 11 draws together the main themes to emerge from the day and highlights any conclusions reached.

## Opening Address: Minister of State David Stanton

Minister of State David Stanton welcomed participants to the annual conference which he said would address issues that were not only intrinsically linked to his brief but also close to his heart as a former teacher and guidance counsellor.

He noted the impact that early intervention can have in diverting vulnerable young people from crime and acknowledged the dedication and commitment of all Garda Youth Diversion Project staff as well as the support given to the projects by the Diversion Office and local Juvenile Liaison Officers.

Minister Stanton said that the Garda Youth Diversion Programme is founded on an understanding of detention as a last resort. He said diversion is an 'evidence based' approach and highlighted a reduction in the overall number of children being referred to the Programme from 20,000 in 2007 to just over 10,000 in 2017 as an indicator of its success. In addition to a sound evidence base, he said that the development of youth justice policy is also informed by the experience of practitioners working with young people on the ground.

Minister Stanton remarked on the restructuring of the Department in line with a new functional model and said that as a result of this the service delivered to Garda Youth Diversion Projects would be strengthened.

He noted the convening of an expert steering group to guide the development of the new Youth Justice Strategy and invited all present to contribute to the public consultations that would follow publication of the first draft in 2020.

Within this context he highlighted the challenge of ongoing fragmentation of service delivery and called for a multi-agency approach to resolve this particularly in the areas of education, prevention and early intervention and engaging difficult to reach young people.

The Minister concluded by once again thanking all assembled for the work they do with vulnerable young people which he described as both challenging and life changing.

## **Presentation: Deaglán Ó Briain, Principal, Criminal Policy and Community Safety, Department of Justice and Equality**

Deaglán Ó Briain thanked Minister Stanton for his opening address and outlined the programme for the day. He then went on to provide a comprehensive update for delegates in relation to a number of developments.

### **Transformation of the Department**

Mr. Ó Briain stated that in line with the new functional model, the transformed Department is now organised on the basis of skills rather than subject matter. As such, the Department has been divided into two pillars - criminal justice and civil justice - with a dedicated team for policy, legislation, transparency, service delivery and governance created within each pillar. Within the criminal justice pillar, Mr. Ó Briain noted the particular relevance of the Community Safety Unit, which among other things is responsible for youth crime and safeguarding children in contact with the criminal justice system.

### **GYDP Advisory Committee**

Mr. Ó Briain said that working with the recently established National Advisory Committee for the network of Garda Youth Diversion Projects was a particular priority for this unit. He stated that the purpose of the National Advisory Committee is to inform, co-design, develop and oversee/monitor the vision and strategic direction of capacity building measures for the Garda Youth Diversion Projects.

The Committee is comprised of representatives of community based organisations, the Department of Justice and Equality, An Garda Síochána and the University of Limerick. It is intended to meet every six-to-eight weeks with three meetings having taken place at the time of writing. It is chaired by John Cahill, former chair of the Best Practice Development Team oversight committee.

### **Project evaluations and pilots**

Mr. Ó Briain emphasised the important role of pilot projects and project evaluations in the Department's approach to the development of evidence based interventions and policy. He noted a number of ongoing project evaluations, in particular evaluations of two projects that seek to engage harder to reach young people and an evaluation of the Work to Learn project. He also noted that plans to commission a wider evaluation of the Garda Youth Diversion Programme were at an advanced stage and expected to go to tender in the new year.

In relation to innovative pilot projects, he noted a number of preventative projects ongoing within the context of the Action Research Project as well as a number of pilot projects in the area of family support.

### **Development of the new Youth Justice Strategy**

Mr. Ó Briain said that development of the new Youth Justice Strategy was being undertaken within the context of an overall review of the 2001 Children's Act. He said that the new strategy would build on the Youth Justice Action Plan 2014-2018 and would be informed by both the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 and the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing. He also highlighted the important role of stakeholder consultation in the development of the new strategy. He noted that a representative of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects sits on the Strategy Steering Group and that three parallel workshops on the strategy would take place in the afternoon.

Mr. Ó Briain said that the aim of the Department was to publish a draft of the new strategy for public consultation in the near future and to finalise it in the first half of next year. He said that the new strategy was set out thematically and would outline precise actions and commitments in the following areas:

- Supporting children and young people;
- Criminal justice system processes for children and young people;
- Oversight, governance, reporting and development.



In conclusion, Mr. Ó Briain invited delegates to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the conference to shape the agenda for the Garda Youth Diversion Projects and to contribute their front line expertise to the development of the new Youth Justice Strategy.

## Guest speaker presentation: Noeline Blackwell, CEO Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

Noeline Blackwell opened her presentation by stating that the 2019 trial of two minor boys for the murder of Ana Kriegel and the sentences subsequently imposed by Justice Paul McDermott brought the area of youth justice policy and practice to forefront of every conversation she had had in recent days.

Ms. Blackwell said that in setting out the reasons behind the sentences imposed, Justice McDermott recognised both the severity of the crimes committed and the particular rights of children in conflict with the law as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). She stated that the UNCRC is 30 years old this year and is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world (only Somalia and the United States have not ratified).

Ms. Blackwell went on to outline the impact that Ireland's ratification of the Convention in 1992 has had on the development of our juvenile justice system. She noted that the Convention led to a fundamental shift in perception that enabled recognition of the need to treat children and young people in conflict with the penal legal system differently from adults. She said that at the heart of this difference is the need to ensure that every child in conflict with the law is treated in manner that:

- Is consistent with the child's sense of dignity and worth;
- Reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others;
- Takes into account the child's age;
- And promotes the child's reintegration.

Along with the duty the UNCRC imposed on State parties to ensure the use of detention as a last resort, Ms. Blackwell said that these principles brought about a sea change in Ireland's juvenile justice system, ultimately leading to the 2001 Children's Act, the establishment of the Garda Youth Diversion Programme and all that has flowed from these developments in the years since. As such, she noted that the Garda Youth Diversion Projects are a true

application of fundamental human rights and have played a significant role in building Ireland's capacity to advance its commitment to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of children in conflict with the penal legal system in line with best practice. She concluded by noting that - by contributing to the creation of a safer, healthier, saner society where the rule of law applies and where all human rights are recognised - the Garda Youth Diversion Projects were of benefit not only to the children and young people engaged directly in them but to all children and to society at large.

## Presentation: Chief Superintendent Colette Quinn, Director, Youth Diversion Programme

Chief Superintendent Collette Quinn opened her presentation by referring to the document 'Stronger Together' produced by her office and thanked all those who had contributed to it.

In relation to the Garda Youth Diversion Programme, she noted that in 2018 there were:

- 16,491 incidents referred to the National Office involving 8,561 children and young people;
- 70% of the children and young people referred were male and 29% female;
- 3,500 children and young people were admitted to Garda Youth Diversion Projects;
- 1,249 children were deemed unsuitable for the Programme.

She noted that the numbers of referrals were declining which she said was evidence of the success of the Diversion Programme.

Chief Superintendent Quinn described the Diversion Programme as a human rights based programme underpinned by a restorative philosophy. She also highlighted the ongoing debate as to whether the often complex needs of children and young people in conflict with the law were best met by a welfare model, a justice model or a hybrid that combines both elements. In this regard she noted that the Children's Act is a piece of hybrid legislation, addressing both the welfare of children and young people and their offending behaviour through the caution system.

Chief Superintendent outlined the criteria for admission to the Garda Youth Diversion Programme and factors that must be taken into consideration in any decision to admit. She also outlined the system of cautions – informal, formal and restorative – as well as the purpose of the Section 29 Conference, the benefit of which was to bring all the key players in a child or young person's life together under one roof.

She noted that together crimes related to public order offences and theft accounted for 52% of crimes committed by children and young people referred to the Garda Youth Diversion Programme.

She also described three main types of referral: the first being children and young people with strong family support who may be referred during a period of personal and social experimentation but generally do not reoffend; the second being children and young people from high crime areas living chaotic lives without parental supervision and support; and the third being children and young people in the care of the state which she highlighted as of particular concern.

She noted that in relation to the second category in particular, youth workers and JLOs might be the first 'good adult' that children and young people referred to the Garda Youth Diversion Programme encountered in their lives.

She concluded by commending delegates for their work which she recognised as not being easy and said that there were many young in Ireland who were better off because of their efforts.

## Presentation: Action Research Project, University of Limerick

Eoin O'Meara Daly, Jackie Dwane and Caitlin Lewis from the University of Limerick delivered a presentation on the Action Research Project including its physical context, the relevance of the project to youth workers, the work that has been carried out so far by the project and plans for the next two years. They also introduced the Practitioners Handbook produced by the project.

Mr. Daly explained that the Action Research Project is being implemented under the auspices of the Research, Evidence, Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) initiative in collaboration with the Department of Justice and Equality. The Action Research Project is structured around 16 Garda Youth Diversion Project case study sites in three regional clusters nationwide (Northern region, Southern region and Dublin region), each with an assigned researcher. The purpose of the project is to examine what constitutes effective relationships between youth justice workers and young people that come into conflict with the penal legal system.

Mr. Daly said that although hard to define the practice of relationship building in youth work, international evidence and practice wisdom confirm that it is core to the delivery of effective youth justice services. He also noted that youth justice workers spend approximately 60% of their time engaged in relationship building with young people. From this he extrapolated that since approximately 60% of the €13 million Garda Youth Diversion Project budget is dedicated to relationship building with young people, it is vital to develop a clearer understanding of what constitutes best practice in cultivating such relationships.

Jackie Dwane said that the project commenced in 2018 with a systematic evidence review of national and international literature on best practice relationship building in interventions involving young people. The purpose of this review was to explore the features of effective relationships as defined in the existing literature and how they can best be sustained.

At the same time, the project also began to engage with all 16 case study sites to gather data about what they are doing and what is working best on the ground in terms of relationship

building with young people. In the coming months this data will be synthesised and combined with the knowledge generated by the literature review. It is anticipated that beginning in early 2021 a series of workshops for practitioners will be rolled out across the project to bring the process of codesigning new guidance and policy regarding relationship building practice. Ms. Dwane said that this will be piloted in the spring and revised as time goes by through a process of constant reflection and evaluation.

Ms. Dwane noted that the aim of the project was to share what works best, to validate the work already being done in the area of youth justice and to create a strong evidence base that can support its development into the future.

Caitlin Lewis introduced the Action Research Project Practitioners Guidance to delegates, which she said was targeted principally at the 16 project sites but was also of relevance to the wider Garda Youth Diversion Project network.

Ms. Lewis concluded the presentation by inviting delegates to get in touch with the team with any questions they may have and to take part in the afternoon discussion session on the Action Research Project.

## Presentation: Best Practice Development Team, Department of Justice and Equality

Niamh Skelly, Edel Kelly and Kayleigh Canning from the Best Practice Development Team within the Department of Justice and Equality presented an overview of the purpose of the Team, the work it carries out and the impact this has had on the development of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects.

Niamh Skelly explained that the purpose of the Team is to support the development of practice across all 106 Garda Youth Diversion Projects nationwide.

Ms. Skelly traced the origins of the team to a 2009 baseline study of all Garda Youth Diversion Projects conducted by Dr. Sean Redmond, which identified the need for projects to be more closely aligned to the risks and needs of the young people referred and lead to the creation of the Best Practice Initiative in 2010 (one post) and ultimately the establishment of the Best Practice Development Team in 2015 (three posts).

Ms. Edel Kelly said the work of the Team in developing practice is guided by the Garda Youth Diversion Project Advisory Committee and by feedback from projects themselves. Ms. Kelly said that this input enabled the Team to support youth justice workers across the country to the benefit of young people.

Ms. Kelly also noted the importance of ensuring that all interventions are underpinned by a sound evidence base. In this regard she referred to:

- The work of the REPPP team in the University of Limerick;
- The development of restorative practice modules by the University of Ulster;
- The widespread use of particular tools including in the YLS/CMI;
- Rigorous piloting and evaluation of all new interventions.



Kayleigh Canning described the service offered by the Team as centred on the provision of support structures such as Garda Youth Diversion Project guidelines and the provision of training and opportunities for further development for youth justice workers.

Ms. Canning said that the Team was responsible for a number of different areas including:

- Capacity building for youth justice workers;
- Quality assurance and risk assessment;
- Sourcing and delivering new interventions;
- Inter-agency cooperation.

Ms. Canning also outlined the priorities for the team over the coming 12 month period as follows:

- Transition to an online YLS system by the end of 2020;
- The further development of Together Stronger;
- National rollout of restorative practice training.

Ms. Canning said that the aim of the Team was to achieve better outcomes for young people through a combination of assessment and planning, the development of a sound evidence base, the provision of training and the cultivation of local knowledge and partnerships.

Ms. Skelly concluded the presentation and the morning session by inviting delegates to contribute to the work of the Team and the Department of Justice and Equality by taking part in the afternoon discussion groups and posting their suggestions on the Training Needs Wall of Ideas.

## Small Group Discussions: Overview

In the afternoon, participants were divided into smaller discussion groups to explore one of nine topics including (in alphabetical order):

- Action Research Project
- Early Intervention Pilot Initiative
- Family Support Pilot Initiative
- Managing Trauma
- Self-care
- Specialist Project Evaluation
- Supporting the role of An Garda Síochána
- Work to Learn
- Youth Justice Strategy

Each group had a facilitator to guide the discussion and a note taker to record participants' input. This material was collated by the rapporteur after the conference for inclusion in this report.

### Action Research Project

The purpose of the Action Research Project discussion group was to learn from participants' experience of what works and what does not in building transformative relationships with young people and to provide participants with more information about the lessons emerging for professional practice from the Action Research Project.

Participants identified the persistence of young people referred to Garda Youth Diversion Projects themselves as playing the most important role in bringing about positive change in their lives. The consistency of youth justice workers, their ability to listen to and understand young people and their willingness to be creative in their approach to working with young

people were also seen as crucial. The benefits of informal engagement, special interest lead engagement and positive reinforcement were also discussed.

The need to ensure that all Gardaí working with young people are aware of and trained in youth justice methodologies and are accepting of the values and attitudes that underpin this approach was highlighted. The need for inter-agency cooperation and 'joined up thinking' was also seen as important in achieving the best outcomes for young people as was early intervention.

The primary barriers to successful engagement with young people were identified as:

- Lack of funding and resources;
- Difficulties identifying young people for referral;
- Delays in the youth justice process;
- The strongly held view of some young people that they will not be dealt with fairly and that the system and/or society is against them.

Participants also discussed how the knowledge generated by the Action Research Project might best be disseminated to practitioners including in particular youth justice workers. A number of suggestions were made including:

- Online distribution via Moodle or similar;
- Mentoring for projects not currently included in the Action Research Project;
- Podcasts;
- More regular opportunities to share ideas informally via conference calls or face-to-face meetings;
- Dissemination through management forums;
- Newsletter;
- Team meetings.

## Early Intervention Pilot Initiative

The purpose of the Early Intervention Pilot Initiative discussion group was to give participants an opportunity to learn more about the initiative, to provide input into the further development of the initiative and to consider its relevance for their own projects.

The facilitator/s introduced the initiative which was launched in 2019 across nine separate Garda Youth Diversion Projects with the aim of enhancing capacity to engage with children identified as being at risk of becoming involved with crime and/or anti-social behaviour. The nine pilot project sites include the following:

- High Voltage – Dundalk, Co Louth;
- Smart – Trim, Co Meath;
- Yaps – Sligo, Co Sligo;
- BYB – Ballymun, Co Dublin;
- Donegal – Donegal, Co Donegal;
- Kerry – Kerry, Co Kerry;
- Rathkeale – Rathkeale, Co Limerick;
- Ray – Roscrea, Co Tipperary;
- Web/Beat – Mulhuddart, Co Dublin.

Discussion group participants were of the view that anti-social and criminal behaviour can become apparent in children at a very young age (8-10 years old) but that the services provided by their own projects were neither intended nor appropriate to meet the needs of these children. As such the Early Intervention Pilot Initiative is unique.

It was stated that while in exceptional cases children as young as 10 could be ‘unofficially’ admitted to existing Garda Youth Diversion projects this was not the norm and children younger than this are not provided for at all.

The need for specialised training for Garda Youth Diversion Project staff working with children in the 8-10 age group was emphasised repeatedly throughout the discussion. It was also suggested that to address issues around criminality and anti-social behaviour with this cohort, a youth justice approach was warranted rather than a mainstream youth work approach.

The need for policies and procedures to establish clear referral pathways to projects that have the capacity to work with young children in the 8-11 year old age group was also highlighted frequently during the discussion. It was noted that currently JLOs cannot refer children younger than 12 years old to the projects and questions around finding the appropriate level of JLO involvement in preventative work with children below this age were raised.

It was also suggested that Community Gardaí could play a potentially significant role in identifying young children at risk of becoming involved in criminal and/or anti-social behaviour and that their role in making referrals should be formalised. Youth justice workers, schools and welfare services were also seen as important sources of information within the community that could help to identify children at risk.

The possibility of being enabled to work with younger siblings of project participants in particular were discussed in some detail. Several youth justice workers remarked that it was not unusual for younger siblings to approach the projects and ask to be admitted but that currently this was not possible. Discussion group participants said that these children would potentially benefit greatly from the projects as the projects were already well known by the children themselves and their families which it was thought would make it much easier to build trust as a result.

It was further suggested that particular attention was paid to the following issues in rolling out the Early Intervention Pilot Initiative:

- Ensuring that younger children were not mixing with older children and young people on the projects as a result of their involvement;
- Ensuring that alternative risk assessment tools were developed for use with a younger age group since the YLS CMI/2.0 is not designed for this purpose;

- Ensuring the provision of family support as part of any early intervention initiative;
- Ensuring interagency cooperation when working with younger children likely to be involved in a wide range of services.

### Family Support Pilot Initiative

The purpose of the Family Support Pilot Initiative discussion group was to give participants an opportunity to learn more about the initiative, to provide input into the further development of the initiative and to consider its relevance for their own projects.

The facilitator/s introduced the Family Support Pilot Initiative which was launched in April 2019 to address the recognised need for wider intervention in the home lives of some young people engaged in Garda Youth Diversion Projects with the aim reducing offending behaviour. At present, the initiative is being piloted at nine sites including:

- North Fingal – Balbriggan, Lusk, Rush and Skerries, Co Dublin;
- Jay – Jobstown, Co Dublin;
- Ucan – across 3 GYDPs – Ronanstown and Lucan, Co Dublin;
- Block – Portlaoise, Co Laois;
- Cabra Step Up – Cabra, Dublin City;
- High Voltage - Dundalk, Co Louth;
- Keep – Kilmore West, Co Dublin;
- Smart – Trim, Co Meath;
- Edge – Carrick on Suir, outreach to Clonmel, Co Tipperary;
- BYB – Ballymun, Co Dublin.

Participants were of the view that the Family Support Pilot Initiative was unique in that it could provide families that did not meet the criteria for Tusla involvement and were yet in acute need of support with the help that they urgently required. In addition, it was

suggested that family support through the projects would benefit families in rural areas where it was less easy to access services provided by Tusla.

While working with families, in particular parents, was seen as important in addressing the behaviours of many young people, participants also said that due to the intensity of the work they do directly with young people most youth justice workers would not have the capacity to dedicate the time necessary to family support. The ability to separate family support from youth work was also seen as beneficial both to young people and their families.

Participants noted numerous factors that could indicate a need for family support when working with a young person including family criminality, drug use in the family, neglect, aggression/violence in the home, parental mental health diagnoses and inter-generational trauma. Participants said that if youth justice workers are required to spend large amounts of time in a family support role when working with particular young people this is also a clear indicator that additional dedicated support is required. Participants also said that additional support may be required where all efforts on the part of youth justice workers to engage with a young person's family on some level were rebuffed and/or where family members maintained a very negative attitude towards youth justice workers.

Participants agreed that if made available, family support would compliment existing services, in particular the Meitheal approach, and was a good fit within the context of the wider Garda Youth Diversion Programme.

Participants envisaged family support working closely and collaboratively with youth justice workers in the projects to plan interventions jointly. It was envisaged that this collaborative approach would also enable both youth justice workers and family support

workers to develop a more complete understanding of the young people concerned and therefore support them more effectively. The need to provide training for youth justice workers around family support in order to enable the development of an effective working relationship was also emphasised. It was suggested that youth justice workers should make the initial referral to family support with the involvement of JLOs. It was also suggested that family support workers should attend referral assessment committee meetings.

Participants were of the view that more effective parenting, the development of better coping skills and ultimately a reduction in offending behaviour could be achieved were family support made available more widely across all projects. However, participants also noted that not all families need additional support and not all would be open to it even if the need clearly existed.

### Managing Trauma

The purpose of the Managing Trauma discussion group was to explore participants' understanding within the context of the Garda Youth Diversion projects of: trauma informed practice; how to manage trauma themselves; and youth suicide prevention.

Participants in the discussion expressed the view that trauma is a particular emotional response to an event or set of events. As such, what one person experiences as trauma may not be experienced as traumatic by another. In the context of the Garda Youth Diversion projects, youth justice workers often work with young people and families affected by trauma. However, the fact that youth justice workers themselves can also be affected by trauma as a result of their work is less recognised.

Indicators of trauma in young people were identified to include the following: isolation, depression, hopelessness, aggression, under achievement, substance misuse, self-harm, issues with trust and attachment, lashing out.



Participants said that funding should be made available to enable all youth justice workers to receive training in trauma informed practice (eg. ACE awareness training). Trauma informed practice should recognise that criminal/anti social behaviour can be driven by experiences of trauma. Such recognition should alter the focus of work from 'What's wrong with you' to 'What happened to you?' from the outset. Participants said that trauma informed practice requires a multi- agency approach which should provide a wrap-around service ideally under one roof for young people experiencing trauma. It was also suggested that youth justice workers should be mandated to refer young people directly to the appropriate services when additional supports were needed and the point was made that the Garda Youth Diversion Projects and the youth justice workers that staff them cannot be expected to do everything.

Participants were of the view that the YLS CMI 2.0 was not adequate to assess the presence of trauma in the lives of young people and how this impacted on risk.

Participants welcomed the ASSIST programme as a 'good starting point' for training in youth suicide prevention. Participants with experience of the STORM programme also said the programme helped to give them much greater confidence working in the area of suicide prevention and self-harm mitigation. However, the challenges faced by youth justice workers in accessing appropriate out of hours services for young people at risk of suicide and self-harm were seen as ongoing and significant. In response, it was suggested that qualified therapists should be assigned to the projects on a pilot basis with funding by Tusla to work with young people experiencing trauma and their families .

In relation to trauma experienced by youth justice workers it was suggested that the option to access external supervision and/or longer term therapeutic support through the Employee Assistance Programme (currently limited to four sessions) was essential and that a much greater emphasis should be placed on self-care for workers experiencing trauma. The use of Guardian24 (personal alarm) was also seen as beneficial in helping workers to feel more secure.

## Self-Care

The purpose of the self-care discussion group was to provide an opportunity for workers to explore their own self-care, with a particular emphasis on what workers currently do or would like to do to promote their own wellbeing.

The facilitator/s introduced the World Health Organisation's definition of self-care: 'self-care is what people do for themselves to establish and maintain health, and to prevent and deal with illness.'

The facilitator/s said that self-care is a personal matter and that as such everyone's approach would be different. It relates to what participants do at work and outside of work to look after their holistic wellbeing so that they can meet their personal and professional commitments.

Participants were then invited to explore what self-care means for them. Participants suggested that self-care means being aware of one's own needs – particularly as they relate to mental health – prioritising them and taking steps to attend to them. Important elements of this included being able to say no, effectively managing one's diary to ensure a balance between work and home life and establishing clear boundaries between work and home life.

Participants said that the provision of external supervision every five weeks or more was key to supporting self-care among youth justice workers. However, this opportunity was not available to all and not all participants availed of it when the opportunity arose. Participants also said that in their experience the following self-care practices were particularly beneficial:

- Taking 10 minutes out from work on a daily basis;
- Reflective diaries;
- Regular exercise;
- Making use of the Employment Assistance Programme;

- Informal peer support.

Participants were also of the view that, in general, self-care was seen as the responsibility of individual workers and something they should attend to in their own time. However, due to the high level of job related stress experienced by youth justice workers it was suggested that more proactive organisational support was urgently needed. The following suggestions were among those put forward:

- Provision of a dedicated in-service self-care room;
- Funding for activities to support workers' self-care eg. yoga;
- Provision of weekly in-service self-care support sessions;
- The possibility to take a day off to attend to one's self-care even in the absence of an acute crisis;
- Better understanding from management of the need for and benefits of self-care for workers.

### Specialist Project Evaluation

The purpose of the specialist evaluation discussion group was to provide an opportunity for participants to learn more about two pilot projects that target harder to reach young people and to explore how this work fits within the wider network of Garda Youth Diversion Projects.

Participants were informed that in 2016 a total of 1,249 children and young people nationally were deemed unsuitable for referral to the diversion programme. This number increased in 2017 to 1,402. Participants were also informed that as much as 50% of youth crime is thought to be committed by these 3% of children and young people who are not receiving support through the Garda Youth Diversion Programme.

The two projects – Solas Rua in Dublin and Janus Justice in Limerick - aim to address the atypical offending behavior of these young people who are not engaged with mainstream Garda Youth Diversion Projects and are continuing to offend at an increasingly serious level.

Both projects were introduced by staff members. Participants were informed that Solas Rua was launched as a pilot project in Dublin 8 by Solas in 2017 to respond to gangland feuding in the area. The project targets young people aged 12-23 who are no longer suitable for or refusing to engage with mainstream Garda Youth Diversion projects and who are involved in the criminal justice system at a serious level due to the nature and/or frequency of their offending. Solas Rua is intended as a four year intervention in the lives of young people. It operates a youth work model based on voluntary participation, relentless outreach and intensive individualised support. Referrals to the programme are made by the relevant JLO sergeant. There were 15 young people on the programme in December 2019.

Janus Justice was launched by Extern Limerick in 2015 to provide individually tailored support to young people aged 12-23 years of age who are failing to engage with/benefit from mainstream Garda Youth Diversion Projects and who are at risk of escalating their offending/anti-social behaviour. The Janus Justice intervention model focuses on the provision of family support in addition to individual work with young people, an important element of which includes residential overnights and respite. Janus Justice is intended as a much shorter intervention in the lives of young people than Rua, lasting roughly four months. Referrals to the Janus Justice programme are made by the relevant JLO Sergeant and Probation Services. There were 15 young people on the programme in December 2019.

Discussion centred on the underlying factors that may make certain young people harder to reach. Numerous indicators were proposed including involvement in organised crime, lack of parental engagement, crisis unemployment in the home, mental illness (youth or parent), violence in the home including violence perpetrated by young people, isolation, drug and alcohol abuse and school drop-out. It was also suggested separately that membership of the travelling community may make some young people involved in criminal/anti social behaviour more difficult to reach and that greater diversity in the youth justice sector may have an important role to play in addressing this.

Participants were in agreement that there was an unmet need for a differentiated approach to working with harder to reach young people in their own areas, even if the numbers were small and that this should be properly resourced. Participants were also in agreement that

due to the intensity of the work required, this could not be undertaken by youth justice workers in addition to their mainstream Garda Youth Diversion Project caseload.

### Supporting the Role of An Garda Síochána

The purpose of the An Garda Síochána discussion group was to provide participants with an opportunity to explore the next steps in the development and implementation of the Together Stronger Guidelines.

The facilitator/s introduced the Guidelines which were developed in 2017 with the aim of strengthening the working relationships between JLOs and youth justice workers. A total of eight workshops took place on the Guidelines in 2019.

Participants then identified the following as aspects of the partnership between An Garda Síochána and the network of Garda Youth Diversion Projects that were working well:

- Positive relationships, particularly between JLOs and project staff;
- Additional community guards in some areas with strong links to project staff and young people;
- Better access to projects in some areas, as a result of the introduction of the divisional model of policing, where previously there was no access;
- Good relationships between schools and JLOs;
- People knowing their roles and supporting each other;
- Good relationships with Gardaí on placement in the projects during training;
- Good staff retention in some projects;
- Management buy in from both community based organisations and An Garda Síochána regarding the projects.

Participants also identified the following as changes that they would wish to make to the partnership between An Garda Síochána and the network of Garda Youth Diversion Projects:

- Provide additional supports for 8-11 year olds in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills;
- Implement measures to ensure that all Gardaí are unaware of the existence of Garda Youth Diversion Projects in their area;
- Implement measures to ensure that all Gardaí are aware of the roles and responsibilities of project staff;
- Implement measures to allow the involvement of Community Gardaí in cases involving younger children, for example those aged 8 -11 years of age;
- Implement measures to ensure that all areas have community policing units and community Gardaí in place;
- Facilitate more regular meetings between Garda Youth Diversion Project staff, teachers and JLOs;
- Implement measures to establish clear channels of communication between all schools and local projects;
- Implement measure to ensure that all areas have access to a project (this is not yet the case, particularly in parts of County Galway).

## Work to Learn

This purpose of the Work to Learn discussion group was to provide participants with an opportunity to gain some insight into the initiative and how it works as well as to consider opportunities for a similar approach in their own projects.

The facilitator/s introduced the programme which was developed by 'Ossry Youth' Kilkenny in 2015. The programme exposes young people taking part in Garda Youth Diversion Projects to the world of work and the skills required to operate effectively in it, through a structured and supported process involving preparation, placement and reflection.

Participants were in agreement that the benefits of the programme for young people were clear and that they would welcome a similar intervention in their own projects. Numerous questions regarding practical issues such as the relevant age group (15-18 years), how to apply for inclusion in the programme (submit a proposal) and the length of placement (six months with option to reapply) were then raised and responded to.

Participants noted that while some youth justice workers would be in a position to engage with local employers to obtain employment for young people this was not the case across the board and may not be practical in rural areas.

The challenges involved in preparing young people for work and keeping them motivated to work were recognised by the group. It was suggested that these could best be addressed by maintaining close contact with employers and young people on placement and by establishing incentives to complete each placement, for example One-for-All vouchers etc. It was also suggested that given the value of peer-to-peer learning, young people who had successfully completed the programme should be involved in preparing new recruits.

## Youth Justice Strategy

The purpose of the Youth Justice Strategy discussion group was to provide participants with an opportunity to learn more about the new Strategy being developed by the Department of Justice, to consider the key themes of the Strategy and to make recommendations which will be considered for inclusion in its development.

The facilitator/s introduced the three thematic areas that will be the focus of the new Strategy. These are:

- Supporting Children and Young People;
- Criminal Justice System Processes for Children and Young People;
- Oversight, Governance, Reporting, and Development.

Discussion then focused on consideration of four cross cutting issues relevant to all areas of the strategy. These are:

- Prevention and early intervention;
- Diversion;
- Procedural Justice (Detection, Investigation, Prosecution, Court Proceedings);
- Sanctions (including Detention) and Post-release and Re-integration.

### **Prevention and early intervention**

In order to ensure that children and young people could get what they need from prevention and early intervention supports participants said that it was urgently necessary to cultivate and formalise a much closer working relationship between JLOs and youth justice workers on the one hand and schools on the other.

To enhance the effectiveness of early intervention services participants made the following recommendations for possible inclusion in the new Youth Justice Strategy:



- Enhanced information sharing among all actors and agencies involved in the lives of younger children - in particular parents, schools, JLOs, youth workers and youth justice workers;
- Establish clear referral pathways that leverage local knowledge and provide equity of access to services;
- Facilitate access to family support;
- Include qualitative data in reporting procedures;
- Clear mapping of the work being carried out by all relevant agencies on the ground;
- Awareness raising in communities about existing projects;
- More transition programmes;
- Greater emphasis on and acceptance of the practice wisdom of youth justice workers in the referrals process.

The existing blockages to achieving effective service delivery in the area of prevention and early intervention were seen as the absence of relevant pilot programmes in many areas, lack of interagency relationships, lack of joint planning and lack of adequate resources.

It was stated that youth justice workers were a critical link for young people and that their role was key to ensuring that prevention and early intervention was underpinned by effective information sharing and interagency cooperation. The need to establish a link between Garda Youth Diversion Projects and projects funded by the Targeted Youth funding Scheme was also agreed and discussed.

### **Diversion**

The primary barriers to the delivery of a more effective Garda Youth Diversion Programme were identified by participants as:

- The availability of adequate funding and resources;
- A lack of interagency cooperation;

- Inconsistent engagement from young people;
- Parents withholding consent.

Participants discussed how best to enhance the effectiveness of the diversion programme in light of these barriers and made the following recommendations for possible inclusion in the new Youth Justice Strategy:

- Enhanced interagency cooperation, particularly with the education sector;
- Greater focus on harder to reach young people;
- More intense and prolonged outreach;
- Early intervention programmes for 8-11 year olds;
- An increase in the age at which young people transition away from the supports provided by the diversion programme from 18-24 years old;
- Ensure all participation is voluntary (participation on the basis of a probation order was highlighted as problematic in many instances);
- Greater balance between primary and secondary referrals
- Ensure that JLOs can and do avail of local knowledge in making referrals;
- Build on the Work to Learn programme;
- Introduce the Meitheal process;
- Provide greater clarity regarding the role and responsibilities of youth justice workers on Garda Youth Diversion Projects;
- Provide specific training for youth justice workers to address the prevalence of sexual games among children and young people;
- Monitor and evaluate impact on the basis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

### **Procedural Justice (Detection, Investigation, Prosecution, Court Proceedings)**

The long delays currently experienced in processing cases through the youth justice system were seen by participants as the primary barrier to ensuring that children and young people can experience a fair, respectful and just legal system. The need to ensure that this process is completed expeditiously in each case was universally agreed and emphasised by participants.

Participants also made numerous other recommendations to ensure procedural justice for children and young people in conflict with the law. These include:

- Enabling children and young people to engage in a mock court process prior to their court date – it was suggested that this could help to impress upon them the seriousness of their actions and the process in which they were engaged as a result;
- Training for all Gardaí in how to deal with young people appropriately;
- Explicitly recognising the role of poverty, exploitation and intimidation in the criminalisation of children and young people and employing a model that can address their welfare needs as well as their criminal/anti-social behaviour;
- Awareness raising for An Garda Síochána to promote a clearer identity for diversion projects within the youth justice system and a better understanding of the role of youth justice workers as distinct from other service providers;
- Extending the age range for referral to the projects in both directions to allow children and young people outside the 12-18 year age bracket to participate;
- Better follow up with past participants in order to track long-term project impact.

Participants also discussed the significant extent to which the role of the youth justice worker had evolved and change over time, particularly over the past four years, as well as acute ongoing difficulties around recruiting and retaining experienced workers.

### **Sanctions (including Detention) and Post-release and Re-integration**

Participants were strongly of the view that to ensure children and young people got the most appropriate supports once they had been found guilty of an offence by the courts it was necessary to utilise the full range of community sanctions and restorative justice processes. Participants were also strongly of the view that currently this is not being done.

It was suggested that in order to ensure that children and young people found guilty of an offence by the courts get the supports they need it was urgently necessary to expedite the

youth justice process. Participants remarked that in to the delays in the system young people often faced the prospect of being sentenced as adults for crimes that they committed as children. It was also seen as vitally important to ensure that appropriate supports are made available to young people in detention and young people aged 18-24.

Participants also discussed the need to establish support services to rehabilitate young people who had served a period in detention and reintegrate them into their communities. Whether or not the participation of young people in the available support programmes should be conditional on an admission of guilt was also discussed and there were mixed views in relation to this. Some participants stated that requiring young people to take responsibility for their actions was a necessary function of the youth justice system. Others felt that it was an insurmountable barrier to participation for some young people reflective of a punitive approach to youth justice that was out of step with international best practice.

## Guest speaker presentation: Pat Divilly, Author, Speaker and High Performance Coach

Pat Divilly delivered an interactive presentation focusing on personal development and self-care. He spoke about his own development and his recovery following a period of mental ill health, he guided delegates through a reflective exercise and introduced a simple self-care tool for delegates to use in their daily lives.

Mr. Divilly guided delegates in a reflective exercise during which they were invited to score their life satisfaction from 0-10 under eight categories: fitness; food; family; social; career; finances, hobbies and spirituality. The purpose of the exercise was to assist delegates in identifying which areas of their lives bring them greatest satisfaction and which are in need of attention.

Mr. Divilly said that the story's we tell ourselves about the world have a major impact on our wellbeing: he said that the story's that matter most are those that we tell ourselves about what love is, what success is and what happiness is.

Mr. Divilly introduced the 1-3-5 method which he invited delegates to use regularly to improve mindset and alleviate stress.

1. Today I am excited about...(morning)
3. Three things I did well today...(evening)
5. Five minutes of calm through box breathing - described as a four second inhale, four second hold, four second exhale, four second hold (anytime during the day every day).

Mr. Divilly encouraged delegates to look inwards and focus on their own development rather than thinking about the end result and turning their attention to the performance of others.

He concluded by thanking delegates for their work and the positive impact it has in world.

## Training needs wall of ideas

Throughout the day, participants were invited to reflect on each of the eight primary criminogenic risks/needs identified for children and young people and to make recommendations regarding any additional training that they felt they would benefit from in relation to each one by contributing their suggestions to a Training Needs Wall of Ideas.

The following recommendations for further training were made:

- Training for youth justice workers in the delivery of adolescent parenting programmes for staff in projects that do not offer family support initiatives;
- Training for youth justice workers to support children and young people in their relationships with teachers and schools;
- Training for youth justice workers in the delivery of education programmes that can lead to recognised qualifications;
- Training for youth justice workers in how to disrupt negative peer influences – in this regard participants also said they would like to see further research into the power of positive peer groups;
- Updated drug and alcohol training for youth justice workers;
- Training for youth justice workers in the delivery of early intervention programmes for children aged 8-12 years;
- Training for youth justice workers in the delivery of non-violent resistance programmes for parents;
- Training for youth justice workers in the delivery of trauma informed practice;
- Training for youth justice workers in how to manage trauma themselves – in this regard participants emphasised that this must include appropriate external supervision for youth justice workers.

Numerous suggestions for additional services for children and young people were also made including:

- The introduction of more alternatives to formal education on the one hand and Youthreach services for young people struggling to stay in education;

- The establishment of a Youth Justice Education fund to provide young people with education and vocational training and to support them to upskill;
- The introduction of more music based programmes for children and young people;
- Greater emphasis on non-competitive sports as a means to engage with children and young people long-term;
- Wider availability of equine therapy.

As was the case during many of the afternoon discussion groups, comments posted on the Training Needs Wall of Ideas also a focus on the need for more effective interagency coordination and cooperation, particularly with the education sector. With regard to the role of the education sector in the lives of children and young people, it was suggested that there was a need for complete transparency from school boards of management regarding the reasons for suspension/expulsion of individual students and that any such decision should only be taken in line with the protocols and processes established in the Education Welfare Act. It was also suggested that schools were not routinely reporting absences over the 20 day threshold to Tusla and that this reporting requirement should be more strictly enforced.

## Conclusion

This section draws together the main themes to emerge from the conference and highlights any conclusions reached. While it is not possible to capture here the points raised by every participant, the summary below is intended to give a sense of the main concerns raised by participants and the main solutions proposed.

### **Interagency cooperation**

The need for more effective interagency cooperation and a multi-agency approach to youth justice was raised repeatedly throughout the conference. In particular, the need for more effective cooperation with the education sector was seen as acute. The following suggestions were made in this regard:

- Institute regular meetings between youth justice workers, JLOs and teachers;
- Establish clear channels of communication between schools and local Garda Youth Diversion Projects;
- Provide training for youth justice workers in how to support children and young people in their relationships with teachers;
- Greater transparency regarding the reasons for suspension/expulsion of individual students;
- Adherence to the protocols and processes established in the Education Welfare Act in relation to suspension/expulsion;
- Routine reporting of absences in excess of the 20 day threshold to Tusla.

While the close working relationship established between youth justice workers and JLOs was said to be largely working well, participants also called for an enhanced role for community Gardaí especially in identifying younger children for referral to the available early intervention initiatives. Participants also called for training in youth justice methodologies for all Gardaí working with young people and greater acceptance of the practice wisdom of youth justice workers in the referrals process.



## **Innovation**

Participants emphasised the need for ongoing innovation and experimentation in the youth justice sector, particularly in relation to prevention and early intervention, family support, employment, managing trauma and working with harder to reach children and young people.

In this regard, the need for evidenced based interventions was broadly accepted and with it the necessity of piloting and rigorously evaluating all new approaches. Participants highlighted the need to ensure that both quantitative and qualitative data are given equal weight in all project reporting and called for the absence of longitudinal studies tracing the long-term impact of participation in Garda Youth Diversion Projects on the lives of children and young people to be addressed.

## **Reach**

The need to extend the reach of Garda Youth Diversion Projects to children and young people outside the 12-18 year old bracket was highlighted repeatedly during the conference. This was particularly the case regarding the 8-12 year old age group where the need was seen as most acute and the potential impact was seen as greatest. In this regard however, participants stated repeatedly that additional funding and resources were necessary including specially trained personnel and clear referral pathways. The need to ensure that younger children did not mix with older children and the need to develop alternative risk assessment tools for use with this younger group were also discussed.

Participants also emphasised the potential role of family support in reducing anti-social/criminal behaviour in children and young people. However, participants stressed that this work should not be undertaken by youth justice workers who were primarily responsible for working directly with children and young people. Rather it should be undertaken by specialists in family support who could work closely with youth justice workers to plan more effective interventions.

Participants were also in agreement that there was an unmet need for a differentiated approach to engaging harder to reach children and young people who were not suitable for referral to mainstream diversion projects due to the nature and/or frequency of their

offending. In line with the two specialist projects discussed at the conference, relentless outreach and intense one-to-one engagement were seen as key elements of this approach.

### **Trauma informed practice**

Participants recognised trauma as a significant driver of anti-social/criminal behaviour in children and young people and called for additional funding to ensure that all youth justice workers were trained in the delivery of trauma informed practice. In this regard, participants said that the YLS CMI/2.0 was not adequate to assess the presence of trauma in the lives of children and young people and how this impacted on risk.

Participants suggested that qualified therapists should be made available to the projects on a pilot basis to work with children and young people who were experiencing trauma.

Participants also called for greater recognition of the impact that work related trauma can have on youth justice workers and called for external supervision and/or longer term therapeutic support through the Employee Assistance Programme to be made available to address this.

### **Self-care**

Given the high levels of work related stress in the youth justice sector, participants called unequivocally for a more proactive approach to supporting workers' self-care. Participants were in agreement that self-care should not be viewed solely as the responsibility of individual workers but as a responsibility shared by workers and employers. The following suggestions were made:

- Provision of a dedicated in-service self-care room;
- Funding for activities to support workers' self-care;
- Provision of weekly in-service self-care support sessions;
- The possibility to take time off to attend to one's self-care even in the absence of an acute crisis;

- Better understanding from management of the need for and benefits of self-care for youth justice workers.