



Submission to the Dept of Justice on Diversion for young adults aged 18 to 24, January 2023.

1. Introduction

Le Chéile Mentoring welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in relation to Diversion for young adults aged 18 to 24.

Who we are

Our Mission: Le Chéile Mentoring is a national, volunteer mentoring and family support service, which works with young people and their families, where the young person is involved in or at risk of offending.

Our Vision: For every young person at risk - the right supports at the right time, to make the most of their lives.

Services for the 18 to 24 age group

This submission is informed by Le Cheile's experience of working with young adults on probation in the 18 to 24 age group since 2018.

Le Cheile's core service is volunteer delivered mentoring for the young adult and where appropriate for the parent/carer. Le Cheile staff also provide casework support to the young adult (e.g. supports access to addiction, education, housing, and mental health services, accompanying to appointments) and family support within limited resources. Restorative justice is provided in counties Limerick, Clare and Cork and we use a restorative approach in all our services.

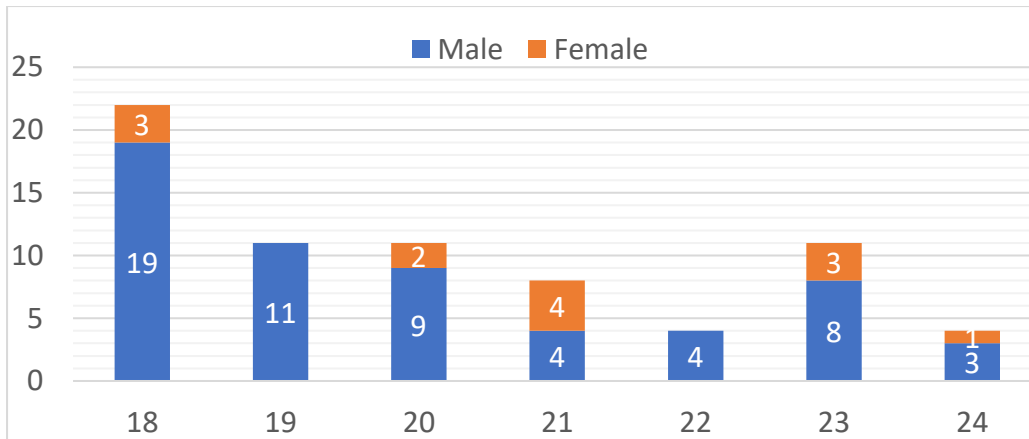
In 2022 we supported 71 young adults on probation with a 90% engagement rate.

2. Le Cheile experience of working with young adults on probation

Profile of young adults supported in 2022

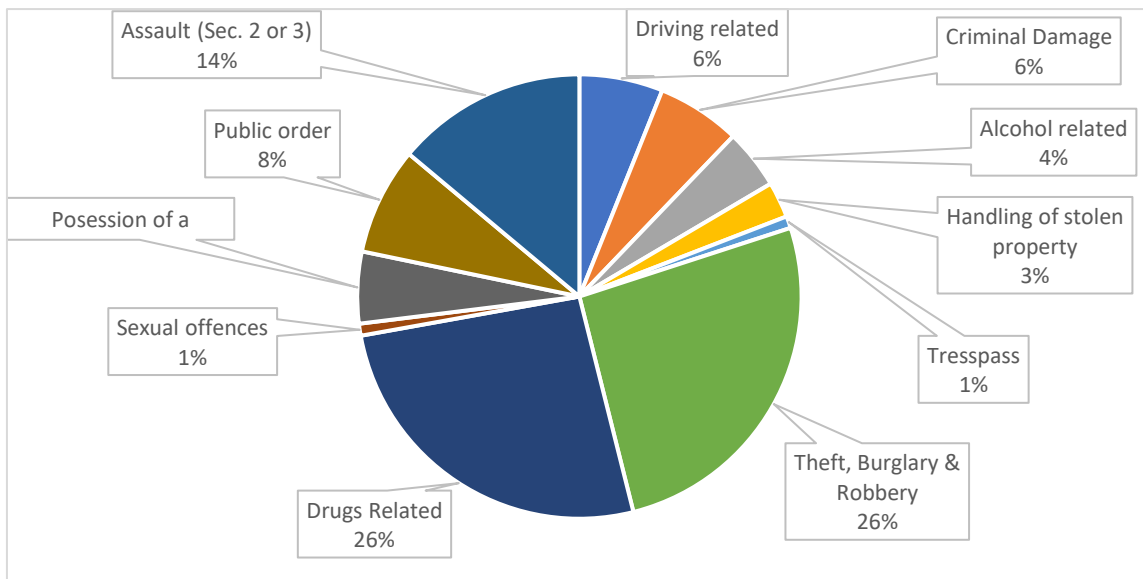
71 young adults aged 18 to 24 were supported, 63 through mentoring and 8 were involved in restorative justice programmes. The average age was 20 years of age. The gender breakdown was 82% male and 18% female.

Table 1 Age at referral by gender



Theft/burglary and substance abuse offences were the most common offences recorded at the point of referral.

Table 2 Offences at the point of referral



This submission is informed by the practice experience of Le Cheile staff who have worked with the young adult age group. Young adults tend to have committed multiple offences over many years and can be entrenched in offending behavior. Offending behavior often dates back to when they were under 18 and there is often confusion regarding what charges relate to and what offences are now in Court. Most young adults have come through the Garda Diversion Programme and other

interventions. Most are early school leavers and are unemployed with some being in low paid /casual employment. Mental health issues and trauma are common as well as addiction issues. Often complex family circumstances and damaged family relationships are a key issue. Some young adults have learning difficulties, sometimes diagnosed and other times not. There may be family involvement in crime as well as family members having been to prison. There is often conflict between the young adult and their family, leading to isolation and sometimes resulting in the young adult being homeless. Increasingly young adults may be homeless or living in very precarious accommodation arrangements. Anti-social peer groups and gangland influences also feature.

In our experience the 18 to 20 age group tend to be very immature and slower to make positive changes. This coincides with increased opportunity to secure alcohol/drugs and access to some income of their own. The 21 plus age group present as more mature and open to making changes in their lives. This development sometimes coincides with a partner/relationship which may be a driver for young adults wanting to make positive changes. At other times it is all about the timing being right for the young adult, a level of maturity being reached and the right supports being available at the right time.

Outcomes

The engagement rate in 2022 was extremely high at 90%. The drop out rate was low at 4%. It should be noted that not engaging or dropping out early can be due to a number of factors including the young adult going into detention or residential addiction services or coming to the end of their probation period or just not being interested in the service being offered.

Le Cheile measures youth outcomes using the Outcomes Justice star tool. As can be seen in table 3, there were significant improvements in relation to reduced offending, positive use of time, less substance abuse, friendships and community involvement and better health and wellbeing. 80% of the young adults had an improvement in at least 2 outcome areas.

Table 3 Young adult outcomes 2020 to 2022

Top 5 areas of progress	
Area	% made progress
A crime free life	58%
Positive use of time	55%
Drugs and Alcohol	52%
Friends and Community	54%
Mental Health and Wellbeing	48%

Top 3 areas of drop back	
Area	% dropped back
Living skills and selfcare	27%
Mental health and wellbeing	21%
Accommodation	21%

There were also significant reductions in a number of outcomes i.e. living skills and self care, mental health and accommodation. It should be noted that the time period 2020 to 2022 coincided with the pandemic which would have impacted on outcomes, in particular mental health and accommodation. Accommodation outcomes have also been impacted by the ongoing accommodation crisis.

3. Feedback on the Department of Justice discussion document on Diversion for young adults aged 18 to 24

Le Cheile welcomes the publication of the discussion document and the commitment to develop diversion measures for 18 to 24 year old's.

We welcome the principles outlined in section 1.4.

We agree and welcome the commitment to develop a different approach for young adults, which will include supports in relation to employment, education and training as well as other personal support needs including mental health and addiction issues. We agree with the idea of an individualised form of support or supervision in the community, with graduated levels of support or intervention depending on the circumstances of the individual involved.

We welcome the inclusion of mentoring as part of the diversion support. The Probation Service has been referring young adults to Le Cheile Mentoring for a number of years and has produced positive outcomes. Mentoring can act as a conduit to access to other supports such as education and addiction services.

We agree that the YDP model is not appropriate for child protection and suitability reasons to meet the needs of this age group.

4. Elements of a Diversion Model for 18 to 24 year old's

It is noted that the Youth Justice Strategy recognises that "the provisions of the Children Act should apply to the processing of an offence with reference to age at the time it is committed, irrespective of the age of the young person when the case actually comes to Court." Young adults should be dealt with in Court according to the age at which the offence was committed (and not the age at which they find themselves before the Court).

Diversion approach pre-prosecution, while on probation and in detention. Participation on a voluntary basis.

Expansion of the Adult Cautioning Scheme might be suitable for some young adults, however a caution accompanied with no tailored interventions is unlikely to address the underlying causes of offending behaviour by young adults. The Diversion response should be considered on a case by case basis and should be tailor-made to individual needs.

Expansion of the Bail Supervision Scheme to 18 to 24 year old's.

Detention as a last resort.

Additional resources will be needed by community organisations providing supports considering the level of need of the young adults involved and the likely increase in referrals.

A lead agency/role is required to assess needs, coordinate a response including inter-agency collaboration, referral to mentoring and or other community support and services.

Participation in diversion to be on a voluntary basis.

Inclusion of mentoring, as a key relationship to support goals agreed with the young adult and as a support to access other services.

Importance of family support, to include practical family support and interventions which support improved family functioning and relationships. The role of a parent/other relative in supporting engagement and desistance in young adults is critical.

Provision of parenting support for young adults who are parents themselves, which can be provided as part of mentoring. This is often a catalyst for change when the young adult becomes a parent themselves and an opportunity to influence outcomes for the next generation.

Coordination and access to education/training/employment supports; addiction and mental health supports.

Inclusion of Restorative justice, including restorative conference (victim and offender), family conferences, victim offender mediation and victim empathy programmes.

Mentoring relationship in prison and post release.

May be potential for (very) small group work to be used where the numbers and needs allow it.

Importance of community linkages and networking and to harness community support.

Training for youth justice workers involved in working with young adults.

5. Conclusion

Le Cheile welcomes the publication of the discussion document and the commitment to develop diversion measures for 18 to 24 year old's. While young adults should be accountable for their actions and behaviours, exposure to the formal criminal justice system and/or a criminal conviction can harm a young person's future life prospects. Where possible, appropriate diversionary options should be explored at all stages of contact with the criminal justice system. Diversion for 18 to 24 age group has been shown to work with young adults on probation.

We trust that there will be further opportunities to discuss the proposed Diversion approach. Le Cheile would also be willing to assist in providing access to young adults who have experienced diversion so that any new approaches will be informed by the experience of those directly affected.

ENDS

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Jan 17th 2023