



Consultation with Young People
on their experience of Le Chéile Mentoring

*“if you are being offered a service like that, grab it with both hands
because it really really helps, it really does help,
I don't think anyone wants to go to jail”*

Young Man, Age 17, Limerick

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1. About this Consultation

This report was commissioned by Le Cheile Mentoring and has been compiled following a consultation with young people who have taken part in the Le Chéile Mentoring and Restorative Justice Service. Participation in the context of children and young people should ensure that they are empowered, enabled, have active involvement in decisions about their own lives and have real influence on matters that affect them. Following the model of participation outlined by Professor Lundy (2007), this consultation aims to provide the space, voice, audience and influence aspects of Lundy's model to young people. The consultation gave young people an opportunity to give their feedback on their experience with Le Chéile Mentoring who are their audience.

For the consultation to achieve the maximum output in terms of feedback from young people, it was felt that face to face interviews would be the preferred method of consultation. This was to enable young people to expand and explain their responses in more detail than they might do in written form online or on the telephone. It was also felt it would achieve better quality feedback from the participants due to capacity and possible literacy issues. Every effort was made to meet as many as possible in a 4 week period. Those who were unable to make it to a face to face interview or where the consultant was unable to get to a particular location, were encouraged to complete an online survey.

The questions from the face to face interview and the online survey were the same. It was evident that the face to face consultations allowed young people to give a more qualitative response and to contextualize their answers. The online participants responded better to the multiple choice answers and tick box questions. All participants consented to taking part and were informed that the findings were anonymous and that for the purpose of this report, they would not be personally identified. Hence, any quotations in this report are taken directly from interviews with participants, however are anonymous.

A total of 14 young people took part in this consultation and of these, 57% (8) were face to face interviews. There were 11 male and 3 female participants who ranged in age from 15-23 years of age. The participants came from a broad geographic spread across the country such as Ballymun Dublin 11, Oberstown Detention Centre Co Dublin, Portlaoise Co Laois, Trim Co Meath, Ennis Co Clare, Southill Co Limerick. Interviews took place in a variety of locations which were all selected as they were accessible to young people and where they felt comfortable. These were in a Probation

office, Oberstown Children Detention Campus, a hotel lobby, a youth centre, a courthouse, a cafe.

42% (6) of those who took part in the consultation have been engaged with Le Chéile for over 1 year and the other 58% less than 1 year. All young people who took part in face to face consultations engaged very well and were able to answer all questions. In the online survey, not all open questions were answered. For the purpose of this report, Le Chéile Mentoring includes the Restorative Justice Programme which is exclusively based in Limerick. and Clare. Two of the young people who took part in face to face interviews were part of the Restorative Justice Programme and the same questions were used.

2. Expectations of Participants

Young people were asked about their expectations of Le Chéile Mentoring with a view to gaining insight into their perception of the service and how the organisation meets these expectations. 12 out of the 14 young people said they meet their Le Chéile mentor or Restorative Justice Worker on a weekly basis and 2 meet every 2 weeks. All young people felt that the regularity of their meetings were enough and met their needs. There was some variation on this, which showed that occasionally if there was a change in circumstances, some of them felt a greater need to meet with their mentor. One young woman captured this in saying *'if I am having a good week it's enough, if I'm not I would like to meet once or twice a week.'* and another young man felt *'if I wasn't in work, I'd meet every week.'*

Overall, young people's responses told of their perception of services in general, and in the case of Le Chéile Mentoring, there was a clear comparison between their perceived expectations and their actual experience when they engaged with Le Chéile Mentoring. 79% of those who responded said that Le Chéile was not what they expected and *'thought it would be like other services'*. One young man said *'it was not like what I expected, they help with whatever I need, I was expecting to be talking about shite, but they're helping me.'* All young people who answered had a negative expectation and talked about feeling nervous about meeting somebody new and not knowing what they had to talk about. They all perceived that they would not like it or weren't that bothered about participating, that it would be *'all pens and paper'* and *'talking about what they did wrong with people taking notes.'* This was a general negative expectation overall prior to engagement. There were mixed reasons for deciding to try it such as it being something new or they felt that jail was

the only other option. One young woman stated she was *'not too bothered about it, the more I realised I needed it, the more it is after helping me, I love going now.'*

However, the feedback regarding how their experience actually was with Le Chéile Mentoring after engaging initially was overwhelmingly focused on 'talking', being 'valued' and feeling a level of care. *'It definitely wasn't like what I expected, felt like I could sit down and talk with my service (Le Chéile) my opinion was valued, I felt like I was actually cared for, not like the person on the other side of the table was just doing their job, it felt like there was actual care there.'* and another young person saying that *'you can actually talk to them, tell them how you're feeling'*.

With regard to Restorative Justice in particular, the participants reflected that although it was different to their expectations, it was actually challenging for them in a way they hadn't expected because they had to work at it and it made them think. *'It is harder than expected, harder than it looks, have to own up to the facts of how you are going to fix it, to do that is harder than being locked up, I think its very easy to be up in Oberstown, you get your dinner, it takes a real man and a real person to actually put his hand up and say I did this and I'll fix it'*.

All young people spoke highly of their mentors and it was evident that the relationship with their mentors was very important and critical to the success of their experience with Le Chéile. They described being able to talk as having enormous value and that the talking was being done with somebody outside their family circle was identified as positive. Young people spoke about the importance and value of talking in the context of having a good relationship and rapport with their mentor and having a 'good match'. Two young people had previous experience of taking part in Le Chéile Mentoring and had disengaged, however on re-engagement they had a different mentor which they both identified as a being a 'better match' in terms of personality and how they get along. They felt that this was the main factor in the current success of their current engagement. Two other young people mentioned the fact that their mentors had similar life experiences to them was which helpful as they felt better understood.

3. Benefits of participation with Le Chéile Mentoring

When asked what they liked specifically about meeting with their mentor and what they could identify as beneficial, over half of those who took part in face to face interviews mentioned talking and being able to express themselves, *'I feel wrecked from talking, but positive that I'm doing the right thing'*. Food was an important element of meetings with their mentor and having it paid for was important as was having bus fare paid for. Young people also talked about going to mentoring meetings as being an opportunity to having a break from home and the family, even in the case where the relationship was good at home. In addition, it was a chance for somewhere to go and to get out and about.

There was a strong sense in all interviews of the trust felt towards their mentor and a sense of not feeling judged even though they had committed crimes. *'They don't treat you as if you are a bad person, they treat you as if you are the same as them, that's key...it takes two to tango, I have to do my part. We have to meet in the middle.'* Some interviewees mentioned the friendliness of their mentors and the fun element being very important during the sessions by saying *'it's relaxed, good fun, not just sitting down talking you can have a laugh with your mentor, have a space to chill.'*

Learning was also identified by young people as being important and this was particularly evident with the Restorative Justice participants who felt that although it was hard work, that was a positive. One young man said *'it's not like you're going to court where you just get told things, you can have a chat about things, do sheet activities and you don't know there the things you are doing, put through situations where you can see it, it's good.'* All of the participants interviewed reflected well on their experience and proved to be very insightful. For example one young person saying *'You learned it's not just about the justice, it's about you as well,it's different than talking to your mother cos its never going to come back.'* and *'my behaviour, definitely, without them I wouldn't know what.'*

There was a variety of key outcomes identified by young people themselves, which came from taking part in Le Chéile Mentoring. All of those who were consulted in face-to-face interviews identified the benefit of talking and expressing themselves. Although one respondent to the online survey felt there was nothing that has been helpful so far, six participants specifically mentioned that their behaviour had changed and they were managing to stay out of trouble as a result of their

engagement with the service. Others could identify that mental health was a factor and that they felt relief from talking and a clearer head with *'the weight taken off my shoulders.'*

With all the participants of the face-to-face interviews, there was also a strong sense of them being able to put their crimes into perspective and to see how destructive their behaviour was. One young man said he felt good that he wasn't drinking every weekend and 'wrecking the place' but felt shame when he thought he used to be like that. Some of the young people could identify the risk they were putting themselves and other people in and overall they could see a difference in themselves.

4. Challenges and Change

With regard to what participants found difficult about taking part in Le Chéile Mentoring, there was a general theme of time and keeping appointments as being a challenge. It is clear that most of the young people have a lack of routine and often have chaotic lifestyles. External factors were identified as being difficulties in taking part in Le Chéile Mentoring as opposed to difficulties about the mentoring sessions themselves or the mentoring process. They identified their own lifestyles, mental health and routine as being the main external challenges to taking part in the mentoring sessions and one young person mentioned having a 'forgetful' mentor as a difficulty.

The young people who took part in the consultation were happy with their mentoring sessions and did not identify any major changes they would like to see. Again, there was a theme of talking and food being important; *'you can have a laugh at the meetings, but once your laugh is over it's down to business. That's key, I think that is very important – you have to come in, have a laugh and a joke and get down into it. Get into why you are here. Wouldn't want to change that'.*

One young person mentioned that it was good to be able to meet 'where it's handy' as a positive. Two of the participants identified that they had expected sessions to be as part of a small group and one of these suggested that mixing people together as something to change. It is worth noting that both of the young people who expected and would have liked group work were female.

78% of young people responded positively when asked how they would advise young people who may be thinking about engaging with Le Chéile. The majority said 'do it' and 'give it a shot'.

Another young man provided further insight when he said *'I felt it wasn't going to work for me and it has worked, I've been through a lot of services and I know what I'm on about.'*

5. Themes

It was very clear from this consultation that relationships are a key element in young people's positive engagement with Le Cheile. The importance of trust and having a sense of not being judged play a major part in how young people will engage and buy into the process. Although all young people could acknowledge their crimes, being treated as a partner in the process and being treated respectfully seemed to give the process a lot more weight in the eyes of the young people. One young person even spoke about feeling a level of care towards him and how this was very important in his level of participation.

The power of talking has long been acknowledged by those working in the area of counselling and psychotherapy and many care settings and this is re-enforced here. It appears that the mentoring sessions give the young people a sense of feeling permission to talk and enabling them to express themselves. Even as one respondent said that although he found the talking exhausting, he knew it was beneficial.

The fun element of the mentoring sessions are very important to young people and being able to have a laugh while also getting down to business and spending time talking and reflecting on the issues at hand. In addition, location was identified as important as mentoring sessions all take place in locations that are accessible to young people and where they feel comfortable which concurs with Lundy's model of youth participation.

6. Recommendations

Recommendations come directly from participants of Le Chéile Mentoring who proved to be insightful and clear about what they felt would support them and might enhance this support. It is evident that overall those who took part in this consultation have had very beneficial support from Le Chéile Mentoring and have given positive yet constructive feedback.

Key recommendations are:

1. Explore the possibility of re engaging young people who have successfully participated in the Le Chéile Mentoring programme with a view to them becoming mentors themselves. Some of the young people interviewed showed a high level of insight and understanding of their own behaviour and their own journey to staying out of trouble and away from the Justice System. They also demonstrated an understanding of their behaviour in a societal context and factors that have influenced their actions and subsequent change in attitude. Some of those interviewed felt it was helpful that their mentors may have had similar life experiences in the past, meaning similar challenges of leading a chaotic lifestyle and getting into trouble with the law. For those who have reached the capacity to understand their own process in leading a crime free life, it would provide a clear progression path and provide further evidence of the successes already being achieved by the Le Chéile Mentoring service. It would also demonstrate a very tangible example of positive peer role modelling and youth leadership at a fundamental level.
2. Two young people specifically mentioned having older mentors as beneficial. It may be that this might suit some better than having somebody closer to their own age. Perhaps having this as an option might suit some depending on personality, as one young man discussed how the younger generations should actually listen to the older generations, which would indicate that having life experience is something that is recognised and valued.
3. The two female respondents specifically suggested having a group of peers as something they had expected and would like. This may be a gender preference and would be worth exploring. As well as receiving support from an individual mentor, an extra layer of peer mentoring and support through group work, if managed tightly, could provide a forum for progression and potential youth leadership. A 'drop in' setting for over 18s was also

suggested as many of these outlets for young people finish at age 18. This may be something to consider in a collaborative piece with a youth service

4. All interviewees appeared to benefit and appreciate being referred to Le Chéile Mentoring and Restorative Justice and seemed to find relief from the approach used. It would seem that early referral to this service would optimize opportunities for change and progression for young people involved in the Justice System.

Appendix i

Questionnaire for young people involved with the Justice System and who engage with Le Cheile Mentoring and Restorative Justice

Explanatory note on the consultation

- I have read and understand the reasons for this survey and I am willing to participate in the consultation process Y/N
- I give consent to take part in this survey and I am aged 18 years + Y/N
- I am under 18 and I have received parental consent to take part in this survey Y/N
- I understand that support is available to me after the survey if I need it Y/N

1 How often do you meet with Le Cheile staff and volunteers:

Mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - once a week - twice a week - once every 2 weeks - once a month - I don't go to this services
Restorative Justice worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - once a week - twice a week - once every 2 weeks - once a month - I don't go to this service

2. Is this enough?

Mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes - No - I don't go to this service
Restorative Justice worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes - No - I don't go to this service

3. How did you feel about taking part in the following for the first time:

Mentoring	<p>Nervous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I didn't want to do it - Curious to see what it was about - Glad that I was going to try something new - Hopeful that it might help - Anything else? Please explain_____
Restorative Justice	<p>Nervous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I didn't want to do it - Curious to see what it was about - Glad that I was going to try something new - Hopeful that it might help - Anything else? Please Explain_____

4. Is it like what you expected?

Mentoring	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes it is what I expected 2. No it's different to what I expected can you explain why ?
Restorative Justice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Yes it is what I expected 4. No it's different to what I expected can you explain why

5. What is the thing you like most about taking part in Mentoring or Restorative Justice ?

6. Which best describes how you feel when you have done your session with your Mentor or Restorative Justice worker ?

- Frustration, its time wasted
- Can't wait to get it over with
 - Confused
 - A clearer head
 - Relaxed, it was good fun
- Relief, it was good to have someone to talk to.
- Other, please explain

7. What has meeting with your mentor or Restorative Justice Worker helped you with specifically?

8. What is difficult about taking part and meeting with your Mentor or Restorative Justice worker ?

9. If there was anything that could be done differently by either your Mentor or Restorative Justice Worker, please tell us

Mentoring Service	
Restorative Justice Service	

10. What would you like to say to future young people le Chéile will be working with to make the service better for young people?

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this survey, if you have been affected by any of the questions please link in with your mentor or Le Cheile staff member for support.

Appendix ii

Consultation with young people who take part in the Le Cheile Mentoring and Youth Justice Support Programme : November 2019

Information sheet for young people who take part in the Le Cheile Mentoring

What is it about ?

A consultation is a conversation about something, to find out more about it and then to use the information to improve it! This consultation is a chance for you to take part in the conversation. In this case, it is about your experience of taking part in Le Cheile Mentoring.

It is also a chance to talk about your experience of the Youth Justice System, for example :

1. An Garda Siochana
2. The Courts
3. The Juvenile Liaison Office
4. The Probation Service

There is no right or wrong answer to any questions that are asked. As you are the expert of your own experience! We want to hear what you have to say!

Why we want to talk to you ?

The government is putting together a new Youth Justice Strategy which is a document that will outline how things should work in the Justice System. This document will affect any young person who is involved with the Youth Justice System in Ireland. Le Chéile believes it is extremely important that your thoughts and opinions are taken into consideration. Le Chéile wants to use the information you provide to influence and improve the way Le Cheile and the Youth Justice System works with young people. Any improvements might not be noticed straight away or while you are involved in the Justice System. It is important to try make improvements for future young people.

Do I have to take part ?

It is your choice whether to take part or not and saying no will not affect the service you are provided from Le Chéile. You can also withdraw from any interview even if you first agreed to do it, and at any time. You don't have to give us the reason why you no longer want to take part. If you withdraw at any stage, we will not use anything that you told us before you decided to no longer take part.

Your opinion is valued and appreciated in a consultation like this and we hope you will look at it as a learning experience and a way of making a positive contribution.

Will anyone else know what I said ?

The person doing the consultation is Lynne she will make notes of what you say. Lynne may ask you to agree to being recorded, but your name will not be shown in any documents or reports. Lynne may record quotes, but will not write anything in the final report that would identify you or anyone else. Lynne will be the only one to know who said what. The only exception to this is if someone says that they are about to hurt themselves or somebody else, or that they know of a child being hurt – if this happens she may have to pass this information on to the Gardai and your Le Chéile Coordinator

Appendix iii



Consent Form for Young People and their Parents / Legal Guardians to participate in the consultation to inform the Youth Justice Strategy 2020

Young person

	Please tick
I confirm that I have been given information about the reserach and understand what it is about.	
I confirm that I have had the oppotunity to ask questions and that these have been answered.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I agree to participate in an interview which may be recorded by the consultant. I agree to participate in an online anonymous survey I understand I can ask for support after the consultation	

Signed _____ **Date** _____

Parent Guardian (if participant is under 18)

	Please tick
I confirm that I have been given information about the consultation and I understand what it is.	
I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that these have been answered.	
I understand that my child's participation in the consultation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without given a reason.	
I understand that the consultant will record the interview and take notes, that these will be held securely and that my child's name will not be used in the final report.	
I agree for my child, for whom I am the legal guardian to participate in an interview and an online anonymous survey I am aware that my child can avail of support after the consultation process from a le cheile staff member/ mentor if required	

Signed _____ **Date** _____