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An Evaluation of 'Street work' as a Model of Detached Youth Work in Community Based Probation Practice: Challenges & Opportunities

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CARL Research Project

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Name and year of course:	Master of Social Work, 2012
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Executive Summary

Background to the Study

'Street work' – a model of detached youth work, where street workers walk around housing estates, meeting local youth and their families, is utilised by Southill Outreach within the south side housing estates in Limerick City. This method of engaging youth has been used since 1990 when the project was set up. Since then there has been no evaluation on how effective 'street work' is at engaging youth and how youth perceive this service. Southill Outreach opted for Science Shop research in order for this study to be carried out. The researcher is also employed by Southill Outreach and has a good knowledge of the topic and the youth involved.

Objectives

The following two objectives were decided on for this study:

1. To gain an understanding of 'street work' as a model of engaging youth who are detached from services, or youth referred from the Probation Service.
2. To develop an understanding of how this model of engagement can benefit/hinder probation practice.

Methodology

This research took on a participatory role with Southill Outreach. This primary research took a qualitative approach, using interviews with young people and a focus group with staff and the Board of Management members of Southill Outreach. In addition, a comprehensive literature review was carried out. An interpretative approach was taken to analyse the data, and a thematic approach was used for coding the data into relevant themes.

Results

Results showed that the perceptions of young people, staff and Board of Management members of Southill Outreach were very positive. The 'street work' role was identified and

also other themes such as The Relationship, Interagency Collaboration, Preventative work, and The Relevance to Probation Practice were all detailed.

Recommendations and Implications of the Study's Findings

The focus group and interviews, along with the literature, provided the researcher with some recommendations of use to Southill Outreach to ensure the work is carried out effectively. These include the development of outcomes for funders, becoming involved in a multi-agency approach to 'street work' and, further large scale research in the area, to include the community as a whole.

Authors Conclusion

This research was a worthwhile and important study to conduct for Southill Outreach. It provided recommendations for the further development of the service and presented an in depth picture of how Southill Outreach clients perceive the service. This can only be of benefit to the agency. The researcher thoroughly enjoyed conducting this research.

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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of Southill Outreach staff members, Board of Management and young people of 'street work'. Internationally, this model of detached youth work is not a new means of meeting youth on the street, but is relatively new to Ireland. This study presents findings from relevant national and international literature, from five interviews with Southill Outreach clients and, from a focus group comprising of staff members and the Board of Management. A thematic analysis identified themes of importance regarding the functions and effectiveness of 'street work' in the south side of Limerick City. The findings suggest that 'street work' is an effective way of working with not only, detached youth and Probation Service referrals, but also their families and the wider community. The findings illustrate that 'street work' needs to be developed to include volunteers and/or other agencies to expand the service. Identifiable outcomes for appropriate recognition and funding also need to be developed.

Chapter One: Introduction & Background

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the research topic by providing background information on the Community Service Organisation (hereafter CSO), Southill Outreach, the definition of 'street work', and the researcher's rationale for carrying out this study. This chapter will also outline the research aims, and objectives and research questions underpinning this study. Finally, this chapter will detail the chapters to come.

1.2 Agency Profile

One of The Irish Youth Justice System's (IYJS) roles is to ensure the 'effective development and execution of strategy in relation to reducing youth crime' (Redmond and Dack, 2011, p.4). This is carried out through the provision of community based organisations as a non custodial intervention for young offenders (Ibid). Southill Outreach, in partnership with the Probation Service was founded in 1990 as a response to the anti-social behaviour in Southill, Limerick. This service was originally set up to help young people, particularly males who were beyond the reach of other agencies, who were joyriding, hanging around bonfires and excluded from services. The aim of Southill Outreach is to work with youth who are liable to become absorbed in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour, and 'who are currently at the judicial stage and who are in detention centres where both pre and post supports are provided' (Ibid, p.9). At present, there are eight staff members including: a Manager, three full time Youth Outreach Workers, two part-time Youth Outreach Workers, one Youth Links Officer (who works with young people in detention centres and prisons) and an Administrator.

Southill Outreach work with young people who are referred by the Probation Service (80%) and other young people (20%) identified as 'at risk' by staff members and statutory agencies – such as the HSE, and voluntary agencies, such as the local Youth Encounter Project. These young people are aged 12-18, with a possible support for young adults up to the age of 23 (Redmond and Dack, 2011). Southill Outreach mainly works with young people from

Limerick City and County, but will also work with young people from Counties Tipperary and Clare if referred by the Probation Service.

1.3 'Street Work'

Part of the remit of Southill Outreach includes doing 'street work'. 'Street work', which is a model of engaging detached youth, has been utilised by staff members of Southill Outreach since 1990. This type of work is carried out with the aim of meeting local youth, especially those who are disengaged from services, through walking in pairs around housing estates in Limerick City at times when youth are most vulnerable - at night, at the weekend and after clubs and other services have finished. This service is carried out in the catchment area of the south side of Limerick City. Different services are provided by other agencies in the north side.

In addition, 'street work' allows workers to identify client's peer groups, their involvement in anti-social behaviour and issues such as isolation, which can then be focused on when working with the clients thereafter. It allows staff members to meet clients that are otherwise un-contactable. Staff members become familiar to the community, by having a constant visual presence on the street and this is perceived by the service to reduce the risk to staff member's safety. The thinking behind 'street work' is that it allows staff members to meet younger family members who may be potential clients in the future, which is important for relationship building.

Young people in the south side of Limerick City respond well to this method of engagement and will often use this opportunity to seek help in relation to issues or concerns, for example, school problems, drug use and criminal charges. The philosophy around 'street work' is that youth are more likely to open up when met on the street in their own environment, among peers, as they are not in a formal environment, such as an office. This work is therefore unconditional – clients are met in their own community, doing what they normally do. There is no pressure on them to engage. 'Street work' also involves meeting with families and calling to homes. It is accepted worker knowledge that family members often feel more comfortable conversing when it takes place without previous arrangement and issues of concern will often be identified in relation to their children. Family members who would tend to avoid approaching the office can seek out staff members on the street.

1.4 The Unique Context of Limerick City

Limerick as a city has many advantages, these include sites of historic interest, river based walkways and facilities and has been titled the European City of Sport in 2010 for the year 2011 (Limerick Leader, 2010), with many successes such as boxing and rugby. This is not the image of Limerick that is portrayed by the media; it unfortunately is one of social exclusion, disadvantage and gangland crime. Limerick City is distinguished by huge inequality in the division of wealth compared to the rest of the country (Humphreys, et al, 2012), thus leaving many areas deprived and disadvantaged. Large local authority housing estates built side by side in the south side and the north side of the city 'has created a pattern of social segregation which negatively affects cohesion of the city as a whole' (Ibid, 2012, p.38).

'Street work' is currently being carried out in the south side of Limerick City in the Southill Estates of Keyes Park, John Carew Park, Kincora Park and O' Malley Park, and also in the Ballinacurra Weston and Prospect areas, which is comprised of large avenues of social housing.

Southill, an area deemed essential for regeneration, endures 'acute problems of disadvantage, a high unemployment rate, significant educational disadvantage with educational attainments well below the national norm' (Fitzgerald, 2007, p.2). Due to many of these difficulties in Southill, people began to move out of the area from the 1980's onwards. From the years, 1981-1991, 26% of the people living in O'Malley Park (area of Southill) left the area and from 1991-2006, a further 43% left, (McCafferty, 2011).

1.5 Rationale

In the past twenty-two years research has never been carried out for Southill Outreach in relation to 'street work'. It was identified by management and staff members of Southill Outreach that research needed to be carried out in this area in order to identify the benefits and disadvantages of engaging in 'street work' for both staff and the client group. In addition, Southill Outreach wanted to hear the valid opinion of the young people of the south side of the city - to identify their perceptions of 'street work'. For this reason, Southill Outreach opted for Science Shop research and a participatory approach. This aims to take a

'bottom up' approach, thus involving the community, their needs and opinions (Cornwall and Jewekes, 1995).

Given the researcher's unique position as a Youth Outreach Worker within Southill Outreach, she is interested in, and wanted to further understand 'street work', from the young person's perspective and also to understand if it is of benefit to the Probation Service. It is accepted worker knowledge that Southill Outreach staff members have been accepted and welcomed on the streets at times when emergency services were regularly attacked. Also, the continued funding of this service is indicative of the success of 'street work' but research needs to question how this works and why.

1.6 Research Aim:

In agreement with the CSO, the overall aim of this research is to evaluate 'street work' as a model of engaging young people through gaining perspectives from the clients, and the staff and Board of Management of Southill Outreach.

1.7 Research Objectives

3. To gain an understanding of 'street work' as a model of engaging youth who are detached from services, or youth referred from the Probation Service.
4. To develop an understanding of how this model of engagement can benefit/hinder probation practice.

1.8 Research Questions

1. How do clients, staff members and the Board of Management of Southill Outreach perceive 'street work', and its influence within the community?
2. How do clients, staff members and the Board of Management perceive the effectiveness of 'street work'?
3. How can 'street work' be utilised for future probation practice?

1.9 Relevance to Social Work

This study has a direct link to social work and probation practice. The CSO is a community based probation project and its clients are probation referrals. This study also uses an ecological framework to look at how clients, staff and board members perceive 'street work' - an example of social work theory being used. This study takes into account relevant social work policies, child protection, children's rights and the Children Act 2001. Findings from this study may provide opportunities for other community based probation funded projects to engage in 'street work' within communities elsewhere.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter set the context for the study; it provided information and a background on Southill Outreach and the uniqueness of Limerick City. The research rational, aims, objectives and questions underpinning this study were outlined. The relevance of this research to both social work and probation practice were highlighted. Below, the structure of the following chapters of this study, are highlighted.

1.11 Research structure

- Chapter 1:

This chapter introduced the research topic by providing background information on Southill Outreach. The researcher's rationale, aims, objectives and research questions were detailed. Finally it outlined the chapters to come.

- Chapter Two:

This chapter will discuss the methodology for this research including the methodology used throughout this study. The theoretical framework and the participatory approach taken will be outlined. The research methods will be described and the interpretative thematic analyses employed will be detailed. Finally, ethical considerations, strengths and limitations will be considered.

- Chapter Three:

Relevant literature in relation to 'street work' on a national and international context will be presented within this chapter.

- Chapter Four:

Discussion and analysis of the findings from the five interviews and the focus group will be depicted in this chapter using a thematic approach.

- Chapter Five:

This chapter will provide the key findings and outline overall conclusions from this study followed by recommendations for the future. Further dissemination of these results will also be outlined.

- Chapter 6

The researcher's reflection in relation to carrying out this study will be depicted in this chapter. Also, the difficulties and opportunities of carrying out research while being employed by the agency will be highlighted.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to gain perspectives from Southill Outreach clients, staff and Board of Management members in relation to 'street work' as a model of detached youth work in probation practice. This chapter will describe the methodology used throughout this study. The theoretical framework and the participatory approach taken will be outlined. The research methods, interviews and the focus group will be described and the interpretative thematic analysis employed will be detailed. Finally, ethical considerations, strengths and limitations will be considered.

2.2 Theoretical Perspective

Throughout this study, the researcher aimed to take an ecological approach. This approach sees the young person's progression and development in perspective of the different relationships that is the basis of his/her life (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). While Southill Outreach's remit is to work with young people, this cannot effectively be carried out without looking at the systems that are functioning/malfunctioning surrounding that young person. The researcher as a worker of Southill Outreach advocates that a young person should not be worked with in isolation without consideration been given to the systems that the young person is intertwined in. 'Street work' enables outreach workers to see the child within that system – their family, peers, community and environment.

2.3 Design

An evaluation of the effectiveness of 'street work' was carried out because the researcher aspired to gain a comprehension of complex issues and not just a factual understanding of what Southill Outreach achieves through 'street work'. 'It aims to move beyond "just getting the facts" in order to make sense of myriad human, political, social, cultural and contextual elements involved' (Walliman, 2005, p.119).

This community based research study employed a participatory approach to the research design and data collection. Participatory research acknowledges that local knowledge and opinions should shape the research (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995). Southill Outreach identified the research need within the agency and also made decisions on the interview and focus group participants. It was deemed essential that young people be included in this study to ensure their voices and the voice of the local community was heard, in relation to 'street work'. This is consistent with one of the key principles of child protection, that 'children have a right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously' (Children First, 2011, p16). Participatory research enabled Southill Outreach clients to have a voice in relation to looking back on childhood/adolescent experiences of 'street work', and looking forward to the future of 'street work' as a service available to younger siblings and the wider community. It also gave the Outreach staff and board members the opportunity to voice their opinions through the focus group, on the work they are doing within the community.

Qualitative research was carried out because it allowed the researcher to interpret data. Data that is 'rich' is unlikely to be gained from quantitative methods. (Grix, 2004, p.120) In this research, two data collection methods were employed in taking a qualitative approach, namely, interviews and a focus group. This allowed for in depth answers to interview questions and a detailed discussion through the focus group. Some clients had literacy difficulties and may have found other methods more difficult, such as questionnaires. It would also be difficult to quantify the perceptions, and feelings of the participants through the use of quantitative methods. Qualitative methods allow for detailed answers in relation to opinions, behaviours and attitudes (Carey, 2009). Therefore, the researcher felt that qualitative methods suited this piece of research best. This research was small scale and focused on one aspect of the work of Southill Outreach, thus, it may not be transferable to the way in which other agencies work with detached youth.

2.4 Data Selection

Theoretical sampling was utilised for the interviews, where information was received from a population that the researcher thinks knows the most about the research topic (Walliman, 2005). A section of the population, who are seldom asked about how they perceive services and the importance of their opinion, was identified for the interviews. The researcher interviewed a sample of five clients who were:

- Over eighteen
- Is/was a client of the Probation Service
- Has experiences of 'street work' as an adolescent in the south side of Limerick City
- Is still engaging with Southill Outreach.

Southill Outreach clients who fit the above criteria were identified and offered the opportunity to engage in this research through interviews. Four male clients and one female client were invited to participate in the study as is representative of the 95% male and 5% female client group. The female client declined to be recorded and because, richer data could be received from having the data recorded, another participant volunteered to be interviewed. As a result five male clients were interviewed and recorded with their knowledge and permission.

For the focus group, the sample was a purposive sample, based on the knowledge of who would know the research topic best and willingness to attend (Jupp, V, 2006). The researcher wrote a letter to staff members (**See appendix 1**) and board members (**See appendix 2**). The criteria for selection was based on staff members and board members who either work in the area where 'street work' is carried out, or have directly been involved with 'street work'. Three board members and three staff were then selected to take part in agreement with the CSO. The researcher carried out the focus group, with the aid of note taking and a dictaphone for accurate recording.

2.5 Data Collection

Five semi-structured interviews with Southill Outreach clients were carried out within the offices of Southill Outreach, using a combination of pre-planned and unplanned questions **(See appendix 3).** This grants an amount of adaptability and gives the researcher the opportunity to question unforeseen topics during interview (Grix, 2004). Interviews were identified as essential as a data collection method in relation to the Southill Outreach client group. This was to allow the client group the opportunity to voice their opinion as it was their perceptions of 'street work' that was deemed most important to the CSO.

A focus group took place with Southill Outreach staff and Board of Management, using semi structured questions **(See appendix 4)**. This provided a space for exploration of difference of opinion and discussion in relation to 'street work'. Focus groups 'provide a social context for research, and thus an opportunity to explore how people think and talk about a topic, how their ideas are shaped, generated or moderated through conversation with others' (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p.37). The idea that focus groups should be made up of strangers is a myth, (Morgan and Kruegar, 1993 cited in Morgan, 1997, p.38). Working with people that know each other can have benefits, including the group can be more relaxed and can be more likely to disclose necessary information (Morgan, 1997). Therefore, the qualitative method of focus group was identified for use with staff members and the Board of Management.

Both methods together provided a rounded evaluation of the effectiveness of 'street work', in allowing the researcher to gain vast data from the client group, staff members and the Board of management.

2.6 Literature Search

The researcher completed a comprehensive search using professional related databases (criminal justice/policing, youth work, social work, probation) to provide a background on 'street work', nationally and internationally. The search terms used by the researcher included: 'detached youth', 'detached youth work', 'street work', 'street based work', 'street based youth work', 'engaging young people', 'disadvantaged' and 'youth', 'outreach work', 'outreach based work', 'outreach based youth work', 'youth crime', 'young offenders'. The relevant articles were selected for inclusion in this study.

2.7 Data Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The purpose of interpretative phenomenological analysis is to investigate in depth how study participants understand their own private and societal world (Smith and Osborn, 2004). This research aims to explore the staff, board, and the clients understanding of 'street work'. Hence, it is important to gain a balance which includes the opinions and beliefs of all

involved. A personal understanding of people and their interpretation of the 'worlds around them becomes a goal', of the researcher (Carey, 2009, p.53).

The five interviews and focus group recordings were transcribed and relevant themes emerged. A theme 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meanings within the data set' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.82). An interpretative lens was used to code the data and identify themes that were important to the clients, staff and board members. Themes were identified from the interviews and focus group and then formulated collectively to create an extensive view of the participant's integrative experiences (Carey, 2009). Relevant literature was applied to the themes and findings were then linked to the provision of recommendations for the future of 'street work' for Southill Outreach.

2.8 Ethical issues

Research ethics entails the researcher being unambiguous about the contract the participants have embarked on (Bell, 2003). The need for protecting the participants rights overrides the need for research, thus the participants were protected at all times. This was established through informed consent **(See appendix 5)** and ensuring the participants knew that they had the right to withdraw from the research at anytime and that the data would be destroyed. The participants were made fully aware and advised before consenting to taking part in the research about the topic of discussion and the potential uses of the findings.

2.8.1 Consent

Participants freely consented to the research. An information sheet **(See appendix 6 & 7)** was provided and explained (in the case of literacy difficulties) to all involved. There were no incentives given to the participants to take part in the study. All participants were over the age of eighteen and had the capacity to consent.

This research aimed to empower the participants through inclusion and all findings will be discussed with participants after the research is complete. The findings of this research should enable Southill Outreach to provide a better service through 'street work', for

Limerick south side estates, that is informed from the perspectives of the clients. The final research report will be available for the participants to view after completion.

2.8.2 Confidentiality and Privacy

All collected data was made anonymous within the research and where language used was identifiable to an individual, this was changed. Issues around confidentiality, privacy and child protection were explained to the participants before the interviews. All participants were informed of the limitations of confidentiality regarding this study - a Science Shop project, on the Science Shop website. All data was stored anonymously through "Google docs" and will be destroyed after this document is graded.

For the focus group, the researcher needed to be aware that what the participants shared in the group was therefore knowledge to all the group participants (Morgan, 1997). Therefore the researcher was aware of the limitation to privacy among the group and insured that questions were not of an emotive context.

2.8.3 Ethical Approval

Southill Outreach Board of Management has given the researcher permission to carry out this piece of research. The final report will be forwarded to them on completion for discussion and further dissemination. The researcher also received ethical approval from the UCC SREC ethics board.

2.8.4 Researcher Bias

The researcher is currently employed by Southill Outreach and engages in regular 'street work', therefore the researcher needed to be aware of her own opinions and ensure not to include these as findings. While carrying out the interviews and focus group, the researcher needed to be aware that all participants knew her and that this may have affected their answers to questions. The researcher believes that there are both strengths and limitations to carrying out research within the place of employment.

2.9 Strengths of the Study

The researcher has seen her own professional involvement with Southill Outreach as a strength to the study and that the young people who were interviewed may not have chosen to be interviewed by another unknown researcher. This will be evidenced in the findings in relation to the identification of trust as an important theme from the clients of Southill Outreach. When one young person decided not to take part in the interview, it was a relatively small task to find another participant; this was due to the local community knowing the researcher. Even so, the researcher must acknowledge the potential for bias regarding the participants' answers to questions. The researcher felt that all data was analysed honestly and is represented in this document as drawn from the focus group and interviews.

'Science Shop provides independent, participatory research support in response to concerns experienced by civil society' (Science shop, 2011). Due to the participatory approach to this research, and the involvement of the CSO, the researcher had access to a client group who may not have been accessible but for carrying out Science Shop research. The researcher identifies this as a strength as it allows for real and appropriate data to be gained and the further development of a service within the CSO.

2.10 Limitations of the Study

The small scale of the study may restrict the research findings. The researcher found that when interviewing the young people, whom, are now over the age of 18, they may not be 'detached' any longer. Therefore the responses may not be representative of those that avail of the 'street work' service or, of the responses the participants may have given when they were under 18 – and detached. The researcher acknowledges that further research needs to be carried out with young people under the age of 18 in order to identify the true perceptions and opinions of detached youth.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter described the methodology used throughout this study. The theoretical framework and perspective, in addition to the participatory approach taken were outlined. The research methods, including interview and focus group, were described and the interpretative thematic analyses employed, was detailed. Finally, ethical considerations, strengths and limitations to the study were considered. A review of the relevant national and international literature in relation to 'street work' will be detailed in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review the limited literature in relation to 'street work' on a national and international level. The researcher will use the available literature to source an appropriate definition of 'street work' and to gain an understanding of how 'street work' can effectively be used as a model of detached youth work. Ecological Theory, the theoretical framework underpinning 'street work' will be discussed and its relevance highlighted for understanding, while also detailing an 'at risk' population whose circumstances may have lead them to criminality. Finally, literature will be outlined in relation to young people and street workers perceptions of 'street work'.

3.2 Definition of 'street work'

Street based youth work/detached youth work was first utilised in the 1950s and 1960s in the USA, in relation to gang violence and the rising 'street corner society' (Fletcher and Bonnell, 2008). It has since become more widely used in the U.K (Ibid), and is now on the increase in Ireland, with the effectiveness of centre based youth provision being questioned (Fletcher and Bonnell, 2008).

Detached youth work, outreach work, mobile youth work, street work and street based work are some of the terms used to define youth interventions that are based on the street. Research acknowledges that defining the differences between these terms is extremely difficult (Davies, 2001, cited in Crimmens, et al, 2004, p.14). Wales Youth Agency (2001), defines detached youth work as:

> a broad term used to describe an approach to engage with young people, who may be or may not be accessing existing youth provisions…these young people may have become "detached" from conventional youth provision either because they reject these services, are excluded from them or are unaware of them (cited in McElwee et al, 2002, p.96).

While this definition appears to be similar to the work of Southill Outreach, it only defines the approach and not the action. Decker et al, provide a description of street outreach work as 'the use of individuals to "work the street" making contact with youth in neighbourhoods with high levels of gang activity' (Decker et al, 2008, p1). Whilst this may be an appropriate definition for the USA, Southill Outreach is more concerned with looking at community issues in terms of criminality, not gang reduction. Given the lack of up-to-date written Southill Outreach 'street work' policy, it would appear that Southill Outreach are engaged in 'street work' as defined as detached youth work, with a follow on 'outreach service'. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher will utilise the definition of detached youth work from Youth Link Scotland, 'Thinking on your Feet Project' defined as:

> A model of youth work practice, targeted at vulnerable young people which takes place on young people's own territory such as streets, cafes, parks and pubs at times that are appropriate to them, on their terms. It begins from where young people are, in terms of their values, attitudes, issues and ambitions and is concerned with their personal and social development (Milburn et al, 1998, p14).

The researcher will utilise 'outreach youth work' defined by Youth Link Scotland as the 'follow on' work with young people arising from 'street work'. This can be defined as 'related to services which are available elsewhere and is generally aimed at feeding young people into those services.....(this can) include work in youth facilities, educational institutions and commercial settings (Ibid).

As part of this participatory research, the CSO has agreed that these definitions are appropriate for the purpose of this research.

3.3 Aims of Detached Youth Work

Nationally there is little reliable academic literature on 'street work'. Internationally, 'street work' and detached youth work appears to have differing aims, from ceasing gun crime (Decker et al, 2008), education and prevention of HIV infection among young people (Tenner et al, 1998) and engagement of youth for further intervention, and problem solving (Lee and Charm, 2002). Although the function of 'street work' may differ between country or project, research shows that the aim initially for these youth projects is to engage youths, with the long term goal being to reduce the 'at risk' behaviour, whatever that may be. Lee and Charm

(2002), describes the aim of outreach work in Hong Kong as 'trying to establish a more trusting relationship with them (young people) for rapport building' (Ibid, p.72). Building trust appears to be one of the main objectives of detached youth work. A study of eleven 'street-based' projects in the UK found that the bond between the street worker and the youth was the most important aspect of the intervention and determined the success of such interventions (Crimmens, 2004).

Detached youth who have had negative experiences with school, shops, addiction services and other services which may help them become less detached, are likely to avoid these services. These experiences appear to lead youth to be significantly negative towards authority figures. Studies in the USA found that high levels of youth had difficult affiliations with the Police (Fine, et al, 2003). Finger et al (2002) acknowledges that, community outreach assists hard to reach young people to conquer their suspicion regarding services which may be of benefit to them. This can be achieved through meeting 'street workers' on the street who are offering support through services. With a level of trust these services can be taken up by some youth.

3.4 Principles of Detached Youth Work

There appears to be a gap in the literature in relation to the principles of 'street work', but the principles of youth work in Ireland include:

- Youth work is an informal education experience
- It is based on participation and partnership with young people
- It is young person centred
- Young people are involved on a voluntary basis
- It is based on experiential learning

(Jenkinson, 2000, p.110)

'Street work' is core to these principles as it aims to meet youth in their own environment, allows for voluntary engagement, and participation is on their terms. Detached youth work involves linking youth to 'pro-social' activities and services (Decker et al, 2008). Therefore helping the young person integrate back into society and become less excluded or isolated.

3.5 Young People's Perceptions of 'Street Work'

There appears to be a lack of research in the area of young people's perceptions of 'street work'. One UK study, (Crimmens et al, 2004) which interviewed young people from different street based projects found that young people identified the positives of street based work. They stated that the most important thing to them was that it provided: - someone to talk to, someone to listen and someone to spend time with. They also identified that trust and respect needed to be earned by the street based workers and that they needed to be sensitive to their needs and wishes (Crimmens et al, 2004). However, youth also found that street based workers can violate their space, and stated that the reason they are sometimes on the street is to avoid parents and other adults (Ibid).

3.6 Street Worker's Perception of 'Street Work'

Street based youth workers have recognised some of the challenges and opportunities for them when working with young people through 'street work'. In Crimmens, et al (2004) research, workers noted that every day can be very different on the street and that clients can be very different from day to day. Young people's problems can differ from individual to individual (Crimmens et al, 2004). Workers acknowledged the need to be sensitive and that for 'street work' to work effectively; it needs to be long term. Workers felt that targeted work can be difficult, and challenging young people on the streets can sometimes lead to the youth workers avoiding these youths that are 'highest risk' , in order to work with 'easier' young people (Ibid).

3.7 Maintaining Boundaries

In a study of street based workers, it identified the difficulty in maintaining the boundaries of building a relationship and adhering to the law. They researchers noted the difficulty and the dilemma of seeing young people taking illegal drugs. Workers accepted that they:

> must assume personal responsibility and sometimes make a 'judgement call', balancing a desire to maintain good relationships with a responsibility to stay within the bounds of the law and their professional code and to do so in ways that minimise

> the risks posed to both the young people and themselves (Crimmens, et al, 2004, p.29).

A 2008 report on American street outreach work in controlling gang and youth violence in the USA found that workers need to find a balance between keeping information confidential for the trust of young people and imparting knowledge to the police if there is a concern regarding violence/harm (Decker et al, 2008).

Another study of 'street work' projects found that law enforcement officers, at times had difficulty with street workers because they found out about criminal activities or incidents before the police did (Decker et al, 2008).

3.8 Young Person's Probation Referrals

Young Person's Probation (YPP) is a specific sector of the Probation Service created under the Children Act 2001 to work with young people (12-18 years) who are before the Courts. The aim of the Children Act 2001 is to ensure that the detention of a child is the last resort, with the aim being to keep the child within his/her own community (IYJS, 2010). Youth Justice has moved away from the punitive notion of punishment and more towards making the young person accountable for their actions through community sanctions (Kelly, et al, 2012). Tackling youth crime and anti-social behaviour are one of the main priorities of the government, using the approach of community sanctions, through the help of community based organisations, and the interventions they provide (Ibid). The Children Act 2001(96) 2 states that the Court should have regard to the education and training needs of the young person, the family relationship with the child, and that assistance should be provided to allow families to deal with the offending behaviour of the child. In a Garda study of people's attitudes to crime, 76% of people rated juvenile crime as a major problem in Ireland (Kelly et al, 2012). This indicates that young people should as much as is practicable be kept within their community, but the general public's perception is that youth crime is a huge concern. Therefore, community based organisations and youth initiatives are essential to aid young people desist from further crime.

3.9 ‘High Risk’/ ‘At Risk’ Youth – An Ecological Approach

‘A set of presumed cause and effect dynamics that place a child or adolescent in danger of negative future events’ (McWhirter et al, 1998, cited in, Lee and Charm, 2002, p.73). Research suggests that labelling youth as ‘at risk’ could have an iatrogenic effect and that early intervention may not be the solution to criminal behaviour among young people. Studies demonstrate the ‘damaging impact which systems contact has on young people, with interventions being experienced as punitive and stigmatising and serving in the long term to amplify rather than diminish offending’ (Tracy and Kempf-Leonard, 1996; Huizinga et al, 2003; McAra and McVie, 2007a, cited in McAra and McVie, 2010, p.184). Although, stigmatising or labelling young people as ‘at risk’ may have consequences, it is important to understand the systems that are associated with youth crime. Negative events could indicate a young person becoming involved in anti-social behaviour or criminal activity at a young age. Whyte (2004) has identified influences affiliated with youth crime. These include:

- Individual characteristics, such as, attitude, involvement with peers and being impulsive.
- Family aspects, such as, criminal background of family members, parenting styles and inconsistent supervision.

Some researchers have found that 30-40% of anti-social behaviour has been identified to directly relate to parenting and family interactions (Barlow, 1999).

- School aspects, such as behaviour problems, low achievement and absence from school.
- Community aspects, such as poor facilities in the community and
- The availability of substances (Whyte, 2004, pps.7-8).

A longitudinal study of youth in Edinburgh in 1998 found violent young offenders were notably more liable than non-violent offenders to be; victims of criminal activity and adult aggravation; they engaged in self harm and para-suicidal actions; displayed many challenging health risk behaviours together with drug use, regular alcohol intake, chaotic patterns of eating, signs of hopelessness and premature experiences of sexual interactions (McAra and McVie, 2010).

Therefore, research suggests that the social context, in which ‘at risk’ youth are entwined, needs to be acknowledged (Whyte, 2004). Research states that an ecosystems approach

places young people and their behaviours into systems, such as home, school, and community. One should look at these systems to gain an understanding of these interconnected systems and how it affects a young person's behaviour (Cooper and Upton, 1990, cited in Hayden, 2007).

A report on the 66 community based Young Person's Probation (YPP) supported projects in Ireland, found that drug/alcohol use, education (attendance, behaviour and exclusion), negative peers and friendships, family (positive or negative effect), and neighbourhood influences were the main issues of concern in relation to youth offending (Redmond and Dack, 2011). This report demonstrates the importance of not isolating the offending youth and his/her behaviour, but instead looking at all aspects or systems of the young person's life. This 'places a high value on understanding the context, and the interconnections of relationships between the different aspects of the problem, as well as changing attitudes and behaviour' (Humphreys et al, 2012, p.45).

3.10 Conclusion

This literature review has identified an appropriate definition for 'street work', a combination of outreach work and detached work. It outlined the aims of this type of youth work and the principles that could be applied to 'street work'. The very limited reliable literature outlined studies on both youth's and street worker's perceptions of street based work and the difficulties of maintaining boundaries were explored. Both 'at risk, and probation referral clients were considered. Finally, an ecological perspective - the theoretical framework was applied. The following chapter will present the perceptions of 'street work' of young people, staff and board members from Southill Outreach and it will explore these perceptions in relation to the relevant literature.

Chapter Four: Findings & Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline and examine the findings from the focus group and the five interviews. As previously discussed, a thematic approach was taken and the following themes emerged: The 'Street Work' Role, The Relationship, Interagency Collaboration, Preventative Work and The Relevance to Probation. These themes will be presented and analysed with regard to the relevant literature. Discussion will occur after the findings under each theme. Finally, a concluding discussion will be outlined.

4.2 Findings

The findings from the focus group (with staff members and Board of Management members) and the interviews (with Southill Outreach clients) will be presented together where themes concur. Thus, interviewees will be identified as 'young person' and focus group members will be identified as 'participant'. Where both young people and staff and board members agree as a whole, it will be identified as 'all participants'. Pseudonym names will not be used to avoid confusion between defining what participants of the focus group and interview participants have said.

4.3 Emerging Themes

Many of the themes identified the participants and young people's understanding of the functions of 'street work' and its effectiveness.

4.3.1 The 'Street Work' Role

Both young people and focus group participants appeared to have a similar understanding of what 'street work' is. All five young people explained that workers are on the street to help them, to arrange activities, and to help their families. Young person 2 explains "*if you stop*

coming down to Outreach on a regular basis, they will try to figure out why you're not coming down and if there is any problems at home or if you have gotten into trouble or anything". Young person 1 comments on the role of helping parents "*it's mostly good for parents, cos they helped my parents, when their son is in trouble, it kinda takes a load off their mind cos they know Outreach is helping their children, it helps mothers in a big way".*

Young person 5 explains that there is a crime reduction role "*yer bringing them out on trips and out of Southill, they're not doing no trouble cos they're with ye and they are out of Southill, ye take them away from the boreddness".*

Participants of the focus group define the role similarly. Participant 2 states:

> "*Street work is a method of meeting young people and older people, it doesn't matter the age group, and families. It depends on the target group I suppose, in their own space where they feel a lot freer because you are in their territory rather than them having to go somewhere. It's to help people who have lost faith in or haven't the confidence to go in* (to a centre) *and explain their situation".*

Participant 4 echoes this definition synonymously "*it's meeting them on their turf, where they feel comfortable but it's not only meeting the young people that are referred to us, but the wider community, be it the younger sisters or brothers that are coming up, or peers or parents".*

4.3.2 Discussion

These findings display a similarity between this study and the definitions of 'street work' given by Youth Link Scotland as outlined in the literature which also acknowledges meeting youth on their terms and in their space. In addition, the above findings demonstrates the ecological way in which Southill Outreach work when on the street through acknowledging the young people's different environments and relationships (**See Figure 1**). It would appear from the data that Southill Outreach will engage not only with the target group but also peers and family members.

The different roles are also outlined from helping young people and their families, to crime reduction. Crime reduction can be difficult to measure, as to what caused the reduction. The data from the interviews demonstrates that young people feel that if they are taken on

activities, away from their everyday environment, then they are less likely to offend. Research is sparse in relation to interventions that take people out of the community, being useful in the reduction of recidivism (Hayden, 2007). However, research also provides that interventions that include outdoor and sports activities can support the development of 'a positive self-esteem and social skills, but they should be combined with other suitable interventions according to their needs' (Ibid, p.142). It is when young people are bored that offending occurs. Some research highlights that there is a connection between the utilisation of free time and the risk of recidivism (Griffin and Kelleher, 2010).

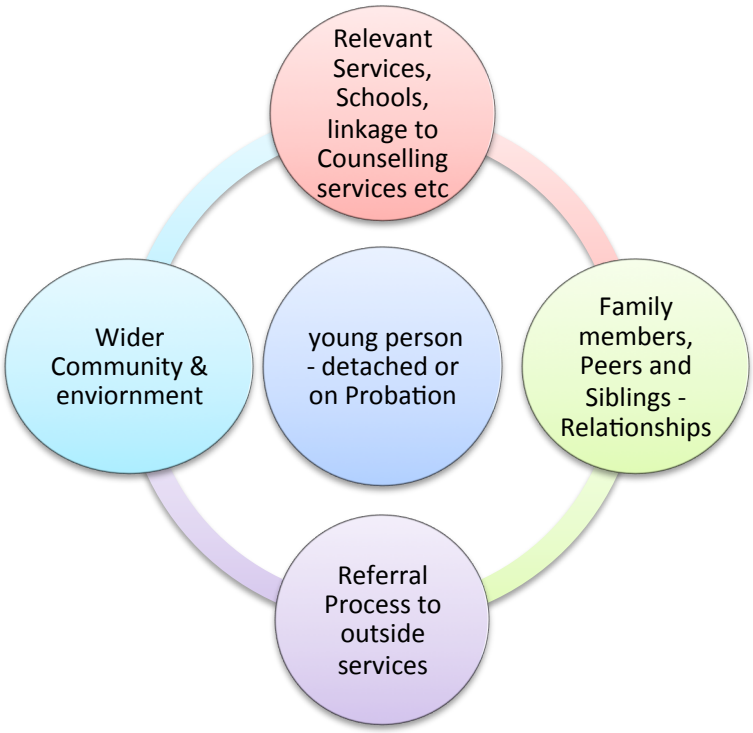


Figure 1:- *Ecological Approach to 'Street Work'*

4.3.3 The relationship

The findings of this study would suggest that, a trusting relationship appears to be an essential function of 'street work'. This too concurs with international literature (Lee and Charm, 2002), suggesting that 'street work' is about rapport building. All participants spoke about the importance of the relationship between street worker and young person. One young person spoke about knowing Southill Outreach staff members for so long that he knew he could trust them before they started working with him because the community had accepted

the workers on the street. This young person felt that he could automatically trust the Outreach workers. "*Just by knowing them you can trust them, cos its outreach man"*. Other young people were not so certain about the trusting relationship and felt that they would have to know the workers before they would talk to them or allow them to help.

Young person 1, when asked what was good about 'street work', stated: *"they ask you how you are, and they don't say how are you, as in, just you know the way people ask you when they don't want an answer, they* (street workers) *say it and they really mean it, do you know what I'm on about man, they just care about us"*.

Participants of the focus group also identified the relationship as the most important aspect of 'street work'. Participant 5 explained that the function of 'street work' is based on forming and maintaining the relationship. *"It's about building a relationship so that we are known, it makes it a lot easier, and it takes away the threat of what we represent, I suppose"*.

It was also acknowledged that the relationship is essential for staff safety. Participant 1 explains this *"it's about safety, it really keeps us safe by being present in that sense and it establishes a relationship that values the child"*. Participants also acknowledged that the relationship can be fragile, and sometimes threatening, but that it is important for staff members to be aware of what is occurring in the area. Participant 2 explains "*it can be very fragile, people get angry and there have been threatening situations, that's where the test of it is, you know...so it's about building up a relationship"*. It is also about knowing when to walk away from young people, being intuitive and respectful of young people's space. Another participant stated the importance of gauging the situation with young people while on the street. Participant 4 acknowledged that 'street work' is "*entirely invitational*" and that "*there is no intimidation on the streets, because the street is their* (young people) *place"*.

4.3.4 Discussion

It is apparent from the findings under this theme that all participants value the relationship between workers and the client group. Focus group participants have acknowledged that this relationship can be fragile and that there is a safety aspect to 'street work' which must be recognised by staff members. This is in line with the literature in relation to the study carried out on young people's perceptions of 'street work' in the UK, which found that at times street workers can invade young people's space. Street workers need to be aware of this intrusion

and respect young people's need for adult free space (Crimmens et al, 2004). Participants of the focus group acknowledged that staff members on the street need to be intuitive and recognise when to avoid these situations. This can be linked to safety of staff members and respecting the wishes of young people. All young people interviewed articulated that Outreach are always welcome to engage with them on the street, but one young person (1) acknowledged that he could understand if young people did not want Outreach staff coming over to them on the street. He explains *"if you are in trouble and workers are there and they are trying to get you out of trouble and you are not going the right way, then obviously it's a burden...and they will be only annoying you".* Recent research conveys that youth are cognisant that they are under eminent degrees of unnecessary monitoring in their own communities (Deuchar, 2010).

The young people all clearly stated that they would not engage with people on the street if they did not know them, and that it is seeing "someone you know and can chat to" that will inform the relationship on the street. This concurs with the literature that found the relationship is what determined the success of further interventions (Crimmens, 2004). The importance of trusting relationships leads on to the next theme which is interagency collaboration and is linked also with trust.

4.3.5 Interagency Collaboration

As recognised within the literature, Finger et al (2002) notes that outreach/detached youth work helps young people to deal with their suspicion of services and supports. As acknowledged in the literature, there is a huge suspicion around authority figures among young people (Fine et al, 2003). In Limerick City housing estates there is a real mistrust around service providers, especially the Gardai (Hourigan, 2011). Some residents are fearful of reprisal if seen communicating with the Gardai (Ibid). This study identifies the complexities of the delicate link with the Gardai and through 'street work'; Southill Outreach has often been seen as a neutral mediator. Participant 5 explains:

> "*we would have been approached by the Guards to intercede in a situation where there was huge hostility from a family who believed the Gardai to be responsible for the death of a family member and they saw us as the only neutral trusted broker"..... "The guards would have seen us as having the integrity not to get involved in sides and the*

family knew we wouldn't take sides but that we would consider their feelings and acknowledge the hurt"

Young person 4 also spoke about his difficulty with the Gardai where the use of meeting workers on the street helped in communicating with the Gardai, he explains, *"I was on the run for something and I told* (outreach worker's name) *on the street, and he got in contact with one of the community Guards and I duno what happened but it got sorted out anyway, we got it all fixed up".* This young person had spoken about being anxious because he had spent time hiding from the Gardai to avoid arrest. He continued, *"Outreach would do it for the rest of the lads as well, it wasn't just me, they would help anyone in Southill*". This perception was mirrored by all other young people that were interviewed.

The participants of the focus group clarified that 'street work' can be a referral process to many services for youth and their families, not just a linkage service between the Gardai. Participant 2 explains "*often it's never observed until the consequences of drunken behaviour or whatever it is and then there is an assessment done in a very formal kind of way and they decide, 'ya he's a chronic alcoholic' or whatever*". The findings suggest that often these behaviours are primarily observed on the street and consequently referrals to other services can be made promptly.

4.3.6 Discussion

Whyte, 2004, as documented in the literature notes that 'at risk' youth have certain characteristics and familial influences, such as attitude, criminal background, behavioural issues and substance use. These characteristics and influences allow for increased mistrust and suspicion of services, such as social workers and the Gardai. It is clear from the data, that many young people in the south side of Limerick City have had negative experiences with such services. Southill Outreach has been perceived by all participants as a mediation service with access available on the streets. All participants recognised that through 'street work' a referral process can take place, and services can be accessed through staff members. It must be noted that services are less likely to be accessed by detached youth (Decker *et al,* 2008), especially without help. The findings of this study indicate that issues of concern can be highlighted and appropriate referrals made quickly, a preventative role almost. This theme will now be discussed.

4.3.7 Preventative Work

All participants of the focus group spoke about 'street work' being 'preventative', responding to crises as they arise without assessment forms and referrals. Participant 4 explains "*it would have been 'street work' that would have informed me around the urgency to respond to children, to call the agencies together, to work collaboratively, because of that huge degree of neglect from services"*. Participant 3 adds "*most services need a five page referral form, in a five minute interval; 'street work' can highlight a crisis and have the privilege to pass the threshold and be invited in and entrusted with information in its raw state"*. The data highlights that this is not just in relation to young people but for the wider community also. Participant 1 explained *"it goes back to prevention; it's trying to get in to communities to prevent something escalating or growing.*

There was a sense of this from the young people too and the immediacy with which staff members can respond to a crisis. Young person 5 explains "*if you ask them to help you down here or on the streets, they will, if you are in trouble, they will bring us away from it straight away and you can clear your head man"*

Young people also identified that prevention can come in the form of knowing young siblings of Southill Outreach clients. Young person 2 explains "*it's important for young children cos, they come to a certain age and trouble comes and they can think back to see who would help them, and they will remember workers on the road, well that's what I did anyway, I didn't know right from wrong"*. Participant 5 of the focus group echoed this by saying "*younger siblings that are coming up along wouldn't know who you are, and they would be like 'who are you like?', and after a few weeks they might chat to us and I think that's a very important element in 'street work'"*.

Participants of the focus group identified the difficulty of preventative work and the work that is not seen to have outcomes, or is *"done under the radar"*. Participant 3 acknowledges *"the work isn't counted, that pre-development work that is done, which is really hard going and I think that this is a unique project in that way, and it does that work, and it paves the way for an awful lot of other agencies to link in"*.

4.3.8 Discussion

All participants expressed that 'street work' can be seen as a preventative aspect of the work of Southill Outreach. Both young people and focus group participants acknowledged the necessity of getting to know younger siblings who may be likely to become involved in crime. Participants also spoke about the failure of other services when working with young people. Research carried out on continual youth offending demonstrates that youth agencies had failed to help young people primarily in education and family support services (Hayden, 2007). This identifies the importance of working in partnership with other agencies, taking an ecological approach to understanding services and how they approached interventions with young people. In Limerick City, while there is many agencies, their work is fragmented and not coordinated leading to an overlap of services and at times counteraction of one agencies work over another (Fitzgerald, 2007).

In addition, participants of the focus group voiced concerns about preventative work not being acknowledged. This is evidenced in the literature which states that when there is funding issues 'street work' can be one of the first services to be cut (Furlong et al, 1997). Also, youth work in Ireland has in the past been too much based on recreation and not evaluating the provision of services (Jenkinson, 2000). In recessionary times, evaluations need to take place and outcomes given to provide a 'value for money' approach to interventions for youth.

4.3.9 Relevance to Probation

Participants of the focus group were asked if they thought 'street work' was of benefit to the Probation Service. This question was deemed necessary by the researcher, because as previously stated, Southill Outreach is a community based probation funded project. The findings illustrate that participants of the focus group were unsure of the benefit of 'street work' to the actual Probation Service and stated that it does not appear to be valued as much as previously. Participant 5 explained "*it's difficult to promote a philosophy when things are being driven by results and investment and how you measure it".* This was acknowledged by all focus group participants. Participant 1 stated that *"street work' is a very person centred way of working and there is a tendency to move away from that for a more cognitive model and outcomes, progress and numbers".*

Participant 4 explains *"even though the Probation Service has changed their name and got rid of the word 'welfare', because 'street work' is very much welfare, it's not valued, it is valuable, just I don't think its valued by probation as much as it was when set up".*

However, Participant 2 explained *"it obviously has a knock on effect for the Probation Service and for anyone referred to Southill Outreach from the Probation Service"..... "there is a specific benefit, like it's a different way of working and there is a different basis to the relationship, it means that staff of Outreach know young people on probation in a different way, clients experience workers on the street in a different way to Probation Officers and that's a huge strength".*

There is considerable difference between the focus group participants and the young people's responses, where participants of the focus group recognised that 'street work' could be seen as what was known as the 'welfare' side of probation and the importance of not been seen as a threat. Participant 2 stated "*you can give the right impression, that it's not just a job and that you are there for the right reasons".* Two young people stated that they were unsure what 'street work' was for but that it was *"part of the job".* However, it was acknowledged by the five young people that 'street work' is of benefit to everyone living in their area. Young person 5 explained "*it's part of the job but they are coming out to help the community like".* All young people recognised that the Probation Service had a role to play with Southill Outreach but recognised that young people do not necessarily need to be referred by the Probation Service, to be helped on the street. Young person 1 explained *"they are around the roads and they will bring you on trips and get you back into school and organise soccer competitions, and they organised for me to go for drug treatment, they would do it for anyone even if you're not on Probation".* Young person 2 explained "*I was in trouble young, and it was well before I was on Probation, I tried to make myself a bit better by asking for help on the street, and you know Outreach will take you on".*

4.3.10 Discussion

The findings suggest that staff and board members felt that 'street work' is not valued as much as previous years but what is acknowledged again under this theme is the unique relationship that workers can build while on the streets. While young people were aware of the Probation Service involvement with Southill Outreach, they felt that on the street,

workers were available to the whole community not explicitly probation clients. This can be linked to the Fletcher and Bonnell, (2008) study on detached youth work, which identifies that street based workers will work with people on the streets whether 'at risk' or not. It is more flexible in its ability to help people than centre based youth work who are confined by rules and targets (Ibid). While this is a positive perception of Southill Outreach, it must be acknowledged that Southill Outreach has a target group – those as risk of offending and probation referrals, as stated in previous chapters. Other work is short term work, or referral-based.

It is important to note that there is a contradiction between the perceptions of the motivation for 'street work' between young people and participants. Participants recognise 'street work' as altruistic in nature, whilst young people see it as 'part of the job'. Therefore on analysis the researcher believes that street workers may need to be aware that some young people may not appreciate and may undervalue this selfless concept. In essence young people value the help given in their area, altruistic or not.

4.4 Concluding Discussion

Overall, this study found 'street work' to be a positive experience for young people and beneficial for staff members and Board of Management. The functions of 'street work' were discussed by all participants and were reflected in the above themes. The key findings of this study are portrayed in (**Figure 2**). The importance of a trusting relationship was discussed by all participants of this study. The findings discovered that there are many functions to 'street work' but one important aspect is that of mediating with the Gardai and other services, and providing a quick appropriate referral system for youth and non-target community members to other appropriate services. In addition, the findings indicate that 'street work' can be seen as both having a preventative and 'welfare' aspect. Participants established that this type of 'under the radar' work is not always accredited but due to regular crises on the street, the immediacy in responding is a priority. The necessity for identifying outcomes for 'street work' and its benefits for youths were voiced. Participants were mainly unsure whether 'street work' benefited the Probation Service itself but professed the benefits to a probation funded project. However, it was recognised that there is some benefit to the Probation Service from Outreach doing 'street work'. This is that it allows for an informal relationship to develop with probation clients, which Probation Officers may struggle to establish due to

the constraints of their professional role and the difficulty of managing the care versus control aspect of the relationship.

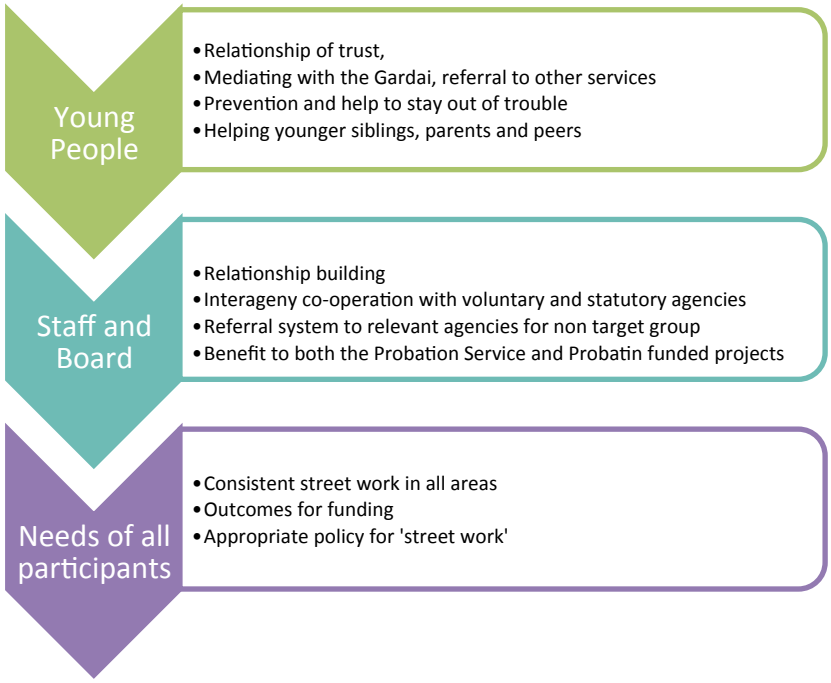


Figure 2*: Key Findings*

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the findings from the interviews and focus group, the researcher analysed these findings relating to the relevant literature. Key findings were documented following analysis and depicted in figure 2. The following chapter will briefly document the key findings from this study and recommendations will be presented for future practice of 'street work' for Southill Outreach. Finally, overall conclusions from the study will be detailed.

Chapter Five: Conclusions & Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to outline the key findings that arose from this research. In addition, it will provide recommendations for the future of 'street work' in Limerick City. The dissemination of results and the relevance of 'street work' to other services will be detailed. Finally, conclusions will be presented.

5.2. Brief Outline of Findings

Relevant themes emerged from the findings; these include themes relating mostly to the function of 'street work' and the participant's perceptions and understandings of the service. These themes are: The 'Street Work' Role, The Relationship, Interagency Collaboration, Preventative Work, and The Relevance to Probation Practice.

5.2.1 The 'Street Work' Role

All participants articulated the functions of 'street work' such as meeting people in their own environment, meeting the target group and the wider community, linking with other agencies, helping youth to avoid re-offending and at times mediating.

5.2.2 The Relationship

All participants of this study acknowledged the importance of a trusting relationship. The findings display that this enables young people to interact with street workers. Participants of the focus group felt that the relationship was also important for staff safety and for increased contact, for example being allowed the opportunity to enter a house when other services were refused.

5.2.3 Interagency Collaboration

Participants in this study felt that 'street work' permitted for an effective referral process, staff and board members felt that street workers have the opportunity to identify problems and situations long before other services. In addition, participants found that 'street work'

can at times be utilised by the community and the Gardai as a 'mediation service' – being a neutral link in the communication between the two.

5.2.4 Preventative Work

Participants acknowledged the use of 'street work' as a preventative measure. Young people stated the importance of meeting younger siblings on the street while participants of the focus group recognised the ability for street workers to identify a crisis in 'its raw state', before it is referred on through numerous assessments. Participants also explained that this work is difficult and at times its benefits are not recognised.

5.2.5 *The Relevance to Probation Practice*

Participants were generally unsure if there was a direct benefit to the Probation Service; participants felt that 'street work' was not valued but that it was valuable. It was recognised that workers can develop an informal relationship with probation clients, and this is the most important aspect of 'street work' to clients of the Probation Service.

To conclude, The Mission Statement of Southill Outreach states:

> Southill Outreach believes in the inherent value and dignity of every individual. We believe that trusting relationships have the potential to bring about positive change. Our aim is to invest time and resources to involve selected young people at street level and in planned activities in a spirit of inclusiveness in order to help them grow into responsible adults (Southill Outreach Handbook).

From the findings of this research, the researcher acknowledges that 'street work' is perceived by the youth (of the south side of Limerick City), staff members and Board of Management of Southill Outreach, to be effective as a model of detached youth work. As stated in the Mission Statement, trusting relationships are the essence of Southill Outreach's work. The findings suggest that this is evident through 'street work'. In answering the research questions, the perceptions of clients, staff and Board of Management have been clearly depicted in this study. 'Street work' as a model of detached youth work in probation practice was deemed effective in Limerick City by participants and suggested recommendations for Southill Outreach as a probation funded project will now follow **(See figure 3).**

5.3 Recommendations

- As previously outlined, for the continued funding and development of 'street work', outcomes need to be achieved and documented. 'Street work' and detached youth work need clear outcomes and goals otherwise it can be difficult to assess if such interventions are worthwhile regarding changing aspects of young people's lives such as behaviour, and their engagement in criminal activity (Decker et al, 2008). Outcomes need to be 'softer' such as monitoring a young person's self esteem or levels or engagement, (Hoggarth and Smyth, 2004) rather than extreme outcomes such as recidivism levels which can be difficult to distinguish whether 'street work' alone was the sole activity that caused the reduction in crime.

- 'Street work' can be time consuming for one agency to consistently deliver. Agencies in Ballyfermot in Dublin came together to provide a combined service to the community to reach young people that are 'hard to reach' (Gough, 2011). This allowed for resources to be shared, and awareness and collaboration from all agencies (Ibid). This may be an opportunity for Southill Outreach to continue 'street work' with the involvement of other agencies in the area to provide a service for a whole community instead of a targeted group. In Boston, USA, a multi-agency approach to 'street work' took place which involved street workers, the Probation Service, local police, and the church aiming to reduce the number of youth murders. It involved combinations of agencies carrying out 'street work' and a concentrated referral system thereafter. This approach resulted in a 2.5 year period where no youth was murdered in Boston (Braga et al, 2001). This multi-agency approach could be developed within the south side of Limerick City.

- This study and other similar studies have emphasised as important, that youth workers need to gain respect from the community (Crimmens et al, 2004). One way of doing this is to have volunteers from the community involved in the work (Ibid). Southill Outreach could train and utilise local volunteers in 'street work' in their locality. In this study, one participant from the focus group spoke about the value and benefit that a worker from the community brought to 'street work' when doing 'street work' in his/her own locality, and how the level of engagement of young people dramatically increased at that time. This displays that having local volunteers and workers from

the community can encourage the engagement of detached youth. This may also decrease the risk to staff safety.

- In this study, the majority of participants of both focus group and interviews recommended that 'street work' should be carried out at least once a week in every area and that it is regular and consistent. Participant 1 acknowledged that being consistently on the street is essential. "*You can't turn the blind eye to what's going on, but if you don't do 'street work' you can, you can allocate it or filter it through a series of assessment forms and the problem eventually becomes a bit sanitised".*

- As a researcher and as a worker of Southill Outreach, the researcher has identified the need for further research to be conducted in this area with the community as a whole. There is a tendency for this type of work to be reduced with funding cuts and therefore the effectiveness of 'street work' needs to be fully understood (Furlong el al, 1997). As this was a small scale study, the researcher suggests that further large scale study is carried out in the future.

- This study, although carried out in partnership with Southill Outreach and the 'street work' service, may have some aspects to it which may be transferable to other youth programs or probation funded projects. 'Street work' is an area that should be further looked at by the Probation Service, social work and other agencies, as it is an effective method of meeting youth who are disengaged from these services.

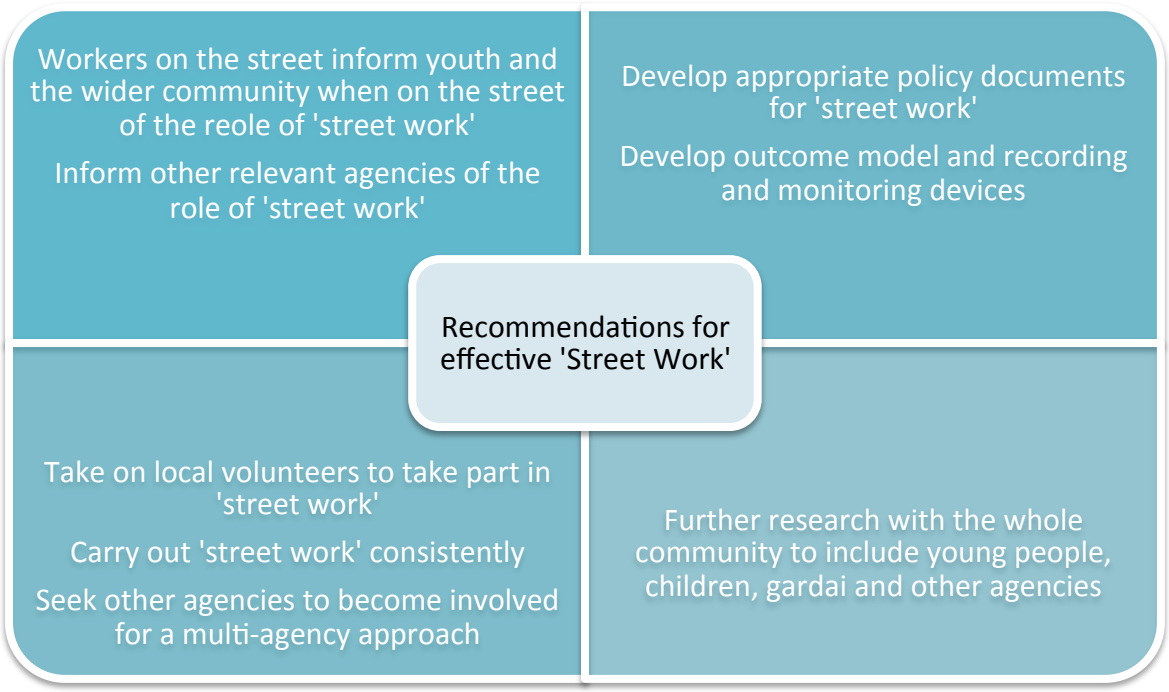


Figure 3: *Recommendations for Southill Outreach for an improved service for the communities of the south side of Limerick*

5.4 Overall Conclusions

This research aimed to evaluate 'street work' as a model of detached youth work in community based probation practice. It aimed to seek the perspectives of clients, staff members and Board of Management in relation to the effectiveness of 'street work' and its use in a probation funded project. This research was a Science Shop project thus taking a participatory approach to the research. The agency provided the participants for the research and helped in identifying research aims, objectives and questions. This researcher took a qualitative approach through five interviews with Southill Outreach clients and a focus group with staff members and Board of Management members. The researcher acknowledges that the research methods chosen were effective as they allowed the research aims and objectives to be achieved. If carrying out a large scale study with the involvement of other agencies and community members, the researcher feels that focus groups would be an effective method for richer and broader findings.

An interpretative approach was applied to the themes that emerged and relevant literature was sourced to aid this study. The researcher acknowledges that there were some limitations and strengths to carrying out research while working for Southill Outreach. These were

previously acknowledged in the methodology section. Overall, the researcher deems that the findings were analysed in a non biased way, while also identifying that the researcher works for the agency. Throughout this research, as a worker of Southill Outreach, the researcher had to be aware of her own bias and to acknowledge this in the study. The theoretical framework used throughout this study was an ecological based framework, acknowledging that all systems are interconnected. 'Street work' is an example of how ecological theory is utilised, recognising the importance of the influence of not only the family on the child but also the outside environment. Recommendations were made to allow for a cost effective, improved service to Southill Outreach and other community based probation projects if deemed appropriate to that service.

Finally, this study will be presented at the UCC Research Conference in May 2012. The study will also be available on the Science Shop website for viewing. The researcher will meet with Southill Outreach staff members and the Board of Management for discussion on further dissemination of this research. This study will also be available for all participants of the study to view.

Chapter Six: Reflective Research

6.1Introduction

This reflection will outline my research journey, the different difficulties I encountered, and the dual role of Outreach Worker and researcher for Southill Outreach. Finally, this piece will highlight my hopes for the future in relation to this research study.

6.2 Reflection

Throughout this piece of research, I continually evaluated my connection with the research topic. As an Outreach Worker of Southill Outreach and as a researcher, I felt the need to do this research to the best of my ability; not only for my thesis but also for the agency where I am employed. I felt that documenting my thoughts in my research journal was hugely beneficial. I felt advantaged in that I was fully supported from Southill Outreach to provide results that were a realistic evaluation of 'street work'. On reflection, at times, I worried that if the findings of this study were all positive, it would look like I took a biased view point and disregarded any negativity around 'street work', because of working for the agency. I dealt with this by acknowledging to myself that I was honest in my analysis of the findings.

The CSO representative provided me with time and participated in the development of research questions, and the data collection questions, but the one difficulty I had was to try to get the representative to give feedback on other areas. It was at times frustrating, being a researcher within work especially when work issues were spoken of, instead of research. I felt, that if I was an outside researcher, dedicated time would have been provided for research discussion.

On reflection, there has been much learning for me in conducting this research, not only as an Outreach Worker, but as a researcher. I felt as an Outreach worker I have learnt about the rationale behind 'street work', the theories, and the policies for safe practice and the protection of staff members. As a researcher, I learnt about the difficulties of interviewing youths, and how questions need to be stripped back of anything other than the basics **(See**

appendix 3). I felt, as previously explained that knowing the youths was a huge advantage in this respect.

I thoroughly enjoyed conducting this study, particularly so because of my genuine interest in the research topic. In the future, within Southill Outreach, I would be interested in developing new effective policy around 'street work' and if possible, further research. I would truly be interested in carrying out large scale research in relation to 'street work' – an under researched topic in Ireland.

6.3 Conclusion

Overall, I felt this researcher required me to reflect on every aspect of the research, I had to constantly remind myself and separate my own opinions from the findings. As a researcher I felt it was important to acknowledge this. I look forward to carrying out further research in the future, if the opportunity arises.

This chapter looked at my reflections while carrying out this research; it explained my difficulties as a worker and a researcher within the same agency. Finally, my interests in relation to 'street work' were highlighted.

Appendix 1

06/03/12

Dear Staff Member

As you are aware I am in my final year of the Master of Social Work and I am in the process of carrying out my thesis titled:

An Evaluation of 'Street Work' as a Model of Detached Youth Work in Community Based Probation Practice: Challenges and Opportunities.

To carry out this research I intend interviewing five Southill Outreach clients and doing a focus group comprising of three staff members and three Board Members. With your knowledge of 'street work', I would appreciate if you would be willing to take part.

The focus group will take approximately 1.5 to 2 hours and is mainly concerned with your opinion of 'street work'. For adequate data collection, the focus group will also be recorded on a dictaphone and the data will be destroyed within six months. I have attached a brief outline of the questions I intend asking, for your information. I will also provide an information sheet and consent form on the day of the focus group.

I would appreciate if you could let me know if you will be available to attend on **087-6467694**. The date suggested by the Southill Outreach Manager is: **16th March 2012 at 14.30 in Southill Outreach**

Yours Sincerely,

_____

Karen McInerney

Appendix 2

06/03/12

Dear Board Member,

As you are aware I am in my final year of the Master of Social Work and I am in the process of carrying out my thesis titled:

An Evaluation of 'Street Work' as a Model of Detached Youth Work in Community Based Probation Practice: Challenges and Opportunities.

To carry out this research I intend interviewing five Southill Outreach clients and doing a focus group comprising of three staff members and three Board Members. With your knowledge of 'street work', I would appreciate if you would be willing to take part. The staff members of Southill Outreach have made themselves available on the following date:

16th March 2012 at 14.30 in Southill Outreach

The focus group will take approximately 1.5 to 2 hours and is mainly concerned with your opinion of 'street work'. For adequate data collection, the focus group will be recorded on a dictaphone. I have attached a brief outline of the questions I intend asking for your information. I will provide an information sheet and consent form on the day of the focus group.

I would appreciate if you could let me know if you will be available to attend as soon as possible on, **087-6467694.**

Yours Sincerely,

_____

Karen McInerney

Appendix 3

Interview Guide Karen McInerney

Title

An evaluation of 'street work' as a model of detached youth work in community based Probation practice: challenges and opportunities.

Objectives

5. To gain an understanding of 'street work' as a model of engaging youth who are detached from services, or youth referred from the Probation Service.
6. To develop an understanding of how this model of engagement can benefit/hinder probation practice.

Research Questions

1. How do young people, staff members and the Board of Management of Southill Outreach perceive the 'street work' model?
2. How do clients, staff members and the Board of Management perceive the effectiveness of the 'street work' model?
3. How can street work be utilised for future probation practice?

Semi Structured Interviews (five young people, over 18)

1. Can you remember the first time you met workers on the street? y/n
   What happened? (Prompt)
   What made you talk to them? (Prompt)

2. What would help you to talk to Southill Outreach workers on the street?
   If you didn't know them? (Prompt)
   Why would you go over to talk to them? (Prompt)

3. What do you know about 'street work'?
   Why do you think staff members do it? (Prompt)

If yes to question one-why do you thing workers came over to you that day?
Why did you talk to street workers that day?

4. Is there anything good about meeting Southill Outreach workers on the street?
   If yes what? And why is it good (prompt)

5. Would you ask for help from Southill Outreach workers, if you needed it, if you met them on the street?
   Why yes?
   Why no?

6. Is there anything that is not so good about meeting Southill Outreach workers on the street?
   If so what?

7. Is there anything the workers from Southill Outreach could do differently when on the streets?

8. How often would you like to see Southill outreach members on the street in your area?

Appendix 4

Focus Group Guide

Introduction

An evaluation of 'street work' as a model of detached youth work in community based probation practice: challenges and opportunities.

Aim: To evaluate 'street work' as a model of detached youth work through gaining perspectives from Southill Outreach clients, staff and the Board of Management.

Welcome:

- Today is about coming together to discuss 'street work' as a group. The purpose of this group discussion is so that you can give your views and opinions while also hearing other people. I am most interested in your own perception of 'street work', its function and the future of 'street work' in the south side of Limerick City.

Ground Rules:

-Everyone has been given an information sheet and has signed the consent form to take part today.

-I would remind you that today's focus group will be recorded for the purpose of accurate information gathering. This data will be destroyed once the study is graded.

-Some of this data may be used in the research project but it will be disguised and made anonymous.

-Everything said here today should be kept confidential between the group and should not be discussed once the group has finished.

-People will have differing views and it is important to respect these views.

-If we are drifting off the topic, I may move the group on or remind people of the topic, this is for time keeping.

-As you are aware, you can withdraw your permission to use the data within two weeks of the focus group, in which case the material will be destroyed.

-I would ask if phones could be turned to silent for the duration of the focus group. Also, that people be mindful if another person is talking, not to talk over them.

Discussion

Questions for Focus Group (3 Staff members, 3 board members)

As everyone knows each other there is no need to introduce yourselves, so we will begin if everyone is ready?

1. What is your understanding of 'street work'?
   (Approx 10 mins)

2. What is the function of 'street work'?
   (Approx 10 mins)

3. Who are you aiming to meet while on the streets?
   (Approx 10 mins)

4. Why does Southill Outreach use the 'street work' model as a means of engaging young people?
   (Approx 10 mins)

5. How often should staff members be available on the street in order to benefit the client group?
   And why do you think it should be this often?
   (Approx 10 mins)

6. What from your understanding are the benefits of 'street work for the young people?

(b) and the agency?

(Approx 10 mins)

7. What, from your understanding are the disadvantages of street work for the client group?

   (b) And the agency?

   (Approx 10 mins)

8. Is 'street work' of benefit to the Probation Service?

   If so, how?

   (Approx 10 mins)

9. (Final Question) What do you think needs to happen in the future?

   Do you think anything needs to be carried out differently?

   (Approx 10 mins)

10 Is there anything else people would like to add in, or feel that they did not get a chance to say and that it is important?

(how ever long is needed)

Thank you for taking part in the focus group. I will write up what you have said, in conjunction with the five client interviews for my thesis. A copy should be available for you to read in May 2012.

Appendix 5

Consent Form for Participants of Focus Group & Interviews

- I……agree to participate in Karen McInerney's research study.
- The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me, and a copy given to me in writing.
- I am participating voluntarily.
- I give permission for my interview with Karen McInerney to be tape-recorded.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below
- I understand that this is a Science Shop study and this study will be available on the internet.

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed……. Date…….

Appendix 6

Information Sheet for Master of Social Work Research

For young people of Southill Outreach

- As part of the requirements for the Master of Social Work course at UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with looking at the effectiveness of 'street work' in the south side of Limerick City. 'Street work' is carried out by the staff team at Southill Outreach as you are aware.

- The study will involve interviewing five clients of Southill Outreach and carrying out a focus group with staff members and the Board of Management of Southill Outreach. The interview should last no more than twenty minutes.

- You have been asked to take part in this research because you are a client of Southill Outreach and you are over eighteen. You will also have experience of staff members of Southill Outreach doing 'street work' and have also previously/currently an involvement with the Probation Service. This research aims to get your opinion on 'street work' as you have experienced it in the area that you live.

- You do not have to take part in this study but if you do, you will be required to sign a consent form. You will be given a copy of the consent form and this sheet for your information. If at any stage you want to withdraw consent, before the interview or after the interview has taken place, this will not be a problem. It will not affect how Southill Outreach works with you in the future. Any information that you provide in the interview will not be identifiable in the research. If you change your mind and withdraw consent during the interview, the information received will be destroyed.

- Your participation in this study will be kept anonymous, therefore if there is something written in the study that you have stated, this will be disguised. Also, while the interview will be confidential, **any information which indicates that**

another person may be injured or harmed in any way will need to be passed on to the Manager of Southill Outreach and thereafter the Gardai.

- The information that you give during the interview will be recorded on a dictaphone. This is to ensure that I have accurate information. Once this research is handed in to the college, the information that you give through the interview will be destroyed within six months. At any stage during this research UCC could request the interview recording and the transcript for external examination.

- No other client of Southill Outreach or staff member will have access to what you have said in the interview.

- When all the information is gathered the results will be presented in my thesis. This will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may also be read by future students on the course. The study may be published in an academic journal and on the UCC Science Shop Website. As stated previously, all information will be anonymous.

- There should not be any negative consequences for you in taking part in this study. It is possible that you may associate 'street work' with another event in your life which you may find upsetting. Therefore, the interview can cease at any stage if you want.

- At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel distressed, a staff member from Southill Outreach will be there to provide extra support for you.

- Southill Outreach Board of Management and the UCC Ethics Committee have reviewed this piece of research and have given permission for the study to take place.

If you need any further information, you can contact: Karen McInerney at 086-0406061 @ Karen@southilloutreach.ie or at Southill Outreach, The Factory, Unit 1, Galvone Industrial Estate, Limerick. If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Appendix 7

Information Sheet for Staff and Board of Management- Focus Group

- As part of the requirements for the Master of Social Work at UCC, I am required to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with looking at the effectiveness of street work in engaging young people on the south side of Limerick City. This will be carried out through gaining the perspectives of clients, staff members and the Board of Management.

- The study will involve interviewing five clients of Southill Outreach and carrying out a focus group with staff members and the Board of Management of Southill Outreach. The focus group should take approximately 1.5 – 2 hours.

- You have been asked to take part in this focus group because you are either a staff member of Southill Outreach and engage in 'street work' or are a member of the Board of Management. I feel that rich data could therefore be gained for this study with your knowledge.

- You do not have to take part in this study but if you do, you will be required to sign a consent form. You will be given a copy of the consent form and this sheet for your information. If at any stage you want to withdraw consent, before the focus group commences or after it has taken place, this will not be a problem. Any information that you provide in the interview will not be identifiable in the research. If you change your mind and withdraw consent, during the focus group, the information received will be destroyed.

- Your participation in this study will be kept anonymous, therefore if there is an abstract from something written in the study, that you have stated, it will be disguised.

- The information that you give during the focus group will be recorded on a dictaphone. This is to ensure that I have accurate information. It will then be

transcribed and stored confidentially on Google docs. Once this research is handed in to the college, the information that you give through the focus group will be destroyed within six months. At any stage throughout this research, UCC can seek the recordings and transcripts for external examination.

- Any staff member or Board of Management members who choose not to take part in this research will not have access to the data collected within the focus group for the purpose of confidentiality.

- When all the data is gathered the results will be analysed and presented in my thesis. This will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may also be read by future students on the course. The study may be published in an academic journal and on the UCC Science Shop Website. As stated previously, all information will be anonymous.

- I do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part in this study. It is possible that you may associate 'street work' with another event in your life which you may find distressing. Therefore, the interview can cease at any stage if you require so.

- At the end of the focus group, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel distressed, I will be available to discuss this with you.

- Southill Outreach Board of Management and the UCC Ethics Committee have reviewed this piece of research and have given permission for the study to take place.

- If you need any further information, you can contact: Karen McInerney Telephone at 086-0406061 or 087-6467694 or email @ Karen@southilloutreach.ie or at Southill Outreach, The Factory, Unit 1, The Galvone Industrial Estate, Limerick. If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

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