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‘Going the Distance’: An Evaluation of Cloyne Diocesan Youth Services Mobile Garda Youth Diversion Project



CLOYNE DIOCESAN YOUTH SERVICES LTD.
YOUTH WORK IRELAND

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh
School of
Applied Social Studies

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CDYS Mobile GYDP Evaluation/Review

The following report was compiled by Ms Margaret Buckley and Mr Pat Leahy, School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork.

Pat Leahy is a lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies and the director of the Postgraduate Diploma in Youth Work. Margaret Buckley is a lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork.

As the study involves contact with minors, ethical consent for the study was obtained through University College Cork's ethics committee and both researchers were Garda vetted.

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1 Introduction and background

Cloyne Diocesan Youth Services (CDYS) are a regional youth organisation and a member region of Youth Work Ireland (YWI) based in County Cork.

CDYS provide a range of service to young people including youth clubs, targeted youth projects and Local Training Initiatives.

CDYS have successfully operated Garda Youth Diversion Projects in Cobh (established 2002) and Mallow (established 2007) for a number of years. In so doing they have built a solid base of professional expertise and established excellent linkages with the Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLO) from An Garda Síochána and relevant agencies such as the schools.

In 2017, CDYS with the support of An Garda Síochána applied to the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) to provide a 'Mobile Garda Youth Diversion Project' (MGYDP) in County Cork to cater for the hitherto unmet needs of the young people in Cork North Garda Division (Northern and Eastern areas) by providing *intense support and intervention to high risk young people* (CDYS, 2017). At the time it was (conservatively) estimated that CDYS could not work with 50 to 60 young people who would benefit from engagement with a diversion project. The mobile initiative would rectify this situation.

This application was successful, and the project commenced operations in September 2017. In July 2019 this research study was contracted to evaluate the project's performance to date.

2 Methodology Outline

This study takes a mixed methods approach to garnering the required information. We have used secondary analysis of data and conducted semi-structured primary interviews with the relevant actors; five young people, four youth workers, three Juvenile Liaison Officers and CDYS management.

A number of site visits were undertaken to gather primary data from the youth workers and from the young people. A focus group meeting was held with the three relevant JLOS and an interview was held with the CEO of CDYS, Mr Brian Williams.

In addition to the primary qualitative research, secondary quantitative research was also completed. The use of aggregated and administrative statistics from the Central Statistics Office and the PULSE system were analysed to garner measures and indicators of geographical area and of the young people themselves. In addition, the results of YLS 2.0 were used to infer the levels of risk of the young people. It must be stressed here that at no time was any identifiable information utilised.

Overall, the project is operating in a competent and highly satisfactory manner. Since its inception it has successfully embedded itself into the 'youth services ecology' of East and North Cork in a variety of locations; principally Mitchelstown, Midleton, Charleville and Fermoy.

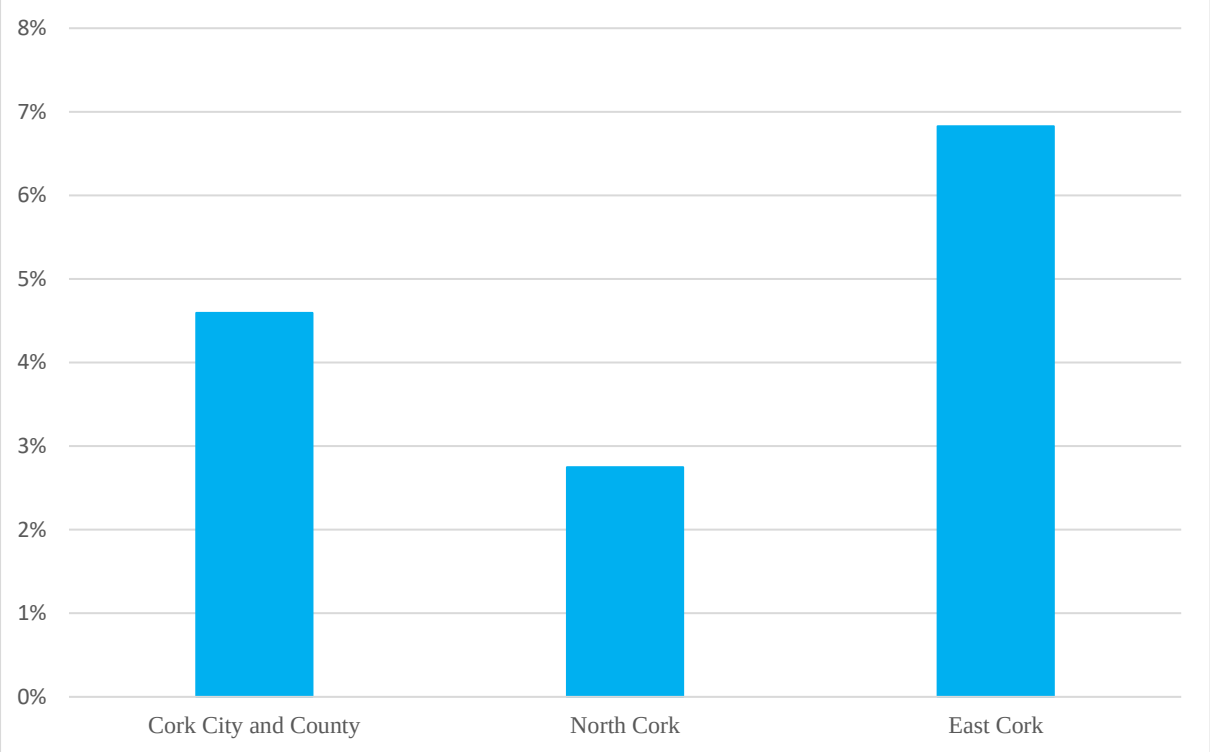
Although the mobile Garda Youth Diversion Project is a single entity, it is easier to view it as two distinctive sections; for simplicity we have termed them the Northern Section (based primarily in Mitchelstown) and the Eastern Section (primarily located in Midleton).

3 Geographical Areas

3.1 Population

Using the Small Area Population Statistics from the Central Statistics Office, the population change from 2011 to 2016 in the areas covered by the project could be extrapolated. The overall population in all areas has increased. As can be observed in Graph 3.1 below, East Cork[1] has had the highest overall increase, followed by Cork City and County and lastly North Cork[2].

Graph 3.1 – Percentage Increase in Population between 2011 and 2016



(Source: CSO Small Area Population Statistics, 2019).

While the overall percentage increase my look relatively small, it should be noted that Graph 3.1 above represents an increase of 25,800 people.

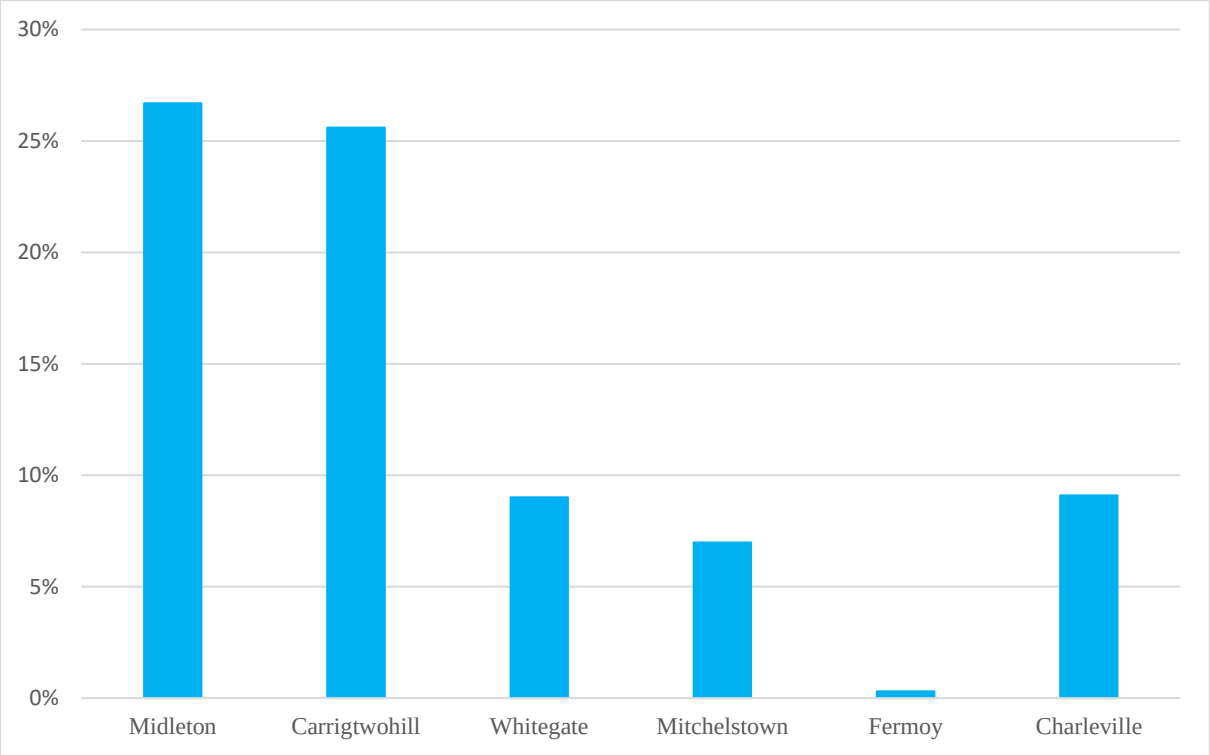
The increase in the number young people who fall into the age cohort in the catchment areas for the MGYDP has increased dramatically. The number of young people aged between 12 and 18 has increased overall by 15 per cent between 2011 and 2016, with the majority of the

[1] Referring to Midleton, Carrigtwohill and Whitegate.

[2] Referring to Mitchelstown, Fermoy and Charleville.

increase in Midleton and Carrigtwohill. Graph 3.2 below shows the percentage increase in population in the six areas covered by this study for the age group 12 to 18.

Graph 3.2 - Percentage Increase in Population of those aged 12 to 18 between 2011 and 2016



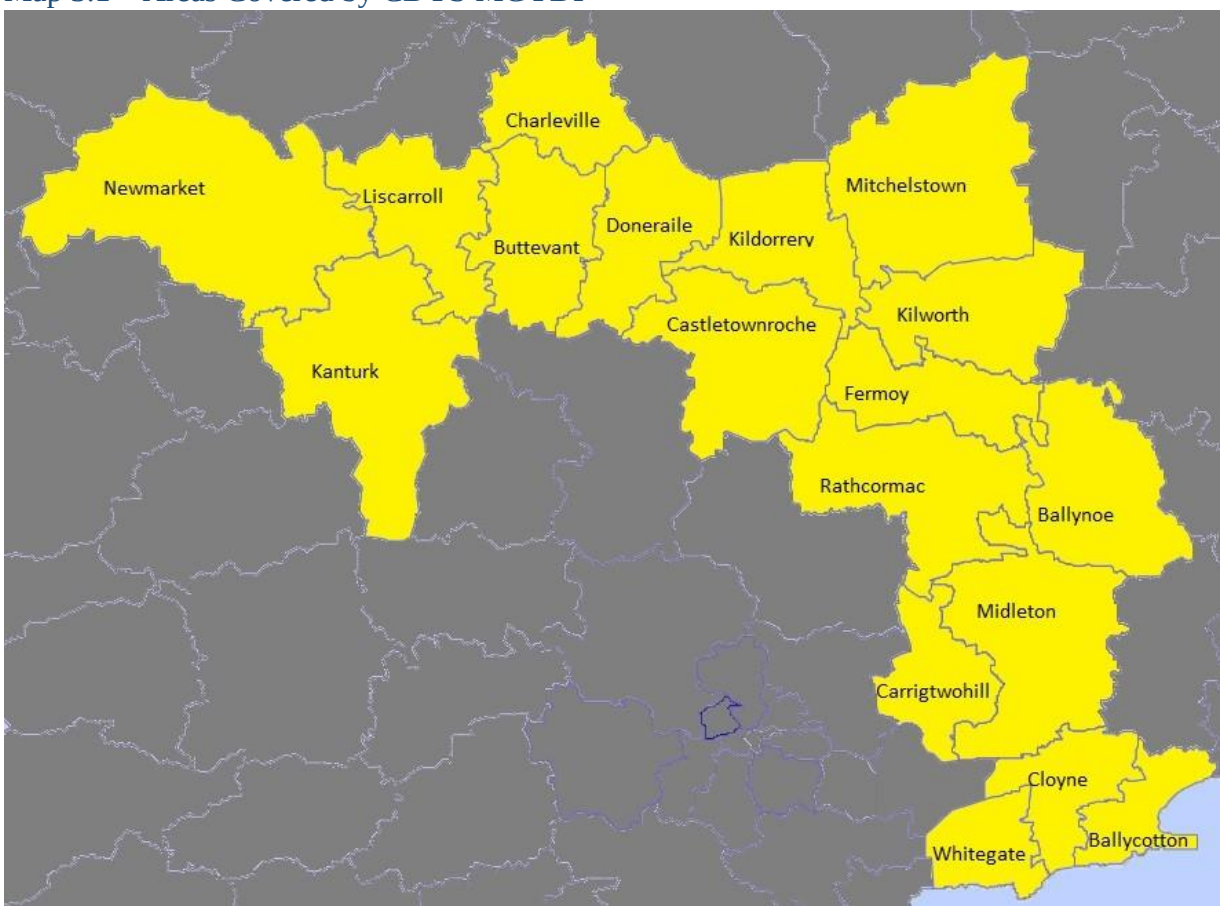
(Source: CSO Small Area Population Statistics, 2019).

Graph 3.2 above represents the percentage increase in population in people aged 12 to 18 from 2011 to 2016. With population projections, it can be assumed that between 2016 and 2019, the population of young people in these areas has continued to grow. According to one Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO) who was interviewed, in 2019 there were approximately 3,500 secondary school students between Carrigtwohill and Midleton. The growing ratio of young people to youth workers and JLOs in the areas mentioned leads to the conclusion that additional youth workers and JLOs could be of more benefit to the young people and assist in reducing the workload of the current staff.

3.2 Geographical Area

The geographical area covered by the CDYS MGYDP is considerable. The area covered is the Garda Division of Cork North[3]. The Mallow area is not part of this study and is therefore excluded. Map 3.1 shows the area covered by the CDYS MGYDP for North Cork. In total, the area covered amounts to approximately 2,200 km^2 (for reference, this is roughly the area of County Kilkenny).

Map 3.1 – Areas Covered by CDYS MGYDP



One of the unique aspects of this programme is that it is mobile, meaning that youth workers and JLOs can meet young people in their local areas, which is very positive. However, this also means that youth workers and JLOs spend a proportion of their time travelling. For example, the project based in Mitchelstown has participants in Kanturk, which is 50 km away, and would constitute a 1-hour drive each way (2-hours total). Given the relative lack of good quality roads in rural Cork and depending on where the meeting with a young person is taking place, the travel time could increase dramatically.

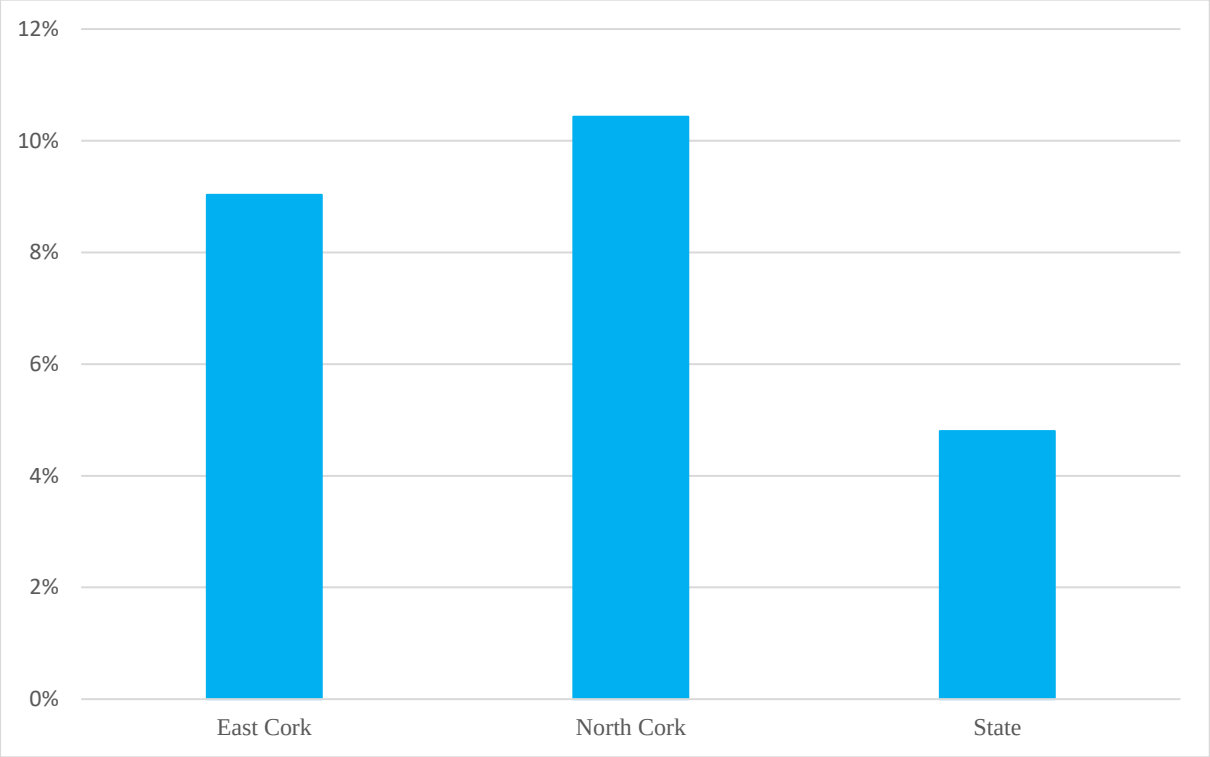
[3] The Garda Divisions are currently being examined and altered.

3.3 Social Geographic Profile

Given the wide geographical area covered by the MGYDP, it is unsurprising that there is a variation in the social geography. East Cork (Midleton, Carrigtwohill and Whitegate) is a relatively affluent area with a high density of population. While it is a relatively wealthy area, poverty is also prevalent, and a number of families have had experience of the justice system. The supports available in East Cork, particularly around education are very good (Juvenile Liasion Officer B).

Unemployment in East Cork is almost twice that of Ireland as a whole and in North Cork it is more than twice that of Ireland.

Graph 3.3 – Unemployment Rate in East Cork, North Cork and the State



(Source: CSO, 2019)

North Cork (Mitchelstown, Fermoy and Charleville) has a higher prevalence of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and, as can be seen in Graph 3.3 above, there is a high rate of unemployment. Mitchelstown was spoken of as a poor town. While outside the town itself

there are large landowners, in the town itself, poverty is widespread. The location of Charleville and Mitchelstown, as a border towns, has effected the range and breadth of services available to young people in the towns. One Juvenile Liaison Officer stated that:

> *Cloyne getting involved in the Mitchelstown area was a huge advantage. It was a huge boost to the young people in Mitchelstown.*
>
> (Juvenile Liaison Officer C).

As mentioned previously, the area covered by the project is vast, as such there is a mix of young people from both rural and urban settings. Depending on the area in which the young person lives, and their ability to attend the centre, the project can be viewed as *more outreach than anything else* (Juvenile Liaison Officer A).

There is a variety of backgrounds represented in both North and East Cork including people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, members of the Travelling Community and non-Irish people, each of which presents unique challenges for both youth workers and JLOs.

4 Young People

This section discusses the young people involved in the Mobile Garda Youth Diversion Programme in; East Cork (Carrigtwohill, Midleton and Whitegate) and North Cork (Charleville, Fermoy and Mitchelstown). It comprises quantitative data from the Garda PULSE system and YLS data, and qualitative data gathered from interviews with young people involved with the programme, youth workers and Juvenile Liaison Officers.

The five topics examined here are;

- Profile of the Young People
- Risk Factors
- Risk Levels
- Offending Behaviour
- Engagement with Other Services

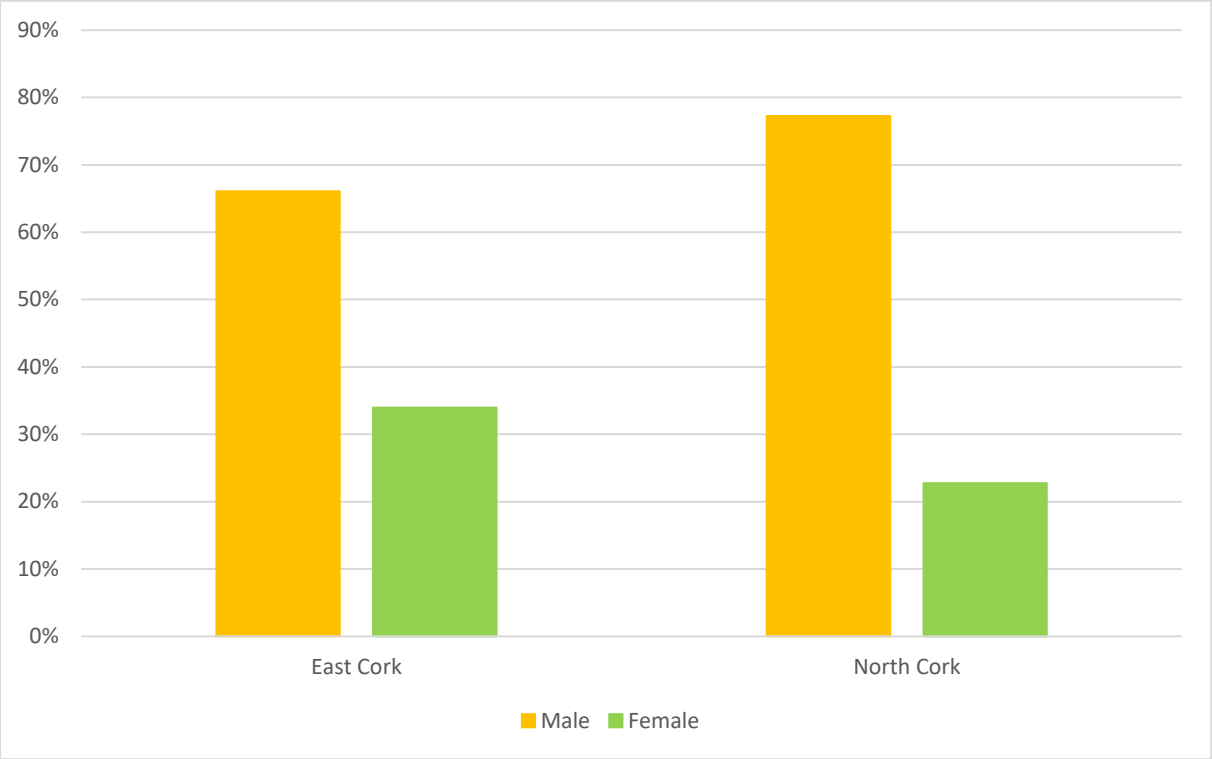
4.1 Profile of the Young People

This profile of the young people involved in the MGYDP describes the gender, age groups and participation in the education system/ employment.

4.1.1 Gender

The majority of the young people referred to the MGYDP in both East and North Cork are male. 29 per cent of the young people involved are female, and 71 per cent are male. Graph 4.1 below shows a further breakdown of the gender dimension between East Cork and North Cork.

Graph 4.1 – Genders of Young People involved in the CDYS MGYDP

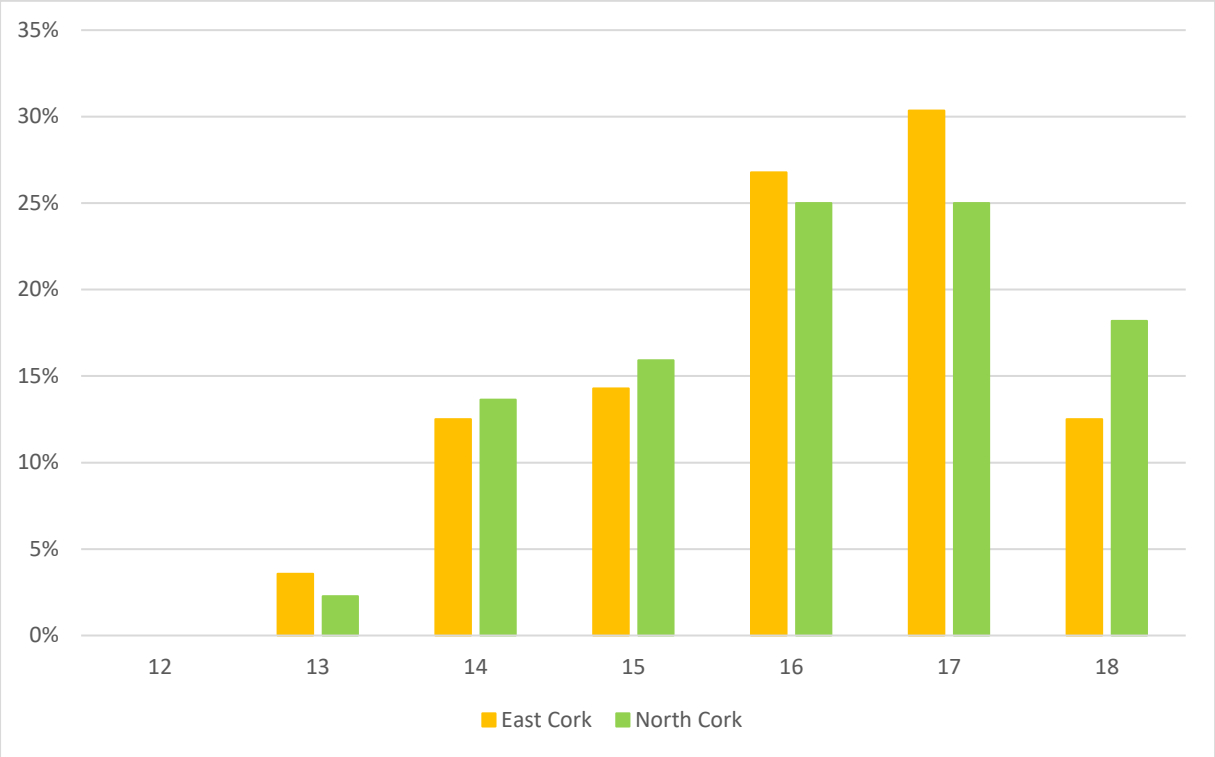


(Source: PULSE System, September 2019)

4.1.2 Age

The target age group for the MGYDP is 12 to 18. After the age of 18, the young people 'age out' of the programme. Currently, no young people aged 12 have been referred to the programme. The highest proportion of young people are aged 16 and 17.

Graph 4.2 – Ages of Young People involved in CDYS MGYDP



(Source: PULSE System, September 2019)

The overall average age is 16, with females tending to be slightly younger on average (15.8), and males slightly older (16.2). The difference in average age between East Cork and North Cork is negligible.

Using the population statistics from the previous section, accompanied by the PULSE data, it can be estimated that 1 in 35 young people aged between 12 and 18 in the areas covered is currently involved in the CDYS MGYDP. The ratio would increase substantially if the young people who have disengaged or aged out were also included.

4.1.3 Education and Employment

Overall, engagement with the formal education system appears to be low. The youth workers have encouraged the young people, where possible, to return to education and engage with the services available (Home School Liaison Officer, Education Welfare Officer, School Completion Officer, etc.). The youth workers are in active contact with school principals in an attempt to compromise and address some of the issues the young people are having in relation to education, as well as maintaining school placements. Education is not always valued in the home and, as a result, the youth workers often need to explain the benefits of returning to education. A young person who is determined to finish secondary school of their own accord, appears to be reasonably unusual. One youth worker stated:

> *We have one in particular who is very focussed. He wants to finish school. So, he stands out.*
> (Youth Worker D).

Some of the young people interviewed are very much aware of the importance of finishing school and, as a result of the efforts of youth workers, can now see a path ahead for themselves.

> *… if I do continue to get my Leaving Cert, either way I'm getting my Leaving Cert…*
> (Young Person A).

> *I just want to get my Leaving Cert.*
> (Young Person C).

> *I want to hopefully back to school, and then college.*
> (Young Person D).

The relatively low engagement with the education system does not stem from a lack of ability or a lack of willing on the part of the young people. Youth workers are asked to mediate between families and schools in order to assist the young person.

> *They really rely on our support as well. A lot of the young people we work with are having issues in school. They might be getting into trouble in school, for whatever reason, and you'd often find that the parents are nearly scared of dealing with the school.*
> (Youth Worker C).

Youth workers are actively finding ways for the young people to engage with the education system that suit them better than the standard route.

> *We're always pulling out the QQI Framework…OK, you didn't do the CAO points, so you're actually just taking the long way around, but that's fine… so, you can explain to them 'university isn't outside your grasp, there's nobody to say that you can't go to university, you're just going to take the long way around.*
> (Youth Worker B).

All of the youth workers interviewed were of the opinion that the mainstream education system does not suit the majority of these young people. The young people appear to struggle with the pressure involved, the strict rules and lack of flexibility in the education system. The traditional educational route does not suit everybody, and the young people involved in the CDYS MGYDP are no exception. While the youth workers certainly encourage the young people to engage with the education system, it is not always a possibility. In these instances, the youth workers will assist the young person in creating a curriculum vitae so that they may apply for employment. Youth workers are committed to helping the young people acquire tools and qualifications that they can use in future, after the project.

> *Even if they are only in short-term, that they will still get some sort of qualification through us, whether it's driver theory test or a first aid cert or a Safe Pass course. They all leave with something they can use.*
>
> (Youth Worker A).

The work-to-learn programme appears to have garnered real benefits for the young people. In tandem with this, the youth workers also try to play to the young person's strengths and use a strengths-based approach with the young people. For example:

> *We had one person who was mad about cleaning. Loved cleaning. Was cleaning at home all the time, really annoyed when the house was dirty. So, we were explaining that that's a strength. 'You've no problem working hard, you can keep things clean', so they're aspects that can be put into other jobs. That was the work-to-learn thing. Got her*

> *involved in that, and the first job was cleaning rooms in a hotel. So, we were able to tell her before she even started the job, 'you'll fit this job perfectly, and you can move around into bar work and all these different things, once you keep the same approach'. And she mightn't have known it, but we definitely knew it.*
> (Youth Worker D).

The youth workers work in connection with other services to assist the young people, this is elaborated upon in section 4.2 'Engagement with Other Services'.

4.2 Risk Factors

Documented risk factors are prevalent in the target group of young people who are referred to the project. The profile of the young people, according to interviews conducted, show the majority to be from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Poverty and unemployment are common in the family backgrounds of young people from all areas covered by the project. Long-term unemployment appears to be a large issue, with many families reliant on social welfare for support. Many young people come from single parent households. Young people from 'traditional' families are a minority in the programme. Many of the young people have also been assigned a social worker, and some reside in care homes.

This profile mirrors the 'typical' characteristics of young people involved in offending behaviour; as Kilkelly puts it;

> *Young people at risk of offending often come from families that have experienced breakdown or trauma and who live in disadvantaged, mainly urban areas; they are early school leavers, have low self-esteem, a learning or other disability, and or alcohol or drug addiction…..the fact that risk factors tend to converge means that those most likely to offend are those who have experienced multiple disadvantage*

An intergenerational element is also evident, in that several of the parents of young people have experience with the justice system, in some cases convictions are seen as being similar to a rite of passage. Numerous young people reside in the same estates and areas, and many of the young people do not have positive adult role models who engender prosocial behaviours due to community standards, as well as social and popular media. One youth worker used the metaphor of knotted shoelaces:

> *We spend an hour untying a knot, then they go home and get it re-tied.*
> (Youth Worker A).

In Midleton, it was estimated that 50 per cent of the referrals are Irish young people, and 50 per cent are non-Irish, which poses additional challenges for both youth workers and JLOs involved in the project. There are language barriers in numerous cases between parents and professionals, with the young people acting as interpreters. In turn, language and cultural

differences has been observed to contribute to social identity crises in young people. They may view themselves as being outsiders and cannot see the benefits of being multi-lingual. The youth workers do highlight the advantages of being multi-lingual and having unique perspectives in terms of future employment and travel prospects.

4.3 Risk Levels

The Youth Level of Service (YLS) 2.0 is used by youth workers to assess young people for level of risk. The YLS 2.0 is a strengths-focused risk/ needs tool that classifies and predicts re-offending within male and female juvenile populations. Eight areas of a young person's life are assessed for risk. These eight areas are:

1. Prior offences
2. Family circumstances
3. Education/Employment
4. Peers relations
5. Substance Abuse
6. Leisure Time
7. Behaviour
8. Attitude

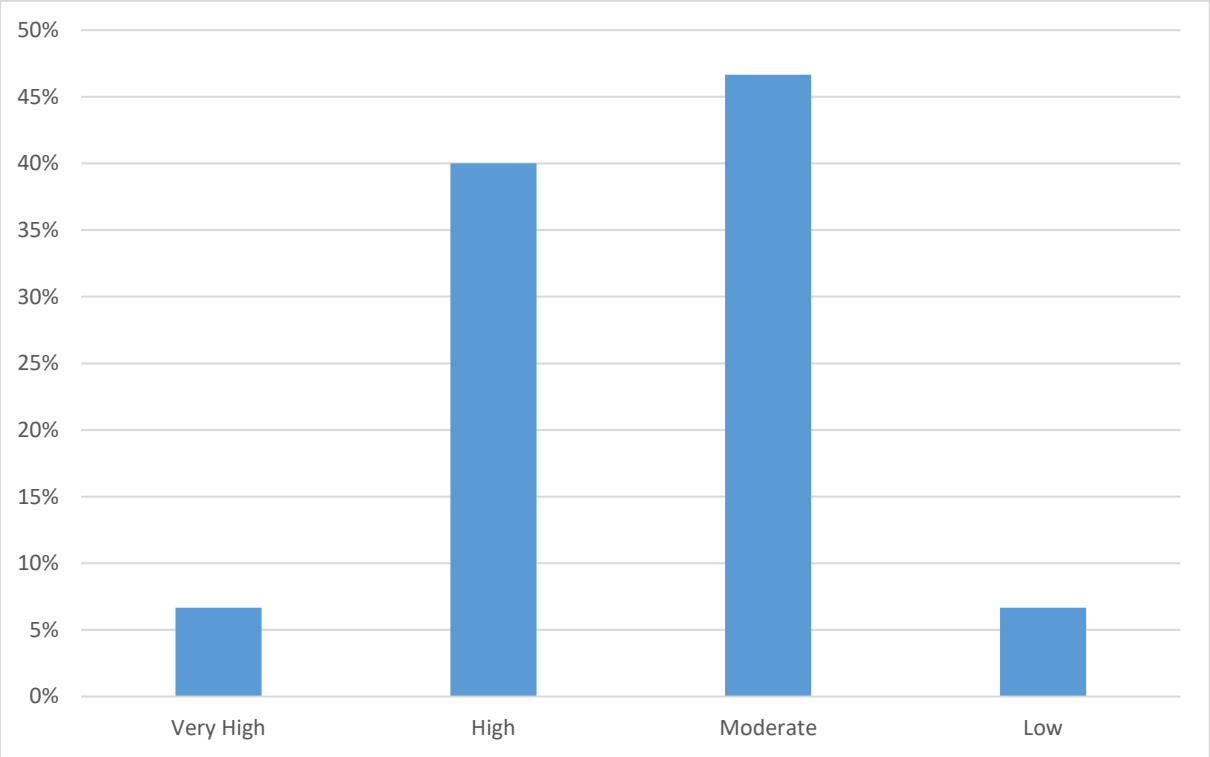
The youth worker works through a list of areas including substance abuse, education and family. An 'X' is put in the box of the area in which the young person is having difficulty at the time of completing the YLS 2.0. Having completed the first two pages, a 'score' is produced. Based on the numerical score received, a young person will be deemed Low, Moderate, High or Very High risk.

The final score or risk level then informs the level of engagement. Low risk young people, in many instances are referred to local services. The work with Moderate to Very high scoring young people will be based on the areas in which they scored the highest.

In East Cork, currently there are 26 young people who are engaged with the project. A number are awaiting a YLS assessment, as it is not completed immediately and requires that the youth workers get to know the young person first. Of those for whom YLS has been completed, 87 per cent score as being High or Moderate risk.

Of those who have disengaged, 30 per cent have done so as a result of 'aging out', that is that they have turned 18.

Graph 4.3 – YLS Scores for those Currently engaged in East Cork



While YLS 2.0 is undoubtedly a very useful tool for assessing the needs of young people and for forming the basis of tailored plans, it must be remembered that personal knowledge of the young people is crucial. Thus, the one-to-one work performed by the youth workers is vital.

4.4 Offending Behaviour

The young people referred to the project have been involved in a range of offences, including; theft from a shop, drug possession, criminal damage and assault. Table 4.1 below shows the type of offence, the number and the area in which they occurred.

Table 4.1 – Offences by number and Type in the Cork North Division in the year 2018-19

	Midleton	Fermoy	Mitchelstown	Charleville	Carrigtwohill	Whitegate
Theft from Shop	15	10	7	2	3	0
Simple Possession	10	3	2	1	1	0
Criminal Damage	4	3	3	4	1	1
Drunkenness Offences	8	4	1	1	2	0
Theft from M. V. P	0	0	0	0	0	11
Public Order Offences	1	3	3	2	0	1
Assault Minor	6	3	0	0	0	0
Possess Offensive Weapon	5	1	1	0	1	0
General Road	1	2	1	1	0	1
Assault Causing Harm	0	2	0	2	0	0
Trespass	1	1	1	0	1	0
Theft (Other)	0	1	1	0	1	1
Others	2	0	0	1	0	0
Purchase/ Consume Alcohol U18	0	2	0	1	0	0
UT (Vehicle)	1	0	1	0	0	1
Handle/ Possess Stolen Property	1	1	0	0	0	0
Threats Kill/ Serious Harm	0	2	0	0	0	0
Driving Licence	0	0	0	2	0	0
Criminal Law (Sexual Offences)	0	0	2	0	0	0
Robbery from a person	1	0	0	0	0	0
Burglary	1	0	0	0	0	0
General bye-laws	0	1	0	0	0	0
UT (Pedal Cycle)	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	57	39	24	18	10	16

(Source: PULSE System, September 2019)

The data on offences must be read with some caveats, first that the data is not necessarily indicative of the actual number of young people involved. The overall number of offences does not directly correspond to the number of individuals involved. The overall number of offences does not give a true indication of output as multiple offences are committed by individuals. For example, Table 4.1 above represents 164 offences committed by 100 individuals in 2018/19.

Secondly, the data may be artificially inflated. For example, there are 11 instances of Theft from M.V.P. (Motor Vehicle, Parked) listed for Whitegate, from interview data, we know that these instances were an aberration. The third caveat is that the data on offences is not necessarily indicative of the issues facing young people. One of the Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs) stated that:

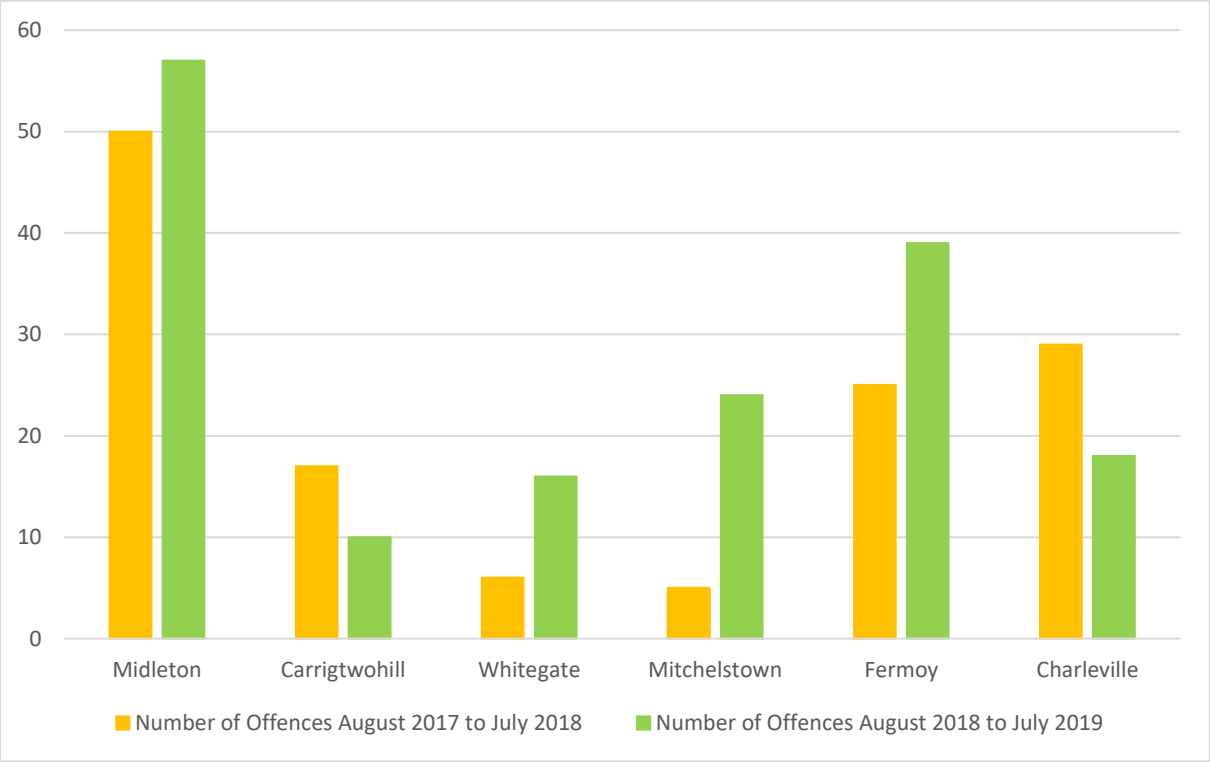
> *The offence doesn't really matter if they need to get in under our wing.*
> (Juvenile Liaison Officer C).

From interviews conducted, it became clear that while a young person may be referred to the project as a result of committing an offence there are many other factors at play. Many of the young people who are referred also have additional issues related to documented risk factors or drug and alcohol misuse.

> *They're coming into us for a specific caution, you know what the offending behaviour is. Then you get to know them, you see where the gaps are in their own lives, you see where the risk areas are. You start affecting those risk areas and you should start to see an improvement in their offending behaviour.*
> (Youth Worker A).

Graph 4.4 below details the number of offences in each district for the years 2017 to 2018 and 2018 to 2019 in comparison. Again, this data must be read in conjunction with the large increase in population observed earlier.

Graph 4.4 – Overall Number of Offences in each District in the years 2017-18 and 2018-19.

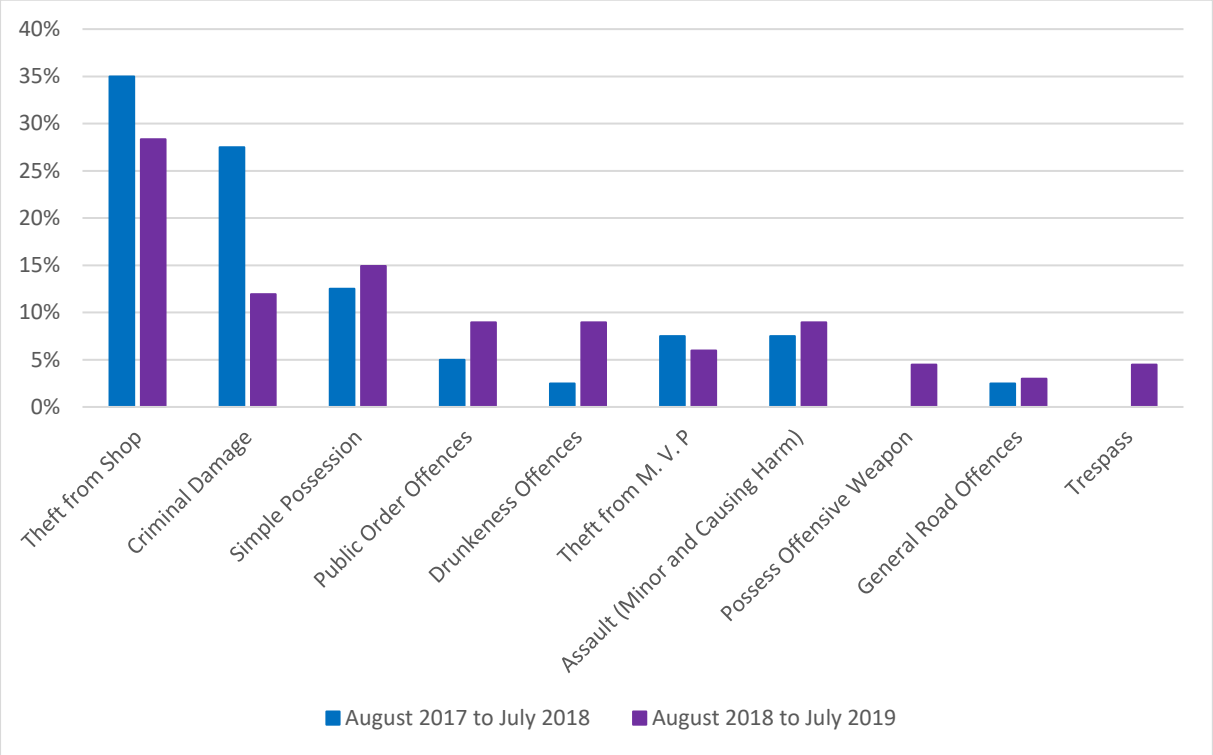


The relative increase in the number of offences in East Cork has been observed by both youth workers and JLOs, with one JLO stating:

> *This last year has been a hard year in East Cork and Midleton.*
> (Juvenile Liaison Officer B).

Theft from shop and criminal damage are the highest proportion offences in North Cork. It would appear, from interviews conducted, that the most common offence is theft from Penney's (a major clothing store in Cork City). Theft from a shop also appears to be the most likely to be a once-off. The majority of female offenders who are referred to the project is a result of theft from Penney's, in the main it is small items such as false eyelashes or fake tan.

Graph 4.5 – Type and Proportion of Offences in North Cork

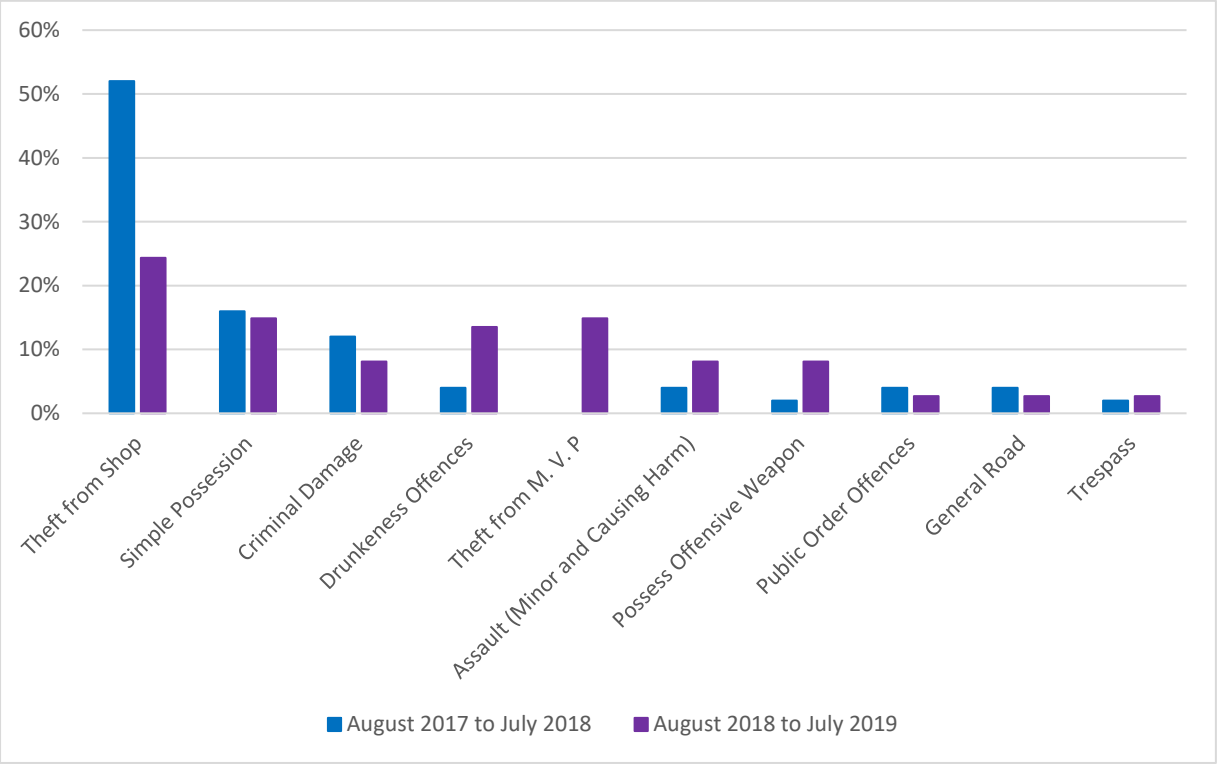


(Source: PULSE System, September 2019).

The proportion of Theft from Shop and Criminal Damage offences have reduced in North Cork by 7 per cent and 16 per cent respectively, between 2017/18 and 2018/19, which is very positive.

In East Cork, the highest rate of offences are; Theft from Shop, Simple Possession and Criminal Damage. Like North Cork, females appear to target Penney's, while males in Midleton have started to steal alcohol from off-licences and supermarkets.

Graph 4.6 - Type and Proportion of Offences in East Cork



(Source: PULSE System, September 2019).

Of the three proportionally highest offences in East Cork – Theft from Shop, Simple Possession and Criminal Damage – each has reduced between 2017/18 and 2018/19. The proportion of offences categorised as Theft from Shop has reduced by 28 per cent, while Criminal Damage and Simple Possession have reduced in proportion by 4 per cent and 1 per cent respectively.

As previously mentioned, such data must be read with certain caveats. However, the effectiveness of the MGYDP in reducing the proportion of offending behaviour in young people cannot be disputed.

The Juvenile Liaison Officers outlined some of the observed and unreported challenges in offending behaviour in the young people. Many of the young people begin with drug and alcohol misuse, which leads to other offences manifesting.

> *If you could get a handle on the underage drinking, I don't think a lot of the other offences would manifest. Underage drinking seems to lead*

> *to drug use, then you have crime to pay for the drug habits. Lots of it is starting with the drinking underage.*
> (Juvenile Liaison Officer B).

The trends indicate that young people today are involved in drug and alcohol misuse younger they were than ten years ago. Youth workers have indicated that the majority of the offending behaviour is around drug and alcohol misuse and theft. Echoing what the JLO indicated, youth workers were of the opinion that committing offences is usually interrelated with drug and alcohol misuse.

Some level of experimentation and recreational substance use is more or less normal in youth culture (Lalor, de Roiste and Devlin, 2007); however,

> *particularly in areas of entrenched social exclusion, the distinction between 'recreational' and 'problematic' drug use may break down , resulting in drug use patterns and repertoires not typically associated with recreational use*
> (MacDonald and Marsh in Paylor et al, 2012, 33).

There is no evidence of organised crime in either North or East Cork. One situation which may fall under the categorisation of 'organised' would be in families. In that case, the young person would be seen as contributing to the family economy which may be built on criminal endeavours. Likewise, in terms of organisation, there has been an increase in the number of organised fights in both North and East Cork. Many of these fights are organised in carparks in which the young males feel they need to 'front up' if they are 'called out'. The popularity of organised fights was theorised as being attributable to a mixture of seeing Conor McGregor as a role model, social media (many of the fights are recorded and distributed), peer influence is also a contributing factor. In terms of gangland crime, there is no evidence in North or East Cork. There are small groups which may socialise together and may be involved in offences together, but this would not fall under the category of 'gangland'.

4.4 Engagement with Other Services

In the main the young people concerned can be conceptionalised as having 'distressed transitions'(Batsleer, 2008, 53); the standard child to adult transition that features a youth phase centred on second level education and onwards progression into the labour market has either broken down or in grave danger of doing so. These young people may also undergo 'fast-track' transitions whereby they 'speed' into adulthood by becoming parents themselves at an early age (Smith, 2008, 22), this fast track can be attractive for young women as it allows a '*local form of adulthood defined through parental and domestic responsibility'* (Thomson, in Kehily, 2007, 99).

Such young people are at a high-risk of school dropout and becoming 'NEETs'; not in education, employment or training.

Early school leaving is usually the precursor to lifelong poverty and the attendant issues of such poverty;

> *There is a real risk of long-term socio-economic disadvantage for an early school leaver. For many, leaving school early will lead to narrower employment opportunities and an increased likelihood of poverty and unemployment*
> (Lally, 2012).

Burgess and Leahy (2003) found that early school leaving in Ireland tends to be the end result of a cumulative process of disadvantage and marginalisation. It is a specific and highly significant life event that thereafter severely limits the person's life opportunities across the course of their employment biography. Early school leaving is the result of disadvantage, the principal obstacle to social mobility, and a key phenomenon in the inter-generational trapping of particular groups in poverty as the children of early school leavers are the ones who also tend to leave early and perpetrate the problem.

With this in mind, a core objective of the project (and indeed many such interventions) is to support the young people to remain in school or in alternative education/training space such as Youthreach or LTI. Previous, subsequent and concurrent involvement in other services is evident. There are numerous and varied other services available to the young people, engagement with which are encouraged by youth workers.

In terms of state services utilised, the majority of the young people referred have been assigned a social worker, who the youth workers interact with. Creative Community Alternatives (CCA) is also available, but not to all of the young people. Part of the DEIS strategy, the School Completion Programme, accompanying School Completion Officer and Home-School Liaison Officer have been spoken of very highly as being supportive of the young people in the education system. Rockies (Cork City Learning Support Services), which operates as an extension of the Youthreach programmes operating under the Cork Education & Training Board, was mentioned by young people who were attending it, and by youth workers when discussing progression of young people. One example of engagement with other services would be:

> *We've one lad now, he came out of CBS, he was given the 7 hours a week tutoring, he's in Rockies now for the year, finishing out his Junior Cert, and he's been promised a place down in Cobh for next year for transition year. He's able to manage his behaviours now and through all the contact with the education welfare officer, we could do that. He's our poster boy at the moment. When he came into us, he was going to CBS, there's no English spoken at home. So, he would have gone into a strict enough school with poor English, and when you're talking about reading and writing… So, he came out as quite high risk when we did his YLS assessment. We identified then 'right, what does this guy need?'.*
>
> (Youth Workers A and B)

There are many voluntary and community-based organisations which both youth workers and young people are involved with. In Midleton, each of the young people mentioned also attending MyPlace (Cloyne Diocesan Youth Services Targeted Project). Wild Work, which is a SECAD initiative, has proven to be extremely popular, a good example of combined efforts would be The River Project, in which a group of young people from both CDYS and The Bridge Project explored, studied and cleaned an area of the Owenacurra River (further elaborated upon 'Working Methods'). The East Cork Music Project is popular with the young people who find productive diversion there, while also being able to use it to forward their ambitions of qualifications.

Access to a community-based drugs worker has been invaluable. However, currently there is no dedicated drugs worker for East Cork, which is an issue, as the youth workers necessarily fill the void.

5 Working Methods

The project's work methods are grounded in youth work praxis and are heavily imbued with the ethos, philosophy and values of this discipline; Nicholls (2012, 21) argues that youth work has to be voluntary on the part of the young person, informal, non-academic, non-vocational, enjoyable and that its content has to be co-produced. From an Irish perspective, the Youth Work Act 2001 defines youth work as a;

> *Planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons*

The project features all of these indicators and features and the primary data gathered illustrates that this is indeed the reality in the mobile project. In common with most youth projects the MGYDP is a highly dynamic environment when the young people are present, a situation that requires highly skilled, flexible and adaptable practitioners who can think and act on their feet.

Typically, the workers engage with the young person (and their family) through targeted outreach (Saipin, 2013, 43); they visit the home and make the young person an offer of a place in the project. *This process requires communications skills, flexibility and a willingness to learn* (ibid.) on the workers part and the ability to be persistent and patience.

> *In the initial home visit, when we meet the family and the young person, we bring consent forms, and the parents and the young person give their consent. Just to see where that young person is at. So, it gives us a broader picture. We're able to gather as much information as possible about the young people, so we can begin to effect change.*
> (Youth Worker C).

Entry into the project is managed in a reflexive manner that allows the young person to voluntarily engage in a psychologically and emotionally safe fashion. Thereafter the workers focus on establishing, strengthening and maintaining solid practice relationships with the young people. Blacker notes that *the environment we operate in affects the possibilities for building and sustaining relationships* (Jeffs and Smith, 2010, 19) emphasising the need for workers to firstly be aware of and use the physical space to best effect and also to create space for meaningful work with the young people. This is exampled in the MGYDP by the use of CDYS projects in Midleton as an entry/aces point for new referrals as they recognisable

features in the youth ecology of the area and regarded as ‘safe ground’ by the local youth population.

Our fieldwork provided copious confirmation of the youth workers using space and time to maintain relationships and to use these relationships to effect change in the young people’s value systems, life outlook, self-image, transitional orientation and behaviour. The work and project are very much tailored to the specific young person, depending on their needs. Building and maintaining trust is central to working with young people.

> *It all takes time. If you’re building genuine trust with the lads, it does take time.*
> (Youth Worker A).

> *That’s the main point of it because we won’t be able to work with them if they don’t trust us for a start.*
> (Youth Worker D).

The project’s two sections feature five areas of *immediate* benefit (Smith and Jeffs, 2010, 4) from youthwork participation for the young people; sanctuary/safety, enjoyment, development, relationships and appreciation. The project also amply demonstrates the indicators of what the European Commission has termed ‘quality youth work;

> *Close relationships between young people and youth workers*
> *Active outreach; Autonomy; Partnerships with other actors*
> *Flexibility, adaptability and access*
> *Learning opportunities, goal setting and recognition*
> *Safe and supportive environments to enjoy experience and make mistakes in*
> (Dunne, A., Ulicna, I., Murphy, I., Golubeva, M., 2014)

Within the project the young people partake in standard youth work type activities; food and cooking are a fundamental bedrock as the selection, preparation, cooking, eating and cleaning up offer endless opportunities for interaction between the young people and staff. There is a certain amount of hanging around/open space work wherein the young people can relax; and there are also organised activities (such as the Eastern sections river clean-up) and outdoor education. All of this contributes to frequent conversations between the young people and

adults. The time and space created allows dialogues to develop and unfold from these conversations; these dialogues are a key active mechanism for allowing the young people to explore their identities and to experiment with different identities.

Guerra (in Rosenfeld et al, 2013, 267 – 269) points out that *identity development is impacted by available opportunities*….and…*the lure of a deviant identity is amplified when it is solidified through negative group affiliations*. The facilitation of identity exploration and through it a re-orientation of personal values towards a more pro-social attitude is a fundamental achievement of the project and an area that can be highlighted as a concrete and specific achievement. In simple terms, participation in project activities invariably allows the young people the opportunity to be good instead of bad and to like being good.

The River Project is a good example of an activity which was both recreational and educational. A group of young people from both CDYS and The Bridge Project in Midleton explored, studied and cleaned an area of the Owenacurra River. A poster of this project, which also details the numerous community partners can be seen in Photograph 5.1.

Photograph 5.1 – The River Project, Midleton



A more passive mechanism is the role-modelling of the workers; the style in which communication occurs, decisions arrived at and conflicts resolved can and is dramatically different from what most of the young people have experienced in the past at home and in peer-group situations. Again, these phenomena allow the young people to explore new ways of expressing themselves, ways which are far more 'pro-social' than hitherto.

> *Getting young people to identify their own offending behaviour as behaviour that's not acceptable in a wider community and tying young people back into communities. Like, all our projects, they're all about tying them back in. 'This is where you live. You're part of this community. You might feel like you're on the edges, but you're here and we're here'. We're part of the community and we're looking at other services that they can access through us.*
>
> (Youth Worker B).

Both sections of the project employ group and individual approaches to working with the participants; the workers felt that group situations offer a far more effective vehicle for practice particularly as groups allow for an organic social learning process to emerge.

Pinker (1997) notes that *children socialise each other* and Harris (2011) argues that membership of a productive social group confers innumerable benefits to the individuals involved; *Young people need challenge, fun and excitement, physical and intellectual. They also need a sense of limits and boundaries, and to feel that there are trustworthy adults around who they can turn to for help if needed* (p.20).

Amongst other benefits being part of a group helps;

- *Share diverse perspectives.*
- *Hold one another (and be held) accountable.*
- *Receive social support and encouragement to take risks.*
- *Develop new approaches to resolving differences.*
- *Establish a shared identity with other group members.*
- *Find effective peers to emulate.*

(Carnegie Mellon University, 2016).

As long ago as the 1927 Thrasher found that in dealing with 'delinquent' youth individual work produced little result; it was only when the group norms were changed that the individuals involved modified their own behaviours (Thrasher, 1927/2000). This phenomenon is social learning, and

> *in the social learning system, new patterns of behaviour can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behaviour of others*
> (Bandura, 1971).

The experience of being in a 'new' yet enjoyable group social setting with its own rules and regulations (dictated by friendly yet firm adults) presents the individual young people with a different set of norms; in order to remain in this enjoyable setting one has to conform to these norms or risk losing membership.

> *It's very well thought out, how we put a group together. So, we try to pair lads up who will fit, if at any time it becomes disruptive then it's back to one-to-one. But one young person's idea can spark creativity in an entire group, or one young person's engagement can be infectious in a group.*
> (Youth Worker B).

Individual 'one to one' (or sometimes two workers to one young person) is also employed by the project sometimes for logistical reasons such as a young person living far away and/or having commitments that dictate their availability to meet in a group, the lack of a space to meet groups in. Other young people may not yet be at a stage where membership of a group in the project would be of benefit to them and some exhibit behaviours that preclude them from group membership.

> *We work mainly one-to-one, two-to-one, three-to-one or we co-work everything, both of us as one. It really works, because I might be involved with some lads over here and (the other youth worker) will pick up on things that I missed.*
> (Youth Worker B).

Both sections of the project engage in 'public' one to one work; semi-private conversations with individual young people; these conversations may only last seconds (they are frequently much longer) but they are a critical social aspect of the project as they offer young people an immediate response to questions and queries and an adult opinion on matters that arise. These conversations are therefore organic and natural and can lead into all kinds of areas; sometimes they lead nowhere, even then they serve a purpose as a form of lubrication for the relationships between young people and youth workers.

In both sections we witnessed the youth workers 'doing the simple things well' - a hugely important yet oft overlooked aspect of the work - they knew the names of the young people. They made sure to say hi or hello to all of them every time they met, they evidenced concern when the youngsters got into trouble (some trivial matters, some, as can be expected in this setting, not so trivial) and they displayed a sense of fun and playfulness.

This sense of fun is another critical element in good practice; young people do not particularly want to be facilitated by dour or over-bearing adults and the target group of the mobile project would most likely exit if this was the case anyway. Humour is deployed by the workers to challenge and confront in a non-threatening manner. Trevithick (2005, p. 178) notes that;

> *The sensitive and judicious use of humour can be helpful in a range of situations*; it can *place the interaction on a more normal, ordinary footing and help us to reveal our humanness*.

Games are used regularly as part of the project.

> *One of the modules in the Life of Choices is to play 'Simon Says' and we were looking at this like 'how are we going to get these lads to play 'Simon Says'? But one of them really got into it, and that was it, the rest of them just became kids.*
> (Youth Worker B).

> *They're tough lads out on the street and they never get a chance to be kids. They wouldn't be allowed to get excited about something childish. We had them colouring-in here one day. It was like 'I'm giving you permission now to be a kid', and they were colouring mad here one day… until they got a bit competitive about how good theirs were!*
> (Youth Worker A).

The use of humour is however heavily predicated on the relationships between parties (for it can have counter-productive results), and solid cultural competence; knowing what is taboo and knowing what is accepted is of vital import.

The characteristics of good practice in youth work are well established (Smith and Jeffs, 1987, 2010, Banks 2010) and the mobile project methods more than amply evidenced that the practice therein is of the highest standard. Harris (2011, 9) points out that *we know that it is fundamentally important for children to feel safely attached to at least one significant adult*. The project provides these young people with a significant adult who will support you but also challenge you.

6 Conclusion

The evidence from all sources in this research study overwhelmingly demonstrate the effectiveness and indeed success of the mobile project. There were minimal negative factors uncovered and any such negative factors present are beyond the control of CDYS. The project is enjoyed by the young people as it conforms to international best practices in youth work provision of this nature.

The project's young people have developed in social, personal and educational dimensions and the situation regarding their offending behaviour has improved; however, it should be borne in mind that no project, intervention or scheme can fully compensate for wider deficits in areas such as parenting.

The project benefits enormously from being embedded in the wider CDYS structure, illustrated by the stronger structural foundations of the eastern section which has access to the far more developed set of youth work opportunities and sites available in Midleton and Fermoy relative to the situation in Charleville and Mitchelstown.

> *In an ideal world, there would be a project in each town, but this is as good as you'll get.*
> (Juvenile Liaison Officer C).

A slightly worrying feature of the project is the staff turnover in the Northern section. Although outside of the organisations control (previous staff moved on so as to work closer to home for example) CDYS should make every effort to recruit and retain the highest calibre of staff to minimise the disruption caused by turnover. Fortunately, these have not been a 'full turnover' all at once whereby both workers left simultaneously, and this has mitigated the situation.

The actual staff group are a credit to themselves and to CDYS; we witnessed genuine warmth, care and affection emanating from the workers towards the young people. The respect of the young people was equally evident flowing in the other direction with the young people demonstrating a high level of regard towards the youth workers. Coyne and Donohue (2013, 222) emphasis that *the success or failure of a programme…depends on the youth workers involved* whilst Wylie (in Curran et al, 2013, 64) notes that *good youth workers think about their practice and take responsibility for becoming better at it*. Our site visit interviews with

the staff evidenced that this is very much the case in the project with the staff members displaying an avid interest in their practice and a desire to improve the lives of the young people concerned.

The work force is always the hinge factor in youth work; everything swings on the skill, ability, knowledge and attitude of the workers. The CEO did point out to us that in recruiting the first thing he looks at is attitude as that is the key element. The mobile projects workforce to date has been more than competent; they have consistently done extra and made every effort in operating the project. The current staff group are qualified in diverse areas; this does have merit in that it allows for a multiplicity of approaches. We do recommend however that CDYS should in future attempt to recruit staff with professional (NSETS) level youth work qualifications as minimum requirement with at least one such qualified youth worker based in each section as a quality guarantee given the youth work nature of the organisation and diversion project.

The specific distinctiveness of the mobile project lies in its ability to provide a vastly increased geographical coverage for youth diversion in county Cork; however, this undoubted strength is also the project's single greatest shortcoming insofar as that it cannot provide a service that delivers daily opportunities in a fixed location to the young people. Without the addition of significant extra resources this will remain the case and it is not possible to justify the establishment of four or so new projects given the numbers of young people involved. It is difficult to envisage any alternative model that can overcome the real barrier of physical distance inherent in this region. As the Juvenile Liaison Officers said:

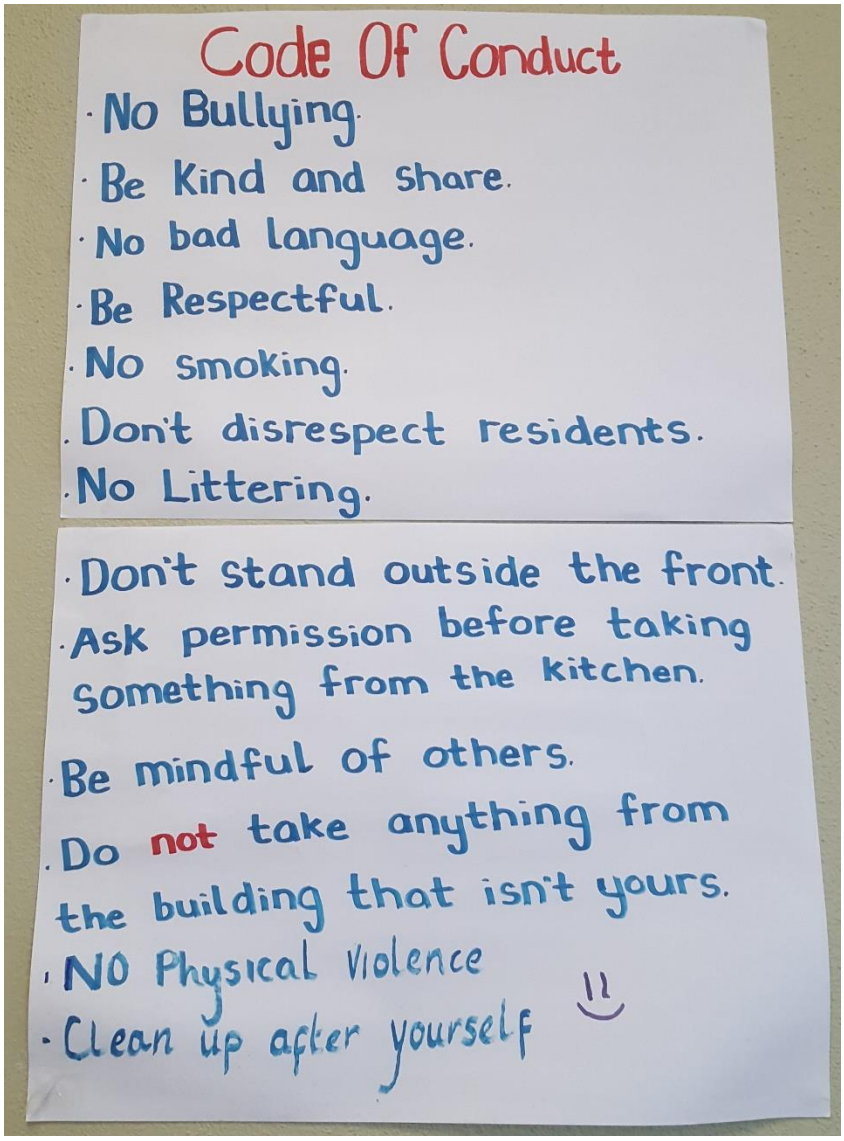
> *They're covering such a big area it's different from the fixed project…*
> *it's more outreach than anything else.*
> (Juvenile Liaison Officer C).

The fundamental model that has been developed by CDYS and the JLOs involved is eminently suitable for transfer to other sites across Ireland. McAleer's research (2019) found that rural areas experience considerable barriers and obstacles in the provision of all forms of youth work and identified a number of means to alleviating this situation. This mobile model of diversion provision does offer a cost-effective further means of delivering services.

The pre-existence of a network of CDYS projects and interventions, the prior experience (in Mallow and Cobh) of diversion work which evolved into a set of best practices in this area and the level of support provided by peers and CDYS are also important elements of the success of the MGYDP.

We believe that it is possible for the structure of CDYS could be re-aligned in such a manner as to organise its projects as youth hubs from which an integrated suite of services – clubs, groups, targeted projects, LTIs and GYPDs could operate. CDYS and applied social studies have recently (December 2019) made a proposal to the Irish Research Council to investigate the feasibility of such a restructuring. It would however be contingent on resources being available for transport.

Photograph 6.1 – Code of Conduct, Mitchelstown



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