

## **Presentation National Youth Justice Conference 27th February 2010**

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### ***Working Together To Reduce Youth Crime***

#### **Colette Quinn**

The Children Act and the National Youth justice Strategy has demanded a level of strategic collaboration never demanded before. The rationale for these collaborations is a) no one agency or body has the resources or remit to respond to all the challenges raised by children and young people who offend but also b) we each have particular strengths that we can bring to the table which when aggregated and well synchronised can improve outcomes for children and communities.

*Partnership and collaboration* are often concepts spoken about in the abstract, undeniably and intrinsically good but difficult to talk about in practical terms. In fact some commentators question whether the effort involved in sustaining inter-agency working is worth the effort at all, given they say, that there is little evidence to show that multi-agency solutions improve outcomes. We are going to talk about a practical example today about how AGS and IYJS are working together with our other key partners, Voluntary Youth Organisations, to yield better returns for the €12 million invested at an early stage of the youth justice system, **Garda Youth Diversion Projects**. It is a collaboration which has gone way beyond a talking shop and has required joint risk taking, information sharing, professional time sharing in pursuit of a common goal and joint leadership.

In 2009 IYJS invested some €12M in Garda Youth Diversion Projects. The first of these projects was set up in 1990 and we now have 100 projects operating in communities across the length and breadth of the country. These projects are administered by An Garda Síochána and managed and delivered by 38 youth and community based organisations providing services to some 3,500 young people. The projects are located at the stage in the youth justice system where young people are at the threshold of possible further offending and where there is sufficient concern that they will not cease their offending behaviour without some help.

Today we are going to talk about the change plan we have developed for Garda Youth Diversion Projects and the improvements that we think the changes will bring about in terms of youth crime reduction. Many of the changes stem from a report published in 2009, 'Designing Effective Local Responses to Youth Crime' or as it has become known the baseline report of Garda Youth Diversion Projects. This report and subsequent implementation plan has been fully adopted by the Garda Commissioner and my office is fully committed to playing its part in seeing it through.

***So what's the problem?*** The problem is that young people are responsible for a significant amount of crime. The type of crime they become involved with is largely thoughtless public order related crime, often influenced by alcohol consumption. This overt nature of much of youth offending may account for the reason why 76 % of the public identified youth crime as a significant concern, second only to violent and drug related crime.

Let's try to get some fix on the size of the problem. According to the latest census information we are a country of some 4.2 million people. 395,000 of our population or approximately 9% is aged 12-17rs [this age span is of significance because this is the age span from age of criminal responsibility through to 18 years or the age at which, under the criminal law, children become adults]. Approximately 5% or 21,000 of these young people every year are referred to the Garda Juvenile Liaison Scheme.

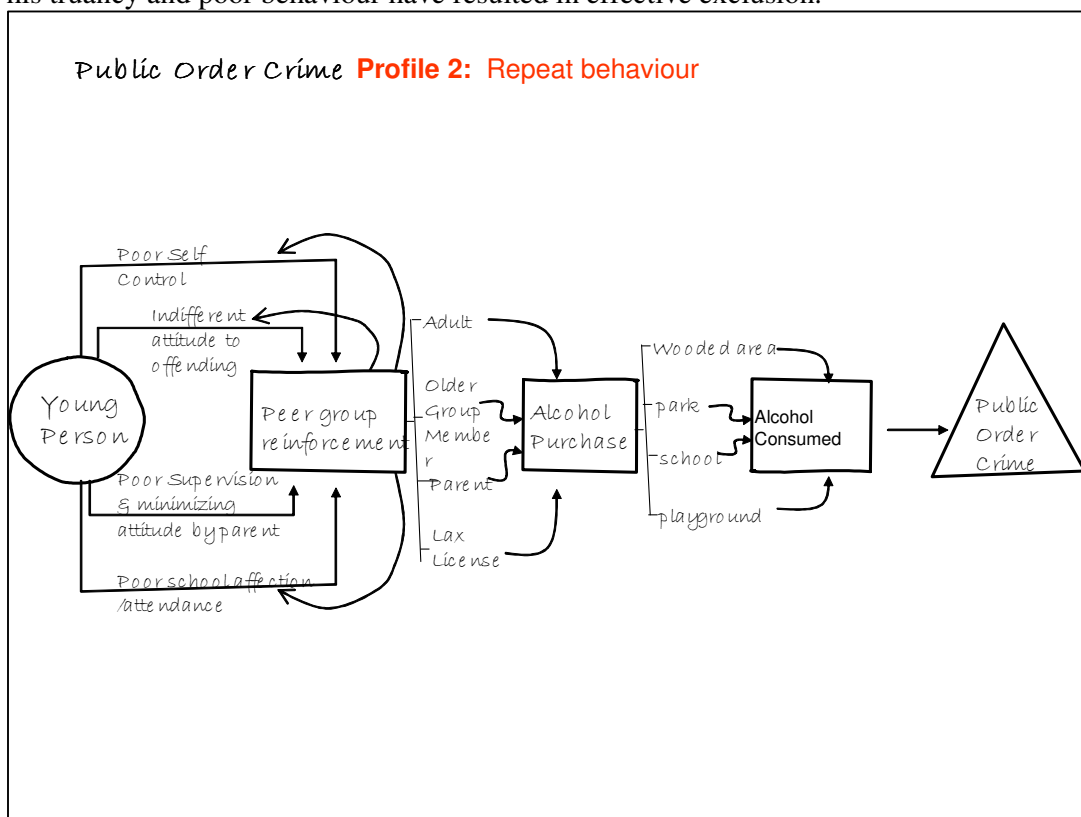
Most of the 100 Garda Youth Diversion projects distributed across the country serve total populations of less than 14,000. Therefore we can calculate that most projects serve local populations of children referred to the Juvenile Diversion Programme, of between 100-250 per year. In 2008 96 visits were made to project sites as part of the national Baseline Study. A key part of each site visit was consulting with local garda and youth professionals about the nature of youth crime in the local community served by the project. Not surprisingly the aggregation of this data across the country has given a sophisticated narrative of how youth crime occurs in Ireland, ..... **the stories behind the facts and figures**. In addition with the support of the recently appointed Garda Analyst office in Garda Headquarters we have begun to analyse 10 years worth of PULSE data [or 70,000 data entries] involving young people coming to the attention of Gardaí.

**What does youth crime in Ireland look like?** Over ½ of youth crime committed in Ireland involves a cluster of offences relating to alcohol related public misbehaviour. Most of this offending is ad hoc, spiking towards weekends, public holidays and calendar events such as Halloween, end of school examinations and summer holidays. In each local community there are a reasonably small number of locations where alcohol is consumed and where public order incidents occur later, as part of a strangely recurring sequence. Most of the young people involved in this type of behaviour do so reasonably infrequently although a significant number are involved most weekends in fairly constant friendship groups. Of the other offences committed by young people, shop theft is particularly common followed by drugs related offences and a much smaller number of more serious offences such as burglary.

Whilst all the young people dealt with as part of the Juvenile Diversion Programme have positive aspects to their behaviours and personality – the baseline report has indicated a high degree of correlation between the challenges presented by young people to garda projects and the risk indicators identified in some key Western criminological studies. Tendencies to impulsive behaviour and poor levels of empathy are common features identified by project staff.

In addition close relationships with an offending friendship group, low motivation to change behaviour, poor levels of supervision by parents and low affection for school also present, particularly with young people offending more frequently. A small number of young people present as being trapped in an all encompassing system of negative influences and are actively encouraged to offend from a young age. Nevertheless some children in escaping such influences are able to negotiate a myriad of day-to-day risks over a significant period of time such that their 'narrative' or local reputation is one which is pro-social rather than anti-social. **We aim to find out more about why these children prosper in the face of such adversity**

Take for example this offence profile that we have been able to develop as a consequence of the 96 local site visits we made and the discussions we held with professionals across the country about youth crime in their locality. This profile featured in over ½ of the local communities served by Garda Projects. The profile describes a young person who as part of an offending friendship group is one of a relatively small number involved in frequent public order offending; most if not every weekend. The type of offences include, under age drinking, threatening and abusive behaviour to the public, and to members of An Garda Síochána, criminal damage offences and occasional assaults of passers by or other groups of young people. The young person presents with poor self control, acting impulsively and considers his weekend exploits as normal. The young person's parents appear to minimise his offending and his involvement in any offending possibly by suggesting that he is prone to peer influence. He has also developed a poor affection for school such that his truancy and poor behaviour have resulted in effective exclusion.



The young person has a high degree of loyalty to a closed set of friends which serve to copper fasten the young person's attitude to the offending behaviour, provide an environment which encourages and elevates risk taking behaviour and which has a poor affection for school.

There are at least four key routes to securing alcohol; a) two or three adults in the town with their own drinking problems are known to be open to buying alcohol for young people in return for alcohol or money, b) there are often older members of the group who are or appear to be over 18 yrs of age, c) some parents provide alcohol to young people and d) there are licensees in the town known to be less than vigilant about checking age

There are at least four or five locations in this town when alcohol consumption occurs at weekends, a wooded area, a park, a local school grounds and a playground. These young people then head off into the town centre where they become involved in public order related incidents most often between the hours of 11.00pm-2.00am. **It was surprising when we built this profile, the degree of resonance it struck with a large number of individual projects when we presented to them in a series of feedback events that we organised for all projects in late 2008.**

This degree of nuance in building macro profiles of youth crime activity; where we have integrated 'risk factors' with situational and temporal factors, was only possible by systematic consultation with professionals on the ground, serving relatively small communities.

This type of illustration or hypothesis, where appropriately evidenced, can also assist in reducing youth crime. Imagine a group of agencies and services in a local town considering how they may start making positive impacts in terms of youth crime; the areas in this illustration which require risks to be reduced and/ or the sequence of events to be altered for a more beneficial outcome are clear

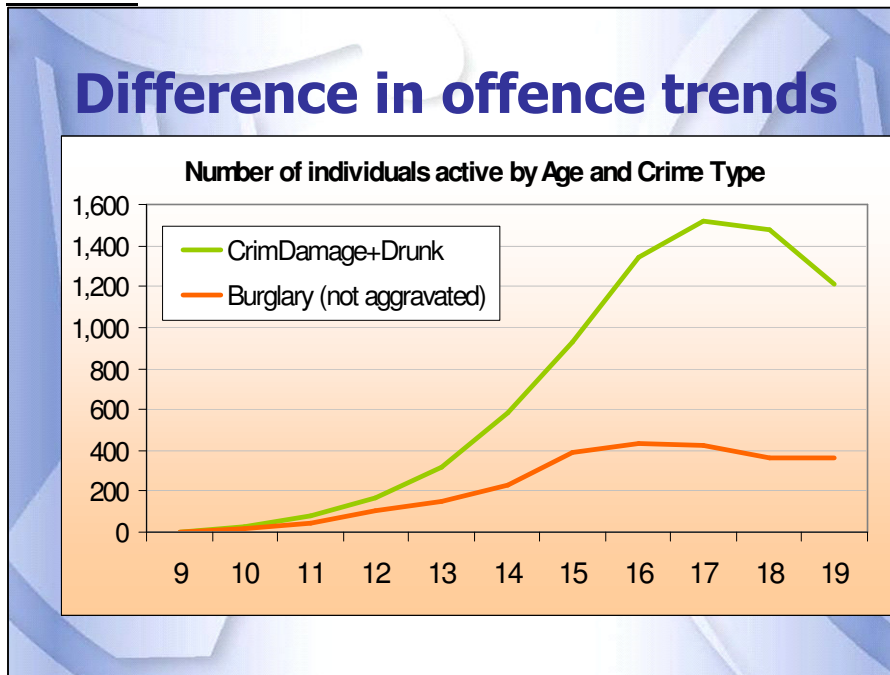
In addition to the baseline study we have been able to analyse a wealth of Garda data relating to suspects who reached their 20th birthday in 2009 and the incidents they were associated with over the last 10 years. This cohort analysis provides a retrospective longitudinal view of youth crime from 1999-2009. Unlike other sources, this Garda data acts as a measure of behaviour across the whole country; the dataset we have compiled is not a sample, it is an effective census snap shot. Subject to the normal caveats of using organisational data this information is reliable. Any potential individual police recording discrepancy will be mitigated given the large dataset.

We know from our initial analysis of the last 10 years of PULSE data that the overall age pattern of offending behaviour and subsequent desistance is similar to other jurisdictions. Offending rates show a steady rise from age 12 – and peak at 18 years followed by a steep drop off to much lower levels by the time these 'young adults' reach the age of 23-25 years.

This pattern is consistent with what we know about the majority youth crimes of public order related incidents and opportunist shop theft; and the sharp drop off in this type of *hedonistic* behaviour can be understood in the context of increasing maturation. If anything this evidence substantially underpins the spirit of the Children Act and the National Youth Justice Strategy and the general approach we have adopted in relation to children in An Garda Síochána since the inception of the diversion programme in 1963. However fleeting this period in the context of a lifetime for a young person – we nevertheless also have to recognise that the behaviour can bring about significant hurt and distress to others

However this reasonably sanguine analysis does not tell the whole story. The data also tell us that **although** there is substantial evidence to believe that most young people will grow out of crime, a small but significant minority will continue into adulthood and commit serious crime. The Baseline Report paints a picture of such young people in an offending profile which appears to create a pressure cooker of risk factors; some well articulated in the risk related research literature, others part of the day to day narrative experienced by these young people. For instance in the small number of

projects where this type of profile persists, project staff talk about the ‘pull factors’ of neighbourhood notoriety, financial gain and status within family and neighbourhood attracting young people to become involved at the periphery of either gang related crime such as involvement in the illicit drugs trade or serious ‘gain crimes’ such as burglary. There appear to be corresponding processes or ‘push factors’ which create a climate of *expectation and menace* for these young people within their family or community and serve to sustain this complex and influential environment for these small number of young people. **Escaping the push and pull of these influences for young people who experience it day in and day out should not be underestimated.**



As you can see from this chart generated by the PULSE data analysis the pattern for a typical set of 'youth crimes' shown in green – [I have chosen Criminal damage and drunkenness as an example] shows an incline to age 18 years followed by a steep decline from 18 yrs -. We can expect this decline to continue.

However if you consider one of the more serious offences for financial gain, I have chosen **burglary because it probably typifies significant behavioural differences and where the motive is probably solely for financial gain**, we can see that the peak age of offending for this group is much younger followed by a plateau which we expect will sustain for some years.

What is clearly indicated from the PULSE data analysis is that a young person coming to the attention of Gardaí at a young age, [less than 14 yrs] for a burglary offence appears to have a high probability that they will commit further offences. It is reasonable to assume that many of these young people could become the next generation of adult offenders unless we deploy appropriate and proportionate interventions at an early stage.

We will be giving further scrutiny to this dataset set and a more general commitment to evidence based planning with the aim of achieving better outcomes for young people and victims of crime.

<Sean Redmond s>

*To summarise*

- Just over 20,000 young people, or 5% of 12-17yolds are on average referred to Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme each year
- Most offending relates to public order related incidents and shop theft
- A large majority of young people will stop offending or start to reduce their offending by 18-19 years
- Some young will go on to offend more prolifically and seriously
- The Baseline report illustrates a number of scenarios which attempt to capture the complexity of the personal and social circumstances of young people involved
- In terms of residual strengths we have a single Garda force / a wide service coverage / capacity for a comprehensive view of youth crime
- We have 100 local services delivered on contract by 38 youth and community organisations

*So how do we set about the task of securing improvements?*

One of the critical first steps in securing better improvements is to understand the available evidence in relation to youth crime, its causes and possible solutions. If you will permit me I will give you my 5 minute read of the research evidence; and **in particular** how it will affect our plans to get better outcomes.

We are not starting with a blank sheet. Criminologists such as David Farrington and leaders in risk research like Hawkins and Catalano have developed models which provide clear and early indications about which children are more likely to become involved in crime and anti-social behaviour. These indicators have been identified in longitudinal studies carried out mainly in the UK and US. The factors themselves are in the main proximal rather than causal - that is - they are **associated** with a particular outcome [in this case offending behaviour] rather than the outcome being a **necessary consequence** of these factors being present. It's a little like the reasons why young male drivers receive the highest motor premiums. We all might have our own ideas about why this is the case but the data clearly indicates higher risks of claims for this group of insures individuals. The risks identified by the likes of Farrington and Hawkins and Catalano occupy a number of domains within the young person's life - for example self, family, friendship group, school, neighbourhood.

Many local professionals subscribe to the view that they can pick out those kids that are likely to get in trouble by the age of 5yrs - some say younger, but in addition to this professional 'gut' we also now have reasonably well developed risk tools which apply the mathematics of probability and odds-ratios to allow us to triage, classify and assess risk to ensure that our limited resources are loaded in the right direction. The science of public health is often used as a comparator - where methodologies exist for screening, preventing and treating the likes of heart disease, diabetes and cancer, with increasingly better outcomes.

In addition there is a wealth of 'what works' evidence that should give us optimism about 'working effectively with young people. Cognitive behavioural approaches [or as we call it 'thinking and doing'] appear to yield some returns in terms of helping young people reflect on their offending and change their behaviour - Restorative approaches offer the opportunity for young people to develop empathy and understand the consequences of their offending on others, perhaps encouraging them to think twice before they offend again.

Taken together improvements in these areas might help a young person be more able to negotiate the many influences they face in terms of opportunities for offending.

Other multi-systemic efforts which deal with schools, neighbourhoods, parents and families recognise the favourable leverage that can accrue from also changing the systems which so greatly influence a young person's behaviour

*However this is not the full story and it is certainly not without controversy!*

There is an increasing volume of research evidence which says to varying degrees that the claims made by social science regarding prediction are at best 'not as good as they make out' and at worst 'spurious, dangerous and of little value'

This research says that risk prediction is not science at all, the methodologies are flawed, the data are selective and that using models based on actuarial information - is too imprecise and pessimistically deterministic - to go back to our insurance example 'there are also young men who are safe drivers'. This evidence, by criminologists such as Paul O Mahoney, and researchers like Kevin Haines and Stephen Case also point out that proximal and causal risks are conveniently mixed up to give more scientific substance to the approach.

Muncie and Goldson highlight that the data used relates to children already over-policed and that this science is politically charged fitting with new draconian law and order approaches across Europe which have coincided with rises in juvenile custodial populations even in jurisdictions which have been traditional low users of custody.

The same emerging body of knowledge which to varying degrees rejects the science regarding risk assessment also rejects the 'what works' literature. These commentators contend that the absence of **structural risk factors** [*such as poverty, poor educational support, housing and unemployment*] from the discussions about what works - renders approaches which concentrate on changing individual behaviour as limited and ineffective. Moreover these critics also believe that by focussing on the individual young person; it serves to hold them responsible for their social circumstances, many of which [*such as poverty*] they have no control over. These critics also state that

given what we know about youth crime - [*that most young people grow out of it*]- the less we can do to contaminate them in the criminal justice system - the better.

### **'THERE IS NO-ONE WAY OF DOING IT!!'**

So there we have it: there is no consensus, **there is no singular body of evidence which is inferred by the phrase *evidence based practice*** . Now if the consequence of this was merely a coffee bar fall out between academics - that would be one thing. However given that modern service development quite rightly aspires to being informed if not driven by evidence **and** that in the real world, planning cycles for change and bedding in can range from 3-5years, the consequence of getting it wrong in terms of the investment of tax payers money is extremely serious. Another concern is that while there is an abundance of evidence, *albeit contradictory*, about cause and effect and programme design ; there is a dearth of research about the *black box* associated with how to transform **paper ideas** into **top quality services** that we'd be happy to stand over.

As an analogy if we were to look at industry - the relationship between good ideas and company performance is a discipline in itself generating volumes of research on strategy and execution. In the best businesses **Lots of** *bright ideas* quite rightly never make it from the R+D section to market - because for various reasons they are unsuitable [*they are over-priced, they won't yield sufficient returns for the amount of investment, the idea requires a different skill set, it draws the company away from its core business, it won't sell in a particular market*].

In our sector we could be criticised for not being discriminating enough. When the next big new idea comes along, one of our legitimate options could and should be to respectfully allow it to pass. The research literature often rather lamely refers to failed programmes as being due to '*Implementation issues*' when really the issues are probably more about those with programme responsibility making the most appropriate decisions about what to run with and making sure what is intended happens - we certainly need more research in this area to make the link.

The reality is that the evidence base is less like medical science to which many criminologists obviously aspire and more like *economic science* where much of the evidence is unfinished, inconclusive, and self promoting - *but this is the real world.* The environment is uncertain and the cost of a wrong move can be very high for both the tax payer and society. It means that we need to keep our eye on the ball and cultivate a pro-active and critical relationship with the research evidence rather than be brow beaten about what the latest research is saying or equally for colleagues to be passive operatives of programmes. That's why we need a learning community of practice, not because its fashionable but because its a necessity in an uncertain landscape.

### ***Compliance is not the same as high performance -***

Though compliance and agreed standards are important principles in terms of ensuring an equality of service to young people, some jurisdictions expend a high degree of effort designing and enforcing models of quality control in the mistaken belief that this equates with best practice. The problem with this type of approach when used on its own is that in return for probably a very modest improvement in

outcomes that such systems bring, professionals on the ground find themselves spending inordinate amounts of time meeting the insatiable information needs of the commissioning body. For example an independent review of youth justice practice in England and Wales by the Audit Commission in 2004 was very critical about youth justice becoming a paper-pushing industry with insufficient time invested in direct work with young people.

However that being said.....compliance has a place in our plans.

So the question is how do we **inspire and challenge** colleagues to better performance and how do we sustain it over the long term. The experience of the Baseline study has demonstrated a keen interest in youth crime at practice level. We have just completed the first important phase of the change with each local project, in collaboration with local Gardaí, conducting its own local youth crime analysis. At an early stage we can say that the standard of subsequent planning documents submitted to IYJS has significantly improved. Each project now has its own bespoke plan for its own community and each of these plans has a clear logic linking its activities with youth crime reduction in that locality. At a national level we now have much more discriminating data than was previously available for the same amount of effort. We have a clear accountability framework for project performance.

So with respect to the GYDP's what are planning practically to make this shift

### **Alignment measures**

These are intended to improve compliance; as i said this has a necessary but proportionate place in our plan. From this year all garda project draft annual plans submitted for funding approval to IYJS have had to demonstrate

Firstly, that each project has undertaken a detailed assessment of youth crime in its locality, evidenced from relevant local Garda data and professional input regarding youth crime patterns. Remember that we are in general talking about reasonably small populations so this quantitative and qualitative analysis should provide a good level of precision.

Secondly that each planned programme of intervention has a clear logic linking the current 'youth crime' situation with the desired outcome and clarifies the intended contribution that the project will make via its interventions. This may seem obvious but it is a radical shift to outcomes based planning and attempts to reconcile the desire for truly local responses with a coherent accountability framework that we can stand over nationally.

Thirdly, that both exercises in a+b are endorsed by local garda management, to give a final governance check on the logic linking improved outcomes with current youth crime patterns, from the professionals who know most about local crime.

Taken together these measures promise a reasonable return - *to get all projects on the same page with a common mission* but if we are honest, this is the extent to which our efforts as funders to secure a leverage, probably ends.

### <Capacity building measures ->

If we are expecting each local project to improve its service and engage in a significantly different way of planning and executing its activities - our thinking is that we have to make this attractive, the motivation has to come *internally* from the professionals on the ground and it follows that IYJS and AGS should encourage and cultivate this motivation.

A key strength of the Garda Youth Diversion projects is its spread and coverage - but it is also its weakness. Lessons learned in Falcarragh cannot be easily conveyed to Dundalk, a promising approach developed in Cobh cannot easily be replicated in Waterford, the current commissioning network of 38 separate youth and community providers adds to the richness but also the complexity. So we have developed a **closed on-line learning community** that will be available through the IYJS portal for every project worker across the country and available for all JLO's and relevant management. This resource will provide an opportunity for staff across the country to dialogue with each other in terms of sharing learning and tactics, it allows IYJS to introduce new knowledge which is easily accessible by professional staff and it offers the prospect of joint designing new approaches based on the obvious wealth of talent we have available in the network of projects up and down the country.

We believe that common purpose **new practice leadership** will emerge over the next few years which will advance a distinctly Irish approach, which will confidently engage with the evidence and consider how it might or might not apply to our specific needs.

This is part of our capacity building strategy in 2010. In addition we will providing training inputs to all 200 staff in projects and making this training available so that Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers can co-train with their local youth work colleagues. The training will try to answer 'how can we encourage pro-social behaviours in young people?' 'How can we motivate young people to change their behaviour?' 'How can we motivate parents who present as indifferent about their child's offending?' - because these are the real issues that practitioners spoke to us about when we conducted the baseline study and we are confident that they have an association with the type of youth crime that we experience.

In setting the tone for top class services we have also chosen top class outfits to provide the training; Functional Family Therapy, one of the proven international best practice models will deliver the training on working with parents and we have entered an exciting strategic partnership with the University of Ulster to deliver training in pro-social modeling and motivational interviewing.

### <Trial sites>

To ensure that we are genuinely pushing out the barriers in terms of practice excellence we have also entered into a trial site programme with 5 existing Garda Youth Diversion Projects in Tallaght, Priorswood, Birr, Ballinasloe and Cork. As a measure of practical support for this change programme, An Garda Síochána deployed the resources of the garda analysis service to conduct detailed youth crime analysis in each locality. Supt Colette Quinn and local garda management are involved with me in case managing the process with each of these trial sites; from

securing the evidence to get a very clear picture about youth crime, to clarifying the outcomes and making the necessary changes. In fairness to the youth organisations involved they have taken a brave step, to engage honestly with the process, to be self critical, to share their learning [positive and negative] with all other projects and to radically change the way they do their business if the evidence demands it. There are no new funds for these trial sites - nor will there be for any required changes. We believe that these trial sites add a top end / boundary pushing compliment to a fairly comprehensive change package and we will be working directly with the youth organisations to ensure that we make the changes.

Of course all of this only matters if we can reduce youth crime - and i think based on our read of the evidence- it probably gives us a good chance of making such an impact.

### **Conclusion**

This morning we've tried to set out our plan to implement one of the key goals in the National Youth Justice Strategy. For a number of reasons the path to achieving the improvements we are looking for is complex and uncertain. However, much in the way that we hope to inspire young people facing much tougher prospects than us to negotiate challenges and come out the other end as unscathed as possible - we have to accept that this complexity is real life.

The Irish Youth Justice Service has a committed partner in this change with An Garda Síochána and together we have a dynamic relationship with immensely talented youth organisations - this partnership will be a key buffer to the risks and challenges ahead.

**All that we have to do now is stop talking about it and get it done**

<Ends>