Youth Mentoring in the Irish Youth Justice Service:
Perceptions, Motivations and Challenges from the Mentor's Perspective

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<u>Acknowledgements</u>

<u>Abstract</u>

Youth offending has been the subject of controversial debates in recent years with reports of unsuitable detention centres for young offenders failing young people in attempts to rehabilitate them. The introduction of the Children Act 2001 brought about a change in policy by attempting to keep young offenders out of prison for as long as possible and to attempt to rehabilitate them within their own communities using community sanctions. The Probation Service of Ireland established Le Chéile in 2005 under the requirements of the Children Act 2001 to provide a mentoring service to children and young people who come in contact with the Probation Service. The aim of this research is to explore the sentiments, motivations and challenges of the adult mentors who volunteer in this service. The research found that the volunteer mentors who provide the service believe it to be a positive approach adopted by the Irish Youth Justice System and the commitment required from them to fulfil the role is worthwhile if there is chance that it may provide guidance and support to prevent at-risk young people from reoffending.

Introduction

Youth crime has been the subject of controversial articles in the past few years with some reports describing how the lack of suitable rehabilitation and detention centres suggest young offenders are often incarcerated with hardened criminals making prisons "finishing schools in criminality" for young offenders (Cusack, 2012; Mullally, 2010). The introduction of the Children Act 2001 brought about a change in Irish policy by attempting to keep young offenders out of prison for as long as possible and to endeavour to rehabilitate them within their own communities using community sanctions. Over recent years, youth mentoring has become increasingly popular as an intervention for young people deemed to be in need of support. The Probation Service of Ireland established its organisation, Le Chéile, in 2005 to meet the needs of the Mentor (Family support) Order under the requirements of the Children Act 2001. Le Chéile provides a mentoring service to young people who have come into the Irish Youth Justice System. The aim of this research is to explore the perceptions, motivations and challenges of the adult mentors who volunteer in this service.

Irish Youth Justice System

Perhaps one of the most important pieces of legislation introduced in the history of the State and the main charter covering children and young people in Ireland is the Children Act 2001. It replaced the out dated Children Act 1908, which was also a landmark document of its time, passed in Westminster while Ireland was still under colonial rule. The new Children Act 2001 sought to generate a major ideological shift regarding best practice in relation to working with young offenders (Farrell, 2013, p.353).

The responsibility of the requirements of the Children Act 2001 is shared between the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Minister for Justice and Equality (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2015). The Act intends to promote the use of community based

sanctions as an alternative to detention, focusing on the welfare, treatment and rehabilitation of young offenders (Farrell, 2013, p.353). It covers three main areas of the law, focusing on; preventing criminal behaviour, diversion from the criminal justice system and rehabilitation of young offenders. The use of detention should only be imposed as a last resort, the Act requires that all avenues be explored before it is ordered (Coyne & Donohoe, 2013, p.61).

The Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) was established in a response to the provisions outlined in the Act and has responsibility for leading and driving reform in the area of youth justice (Farrell, 2013, p.355). Young Persons Probation (YPP) is a specialised division of the Probation Service established to work with children and young people who come before the courts or who are in the adolescent detention schools or centres. Young Persons Probation provides pre-sanction reports on young persons, family conferences and supervision of community sanctions (The Probation Service, 2015).

Sections 131 (1) of the Children Act 2001 stated that "the Court shall assign a person, including a relative (a mentor) to help advise the child and support the child's family to monitor their overall behaviour" (Irish Statute Book, 2015). Under the supervision of The Probation Service, Le Chéile was established in 2005 to meet the needs of this Mentoring service of the Mentor (Family support) Order. They provide youth mentoring, family support and restorative justice services in regional centres throughout Ireland (Le Chéile, 2015).

Youth Justice Policy

The current policy document from the Department of Justice and Equality is called *Tackling Youth Crime - Youth Justice Action Plan 2014 – 2018*. The mission statement of the plan is "to create a safer society by working in partnership to reduce youth offending through appropriate interventions and linkages to services" (Department of Justice, 2013). The report asserts that while youth crime constitutes up to 15% of all crime (excluding road traffic

offences), the vast majority of young people grow out of crime. It also states that since the first National Youth Justice Strategy commenced in 2008, the number of children detained by the Courts annually on criminal conviction has consistently dropped (Department of Justice, 2013, p.2). The strategy contains five high level goals:

> to provide leadership and build public confidence in the youth justice system; to work to reduce offending by diverting young people from offending behaviour; to promote the greater use of community sanctions and initiatives to deal with young people who offend; to provide a safe and secure environment for detained children which will assist their early re-integration into the community; and to strengthen and develop information and data sources in the youth justice system to support more effective policies and services (Irish Youth Justice Service, 2008).

Legislation relating to youth work, the 1997 Youth Work Act, was prematurely enacted by an outgoing government. Before leaving office, two important elements were initiated; the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and the National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC). The 1997 Act was superseded by the current legislation Youth Work Act 2001 whose remit was to define the development, structure, implementation and funding of youth work in Ireland (Jenkinson, 2013, p.6). The publication of National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007 was the result of a consultation process from within the sector and set out the main priorities for the development of youth work which formed the basis for many key developments during the following decade (Jenkinson, 2013, p.8).

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) developed comprehensive guidelines for people working with young people involved in the Juvenile Justice System which outline the needs, issues and risks of those young people. They encourage an empathetic approach that underlines the principles set out in the Act while ensuring the personal and developmental needs of the young person are being met (Kelly & Ní Laoi, 2012).

Sociology of (Youth) Crime

The early development of criminology is defined by two schools of thought; the classical school and the positivist school. The classical model is associated with Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794) and his highly influential commentary "On Crimes and Punishment" in which he sought to change the barbaric way that punishment was being administered in pre-Enlightenment times. He shifted the focus onto philosophical, legal and procedural principles that he felt should be the foundation for criminal justice. His principles included; equal treatment of all people, that punishment should outweigh the pleasure gained from committing the crime, and that punishment should be proportionate to the gravity of the crime. Much like the criminal law system in Ireland at present, the classical school assumed that humans are rational agents equipped with free will and capable of choosing whether to commit a crime or not and that the risk of appropriate punishment should act as a deterrent (O'Mahony, 2007, p.221).

The positivist school rejected the classical schools argument and was influenced by Darwin's evolution theory and the development of empirical scientific methods and statistics. Positivist theorists, such as Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), believed that crime was biological and environmental factors beyond the individuals control that determined human behaviour; that people could be 'born' criminals, and could be identified from birth as such. Positivist theories have since been dismissed by most academic thinkers and replaced by theories emphasising the impact of the social environment (O'Mahony, 2007, p.222).

Functionalism emphasises the importance of moral consensus, where people share the same norms and values, in maintaining order and stability in a society. Robert K. Merton (1910-2003), drew extensively on Durkheim's early functionalism theory but also identified the manifest and latent functions as well as distinguishing between functional and dysfunctional aspects of social behaviour (Giddens, 2009, p. 24). Crime is understood to

occur where there is a breakdown of the traditional norms and values which, as a consequence, leads to social disorganisation (Walklate, 2007, p.23). Merton's work also addressed the way in which the tensions between the legitimate and illegitimate means of acceding to the norms and values of a particular society resulted in deviant and criminal behaviour and social disorder (Walklate, 2007, p.23).

Like functionalists, conflict theorists emphasise the importance of structures in society. But, unlike functionalist's emphasis on solidarity and stability, the social conflict sees society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and change (Macionis, 2007, p. 17). Conflict theorists examine how factors such as social class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and age are linked to a society's unequal distribution of money, power, education and social prestige (Macionis, 2007, p. 17). William J. Chambliss (1933-2014) asserted that capitalism creates the desire to consume and that not all members of society are able to earn enough to match the levels of consumption induced by the capitalist process (Walklate, 2007, p.29). This results in those who have and those who have not being in conflict with one another. Sometimes that conflict is violent; more often it results in the behaviour of those who have not being labelled as criminal. So, in essence, crime is understood as a reaction to the general life conditions in which individuals find themselves as a result of social class position, with crime being seen as a rational response to their individual conditions (Walklate, 2007, p.30).

Unlike structural functionalism and social conflict approaches, symbolic interactionism, through the theories of the work of George Mead Herbert (1863-1931) and Erving Goffman (1922-1982), analyses society from a micro level orientation; a close up focus on social interactions in specific situations that sees society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals (Macionis, 2007, p. 20).

Howard Becker's (1928-) book "Outsiders" (1963) remains hugely influential as one of the first books on labelling theory and its application to studies of deviance (Walklate, 2007, p.27). Becker outlines two strands to his theory. The first strand relates to how a particular behaviour is labelled deviant, actions are simply those which are defined as deviant within a particular setting or culture. The second is an attempt to understand the impact of the labelling process (Becker, 1963, p. 4 & 9). Symbolic interactionism rejects the positivistic notion of deviants simply reacting to external forces largely beyond their control. Instead of blaming deviants, and looking at their motivations, pressures and social forces, it looks at interaction between deviants and those who define them as deviant (Becker, 1963, p. 9). It particularly looks at how and why certain groups are defined as deviant and the effects of such a definition, for example, the interaction between deviants, parents, teachers, doctors, police, judges, and probation officers is analysed. Since individuals' self-concepts are largely derived from the responses of others, individuals tend to see themselves in terms of the label. This may produce a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby the deviant identification becomes the controlling one (Walklate, 2007, p.28).

Most modern criminological theories place socialisation at the heart of most criminological behaviour. The concept of socialisation categorically identifies familial, social and cultural factors as the backbone of individual conscience. It is a formative process mediated by individual psychology and biology (O'Mahony, 2007, p.225). Recent large scale, longitudinal studies have been an important development of identifying potential causes of crime. They have identified key aspects of socialisation within the family that correlated with future youth crime. Factors including parental rejection or neglect, lack of discipline, exposure to adult members committing crime, anti-social values and attitudes, low intelligence, school failure, peer pressure, large family size, material want and boredom are considered risk factors to youth offending. Research by Youniss and Smollar (1985) found

that although the importance of peer networks increase during adolescence, parents remain key figures in young people's lives. They found that adolescents who are supported well by their parents are less likely to be predisposed to delinquent or anti-social behaviour and have an easier transition to adulthood (McGrath, Brennan, Dolan & Barnett, 2014, p.239). Nearly half of all crime is committed by teenagers, and the minority that continue into adulthood typically come from the lower socio economic groups. These findings bolster the hypothesis that the most important factor in the socialisation process comes from the home (O'Mahony, 2007, p.226).

Barry and McNeill assert that youth offending is not just a question of rational choice by young people, it is also the result of a lack of structural opportunities for young people in terms of education, employment, housing and adequate income. They also identify that this duality between agency and structure is rarely seriously considered by policy makers and that young people are often held responsible for their behaviour (2009, p.12).

(Targeted) Youth Work

The Youth Work Act, 2001, Section 3 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 through their voluntary participation, and which is (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and (b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations (Irish Statute Book, 2015).

Youth work in Ireland differs from most social work situations globally, by having a statutory definition, and despite being considered by some authors as "unfinished" and "determinedly structured", reflects the core features of how youth work has evolved historically in Ireland (Devlin 2010, p.94). The first point is that it is an educational endeavour more accurately described as an *informal* education because it is not generally connected to the formal school setting. The second principle it is that participation from the young person is voluntary, which

also differs from the formal schooling. Finally, the Act states that youth work is typically carried out by non-statutory organisations (Devlin 2010, p.94). Devlin also asserts that many, and perhaps most, of the adults who work for the voluntary organisations who provide the services are unpaid. He attributes this pattern to the "principle of subsidiarity which has underpinned social policy and social services in Ireland since their inception" as well as "religious and political movements" (Devlin, 2010, p.95).

Devlin traces the origins of youth work in Ireland, and suggests that Ireland, like most other countries, were a part of the "broad philanthropic movement" of the 19th and 20th century who became involved with rescuing "needy, destitute and troublesome children and young people" who had become more visible with the newly industrialised and urbanised society (Devlin, 2010, p.95). Much of the early interventions were carried out by the church, the Young Men's Christian Organisation (YMCA) established in 1844 was the UK's (including Ireland) first national voluntary organisation, which led to the establishment of the Catholic Young Men's Society (CYMS) in 1849. They had different religious catchment groups and political outlooks (Devlin 2010, p.96). Another milestone was the founding of the Boy Scouts in 1908, Ná Fianna Éireann (Soldiers of Ireland) 1909 and Girl Guides (1911). Their Catholic counterparts came shortly after Ireland gained its independence; Catholic Scouts of Ireland in 1927 and Catholic Guides of Ireland in 1928 (Devlin, 2010, p.97; Scanlon et al, 2011, p.15).

Since the implementation of the Youth Work Act, youth work has become "increasingly professionalised…and has a much greater sense of identity" which echoes similar developments in the social care sector. This is down to a number of factors; more people working within the sector have a professional qualification, which has now become almost essential for youth work employment and attributed to the addition of numerous third level courses in youth work; the rise of in service training by youth work organisations and

finally; the provision of a definition of youth work in the legislation has had an significant and positive impact which gives strength and credibility to the sector (Jenkinson, 2013, p.9). There is also a greater sense of unity, largely attributed to the National Youth Work Advisory Committee, whose members (both statutory and voluntary) contributed to a programme of work which led to a greater sense of consensus and cooperation between youth work agencies (Jenkinson, 2013, p.10).

The economic climate change has had an effect on the youth work services, both in times of economic growth and during the recession. The Celtic Tiger saw the expansion of youth work service provision with government funding for areas within the Drug Task Force and in Department of Justice sources (Jenkinson, 2013, p.10). Consecutive Irish governments and policy makers have identified youth work as a means of addressing social issues such as early school leaving, juvenile crime and underage drinking (Scanlon et al, 2011, p.3). An increase in funding in areas relating to crime and drug use, such as Garda Diversion Projects, resulted in a targeted approach being adopted, which may undermine the commitment of agencies to provide services to the general youth population. This approach raises debates among critics who on one hand suggest that it is a way of reaching and engaging marginalised young people, others argue that it is a way of keeping vulnerable young people under supervision (Scanlon et al, 2011, p.3). Jenkinson highlights that there may be difficulties with this type of targeting as it pathologises young people and identifies them as being dysfunctional as well as presenting challenges to youth workers who are educated to challenge labelling and negative stereotyping (Jenkinson, 2013, p.10). Some commentators are concerned that there is a two tier service developing, which undermines the services for the general youth population and policy makers see as compensatory for deficiencies in the statutory services (Jenkinson, 2013, p.11; Scanlon et al, 2011, p.4). Another theme Jenkinson identifies is the move in the sector towards "outcomes and evidence based work", where

organisations are being asked to demonstrate how effective their interventions are (Jenkinson, 2013, p.12). This approach may have a devaluing effect on the development of soft skills, such as communication, team work and self-esteem that are an important aspect of youth work (Jenkinson, 2013, p.13).

There is a general consensus among researchers that targeting (in some form) is necessary to reach the most disadvantaged young people in Irish society, but some argue that the principle of voluntary participation has been replaced by more coercive forms of participation and a greater orientation towards the surveillance and control of young people. It is argued that the state has, to some degree, taken control of the management of Irish youth work through funding, legislation and other policy measures (Scanlon et al, 2011, p.4). Research suggests that both youth workers and policy makers are concerned about the evolving two tier system at the core of contemporary youth work which while trying to empower and integrate young people could also be seen as a social control alienating at risk youths from their mainstream peers (Scanlon et al, 2011, p.15).

Though stated in the Garda Youth Diversion Project Guidelines issued by the Department of Justice and Equality that the courts may not direct a young person to participate in projects, it is felt by some that the subtle power inequalities which are at play between authority figures and young people may compel some to do so, whether willing or not (Scanlon et al, 2011, p.14).

Youth Offending

Barry has carried out considerable research on youth offending in Scotland. Her research suggests that "the three phases of offending - onset, maintenance and desistance - run parallel courses with the three phases of youth transitions - childhood, youth and adulthood and that both these processes are influenced by discrepancies in levels of capital for young people at

each stage" (Barry, 2007, p.186). She feels that research, practice and policy focus too much on sensationalising the crimes committed by young people without enough regard being shown to the causes. Young people are the main focus of criminal enquiry, and their behaviour is often seen as abnormal, rebellious or pathological rather than a manifestation of the power imbalances inherent in society (Barry, 2010, p.121).

Many young people, especially those who are disadvantaged, are restricted by societal structural constraints while transitioning to adulthood. She argues that by addressing these constraints to explain youth criminology would lead to greater levels of desistance by the offender as they reach adulthood (Barry, 2007, p.185). She draws on Bourdieu's dynamics of power in society, namely capital in the forms of; social, cultural, financial and symbolic capital to show how young people can gain some credit from their peers through offending behaviour. Social capital, in the form of relationships and friendships is mainly sourced from the family, and through school peers and other social networks, is a crucial form of capital for the transition of youth. Economic capital, in the form of financial means to luxuries and everyday living is often only attainable through criminal means for many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Cultural capital has not been considered hugely relevant in terms of the transition of youth to adulthood, but has seen an increase in recent times relating to the commodification of youth and young people's unique cultural identities. Symbolic capital brings together the three other forms of capital to give a positive reputation among one's peers. For young men in particular, offending behaviour can be an important source of social and self-identity within the peer group (Barry, 2007, p.189-190; Barry, 2010, p.133). She suggests that the reform approach adopted by the UK government does not consider young people in the context of their origins as children and their ambitions of adulthood, but in a vacuum. She feels that young people need and want to experiment, to interact with others, to

be respected and to achieve eventual recognition and inclusion within the wider society (Barry, 2007, p.197; Barry, 2010, p.133).

Barry has also carried out research on the current probation practice in Scotland and how the probationers and parolees would consider the 'ideal model' to be. Her findings show a preference by both sets of participants that the probationer would be more like a mentor than a monitor, someone who was proactive and constructive, offering encouragement and emotional support. She asserts that the social work within the justice services have changed to serve the needs of politicians and policy makers which is wholly incompatible with the needs of the offenders themselves (Barry, 2000, p.575).

Youth Mentoring

Youth mentoring is defined as a relationship between a young person and an adult mentor introduced through a matching process often around a shared interest or hobby. The mentor is viewed as a role model who offers a positive influence over the young person, providing guidance, support and direction which strengthens the capacity of the young person to forge other supportive relationships (Philip, 2008, p.28).

McGrath et al. cite four main types of support identified by Cutrona in being important for adolescents and their networks of social support (2014, p.238). 'Concrete' support reflects practical acts of assistance between people, 'emotional' support comprises acts of empathy, listening and generally 'being there' for someone 'advice' support is that both advice itself and reassurance that goes with it and 'esteem' support centres on how one person rates and informs another of their personal worth (2014, p.238). Mentoring is one way of providing these supports to vulnerable young people.

Mentoring has become an increasingly popular form of providing social support for at risk young people traditionally focusing on young people who have come to the attention of

the authorities (Greenop, 2011, p.34). In Ireland and the UK, there has been an escalation of mentoring services particularly for excluded pupils and young offenders. Mentoring programmes strive to provide role models who can offer advice, support and structured activities to empower young people (Greenop, 2011, p.35). Le Chéile, the organisation established by The Probation Service, aims to provide a positive role model and increase self-esteem and self-confidence levels of the young person on probation through goal setting and activities. They promote the mentoring as a non-judgemental friend to the adolescent that will listen, advise and assist in life choices (Le Chéile, n.d.). But research suggests that the evidence of positive outcomes is mixed and inconclusive and benefits are described as modest. Greenop refers to studies by Liabo and Lucas (2006) and Grossman and Rhodes (2002) which found that, if poorly managed, mentoring programmes may actually worsen the lives of their mentee, especially when the pairing breaks down. There are also criticisms to some research that claims to have profound outcomes, asserting that they may be biased in order to compete for funding (Greenop, 2011, p.35; Philip, 2008, p.20).

Some commentators have pointed to the ways in which young people are often coerced into mentoring relationships, finding that within criminal justice mentoring schemes, for example, pressures to continue with a relationship in order to avoid returning to court or being incarcerated could exert a powerful influence. Explicit or implicit coercion is highly likely to redefine the relationship for both mentors and mentees and to undermine attempts to build trust (Philip, 2008, p.29). Philip questions the level of embeddedness of the mentoring identified as a feature of policies targeted at youth in the UK. She cites research that found that mentoring is most successful on individuals who are defined to be 'ready to change' or almost 'socially excluded' (Philip, 2008, p.20). Another criticism she addressed was the failure of some mentoring programmes to take into account the structural constraints that exist for some groups of people "which have condemned some young groups of people to

uncertain, poorly paid and dead end jobs" (Philip, 2008, p.21). She also criticizes the "champions of youth mentoring" who she feels tend to see it as a "silver bullet…an unrealistic…quick fix approach" (Philip, 2008, p.21). Greenop concludes that his evaluation suggests that mentoring has a positive but modest effect which increases over time (2011, p.35).

Volunteering

There are three key defining characteristics of volunteering. First the activity should not be undertaken primarily for financial reward. Second, the activity should be undertaken voluntarily, according to an individual's own free-will. And third, the activity should be of benefit to someone other than the volunteer him or herself, or to society at large. (United Nations, 2011, p. 10)

A functional study into the motivations of American volunteers outlined six motivational functions served by volunteerism; values, understanding, social, career, protective and enhancement. They developed their theory by building on the theories of attitudes presented by Katz (1960) and Smith et al. (1956) (Clary et al., 1998, p.1517). The first function, values, is identified as a function that may be served by involvement in volunteer service. It centres on the opportunities that volunteerism provides for individuals to express values related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others. Secondly, volunteering may provide the opportunity for new learning experiences and the chance to exercise knowledge, skills and abilities that might otherwise go unpractised. Thirdly, a motivation for volunteering may be socially related, concerning relationships with others or to engage in an activity viewed favourably by important others. The fourth function is concerned with career-related benefits that may be obtained from participation in volunteer work. A sizeable proportion of volunteers are found to perceive volunteering as a means of

preparing for a new career or of maintaining career-relevant skills. The fifth function is associated with the functioning of the ego; such motivations centre on protecting the ego from negative features of the self and, in the case of volunteerism, may serve to reduce guilt over being more fortunate than others and to address one's own personal problems. The final function derives from indications that there may be more to the ego than protective processes. Research has found evidence of positive strivings, as when some respondents report that they volunteer for reasons of personal development or to obtain satisfactions related to personal growth and self-esteem. In contrast to the protective function's concern with eliminating negative aspects surrounding the ego, the enhancement function involves a motivational process that centres on the ego's growth and development and involves positive strivings of the ego (Clary et al., 1998, p.1518).

Previous research on mentoring has focused on the impact of the mentoring on the young person-parent relationship and the community. There are limited and mixed results on the benefits of this type of intervention. There is a need to explore the perceptions of the adults who volunteer to provide this service and the impact it has it has on their lives. How do adults who mentor young people on probation through the Irish Youth Justice Service experience and perceive their role?

Method

Design

Understanding how mentors perceive and experience their role is an important aspect of understanding the concept of youth mentoring. The research question posed is of an exploratory nature; the research seeks to investigate an area that has been under researched in previous literature. The data obtained will be personal and based of the experiences of the participants and is intended to provide a more developed understanding of the issue. A qualitative approach was adopted because of the subjective nature of the research question as qualitative research provides an "in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about the sense they make of their (…) experiences, perspectives and histories" (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013, p. 4). As mentors may have a different outlook on their role than the policy makers and the young people they mentor, information on the perceptions and experience of the volunteers is important to provide a meaningful addition to the existing body of literature.

It was originally intended to carry out two group in-depth interviews/discussions consisting of three to four mentors. Herbert Blumer, cited in Flick's book on qualitative research, held that "a small number of individuals, brought together as a discussion or resource group, is more valuable more times over than any representative sample" (2006, p. 191). But access to and availability of the willing participants was limited so alternatively three interview sessions were carried out. The first interview consisted of three participants, the second had two and the third was a one to one interview. The same interview schedule, included in Appendix A, was used in all interviews to ensure consistency and to enable comparisons in the analysis. Clear, open ended interview questions were posed throughout to ensure the researcher brought "the interviewee down from the surface, everyday level of

interaction to a level at which they can together focus on a specific topic or set of topic, perhaps, reflecting on them in a way they had not before" (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 186).

Participants

The participants consisted of six current mentors of the Le Chéile Youth Mentoring programme run by the Probation Service of Ireland. A purposive sampling method was used; each participant had been involved with the service for a minimum of one year and has been a mentor to at least one young person on probation, which fulfil the "particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and questions" (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 113). These criteria limited the total number of possible respondents but give a unique perspective to analyse the experiences of accomplished mentors. Their occupations were varied; some were employed within the social work field, some were employed in a completely different area, some were unemployed or retired, and some were attending or had attended college courses relating to social work.

Contact was made with the volunteer supervisor in Le Chéile with a letter requesting permission to access the members of the organisation from the research coordinator of the social science programme in Dublin Business School. A permission letter was obtained from Le Chéile along with contact details of the mentors. The volunteer coordinator agreed to allow the researcher to facilitate the interviews in the conference room in the Probation Service building preceding a scheduled supervision meeting. An email was sent to the volunteers who fulfilled the criteria to ascertain how many would be willing to be involved, outlining the research question and informing them that their participation would be completely anonymous, confidential, voluntary and independent of Le Chéile. Six of the mentors contacted responded positively and arrangements were made for the meetings.

Procedure

Two of the interviews were conducted in the Probation Service building and one in a local hotel in early February 2016 and each lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Permission was obtained from the participants to allow the recording of the interviews on an electronic dictation machine. Subsequently each interview was transcribed verbatim, imported into NVivo 10 and coded based on different themes that emerged from the findings. A data-led inductive approach was adopted as there were no known theories or patterns to be tested during the research process.

Ethics

As with all quantitative research, there are ethical issues to consider in every stage of the research process. The Sociological Association of Ireland (SAI) require that research should avoid harming the participants, including not invading their privacy and not deceiving them about the research aims and generally having a "responsibility both to safeguard the interests of those involved in or affected by their work and to report their findings accurately and truthfully" (SAI, n.d., p.6).

The second ethical consideration was ensuring participants had given informed consent. This was obtained by providing an outline of the study in the initial contact email as well as a consent form prior to the interview taking place. The consent form outlined the remit of the study and allowed the participants to withdraw their participation at any time prior to the research being submitted. It also provided contact details of the researcher and the research supervisor in Dublin Business School. One copy was given to the participants and another signed copy retained by the researcher. A sample copy of the letter of consent is included in Appendix B.

In addition to this anonymity and confidentiality must be maintained at all times, both for the participants and their mentees. To ensure this all of the names of the participants have been changed and any identifying information relating to their identity or location has been omitted. While the participants themselves are not considered to be part of a vulnerable group, it was inevitable that some references to their mentees and geographic locations would arise through the investigation. Given that these are both young people and people who are on probation was imperative that their identities remain protected.

Research Findings

The Probation Service Mentoring Approach

The participants felt that it was a positive approach by the Probation Service to provide the service to young people on probation who were interested in engaging with a mentor. Seán considered it to be an "enlightened approach" and believed "the justice system without this is a very blunt instrument" for young offenders. The mentors all felt it mattered to the young person that it was volunteers providing the service rather than paid staff because "they see you giving your time (…) I think that matters to them, rather than officials telling them what to do" (David), and "you're not there because you have to be there, you're there because you want to be there" (Nicola). Michael and Oliver agreed and elaborated on their assessment on why the unpaid status of volunteers was an important aspect;

> (…) you're getting a workforce you don't have to pay for and they are genuinely caringly interested and these young people are getting a look at another way. (…) I think if you're paid you become the probation officer (…) another professional with a social care degree (…) I'm not part of the system, I'm just some bloke (Michael).

> if you're paid staff, you're gonna be seen as probation service then a lot of kids will just close down, they won't engage (…) you can see them detaching because they'll have had contact with social workers and they'll have contact with key workers and they'll have been in the system (…) they won't engage with you, they just won't engage with you (…) the fact that you're a volunteer I think that it kind of has a little bit of street credibility about it that you're not getting paid for it (Oliver).

Attention was drawn to the economical aspect of the approach. David felt that although "this is only a new thing, in years to come they'll [the government] find that the cost factor, that it well pays for itself" and Nicola agreed "obviously prison costs so much for sending somebody down for six months" so the mentoring is seen as worthwhile for the young person, the community and the government's expenditure.

With regard to the training and support from Le Chéile, all of the participants felt adequately prepared for the initial pairing and stated "you're not going in blind" (Nicola), "it was always very well explained (…) there was no big surprises, well I haven't found any big surprises so far" (Oliver) and "there's nothing really that I felt unprepared for because of the extensive training" (Seán).

Michael considered the four scheduled group supervisions per year to be "about right" and beneficial for "reminding you of the boundaries at the same time you are unloading on [volunteer coordinator]". Nicola described how "everything that we learned in our training actually applied" to one of her mentees. Seán considered some of the optional on-going training and seminars provided by Le Chéile was "incredibly beneficial" but David felt that he "definitely could do with more" relating to more specific cases such as ADHD and drug addiction. Catherine disagreed, having had a mentee with ADHD, suggested that too much training might be "going out of our scope of practice in the sense of going down the lines of a professional and we're not that". Her experience was

> Le Chéile's only a phone call away and they are very supportive like even the info and knowledge you can get which is a huge benefit cause you don't feel like you're on your own (…) [volunteer coordinator] may not have the answer for you there and then but I guarantee she will get you the answer.

When an issue arose at a group supervision Seán explained how he received a follow up phone call from the volunteer coordinator "one time after a supervision meeting, I had my doubts about something (…) [volunteer coordinator] rang me and was chatting on the phone (…) and at the end of it all (…) everything was sorted, everything was fine".

Targeting Youth

David acknowledged that personal and social circumstances play a part in the outcomes of young people's lives "social differences can be a big factor that they can't control or

influence themselves". Oliver stated that "some kids are in the probation service cause they are just unlucky or they are just stupid once and they get caught". Seán felt targeting was a means to provide guidance "to someone who'd done something maybe a bit silly at best or a bit spiteful at worst" and was "confident" Le Chéile be careful would only match him with someone who committed an offence "at the lower end, the minor end of things". He felt that it was necessary to target young individuals who were susceptible to crime but that the probation officer felt had a chance for rehabilitation.

> [Mentee] isn't a hardened criminal, he's a kid, he really is a kid and I'm not sure if our few hours a week is enough to steer him away for some silly decisions he might make, but there's a chance and if [mentee] is a representative of le Chéile young people, there's a chance with all of them.

Oliver criticised the system in place for children and young people as "absolutely appalling" and stated that "if you're tarred with any kind of brush at all in the system" the system fails them. He asserts the following;

> I've never ever met a bad kid, I've met kids with dysfunctional strategies but I've never met a bad kid. They have a bad construction of the world cause they haven't seen anything positive.

Nicola felt that while targeting young people on probation is beneficial, "parents need to be concentrated on" because often they "don't have the tools" to provide support to their adolescent children.

Some of the participants expressed an occasional more cynical view of the young person's engagement with the service. David felt that sometimes "they can use you" and Nicola agreed that sometimes she felt that "they'll be there only (…) to get a nice one put on the (probation) report" and Catherine agreed that "it looks favourable that they are engaging in this something". Michael also admitted

> …sometimes I'm cynical and I think he just sees me as a free meal and a free cinema film and he thinks that I'm a bit of an old dope but he just goes along, just plays the game and that's all he's gotta do, just 3 hours a week

and that's it and sometimes i think that he's playing the system and he sees me as part of the system…

Mentoring

The participants defined their role of mentor as; "listening", "being a shoulder" (Nicola), "to help give them direction" (David), someone who provides a "positive influence" (Oliver) and "untitled support" (Nicola) but not an "authority figure" for "young people that need a guiding hand potentially" (Seán) and "someone who wouldn't be authoritative or authoritarian as in you're not a teacher, you're not a social worker you're not a member of the guards" (Catherine).

> I think we do have a positive influence cause I think a lot of kids, a lot of kids I know anyway, they don't they don't have any kind of positive influence at all so anything really you know, ya can't miss. It's an easy target (Oliver).

Seán feels the role is best characterised as

> …to set a good example and show them the fun and joy there can be in life (…) they are young and have all these options ahead of them (…) help them find their passion (Seán).

Oliver and Michael described is as;

> It's just to have a warm relationship on their level (…) communicate with them on their level (…) the relationship on their terms and it has to be on their terms (…) but to set little goals along the way and it's like strategic planning and improvement (…) so you're just trying to improve them without making it obvious (Oliver).

> all I'm doing is talking to these lads, there's no massive responsibility, I don't have to take them under my wing 24/7, I don't have to be father figure, I just have to meet up, have a chat, bit of craic, how you doing and hopefully steer in the right direction (Michael).

Perhaps the most common challenge experienced by the mentors in their role related to the engagement of the young person which varied from getting "fobbed off because of the activity planned" (Catherine), to silence when the young person is having personal issues

"when he's having a bad time he's a closed book" (Michael). Boundaries also were an issue both for the young person and the mentor "it was like I stepped in the role of her mother (…) boundaries always always had to be brought up" (Nicola) "the boundaries can be a bit frustrating" (Oliver). Both Michael and Nicola found it difficult when the pairing ended abruptly for medical and reoffending reasons giving Nicola a sense of "no closure" and Michael found a five month break to be challenging but hopes to resume the relationship quickly "the first week back was very awkward but we're gonna get back to where we were quite quick I think".

Some of the participants expressed a challenging aspect as being the reaction they get from their friends and acquaintances in the community about the mentoring they provide to young people on probation. The attitudes encountered range from "my friends think I'm mental, saying why in god's name are you doing this? (…) range from racism to you're doing it for nothing" (Nicola) to "they shrug it off" (David) to "why are you wasting your time" (Catherine). David explained that one of his mentees had been a traveller and one had been an immigrant and he had experienced some "racism in friends". Nicola also mentioned how she would "hear comments like oh they wouldn't do that for one of our own". Catherine described a time when she was in town with her mentee and they "came across a friend or acquaintance who they had offended on and they were wondering why I was with them and it brought a kinda awkward conversation".

Volunteering

Most of the participant's cited their motivations as being a sense of "giving something back" to their communities and having some free time to do so. Catherine had studied a social related degree and felt that this might provide a stepping stone to get into a socially related field of employment.

I've been thinking I might like to get back into it and I saw this advertisement in the newspaper and I thought this would be a chance to kind of put my feet back in the area (Catherine).

Similarly Michael hoped to gain insightful experience for his career change from ICT to social work, stating he "got something from it, got insight to young people, got insight to how probation and Le Chéile work". Nicola and David found that in their unrelated day jobs they often had people come to them with their problems and felt that they were empathic to those people.

…there was always somebody who might have had issues that needed somebody to talk to (Nicola).

I found that I could talk to people when they came to me with their problems (David).

All of the mentors found that overall it was an enjoyable and positive experience. Oliver and Seán said that while they felt "nervous" before meeting their mentee, it was a "rewarding" role. Catherine stated;

I enjoyed meeting the mentee, meeting the other mentors, listening to all their experiences and it prepares you for what may come and it encourages you to stay, knowing that everyone's doing something good, it's helping the community, its helping somebody, its helping somebody's family. At the end of the day there isn't really anything bad you could say about it… it mightn't work but you tried.

Oliver feels privileged to be in a position to provide support to vulnerable young people;

I think it's a real honour to work with young people I think when a young person lets you into their life and they are coming from a bad place its very humbling to be honest with you. I do feel honoured cause sometimes you are the only person that they trust. You wouldn't get paid enough, there's no money that would give you that kind of a feeling and that's why I think the volunteer thing is so important, that aspect of the volunteer status is really important.

Catherine summarised the volunteering aspect as the small amount it takes out of her life is worth it if there is a chance that a young person can benefit from it.

> even just giving up an hour or two every week to know that it's made a huge benefit to someone and I haven't really done a huge amount, in the sense that it hasn't taken a huge amount of my life but it's made a difference to someone (Catherine).

Seán described his relationship with his mentee "we've just been going out having fun, we've had chats and conversations about different things like drugs and different bits and bobs, and I've told him my own stories and everything there have been moments, but overall it's been very smooth sailing". Michael summarised his feeling as "generally I'm happy, he's nice, Le Chéile is nice, they're not asking for anything I'm uncomfortable with, it's more or less what I hoped it would be". And Seán compared it to giving a gift to someone and getting a "sort of warm glow inside you whether its beneficial to someone else as well I don't know, you think you are doing some good".

Discussion

The aim of this research project was to explore the experiences and perspectives of adults who mentor young people on probation within the Irish Youth Justice Service. A review of the existing literature concluded that there was a gap in the existing research relating to the sentiments of the volunteer mentors carried out in Ireland and the existing literature into mentoring has yielded mixed conclusions on its merits to the young person. The research question on how volunteer mentors define and experience their role, their motivations and challenges and their insights from the mentors' perspective sought to gain an understanding of the perceptions of the adults who volunteer in the Le Chéile organisation. Six current mentors from the Le Chéile youth mentoring organisation with a minimum of one years' experience were interviewed in a group of three, a group of two and one to one interviews.

The Le Chéile approach

The Children Act 2001 initiated a major turning point in Irish policy regarding best practice in relation to working with children and young people, including young offenders. As a response to its enactment, The Irish Youth Justice Service was established who set up a specialised division within The Probation Service to manage Young Persons Probation. Le Chéile was established under the umbrella of Young Persons Probation to provide mentoring to young people who are in the courts system. Barry's studies on probation practice in Scotland described what probationers and parolees considered to be their 'ideal model' of the social worker to be, "someone who was proactive and constructive, offering encouragement and emotional support and acting" (2000, p. 575). Le Chéile's description of their service as "positive role model, advisor and friend" encompasses Barry's ideal model (Le Chéile, n.d.). Through Le Chéile, adult volunteers are recruited, trained and supported to provide one to

one mentoring for around three hours a week and up to two years to young people consenting to engage with the service.

The research findings reported an overarching positive reaction to this approach adopted by The Probation Service, possibly reflecting the ideological shift in thinking in Irish society relating to managing and rehabilitating young offenders. One of the participants described it as "enlightened" and others expressed that it may even have a beneficial cost implication for the government in terms of saving on the cost of sending someone to prison.

The mentors felt that their volunteer status was an important aspect of the relationship with the young person as they felt it encouraged a greater degree of engagement. The participants believe the reasons may be that most of the young people involved in probation have had often negative experiences with other social service professionals. The volunteer aspect provided a certain "street credibility" with the adolescents who seemed to appreciate that the mentors were building a relationship with them because they wanted to and not because it was their job. Contrary to Philip's assertion from a previous study that young offenders may commit to the mentoring through implicit or explicit coercion, the interviewees did not express any indication that they felt this was the case with Le Chéile, though some suggested that they occasionally felt that the young person may be "playing the system" (2008, p.29).

In general they all found the organisation to be highly supportive and felt the initial training and on-going support and supervision provided most of the resources required to carry out the prescribed role. A couple of the participants felt they would like to attend more training and informative trainings around behavioural issues, if they were available. Others felt that the balance of trainings and supervisions were adequate.

Targeted Youth Work

Youth work in Ireland, like most other countries, began as a means of rescuing "needy" and "troublesome" children and young people (Devlin 2010, p.95). Recent policy changes in Irish society have identified youth work as a means of addressing social issues, including youth crime through schemes like the Garda Youth Diversion Work and Le Chéile. In chapter one Jenkinson highlights on of the difficulties with targeted youth work in such manner. He felt it pathologises young people and identifies them as being dysfunctional and raises issues for adults working in the service who strive to challenge stereotyping and labelling (2013, p.10). The mentors in this study were critical of the 'system' in place for children and young people in Ireland and criticized the labelling of children in the system which they feel can ultimately leads to the system failing them. The participants felt that most "dysfunctional" children are that way because they have not seen anything positive in their lives. Barry and McNeill assert that youth crime is often the result of a lack of structural opportunities for young people relating to education, employment, housing and income, often not solely a question of rational choice by the young person (2009, p.12). McGrath et al contend that young people who are well supported by their parents are less likely to commit crimes or engage in other forms of antisocial behaviour (2014, p.239). This theme also emerged from the research findings; some of the mentors felt that parents may also need a targeted approach adopted to provide support and education to support their children transition into adulthood.

There is a general consensus that some form of targeting is necessary to reach vulnerable or disadvantaged young people in society (Scanlon et al, 2011, p.15). The research findings implied that most of the mentees that the participants had encountered through Le Chéile had been involved with other forms of interventions from the State which supports the findings in previous literature in chapter one that personal, familial and social circumstances play and integral part in shaping the outcomes of young people's lives.

Mentoring

Philip defined youth mentoring as a relationship between a young person and an adult who offers a positive influence, guidance and support to enable the young person to form other supportive relationships in their lives (2008, p. 28). The interviewees defined the role of mentoring broadly in line with Philip's definition and the four types identified by Cutrona in chapter one; practical, emotional, listening and being there, and providing advice and building self-esteem (McGrath et al., 2014, p.238).

The participants expressed the importance of not been seen as someone in authority, telling the young person what to do, instead their role is more usefully characterised by the mentor listening to them and being there and being a positive influence. The previous research asserted that while mentoring has become popular for providing social support for at risk young people and young people on probation the outcomes of these relationships are inconclusive and modest (Greenop, 2011, p. 35). The mentors concluded that the weekly meetings with their mentees did not ask too much of them, they did not feel a great responsibility in terms of expectations from Le Chéile and ultimately they hoped they might help the young person to identify more positive aspects in their lives, if not now then maybe in the future.

The argument in the previous literature that young people may feel pressured or coerced into engaging with a mentor relationship (Philip, 2008, p. 29) was not supported by the findings but some that the participants occasionally felt that the young person may engage with the service for it to look good on their probation report or that they might "use" the mentors for a free meal or activity while they are "playing the system" and it being beneficial for the young person in front of the probation officer and / or judge.

Volunteering

The UN define the three key defining characteristics of volunteering as; not being for financial reward, should be undertaken voluntarily and should benefit someone other than the volunteer him or herself, or to society at large (2011, p. 10). In addition to this, Clary et al six outlined motivational functions served by volunteerism are to be; values, understanding, social, career, protective and enhancement (1998, p.1517). All of the participants expressed their main motivation as being a sense of "giving something back" to the community, in line with Clary's value of altruism and humanitarianism. Additionally some of the participants had studied or were studying in a social related field and felt it would provide experience in the area that might aid their career progression, similar to Clary's description of career related benefits. Others felt that their open personalities encouraged people to talk to and confide in them; that they naturally were able to be supportive to people who needed a "shoulder".

While most of them knew very little about Le Chéile before commencing the training, they felt that the commitment required from them, three hours once a week, was a reasonable expectation, and felt that if there was a chance it could make a difference to a vulnerable young person it would be worth it.

This research shows that the participants acknowledge the mentoring approach adopted by The Probation Service through Le Chéile as a positive one and feel that the principles of the organisation, being voluntary and youth centred are important to the young people who engage with the service. It would also have been beneficial to explore the thoughts and opinions of the young people who engage with the service, but due to ethical concerns this approach was beyond the remit of the researcher at this time. Future studies could explore mentoring from the three perspectives involved and see how they correlate; the organisational side through Le Chéile and Young Persons Probation, the mentor's

perspectives through additional qualitative research with mentors nationwide and, perhaps most importantly, investigate how the young people feel about the service. Additionally, although the mentoring approach to young people in the courts system is relatively new, a longitudinal study analysing the effects the mentoring relationship had on the young person into adulthood and into their twenties and thirties would also be interesting.

Le Chéile was established in 2005 following updated legislation regarding how young people in the Justice System were treated. The change in policy was introduced to attempt to keep young people out of detention centres as long as possible. Instead the Youth Justice System is promoting the use of community based sanctions as an alternative which focuses on welfare and rehabilitation of young offenders. This research aimed to explore the sentiments, motivations and challenges of the adult mentors who volunteer in this service. The mentors feel strongly that the approach adopted by the Irish Youth Justice Service is a positive step by reducing the number of young people being incarcerated with hardened criminals in unsuitable prisons and detention centres. The main motivations expressed were of an altruistic nature, the sense of giving something back and being able to make a difference to a young person. Some of the challenges encountered included; the initial engagement of the young person in the relationship, boundaries, when a relationship ends prematurely or abruptly and perhaps most surprisingly the attitudes from friends and acquaintances towards their volunteering role. Overall they are very satisfied with the Le Chéile organisation, stating that they found the training, on-going support excellent and their overall experience more or less what they hoped it would be.

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**Qualitative study into how adults who mentor young
people on probation perceive their role.**
<u>Interview Schedule</u>

1. Opening Questions
How are you? How was your day?
Have you <u>taken part</u> in a research study before?
Have you any <u>questions / concerns</u> about it before we start?
Is it okay for me to <u>record </u>the conversation?

<u>How long</u> have you been mentoring with Le Cheile?
Can you tell me how you became involved with Le Cheile? I'm just wondering what brought
you to this point, why did you <u>decide</u> to volunteer with young people on probation.

2. Role
How would you <u>define</u> your role as a mentor to young people on probation?
What <u>interests</u> you most about your role as a mentor?
What <u>attributes or skills </u>do you think you need to be a good mentor?
How do you think knowing the young person is on probation affects your <u>approach</u> the role?
What do you think of the approach of the Youth Justice system to try to <u>rehabilitate young
people</u> through mentoring schemes and Le Cheile?
How <u>effective</u> do you think the mentoring approach is?

3. Expectations
Can you remember if you had any <u>expectations</u> before you started mentoring?
How does the reality of the mentoring <u>compare</u> to your initial expectations?
What did you <u>think</u> it would be like to do this type of volunteering?
Has it <u>impacted</u> on you or on your life in any meaningful way?

4. Typical meetings
Can you describe a <u>typical meeting</u> with your mentee?
What do you think about it being <u>activity / social</u> based meetings?
How <u>useful </u>do you think these types of meetings are?

5. Challenges
Have you had any <u>challenges</u> in your mentoring role?
If so, how did you <u>overcome </u>them? (on your own or with the volunteer support worker in Le
Cheile?)
How have things been in the relationship since they were <u>addressed?</u>

6. *Willingness / Engagement of young people*

How <u>willing</u> do you think the young people are to participate in this mentoring?

How has your young person <u>engaged</u> with you?

How well do you think Le Cheile <u>matched</u> you with your mentee?

What do you think are the <u>most beneficial things</u> young people get out of it?

7. *Training & Support*

How well <u>prepared</u> did you feel before you started your mentoring role?

Do you think Le Cheile provides you with enough on-going <u>support</u> you in your mentoring role? Is there any <u>additional</u> support you think would be useful?

Le Cheile chooses to have their youth mentoring carried out by volunteers, what do you think of it being unpaid versus having paid staff to fulfil the roles?

8. *Overall Experience*

How would you describe your <u>overall experience</u> since you began mentoring with Le Cheile?

What have you <u>gained</u> from your role as a mentor?

Would you <u>recommend</u> this type of mentoring to a friend or colleague?

And finally, do you think you will continue mentoring for long?

What is the <u>best thing</u> about it?

What is the <u>worst thing</u> about it?

9. *AOB*

Is there <u>anything else</u> that we haven't talked about that you feel is important?

10. Thank You

YOUTH MENTORING IN IRISH YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE: PERCEPTIONS FROM A MENTORS PERSPECTIVE

My name is Tina Russell and I am conducting research that explores mentoring within the Irish Youth Justice System.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves an interview that will take roughly 40 minutes.

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any of the questions do raise difficult feelings, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is confidential. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated up until the research study is published.

The interview, and all associated documentation, will be securely stored and stored on a password protected computer.

It is important that you understand that by participating and completing the interview that you are consenting to participate in the study.

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact myself or my supervisor on the contact details below.

Tina Russell   tinaruss@gmail.com
Dr Niall Hanlon   niall.hanlon@dbs.ie

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant Signature: _____   Date: _____