

Abstract

Youth crime has been the subject of recent controversial debates with reports of young offenders being incarcerated in unsuitable detention centres. The introduction of The Children Act 2001 brought about a change in policy by attempting to keep young offenders out of prison and to attempt to rehabilitate them within their own communities. The Probation Service established Le Chéile in 2005 under the requirements of the Act to provide a mentoring service to young people who come in contact with the courts system.

This research aims to explore the sentiments, motivations and challenges of the mentors who volunteer in this service through qualitative in depth interviews. The research found that the volunteers who provide the service believe it to be a positive approach adopted by the Irish Youth Justice System and that the commitment required from them to fulfil the role is worthwhile if there is chance of it providing guidance and rehabilitation to an at risk young person and preventing reoffending from them.



Introduction

Research was explored regarding the Irish Youth Justice System, the current youth justice policy action plan and the sociology of youth crime to assess the historical and current state of affairs regarding youth crime and how young offenders are managed in the courts system.

Previous literature on targeted youth work, youth offending, youth mentoring and volunteering was analysed which provided insight into the history of youth work in Ireland as well as the merits and weaknesses of targeting young people for concern. The motivations of people who volunteer in services such as mentoring was reviewed.

The literature review revealed a gap in the knowledge around the perceptions, motivations and challenges of the adults who fulfill the role leading to the research question...

How do adults who mentor young people on probation experience and perceive their role?

Methods

DESIGN: A qualitative approach was adopted because the subjective nature of the research question. Clear, open ended interview questions were posed throughout to ensure the researcher gathered rich data from the participants.

PARTICIPANTS: 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. Six mentors from the Le Chéile youth mentoring were selected.

PROCEDURE: Contact was made with the volunteer supervisor in Le Chéile with a letter requesting permission to access the members of the organisation. Interviews were conducted in early February 2016.

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: 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.

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.

Anonymity and confidentiality must be maintained at all times, both for the participants and their mentees; all of the names of the participants have been changed and any identifying information relating to their identity or location has been omitted.

Findings

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. 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. 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.

Discussion

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. 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.

Overall the participants are happy 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.

References

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