



# Preventing Youth from Entering the Criminal Justice System

## Instruments and Cross-Agency Cooperation in Northern Ireland

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Problem Statement: Children's involvement in the criminal justice system leads to long-term negative consequences, including cycles of recidivism and reduced life opportunities.

Objective: Explore strategies, tools (instruments), and collaborative efforts across agencies to prevent children from entering the system.

# Key Drivers of Children Entering the Criminal Justice System

Family

Education

Peers

Substances

Community

# Consequences of Incarceration

Economic

Health

Psychological

Education

# Cross-Agency Cooperation: Why It Matters

Multidimensional Problem: Youth crime is influenced by education, family, community, and health issues, requiring a multi-agency approach.

Benefits of Cooperation:

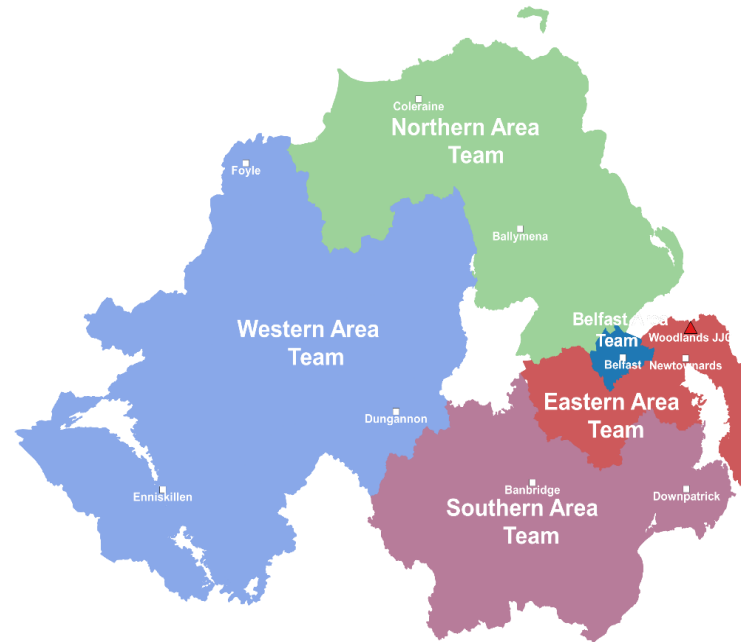
Holistic interventions for at-risk youth.

Reducing duplication of efforts and addressing gaps in services.

Coordinating interventions that span education, mental health, justice, and social welfare systems.

# Youth Justice Agency

- ▶ The Youth Justice Agency was established in April 2003 and is part of the Department of Justice under the direction and control of the Minister of Justice. We work with children aged 10-17 years who have offended or are at serious risk of offending and is made up of two directorates- custodial services and community services.
- ▶ Our community-based services are delivered by our **Youth Justice Services** directorate through 5 Area Teams located across Northern Ireland. Each Area Team is responsible for the delivery of a wide-range of front-line services, often jointly with or on behalf of other partner agencies.



## Custodial Directorate

### Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre

- ▶ Custody for children and young people is provided by our **Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre** which is located in Bangor and services the needs of all of Northern Ireland. Woodlands has been designed as a centre of excellence within a secure environment, offering a wide range of services and support to help prevent children and young people from re-offending. It provides a safe, secure and stimulating environment for up to 36 boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 17 who have been remanded or sentenced to custody by the courts. It also operates as a place of safety for PACE purposes.



# Model of Practice

- ▶ **Children First (Haines & Case)**
- ▶ We ensure that the rights of children are respected and that children are treated as children
- ▶ We deliver services in a child-friendly and child-appropriate manner
- ▶ We recognise, build on and celebrate children's positive behaviours, strengths, resilience and their positive contribution to society



# Continued...

- ▶ We consider the needs and developmental stage of children
- ▶ We consider, assess and address the broader context and underlying causes of offending by children
- ▶ We recognise the responsibility of society and adults to help children to avoid conflict with the law
- ▶ We promote Earlier Stage Intervention in maximising opportunities for prevention and diversion ensuring the minimal necessary intervention

## Our Approach

### ► **Systemic**

This means children's offending behaviour is understood from within its broader social context; work is undertaken by YJA and its partners to address both offending behaviour and its underlying causes.

### ► **Restorative**

Children are encouraged to make amends for the harm caused by their offending behaviour. Restorative processes are used to "restore" children, families and victims and to promote the inclusive reintegration of children within their communities and wider society.

### ► **Relationship-Based**

YJA interventions are delivered within the context of positive working relationships. These relationships are based on meaningful engagement, empowerment, respect, honesty, trust and optimism.

### ► **Strengths-Based and Future-Focused**

YJA focus is on recognising and celebrating the existing strengths and resilience of children and their families/carers. We aim to nurture and sustain hope, personal agency and to strengthen social networks. Our interventions promote and support positive change.

# Our Approach 2

## ► Trauma-Informed

Multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma may contribute to offending behaviour by children and/or make it more difficult for them to address it. All YJA staff are ACE-aware and practice in a trauma-informed way.

## ► Participation and Engagement

YJA is committed to continuing to develop and deliver services in partnership with service users. Children and family engagement in service design is crucial.

## ► Evidence and Positive Outcomes-Based

YJA practice is informed by holistic research and is evidence based. YJA measures the impact of its services both on a population and individual basis.

# Key Agencies Involved

## Education Department

Identifying at-risk students and intervening early through counselling and mentorship.

## Social Services

Offering family support, addressing trauma, and ensuring basic needs are met to reduce criminal risk.

## Mental Health Services

Providing mental health screenings and access to treatment for conditions that contribute to criminal behaviour.

## Youth Justice System

Collaborating with agencies to divert youth from detention and offer alternative resolutions.

# Key Instruments for Prevention NI

## ➤ Early Intervention Programmes

Examples: Children's Diversion Forum, Family Therapy, Mentoring, after-school programmes.

Impact: Reduced criminal behaviour by addressing needs early.

## ▶ Restorative Justice Practices

Definition: Focusing on repairing harm through dialogue between victims, offenders, and community.

Benefits: Prevents criminal records and fosters accountability and reconciliation.

# Continued

- ▶ Diversion Programmes

Definition: Redirecting youth away from formal judicial proceedings toward community-based programs.

Examples: Community Resolution Notice

- ▶ Education and Skill-Building Programs

Focus: Providing educational support and vocational training to prevent school dropouts and improve future employment prospects.

# Role of Law Enforcement in Prevention

Community Policing: Building trust with at-risk youth and fostering positive relationships

Police Diversion Programmes: Training officers to handle youth offenders through counselling or referral to social services rather than arrest

Collaborative Task Forces: Specialised teams focusing on youth issues, involving law enforcement, social workers, and education professionals

# Case Study

- ▶ Case Study: Children's Diversion Forum (CDF)



Meeting takes place - Chaired by YJA, all partner organisations should agree any actions and outcome. CDF Chair to advise YJA Admin how child is to be recorded

### CDF PROCESS OUTCOMES

Referral not appropriate

YJA/ Social Services/ Education Welfare Services/ Youth Services/ P SNI accept referral

Child referred / signposted onto other appropriate specialised, targeted or universal supports/ services within the voluntary, community or statutory sectors e.g. Family Support Hub

**Did not Engage -**  
Note that this won't be confirmed until review meeting of child

YJA Admin to finalise minutes of forum meeting, previous information on a child being reviewed at next CDF should be kept on minutes. Minutes should be forwarded via secure email to all partner organisations and YJA representatives with WebEx invite for next meeting

YJA Admin to update the referrals database with final outcome (instructions attached)

Local management to closely monitor and review CDF procedural guidelines, minutes and case progression on regular basis