

RESEARCH
EVIDENCE INTO
POLICY PROGRAMMES
AND PRACTICE



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of
Children and Youth Affairs



UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

School of Law

Responding in the Pandemic: Supporting Young People in the Diversion Programme

John Reddy REPPP

Today's presentation

1. What REPPP does

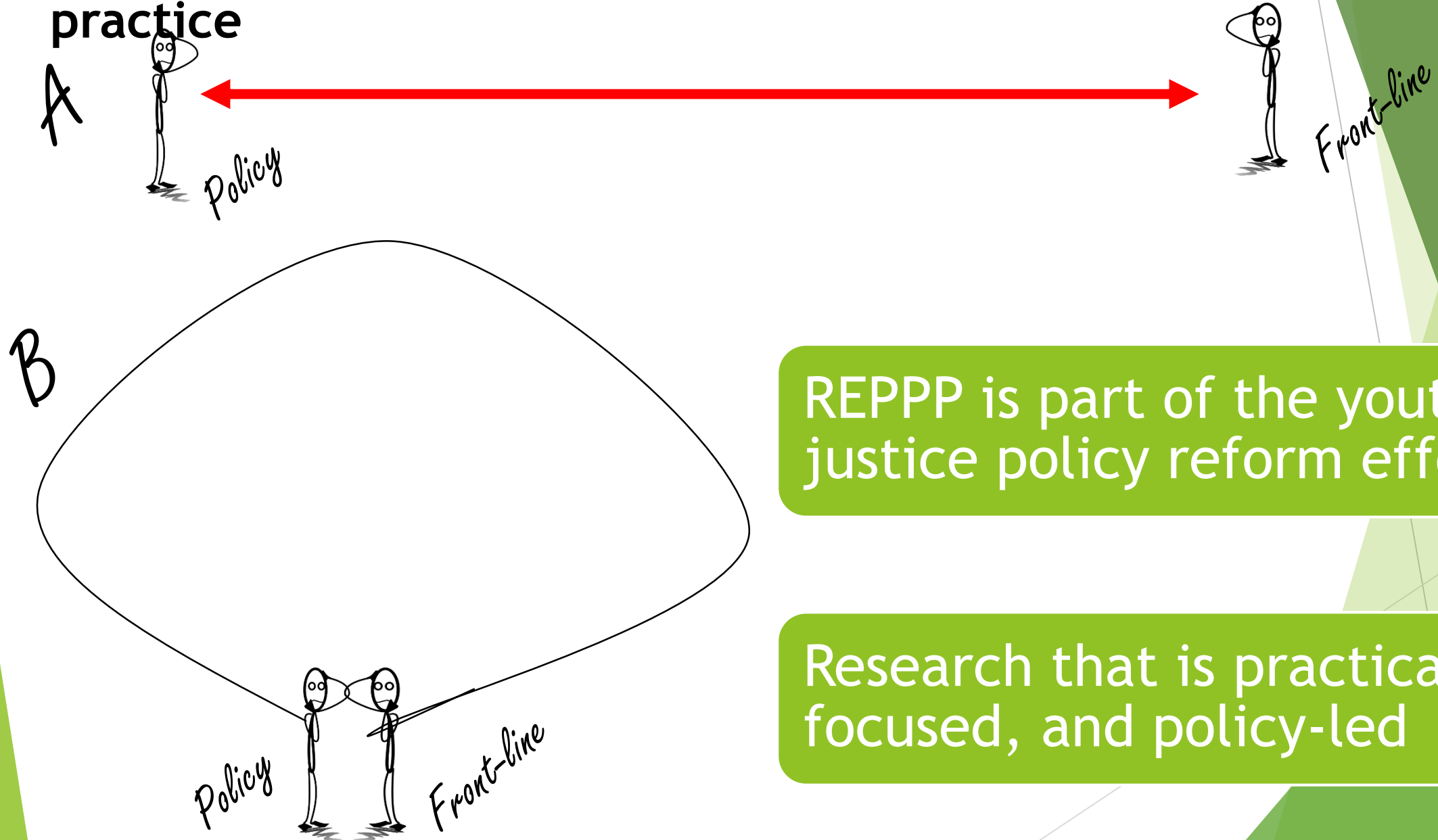
2. The study and how it was conducted

3. Young people in GYDPs and the Pandemic and public health measures

4. GYDPs and supporting young people

5. The potential to strengthen future GYDP practice

Policy Reform in Programmes and practice



REPPP is part of the youth justice policy reform effort

Research that is practically focused, and policy-led

Examples of REPPPs 'practical' focus include

Greentown (2016-22)
serious crime problems

ARP:
Relational practice

The Data Study:
Improve
measurement
capabilities

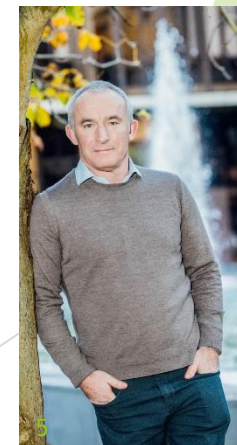
**Executive Leadership
Programme -**
Unpicking complex
problems in
communities

Master level courses
Youth justice and
evidence-informed
practice and
evaluation

Short-term studies -
case studies, rapid
literature reviews,
and surveys

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An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

REPPP project - Excellence and Impact

10/10/2021

About the Study

- ▶ Two nationwide surveys with Youth Justice Workers in Garda Youth Diversion Projects during the first lockdown (March-June, 2020)
- ▶ Why do this?
- ▶ Living in marginalised groups and communities
- ▶ Most offending public order and antisocial behaviour in nature
- ▶ Relational practice - GYDPs
- ▶ To provide up-to-date, and reasonably accurate evidence at a local level to inform national policymaking
- ▶ Balanced reflection of youth justice workers analyses



How it was conducted

- ▶ Timeframe - March - June
- ▶ Commitment of 104 GYDPs - got national coverage
- ▶ Using expert witnesses to access the ‘on-the-ground’ picture in local areas
- ▶ ‘One point of contact’ who liaises with GYDP colleagues, local Gardaí, other community workers and with the children, parents, and caregivers
- ▶ Response rate 97% for Survey 1 and 92% for Survey 2



Young people in GYDPs in the Pandemic

- ▶ **Survey 1** - ‘a majority’, ‘most’, ‘nearly all ‘ young people were being compliant with the public health measures
- ▶ Early in pandemic (March/April)
- ▶ Young people generally were not meeting in large groups, were maintaining social distancing, and staying local
- ▶ **Socialising with peers locally**
 - ▶ likely to meet in groups ‘with friends’, ‘playing football with friends’, ‘meeting friends for a cycle’ and ‘hanging-out with friends at the shops’
 - ▶ in the evenings and at night mostly to socialise with peers locally
 - ▶ social distancing in most interactions generally is not practiced
- ▶ **In Survey 2**, compliance levels were reported to having reduced as time progressed...‘a weariness was setting in’

Young people in GYDPs and at-risk behaviours

- ▶ A minority of young people were not complying
- ▶ Associated with including drug and alcohol misuse
 - “Parties that are attended by young people in the locality. These parties involve alcohol consumption and a disregard for the social distancing or lockdown rules”*
- ▶ Difficult for those with addiction problems to not only source drugs (or afford them) but also the treatments and support they required
 - “Young people are leaving their home to go out and get drugs. A small number of our young people with serious drug habits are failing to comply or recognise the seriousness of situation”*
- ▶ Trips outside areas to source drugs and in some reports to commit offences

Factors making it easier or difficult for young people in GYDPs to cope

Home life factors

- ▶ For some, it was an opportunity to build stronger connections - staying at home, meals together, family activities, helping during lockdown

For many, 'staying at home' involves risks

- ▶ Increased tension and stress for both parents and young people
- ▶ Chaotic homes with multiple risks
- ▶ Alcohol and drugs misuse, conflict and domestic violence
- ▶ Where acute poverty and criminal activity was the norm

Difficult ensuring young people stay at home

- Parents are unable and/or are frightened to challenge their children
- Conflict within the family home...reports of increased aggressive behaviour by a young person in the home

'...there has been huge conflict within family homes in terms of parents trying to keep their young people home – especially as not all families have been keeping their young people in'



Strategies to cope and to avoid conflict

- ▶ Staying in contact with friends, both online or in person, staying up all night, and then sleeping in daytime to avoid contact with others

'We have young people staying up all night and sleeping all day because it's the best way to avoid conflict in the house. This is one of the many contributing factors of why some young people are becoming annoyed with the situation'

Lifestyle changes

- ▶ More time online - particularly at night-time
- ▶ Increased substance and alcohol misuse
- ▶ Changes in routine and sleep patterns
- ▶ For some night-time is a *'quiet time'*
- ▶ Implications for school and education - *'extra holiday'*
- ▶ Restricted their engagement with friends their GYDP
- ▶ Personal and social isolation;
- ▶ Concerns for the future and the loss of employment (by parents)
- ▶ Stress and mental health issues recorded

So what emerges for young people in GYDPs

- ▶ The level of adversity and risks had increased
- ▶ Most young people adhering to the health measures and a minority not doing so
 - ‘some *young people think that the rules don’t apply to them*’
- ▶ Serious breaches of the health measures tending to be associated with drug and alcohol misuse
- ▶ Chaotic home life - parental behaviours and attitudes not helping
- ▶ Using strategies to cope and to avoid conflict that may be harmful
- ▶ Increases in stress and mental health issues

So how did GYDPs
respond to meet the
needs of at-risk young
people?



Flexibility in GYDP practice

Young people were missing GYDP activities

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graph TD; A[Young people were missing GYDP activities] --> B['At risk' young people more than ever required the structure, stability, and support provided by GYDPs]; B --> C[Covid-19 public health measures had altered engagement]; C --> D[Flexibility - Plans adapted, engagement modified, and tailoring supports to meet young people's needs];
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‘At risk’ young people more than ever required the structure, stability, and support provided by GYDPs

Covid-19 public health measures had altered engagement

Flexibility - Plans adapted, engagement modified, and tailoring supports to meet young people's needs

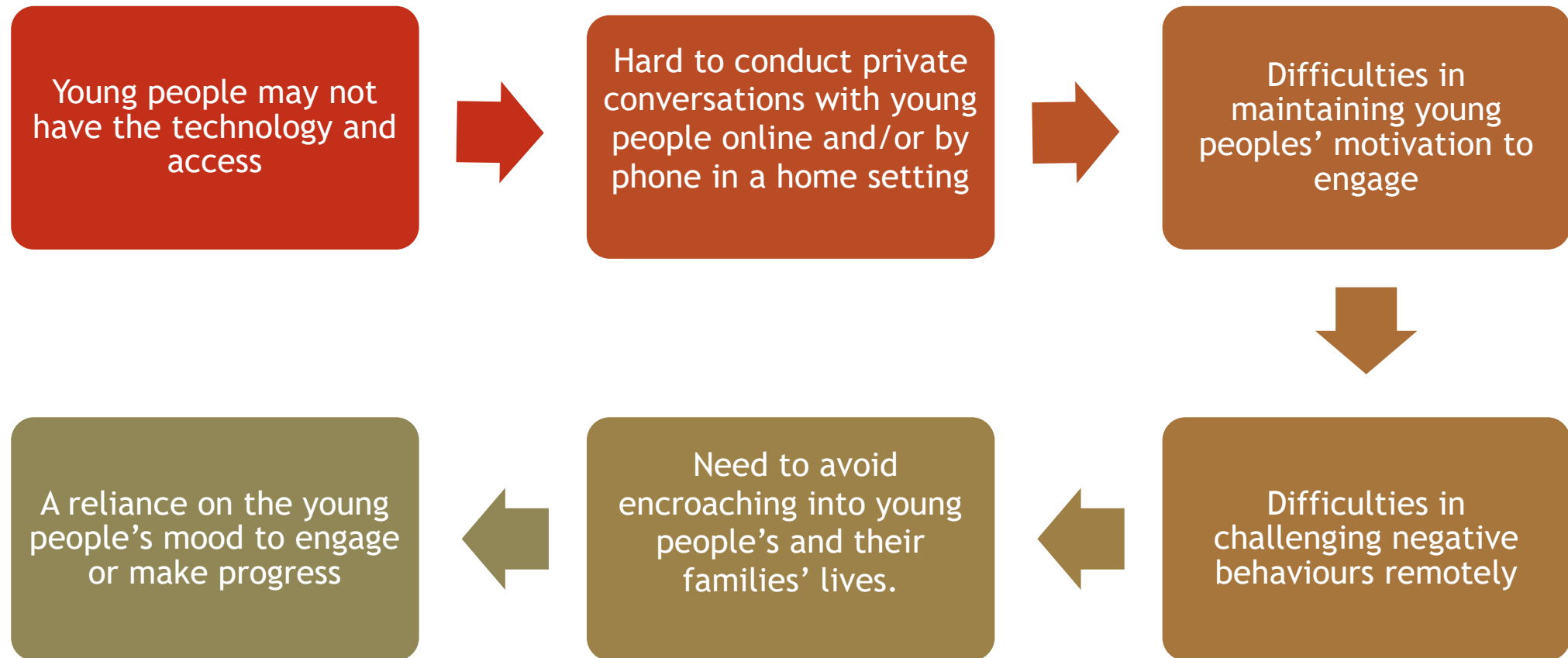
Adapting practice to remote working methods

A move to phone and online engagement

- ▶ GYDPs found innovative ways to engage young people
 - ▶ Individual check-ins, and group work activities online
- ▶ To sustain young people's interest
 - ▶ online engagement activities were provided - incentive-based games, quizzes and video calls.
 - ▶ Early on GYDPs identified a need for more interactive forms of engagement - weekly group work meetings, quizzes, virtual group drop-in, art projects, fitness sessions
- ▶ Increased flexibly - '*checking in*' more regularly but for shorter periods of time - 10 to 20 minutes remotely versus an hour if the contact was face-to-face
- ▶ **Tailoring supports**



Things to be mindful of with online engagement



61% of young people were engaging to at least the same extent with their GYDP as they were prior to the Pandemic

Things that helped

- ▶ Active participation of parents
 - ▶ To facilitate engagement with young people and particularly helpful if young people were considered particularly at risk

‘We have found it a lot easier to contact/engage with parents as opposed to young people themselves’

- ▶ GYDPs developed stronger relationships with families
- ▶ Knock on effect - in some instances, enhanced parent/child relations reported
- ▶ Interactions also led more awareness of the Covid-19 threat to families and increased compliance with the health measures



Collaborative working - Supporting families

- ▶ Collaborative working and resource sharing among GYDPs
- ▶ Weekly peer support meetings and sharing resources (and online information) and practice toolkits
- ▶ Increased levels of engagement with Juvenile Liaison Officers - *'regular', 'weekly' or 'constant'*
- ▶ Family support role

GYDP providing a support and coordinating role, in many instances, getting supports to the most at risk e.g. mental health and other services due to the Covid-19 restrictions and so the.



Increased outreach and face-to-face engagement in May

- ▶ Some GYDPs delivered care packages and food parcels to homes - providing opportunities to engage with young people and families
- ▶ Home visits increased GYDP visibility in the community and had helped to improve YJW relationships with families
- ▶ Home visits were highlighted (in May) as important for young people who are vulnerable or experiencing difficulty

‘in essential cases [outreach] has helped young people lessen criminal behaviour and prevent crises’ ‘especially responding to young people who are becoming more distanced’

GYDPs in the Pandemic

Need to be flexible and adaptive - child centred approach

- ▶ Keep young people engaged with their GYDP
- ▶ Engage with young people daily/weekly depending on their level of need
- ▶ Remote working - more afternoon and evening work (daytime sleeping)
- ▶ Remote engagement helped by the active participation of parents/caregivers
- ▶ Engagement online was mixed (online/remote not for everyone)
- ▶ Absence of face-to-face engagement - difficult initiating (new referrals) and maintaining relationships
- ▶ Outreach (face-to-face) work only with the most vulnerable young people

What helped & what was learned

- ▶ **Collaborations helped** - GYDPs, community services, Gardaí, and parents/caregivers increase
- ▶ Youth justice worker / family relationships strengthened
- ▶ Increased understanding of young people's contexts and their needs
- ▶ Have a plan - a local crisis strategy - remote and outreach plan for responding to the needs of the most vulnerable young people was advised
- ▶ From these findings - young people in GYDPs, during this time of crisis, benefited from the supports provided by GYDPs

Thank You!

More information on this study and the work of REPPP

Contact

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▶ Surveys 1 report available at
[http://www.justice.ie/en/jelr/report_on_compliance_with_covid-19_restrictions_among_garda_youth_diversion_project_participants_\(d je-ul\).pdf/files/report_on_compliance_with_covid-19_restrictions_among_garda_youth_diversion_project_participants_\(d je-ul\).pdf](http://www.justice.ie/en/jelr/report_on_compliance_with_covid-19_restrictions_among_garda_youth_diversion_project_participants_(d je-ul).pdf/files/report_on_compliance_with_covid-19_restrictions_among_garda_youth_diversion_project_participants_(d je-ul).pdf)

▶ Research Evidence Policy Programmes and Practice

▶ @REPPP4