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Investigating the Role of Alternative Education Provision in Supporting Pathways out of Crime for Young People.

Bronagh Fagan

Technological University Dublin, bronagh.fagan@tudublin.ie

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**Investigating the Role of Alternative Education Provision in Supporting Pathways out
of Crime for Young People**

A thesis submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in part fulfilment of the
requirements for award of Masters (MA) in Criminology

Bronagh Fagan

Supervisor: Mairead Seymour

September 2016

Department of Social Sciences and Law, Dublin Institute of Technology

Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the Masters in Criminology is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

Signature of candidate: _____

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Abstract

Interest in the study of desistance has increased dramatically since the 1970s and 1980s and has become the focus of much criminal justice policy, practice and research. Strong evidence suggests that individuals with a history of difficulties at school and low levels of educational attainment are more likely to offend, continue offending and become entangled in the criminal justice system. However, vast numbers of children continue to fall through the cracks of mainstream education in Ireland every year. The principal aim of this study is to investigate the role of alternative education provision (AEP) in supporting pathways out of crime for young people. Furthermore, the following components are explored: key desistance theories, influential factors which impact on young people's desistance from offending, links between education and desistance and the manner in which AEP facilitates (or not) the development of elements conducive to young people moving away from offending. An extensive review of the literature was conducted and the perceived impact and personal experiences of past pupils of AEP were explored using a qualitative research approach. Findings that emerged from the study indicate that, through the development of psychosocial competencies, practical skills and positive relationships, most participants were supported by AEP in their transitions away from a potential life of crime. Through a sense of belonging, individual needs being met, the development of interpersonal relationships, the provision of a potential platform for change in self-identity and the development of resiliency in terms of the impact of life events, the value of AEP, as described by all participants, extended far beyond the classroom.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

“Our current education system, despite definite improvements and developments, has a long way to go before it adequately serves the needs of the most vulnerable Irish children”
(Gibbons, 2009).

An extensive number of children continue to fall through the cracks of mainstream education and become marginalised from society. It is well documented that those with a history of difficulties at school and lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to offend, continue offending and get entangled in the criminal justice system (Dale 2010, Farrington 2003, McAra and McVie 2007, O’Mahony 1997). The manner in which young people, who begin to experience such difficulties, are treated raises many complex issues. The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the role of alternative education provision (AEP) for young people in supporting pathways out of crime, from the perspectives of past service users. This chapter outlines the rationale for the study, the aims and objectives of the research and a summary of the layout of the thesis.

1.2 Rationale

Educational disadvantage and the link between education and crime is a topic that the researcher is extremely interested in arising from her professional and volunteer roles. The school where the researcher currently teaches is in a designated disadvantaged area with 35% of its adults out of work and only 5% of adults in the community have a third level education (Doyle et al., 2010). Crime rates are also considered very high in this area. She also works as a volunteer Youth Officer for St. Vincent de Paul in Dublin’s inner-city Family Visitation Sector. Previously, the researcher has taught in a detention centre for young offenders in Tanzania where the majority of inmates never had the opportunity to attend formal education prior to prison. The researcher also completed a placement in a Youth Encounter Project a number of years ago. The insights gained by the researcher in the above mentioned settings and situations have raised her awareness of the potential effects of limited education on individuals, families and communities.

1.3 Alternative Education Provision

Schools, such as Life Centres and Youth Encounter Projects, provide an alternative education setting for young people who have experienced varying degrees of social adversity and have left or been excluded from mainstream school. These schools generally aim to; provide individualised holistic education for young people at risk, retain them in the education system and provide them with supports towards progression. They emphasise social and personal development and a holistic approach to the child, focusing on his/ her gifts and areas of strength as well as addressing his/ her needs. They include group learning opportunities such as sport, creative activities and awareness raising including drug and alcohol awareness and opportunities to learn in alternative settings.

It is necessary to develop educational experiences that will enable students to develop their emotionally driven personal intelligences per se, that is, as a discrete area of human capability. This area of education is particularly important in preparing students for care, love and solidarity work, given that all people live their lives in relations of dependency and interdependency. But it can also play an important role in making the process of education itself more satisfying for all concerned (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004, p. 153).

Children are referred through different agencies which include schools, social workers, courts (generally for non-attendance), by their parents and sometimes self-referrals. O'Brien, Thesing and Hegarty (2001) convey that AEP is inclined to occur organically, i.e., where a need exists, a programme will occur, whether it is funded by the state or otherwise (p. 87). With consistent waiting lists, it is apparent that there is a high demand and requirement for them. This concept is supported in a report, produced by the Department of Education and Science in May 2006, on AEP which recognised thirty one centres in Ireland where full-time education is provided for a year or more, or where young people are sent for a limited timeframe to address behavioural issues. The majority of programmes identified cater for young people between the ages of 12 and 16 years.

1.4 Aims

This study aims to investigate the role of AEP in supporting pathways out of crime for young people. It adopts a qualitative research approach and draws on the perspectives of past pupils of a Youth Encounter Project and two Life Centres in the Greater Dublin area.

1.5 Objectives

A number of objectives support the aim of this study. These include to:

- Explore various desistance theories
- Examine key influential factors involved in youth offending and desistance
- Uncover the impact of education and early school leaving on crime
- Examine the core aims and principles of certain AEP
- Establish the role of alternative education by exploring the life experiences of past pupils and the impact (if any) that availing of AEP has had on their lives, mainly in relation to crime
- Analyse key findings based on the interview material and link them back to the relevant literature in order to evaluate the role of AEP in pathways out of crime
- Lay the foundation for further studies in this field

1.6 Organisation of Chapters

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one has focused on the rationale for the study and the aims and objectives of the research. Chapter two forms the backdrop for this piece of research as it consists of a review of the literature. Various sources, chosen in terms of their relevance to the topic and research question, are explored and critically reviewed. The research methodology is outlined in the third chapter. It explores the design of the study, the methods used, the analysis, research process and research ethics. Chapter four is the heart of this dissertation. Prominent themes which emerged from interviews conducted are analysed and discussed. Key findings are discussed within the context of the literature in order to critically interpret the subject matter and formulate conclusions. These conclusions are briefly reiterated in chapter five along with the acknowledgement of limitations and suggested recommendations based on the key findings.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores the concept of desistance along with various desistance theories and relevant research. Section two is based more specifically on youth offending and desistance. It examines the impact of individual factors, family influences, community influences and state policies on young offenders' desistance from offending. The third section focuses on the strong links between education, crime and desistance. Unequal opportunities, early school leaving, education as a pathway out of crime, the concept of AEP and research based on AEP is investigated in this final section.

2.2 Desistance

Researchers concerned with desistance examine how and why individual offenders desist from crime at different stages in the life-course (Farrall and Calverley, 2006). They aim to investigate and determine the complicated nature of social and psychological processes which result in offenders moving away from crime. Whilst recidivism is a more established area of research, interest in the study of desistance increased dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s following the publication of significant longitudinal studies (Wolfgang et al., 1972 and Farrington 1961-1981).

Desistance is no longer viewed as a "mere appendage to research on criminal careers and clearly represents a legitimate topic for research in its own right" (Farrall and Maruna, 2004, p. 358). It is the focus of much criminal justice policy, practice and research and is one of the key outcomes that criminal justice interventions are designed to achieve (McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler and Maruna, 2012). However, a review of the literature reveals that criminological theorists have yet to agree on a common definition for desistance or provide comprehensive explanations of the process it entails. This limited level of agreement exists due to various complexities which effect individual interpretations (McNeill et al., 2012). Some theorists perceive desistance to be a permanent cessation of offending over a number of years, whilst others accept a more flexible definition which provides scope for accepting that incidents of re-offending might occur. The question of whether desistance is the "final termination of a criminal career or a significant crime free gap" (McNeill and Weaver, 2007, p. 90) has been repeatedly posed by many scholars.

2.3 Desistance Theories

Maturational reform theory suggests that aging inevitably reduces or stops offending (Gleuck and Gleuck, 1940). Unlike most aspects of the study of desistance, it is widely accepted that offending behaviour peaks in late adolescence and early adulthood before dramatically declining with age for the majority of people (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011). This pattern is commonly referred to as the ‘age crime curve’ and should be acknowledged in investigations involving young people and desistance (Seymour, 2013). The notion that this is a natural or biological process, comparable to puberty, is among the earliest theories regarding desistance (Goring, 1919). This is important to consider in this study as, if it is the case that young people naturally grow out of crime, then perhaps AEP and other interventions may be viewed as counterproductive (Barry and McNeill, 2009). Whilst a person’s age still remains one of the best predictors of whether or not they will desist from crime, arguments have been put forward surrounding complexities lurking in the undergrowth of the age-crime curve. It has since been argued that desistance cannot be solely attributable to the process of maturing and the influence of external environmental factors rejected. The Gleucks themselves proposed that researchers “dissect maturation into its components” (1940, p. 270). Basic interpretations of the ‘age crime curve’ have been criticised and accused of being neglectful in the sense that they do not ‘unpack’ the meaning of age (Sampson and Laub, 1992).

Another theory which merges desistance and human agency is rational choice theory which demonstrates that offenders exhibit criminal behaviours to seek some sort of advantage to themselves (Cornish and Clarke, 1986). Having been developed and expanded since the late 18th century, it emphasises decision-making abilities involved in the onset of criminal behaviour and the cessation of such behaviours. However, rational choice is complex as it is influenced by structural opportunities and constraints which vary for individuals (Barry and McNeill, 2009). It could be argued this theory can be easily manipulated to suit practitioners and policy makers. Programmes which target offending behaviour makes the individuals responsible for their own rehabilitation and desistance and if they fail to accept such responsibilities then it would appear that punishment is justified (Bennett, 2008).

Created in an effort to explain developmental processes which shape the age-crime curve, Moffitt’s taxonomy of two types of offenders is composed of adolescent limited offenders and life-course persistent offenders. Short-term adolescent offenders go through a brief and circumstantial problematic period in terms of behaviour whilst life-course persistent

offenders have behavioural issues stemming from childhood which remain constant throughout adolescence and adulthood. Life-course persistent offenders are depicted by Moffitt (1993) as children who fail at school, have poor social skills, mental health problems and low self-control who become early school leavers, teenage fathers, divorced and alcohol dependent. However, according to data collected by Sampson and Laub (2003), the men who fit the childhood and adolescent criteria for life-course persisters, just as often desisted from crime in their adult lives.

Sampson and Laub reject Moffitt's strategy of grouping offenders into specific categories and argue that childhood experiences, characteristics of an individual and events during each period of the life-course can explain long-term patterns of offending. These key turning points, coupled with the strengthening of social bonds are believed to enable personal transformation and allow for engagement with conventional social roles (Sampson and Laub, 1993, 2003). Time spent in reform school, involvement in the military, marriage, and moving locality were significant factors recognised by Sampson and Laub's interviewees as turning points for desistance. "Offenders desist as a result of a combination of individual actions (choice) in conjunction with situational contexts and structural influences linked to important institutions that help sustain desistance" (Sampson and Laub, 2003, p. 145). Whilst extremely influential in recent times, Sampson and Laub's findings have also been susceptible to criticism. Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002) highlighted a limitation of their study in the form of their sample being composed completely of white male offenders who matured into adulthood in the 1950s. This criticism creates uncertainty with regard to whether or not their corresponding theory adequately portrays the experiences of other types of offenders, for example females or offenders coming of age within a more contemporary social context and economic landscape (Giordano et al., 2002). It is also important to note that all offenders within their sample did not necessarily interpret turning points in the same way. Some desisters credited their institutionalisation in reform school as a positively transformative event, whilst it had little effect on subsequent criminal behaviour for others. This is relevant to consider in this particular study as it may be the case that involvement in AEP impacts on each individual in a completely different manner.

This notion of 'turning points' having different effects on individuals is reflected by the fact that theorists concerned with desistance have begun to focus on which specific changes on

the level of personal cognition (Giordano et al., 2002) or self-identity (Burnett, 2004) may foreshadow or concur with developments in social attachments.

Having identified that individuals who desist from crime have high levels of self-efficacy and had managed to ‘make sense’ of their lives, the significance of positive self-identity and narratives in the process of desistance is emphasised by Maruna (2001). The ex-prisoners interviewed, who had desisted from crime in Maruna’s study, often wanted to put their experiences ‘to good use’ by helping others to avoid the mistakes they had made. He considers that, in order to desist from crime, “offenders need to develop a coherent, pro-social identity for themselves. As such, they need to account for and understand their criminal pasts and why they are now ‘not like that anymore’” (Maruna, 2000, p. 7). Maruna focused on internal changes associated with desistance and noticed that desisters developed an exaggerated sense that they could control their own futures. This ability to imagine a new pro-social identity accounts for one of the four key elements of the Theory of Cognitive Transformation as articulated by Giordano et al., 2002. The other three include an openness and willingness to change, exposure to a ‘hook for change’ and a transformation in the way the offender views deviant behaviour.

2.4 Youth Offending and Desistance

Although desistance continues to experience theoretical and methodological problems, a review of the literature indicates that key factors involved in desistance can be categorised into: individual factors, family influences, community influences and state policies. The aim of this section is to explore research based on youth offending and desistance in order to uncover how such elements have been found to impact on behaviour at this pivotal age and to develop a better understanding of youth offending and the effectiveness of interventions.

2.4.1 Individual Factors

Individual factors associated with desistance include age, gender, education, identity transformation, family roles and criminal history. As documented earlier in this chapter, rates of offending decline with age, with younger offenders being more likely to offend and reoffend. It is also important to note that female offenders are more likely to desist than males. By the early twenties, rates of offending are five times lower for young females than young males (Graham and Bowling, 1995). The move away from crime, which happens for the majority of young people, is described by Seymour (2013) through a developmental lens

which depicts the process of desistance as one which is aided by a growth in psychosocial proficiencies and skills in late adolescence. This progression is coupled with the capacity to make better decisions and reduce offending behaviours. In order to utilise age as an effective measure in the desistance process and comprehend social behaviour demonstrated by young people, specific corresponding elements which impact on behaviour must be identified (McNeill et al., 2012). One such element (which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter) is education. Under-achievement at school can have profound consequences for children and their future, not only in relation to economic uncertainty, but in terms of well-being, self-esteem, health and participation in family and community life (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). As identified in the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (McAra and McVie, 2007), those with lower levels of educational attainment and a history of school failure are more likely to offend, continue offending and get caught up in the criminal justice system. The concept of identity transformation as another factor involved in desistance exists as there is an evidential link between lower self-reported offending and the desire and motivation to stop offending (Maruna, 2000). This decision to change is often intertwined with the influence of family roles. In comparison with adults who commit the same crimes, young people are much more responsive and susceptible to rehabilitation and change (Irish Prison Reform Trust, 2015). The difficulties associated with making this change, however, can also be influenced by criminal history. Criminal history is described by Kershaw, Goodman and White as “the most influential variable for the prediction of future offending” (1999, p. 14). The younger a person is when they become involved in the criminal justice system, the longer they are likely to remain caught up in it (Farrington, 1977).

2.4.2 Family Influences

Families are pervasive and considered to be the child’s first and longest lasting context for development (Berk, 2009). Therefore, family influences have a powerful and complex effect on a young offender. The significance of their family background and parenting styles have featured in key longitudinal studies (Utting, Bright and Henricson 1993 and Farrington 1961-1981) as some of the most common attributes which place them at risk of involvement in criminal behaviour. Factors suggested to have a negative influence include poor parenting skills, parental conflict, criminal/ anti-social and/or alcoholic parents, disruptive or poor attachments with the child, and family breakdown/ family dysfunction. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1991) argued that aspects such as parenting styles and marriage are ineffective with regard to offending as criminality is based on self-control and opportunity structures.

However, the very fact that they put an emphasis on self-control links their theory back to family influences as self-control is developed in early childhood, a period when most young people's developments are impacted solely by family. Changes in family roles and relationships have proven to have an impact on an individual's pattern of offending and can be significant in the desistance process (Sampson and Laub 1993, Farrall 2002, Farrall and Calverly 2006). Families and friends can offer a support network for young people along with practical assistance, financial aid and emotional support. The family unit has been considered to be one of many informal social institutions which bond the individual and society with an individual being more likely to offend if a weakening of this bond occurs (Sampson and Laub, 1993).

2.4.3 Community Influences

Studies have indicated that characteristics and attitudes of a young person's community can influence desistance. Their immediate surroundings effect how they view and interpret the world around them and their place in it. Negative community characteristics identified in the literature include; community disorganisation and physical degeneration, inadequate levels of local service provision, high levels of mobility, lack of attachment to the community and a large percentage of rented or local authority housing (Utting et al., 1993 and Farrington 1961-1981). The impact of community influence is reflected in figures which suggest that Irish prisoners are 25 times more likely to originate from (and return to) a gravely deprived area (Irish Prison Reform Trust, 2016). It is further highlighted in studies which show that ex-prisoners who move away from their communities are much more likely to desist (Osborn 1980, Sampson and Laub 1993). Lack of attachment to the community stands out from some of the physical and economic factors associated with negative community influences as it is more to do with the attitude of an individual towards their community. This sense of belonging is of great significance for young people in terms of desistance. "People who have no sense of belonging have no social status to risk" (Leibrich, 1993, p. 240). Crime can signify an absence of this sense of belonging or lack of responsibility to contribute to the established community (Leonardsen, 2003). However, it is also important to note that desistance is a 'two way process' which requires an effort to change on the young person's behalf and to accept and welcome the change by the community (Barry, 2013).

2.4.4 State Policies

Due to the complex nature of the onset of crime, recidivism and desistance, the number of state policies which play a role in impeding or supporting a young person's pathway out of crime are extremely broad. Criminal justice policy is obviously a major influencing factor. Current criminal justice policy and practice would appear to centre on risk and the criminogenic needs of young people rather than reducing structural and economic inequalities. There has been a substantive rise in influence of the risk factor prevention paradigm (RFPP) in recent decades (Farrington, 2000). The core idea underpinning the paradigm is that it is possible to identify key risk factors for offending and counteract them through the implementation of prevention methods. However, the model has come under scrutiny for (Case 2006 and Goldson and Muncie 2006). By simplifying the complex lives of young people, the RFPP justifies the provision of a basic list of (potentially bias) criteria for recognising children at risk of offending and responding to them by simply counteracting risk factors with methods of avoidance. Interwoven with criticisms of the RFPP, the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime revealed that early diagnosis of children as 'at risk' can be inaccurate and may result in them receiving unnecessary interventions which wrap them up in the criminal justice system. This can be difficult to gauge as other research also suggests that the earlier the intervention, such as effective probation, the shorter the criminal career (Tracy and Kempf-Leonard, 1996). In terms of probation, Barry (2006) found that the personality of the worker, the relationship they developed and the requirement for continuity and consistency of approach were of much more significance than the content of the programme itself. Although it could be argued that her research would benefit from an input of policy analysis, Barry effectively portrays that criminological theory has not explored complex processes involved in desistance. This makes the creation and implementation of youth justice policies, which are effective in terms of desistance, extremely difficult. Regardless of the general approach adopted by the system (diversion-based or punitive), arrests and sanctions appear to have a very limited impact on offending (Huizinga and Henry, 2008). A recent report, published by the Irish Prison Reform Trust (IPRT) (2015), identified that among the more successful responses to crimes committed by young people are; diversion programmes, intensive community orders, restorative justice practices and supervised bail support. However, in many instances, research reveals more negative consequences associated with criminal justice based measures being implemented with young offenders (Barry, 2006 and McAra and McVie, 2007). Diversion away from this system is viewed by many as the most efficient and productive manner in which to promote desistance

among young people. As suggested by the IPRT, there may need to be a shift in focus and resources from criminal justice to policies which impact on social justice (2012). Perhaps broader social inequalities, for example inequalities in the education system, could be targeted to empower vulnerable young people and enable them to desist.

2.5 Education and Desistance

2.5.1 Inequality

According to Baker et al. (2004), equality can be interpreted in terms of individuals and a wide range of groups, it can relate to different relationships and other dimensions in people's lives, all of which have some form of foundation in the concept of treating people as equals. Regardless of the education system's intentions, "Inequality in Ireland means that some children do not reach their potential because their opportunities are limited before they begin" (Gibbons, 2009, p. 1). Under achievement and negative experiences at school can have profound consequences for these children and their future, not only in relation to economic uncertainty, but in terms of well-being, self-esteem, health and participation in family and community life (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). Offenders in the criminal justice system tend to have very low levels of educational attainment, which may or may not have contributed to their offending behaviour, but will have helped prevent them from engaging with life opportunities that are available in Irish society (National Crime Council, 2002). Furthermore, fewer attachments are a potential key factor in what the evidence tells us supports individual pathways out of offending behaviour.

2.5.2 Early School Leaving

According to the Economic and Social Research Institute (2010), every year over 9,000 children leave the Irish education system before completing their Leaving Certificate. The majority were found to have experienced unemployment after leaving school. Those who obtained jobs were generally in low-skilled or insecure areas. Leaving school early makes individuals vulnerable to a multitude of risk factors, such as crime and violence which are considerably higher among early school leavers (Dale, 2010). Although no longitudinal studies have been published regarding background characteristics of the Irish prison population, those conducted in other jurisdictions indicate that early school leaving (along with factors such as lower than average IQ, poor academic performance in school, poor attendance and school disorganisation) are key risk factors that make children more

vulnerable to offending (Farrington 2003, Feldman 1993, Utting et al. 1993). A sample of 108 prisoners, examined by O'Mahony (1997) in Ireland, revealed that 63% had frequently truanted from school, 50% had left school before the age of 15 years, 80% had left school before the age of 16 years, 75% per cent had never sat a State examination and over one quarter (29%) of the prisoners had difficulties in relation to literacy. It is also interesting to note that over half of drug users receiving treatment in Ireland during the year 1996 had left school before or upon reaching 15 years of age. Furthermore, almost 10% of this sample stated that they only had completed primary school (Moran et al., 1997). More recent figures released by the IPRT (2016) indicate the continuation of strong links between early school leaving and crime. It is reported that over half of the current Irish prison population left school before the age of 15 years and it remains the case that most Irish prisoners have never sat a State examination. Over 70% are unemployed when committed to prison and a similar proportion reported being without any specific trade or occupation. Further statistics released by the IPRT indicate that almost half of children on custodial remand in Ireland, have a learning disability. Of the 520 inmates who registered in the school at Mountjoy Prison in 2008, 20% were unable to read or write and 30% could only sign their names. Whilst it is wrong to assume that early school leaving or low educational attainment alone cause an individual to offend, the reoccurring nature of such factors among criminals suggests that they play an influential role as significant risk factors.

2.5.3 Education as a Pathway Out of Crime

Education has been proven to have the potential to support pathways out of crime at any stage of an individual's life course. This not only benefits individuals, but their families and wider communities: "As education and skill levels increase, the levels of positive social outcomes also increase" (Department of Education and Skills, 2014, p. 10). Advances in education in our detention schools, prison system and post-prison services are evident. However, perhaps the most effective role of education in supporting pathways out of crime is for it to act as an early intervention or diversion method for children, in order to avoid negative consequences associated with early school leaving and disengagement from the education system. In 2012, the IPRT called for the adequate distribution of fundamental services, such as education, to guarantee that all children can avail of necessary services and supports. According to the independent charity, "This is the most effective long-term strategy for addressing the marginalisation and inequality associated with higher rates of offending" (IPRT, 2012, p. 24). Even theorists such as Sampson and Laub (2003) and Elder, Crosnoe and Johnson (2004),

who argue the significance of conditions, events and choices made throughout the entire life-span, have acknowledged the overwhelming importance of childhood conditions. Failure at school is all too often considered a personal failure rather than potentially a societal problem of inequality. “Succeeding in education is the key to providing children with the tools they need to break intergenerational cycles of poverty and to create positive futures for themselves” (Gibbons, 2009, p. 6). This indicates a need for alternatives to mainstream education to accommodate children for whom mainstream education has been deemed inappropriate.

2.5.4 Alternative Education Provision

It is difficult for many young Irish people to succeed as they are constantly faced with adversity (McElwee, 2007). As outlined in the ‘Youth Encounter Projects Schools Value for Money Review’ (Department of Education and Science, 2008), some students are more marginalised than the majority of disadvantaged students. They bring with them a wide range of negative life experiences and, without exception, have experienced failure and rejection in the education system. Many of the young people who attend AEP have also been, or possibly are, involved in crime and it is not untypical that the young person’s family also has some criminal involvement. Due to these obstacles, they repeatedly receive the message that they are unproductive. With lack of or inadequate supports in place to protect them, it is challenging to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to be resilient. The harsh reality of life experiences that many of these young people have faced often deprived them of a carefree childhood. “These lost years matter: both truancy and exclusion are associated with a significantly higher likelihood of becoming a teenage parent, being unemployed or homeless later in life, or ending in prison” (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). AEP provides a more suitable education setting for these children in order to empower them to reach their full potential. As mentioned previously, AEP, for example Life Centres and Youth Encounter Projects, aim to provide individualised holistic education for children at risk, retain them in the education system and provide them with supports towards progression. They cater for children between the ages of 12 and 16 years.

2.5.5 Research Based on Alternative Education Provision

In educational terms, the key to keeping young offenders out of prison and from becoming marginalised from society would appear to include maintaining them in alternatives to mainstream education to provide them with positive experiences and opportunities for

personal growth. However, as borne out in the desistance literature, with limited information and evaluations of AEP, it is difficult to determine the actual role played by AEP in relation to pathways out of crime and other success criteria. It has been argued that mainstream schools seek to improve exam results and their public image by getting rid of unruly youngsters (Lepkowska, 1998) and that alternative schools and programmes act merely as a ‘dumping ground’ or repository for unwanted (in mainstream classes), problematised children (Mills, Renshaw, and Zipin, 2013). Even if such accusations were proven to be the case, the only other option for many of these children is incarceration in detention centres. That poses the question then whether any option is better than being completely marginalised from society in an isolated institution. Findings highlighted earlier in the youth offending and desistance section would indicate that this is true. Perhaps it could be argued that anybody who categorises vulnerable children as simply ‘unruly’ does not have an understanding of the child or highly regard his/ her best interests. Furthermore, however complex a child might present, schools who ‘write them off’, to improve an image or average grades, cannot have truly uncovered the child’s assets or appreciated their potential. “The more negative experiences we have, the more likely we are to be resentful and bitter about a system that has failed us” (McElwee, 2007, p. 5). On the other hand, AEP has been deemed invaluable as “they adopt an ecological approach to working through relationships based on use of self, which are individualised to the needs of each pupil. Self-mastery, social competence and belief in the future are fostered in the pupils” (McElwee, 2007). The approach which is embraced means that ‘difficult doesn’t mean impossible’ (Gordon, 1996) and such schools are in a position to provide support at a much more intensive level than that available under provisions of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan¹. While it is impossible to establish if alternatives to mainstream education prevent participants re-offending, this study aims to investigate their role in supporting pathways out of crime.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the concept of desistance along with the exploration of various theoretical frameworks and research based on desistance. The relevance or impact of

¹ The DEIS action plan for educational inclusion was introduced in 2005 and shapes a continuum of interventions to address the educational needs of children from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second level education. An important aspect of DEIS is the School Support Programme which is implemented in approximately 880 schools in Ireland with the highest levels of disadvantage. These schools are provided with a variety of additional resources including extra funding, additional staffing, access to literacy and numeracy programmes and targeted interventions such as the School Completion Programme and Home School Community Liaison Scheme.

individual factors, family influences, community influences and state policies on young offenders' desistance from offending were then examined. Finally, strong links between education, crime and desistance were taken into consideration. This entailed the investigation of unequal opportunities, early school leaving, the notion of education as a pathway out of crime, the concept of AEP and research based on AEP. It has been identified that the definition and process of desistance is complex and that a multitude of factors impact on a young person in terms of their pathways in and out of crime. A review of the literature revealed that one specific element which puts young people in a more vulnerable position, in terms of their likelihood of offending, is limited education. With a lack of information and evaluations of AEPs, it is hoped that this study will shed an investigative light on their role in terms of the manner in which AEP facilitates (or not) the development of elements conducive to young people moving away from offending.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research methodology and plan selected for this study. The chapter is composed of detailed explanations based on the research field, research design, data sampling, data collection, ethical considerations and data analysis.

3.2 Criminological Research

The fundamental function of research can be intricate and defined in many ways. As Kerlinger (1970 quoted in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2008, p. 6) explains “It is a systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about the presumed relations among natural phenomena” Criminological research forms the epicentre of criminological theory which strives to provide a comprehensive overview based on what influences people to commit crime, which in turn should enable corresponding ongoing investigations to discover appropriate responses and the development of effective prevention and diversion methods. However, criminological research is not merely undertaken for the benefit of academic disciplinary advancement but also to impact on government policy and to campaign for developments or change in social policies and practices of the criminal justice system (Chamberlain, 2013). According to the SAGE Handbook of Criminological Research Methods (Gadd et al., 2012), four key challenges of criminological research include; the illicit nature of crime, the diversity of crime, multi-levels in criminological research and the messiness of criminological research (in terms of aspects such as the broad range of subjects and the disorderliness and volatility of the research field itself). This study will have further issues to take into consideration which concern the complex dynamics between criminological and educational research as it fuses the two fields together. Bassey (1999) establishes educational research as critical enquiry which should be aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to make improvements in educational action. Although generally action-orientated, educational research can also be concerned simply with understanding the phenomena of education. According to Griffiths (1998), some examples of educational research have an underlying concern with social justice. This concept resonates in this piece of research as the distribution of money, resources, opportunities and privileges within society are intertwined with young people’s offending and their pathways out of crime.

3.3 Research Design

Research methods broadly differ and exist ‘to explore, to describe and/or to explain’ (Robson, 2011, p. 39). As highlighted by Bachman and Schutt (2016), methodological issues will present themselves in various forms as every research method entails its own strengths and limitations and no research method can simply be memorised by rote and applied mechanically. Such issues tend to take on exclusive dispositions when intertwined with criminological contexts (Chamberlain, 2013). With this taken into consideration, the methodology selected for the purpose of conducting this piece of research emanates from the qualitative tradition. This approach is utilised in order to gain insights into a particular issue and to support others in understanding the diversified underlying reasons and motivations for actions. This type of research is also used to reveal common trends in opinions and frequently to develop ideas or concepts for further future research. This study is based on the phenomenological approach, as the researcher is of the opinion that this will prove to be the most beneficial or gainful. The approach entails highlighting specifics in a bid to identify the manner in which certain phenomena are perceived by those providing the data. The phenomenological approach was selected as the researcher felt that a limited number of respondents could provide the necessary detailed information. Furthermore, the emphasis is on the depth rather than breadth, with those emotions, feelings and experiences being of real significance. The researcher also understands and is conscious that issues of subjectivity always arise when using this form of research approach. Both the subjectivities of the researcher and those of the respondents will rarely be absent as each individual’s judgements can be said to be formed by personal opinions and feelings rather than external influences. Maruna (1999) suggests that studies based on desistance should adopt a sufficiently psychosocial interpretation of subjectivity whilst Farrall and Gadd (2004) illustrate that an explanatory approach to narrative content, sensitive to the feasibility of unconscious motivations, allows the researcher to interpret life stories more accurately. Such concepts were taken into consideration in this study. Due to the exploratory and investigative essence of this study, instead of testing current theories (which is ingrained in quantitative research), the chosen methodology is suited to an approach which emphasises the creation or production of theories (Bryman, 2008). In terms of this approach, qualitative interviewing serves the distinct function of investigating and accumulating narrative material and stories based on personal experiences. Whilst sample surveys are one of the most common ways of asking questions in criminological research, they can sometimes fall short on validity (Maxfield and Babbie, 2015). The insights gained in interviews into motivations, actions and consequences

serve as a resource for the development of a deeper understanding of the individuals' life experiences (Kvale, 1996). Six past pupils of AEP were interviewed in order to explore the role that their involvement in this form of education has had on their lives. By obtaining information directly from them, participants were given the opportunity to express their own personal perspective with regard to their feelings, experiences, thoughts and opinions.

3.4 Data Sampling

In terms of data sampling, the majority of qualitative research in the field of criminology relies on purposive or snowball sampling techniques (Lamont and White, 2005). In accordance with this theory, a purposive or selective sampling technique was implemented by the researcher. This was done in the sense that the sample was chosen in an intentional manner (Punch, 1998). As the aim of qualitative research is to obtain original, additional and most comprehensive understanding on a theme, methods of selection and interviewing styles must be suited to that particular purpose. The researcher contacted several establishments where AEP is facilitated and also other establishments which have direct contact with people who may have availed of such services. Each of the establishments in question are located in the Greater Dublin area and provide educational experiences for young people who are at risk of offending or for individuals who have had previous contact with the criminal justice system. Altogether, six past pupils of AEP participated in the study. The criteria in order to be eligible for participation was that the individuals needed to (1) be eighteen years of age or over (2) have participated in AEP for a duration of one year or more and (3) have had some contact with the criminal justice system or were (or may still be) deemed at risk of offending behaviour. Whilst the core aim of this study was to explore the role of AEP in supporting pathways out of crime, the researcher chose not to limit her participants to solely those who desisted from crime or solely those who continued to offend or be deemed at risk of offending behaviour after participating in AEP. This decision was made for a wide variety of reasons, for example; due to complications in terms of defining desistance, the level of complexities involved in the process of desistance, the manner in which those complexities impact on an individual can differ and the notion that what merits a 'success' story can be interpreted as a matter of opinion. Furthermore, no such schools specifically mention that they provide a crime prevention aspect so the researcher was keen to explore what exactly is on offer and what impact it has had on past pupils, regardless of the paths they are subsequently on. The researcher decided to focus her attention on past pupils rather than current pupils due to the presumption that this target group would be more capable of

acknowledging, analysing and articulating the impact and role that AEP has had on their lives, particularly in terms of supporting pathways out of crime. This presumption is based on the researcher's experience of working with young people and ex-offenders and the concept that distance and time often enables individuals to be more reflective. The data sample was composed of one female and five males aged between 18 years and 47 years. One participant is the past pupil of a Youth Encounter Project whilst the remainder are past pupils of two different Life Centres. More detailed information is provided on each individual participant at the beginning of the 'Findings and Discussion' chapter.

3.5 Data Collection

Before describing the manner in which data were collected it must be noted that the process of tracking down the data sample was not a straightforward one. There appears to be a gap in the system in the sense that there is no funding for follow up or after care for students of AEP and it can therefore prove difficult for such schools to remain in contact with past pupils or to produce data about the pathways that individuals have gone on to take. Schools which provide AEP have no obligation to the students once they have completed their time there. However, it would appear that most past pupils have strong ties with the schools and staff members involved in this piece of research and this connection appears to be maintained far beyond the period of enrolment. As a result, relied heavily on the educational gatekeepers who had maintained contact with past pupils to act as the vital link between her and potential participants. This meant that the researcher was trying to negotiate times and dates which suited the gatekeepers for interviews with the data sample whilst they were contacting past pupils and attempting to do the same with them. Many unforeseen circumstances arose. One gatekeeper was called away on business at the precise time that had been agreed for interviews to be conducted. A couple of potential participants were in prison when the researcher began her research and uncertainty surrounding release dates made it difficult to arrange interviews. Another gatekeeper put the researcher in contact with a past pupil who appeared very eager to participate but for whatever reason never showed up or responded to any messages when the time came for the interview to take place. Another gatekeeper managed to contact several past pupils willing to participate in the research but when she had an unfortunate accident in the days leading up to the interviews the communication and plans broke down. With perseverance, determination and the much appreciated assistance of two particular gatekeepers, the researcher managed to recruit six participants.

Data were collected from these participants through the execution of the phenomenological approach in the form of semi-structured interviews. This type of interview is generally used by researchers in order to obtain information as a means of gaining a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation (Bryman, 2008). This data collection method was considered the most effective of its kind as the role of AEP in supporting pathways out of crime is being explored based on the experiences and narratives of past pupils. The researcher opted to conduct individual interviews rather than group interviews as it has been documented that they are preferable when working with vulnerable groups (Caulfield and Hill, 2014). This statement is not intended to demean the participants or categorise them all as vulnerable but is more to do with the fact that they have all had some level of criminal involvement at a very young age. Individual interviews are also said to provide such participants with greater scope to express themselves. Each interview was composed of six to eight key questions which were used as a guide to steer interviewees to give detailed accounts of their own personal experiences of AEP. The broad areas addressed were based on their personal experiences of education, key factors involved in their criminal involvement and in particular the impact of AEP on their lives. Open-ended questions were incorporated to enable the interviewee "the space to express meaning in his or her own words and to give direction to the interview process" (Green, Camilli and Brenner, 2012, p. 357). Each interview lasted approximately 20 - 40 minutes. Interviewees were informed of this timeframe prior to the interview. Each interview was recorded, transcribed and retained for a proscribed length of time (six months) before being destroyed.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

It is compulsory for ethical issues to be taken into consideration when undertaking any form of research (Creswell, 2009). Prior to commencement of the study, ethical approval was sought and received from the Head of the School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). The researcher has recognised and abided by the DIT Research Ethics Committee Guidelines. Researchers have a duty to protect and form a trust with participants, uphold the integrity of the research, ensure the absence of misconduct which may also reflect on their institutions and to handle issues which may arise (Creswell, 2009). Investigator's relationships, informed consent and confidentiality are among elements of particular significance in terms of ethical conduct (Gadd et al., 2012).

As mentioned previously, a strong dependence and emphasis was placed on the collection of data via interviews. In terms of investigator's relationships, the researcher was aware of the ethical considerations that interaction with the participants entails, particularly when discussing personal and sensitive issues based on difficult experiences. The researcher ensured that she did her utmost to make the participants feel comfortable and relaxed in her presence. The researcher endeavoured to develop rapport and a level of trust with the individual and to lessen any perceived status difference between the interviewer and interviewee. This included elements such as the interviews taking place in a location and time which suited them, participants being introduced to the researcher by someone whom they respected and trusted (the gatekeeper/their ex-principal) and the researcher having informal conversation with the participants prior to the commencement of the recorded interview. One participant brought his child and niece along and the researcher spent some time with them before proceeding into a different room to conduct the interview. Building this kind of positive rapport with participants is essential, particularly when seeking openness about sensitive topics (Caulfield and Hill, 2014).

Prior to commencement of the interviews, each interviewee was also informed of the ethical code and assured that it would be adhered to. With regard to informed consent, the following components were made clear to all participants involved in this study; the process in which they are to be engaged, why their participation is required, how the information presented will be used utilised and to whom it will be disclosed to. The participants gave verbal and written consent and were also provided with the opportunity to ask questions about the research. Their consent also signified confirmation that holistic and comprehensive information had been provided to the participant, regarding the purpose of the research and that their permission has been granted for the recording of the interview. By agreeing to participate, interviewees also outlined their understanding that any material which is recorded and matters discussed throughout the interview would be treated in the strictest confidence. The researcher assured participants that they could refuse to answer certain questions and still take part in the study if they wished to do so (Hill, 2005). They were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without affecting their future relationships with the institute (Miller, Birch, Mauthner, and Jessop, 2012).

The ethical code for researchers, which is “to protect the privacy of the participants and to convey this protection to all individuals involved in the study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 99), was adhered to. Participants were informed that each interview would remain confidential, would not be used for any purpose other than that which had been described to them and that any information about them in the thesis would remain anonymous. Each interviewee was recognised as a number in all interview notes. Participants were told that there was a possibility that the data collected for the thesis may be used for future publications and uploaded on the DIT Research Repository Arrow. Audios and other means of electronic information were filed on a laptop which was password protected. This information was destroyed once the research process had concluded.

3.7 Data Analysis

The concept of analysis can be described as “a close engagement with one’s data, and the illumination of their meaning and significance through insightful and technically sophisticated work” (Antaki et al., 2003, quoted in Bazeley, 2013, p. 4). The process of data analysis starts as soon as the research project begins as from the moment the idea for the study is conceptualised; steps were taken which affected the interpretation and explanation of the observed phenomena (Bazeley, 2013). The data analysis process which corresponds to the qualitative research methodology adopted in this study is non-statistical. The manner in which it unfolded in this study entailed a number of key phases which are detailed below.

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher verbatim. According to Robson (2011), this boosts the validity of the findings by providing a genuine description of what was heard during the interview. The researcher then intensely read through each transcript and recorded her first impressions. Line by line, each transcript was carefully re-read. Repetition, aspects that stand out to the researcher, information that the interviewee explicitly states as important and information that relates to the literature review or that reminds the researcher of a theory or concept were then labelled. The researcher decided which threads of information were most important and relevant whilst attempting to remain unbiased, creative and open minded. Categories were created based on these threads. The researcher then labelled categories and selected the most relevant ones based on the evidential connections emanating from the research interviews. The categories were studied and the researcher decided whether or not a hierarchy was evident. The researcher also wrote about the categories and how they were

connected, using, as far as possible, a neutral voice. Findings were also interpreted in light of those from previous studies published in relevant sources.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research methodology and plan which was chosen for this study. This included detailed explanations regarding the research field and research design. A description of and rationale for the data sampling technique has been provided along with the manner in which data was collected. The significance of ethical considerations has been emphasised. Finally, the concept of data analysis and the process which it entailed was detailed in this chapter. The findings and data which emerged from this process are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of the key findings which emerged from the data collected. Following a brief profile of each participant, the findings will be discussed and analysed in terms of the relevant literature. Reoccurring themes which surfaced during the investigation into the role of AEP in pathways out of crime were identified as follows: the influence of a sense of belonging, an awareness of whether or not individual needs are met, the significance of relationships, AEP as a platform for change in self-identity and the impact of events throughout the life-time. Each theme can be linked to various desistance theories and other prominent influencing factors in the desistance process for young people.

4.2 Profile of Respondents

As outlined in the methodology chapter, the sample consists of six participants who had previously participated in AEP for a minimum period of one year. The sample consisted of one female and five males aged between 18 and 47 years at the time of the interview.

P1 is 18 years old and the only female to participate in the study. She began experiencing difficulties in mainstream school in fifth class. She started smoking at school and was repeatedly suspended. This escalated to smoking weed and committing other offences. She was arrested and charged on several occasions before being expelled in first year of secondary school. She secured a place in a Life Centre where she completed her Junior Certificate and is hoping to do her Leaving Certificate in another centre in the community. She would like to become a jockey and has had no further criminal involvement.

P2 is 19 years of age and the second youngest of nine children. He left mainstream education in third year having been on a restricted timetable for over two years. He was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and feels that problems at school stemmed from this. He spent three years in a Life Centre where he completed his Junior Certificate. He was arrested once for theft and reported in the interview this was the only crime he had ever committed. He hopes to do the Leaving Certificate and a FETAC level five in Art before going to the National College of Art and Design for further art and design education. In the meantime, he is doing a local jobs course.

P3 is 18 years of age and has four brothers, two of whom are currently in prison and one who attends another AEP. He explained that he enjoyed primary school but found secondary school overwhelming and was expelled in second year having been put on a restricted timetable. He was arrested on several occasions between the time he began experiencing difficulties in mainstream school and his initial year in a Life Centre. He reported having no criminal involvement in the three years since then. He spent four years in a Life Centre where he completed his Junior Certificate and achieved a Gaisce award and Safe Pass. He is currently enrolling in Youthreach and would then like to go to college.

P4 is 22 years of age and stated during the interview that he previously experienced great difficulties with anger management. He was expelled from primary school in sixth class. He spent four years in a Life Centre where he completed his Junior Certificate. He outlined that he had no criminal involvement until immediately after completing his time in a Life Centre. He was arrested numerous times but avoided a prison sentence. He reported that he has had no arrests or charges in the five years since then and has remained involved in education. Whilst currently completing a personal development course, P4 is starting a Community Development Course in September and is hoping to study youth to become a Youth Worker.

P5 is 27 years of age and is the youngest of ten children and the uncle of P4. He experienced significant academic and behavioural difficulties throughout primary school and was put into a special class in mainstream school for three years. He went straight from sixth class into a Life Centre where he spent four years. He began abusing alcohol during his last year in the Life Centre and began to accumulate charges. He explained that he has 'battled with' addictions and been in and out of prison several times in the 11 years since finishing in AEP. A strong link has always been maintained between him and the Life Centre. At the time this research was conducted he had not been arrested or involved in crime for a year and a half.

P6 is 47 years of age and grew up in what he described as difficult family circumstances that included parental alcohol abuse and domestic violence. From the age of eight years he began to find school extremely distressing and experienced significant literacy difficulties. He was expelled at the beginning of second year and went to a Youth Encounter Project for one year. He spent the following eight years in and out of prison where he completed his Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. He has completed various FETAC courses in

communication skills, addiction studies, literacy and creative writing. He is currently doing a degree and states that he has not committed any crimes or gone back to prison in 24 years.

Due to complexities outlined in the literature review, regarding the lack of consensus surrounding the definition of desistance, it is difficult to categorise the participants into distinct categories. Whilst all participants reported that they had not committed any crimes in periods between a year and a half and 24 years, it is at the reader's discretion whether they interpret such information as what McNeill and Weaver (2007) determine as crime free gaps or the termination of criminal careers.

4.3 Sense of Belonging

During their time in mainstream school, all six participants experienced one or more of the following: suspension, restricted timetables², being put into a special class and/or expulsion from school. Interviewees strongly described these experiences in negative terms and considered that they fuelled the social, emotional and academic difficulties that they were already experiencing. P1 explained that she felt as though everybody at school had given up on her from the time she began to experience difficulties in fifth class until she was expelled in first year.

I used to go to mainstream and it just wasn't for me ... I wouldn't go to class and I was just standing on the corridors ... They (teachers) were all just like 'ah we're sick of her'. They just got fed up ... When I got to first year I got kicked out of school.

P4 repeatedly recalled that no secondary schools in the area would allow him or his guardian in to view them at 12 years old when he was due to make the transition from primary to secondary school. He also mentioned that, after completing four years in a Youth Encounter Project, he wanted to complete his Leaving Certificate but would not ask in local schools which had previously rejected him and did not feel comfortable returning to mainstream education in a different locality at such a late stage in the school cycle.

I was a bit of a messer and hit me teacher with a stool and then I wasn't allowed in to view any of the secondary schools or anything around here ... I hit him in his office

² A restricted timetable is a shortened school schedule, generally implemented as a result of misbehaviour. It indicates a reduction in the number of hours, classes and/or days that the individual student is allowed to attend school.

with the stool. So he sent word around and I wasn't allowed in to view the secondary schools.

P5 described feeling marginalised and insignificant throughout the period he spent in mainstream education:

In primary school, I was in a class and it was like a special class ... Y'know for people messin' and people who can't read and all and you were ... just pushed to the side ... I was in that class for what three years.

The infant classes were manageable for P6 who never truly felt like he fitted in at school. He explained that he felt as though he went unnoticed initially, at a time when most children believe they are the centre of the universe:

The infant primary was ok. Then probably up around third or fourth class was when things started kinda being too much 'cause I used to just slide under the radar up until then.

The experience of mainstream education was characterised by all participants as exclusionary and alienating. In contrast to their experiences of mainstream education, participants overwhelmingly referred to the strong sense of belonging they felt while participating in AEP. Most participants described it as a home: "The best days of my life were in the Life Centre, I have to say, brilliant. I'd get up every morning just to go to the Life Centre. It's like a home" (P2), "It's like you're in your house or something ... it's like leavin' one gaff and goin' to another" (P3). Without this sense of acceptance, some participants felt as though opportunities to develop would have been extremely limited.

If the Life Centre hadn't been there I'd of had nothing. I really don't know. No other school would take me or anything so I'd of been just left ... You felt wanted. You really felt wanted. When I first went in I felt at home or something (P4).

The manner in which P6's placement in AEP came about epitomises this sense of belonging that repeatedly surfaced throughout the interviews. Having been expelled from school at 13 years old, he had several friends in a Youth Encounter Project who he would walk to school every day before sitting on a wall outside waiting for them to finish. He recalls:

I'd be waiting on them to get off school and it came to [the principal's] attention that I was always outside so eventually he just came out and brought me in to the classes so

that's how I got brought into it. He was aware that I was just hangin' around outside so he used to say 'right come on, you may as well come in'. Then he got me involved in whatever they were doing.

P6 claims that this welcoming gesture and the opportunities that it entailed had a major impact on him in later years in terms of his attitude towards education, criminal involvement and his belief in his own abilities. As with all of the reoccurring themes that emerged from the data collected, it is difficult to determine in isolation exactly how much of an impact this sense of belonging had on the participants in terms of pathways out of crime. What can be said is that it appeared to provide the foundations upon which they were able to forge meaningful relationships in their lives.

Interestingly, three participants felt that the completion of their time in AEP proved to be a difficult time for them. P5 initially got involved in crime coming towards the end of his final year in AEP and P2 and P4 became temporarily involved in crime immediately after completing AEP. This transition period towards the end and at the end of AEP stood out as a period when some participants became vulnerable/ at risk of offending.

I think I was about 17 when I got my first charge. I was in a robbed car and crashed ... That's the first time I ever got charged. I got six month probation report and then went to court and had to do probation for a year then. It was mostly just robbed car charges, firearms. That was really it, trespassing ... stupid things. I was only after finishing in the Life Centre ... I was doing nothing ... I never got a charge once when I was in the Life Centre, never once (P4).

It could be argued that they offended at this time due to their age and the widely accepted notion that offending peaks in late adolescence (Bottoms and Shapland, 2011). These findings may also reflect the concept that social institutions can connect the individual and society with a person being more likely to offend if a weakening of this bond occurs (Sampson and Laub, 1993). As mentioned previously, without a sense of belonging, there is no real social status to risk in terms of offending (Leibrich, 1993). However, it would appear that simply being a member of a social institution is not the glue that connects the individual and society. Rather, it is what happens within the social institution that impacts on the individual. All participants went to mainstream school but lacked an attachment and experienced rejection. In contrast, the sense of belonging they felt in AEP had profound consequences. AEP gave participants a valuable place and meaningful role in their communities, which most of them found again when they reconnected with other

organisations for further education or employment. These positive educational experiences have enabled most participants to choose a pathway out of crime. This theory demonstrates that changes in a person's relationship with such institutions are central to comprehending offending over the life-course. Therefore, it is critical that individuals are given the opportunity to reconnect to institutions, like school and work. Those who leave school with little or no qualifications generally have limited re-engagement with post-school education and training (Byrne and Smyth, 2010). This might indicate that children need the prompt intervention of AEP when mainstream education has been deemed inappropriate.

4.4 Awareness of Needs Met

Linked to the strong sense of belonging participants experienced in AEP was the perception that it was also a place where their needs were met. These needs varied from basic nutritional needs to behavioural and emotional needs to educational needs. The past pupils had a real awareness that their needs were not met in mainstream school. Just as punitive measures in the criminal justice system tend to have a limited impact on offending (Huizinga and Henry, 2008), none of the past pupils reflected on suspensions, restricted timetables, special classes or expulsion from mainstream school as productive measures in terms of their development. There was a strong sense from participants' accounts that official responses to them were at best unhelpful and at worse inappropriate and counter-productive:

I got put on a restricted timetable for two years over me ADHD, me problems. It was just me anger. They couldn't handle me. There was just a phone call saying he's on his way home (P2).

When I was in mainstream school they tried like to put me onto counsellors and all that and anger management and all that but I didn't even really think I needed that ... just to relax more like I'm not as fast as everybody else in school. I don't know, I just haven't got the same work rate as everybody else and I was in the high class and I don't think I should have been. I was trying to get put down into the lowest class and they wouldn't let me ... They shoulda let me tried it out and I woulda still been there. They didn't let me try it out and they gave me a cut timetable and then I just started actin the bollix (P3).

It was coming more transparent that this fella can't read, this fella can't write properly. There was no assistance ... As far as they were considered I was lazy, inattentive and then I became troubling or problematic in the sense that ... you'd get asked to do something that involved reading or writing and you'd cause a scene just to get away with not doing that so that the attention wasn't on ya. So then you became disruptive in class and you'd get sent home (P6).

Participants interpreted such measures as the schools inability and lack of desire to accommodate their individual needs. The implications of unmet needs are that young people are further propelled into situations that stunt their development. McElwee (2007) for example argues that pupils are placed at risk when they experience significant disparities between their circumstances and needs, and the capacity of willingness of society to accept, accommodate, and react to them in a manner that supports and enables their holistic development.

Participants identified a number of ways in which their needs were met in AEP. Specific reference was made food being provided. Participants also liked that their work was at a suitable pace, targeted to their learning style and ability. One to one or small group teaching occurred and behavioural issues were talked about and addressed rather than being punished.

It's just easier because it's one for one teachin' and there's not that many crowds around ya. There's only a few people in it so there's no one annoyin' ya or anything ... See cause in mainstream there's so many kids that you have to talk to at once but in the Life Centre there's not so like you can talk to them like. They have the time for us (P1).

If you need help, there's help there for you. And then it's like, you just get through things in the click of a button ... One to one was one of the main things and the help and the support ... You'd be in a rush to get up in the morning and do your work (P2).

They helped me. They just always made me happy. Do you know what I mean? Anytime I left that Life Centre I was happy. You couldn't be sad in that place man. Cooking you food all the time and all. We were well fed (P3).

They give ya a chance, help ya out, break the words up and do whatever to help you out (P6).

You wouldn't have to ask twice for anything. If you wanted help with anything, anything, any situation at all you would get it there and then. You'd never have to wait. It was good for the likes of that. Anything you needed at all, they would always meet your needs When I was in primary I learned nothing at all but when I left the Life Centre I could read and write ... You were treated good in there, fed every day and everything. The teachers always treated you with respect and all. They would always give you your own bit of space when you needed it or whatever. Do you know what I mean? They tried to meet everybody's needs (P4).

Whilst AEP might not counteract all of the negative experiences participants had in mainstream education, it provided them with opportunities to grow in an environment conducive to their individual needs. Participants explained that being provided with opportunities to have their practical, social and emotional needs met positively influenced them and potentially supported their pathways out of crime. This was demonstrated by the evidence that all participants had successfully completed state examinations and some had also completed or were involved in further education and training at the time of interview. As outlined in the literature review, early school leaving, poor academic performance and school disorganisation are among key risk factors which make children more vulnerable to offending (Dale 2010, IPRT 2016, Farrington 2003 and Feldman 1993). Retaining young people in education and meeting their individual needs potentially supported their pathways towards desistance.

4.5 Relationships

As outlined previously, the strengthening of social bonds can play an important role in desistance as it enables personal transformation and the ability to engage with conventional social roles (Sampson and Laub, 1993, 2003). Analysis of the data in this study identified that AEP provided a platform for developing positive interpersonal relationships which were valued by participants.

4.5.1 Relationships with AEP Staff

The main forms of influential relationships mentioned were positive ones between participants and AEP staff. Staff were often referred to as being like family to the participants: “She treats you like ... She’s like a mother to you” (P2), “He’s a nice oul bro [worker] is” (P4), and “It felt like your family” (P1). Participants described that staff genuinely connected with and cared for them and that this helped them to learn:

They listen to you. They look after you like. If you were in your horrors or anything you’d be put in a good humour (P2).

It’s like your ma teachin’ you maths and your sister in there teachin’ you how to do english ... When you’re doin’ one on one teachin’ you do build relationships, like as a friendship relationship and it does help. It really does help ya learn (P3).

Connections made between staff and pupils reportedly extended far beyond the classroom. For example, although P5 completed AEP 11 years ago, his ex-principal appears to have continued to play an ongoing role in his life since then:

[Principal] like has been helping me out with things ... Still now ... I do see [him] nearly every second or third day. He really is tryin' his best to help me out because I was trying to get into a treatment centre over me addictions ... So [he] has just bein' tryin' to help me as well (P5).

These findings coincide with findings which revealed that the development of good relationships is one aspect of probation which is more significant than the content of the programme itself (Barry, 2006).

4.5.2 Relationships with Family

As outlined in chapter one, family influences and relationships have a significant and complex effect on young people. The importance of family background and parenting styles have featured in key longitudinal studies (Utting et al., 1993 and Farrington 1961-1981) as some of the most common attributes which place children at risk of involvement in criminal behaviour. Families have the first and longest lasting impact on the development of a child (Berk, 2009).

In terms of relationships with family, one participant explained just how influential they can be. Although P6 has not offended for 24 years, he spent eight years of his life in and out of prison and felt this was mainly due to the negative relationship with his father. He attributes overcoming this resentment towards his father in later years as supporting his pathway out of crime:

I remember being a very, very bitter person and that contributed to me staying in the prison system because I was very, very bitter towards me father ... The only thing I can do is to learn from that and learn that that's not the life that I wanted. So I just had to work very, very hard at that, especially in the relationship side of it (P6).

Most participants spoke about the positive impact that AEP had on their relationships with family members. This came not only as a result of skills they learned in AEP but through the services linked to AEP. Several participants explained that they were given the opportunity to get involved in an organisation which worked with young people and families who

experienced emotional, behavioural, communication and/or relationship issues. In the following quote, P2 describes home life and relationships around the time he left mainstream education and how it changed following his involvement in a family support service provided through AEP:

It was bleedin' nuts ... madness ... [Teacher] got me into Familiscope then, a big huge group with over 20 families in it with their kids and we'd get split into different things for hours. It's to put families together like from fightin' ... A few Life Centre students went. It was me, me little brother and me ma. At the end we even got photography picture taken for our house. Brilliant it was. It was a good thing to get y'know ... talkin' to your family.

P2 also explained that he would go back again if he felt it was necessary and that his family really benefitted from the service.

Working on relationships is central to assisting desistance from crime (Farrall 2002, Farrall and Calverley 2006). The relationships developed and nurtured through their involvement with AEP emerged as one of the key elements which positively impact on pupils in many ways, including steering them down a pathway away from crime. Perhaps the fact that AEP does not set out to act as a designated crime prevention intervention makes it all the more appealing to young people as those who feel a connection with others in a (non-criminal) community are more likely to desist from crime (Farrall, 2004).

4.6 Changes in Self-Identity

Many influential studies based on ex-offenders have highlighted that a systematic change in identity and self-concept is critical to the process of reform (Burnett 1992, Graham and Bowling 1995, Leibrich 1993 and Maruna 1997). Given how young people described their experiences of mainstream schooling it is not difficult to see that their identity and sense of self was intertwined with feelings of failure and rejection. According to participants, their perspectives on themselves and their potential altered in many cases as a result of their involvement with AEP:

Since [starting AEP] me whole Life has just changed ... I felt like I was being the class clown ... I started smoking weed and all ... I thought I was great hangin' around with all the boys and they started doin' stuff [crime] and then I got involved in doin' it and then next of all we're getting arrested and getting charged and stuff. I've changed

since me past ... ever since I went to the Life Centre me head just start goin' down [keeping out of trouble] (P1).

P2 spoke with pride about how he had changed since his time in mainstream education. He described the experience he had of returning to his old (mainstream) school to collect his niece:

I went down to them and they were all in shock ... I'd changed ... They were all calling me and they were in shock ... I was just changed and me anger was just different. I was in the Life Centre at the time (P2).

P4 got his first charge as soon as he finished in the Life Centre. He distanced himself from those who he was temporarily involved in crime with throughout the interview and disapproved of the manner in which they continue to conduct themselves:

I just had nothing to do. I got mixed in with the wrong crowd as well. Not anymore but I used to. They were a bit older than me and they still go around now bleedin' drunk out of their minds every day of the week and rob cars and all that. I split from them then (P4).

He then went on to explain how he was able to address his anger issues, which he felt had previously defined his character, throughout his four years in the Life Centre:

A bad temper will get you nowhere. Anytime I used to snap I couldn't remember nothing. I was just proper ... I was afraid to be honest ... because of what I'd probably do to somebody. There was no thinking. I didn't give a fuck about nothing. I was just a stupid little kid but. I'm not like that nowadays (P4).

Whilst it could be argued that these participants changed their behaviours as a result of maturation (Gleuck and Gleuck, 1940) or because they were simply adolescent limited offenders (Moffitt, 1993), this shift from negative to positive perceptions of self as an element in the desistance process resonates in the type of data generated by Maruna (2000). Maruna's findings indicate that offenders must establish a coherent and pro-social identity for themselves in order to desist. The concept of this new pro-social identity also reflects an element of the theory of cognitive transformation whereby cognitive and identity transformations and the individual's own role in the desistance process is emphasised in terms of moving towards and sustaining a different way of life (Giordano, et al., 2002). It could be suggested that for some participants AEP had the potential to function as a 'hook for

change', which, as discussed in chapter one, is a necessary component of the desistance process. AEP appears to have provided a platform for change in terms of recognition of potentials and qualities for many of the participants, with most distancing themselves from their old identities and behaviours throughout their narratives.

The Life Centre is a good school. I'd recommend it to anybody. They just make everyone a better person when they come out. You go in like with a temper or anger or something and you come out just brand new (P3).

4.7 Impact of Life Events

On the basis of participants' narratives AEP seemed to have an impact which extended far beyond the primary concern of this study, which was to investigate its role in supporting pathways out of crime. Inevitably, life events had a substantive impact on participants but even for those who were involved in crime post AEP, there was an overwhelming sense that skills which had been acquired and nurtured during their education were never lost.

P2 explained that, shortly after completing three years in a Life Centre, the death of his grandmother deeply affected him and altered his immediate plans, "I was planning on doing me leavin' (Leaving Certificate) after the Life Centre but then I went down a bad road. I lost me Nanny and it was mad after I left. I went down the wrong road". Perhaps sometimes nothing can prepare people for coping with the loss of a loved one. However, he then spoke about all the positive experiences that he had in recent years in the Life Centre and stated, "If I hadn't got the Life Centre there I would have been totally bolloxed ... I'd still be goin' down a bad road". He explained that he had not offended in the three years since then and said, "I'm getting things back together for me own sake and because I have a talent".

P6 described how he faced some extremely difficult circumstances immediately after leaving AEP which had a direct impact on his involvement in crime and meant that the benefits of it were delayed:

I became homeless at 15 years of age so you're on the streets at 15 years of age and crime became a necessity ... for food, for shelter. You'd be robbing cars just to sleep in them and stuff like that so you didn't have time to nurture or use the new skills or to realise that you had found a gift in it or inkling how to do it. So it didn't at that time register at all and it wasn't for many years later.

His experience in AEP is still viewed as an extremely positive life event as it prompted him to spend his time in prison availing of education:

It set a foundation that made me not be so sceptical of school and to give it another chance ... It made me do my Junior Cert when I was in Patrick's³ like because I was after getting comfortable with the environment of school again ... Then it was the same with me Leavin' (Leaving Certificate) ... It did raise me self-esteem and it did make me start reading in prison. I started going to the library and getting books and chancing me arm with them. I was very proud of my Leaving Cert. results ... I never would have thought that I'd of got there cause school (mainstream) had ... well it was dismissed in my mind. I thought school and me were over.

The platform AEP gave P6 meant that he has remained in some form of education throughout most of his adult life.

It is recognised that education alone did not act as the catalyst for change for these participants. For example, P6 described the birth of his son as a turning point:

1992 my son was born and I have never been to prison since ... So the birth of me son was a major influence cause I just wanted to do one thing right. I didn't want to be absent from his life and I wanted to always be there and not to give him the same negative experience that I'd had with my father. It was to break all that cycle as well that like I'm not gonna be the same father that me own father was. Someone needed to put that aside, especially the violence and drinking.

Becoming a father also proved to be a positive influential life event for P4. Interestingly, each time he mentioned his one year old son, he spoke about his own behaviour before the Life Centre and how he would use the skills that he had learned from staff in the Life Centre if his child was ever to experience similar difficulties, "I have me own son now so if he ends up anything like I was then I'll be able to do what [principal] taught me to do with my temper".

The data collected demonstrates that AEP is not always the sole reason that participants persist or desist from crime and the skills and seeds of change that were planted during AEP did not necessarily come to fruition immediately, particularly where difficult life circumstances (such as family bereavement) arose. However, throughout participants' narratives there was an overwhelming sense that the lasting benefits of AEP were vast.

³ St. Patrick's Institution: a closed, medium security detention centre for 17 year old males held on remand for trial.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed account of the key findings which emerged from the data collected. Following a brief profile of each participant, the chapter was structured in terms of reoccurring themes which emerged during the investigation into the role of AEP in pathways out of crime. They included the influence of a sense of belonging, an awareness of whether or not individual needs are met, the significance of relationships, AEP as a platform for change in self-identity and the impact of events throughout the life-time. Each finding was discussed and analysed in terms of relevant literature which detailed desistance theories and other significant influencing factors in the desistance process for young people. It has been identified that through the development of psychosocial competencies, practical skills and positive relationships, AEP facilitates the growth of elements conducive to young people moving away from offending. For the one participant who had ongoing contact with the criminal justice system, assets gained in AEP were still regarded by him as invaluable, for example the development of life skills and lasting pro-social relationships with AEP staff.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

The idea for this study originated from the researcher's experience of teaching and working with vulnerable young people in mainstream education, a juvenile prison and in an AEP setting. These professional and volunteer roles provided the researcher with opportunities to witness first-hand the power of education and the potential impact that experiences within the education system can have on an individual in terms of the pathway that they choose to take in life. As Dewey (1897) describes, 'Education is a social process ... Education is growth ... Education is not a preparation for life: education is life itself'.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the role of AEP in supporting pathways out of crime for young people. Furthermore, the researcher sought to explore the following components: key desistance theories, influential factors on young people's desistance from offending, links between education and desistance and the manner in which AEP facilitates (or not) the development of elements conducive to young people moving away from offending. The researcher aimed to achieve these objectives through an extensive review of the literature and by examining six past pupils' experiences of participating in AEP.

Whilst the literature indicated the complexities of a multitude of factors which impact on an individual offending, a qualitative research approach was adopted and the focus was placed on the perspectives of past pupils of a Youth Encounter Project and two Life Centres in the Greater Dublin area. It was the raw emotions, feelings and personal experiences, shared by those who had participated in AEP which proved to be invaluable to this piece of research. This type of insight helped to shed light on the work of AEP and form the groundwork for future studies in the area.

The key findings of this study indicate that, through the development of psychosocial competencies, practical skills and positive relationships, participants were supported by AEP in their transitions away from a potential life of crime. For the one participant who had ongoing contact with the criminal justice system, assets gained in AEP were still considered by him to be invaluable, for example the development of life skills and lasting pro-social relationships with AEP staff. Through a sense of belonging, individual needs being met, the development of interpersonal relationships, the provision of a potential platform for change in

self-identity and developing resiliency in terms of the impact of life events, the value of AEP, as described by the participants, extended far beyond the classroom.

The implications of these findings reinforce the concept that mainstream schools, while fulfilling a general educational function, struggle to accommodate the specific social, emotional and educational needs of individual children. This had serious implications for the participants, who left or were expelled from mainstream schools, placing them in a more vulnerable position in terms of the likelihood of criminal involvement and ending up in prison (IPRT, 2016):

I probably would have been locked up ... If I hadn't got this to go to then I'd of been fucked and I'd of had nothing ... If the Life Centre hadn't been there I'd of had nothing ... No other school would take me or anything so I'd of been just left. Who knows? I would have just had more time to get into trouble then and been around the wrong people (P4).

As outlined previously, failure in school is all too often considered a personal failure rather than potentially a societal problem of inequality. On the basis of findings presented in this study, AEP appears to offer a positive alternative to cater for the holistic needs of children who fall through the gaps of the standard education system:

I'm glad I went through the four years in the Life Centre. I wouldn't take it back for anything. I now know where I stand in life and they put me head in the right place (P3).

While it is not possible to determine a link between participation in AEP and desistance from offending in the medium and long term using the methodology adopted in this study, there is evidence to suggest that participants made substantial progress in educational, social and behavioural fields, which appeared to support their pathways out of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Criminal justice interventions are not always necessary or productive in terms of diverting young people away from anti-social and/or criminal behaviour. By holding young people accountable for their actions without being overly punitive or stigmatizing them in a way that reinforces a criminal identity, it would appear that AEP has found the balance that Seymour (2013) deems to be a challenge for any progressive youth justice system. If this is such a

difficult task for the youth justice system to achieve and if studies have discovered negative consequences regarding the implementation of criminal justice based measures with young offenders (Barry 2006 and McAra and McVie 2007), perhaps AEP is more suited to meet the needs of children who are deemed to be ‘at risk’.

The learning that takes place in AEP resonates in significant aspects involved in desisting from crime. AEP certainly cannot solve all, or even many, societal and educational related problems, and does not necessarily result in every student choosing a pathway out of crime, but if through them, vulnerable children can find a different sense of self and so a new perspective on the world and their place in it, surely they serve an invaluable purpose in society today and in the future. “A child is a gift so valuable that we should cherish each and every one and help them to develop, so that they grow into active, well-adjusted and happy adults” (Mandela, 1999 quoted in Sedgwick, 2006, p. 35).

5.2 Recommendations

Most forms of AEP are state funded and have had their levels of funding cut in recent years as part of broader economic austerity measures. This reduces the capacity of AEP programmes in terms of the numbers of referrals accepted and their ability to support young people. The potential economic and social benefits (including reduced reoffending) of AEP have been demonstrated in this research and further study is recommended to provide a more substantial evidence base. The cost of AEP relative to the cost of detaining young people in custody is modest and furthermore avoids the negative effects of incarceration.

One of the issues identified in this study was the increased vulnerability and risk of engaging in criminal behaviour experienced by young people at the time that they transitioned out of AEP. Currently, follow-up support is given on an ad-hoc basis. Follow up programmes to support and monitor the progress of past pupils would offer a more beneficial approach to maintaining young people’s pathways out of crime and reducing their vulnerabilities.

Further studies might also explore how a smoother transition from mainstream school into AEP might be achieved. Four of the six participants were expelled from mainstream school before securing a place in AEP. Although participants repeatedly articulated that AEP changed their lives for the better, some expressed regret and feelings of frustration towards how their time in mainstream education came to such an abrupt and distressing end. It is

recommended that, where possible, children are enrolled in AEP before it gets to the stage whereby they have been expelled from mainstream school.

The age of entry to AEP and considering lowering the age limit might be examined in future research. Currently the age of entry is 12 years. Research has identified that by the time a child reaches this age, their beliefs about their concept of intelligence have a pivotal role in their achievement motivation, in the behaviour they display during difficult tasks, in the decisions they make with regard to accepting challenges and in their interpretation of success and failure (Cain and Dweck, 1989). It is suggested that AEP may have increased success in maintaining children in education if children are accepted to the programme before they become totally marginalised from mainstream education.

In addition, the age of 16 years may be too early to leave AEP given that the growth in psychosocial proficiencies and skills which aids the process of desistance often happens in late adolescence (Seymour, 2013). The evidence presented in this thesis points to young people's desire to have AEP offered beyond 16 years of age as well as to the benefits they appear to accrue from participation. In light of these findings, it is recommended that a senior cycle of AEP or the opportunity to complete their Leaving Certificate would be beneficial in building young people's pro-social capacity and sustaining their transitions from crime pathways.

Finally, it is also important to acknowledge that AEP may not necessarily suit the needs of every early school leaver and it is therefore recommended that further investigation is conducted into the needs of young people marginalised from mainstream schooling to ensure that they receive adequate education and opportunities to avoid negative pathways including involvement with the criminal justice system.

5.3 Limitations

The research was conducted on a small scale and based on the experiences of six interviewees, many of whom are from a narrow geographical area. However, the intensity of this concern is lessened by the quality of the data collected and the manner in which reoccurring themes reflect aspects of existing literature. A second potential limitation is that accurately measuring the long term impact on the lives of the past pupils of AEP is extremely difficult due to the complexities surrounding a multitude of other factors which may be

associated with pathways out of crime. Even for those who credited their time spent in AEP as a major reason for their pathway out of crime, uncertainty surrounding the definition of desistance made it difficult for the researcher to determine who could be categorised as a desister. Another possible limitation of the study is the broad age range of participants (between 18 years and 47 years). It was extremely difficult to trace past pupils who had left AEP a substantial number of years ago. Only two participants had completed AEP over ten years ago. Perhaps if the entire cohort had had a similar follow-up period, their narratives would have provided a more holistic depiction in terms of the impact of AEP on their pathways out of crime. Another potential limitation is that there was only one female participant. The integration of more females may have brought to light other issues and alternative perspectives. However, as in the prison system, males are represented much more than females in AEP so the ratio of males to female participants may not necessarily be viewed as a limitation.

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List of Appendices

APPENDIX A: Letter to Gatekeeper

Dear _____,

My name is Bronagh Fagan and I am currently undertaking a Masters in Criminology at the School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences at the Dublin Institute of Technology. I am completing a research dissertation on the topic of the role of alternative education in pathways out of crime. I would like to focus on the voices and opinions of past pupils (over 18 years) of alternative education programmes as the main informants of this study.

The approach envisaged would be semi-structured interviews of up to 20-40 minutes. I would like to recruit eight-ten past pupils who would be willing to talk about their experiences. The interview questions would be mainly based on their experiences of becoming alienated from mainstream education, their involvement in crime, the intervention of alternative education provision and its impact on their lives (directly and indirectly as it related to their involvement in crime).

I am writing to seek your assistance in informing past pupils about this study and to enquire about their interest in participating. I look forward to hearing from you in due course. My contact details are [email] and/or telephone [number].

Best regards,

Bronagh Fagan

APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form

Researcher's Name: Bronagh Fagan	
Faculty/School/Department: School of Languages, Law and Society	
Title of Study: The Role of Alternative Education Provision in Supporting Pathways Out of Crime	
To be completed by the interviewee:	
Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study?	YES/NO
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	YES/NO
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	YES/NO
Have you received enough information about this study and any associated health and safety implications if applicable?	YES/NO
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study?	YES/NO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at any time • without giving a reason for withdrawing • without affecting your future relationship with the Institute 	
Do you agree to take part in this study the results of which are likely to be published?	YES/NO
Have you been informed that this consent form shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher?	YES/NO
Signature of interviewee: _____	
Name of interviewee in block letters: _____	
Signature of researcher: _____	
Date: _____	

APPENDIX C: List of Interview Questions

Could you tell me a little bit about yourself – age/ family background/ area you are from?

Can you tell me about your experience of mainstream school and when you started to experience difficulties?

When and how did you begin to get involved in crime? (if applicable)

When you left school, what options were available to you, other than attending AEP?

What were your expectations when you first came to AEP?

What was different about AEP compared to your old schools?

What was important about how you were treated in AEP?

What ways has AEP impacted on your life?

Have any of these aspects impacted on your likelihood of offending or other aspects of your life, such as employment and relationships?

Has AEP impacted on your life in any other way?

If you could make any changes to AEP, what would they be?

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

APPENDIX D: Transcript of Interview

Researcher: Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

P6: Right, I'm 47. I'm one male out of a family of four. That's excluding mother and father so that's a family of six. Three sisters, I fell as in the third oldest. I came from ... born in Ballymun but moved to Finglas when I was probably five or six so I've always fluctuated between the two of them. So that would be me family statistics. You don't want me to go into the nitty gritty of it do ya? Cause I could tell ya all about me ma and me da.

Researcher: Well you can give an overview if you like.

P6: Well I woulda came from a very eh ... dramatic would be the word I'd look ... environment. My father would drink and so forth and all the fallout that came with that and then being the only male then the expectations on you as the only male cause when there'd be fighting and what not it'd be me that would have to go down and do the interventions. So eventually it became me that was the primary target and that role was bred into ya from a young age like cause it just became systematic like aw me ma and da are fightin' again, you go down and get between them so that you'd take the attention off me mother. Until eventually then I learned then at a young age that well if I'm causin' trouble me ma's not getting into trouble. So I took up that role and then with not being able to read, that would have added more stress because the teachers were always sending home bad reports about ya so you're always getting into a negative light so it just progressed from that and then you'd be put in timeout in your bedroom. I used to think that was just grooming me for prison eventually like it was just grooming me for the role like.

Researcher: Yeah. Can you tell me about your experience of primary/secondary school?

P6: Primary ... I probably think it was ok of a time up to the point of say after your First Communion, so say the infantry primary was ok. Then probably up around third of fourth class was when things started kinda being very much. I used to just slide under the radar up until then. But then it became very more in your face then and there was expectations being put on ya and as I said I couldn't read and that led to me not being able to write either because ... So then I didn't step forward or put myself forward for anything like that so then me skills totally derailed cause I wasn't using the little bits that I had to kind of progress on with like. So eventually then it came to the stage when I couldn't read nor write because the fallout of not being able to read a word or spell a word was then ya couldn't write or string a sentence together. Do ya know what I mean?

Researcher: Yeah I understand. When and how did you begin to get involved in crime?

P6: Em I would have got expelled from school in second year in secondary school.

Researcher: Had the transition been hard into secondary school?

P6: I done alright on me entrance exam. I don't know how but I done alright because I'm not by no means stupid so for a question and answer format like and then being able to manipulate for argument sake the sheet you gave me there (copy of the interview questions), I'd be able to string a paragraph together using the words that are in that. So I was able to get

through my entrance exam and actually ended up in the second highest class. So it was ok then until expectations were put on you and it was coming more transparent that this fella can't read, this fella can't write properly ... then the stigma of that then and people ripping the piss out of you.

Researcher: And the resources probably weren't there to support you. People probably didn't even know what Dyslexia was then.

P6: No, there was no assistance. Nobody knew what it was. As far as they were considered I was lazy, inattentive and then I became troubling or problematic in the sense that I kept like, for argument sake, you'd get asked to do something that involved reading or writing and you'd cause a scene just to get away with not doing that so that the attention wasn't on ya so then you became disruptive in class and you'd get sent home. So I got expelled eventually in the early stages of second year and em then you'd all that time on your hands. You know, as I said at the time Finglas was just rampant at the time with different forms of criminality. Used to just go off up the fields scrambling and this that and the other and then I was getting into hanging around with older people and being influenced and them also exploiting you then as a younger person. So crime then became ... and actually prison ... before I ever went there it was your biggest fear getting caught and goin' to jail and then when I got me first sentence I seen what prison was like and it was actually a comfort then because then I knew that me father couldn't get at me. I actually didn't mind goin' to prison because it actually used to be like a bit of a retrieve that I wasn't being the victim of his abuse anymore. I actually didn't mind being in prison like.

Researcher: I see. So when you were expelled from school, what options were available to you, other than attending the Youth Encounter Project?

P6: None, I done a welding thing in FÁS but that was like a tokenistic kind of thing. Do you know what I mean? There were no other opportunities that came my way, not that I wasn't receptive of them either. I was kind of very do my own thing I'm independent and because ya got involved with the bigger lads you were always tryin' to impress them so ya wouldn't do anything positive because it was a bad light which is mad isn't it?

Researcher: Yeah!

P6: It would be looked at as if ahh look at you like. Do ya know what I mean?

Researcher: I do and how did you end up in the Youth Encounter Project?

P6: I knew a couple of people that were in it and they brought me down to ... What's his name? ... the principal back then. Sure our teacher from here (education centre for ex-offenders) was even workin' there for a while. I was introduced to it through other friends of mine who were sent there by their schools. That family had a history of it so all their siblings eventually went to it. So I used to be waiting outside for them to get off cause it used to be short days. They used to finish at two o'clock or half two or whatever it was.

Researcher: Yeah. They stick with the primary school hours and holidays still today.

P6: Yeah. Well what happened anyway... I'm nearly sure that principal's name was Frank... like I said, I'd be waiting on them to get off school and it came to his attention that I was

always outside so eventually he just came out and brought me in to the classes so that's how I got brought into it. He was aware that I was just hangin' around outside so he used to say 'right come on, you may as well come in'. Then he got me involved in whatever they were doing because the curriculum was different than a normal school and the expectations weren't as ... and you got that one on one attention and weren't being demonised either. You weren't being put up in front of the class and being made a fool of.

Researcher: What were your expectations when you joined?

P6: Ah it was just something to do, I said sure I'll give it a go. There were no expectations. Like I said school, I had already switched off in me mind that there was nothing good ever going to become of it. I woulda only been in it for one year and then I ended up getting really involved in crime and going to prison. I would have been about 13 or 14 getting brought into that and then I got me first sentence when I was 15. So then that just escalated and prison became a creature comfort. I'd be only out for a couple of months and then I'd be back in prison again.

Researcher: So you never went back there (to the Youth Encounter Project)?

P6: No but what it did do was it made me do my Junior Cert when I was in Patrick's like because I was after getting comfortable with the environment of school again and it wasn't so much of a ... So I went over. Your choices were in St. Patrick's to do some sort of work programme and they weren't great but school was the other option. So I used to go to school and eventually then my teacher just said to me, 'look, do you wanna do your Junior Cert. or Group Cert.' or whatever it was called back then. We were doing it in May or June and I had gone in in March and I said 'right go on I'll give it a go like'. It was just selected subjects. I think it was only four subjects: Maths, English, History and Geography or something. So they were your four subjects and I done pretty well in them but it didn't have an impact on me in the sense that it didn't register that I actually had got ... cause you were still in the mode of I'm no good at school. I can't read properly. I can't write properly. So you were never gonna excel in school so it was all ... Yeah it didn't actually fully register that jaysus yeah I got all As. I got one B actually. No two As, a B+ and a B.

Researcher: That was brilliant!

P6: I was only in since March! Do you know what I mean like? Then it was the same with me leavin'. When I done me leavin' I had only gone in in the February of that year and your man says to me 'do the leavin' and I did Business Studies, English, Maths and there was a fourth subject. Again I got high points. It would have been distinctions on two of them and eh I think it was a B and one C.

Researcher: That was great!

P6: It was for the time that was put into it because I had very little preparation.

Researcher: Did they give you support in St. Pat's? You know the way you were saying that's what you liked about the Youth Encounter Project.

P6: Yeah because school wasn't seen as something that criminals done so it was fairly tailored for three or four people to come over to class so you actually have the full attention

of the tutor. It's actually [worker] that's here who was the tutor back then! The patience he woulda had! There you go look what happened in Patricks still happens like [worker] here. Do you know what I mean? It was a positive influence in my life and I can still come to the services that he provides even though that was nearly 30 years ago.

Researcher: That's amazing! What was different about that Youth Encounter Project compared to your old schools?

P6: Well for one, like I said to you, was the class size, the awareness that the teachers had towards your difficulties was a lot more supportive and a lot more understanding and for that then they took a lot more time to go through things with ya and made sure ya really understood what you were doing. Whereas before the classes were so big.

Researcher: Like crowd control?

P6: Exactly, that's all it was and the brand of people that were there were just off the charts. I don't know how the teachers done it in fairness on reflection. I think they just used to come in and pray they'd get through the day without having a breakdown. But the difference compared to that was that you've got the attention and you got em, what's the word I'm looking for? Encouraged! You got encouraged and you got praising on what you were able to achieve. Do you know what I mean?

Researcher: Yeah, so they focused on your strengths.

P6: Yeah, rather than demonising your weaknesses and broadcasting them and there was no feckin' punishment. See when I was in school there was still corporal punishment and I was forever getting that. That didn't happen in the Youth Encounter Project. That principal's name might have been Kevin!

Researcher: Do you feel that your involvement in the Youth Encounter Project impacted on your involvement in crime?

P6: Not at the immediate time because at a certain point in time like I became homeless so crime ... I became homeless at 15 years of age so you're on the streets at 15 years of age and em crime became a necessity ... for food, for shelter. You'd be robbing cars just to sleep in them and stuff like that so you didn't have time to nurture or use the new skills or to realise that you had found a gift in it or inkling how to do it. So it didn't at that time register at all and it wasn't for many years later

Researcher: Has the Youth Encounter Project impacted on your life in any other ways?

P6: Well I'm now out in Maynooth doing a degree. I was hanging around and he (the Youth Encounter Project principal) knew the family that I was hanging around with were in need of support so he knew that anybody that would kind of been with them would be very low in the tolling pole too. Like I said, they would trot down at about 11 or 12 o'clock so for two or three hours I was sitting out on the wall anyway. So his thoughts probably were well he may as well be sitting in here than out there because something might sink in. So yeah it impacted on me life in other ways. As you mentioned, self-esteem and things were raised a little bit. I was very proud of my Leaving Cert. results considering the timeframe I had to do them. I never would have thought that I'd of got there cause school (mainstream) had ... well it was

dismissed in my mind. I thought school and me were over. So to go back then ... What age would I have been when I done me leavin'? ... It probably wasn't until I was 18, maybe 19, give or take. Do you know what I mean? So it didn't affect me in a major noticeable way yet. However, I did always know that I was going to go to college. Something twigged, I don't know if it was the prestige side of it just to say you'd achieved something but when the teachers (in mainstream) were talking about me being dumb I was like I'll show you. I'll show you. I wanted to go to Maynooth and I mean I'm talking like at 18/19. I knew I was going to Maynooth. I don't know why Maynooth, I didn't even know what courses they done. I just remember going past it going to me sister's wedding and I was with me brother in-law in the car and he was explaining he had done a course in it and I said 'Do you know what; I'm going to go to that college one day'. It was over your head like. The only college you're doing is Mount Joy kind of thing. So yeah from that it (Youth Encounter Project) it did raise me self-esteem and it did make me start reading in prison. I started going to the library and getting books and chancing me arm with them. I remember making a really positive connection then as to why I couldn't read because I remember years ago they used to do the eye test in your school and my da wore glasses. So letters would be getting sent home sayin' they needed glasses like and one day he had about eight encyclopaedias and he put them up on the draining board and had the girls stand down at the mantel piece and ask them 'What's the title of the third book down?' They were struggling with it but I could actually read the names of them books at the time but I got bet for it so every time I was asked to read in class I just said no. I woulda been only six or seven when this was happening you know and from that age then it was like a flip switch saying 'No, don't read, The last time you done that you got bet'. Do you know what I mean? It progressively impacted on me learning.

Researcher: Yeah, I know what you mean. Apart from education, are there other factors that you feel impacted on your involvement in crime?

P6: Me son being born, that was it. 1992 my son was born and I have never been to prison since. His birthday's in October. He just got a job offer in Dubai and he's moving to Dubai.

Researcher: Really! I'm going to do some travelling next year.

P6: Brilliant! Do it! It's only a year of your life and you'd spent 20 years regretting not doing it! ... So the birth of me son was a major influence cause I just wanted to do one thing right. I didn't want to be absent from his life and I wanted to always be there and not to give him the same negative experience that I'd had with my father. It was to break all that cycle as well that like I'm not gonna be the same father that me own father was. Someone needed to put that aside, especially the violence and drinking.

Researcher: You obviously managed to do that. Sometimes no matter how hard some people try they end up repeating history.

P6: Yeah familiarity brings content like. You're so used to being ... now I've often at certain pivotal points in the whole duration of me son seen me father comin' out in me and was able to curb it. I was able to say whoa! It had such a negative impact on me that I couldn't even process the stuff for years. I didn't start processing it until me son was born. For me, it was too ... let's say I was always the victim and then I took the role then as the victim. So I never actually processed it an looked at it but I did remember saying to meself is what I will learn from this whole experience is this is not how I want to be and this is not the type of environment I want my child to grow up in. I remember being a very very bitter person and

that contributed to me staying in the prison system because I was very very bitter towards me father. Then one time I just remember sittin' down and sayin' to meself 'Do ya know what, this anger and resentment is doing you no good at all and I ended up lookin' at the whole scenario and thinkin', do ya know what, that was his life. That's how he chose to live it. The only thing I can do is to learn from that and learn that that's not the life that I wanted. So I just had to work very very hard at that, especially in the relationship side of it. Although I wouldn't be a promoter of violence, even the mannerisms on how you addressed your partner, I could identify bits of me father comin' out, especially in heated arguments. You'd say something off the top of your bat and then go that's exactly the way me da would done it. That was enough to curb it in and apologise and move on from that. Years later the reward of that was I was a Youth Worker and I had friends at home that would pop over for a cup of tea and they'd be lookin' at the interaction between me and me son and they'd say ' jaysis I'd love to be able to talk to me da like that'. And I would think well the only thing I value and the only positive thing I ever done in me life was me son. I never demonised him. I never put expectations on him. The reward of that was he became a very placid and able to put together his own thoughts. I remember him comin' in one time and tellin' me... He was in secondary school at the time after doing his Junior Cert. and he was going into that year where ya kind of do nothing

Researcher: Transition Year

P6: Yeah! All his friends were involved in crime. They were all selling one sort of a substance or the other. Me son came in and said 'Da, I'm gonna leave school and start doing ...' this that and the other. I said 'Why?' and he said 'I do hear you and ma talkin' about money and I could be working and throwing yous x amount a week'. I told him he could take a year off and in that year off he either has a job at the end or can go back and do the leaving. Within that year he re-enrolled and went back and did the leavin' and went on to DIT out in Blanchardstown. He was able to make his own decisions and not ... When I say that, obviously there was direction. He knew he could say what he wanted to say and there'd be no repercussions. Me da won't go off the head. It'll be talked about normally. He learned throughout the years that his da would give him the information and you made the choices. If you told to ignore the information the result would be what your da told you it would be so the next time you gave him information he valued it.

Researcher: We're nearly there now. If you could make any changes to Youth Encounter Projects and similar schools, what would they be?

P6: I've loads of friends that went throughout the whole system of the whole lot of them. One thing I could say that we were sayin' was about not getting the attention for funding reasons and other reasons that people didn't see the value of giving funding to a place that had one or two out of every five go on to prison. They don't see that as a ... Whereas you look at people that didn't have that as a mediator. They just went directly to prison! For argument sake, if they put together a string of testimonies from the past pupils and brought all of them forward and gave it to the Minister of Education ... I think people need to do up testimonies and kind of look at if [AEP] wasn't there, where would I have been? Because even though I said it didn't have any direct impact at that time, however, it set a foundation that made me not be so sceptical of school and to give it another chance, that I was able to go back and do me leavin' and then to be able to sign up for like say tokenistic programmes. I would have done like level three and level four say communication skills, addiction studies, literacy and creative writing. Those little tokenistic courses that there's no way would I have stepped forward for

them if I hadn't of had that initial good experience. So testimonies and bring the likes of the education board on a tour of these places and have a look at it all first-hand.

Researcher: Well that's it then if you have nothing further to add. Thank you so much for talking to me.