

Assessment & Case Planning Guidelines for Youth Diversion Projects

Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory Screening Version
(YLS/CMI SV)

&

Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory 2.0 (YLS/CMI 2.0)

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By the Research & Development Team for Youth Diversion Projects



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Background

The Department of Justice and An Garda Síochána approved the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory 2.0 (YLS/CMI 2.0) as the assessment tool for Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs) following a two year trial period that finished in 2015. The YLS/CMI 2.0 assessment tool is owned by Multi-Health Systems (MHS), Canada. It was developed by Dr. Robert Hoge and Dr. Donald Andrews in 2002 for the purpose of assessing the risk of recidivism in young people and developing a case management plan on the basis of the specific risks and needs of the individual (Hoge, 2005). This means that interventions can be tailored appropriately and can lead to an increased chance of positive outcomes for young people.

Young Persons Probation (YPP) have used the YLS/CMI Screening Version (SV) and YLS/CMI 2.0 in Ireland since 2005 with YDPs using the YLS/CMI SV since 2010 following a successful trial. The full version YLS/CMI 2.0, was piloted with 15 YDPs between 2013 and 2015. On evaluation, the decision was made to implement the YLS/CMI 2.0 and train all YDP practitioners in its operation and usage with referred young people aged 12-17.

National policy such as the Youth Justice Action Plan 2014-2018, National Youth Justice Strategy 2021- 2027 and Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028, emphasises the use of the best available evidence to support services for young people and improve their outcomes. The YLS/CMI 2.0 has a strong peer reviewed evidence base with a large volume of international research supporting its validity (see Dellar et al., 2023)

The YLS/CMI 2.0 should only be used following appropriate training. The User Manual (Hoge & Andrews, 2011) which accompanies the training clearly sets out the administrative guidelines for the tool. It also outlines the background, best practices in assessment and evidence base. Likewise, the YLS/CMI SV Manual sets out how the screening version should be administered.

The purpose of this guidance document is to outline how the YLS/CMI is to be used in YDPs including the use of both the YLS/CMI SV and the YLS/CMI 2.0 for the purposes of assessment and case planning.

Assessment in YDPs

Assessments are used at two critical decision points in a YDP. The YLS/CMI SV is used at the referral stage and the YLS/CMI 2.0 is used for assessment and case planning throughout a young person's engagement with the YDP. The following section contains detailed information on this process, starting with referral.

Referral

The YLS/CMI SV must be used as part of the decision-making process upon referral of a young person to the YDP. Referral Assessment Committees¹ meet at least six times a year and review each referral on a case-by-case basis to determine their suitability for inclusion in the YDP. The completed YLS/CMI SV should be used by the committee to inform their decision. However, it should not be the sole determinant. For example, local knowledge and professional judgement may indicate that a YDP intervention is appropriate. When a referral is made to the YDP, the Youth Justice Practitioner completes the following actions;

1. Makes contact with the parent/guardian to arrange a meeting.
2. Provides parents/guardians with the necessary information regarding the YDP and GDPR data collection.
3. Gains informed consent from the parent/guardian using the Screening Version Consent Form (further instruction regarding consent below).
4. Completes the YLS/CMI SV screening assessment in conjunction with the referrer and any other relevant stakeholders.
5. Takes the completed YLS/CMI SV to the Referral Committee for consideration.

Ideally, all the information required to complete the YLS/CMI SV will be available to the Youth Justice Practitioner and the referrer but in practice, the screening assessment process may require gathering further information. This may involve meeting the young person, his/her parents or guardians, and/or telephone conversations with school personnel or any other relevant agencies. It is expected that this process is conducted as quickly and efficiently as possible so that an interim level of risk can be established, and this can inform the referral decision.

In general, YDPs are suitable for moderate to high-risk young people. International best practice discourages the inclusion of low-risk young people in such interventions as their level of risk may increase by virtue of their involvement (see McAra & McVie, 2010). Therefore, in most cases, YDPs are not considered suitable for young people who score 2 or below out of a possible 8 risk/need areas in the YLS/CMI SV. This score must be taken into consideration when assessing referrals for inclusion. A very clear rationale based on the risks and criminogenic needs of the young person must exist for the inclusion of any young person scoring 2 or below on the YLS/CMI SV. It is equally important, as part of the agreed Referral Committee process, to reflect on the YDPs capacity to effect change with very high-risk young people when considering them for inclusion.

Case Planning

As all interventions in a YDP should be based on the risks and needs of the young person, the YLS/CMI 2.0 should be completed with all young people admitted to the YDP as soon as possible. The YLS/CMI 2.0 is more comprehensive than the screening tool (SV), therefore it requires a

¹ The Referral Assessment Committee consists of a local Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer and one or more youth justice workers, and depending on local requirements and circumstances may include the Probation Service, Tusla and other relevant bodies. For more information on the Referral Assessment Committee, please see the *Youth Diversion Projects Operational Requirements 2024*

greater level of knowledge and information about the young person. This information gathering may take some time, but in general, the assessment should be completed within 6 to 8 weeks of admission to the YDP.

While the YLS/CMI 2.0 is the baseline assessment required for all YDP participants, Youth Justice Practitioners can also use other assessment tools (some may be suggested by Community Based Organisations (CBOs)) which enhance their understanding of and engagement with young people.

Transition from Early Intervention

When a child has been referred to a YDP as part of the Early Intervention Initiative (an initiative for which there is separate guidance) and is approaching 12 years of age, a plan is to be agreed at the Referral Assessment Committee. The committee can decide to either disengage the young person from the service with the appropriate supports or have them remain with the YDP (with young people aged 12+). The Youth Justice Practitioner must complete an Early Assessment Risk List Version 3 Assessment Summary (EARL-V3 AS) which is used for assessment and treatment planning/case management planning for children aged 8-11 engaged in Early Intervention in YDPs. This should support the decision at the Referral Assessment Committee regarding the child's transition out of Early Intervention. This transition process should not exceed 6 months from the young person's twelfth birthday.

If the decision at the Referral Assessment Committee is for the young person to remain with the YDP, the Youth Justice Practitioner must gain 12-17 Engagement Consent from the parent/guardian to allow for the completion of the YLS/CMI 2.0. There is no need to gain YLS/CMI screening consent as the Referral Assessment Committee will use the latest EARL-V3 AS to determine suitability prior to turning 12 years of age. For more information, please refer to the *Guidance for Early Intervention Work in YDPs*.

Assessment Flowchart for YDPs

Figure 1. shows the Referral, Assessment and Engagement Flow Chart, designed to support practitioners. It outlines the steps involved in a young person's journey through the YDP, including young people aged 7-11 (for whom the Earl Assessments take place), and young people aged 12-17 (for whom the YLS/CMI Assessments take place). For the purpose of this document, the flowchart and process responsibilities outlined below refer to young people aged 12-17. For further information on the processes for Early Intervention, please refer to the *Guidance for Early Intervention Work in YDPs*.

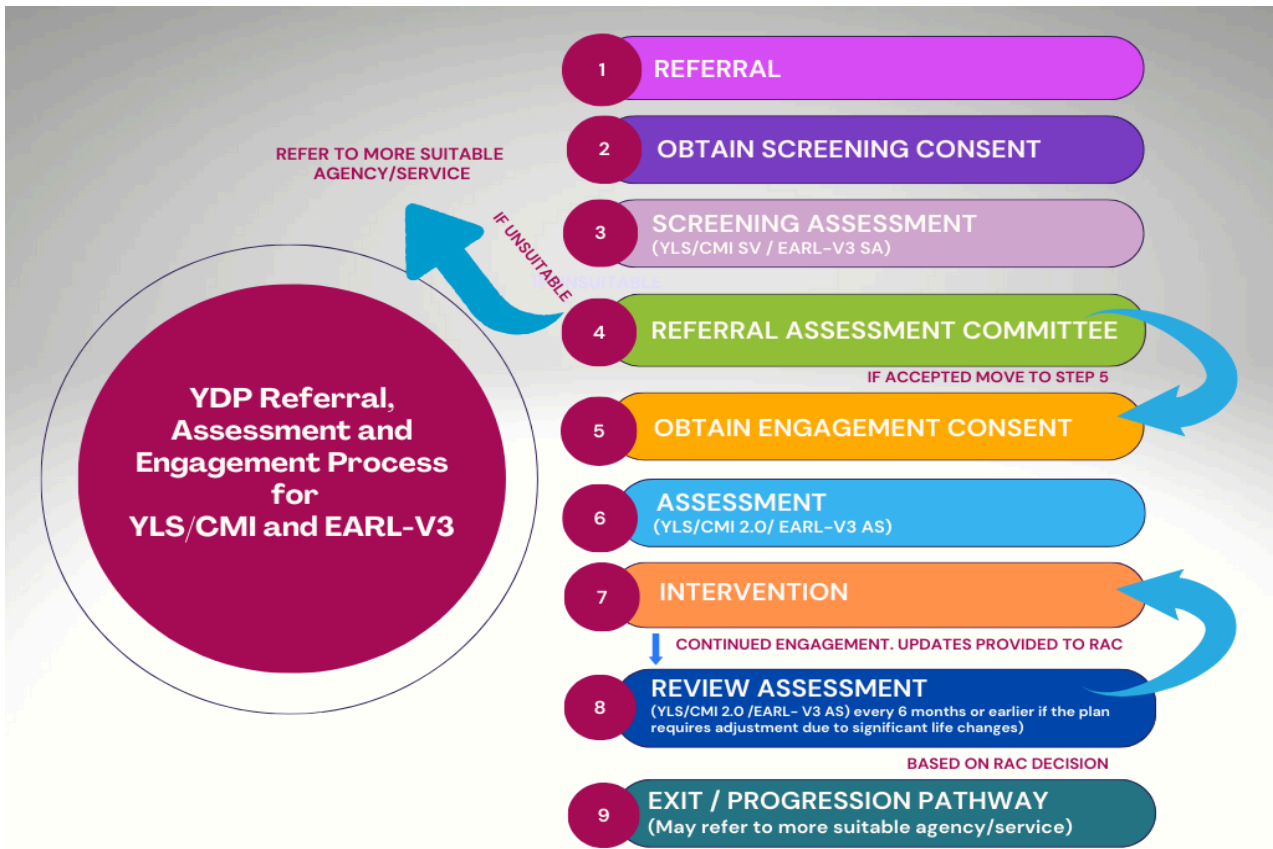


Figure 1 YDP Referral, Assessment and Engagement Process for YLS/CMI 2.0 and EARL-V3

Process Responsibilities

Consent

Informed consent must be obtained when conducting all assessments. This means that the assessment process must be discussed with parents/guardians and the young person, and the eight risk/need areas explained in a way that is easily understood by them. **The YLS/CMI SV can be described as a framework for gathering information about the needs of a young person to determine whether they are suitable for involvement in a YDP. The YLS/CMI 2.0 can be explained as a framework for gathering information which will be used to plan interventions with the young person.** In addition, the parent/guardian should be provided with the *'Information Leaflet and Privacy Notice on Data Collected by the Youth Diversion Projects'* prior to signing the consent form. It should be discussed with the parent/guardian that in addition to speaking to them and the young person, information may be obtained from the Juvenile Liaison Officer, school or any other relevant agencies. Best practice indicates that young people should be aware of the process.

YLS/CMI SV Consent

Youth Justice Practitioners must obtain consent for the use of the screening assessment using the

Screening Consent Form.

YLS/CMI 2.0 Consent & Information Sharing

When a young person is admitted to the project following a decision at the Referrals Committee, the YDP Standard Consent Form must be completed by the parent/guardian and the young person. The section relating to consent outlines that the young person's needs will be assessed to help plan for them and sets out the policy in relation to information sharing.

Young people in the youth justice system may have complex needs and may be involved with multiple agencies. Sharing information when necessary is key to supporting young people and helps achieve the best possible outcomes. Parental/guardian consent must be obtained before any information from the assessment is shared with other professionals. Youth Justice Practitioners must share information only as appropriate and necessary, in accordance with statutory Data Protection requirements (as per CBO Data Protection guidelines), doing their utmost to ensure that the young person is not adversely affected by the sharing of their information.

Information Used

Best practice in assessment suggests that a variety of information sources should be used to complete the YLS/CMI SV and YLS/CMI 2.0. These include conversations with the young person, their parents and any other professional involved, official records and professional observations. Youth Justice Practitioners must judge the quality and reliability of the information received. It is encouraged to use more than one source, so that information can be verified and triangulated. This may not always be possible but the general principle when completing the assessment is that it should be done based on the best information available. The primary source of information will be the young person and their parents/guardians. It is important that they are involved at every point of the process. This includes outlining the results of the assessment and involving them in case planning.

The level of detail and definitions provided for the YLS/CMI 2.0 mean that the assessment is more comprehensive than the YLS/CMI SV, for example, the 2.0 assessment contains a 42 item inventory of the risk/need items (Part 1) and incorporates an assessment of other needs and special considerations (Part 3). The YLS/CMI User Manual provides definitions for each item in Part 1 and Part 3. However, the information used will always require analysis and interpretation. This means that there is always some level of subjectivity, and the professional interpretation of the assessment is paramount. The term 'subjectivity' here refers to professional judgement; it is not an opinion based on a whim but on information and evidence that has been gathered as part of the assessment process. All YLS/CMI assessments require a measure of judgement or opinion of the professional completing it. The assumption underlying this is that Youth Justice Practitioners are qualified and capable of making this assessment (and can plan interventions to improve things for the young person).

Neither the YLS/CMI SV nor YLS/CMI 2.0 are interview schedules to be used with young people, nor should they be used as such. They merely provide a framework to structure information

gathering ensuring that it is relevant to the level of risk, need and responsivity required.

Omitted Items

If there is inadequate information available to complete the assessments, every attempt should be made to obtain the relevant information. It should be noted that the YLS/CMI SV is still valid with up to 2 items omitted. The YLS/CMI 2.0 is valid with up to 4 items omitted.

Review

As the YLS/CMI SV is now used at the point of referral as part of the decision about the suitability of a young person for a YDP, it should not be repeated once a young person has been admitted to the YDP. This does not mean that if a young person is considered unsuitable they cannot be re-referred if their circumstances have changed. In this case their previous YLS/CMI SV assessment should be reviewed and a new YLS/CMI SV completed.

The YLS/CMI 2.0 should be reviewed every 6 months or sooner if something significant changes for the young person that alters the planned outcomes set out in their Case Management Plan. It is important that interventions are planned on the basis of the most up to date information available to ensure appropriate case planning and the possibility of better outcomes for the young person. Levels of risk can fluctuate, and an assessment is a snapshot of a point in time, so it is important to review regularly to ensure that the needs of the young person are being met.

Storage & Data Protection

Completed YLS/CMI SV and YLS/CMI 2.0 forms should be stored together in an individual file, one each per young person. Due to the sensitive nature of the information contained in these files, they should be anonymised containing only the young person's project ID number. The files should be stored separate to any other files which may have any identifying information in them. As Case Management Reviews and further assessments are carried out they should be added to the file.

All records should be signed and dated. Storage will be in accordance with the CBOs data retention policy and/or guidelines. There are basic principles that must be adhered to by any organisation storing personal information. Files containing personal data must be kept in accordance with data protection legislation and stored securely (i.e. in a locked filing cabinet or password protected if stored on a PC). Likewise, young people's details should not be sent electronically unless by a secure method.

Information sharing is a contentious issue. Data protection legislation is often quoted by practitioners and agencies as reasons not to share information. However, if you are open with young people and parents/guardians and obtain their informed consent, this should not be an issue. Involving young people and parents/guardians in this way facilitates openness and transparency and builds trust. It is important to record any discussions or conversations you have with young people and parents/guardians about the assessment process and information sharing.

Supports

The use of a comprehensive risk/needs assessment and case planning tool aims to help projects improve outcomes for young people. This development aids YDPs in targeting the right young people and helps them provide interventions that meet identified needs. The objective is to reduce the level and/or frequency of youth offending. As use of the YLS/CMI SV and YLS/CMI 2.0 are considered core aspects of the work of a YDP, several supports have been put in place to support Youth Justice Practitioners to use the tools confidently, competently, and consistently. These include;

1. Training

YLS/CMI SV and YLS/CMI 2.0 should only be administered by trained professionals. The YLS/CMI SV and 2.0 training prepares participants for use of both tools. Training sessions will be held regularly to ensure that Youth Justice Practitioners receive training in a timely manner. Workshops are also provided for line-managers of Youth Justice Practitioners to enable them to understand the processes and identify their role in supporting staff.

2. Communities of Practice

Each user of the YLS/CMI 2.0 will be invited to attend a Community of Practice. These are peer support groups who meet to discuss their use of the tool, work through issues, give/receive advice, share information and upskill. Attendance at these sessions is mandatory. They are a fundamental aspect of the role of the YLS for Youth Justice Practitioners.

3. Support Person

As questions or issues arise that cannot be answered by the YLS/CMI 2.0 User's Manual, this guide or peers, the YLS/CMI 2.0 Trainers are available to provide advice and support. They should be contacted through email and will respond in a timely manner; however, they may not be in a position to answer urgent queries. The trainers details are distributed to users at the 2-day training.

If a query is urgent or cannot be answered through the aforementioned channels, then a member of the YDP Research and Development team can be contacted.

4. Quality Assurance

Maintaining the integrity of the risk/needs assessment and case management tool is an ongoing process. In addition to the supports available to Youth Justice Practitioners, a number of other measures will be put in place to monitor and assess the use of the YLS/CMI SV and YLS/CMI 2.0. Regular studies of inter-rater reliability will take place in order to measure the level of consistency of the tool across all assessors, given a similar set of circumstances. This involves users scoring a prepared case study. The range of scores obtained is analysed to determine the reliability of application of the tool across the network. If the score is inconsistent, assessment results may be inaccurate in places, leading to improper targeting, intervention planning or

reporting and this may ultimately reduce the likelihood of positive outcomes for young people.

YLS/CMI case audits are also carried out to ascertain if the assessment process is happening in the expected way. This generally involves a review of case files and a limited number of interviews with Youth Justice Practitioners in a given project.

Conclusion

This guidance document has outlined how to use the YLS/CMI in YDPs including the use of both the YLS/CMI SV and the YLS/CMI 2.0 for the purposes of assessment and case planning. It has identified the supports that are in place for youth justice practitioners continued use the YLS/CMI SV and 2.0 assessments. For further information, please refer to the following documents; *Guidance for Early Intervention Work in YDPs*, *Guidance for Family Support in Youth Diversion Projects* and the *Youth Diversion Projects Operational Requirements 2025*.

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