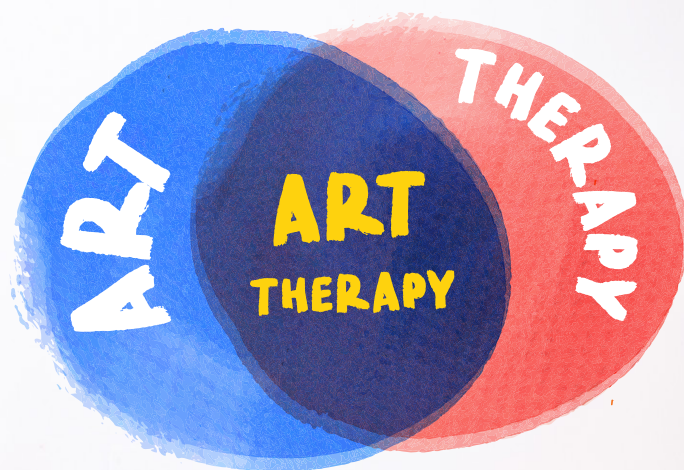




ART THERAPY



YOUTH WORK IRELAND LAOIS EVALUATION

Sophia Lennon, Art Therapist
Youth Work Ireland Laois

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INTRODUCTION

This section explores the definition and benefits of Art Therapy as an intervention that supports young people in Laois, Offaly and surrounding areas.

WHAT IS ART THERAPY?

Art Therapy uses the art-making process to help young people to learn how to explore feelings, increase self-awareness and cope with life's challenges. Art as a means for healing and communication is highly relevant for children and teens. Young children often rely on their limited language skills to express complex thoughts and emotions. That barrier can be breached with methods of expression they understand a little better through art therapy.

BENEFITS OF ART THERAPY

Young people who present with emotional intolerance/stress often have not developed the verbal skills required to express this distress, and art therapy provides the model for non-verbal communication and expression in a safe and therapeutic environment.

Art Therapy uses creative and adaptive skills in providing varying treatment intervention modalities to address these varied presentations in a client friendly and responsive manner. Supporting autonomy in young people, helps with independence. Giving a space to express themselves, enables them to use their voice and become more attuned to their own values. This in turn helps young people make positive choices for their lives and grounded decisions.

ART THERAPY CAN BE USED TO:



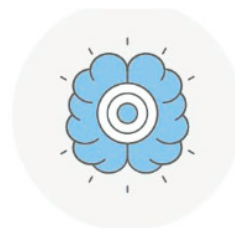
IMPROVE COGNITION



IMPROVE SENSORY-MOTOR FUNCTION



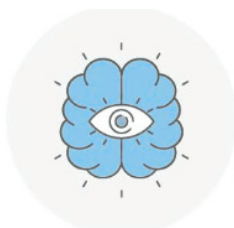
CULTIVATE EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE



FOSTER SELF-AWARENESS



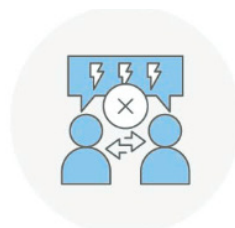
FOSTER SELF-ESTEEM



PROMOTE INSIGHT



ENHANCE SOCIAL SKILLS



REDUCE CONFLICT

Figure 1 - Applications of Art Therapy

BACKGROUND

This evaluation examines the Art Therapy sessions delivered in Youth Work Ireland Laois (YWIL) between March 2025 to December 2025.

OVERVIEW OF ART THERAPY IN YOUTH WORK IRELAND LAOIS

Art therapy sessions were delivered on average over 14 hours a week from March 2025 to December 2025. The Art Therapy sessions last for 50 mins in duration in the YWIL premises in Portlaoise, making this a community-based therapeutic service. YWIL have a remit of 10–24-year-olds, therefore, the Art Therapy sessions are offered to young people aligned with this age range. Information support and guidance is available and provided by the Art Therapist to individuals, parents, and professionals enquiring about the service over the phone. An initial assessment is offered to the young person and parents/carers to gain background information on the young person and to gauge the severity/complexity of the mental health difficulty present.

If community-based therapeutic services are deemed appropriate for the young person (experiencing mild to moderate mental health difficulty), they will receive on average between 6 -10 sessions of art therapy with continuous evaluation throughout with the young person and parents/carers.

In addition, check-in and follow-up phone calls with parents/guardians and support workers, as well as liaison with linked schools and services are carried out by the Art Therapist. In some cases, more sessions are necessary e.g., if there is a language barrier it can take longer to build rapport. If the mental health difficulty is at a higher severity or complexity (moderate to severe), the Art Therapist signposts them to the appropriate services. The Art Therapist compiles letters and reports as requested by parents/guardians to schools, GP's and other services.

PURPOSE

In addition to Art Therapy interventions, the sessions can include Distress Tolerance Life Skills, Anxiety Management, Wellness and Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) and Self-Esteem skills. These interventions aim to reduce emotional distress and increase coping mechanisms depending on the need of the young person.

Diagnostic Groups where Art Therapy was indicated and that have proved beneficial include; Trauma, Anxiety, Low Mood, Bullying, School Refusal, Anger, Grief and Loss, Suicidal Ideation, LGBTI+ support, Difficulties with Food, Low Self Esteem, Relationships Difficulties and Parenting Difficulties and Emotional Dysregulation. Young people with ASD also benefit from a pressure-free medium of art therapy to express their thoughts and feelings.

METHODS

This section describes the different processes and assessments used in the YWIL Art Therapy service in Portlaoise.

REFERRAL PROCESS

Referrals to the service can be made by the young person if over 18 years (self-referral), their families, school, local general practitioner (GP), or other health agencies/organisations. Consent is then made through parents or guardians. Once a young person turns 18 years of age, a young person can self-refer. However, parents are often keen to support the young person in accessing the service as often the family provides an important support.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Demographic variables such as age, gender, and living situation were recorded on the system at initial assessment. Living situation was categorised as living with family, friends, parents, alone or other. A standardised approach within the service was used to gather information regarding the presenting issue of the client by the art therapist prior to the initial assessment. Referral information including source and reason were obtained at the initial assessment in YWIL offices.



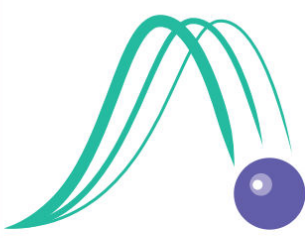
CLINICAL ASSESSMENT

The Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation (CORE) was used within the YWIL Art therapy service to rate the severity of a young person's level of psychological distress. This was measured at baseline using the CORE10 and again following their therapeutic intervention. These outcome measures are introduced to evaluate progress made by each young person throughout the therapeutic intervention. There are 10 statements on the CORE10 form about how the young person has been over the last week. They are asked to think about how often they felt that way last week and tick the box closest to this. CORE-10 scoring involves summing item responses (0-40), with higher scores indicating more distress.

Scores are put into the following categories:

Less than 10 – non-clinical range	
0-5	Healthy
6-10	Low

11 to 40 – Clinical Range	
11 -14	mild psychological distress
15 - 19	moderate psychological distress
20 - 24	moderate-to-severe psychological distress
25 - 40	severe psychological distress

 <p>CORE-10</p>	Client ID <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	Age <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> M <input type="checkbox"/>
	Date form completed <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	F <input type="checkbox"/>
	Therapist ID <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	Stage S Screening H Referral V Assessment F First therapy session P Pre-therapy (unspecified) U During therapy A Last therapy session X Follow-up 1 Y Follow-up 2
	Service ID <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	
	Episode <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Session <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	

IMPORTANT - PLEASE READ THIS FIRST

This form has 10 statements about how you have been OVER THE LAST WEEK.
Please read each statement and think how often you felt that way last week.
Then tick the box which is closest to this.

Over the last week...						OFFICE USE ONLY
	Not at all	Only occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Most or all of the time	
1 I have felt tense, anxious or nervous	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 I have felt I have someone to turn to for support when needed	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 I have felt able to cope when things go wrong	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Talking to people has felt too much for me	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 I have felt panic or terror	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 I made plans to end my life	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 I have had difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 I have felt despairing or hopeless	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 I have felt unhappy	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Unwanted images or memories have been distressing me	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total (Clinical Score*)						<input type="text"/>

*Quick scoring if all items completed: add together the item scores to get the Clinical Score.
It is not recommended to compute a score if more than one item was omitted but if nine were completed: add together the item scores, divide by nine to get the mean score, then multiply by 10 to get the Clinical Score.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME IN COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

Figure 2 - CORE10 Assessment Tool

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section provides an insight into the demographic breakdown of the young people that attended the YWIL Art Therapy service from March 2025 to December 2025. It also highlights the common mental health difficulties that young people are experiencing in the area and the differences in the level of psychological distress recorded at referral and on discharge from art therapy using the CORE assessment measure.

GENDER BREAKDOWN

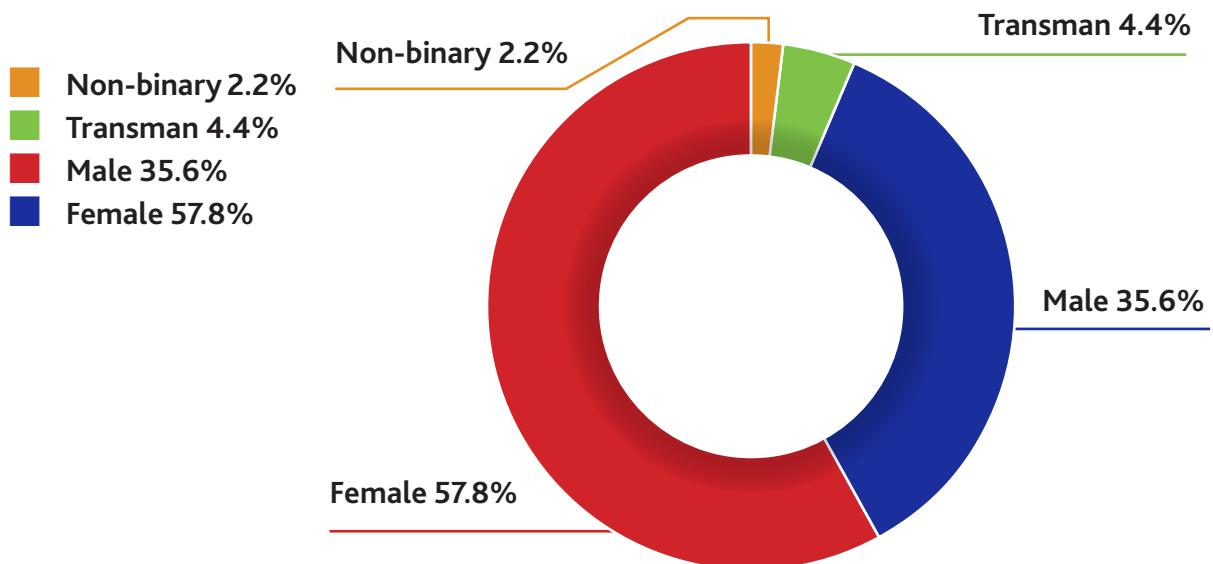


Figure 3 - Breakdown of young people that accessed Art Therapy by Gender

The pie chart above shows that the majority of clients are female (57.8%), while one third (35.6%) of the referrals are young males.

This is a noticeable increase in young men seeking help and support from previous years in the area. This is possibly due to the stigma young men often encounter resulting in them not knowing what to say, or even how they're feeling at different stages of life. Tapping into their creativity in these sessions offers a new form of communication for them that is non-threatening and over which they have control.



AGE RANGE

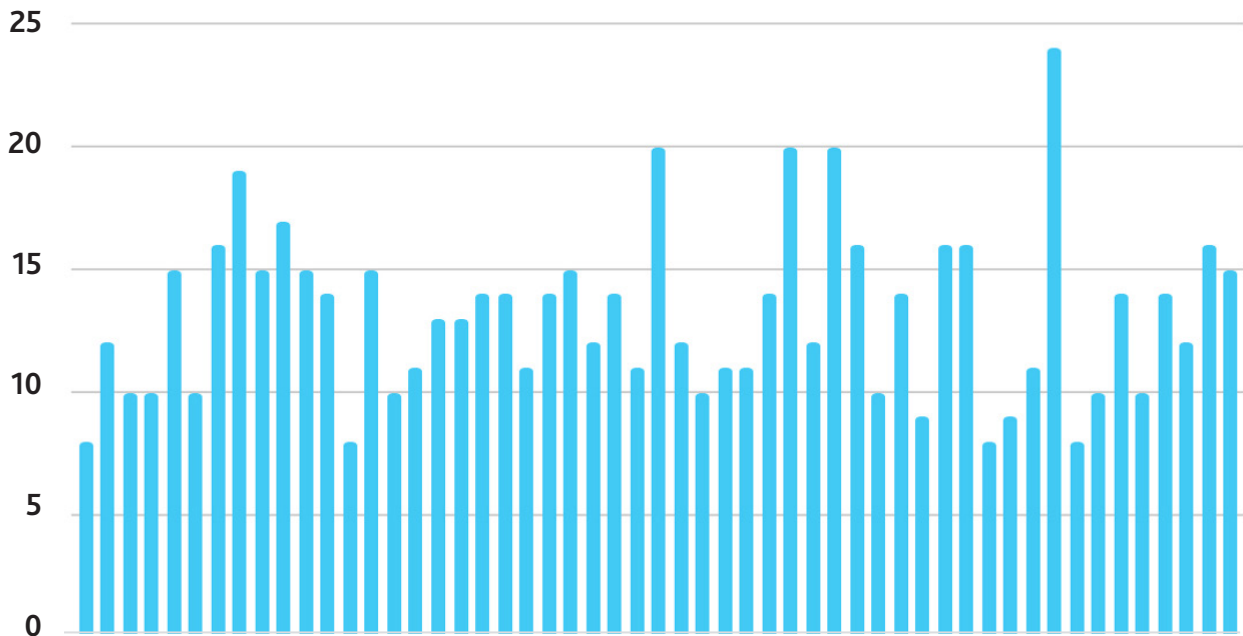


Figure 4 - Breakdown of young people that accessed Art Therapy by Age

There is a varied age group of young people seeking art therapy, it has been noted that we are experiencing an increased number of 8 -12-year-olds in primary school (5th & 6th class) during 2025.

Navigating friendships and feeling isolated, with an increased worry about transitioning to secondary level are high school-related issues arising in young people. There is also an increased amount of school refusal in this age range.

Most young people are in secondary level of school and finding it difficult to navigate same due to bullying, feeling 'different', feeling isolated and experiencing anxiety.



There has also been interest in younger ages below 10 that have been put on the interest list, if space becomes available these young people that are approaching age 10 will be offered the service.

SOURCE OF REFERRALS

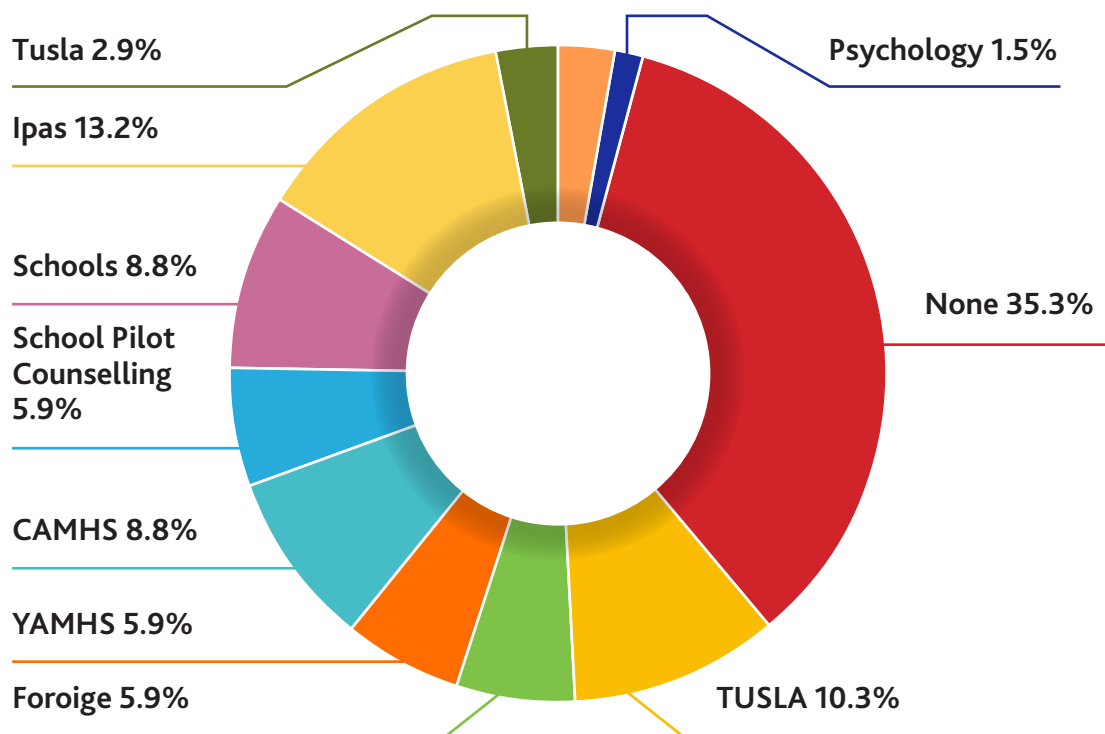


Figure 5 - Breakdown of young people that accessed Art Therapy by Source of Referrals

A high volume of parents of young people are being signposted to YWIL for Art Therapy by local schools and through therapists on the pilot counselling scheme as they are restricted to 6 weeks and not permitted to see their young clients privately. Some have contacted us and asked for permission to recommend our art therapy service for follow-up work if necessary.

Social workers are also availing of the service, setting up initial appointments and linking with the Art Therapist. Schools inform parents of support services such as CAMHS, Primary Care Psychology, Jigsaw, Foreige and YWIL Art Therapy – this means there is a constant flow of referrals and currently a waiting list for Art Therapy.

PLACE (progressive Learning into accessible continuous employment) have also recently connected with our service, referring young adults developing career pathways and needing additional support.

It has been noted that many of the referrals are currently awaiting appointments with local services or that they were assessed by same but not meeting their threshold and had no access to CAMHS or AMHS. With a lack of anywhere else to go for support if they did not have the financial means to seek support privately.

Parents have also stated to the Art Therapist that they feel much more comfortable self-referring to community based therapeutic supports.

MONTHLY REFERRALS

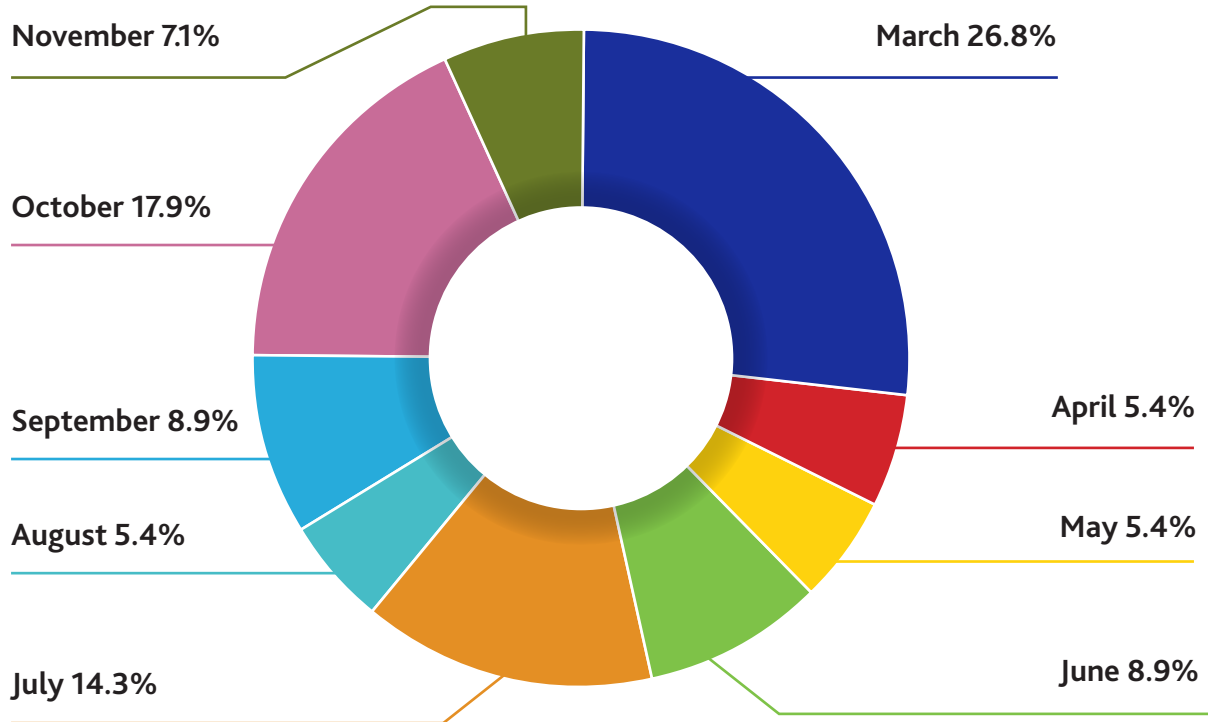


Figure 6 - Breakdown of young people that accessed Art Therapy by Monthly Referrals

Coordination and structuring of art therapy program took place in March/April after waiting for funding. We prioritised existing members of YWILaois, particularly from IPAS and a list of people who had been enquiring about the service. When the academic year begins there is always a surge in referrals, with heightened anxiety in young people going back to school. at both Primary and Secondary level.

When the academic year begins there is always a surge in referrals, with heightened anxiety in young people going back to school (both Primary and Secondary level). However, there is a high demand for the Art Therapy service throughout the year, with the highest referrals last year seen in March (26.8%), October (17.9%), July (14.3%), September (8.9%) and June (8.9%).

There is currently an interest/waiting list of 15 young people seeking support while awaiting more funding. As it is a self-referral process there is evidence to show that they are motivated to engage with the services to improve mood and wellbeing.

It's also important to note that the majority of these young people are not existing members of YWIL upon referral. Mainly internal referrals are from IPAS and LGBTI+ groups. Through attending the art therapy service the young come into the YWILaois space and begin to gain confidence and independence, a lot of these young people are then given opportunities to join other projects and groups in YWILaois.

LOCAL SCHOOLS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN YWIL ART THERAPY

Young people from varied different schools availed of the YWIL Art Therapy service between March 2025 and December 2025. Majority of clients were attending secondary school, however, there is an increasing number of referrals being made for primary age young people.

1.	Tullamore College	2.	Scoil Chríost Rí, Portlaoise
3.	Portlaoise Youthreach	4.	Tyndall College, Carlow
5.	Mountmellick Community School	6.	Loreto, Kilkenny
7.	Dunamase College \ Coláiste Dhún Másc	8.	Raheen National School
9.	Portlaoise College	10.	St. Francis School, Portlaoise
11.	Youthreach Mountmellick	12.	Portarlington Primary School
13.	St. Fergal's College	14.	St. Colman's N.S, Stradbally
15.	Banagher College, Coláiste na Sionna	16.	Rath National School
17.	Ard Scoil Chiaráin Naofa, Clara	18.	The Heath National School
19.	Portlaoise College	20.	Paddock National School
21.	St. Mary's CBS, Portlaoise	22.	Holy Family Senior School
23.	Heywood Community School	24.	Killeigh National School
25.	Coláiste Iosagáin, Portarlington	26.	Our Ladys Meadow National School, Durrow
27.	Mountrath Community School	28.	Sandylane National School
29.	Tullamore College	30.	Ratheniska National School
31.	Scoil Naomh Eoin, Killenard	32.	Scoil Mhuire, Abbeyleix
33.	Killina Presentation secondary School, Kildare	34.	Maryborough National School
35.	Paddock National School	36.	Clonaslee College
37.	Scoil Bhríde N.S	38.	Shanganamore N.S

PRESENTING DIFFICULTIES

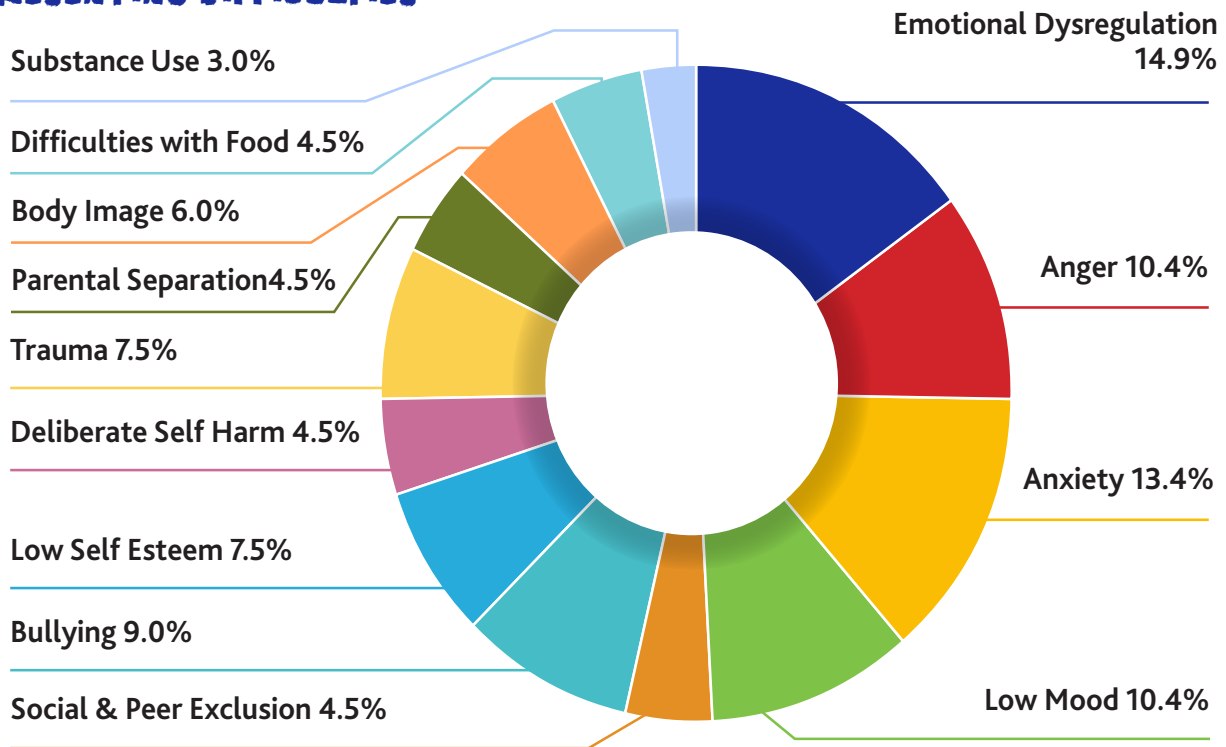


Figure 7 - Breakdown of young people that accessed Art Therapy by Presenting Difficulties

The initial assessment is based on a bio-psycho-social framework and is carried out over an initial phone call with the parent/guardian if the young person is under 18 years. Then an introductory session to gain written consent and determine the nature of the presenting issue, the young person’s strengths and resources, developmental issues, educational and social history and a mental state exam. The assessment also includes a thorough risk assessment. Individuals who present with moderate to severe mental health issues beyond the service’s scope are referred to another mental health service, such as CAMHS or AMHS.

The majority of young people being referred for art therapy appear to be experiencing escalating generalised anxiety and emotional dysregulation which is impacting on their daily life, socialising and school.

Some are experiencing pervasive low mood and have a history of deliberate self-harm. Most young people are experiencing sleep disturbance and present as anxious particularly in relation to school and social peer stressors. There is an increase in school refusal presenting to the service.

With the significant increase in substance use among young people, there has been a demand for therapy for individuals engaging with CADS (community Alcohol and drugs service) and needing supportive therapy within YWILaois.

Art therapy provided the model for non-verbal communication and expression to enable them to express their present difficulties and gain insight into same. Through the discovery and unveiling of feelings, the young people are better able to understand themselves and their problems.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS BEFORE & AFTER ART THERAPY

The level of psychological distress at referral and on discharge from art therapy was measured using the CORE assessment measure. This shows an improvement in the young people's overall presentation after attending the Art Therapy sessions in YWIL. They are asked to complete the CORE self-report questionnaires at the beginning and at the end of therapy. There has been a reliable and clinically significant improvement, with a movement from a 'moderate' clinical range to a 'low' non-clinical range.

The majority of the young people's low mood and sleep patterns improved, demonstrating insight into recognising difficult emotions and how to manage them. They have gained more insight and skills that have helped to gain control over their social anxiety and re-engage in social situations with their peers, school and in social activities.

Should they require any further support or if there are any concerns regarding their mental health in the future we have advised the young person and their parents to seek an appointment with their GP.

When a referral is made and the young person is presenting with moderate/severe levels of psychological distress that suggest significant mental health issue, YWILaois supports them in accessing a service that is more suitable for their needs.

An Example of CORE 10 Measure Outcome

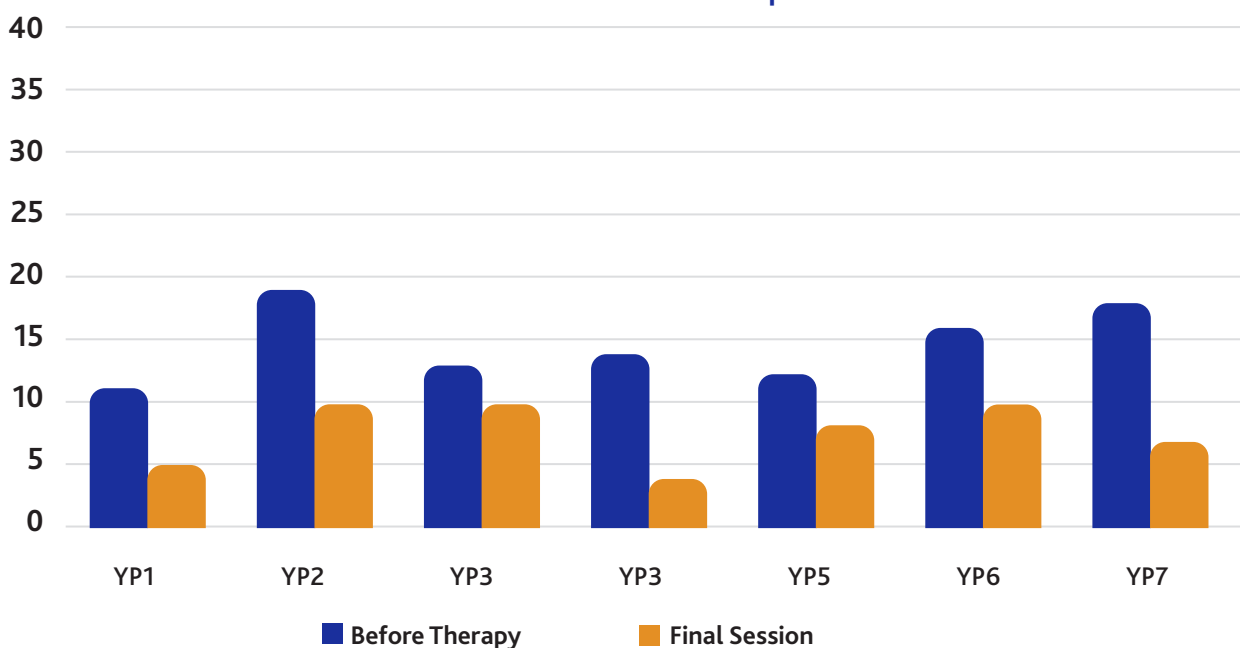


Figure 8 - An Example of CORE 10 Measure Outcome

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community-based therapeutic services offer essential support to public services, families, and individuals every day.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

PROMOTION OF ART THERAPY TO YOUNG MALES

As referrals for Art Therapy is increasing for young males, it is evident that there is an increased need for non-verbal communication interventions implemented with a focus on young males in primary and secondary school. It is important to increase help and support for these young people by promoting Art Therapy to parents/carers and other popular outlets within this cohort.



RECOMMENDATION 2:

INCREASE CAPACITY

There is a clear need for community-based therapeutic services as highlighted by the referrals made by public mental health services to YWIL, with a current interest/waiting list of 15 young people seeking support. There has also been a notable increase in primary school aged young people seeking mental health support, as well as an increased prevalence of school refusal in both primary and secondary schools. This emphasises the need for an increased capacity in community-based therapeutic services in the area.



RECOMMENDATION 3:

STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS WITH PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

As parents seem to feel more comfortable referring their children into community based therapeutic supports, it is important that other linked services are aware of the supports offered in the community and regularly link with the community-based services as alternative pathways of support.





CONCLUSION

Art Therapy can be a very gentle approach for supporting their self-monitoring and help them to develop calming and self-regulation skills.

The young people engaging in the service attend individual art psychotherapy sessions which are aimed at expressing and processing feelings around recent life events with a view to reducing overall level of emotional distress. Majority of young people that accessed the YWIL Art Therapy service also received assistance with anxiety and distress tolerance skills aimed at reducing emotional distress, increasing coping mechanisms, and their self-confidence.

There is a clear need for community-based therapeutic supports and services focusing on early interventions for improving Youth Mental Health within our community in Laois. YWIL has provided free clinical support for young people in a safe and non-judgmental setting. Young people and their parents have stated that they feel more comfortable self-referring to community services such as YWIL and appear to gain confidence in themselves and feel more motivated to use our support.

Young people are often on waiting lists for other local services or not meeting the moderate – severe mental health threshold to have access to CAMHS/ YAMHS. Primary Care Psychology have stated that they are “Thankful for YWIL support for people on waiting lists, especially Art Therapy, many people that have attended YWIL praise their support when starting in Primary Care Psychology”. CAMHS are also “Thankful for support from YWIL through Art Therapy that can help young people with mild to moderate young people on our waiting list”.

Given the engagement from the local community and constant referrals with the positive mental health outcomes from attending the Art therapy service in YWIL, it would be important to continue to maximise and improve this existing service to continue to support and improve the young people’s mental health that are struggling with mental health in our community.

ART THERAPY

can help you communicate what is sometimes difficult to put into words

Support is available if you are feeling overwhelmed or down about:

- School
- Work
- College
- Family
- Friendships
- Relationships
- Sexual Identity
- Confidence

LET IT ALL OUT

No art experience is necessary
Sessions are confidential
6 free sessions

Find out more about our art therapy sessions
057 866 5010
clive@ywilaois.com
sophia@ywilaois.com

Youth Work Ireland
LAOIS

ART THERAPY PROMOTIONAL POSTERS

ART THERAPY

can help you communicate what is sometimes difficult to put into words...

Support is available if you are feeling overwhelmed or down about:

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- Confidence

LET IT ALL OUT

No art experience is necessary
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To find out more about our art therapy sessions
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Youth Work Ireland
LAOIS

Design: Claudine Leonard Design, Stradbally, Co. Laois