

# Stakeholder Review of the Law Engagement & Assisted Recovery (LEAR) Programme in Dublin City

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## Background

The Law Engagement and Assisted Recovery (LEAR) programme, previously known as the Assertive Case Management Project, began in 2014 in Dublin City Centre. It was developed in response to recommendations from the ‘A Better City for All’ report, which called for innovative approaches to supporting individuals entrenched in street life.

LEAR was designed as a **partnership model**, delivered by Ana Liffey Drug Project in collaboration with An Garda Síochána (the Irish Police Service), the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, and later with support from local councils, courts, businesses, and treatment providers. Initially operating in specific areas of Dublin, LEAR has since expanded to wider areas of Dublin and to Limerick City.

This Stakeholder Review is a follow up to a previous independent evaluation of LEAR, and draws on 13 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. These insights help map what is working, where improvements can be made, and **what impact LEAR is having on individuals and communities.**



## How LEAR Works

The LEAR project is a **client-centred low-threshold case management service supporting street-involved individuals with complex needs** in environments that suit them, such as streets, cafes, housing, or in Ana Liffey’s offices. **Referrals predominantly come through An Garda Síochána**, with a focus on ensuring accessibility for those excluded from traditional services. Clients undergo an initial assessment to identify their personal goals, including health, housing, legal, social, or relationship matters.

LEAR’s approach is **flexible**, with staff offering practical support like appointment reminders, accompaniment, and liaising with other agencies. **Recognising the complexities** of clients' lives, the service adapts to unforeseen challenges, **ensuring continued support**. LEAR also builds recovery capital to support the clients’ self-defined goals. Clients are also supported to address any concerns about the service, ensuring they are resolved effectively.

## Engagement in Practice

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of trust, consistency, and flexibility in LEAR’s approach. Collaboration between Gardaí, staff, and community actors is central to reaching those excluded from other services.

“She was in custody and there were three other women on the floor, in the depths of their addiction where she was a year previously. And she says, I started on them, I worked on them, about the LEAR project, it’s that kind of co-production element of this I thought it was really powerful.” (Gardaí)

“And I hear them talk with the Gardaí on the phone, I see them having meetings, they go to their regular meetings with them. They have strong working relationships that respect each other’s unique needs, and I suppose unique schedules as well. There’s a lot of flexibility to make it work between those two frontline teams, Garda, and our workers.” (LEAR Manager)

“But I think the more we do Guard presentations, very regularly, and we link in with the Guards and all the new intake of Guards, we would do presentations with them to explain what we do. And a lot of them are starting to understand.” (LEAR Project Worker)

“I ever needed [my case manager] on the phone, like, he’d be always there, like, do you know what I mean? Like, he’d always pick up the phone, like, things like that [...] I just like genuinely got on with him. Yeah. And then, but now like I trust him” (Former LEAR Client)

“If you have a client in prison, we can do professional visits. We can send clothes into them. So, the support follows where they’re at. If they’re in a hostel, jumping from hostel to hostel. If they’re in hospital, anywhere they are, we can link in with them. And we try and stay in contact.” (LEAR Project Worker)

## Outcomes That Matter

The project has led to a range of positive, life-changing outcomes. Stakeholders and service users alike report improvements in health, housing, relationships, and recidivism.

“She’s working with another key worker, but over the years with her, we have reduced her alcohol use. We have got her accommodation, like stable accommodation. This would be the first type of stable accommodation she had since she left home at the age of 17. We have also managed to minimise her engagement with the Gardaí. The Gardaí are actually quite fond of her.” (LEAR Project Worker)

“Just give, just tell people like there is hope out there at the end of the day. Like, do you know what I mean? There is a chance for recovery, but you know what I, you just have to be in the right state of mind to do it.” (Former LEAR Client)

“If someone doesn’t want to go to treatment or they’re not ready to discuss their drug use, we will help them in other ways around that...maybe one day they want to discuss their drug use. So, I think having that open arm approach kind of helps the clients feel comfortable and not being judged and a nonjudgmental attitude as well.” (LEAR Project Worker)

“We have to deal with the criminal justice piece, but in tandem, maybe try and improve that person’s life and then improve society because they’re not re-offending, therefore we have a safer society.” (Gardaí)

“changed my life all the better” (Former LEAR Client)

“...they’re prolonging lives, they’re saving lives, of like the most vulnerable people.” (NGO Worker)

## The Future of LEAR

The LEAR model **thrives through strong collaboration**, benefiting clients, stakeholders, and communities. Clients see improved relationships with Gardaí, reduced reoffending, and better health outcomes, including reduced substance use and improved wellbeing. The model enhances engagement between stakeholders, ensuring **coordinated care**. It can be expanded to meet the needs of street-involved individuals with complex and multiple needs and adopted in other contexts and areas.

