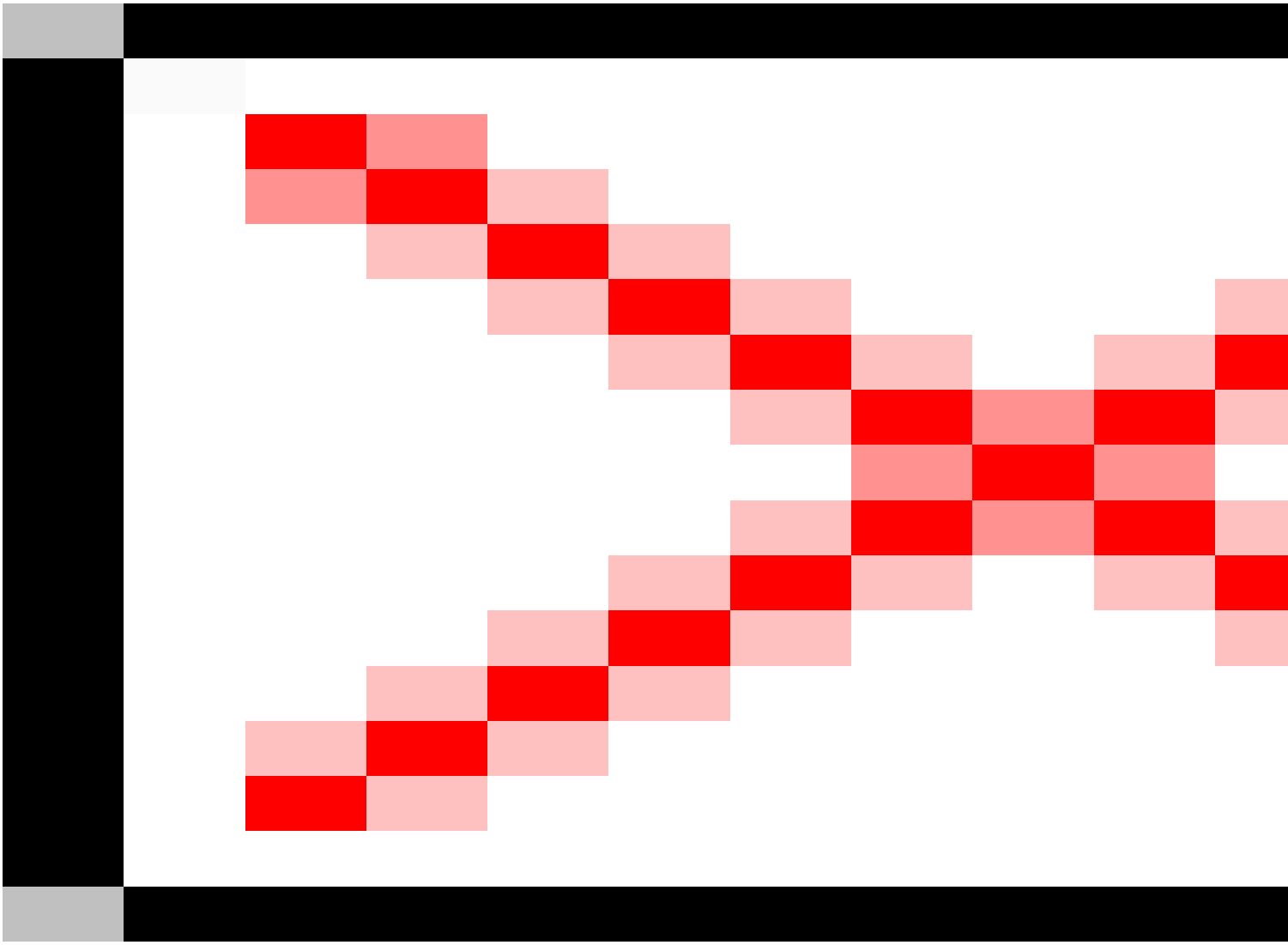
'A Life of Choices' Programme



A Life of Choices is a group work resource which enables facilitators to explore crime and offending behaviour with young people. A Life of Choices came about as part of Foróige?s response to the increased need for the alignment of practice with offence related issues for those working with young people involved or at risk of becoming involved in offending.

This evidence informed programme was developed based on the ?What Works? literature and is underpinned by many of the principles and practices found to be effective in reducing offending behavior in young people. These include cognitive behavioural theory, motivational interviewing, the transtheoretical model of change and experiential learning. This programme also recognises the importance of considering the local youth crime context and using professional observation when providing an intervention to address offending behavior in young people.

The aim of A Life of Choices is to equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in pro-social behaviour, make positive life choices and ultimately reduce the level/frequency of their offending.

The key themes emphasised throughout the programme are empathy, responsibility, impulse control, respect, pro-social behaviour and reflection. The programme begins with a range of assessments which can be used in conjunction with any assessment methods already in place for the target group.

A Life of Choices is comprised of 12 core modules whose duration range from one to several weeks each. These modules frame the skills building phase of the programme and are the foundation upon which the rest of the programme is built. Each module builds on the skills learned in the previous module.

The core modules are:

- Social Skills
- Communication and Relationships
- Peer Influence
- Anger Management
- Problem Solving
- Conflict Resolution
- Understanding Offending Behaviour
- Values
- Decision Making
- Motivation to Change
- Victim Empathy
- Impulsivity Control

While all groups complete the core modules the programme can then be tailored to the individual needs of each group through the use of the elective modules. There are 16 elective modules which can be chosen from to address the needs of the particular young people taking part in the programme.

The elective modules are:

- School Attachment and Attainment
- Understanding Theft
- Understanding Public Order
- The Impact of Harming Others
- Understanding Property damage
- Road Safety
- Understanding Trespassing and Burglary
- Understanding Weapons and the Law
- Anger Management
- Employment Readiness
- The Impact of Drug Dealing/Drug Running
- Civic Engagement
- The Impact of Racism and Discrimination
- My Offending Behaviour
- Understanding Gangs
- Role Models and Motivation

The A Life of Choices manual also includes additional resources such as a guide to relevant Irish legislation, an information section and the A Life of Choices board game. A number of posters and a CD of worksheets and certificates also accompany the manual.

Training Description

The A Life of Choices training is a 2 day training comprising of an overview of the theories in relation to youth offending as well as those underpinning the programme and an overview of youth crime in the Ireland and some of the relevant legislation. This interactive training affords the participants the opportunity to become very familiar with the resource and practice a number of elements of the programme. By the end of the training participants will be able to:

- Describe elements of the Children?s Act 2001 and its connection with the youth work context
- Outline theories in relation to crime and those underpinning the Manual
- Identify appropriate activities based on the needs of their participants
- Use A Life of Choices to facilitate behaviour change with GYDP participants

Evaluation

A Life is Choices is currently undergoing an evaluation by National University of Ireland, Galway. Results of this should be available in early 2015.

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