

Irish Times -16th July 2008 by Carl O'Brien

"Can I just see my Mam? Please? Judge will you let me see her . . . I need me Ma. Can you not just sentence me now, judge. Please!"

Carl O'Brien reports from the Children's Court.

THE BOY'S face crumpled and tears began to stream down his face.

"Can you not just sentence me now, judge!" he cried, with imploring eyes.

"Please! . . . I want to see my Ma. Please?"

"I'll do anything."

The small 15 year old in a white polo shirt had offences stretching back three years to when he was just 12 years of age.

Yet none of them had ever been fully heard before the Children's Court.

Earlier, his defence solicitor told the judge that the boy was anxious to have the charges hanging over him finally addressed.

"We have reached a stage where he wants to deal with everything before the court as soon as possible," his solicitor, Mary O'Sullivan said.

"He has indicated a plea for all the matters, judge."

It was a frenetic day in court 55 with an impossibly long list of cases to be heard.

But Judge Clare Leonard listened patiently and asked to hear the details.

Gardaí said they picked the boy up a few days earlier following two benchwarrants for his arrest for a range of matters.

The list ranged from criminal damage to cars, to being drunk in public places.

The boy, who is small for his age, jiggled his legs nervously and scanned the judge's face for a reaction.

A probation officer said the boy had not been co-operating with the service since late last year.

"He is at serious risk, with medical and offending needs," the probation officer said.

"There is no parental control, despite a willingness to engage in services."

The boy's stepfather, seated at the back of the room, shifted in his seat and rubbed his hand across his chin.

The judge, leafing through the charge sheets, noted the boy had been charged for very serious offences.

"I see there was a threat that he would burn his upstairs bedroom . . . that he was drunk and intoxicated in a public place; I see he had to have his stomach pumped for excessive consumption of alcohol; that he damaged a car door; that he attempted to

get into it; criminal damage to another car; benchwarrants on all those charges . . . so, we're not in a happy place, are we?"

Judge Leonard paused.

"I'll have to put all these matters in for one day . . . "

The boy suddenly interrupted. "Can you not just sentence me now, judge?" he howled.

"Please!"

The boy writhed around on the bench and buried his face under his arm.

"I want to see me Ma!

"Can I please!"

His defence solicitor pointed out that the boy would be sixteen years old shortly.

This meant he could end up in St Patrick's Institution rather than a correctional school which would be in a position to give much more structured support.

"Please, judge! My heart, it's beating, my heart," the boy cried again.

The judge interrupted and said an ambulance should be called.

"I don't need an ambulance!" the boy cried, again.

"Can I just see my Mam? Please? Judge will you let me see her . . . I need me Ma."

Judge Leonard adjourned the case, discussing the matters in private with the boy's counsel, gardaí and probation officers.

After twenty minutes the case was readjourned.

The boy, who had refused to get into the ambulance, was still upset and wiped his glassy eyes.

Judge Leonard told him he would be brought to hospital for a check-up and then on to Trinity House, a detention school, where he would spend two and a half months.

"You've been very upset.

"I want to make sure you're well . . . A garda will visit your mother and let her know that you're all right.

"In Trinity House a probation officer will assist you, set things up for you on how to live and look after your health."

The boy, still crying, said he would do anything if he was allowed to see his mother,

"She can visit you. You have a list of charge sheets - you'll be back before the court in September on them.

"You'll be put on probation and when you're out . . . things will be set up for you," she said hopefully.

"Okay, so," the boy said, sadly, wiping his face with his T-shirt.

"Best of luck now," the judge said.