



News Release

For Immediate Release
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GETTING INVOLVED IN VULNERABLE CHILDREN'S LIVES EARLY AND OFTEN CAN STEER THEM FROM A PATH OF CRIME: B.C. STUDY

VICTORIA - A major B.C. study released today shows that although children and youth in care are at higher risk of becoming involved with the youth justice system, early interventions targeted at risk factors can change the paths of these vulnerable adolescents.

The report calls for a renewed focus by government to act as a compassionate, responsible parent to those children and youth in its care. This includes paying closer attention to their daily lives at school, and taking action whenever they come into contact with police.

The study, *Kids, Crime and Care: Youth Justice Experience and Outcomes*, is a joint project of the Representative for Children and Youth, and the Provincial Health Officer.

"We need to get involved in these children's lives earlier, and more often," said Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative for Children and Youth. "We owe it to them to help guide them away from paths of unmet potential and troubling futures, and towards lives of achievement and contribution."

Dr. Perry Kendall, Provincial Health Officer, said that interventions are essential, and best implemented as early as possible. "We need to begin to look at early intervention as a crime prevention strategy."

Despite recent increased attention to gang violence in B.C., the report highlights that there is no crisis in our youth justice system and that B.C. is leading the country on most youth justice measures. However, there remains a group of vulnerable children and youth whose needs are not being met, which places them at-risk when it comes to crime.

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The study -- one of the largest undertaken in Canada on this subject -- examines a wide variety of outcomes of 50,551 B.C. children born in 1986 and attending a B.C. school in 1997/98.

Data available over a 10-year span was analyzed, with a focus on youth justice system involvement. It included examining data in categories including education, special needs, justice encounters and outcomes, family structure, income assistance reliance and histories of violence.

Kendall and Turpel-Lafond said that with youth crime, accountability is always necessary and tough enforcement required in some circumstances. But they said the study shows that addressing challenges facing B.C.'s children and youth can best be done by improving stability and positive influences in their lives, working towards educational success, and examining and addressing what is going on in their lives if they come in contact with police – just as any concerned parent would do.

This report is the third in a series of joint special reports on different aspects of the health and well-being of children in care in British Columbia.

Backgrounder attached.

Kids, Crime and Care report available at www.rcybc.ca.

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Backgrounder

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Highlights of

Kids, Crime and Care: Youth Justice Experience and Outcomes

Facts:

- 50,551 children born in 1986 and attending school in B.C. in 1997/98 were studied.
- Of the study group 3.3 per cent had been taken into care at some time.
- Currently, the provincial government is parent to more than 9,000 children and youth in care in British Columbia.

Study Findings:

- Living outside the family parental home increases the risk that a child or youth will become involved with the youth justice system.
- In the study cohort, 36 per cent of all youth in care had appeared before youth court, compared to less than five per cent of the general study population.
- A higher proportion of youth in care in B.C. become involved with the youth justice system than graduate from high school.
- When youth in care entered the youth justice system, the likelihood of high school graduation dropped to 13 per cent.
- Fewer than one-third of the children who became involved with the youth justice system graduated from high school.
- Two-thirds of those involved with youth justice had been on income assistance either by themselves or with their families by the age of 19.
- Nearly one-third of those in the youth justice system were Aboriginal.
- Aboriginal youth were five times more likely to be incarcerated than those in the general population.

What Can Be Done?

- Research shows that poverty and other identified risk factors can impact the family and increase the likelihood of future involvement with the criminal justice system.
- The more risk factors a child is exposed to, the greater the chance they have of justice system involvement, mental illness, lower education, higher rate of crime and unemployment as an adult.
- Early intervention supports to address these risk factors are essential.
- Better outcomes require a higher degree of coordination, focus and accountability.
- It's never too late for interventions.
- Stability in out-of-home placements, police contact constantly triggering reviews of plans of care, and close attention to the daily school experience of each child in care are also needed.

Summary of Recommendations

1. That when a child or youth in care, or in the Child in Home of a Relative program, has more than three placement changes in a year, a report is made to MCFD's Regional Director of Integrated Practice.
2. That MCFD revise its policies and practices to ensure foster and adoptive parents receive the training and necessary supports to care for children with mental health and behavioural issues.
3. That each time a youth in care has a new occurrence of involvement with the youth justice system, their plan of care is reviewed within 30 days and modified as required to address the criminal behaviour.
4. That the ministries of Attorney General and Public Safety and Solicitor General examine policies and practices to ensure that youth in care are not being charged in situations where adolescents living with their families would not be charged.
5. That by September 2009 every school in B.C. assigns a staff person to oversee education planning, monitoring and attainments of children in care that attend their school.
6. That MCFD publicly commits to ensuring that youth justice continues to have provincial leadership with executive representation by an assistant deputy minister.
7. That government social policy ministries produce a cross-Ministry plan that identifies an interlocking network of services to support and assist children, youth and families through the developmental stages.

Full report available at www.rcybc.ca.

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