



News 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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