



Backgrounder

February 23, 2009

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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