



# Talking about kids, crime & care – part 1

**The title on the report** says much about its contents: *Kids, Crime and Care*. It is subtitled *Health and Well-*

*Being of Children in Care: Youth Justice Experiences and Outcomes*. It was prepared and released jointly by BC’s Representative for Children & Youth, and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer.

Though it may appear to be all about the youth and children (clients, if you will), the report is also about the responsibilities of those entrusted with caring for them. What is most important about this report is that it helps to identify the strengths of the care and justice systems while pointing to areas that must be addressed.

First, a definition. The term ‘in care’ refers generally to a situation where the government has taken over responsibility for an under-aged person under the Child, Family and Community Service Act. In other words, the provincial government is the parent.

There are about 9000 children and youth in care in British Columbia right now. About half live with relatives (not their parents). About 1500 First Nations children are in the home of a relative under federal responsibility. A further 600 youth live independently under ‘Youth Agreements.’

The study behind this report is one of the largest ever undertaken in Canada on youth justice and children in care. It examined a 10-year span in the lives of 50,000 children and examined data on more than

200 intervention programs. It was conducted to better understand the risk factors that can lead to vulnerable youth becoming involved in the justice system.

A very positive finding of the research identifies BC as having “the second-lowest youth crime rate in the country and a strong delivery system of youth justice programs and services.” The authors reflect that the system has been supported and seen as part of child and youth development instead of a tool for punishment. They add that “much commendable and capable leadership has been shown in this area.”

As we have written before in this space, a strong start and a good early childhood pays off for the child and for society. Small investments early on mean substantial savings down the road. With vulnerable children and youth, this fact is well reflected. Helping a youth in BC under community supervision costs about

\$20,000 a year; incarcerate them and the cost balloons more than ten-fold.

Intervention programs are intended to divert a child from the path toward crime. They aim to increase youth’s resilience and positive social attachments, both crucial to healthy development. We need to also recognize that

while early intervention is best, it is never too late to intervene, to help a youth to turn their life around as they strive to become productive adults.

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