



About kids, crime & care – part 2

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Last week we looked over

a new report from the provincial Representative for Children & Youth and the Provincial Health Officer called Kids, Crime and Care. It evaluates how children come into contact with the justice system with a particular focus on children in the care of the province.

The central criticism of the report is that there is not yet enough consistency and coordination, and a lack of focus in ‘the system.’ They write: “Better outcomes for children require a much higher degree of coordination, focus and accountability.” Recommendations are connected to several key factors in the life of a child.

Stability is a primary need for a child, however, issues of stability are common in guardianship situations. Living arrangements must be stable with consistent and qualified caregivers. This is brought to the fore with the finding that children living out of the parental home are more likely to be recommended for charges, which brings us to the second theme: contact with the justice system.

Data in the report clearly shows that children in care in BC are more often charged than other youth, and are more likely to end up in custody. There is a concern, then, that

some of these youth may be charged in

situations where youth living with their families would not be charged, or that youth in care may suffer from the absence of parental advocacy once they are in the justice system.

Education is another theme. Where a parent will involve themselves in the success of their child’s education, children in care often do not benefit from the

advocacy of family. Therefore, the authors recommend that where the province is the parent, professional educators should be managing the education of the child. Specifically, the recommendation is that in every BC school, a single staff person be assigned to oversee education planning, monitoring and attainments of the children in care attending the school.

British Columbia has shown much leadership in the area of youth justice. The report encourages continued leadership in this area, along with continued investment in rehabilitation, pro-social supports and focusing on child development, all areas that have proven their value for children.

Support for families is also a key theme. Any approach to addressing the challenges of children in care should start with supporting families all along the course of life, from conception to adulthood. And given the extraordinarily disadvantaged circumstances of many Aboriginal families, plans must address their situation in particular.

Early intervention is the crucial element for all these programs and approaches as it is most effective at reducing the risk factors of later criminality. The benefits accrue to the child, their family, schools and to the

community as a whole. And even if intervention comes

later, the payoff is positive for all involved.

Best of all, though, is early intervention. After all, a year in the life of a child is a very long time.

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