



Response to the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence

Crime Prevention Ottawa congratulates the Honorable Roy McMurty and Dr. Alvin Curling on their exhaustive report: *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence*.

We strongly support your focus on a place-based approach to tackle violence. Focusing efforts and resources on neighbourhoods most at risk will lead to a better allocation of resources towards those most in need. Crime Prevention Ottawa has taken this approach in our own work through the mapping of crime and census data to identify vulnerable neighbourhoods.

We also strongly support the recommendation for an increase of \$200million in the budget for child and youth mental health. If this increase is invested in evidence-based programs to address problems, such as multi-systemic therapy, wrap-around services, the “Boston Model,” addictions prevention or treatment, this investment could lead to significant improvements.

Nevertheless, we were disappointed to see that the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence had very few specific recommendations to address violence in the short and medium term. Ending poverty and racism are laudable goals, but reaching those goals may take a generation or more whereas there are many concrete things that could be done right away to address youth violence.

A general approach to ending poverty in Ontario is very important and something that we support. Nevertheless, we believe that short term targeted measures to assist young people to cope with living in poverty could have been helpful: measures such as easier access to transportation to school, more school based food programs or free arts and recreation programming.

We strongly support the approach of creating community hubs for accessible recreation for children and youth living in poverty. What is missing from the report are concrete suggestions to funding and proven models of programming to be delivered in these community hubs. Without good staffing and good programming, community hubs can also become a focus of negative behaviours.

Given the Review's focus on poverty, the report is strangely silent on the very significant changes in both employment and immigration. With the huge increases in federally funded settlement services in Ontario and the transfer of federal employment programs to the provincial government there are opportunities for change. The report fails to mention these federal-provincial agreements and does not seek to capitalize on these changes.

There is a very high statistical relationship between involvement in the child welfare system and youth crime. One US study indicated that a child known to child welfare was 67 times more likely to be arrested. The report notes this issue but makes no recommendations to remedy the situation. We find it unacceptable that youth are now obliged to attend school until they are 18 but can choose to opt out of child protection at 16. More attention needs to be focused on Ontario's child welfare system.

Similarly, one of the most significant risk factors for criminal involvement is erratic and abusive parenting and an unhealthy home environment. Very little is said about the role of families and none of the recommendations address the issue of parenting other than a very general suggestion to improve services and increase after-school programs. Crime Prevention Ottawa supports targets programming for those families most in need of intervention and support.

Crime Prevention Ottawa supports the collection of race based statistics suggested in the report, but, we suggest that the links between racialized youth and crime may be weaker than implied in the report and that the collection of race based statistics may lead to a few pleasant surprises.

When Crime Prevention Ottawa did a mapping exercise to correlate police reported crime data with census data, we did not identify a statistically significant relationship between immigration status or visible minority status and crime by neighbourhood. We did however find a significant relationship between crime and low-income, crime and rental housing and crime and commercial zoning.

Another hopeful example is the recent report released by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa about Early School Leavers based on the 2006 census. Early school leavers were defined as people between the ages of 15-25 who had not completed high school and who were not in school. Immigrant youth were significantly **less** likely than Canadian born youth to be early school leavers. Overall visible minority youth had the same rates early school leaving as white youth, although the Black and Arab communities were above the average.

Members of youth gangs as identified by the Ottawa Police Service are disproportionately visible minority and immigrant youth, nevertheless, this only represents a few hundred young people out of the many thousands of youth in Ottawa. Youth gangs certainly appear to be a growing phenomenon across Canada and of significant concern to Crime Prevention Ottawa, nevertheless we think it important to keep the problem in perspective.

Crime Prevention Ottawa has created an Ottawa Youth Gang Prevention Initiative which is using a combination of research, partnership building and education to address the youth gang phenomenon. An approach targeted to specific neighbourhoods is being developed.

Finally, Crime Prevention Ottawa welcomes the call for greater coordination between Ministries. We are currently confused as to connections between the recommendations of the Review of the Roots of Youth; the draft MCYS Framework on Youth Gangs; Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy; and various other new funding initiatives such as Focus on Youth and the Urban Priority High School funding.

We are not convinced that the proposed "Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and Anti-Racism" will be able to address the necessary coordination issues to address youth violence and crime prevention. We see the absolute need for a clear public accountability and reporting mechanism, oversight capacity with regards to related ministries, financial strength and a clear focus on crime and violence.

Crime Prevention Ottawa has attempted in the past to engage in a discussion with the provincial government about crime prevention but there is no clear interlocutor with carriage of this issue. This report does not seem to create any body in the provincial government who is responsible for preventing crime and violence. Although we strongly support the coordination of efforts to end racism and poverty, we do not believe that this is a panacea for addressing crime and violence. We encourage you to look at the results of Alberta's Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force as a model of an integrated approach.

We also draw your attention to the work of the Institute for the Prevention of Crime and their publications as well as the resolution on crime prevention adopted by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. This resolution calls for matching investments in prevention and enforcement to combat crime.

Overall, Crime Prevention Ottawa supports the general thrust of the report but we are disappointed that there are not more immediate, specific recommendations, which could make a difference to youth violence in our neighbourhoods today.

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