



Crime Prevention Ottawa's Submission to the

**Review of the Roots of Youth Violence
(December 2007)**

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Executive Summary

Crime Prevention Ottawa brings together leadership stakeholders and the community to work towards safety and crime prevention in Ottawa.

We believe in a holistic, evidence-based approach to preventing youth violence. In order to ensure that all interventions are targeted to those most at risk improved sources of data are essential. Preventing violence is a complex problem which needs the cooperation and partnership of all players including the Province, the Municipality and the community. Our key recommendations include:

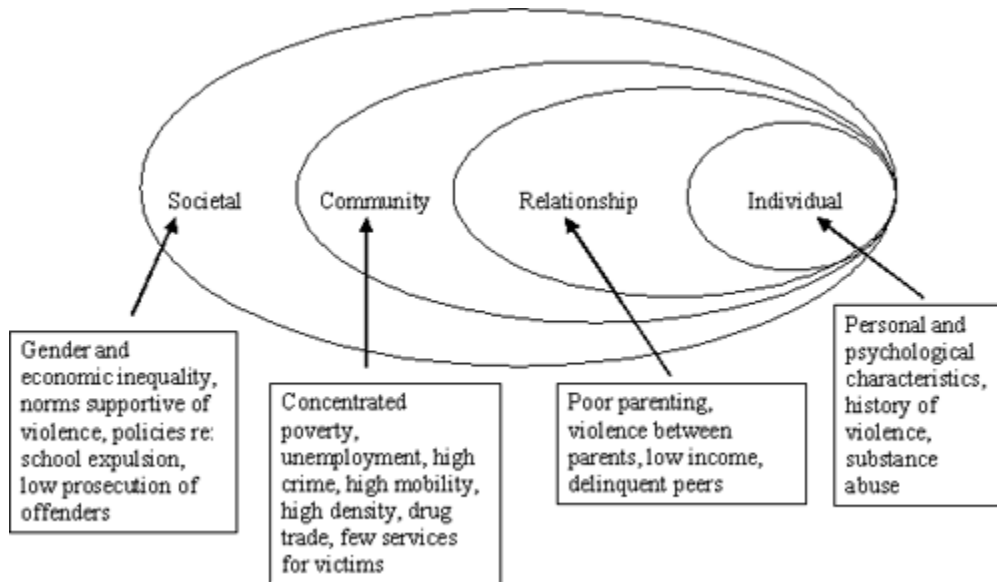
- Create a permanent responsibility centre to coordinate crime prevention efforts across the Provincial government and support similar sustainable coordination at a municipal level.
- Identify sustained strategic investments to mitigate the worsening effects on children and youth on the growing gap between rich and poor.
- Harness investments in Employment Services and Immigrant Settlement to address issues of youth violence.
- Make targeted investments in community development initiatives in high risk neighbourhoods, in programs to support high risk families and in alternative programs in youth justice.
- Review the education funding formula to get schools boards out of cuts and crisis mode.

Introduction

Crime Prevention Ottawa's mission is to "contribute to crime reduction and enhanced community safety in Ottawa through collaborative, evidence-based crime prevention." Our role is to build community capacity, foster community action, nurture partnerships and engage in policy dialogue.


The objective of this paper is to lay out Crime Prevention Ottawa's advice with regards to how risk and protective factors play out in the various sphere's within provincial jurisdiction. We will also make recommendations on how to protect youth against these risk factors and how to support protective factors in their lives.

The general risk factors that lead to young people getting involved in crime are well known and well researched. This World Health diagram is the classic representation of the complex risk factors for crime:



Krug et al. 2002. *World report on violence and health*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

The Social Development research group at the University of Washington has also developed a comprehensive analysis of the risk factors, this one is specific to youth:



Risk factors exist in different environments:

		Substance Abuse	Delinquency	Teen Pregnancy	School Drop-Out	Depression & Anxiety	Violence
Risk Factors							
Community							
Community	Availability of Drugs	✓					✓
	Availability of Firearms			✓			✓
	Community Laws and Norms Favorable Toward Drug Use, Firearms, and Crime	✓	✓				✓
	Media Portrayals of Violence						✓
	Transitions and Mobility	✓	✓		✓		
	Low Neighborhood Attachment and Community Disorganization	✓	✓				✓
	Extreme Economic Deprivation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Family							
Family	Family History of the Problem Behavior	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Family Management Problems	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Family Conflict	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Favorable Parental Attitudes and Involvement in the Problem Behavior	✓	✓				✓
School							
School	Academic Failure Beginning in Late Elementary School	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Lack of Commitment to School	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual/Peer							
Individual/Peer	Early and Persistent Antisocial Behavior	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Alienation and Rebelliousness	✓	✓			✓	
	Friends Who Engage in the Problem Behavior	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Favorable Attitudes Toward the Problem Behavior	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Early Initiation of the Problem Behavior	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Constitutional Factors	✓	✓				✓

A Comprehensive, Coordinated Strategic Approach From the Province

Whether it is school failure, family conflict, unstable neighbourhoods, anti-social values or any other risk or protective factor, there is such wide array of individual, family, community and institutional dimensions to the problem that a comprehensive, coordinated, strategic approach is called for. Crime Prevention Ottawa attempts to do that by bringing together, in partnership, all local aspects of prevention including the local delivery of provincially and federally funded services.

The provincial government makes the policy and legal frameworks for many important aspects of crime prevention, such as education, health and child welfare. This creates a massive challenge in coordination and joint planning. Thus Crime Prevention Ottawa calls for the creation of a Provincial Coordinating Body that would seek to coordinate planning and policy with regards to preventing crime and enhancing community safety across a wide spectrum of provincial ministries.

Three key criteria for the success of such a coordinating body are: public accountability, oversight capacity with regards to related ministries and financial strength. Public accountability could be ensured by mechanisms such as an annual report to the legislature and an independent Board of Governors with a broad scope of expertise and experience. Oversight capacity would mean that there would be an ability to make recommendations with regards to the policies, programs and procedures of Ministries who are central to this issue such as the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Finally, there must be real financial resources attached to this coordinating body both in the ability to influence the spending decisions of other ministries and in dedicated resources.

Two important functions that this provincial coordinating body could fulfill would be to ensure good data and to enhance inter-governmental cooperation. Good data about youth violence, including victimization surveys, would enhance the effectiveness of program investments. Also, just as there needs to be cooperation among provincial ministries, there needs to be communication and cooperation between levels of government. The coordinating body could serve as an interlocutor on issues of prevention with both the federal and municipal levels of government. In fact, Crime Prevention Ottawa has found it challenging to identify anyone in the provincial government to engage in strategic discussions with regards to crime prevention in our community.

A Comprehensive, Coordinated Strategic Approach at a Local Level

Just as a comprehensive, coordinated, strategic approach is necessary at a provincial level, it is equally important that the Province support such an approach at the local level as we are trying to do with Crime Prevention Ottawa. It is at a local level that emerging problems can be quickly identified and appropriate solutions tailored to specific communities.

It is very important that any long-term approach to addressing the roots of youth violence be flexible enough to address the actual conditions and the actual problems in individual communities and families. There cannot be any “one size fits all” approach, which will address problems across Ontario.

A Systems Approach and a Program Approach

The prevention of youth crime and youth violence require an approach which looks both at the big systems and processes in place as well as small local programs. We need to ensure that the billions of dollars being spent on education, housing, health, social services and criminal justice are delivering services which contribute to the solution of the problems and don't risk becoming part of the problem. At the same time, small, targeted investments in creative programs can have significant effects on the lives of young people. Wise investments in such programs are an important part of an overall strategy but need to be well targeted to those at most risk and must be sustainable.

Youth violence is rooted in a wide range of issues from family supports to poverty issues to anti-racism. The strategy needs to start early and include school readiness and even pre-natal issues like fetal alcohol syndrome.

The following are some preliminary suggestions of how the Provincial government could improve outcomes for youth. All of these different spheres need to be part of a comprehensive approach to the risk factors for youth violence. We have tried to address a mix of local and provincial approaches as well as systems and program approaches.

Poverty

Although addressing poverty may be beyond the scope of this inquiry, poverty is at the root of many of the issues that lead to youth violence. There is a well documented increase in the gap between rich and poor in our province. The task force should consider ways in which to mitigate the worst effects of this growing gap on children and youth. For example, the focus groups for Ottawa's Pathways to Education program identified one of the major barriers to school attendance was the cost of bus passes. In fact, the "jacking" (theft) of bus passes is a crime problem in some Ottawa neighbourhoods – it gets very cold here and financial assistance is only available to those who live more than 3 kilometres from school.

Access to Recreation

Young people need access to a range of recreational opportunities so that they can develop skills, be part of a positive group and occupy their leisure time with pro-social activities.

After clothes, I-Pods and bus passes, it is perhaps in recreation that the gap between rich and poor and the gap between engaged and disengaged parents is most stark in young lives. While some families invest thousands of dollars and endless hours for their children's swimming, hockey, dance or other activities – a large number of children never participate in any organized activities outside of school. Even if cost were not a factor, many parents are too overwhelmed, overworked, depressed, addicted or otherwise incapable to attend to the recreational needs of their children.

The City of Ottawa provides a range of recreational programming, but because the City is in a tight financial situation, most programming is run on a cost recovery basis. The City's "Fee Assistance Program", although well intentioned, does not come close to addressing the needs of most at-risk children and youth. The provincial "Communities in Action Fund" offers small amounts of short term project funding for recreation programming.

Crime Prevention Ottawa would recommend that the province, in partnership with municipalities and the community, develop a strategic approach to recreation for high risk children and youth which would address the issues of access, continuity and a range of offerings suitable to the full diversity of Ontario. There are many examples of recreation programming having a significant impact on the lives of young people, such as the "Youth Inclusion Program in the United Kingdom.

Employment

The Province of Ontario has a major opportunity in the context of the new federal-provincial agreements to ensure that employment programs meet the needs of high-risk youth. Crime Prevention Ottawa has communicated with MTCU on this subject and is interested in participating in the consultation process. We encourage you to see this as an ideal opportunity to re-shape programming, to consult broadly on the policy and program directions, and to ensure that programs are designed with the needs of complex, difficult to serve clients in mind.

Immigration

Again, this is a major opportunity for the province, because of the increases in funding for immigrant services in Ontario. These investments need to be creative and address the long-term issues leading to youth violence. For these investments to work to address youth violence, the Federal government needs to be encouraged to drop the service eligibility criteria that limit services to three years in Canada and that exclude refugee claimants. In Ottawa there appears to be a disturbing correlation between communities of refugees caught up in lengthy immigration processes and gang membership. More research is needed on the long-term effects of prolonged family separation and early childhood war trauma.

Neighbourhoods

The presence of drugs, weapons and gang activity in a neighbourhood increases the likelihood that a youngster will become involved in crime. Unfortunately these problems tend to be concentrated in specific neighbourhoods in Ottawa and in the rest of the province. Special attention needs to be paid to the fabric of these neighbourhoods with investments in community development through locally based organizations and initiatives. Community Houses, which in Ottawa are largely supported by the City and the United Way, are an example of successful programs that need more support.

Many neighbourhoods are terrorized by entrenched drug operations that the regular systems of landlord and tenants laws and criminal law do not seem to be able to dislodge. It is unacceptable for children to grow up next door to crack houses. The province should implement "Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods" legislation to enable authorities to deal with these problem properties in a timely and efficient manner.

In Ottawa, and in other cities, the download of deteriorating social housing is a problem the municipality cannot afford to address. These are often the same neighbourhoods experiencing elevated levels of violence.

Education

School failure and early school leaving are significant risk factors for youth crime and violence. Many new provincial initiatives have addressed this problem, such as the student success teachers. Nevertheless, large urban boards, including the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), remain in the “cuts and crisis” mode because they have collective agreements above the provincial average. The provincial government has offered all unions the same increases while the funding formula is inflexible. This situation needs to be resolved. This year the OCDSB was forced to cut its prevention coordinator, whose job it was to bring violence prevention programming to schools, as part of the effort to meet the budget crunch.

Crime Prevention Ottawa welcomes the recent changes to the Safe Schools Act which we hope will lead to less youth being suspended and spending their time in less than constructive pursuits. Unfortunately, it appears that the funding offered for programming to engage suspended students is unlikely to meet the needs.

Crime Prevention Ottawa also welcomes the new focus on character education in the schools. We urge you to look at how this initiative can be tied to evidence-based interventions such as “The Fourth R” to ensure that programs are truly effective. Crime Prevention Ottawa has been supporting the introduction of the grade 9 health “Fourth R” curriculum in local high schools and we hope that provincial support can soon be made available.

Many researchers cite the importance of the early identification of early onset, persistent anti-social behaviour as an important aspect of prevention. The schools are ideally situated to identify such children, and, in fact, do so through the IPRC process. Unfortunately, many parents respond negatively to these interventions, fearing that their children are being unfairly labelled and can be unsupportive of the school’s efforts to address behavioural issues. The Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa promotes an avenue to getting better results with early onset children through a cooperative, wrap-around approach that includes schools, family, neighbourhood and community agencies in addressing these high-risk youngsters. These kinds of initiatives need to be explored and supported.

Crime Prevention Ottawa inventoried the extra programming in schools and found that individual schools vary enormously in their extra programming for high-risk children. Supports need to be in place to inspire principals – educational leaders – to develop local projects that build positive engagement in their schools and their communities.

Family and Community Services

Healthy family relationships and positive parenting are keys to healthy development in children. Promoting positive relationships between parents and their children must start very young. American studies have shown that home visits by public health nurses can have significant crime prevention effects in the long term. Ontario's Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program is not currently considered a crime prevention program, but it may be helpful to do so. Crime Prevention Ottawa would support increased provincial funding for the program and the targeting of the program towards higher risk mothers. In fact, studies have indicated that investments in this kind of programming are more likely to produce results than investments in increased policing.

Creative new programming ideas to help families build healthy relationships are being piloted and need greater support. For example, the "FAST" program, Families and Schools Together and the Strengthening Families for the Future are evidence-based programs. But neither program has a long-term funder for the delivery of services notwithstanding good results from the various pilots.

There are many changes underway in the Child Welfare system, which do seem hopeful. One question, which has not been addressed, is the age at which youth can opt out of child protection services. Ottawa's homeless shelters for youth are seeing too many young people who are leaving the child protection systems too early without sufficient life skills.

Crime Prevention Ottawa has been an active participant in Ottawa's Integrated Drug and Addiction Strategy which calls for improved prevention and treatment services. Furthermore, we note that the lack of mental health services for children, youth and their parents is a significant issue in our community.

Criminal Justice and Policing

There need to be meaningful consequences when young people break the law. A number of issues need further exploration: do the long delays in the court system undermine the system leaving youth feeling that there are no meaningful consequences? The victims of youth violence are often other youth – and far too often this violence is not reported to anyone in authority. Does the low rate of reporting lead youth to feel that they are above the law? In Ottawa, the Police have done an excellent job at engaging with minority communities at a leadership level – but on the street is the distrust between police and minority young people still undermining the enforcement of the law?

The Youth diversion program in Ottawa is achieving a great deal of support. This program and restorative justice approaches need to be re-enforced.

Systems

As has been noted above, there are significant resources being invested in our communities, but those investments don't always work for the families, youth and children most in need. Cooperation and coordination is needed at a provincial, local and client service level. At a basic level, services need to be designed to increase coordination and not put up barriers. There have been many calls for increased service integration and there are many examples of success. Nevertheless, working in partnership remains a challenge. Systemic issues such as confidentiality rules and the fractured systems of funding need to be explored.

Conclusions

The various factors that are at the roots of youth violence need to be addressed by a wide range of interventions across many ministries, institutions and community stakeholders. In order to address these factors in a concrete, long term, strategic manner, a permanent responsibility body, which will lead and coordinate these efforts is called for. Only when youth violence is seen as the complex, multifaceted problem that it is, can real, long term solutions be found.

Key to ensuring a real focus on prevention will be a provincial coordinating body which is publicly accountable, which has authority to make recommendations to other ministries and which has real financial clout.