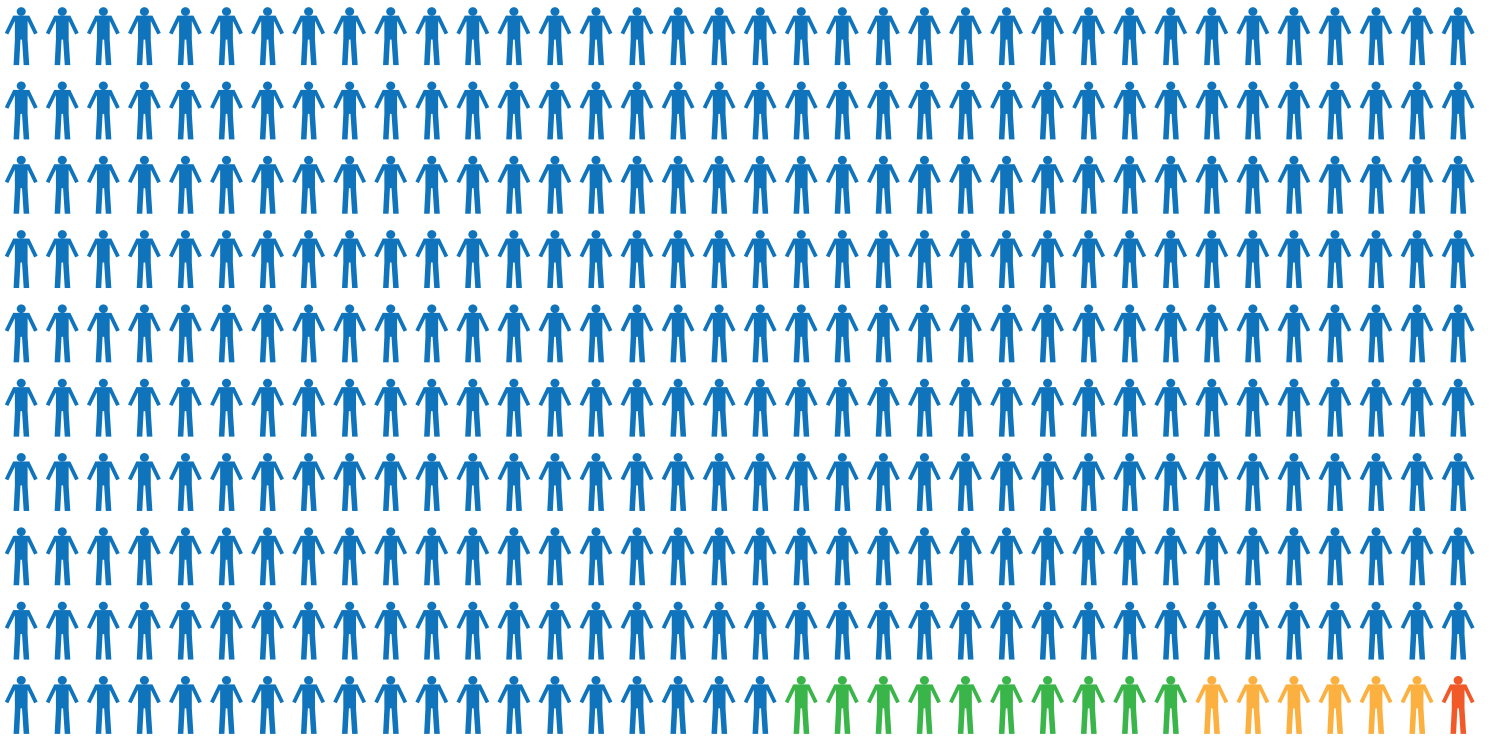


From One System to Another

Crossover Children in Waterloo Region



Region of Waterloo



**Waterloo Region
Crime Prevention Council**
Together for a Safer Community



From One System to Another: Crossover Children in Waterloo Region

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Published by the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council.
May 2012

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Accessible formats available upon request.
Region of Waterloo Document Number 1052554
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Executive Summary:

Children living in the care of the child welfare system have a higher likelihood of justice system involvement in comparison to children living with their biological parents. They are also more likely to become repeat offenders. Crossover children are defined as youth living in the care of the child welfare system who are subsequently charged with a criminal offence; they “cross over” from one system (child welfare) to the other (youth justice). A review of the literature identified six risk factors which increase the likelihood that a youth in contact with the child welfare system, will cross over into the justice system and become a “crossover child”.

Those risk factors are:

- Multiple moves once in care,
- Being placed in a group home,
- Facing mental health issues,
- Facing substance use issues,
- Exposure to maltreatment for long periods of time, and
- Being a male.

If these risk factors culminate in a contact with the justice system, crossover children face a number of possible negative long term outcomes, such as a lifetime of continued re-offending.

This report is in accordance with the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council’s commitment to reducing violence in the Waterloo Region. By focusing on children who crossover, the report summarizes current practices in the area and explores new interventions. The new interventions aim to reduce the number of crossover children and the severity of their involvement with the justice system. This report, in line with current literature, supports early interventions that focus on supporting parents, addressing mental health and addiction issues, and preventing exposure to maltreatment.

In Waterloo Region, children in the care of Family and Children’s Services are considerably over represented in the criminal justice system. This report is the result of much collaborative work from local community organizations, such as the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council and Family and Children’s Services of Waterloo Region. The report proposes recommendations aimed at primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

Recommendations

Primary Prevention

- 1) Reduce the stigma attached to youth at-risk

Secondary Prevention

- 2) Minimize the number of moves children in care experience
- 3) Increase the number of kinship placements and kinship relationships for children in care

Tertiary Prevention

- 4) Decrease the use of group home placements
- 5) Eliminate recidivism among crossover children



Introduction

The Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council (WRCPC) is committed to reducing violence within Waterloo Region. With this goal in mind the council has created a sub-committee, the Violence Prevention Plan Implementation committee (VPPIC), and tasked it with the goal of developing interventions to reduce violence over a forty year time frame. One of the main priorities of the VPPIC is to conduct locally focused violence prevention research. These projects are designed to lead to practical solutions to be implemented within Waterloo Region.

Forty years is a long planning horizon which provides opportunities to focus upon interventions that will create lasting changes. Many projects focusing on children and youth do not have an immediate impact on crime rates but over the long term they can substantially reduce incidents of violence in the community.

This report focuses upon improving services and outcomes for one group of youth, called 'crossover children'. Crossover children refer to teenagers who are in the care of the child welfare system and are charged with a criminal offence (Herz & Ryan, 2008). Creating new interventions focusing on crossover children will create a renewed sense of hope among these youth. This will assist in the short term by improving outcomes related to mental health, attachment and substance use issues. In the long term it will reduce offending and help these youth become contributing members of society.

Crossover children refer to teenagers who are in the care of the child welfare system and are charged with a criminal offence.

Process

Developing interventions recommended in this report involved multiple partners and multiple steps. Firstly, the Violence Prevention Plan Implementation Committee (VPPIC), a sub-committee of the WRCPC, met to develop a basic plan for the project. This committee served as a steering group discussing the project multiple times throughout the research and planning process. A meeting was held with two staff members of Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region (F&CS) – the Manager of Research, Planning and Quality Improvement and the Senior Service Manager¹. This meeting solidified F&CS' interest in the project. Next, a presentation was given to the Justice Advisory Group (JAG), a local committee which is comprised of multiple agencies and organizations involved in the youth justice system including police, the courts and F&CS. This meeting led to another meeting with staff from F&CS. The meeting was held with the Youth Court Worker and the Child and Youth Services Supervisor. A presentation was then made to another sub-committee of the WRCPC, the Advisory Group on Research and Evaluation (AGORE). This committee provided input into the research process and reviewed this final report.

Each of these many meetings was used to gain insights into practices taking place in Waterloo Region and to guide the literature review. This report primarily summarizes these practices and the literature review, concluding with a number of possible recommended options.

¹ The Senior Service Manager is also a member of the VPPIC.



Literature Review

The literature review was conducted using a life course theory perspective. This theory encompasses onset, duration, desistance, continuity of offending, trajectories, and the risk and protective factors which all vary across the life course of an individual. It is important for children to develop proper internal controls and to learn social rules, as failing to do so can lead to behavioural challenges which can lead to crime. According to life course theory, traditional delinquency experiences in youth predict crime in adulthood (Williams & McShane, 2004). Life course theory also argues that informal social control is important. According to this theory, various forms of social bonding change the propensity to commit crime over time. For example, an individual with strong ties to employed peers will be less likely to commit crimes than an individual with peers who face behavioural challenges. Similarly, a youth with strong family ties will be less likely to commit crimes than an individual with weak family ties. Life course theory therefore, predicts a high likelihood of youth involved in the child welfare system also becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

It is important for children to develop proper internal controls and to learn social rules, as failing to do so can lead to behavioural challenges which can lead to crime.

Children in care, as predicted, are much more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system (Haapasalo, 2000; Finley, 2003; Herz, Ryan & Bilchik, 2010; Yampolskaya, Armstrong & McNeish, 2011; Ward, Day, Devc, Sun, Rosenthal & Duchesne, 2011; Farineau & McWey, 2011) and are more likely to become repeat offenders (Cottle, Lee & Heilbrun, 2001; Ryan, Hernadez, & Herz, 2007; Moffitt, 1993; Ward, Day, Bevc, Sun, Rosenthal & Duchesne, 2010; Herz, Ryan & Bilchik, 2010). They are at greater risk of engaging in antisocial behaviour in adolescence and adulthood than those who have not been placed in care (Corrado, Freedman & Blatier, 2011). Behaviour putting youth at risk of conflict with the law and justice system involvement also tends to start earlier than among youth not in care (Alltucker, Bullis, Close & Yovanoff, 2006). Delinquent behaviour and crimes by youth in the child welfare system are more likely to lead to charges. In a British Columbia study, children in care were nearly seven times more likely to be charged with criminal offences than children not in care (Corrado, Freedman & Blatier, 2011, p 109).

This section will begin by exploring what causes an increased likelihood that a child growing up in care will become involved in the youth justice system. It will then examine the long term outcomes for crossover children. Finally, it will conclude by showing how to prevent children from becoming crossover children.

The risk factors leading to an increased likelihood that an individual in the care of the child welfare system will become involved in the criminal justice system have been thoroughly explored in the literature. Protective factors which decrease or mitigate risk factors have also been explored. Six risk or protective factors, as demonstrated below, have been identified: multiple moves once in care, being placed in a group home, facing mental health issues, facing substance use issues, exposure to maltreatment for long periods of time and being a male. However, what is most evident is the lack of a direct causal relationship between being placed in the care of family and children's service agencies and involvement in the justice system (Finley, 2003; Haapasalo, 2000; Alltucker, Bullis, Close & Yovanoff, 2006). Instead, it has been argued that, "children suffering from histories and trauma and attachment disruptions are predisposed to behaviour problems" leading to difficulties in residential placements (Finley, 2003, 5). Group home staff members are then challenged to manage these difficult behaviours leading to involvement in the justice system (Finley, 2003). It is important to note that these placements likely actually improve outcomes for the children, but the past traumas are so severe that the system cannot fully mitigate their impact (Huefner, Handwerk, Ringle & Field, 2009; Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000).



One specific practice within the child welfare system has been noted to make outcomes worse for children. This issue is related to moves within the system. The likelihood of involvement in the justice system increases among children with multiple moves in the child welfare system (Haapasalo, 2000; Finlay 2003; Ward, Day, Bevc, Sun, Rosenthal & Duchesne, 2010). Finley (2003), the chief advocate in Ontario for child and family services, expanded on this theme using information gathered from interviews with five crossover youth. She found the negative impact of multiple placement leads to a sense of loss causing further attachment issues among crossover youth. In addition, Finley (2003) found four additional themes related to the child welfare system. First, she found that the youth faced trauma leaving home, all the youth thought they were happiest when living with their family of origin. This even included youth who left their home because of abuse. The second theme she noted was that the relationship with child welfare workers was extremely important to the youth. Youth found it disruptive to have multiple workers and the relationship with workers was mixed, some seen as positive and others negative. The youth noted that when there was a lack of responsiveness by a worker they acted out. Her third theme focused upon turning points. The youth all talked about turning points like being asked to leave or leaving the home. In these difficult moments the youth wished they had more support. Finley's last theme was that group homes were gateways to custody. The group homes were seen as a bad environment even by the teens. They all talked about wanting out of the group homes but they felt because of their age that getting into foster care was hopeless. Some of the teens talked about acting out as a mechanism of leaving the group home feeling that the juvenile justice system was a better place to be. Finley (2003) demonstrated bleak outcomes for teens that end up in group homes. Other academic literature validates this outlook.

Even youth who left home because of abuse thought they were happiest when living with their family of origin.

Ryan, Marshall, Herz and Hernandez (2008) performed a comprehensive study using police reported arrests to compare youth in group home placements to youth in foster placements. The results showed that being placed in a group home predicted arrests. In addition, being male was an important factor as was being a victim of prior physical abuse. Particularly troubling is that only 25% of the sample ever lived in a group home but 40% of the arrests occurred while individuals were in a group home setting. Ryan et al argue that this presents two, non-mutually exclusive, possible causes of these arrests: 1) peer contagion and/or 2) group home policies. This caused them to ask two poignant questions: "are youth actively seeking peers who share similar beliefs and attitudes with regard to aggression, delinquency and crime (selection association) or is the peer group developing similar attitudes over time as a result of frequent contact and limited supervision (reciprocal association)?" (Ryan et al, 2008, p. 1096). Their second question focused on threats within the group home. This is particularly relevant as more youth in a group home are charged with making threats compared to youth in non-group home placements. They asked: "Are verbal threats more likely to occur in group settings or does the response to a threat vary between group home staff and foster parents?" (Ryan et al, 2008, p. 1096). They were not able to answer these questions with their data, but either possibility does not negate the main finding that teens in group homes face a higher risk of arrest. Ryan et al (2008), however, concluded their study noting that their results may face limitations due to the over reliance on police reported data.

The limitations in the previous study were answered by a study by Farineau and McWey (2011). They similarly compared group home results to children in foster care, but instead of using police data they relied upon self reported delinquency and caregiver reported delinquency. In the Farineau and McWey's (2011) study comparing adolescents in group homes to those in foster care, they found that it was living in a group home, with lack of closeness to the primary caregiver and participation in three or more structured activities per week, which predicted delinquency (Farineau & McWey, 2011). Adolescents who reported closeness to their caregiver had the lowest self reported and caregiver reported delinquency scores. This suggests, according to Farineau and McWey (2011), that "involvement in extra-curricular activities could not counter the negative consequences of weakened relationships with caregivers" (p. 986). Unfortunately, living in a group home is not the only risk factor for justice system involvement among children in care.



Children in care facing mental health issues are much more likely than children without mental health issues to become involved in the criminal justice system (Johnson-Reid, 2002; Corrado, Freedman & Blatier, 2011). This is a particular concern as nearly 2/3 (65%) of children in care are diagnosed with mental disorders, compared to less than 1/6 of children not in care (Corrado, Freedman & Blatier, 2011, p102). Mental health issues include, but are not limited to, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder and neuropsychological conditions like fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (MacRae, Bertrand, Paetsch & Hornick, 2011). In one study nearly three quarters (72%) of children in care involved in the criminal justice system had educational special needs as a result of intense behavioural problems or serious mental illness. Alongside issues of mental health issues, substance use issues among children in care also increases the risk of justice system involvement (Johnson-Reid, 2002).

Finally, the issue of maltreatment warrants consideration. The older a child is at time of placement in the child welfare system the greater the likelihood of involvement with the justice system (Haapasalo, 2000; Ward, Day, Bevc, Sun, Rosenthal & Duchesne, 2010; Yampolskaya, Armstrong & McNeish, 2011). This may be explained by the amount of exposure to maltreatment these children face before coming into care. Yampolskaya, Armstrong and McNeish (2011) showed that male children who have been maltreated for long periods of time and end up in care are at high risk of involvement in the justice system. Their definition of maltreatment includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and emotional abuse, with children who experienced sexual abuse being at the highest risk of justice system involvement.

The older a child is at time of placement in the child welfare system the greater the likelihood of involvement with the justice system.

This review has identified six factors that increase the likelihood that a youth in contact with the child welfare system will become a crossover child. These factors are:

- Multiple moves once in care,
- Being placed in a group home,
- Facing mental health issues,
- Facing substance use issues,
- Exposure to maltreatment for long periods of time, and
- Being a male.

If these risk factors culminate in a contact with the justice system, crossover children face a number of possible negative long term outcomes.

Most people commit some delinquent acts in adolescence (Moffitt, 1993). In other words, even if they are not caught by the justice system most youths commit acts which violate the law. Sociologists and criminologists generally categorize youth who commit delinquent acts into two groups; life course persistent and adolescence-limited. Life course persistent individuals keep engaging in criminal acts their whole life, whereas adolescence-limited youth stop engaging in criminal acts as they get older (Moffitt, 1993). Life course persistent individuals differ in a number of key ways. They tend to start offending much earlier potentially as young as three, they are more likely to face neuropsychological impairments, they have lower academic skills, and they have difficulty with relationships. Studies predict about 5 to 10 percent of juvenile offenders will become persistent life course offenders (Cottle, Lee & Heilbrun, 2001; Moffitt, 1993; Ward, Day, Bevc, Sun, Rosenthal & Duchesne, 2010; Yampolskaya, Armstrong & McNeish, 2011). However, the numbers are much higher for crossover youth.



Ryan, Hernandez, and Herz, (2007) found three trajectories for children leaving care: non-offenders, early onset desisters and chronic offenders. Non-offenders did not commit any crimes, early onset desisters stopped committing crimes by about age 18 and chronic offenders continued committing crimes well into adulthood. The non-offender group was the most common, with 52 percent of study participants. Next were chronic offenders, with 27 percent, followed by desisters at 21 percent. The adolescents without any arrests while involved in the child welfare system were most likely to end up in the non-offenders group. Only 5% of the non-offenders group had any arrests. The study found the desisters group arrests peaked at age 18, and their offending is generally restricted to minor offences. The chronic offenders tended to be involved with the justice system while in the child welfare system. Their first arrests came earlier than that of other children. Chronic offenders also tended to have school enrolment issues, and they were the most likely to experience placement instability (Ryan, Hernandez, & Herz, 2007). Therefore, the early onset desisters can be seen as equivalent to adolescent limited offenders and the chronic offenders as similar to life course persistent offenders. In addition, the majority of crossover youth repeat offenders suffer from mental health issues and/or substance use issues (Herz, Ryan & Bilchik, 2010). Once involved in this chronic offender group the long-term outcomes are bleak. Particularly troubling is research showing crossover youth are more likely to abuse or neglect their own children (Colman, Mitchell-Herzfeld, Kim & Shady, 2010).

Despite these negative long term consequences for crossover youth there is little literature on what interventions can be used to prevent children from becoming crossover children. Ryan, Hernandez, and Herz's (2007) research showed that there is a group of children in the child welfare system that is likely to turn into chronic offenders. However, they found "there are no established standards for how best to serve this crossover population" (Ryan, Hernandez, & Herz, 2007, p. 90). The findings discussed below show some minor exceptions.

Before exploring specific intervention options a few general recommendations for reform are worth noting. Krinsky (2010) a former federal prosecutor from Los Angeles, California, argues four primary reforms are needed to ensure that foster care is not a breeding ground for the justice system. Some of these reforms are applicable to the Canadian context as well. First, efforts to combat juvenile crime must address the needs of youth in foster care. This can be done by addressing mental health needs of youth in care, providing supports for teens as they leave care, and providing more flexibility in funding to keep families intact. Secondly, there is a need to prioritize investments in proven early interventions. The third reform is to revisit the inflexibility in sentencing youth. This is less applicable to Canada, but given the recent passing of Bill C-10 this may become an important issue in the future. Bill C-10 provides mandatory minimum sentences for a number of criminal offences which will make it more difficult to divert young offenders from juvenile detention facilities to alternative sanctions. Finally, the fourth and final recommendation is to end the stigma associated with the image of youth at risk, and change perceptions of youth under the care and supervision of family and children service agencies.

Other authors have also made general recommendations to improve services for crossover children. Typically these recommendations have been mentioned at the end of studies reviewing the root causes of crossover children. For example, Ryan, Hernandez, and Herz (2007) suggest "...it seems worthwhile for child welfare agencies to consider identifying children and adolescents struggling in school settings (early identification, that is) and developing strategies to improve academic engagement" (p. 91). In contrast, Farineau and McWey's (2011) focus on social control and suggests that "promoting an adolescent's social control by working to improve their relationship with their caregiver may improve behavioural outcomes" (p. 967).



Jack's Troubled Career

Jack's Troubled Career by H. Philip Hepworth first appeared in the Prevention newsletter produced by the National Crime Prevention Centre. It is an account of the financial costs to society of one young person in trouble. Although the story is fictional, it is an effective example, showing how difficulties early in life can escalate to serious problem with the law. The story uses accurate numbers which represent conservative costs to various government systems.

In the first ten years of Jack's life he is exposed to child abuse and family dysfunction has difficulty relating to peers, does poorly in school, and goes through multiple placements in different foster homes. Before Jack turns 12 he has already come in contact with the police for his misbehaviour at school and in the community. His first charge comes at the age of 12. For the next five years he is regularly in contact with the justice system having a total of seven appearances in youth court. During these six years Jack spends time in group homes and open custody facilities, and ultimately in a secure custody facility. Jack is released from custody by the age of 18 and soon after his girlfriend becomes pregnant. The story ends emphasizing the likelihood of the cycle continuing with Jack's child.

In 1997 when the story was written the total spent on Jack to age 18 was \$511,500. Taking this number and inflating it using the Bank of Canada inflation calculator, equates to \$686,741 in 2012. This amount only includes the cost to the justice system and the child welfare system. It does not include the cost of pain and suffering his offences inflict on others.

This story is not suggesting that the child welfare system does not help children. Instead, it points to the importance of investing in early interventions. Over 75% of the expenses associated with Jack's troubled career occur once he has become involved in the justice system. If some of this spending was redirected toward early interventions, which succeeds in preventing child abuse, criminal involvement and recidivism the long term benefit to society would be enormous.

A study by Platt (2009) on juvenile offenders but not specifically examining crossover children is worth citing. Platt's (2009) study examining protective factors that reduce recidivism for juveniles exiting prison found living with relatives was related to reduced recidivism. Conversely pro-social peers, school and participation in extra curricular activities did not reduce recidivism. Similarly, finding family members of foster children can provide emotional supports for children in care even if it does not lead to legal permanency (Malm & Allen, 2011). This could help to reduce recidivism or instances of crossover children. Finally, it is worth noting Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) found child welfare agency organizational climate was positively related to outcomes for children in care.



The literature did, as previously mentioned, find interventions worth exploring. These interventions will be reviewed below. However, there is one intervention that did not work which merits mention. Abrams, Shannon and Sangalang (2008) evaluated a Transitional Living Program for crossover youth and non-crossover youth. Youth spent six weeks upon release in a transitional program that gradually increased their time spent in home settings. The results did not find a statistically significant impact for the program on recidivism. Instead, age at arrest and number of prior arrests predicted reoffending (Abrams, Shannon & Sangalang, 2008). Fortunately, other interventions have been found in the literature to be effective or promising at reducing recidivism or preventing kids in care from becoming crossover children.

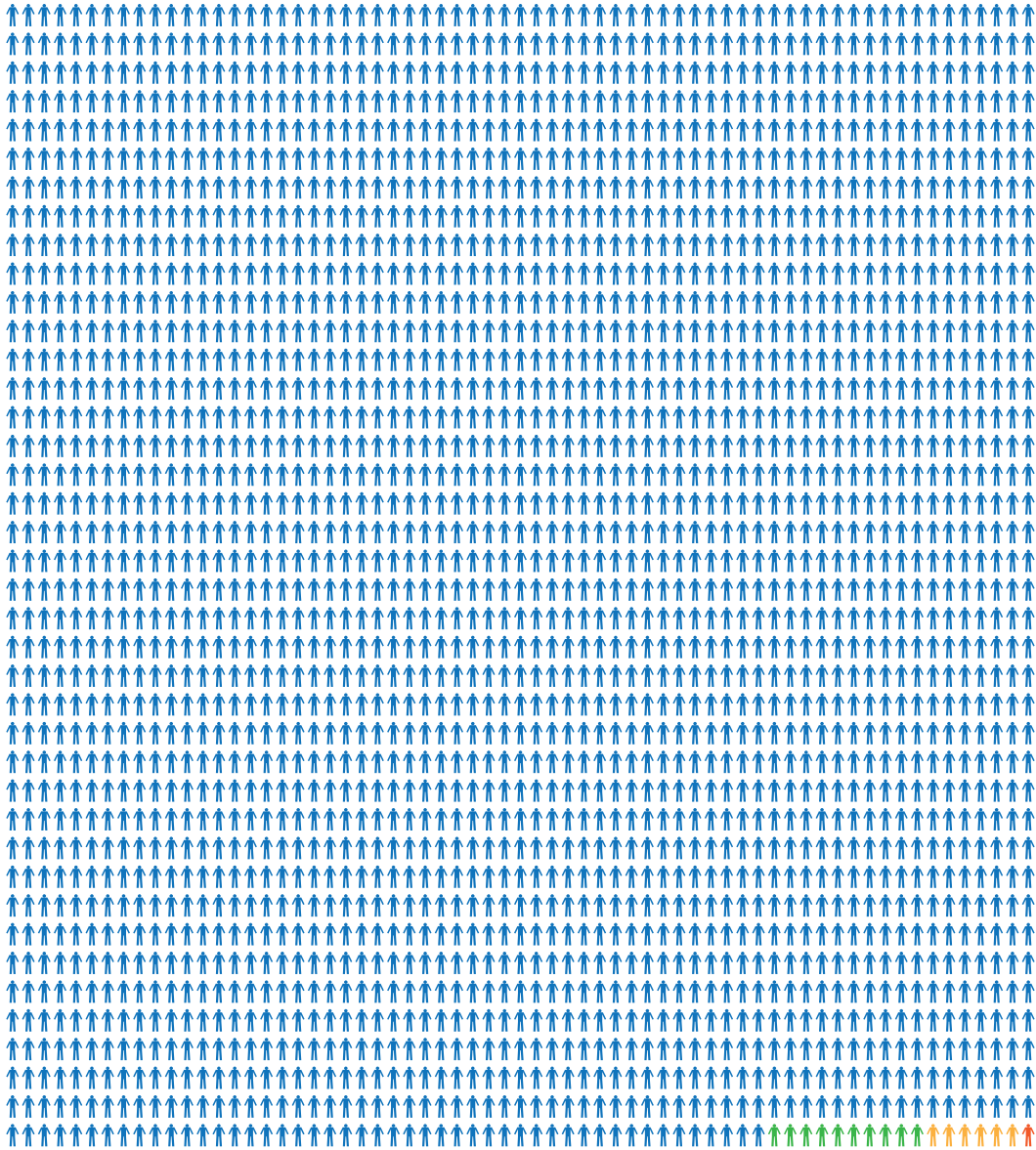
A brief recap of this section will be provided before reviewing the local context. The section began by showing that children in care are much more likely to become involved in the justice system (Haapasalo, 2000; Finley, 2003; Herz, Ryan & Bilchik, 2010; Yampolskaya, Armstrong & McNeish, 2011; Ward, Day, Devc, Sun, Rosenthal & Duchesne, 2011; Farineau & McWey, 2011). Once involved in the justice system they are at a high risk of becoming repeat offenders (Cottle, Lee & Heilbrun, 2001; Ryan, Hernadez, & Herz, 2007; Moffitt, 1993; Ward, Day, Bevc, Sun, Rosenthal & Duchesne, 2010; Herz, Ryan & Bilchik, 2010). Children in care become involved in the justice system at a higher percentage than other children primarily due to the issues associated with their requirement to be placed in care (Finley, 2003). Once in care a number of other factors can predict their likelihood of justice system involvement. These include multiple moves once in care, being placed in a group home, mental health issues, substance use issues, exposure to maltreatment for long periods of time and being male. Unfortunately, once a youth becomes involved in a group home or the justice system few interventions have been proven to decrease the likelihood of long term justice system involvement.

Local Context

Within Waterloo Region, Youth Justice Services took a snapshot of children in Kitchener and Waterloo who were on probation as of July 19, 2010. There were a total of 389 children aged 12 to 18 on probation. From this group 49 (13%) were living in Family and Children's Services custody and a further 17 (4%) youth were involved with F&CS (Salmen, 2010). Putting these numbers in context, in October 2011 there were 560 children in care in Waterloo Region (Wood, 2011, p. B1)² and over 125,000 children and youth under the age of 19 live in Waterloo Region ("2006 Census Bulletin 2", n.d.). This means that less than 1% of the children are involved with F&CS. Yet, F&CS clients make up 17% of youth on probation. Clearly, a disproportionate number of children in care are becoming involved in the youth justice system.

These results clearly demonstrate children in the care of Family and Children's Services within Waterloo Region are over represented in the criminal justice system. According to Finley (2003), part of the reason for higher re-offending among crossover youth compared to other youths at risk for coming into conflict with the law may be found in group home settings. She found children living in group homes may get in trouble with the law for things that they would not get in trouble for outside of a group home. For example, if a youth misses a court mandated curfew, group home staff members are very likely to notify the police, whereas if a child living at home with his or her parents they are less likely to report the breach. This is an issue that has been identified as a local priority and has been improved upon. However, discussion with staff members at F&CS suggests more work may still be warranted in this area.

² This represents a 10% increase in children in care since April 2011 (Wood, 2011, p. B2)



RATIO 1:50



of Youth in Waterloo Region



Youth involved with F&CS



Youth involved with Probation & Parole



Youth involved with F&CS AND Probation & Parole



Current Intervention in Waterloo Region

Waterloo Region also has a number of projects that may help to reduce the likelihood of a child in care becoming a crossover child. Recently Waterloo Region Family and Children's Services hired staff to focus on finding family connections and dealing with attachment issues among children in care. F&CS also offers plenty of programming for children in care, such as the peer mentoring program.

Once a child has had contact with police within Waterloo Region a number of programs are offered by the John Howard Society of Waterloo Wellington and Community Justice Initiatives to assist the youth. These programs are available for all youth, including those who are within the care of F&CS.

The following programs are offered by the John Howard Society. Extra judicial measures provides workshops for youth who have not been charged but have been diverted by police to learn more about the effects of their offending behaviour. Extrajudicial sanctions is a process of diversion from the courts according to qualifiers the Crown Attorney decides upon. Expanded extrajudicial sanctions is a more intensive court diversion program, involving a partnership with Community Justice Initiatives for youth having problems in their home environment. These three programs provide opportunities for youth to take responsibility for their actions and make amends to the victims and the broader community. The Attendance Centre Program is an alternative to custody for youth who have been convicted of their crimes. The program is often recommended in court or referred by the young person's probation officer. It focuses upon developing cognitive skills and reinforcing positive values to create responsible behaviour. Youth develop stronger problem solving skills and learn to apply critical reasoning and consequential thinking in their everyday lives. Youth who have anger issues are also enrolled in 16 sessions on anger management. This course of study and discussion helps youth learn ways to recognize, manage and express anger appropriately.

Community Justice Initiatives delivers three programs related to crossover youth. The first is called Family Group Decision Making (FGDM). Through FGDM families involved with F&CS are offered a culturally-sensitive process engaging family, extended family and friends to collaboratively develop a permanent care plan for their child or children. The plan addresses the safety concerns of F&CS but seeks to retain and strengthen family relationships with the hope that the child or children can remain in the family. The second is the Youth Victim Offender Reconciliation Program. This program is for youth aged 12-17 who have committed an offence and take responsibility for their actions. In the program, the youth are encouraged to agree to a restitution agreement with the complainant and to restore the complainant's losses. Finally, Community Justice Initiatives has recently introduced the Back Home Project to assist youth as they exit custodial institutions.

Children in care make up less than 1% of the population of Waterloo Region yet they make up more than 10% of the youth involved in the justice system (Salmen, 2010). This issue has not gone unnoticed, and Waterloo Region agencies have developed a number of programs to assist children in care and children in the justice system. Some of these programs, such as Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) at Community Justice Initiatives, have been designed to interact with the criminal justice system and Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region. There are still additional opportunities to improve on Waterloo Region's services for crossover children. The next section will outline some promising interventions worthy of consideration.



Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region's Role

Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region recognizes the need for all children and youth to have a secure attachment to a primary caregiver. The vast majority of the children and youth served by Family and Children's Services remain in the care of their families. The agency offers a number of parenting and children's programming throughout Waterloo Region. Many of the programs are offered in partnership with community agencies such as: The John Howard Society; Mosaic Counselling and Family Services; Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region, The House of Friendship; Ontario Early Year's Centres and various other Community Centres and local agencies.

In 2009, through a Ministry of Children and Youth Services grant, the agency began a project focused on building knowledge of attachment and trauma responses in children and caregivers. In partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University, Kitchener Waterloo Counselling Services and the Reach Out Centre for Kids, Family and Children's Services began a project to enhance the understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment disorders on children who have been placed in foster or kinship care. Another important component of the project is to improve our understanding of the impact of inter-generational trauma and attachment histories for parents and the impact this has on their parenting. Early results of this research indicate that understanding and focusing on trauma and attachment work results in parents feeling more supported by agency staff and improved engagement with the agency. In addition, foster parents increased their level of understanding of children and youth behaviour and placement moves for children in care decreased.

This report highlights the benefit for youth who are connected to relatives in reducing recidivism. Family and Children's Services understands the benefits of placing children with relatives. Children placed with family experience a sense of continuity in their lives, they have a more secure attachment to their caregivers and improved self-esteem. In 2010, the agency created a Kinship Service team specializing in assessing and supporting relatives to care for children unable to live with their parents. In 2011, the agency introduced two new positions devoted to finding family for children who are not able to live with their biological parents. Family Finders also assist youth who are Crown Wards to build family connections that will become life-long and enduring supportive relationships for the youth, even if the youth cannot live with their relatives.

Family and Children's Services provides a number of supports and services to children in care to assist them to meet their educational goals and reach their full potential. For example, a number of programs are offered to children and youth focused on building assets – these programs offer opportunities to build social skills, learn about music, arts, and sports all while having fun. Several initiatives are aimed at education. For example, two educational consultants help advocate for children and youth in the school system and assist the agency to develop collaborative working relationships with our local Boards of Education. A tutoring program is offered to children and youth which involves tutors working directly with the classroom teacher and at times in the classroom setting. Last year through the support of the agency's Foundation 32 youth who are Crown Wards were supported with scholarships to assist them in completing post-secondary education. Once a youth in care receives a scholarship, the Foundation commits to annual financial assistance until the youth has completed their program.



Interventions in the Academic Literature

In 2009, the Ontario Government reviewed policies related to adoption. They released the report *Raising Expectations* (2009) which made a number of relevant recommendations. First the report calls for families to be recruited for older Crown wards and Crown wards with special needs. This would be done by “Develop[ing] a focused program to find families for older Crown wards and Crown wards with special needs.” (emphasis in original) (*Raising expectations*, 2009, p. 12). Once Crown wards were adopted, the report suggested support needs to be provided to adoptive families by providing them with referrals to community-based services alongside post-adoption subsidies. This entire report should then be monitored by the provincial government to ensure the recommended target of doubling the number of Crown wards adopted is met, and to review outcomes for youths who are not adopted.

While this approach is pursued provincially, Waterloo Region has the opportunity to begin local initiatives to complement the work being done at a provincial level. This report found seven projects in the academic literature that could be applicable in Waterloo Region.

1) Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care

Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) is an intervention designed to assist children in the child protective system that have been in trouble with the law or at risk of contact with the justice system. The treatment program assists children to return to live with their biological parents.

Youth in the MTFC program are placed with trained foster parents while the youth's biological parents participate in family therapy. The child's placement is used to set boundaries. The children's biological families are also taught how to set appropriate boundaries allowing the children to return home. Eventually the youth joins the family therapy sessions. While the biological parents are improving their parenting skills the youth are closely supervised with clear rules in place at home, in the community and at school. This intensive supervision limits foster parents to one or two children at a time. One of the keys to this program's success is that it shields children from other youth in group homes who are facing behavioural challenges and brings them into contact with less troubled youth (Chamberlain & Reid, 1998). Applying MTFC to Waterloo Region would require a substantive effort. Foster care families would need to be recruited to assist children with behavioural concerns, extensive training would need to be provided up-front to these families, and finally on-going supports would be required once children were placed in their temporary care. However, despite these expenses, a cost benefit analysis has shown this program to significantly reduce recidivism (Chamberlain & Reid, 1998). The savings associated with the decreases in offending are significant enough to more than offset the costs of the program (Aos, Phipps, Barnoski & Lieb, 2001, Osher et al, 2003).

2) Teaching Family Model

The Teaching Family Model is an intervention designed for children at-risk of justice system involvement including children in the foster care system. It is similar to the MTFC program. The Teaching-Family Model involves carefully selected Teaching Parents, (usually married couples). Teaching parents are provided approximately forty hours of in-depth training before initiation into the program. They then live in a family style living environment with approximately six to eight youths. Over the nine months the children are living in the residence there is an emphasis on family living and developing skills. The teaching parents also interact with the youth's biological parents, their teachers and other support networks.

The Teaching Family Model has less start up costs than MTFC. Therefore this model may be more feasible for introduction into Waterloo Region.



3) Stop-Gap Model

The Stop-Gap Model is a short term (90 day to 1 year) intervention focusing on children aged 6 to 17 with behaviour issues. This model envisions group care as a short term intervention focused upon helping the youth discharge to a less intensive community treatment. The program is designed to stop a youth's disruptive actions and prepare the youth for a lower level community based treatment. Children working in this model go through three levels of intervention 1) Environment based (i.e., academic intervention and social skills) 2) Discharge related (i.e., intensive case management) and 3) Intensive interventions (i.e., support planning). The program offers a parent and child component. However, the Stop-Gap Model has limited evaluations (James, 2011). If this program is offered in Waterloo Region it would be worthwhile to conduct a pilot project with an evaluation component to determine the effectiveness of the model.

4) Aggression Replacement Training

Aggression replacement training (ART) focuses upon cognitive-behavioural issues in a group setting. Juvenile offenders are placed in ART with the goal to improve their behaviour. The program has not been explicitly applied to crossover youth but instead it is offered to offending youth generally. ART has three components to the intervention: anger control, skill streaming and moral reasoning. Anger control helps participants identify their triggers and learn to control their reactions; skill streaming teaches social skills and moral reasoning teaches the youth how to work through conflicts. The program has been shown to reduce recidivism in a cost effective manner (Aos et al, 2001; Osher, Quinn, Poirier & Rutherford, 2003).

Waterloo Region programs are likely already incorporating elements of ART. The emphasis on anger reduction and moral reasoning skills are already featured in the extra judicial measures and extra judicial sanctions programs offered by the John Howard Society of Waterloo Wellington.

5) Positive Peer Culture

The Positive Peer Culture program is for troubled youth aged 12 to 17. The program is not specifically for children in care but it is applicable to a residential setting. Typically the program involves groups of 8 to 12 youths who meet five times a week over six to nine months. The program relies upon four components: 1) Building group responsibility 2) Regular group meetings; 3) Service learning; and 4) Teamwork skill development. The program does not have a parent component and it has been suggested that it may be less applicable for children in the justice system who have faced maltreatment as children (James, 2011). If the Positive Peer Culture program is adopted in Waterloo Region it may be worthwhile to apply the program to children in the justice system generally while reserving some spots for children who are Crown wards of F&CS.

6) Sanctuary® Model

The Sanctuary Model is designed to assist children in care that have experienced trauma. The model begins by building shared goals among treatment staff. The model includes 12 specific sessions focused upon safety, emotional management, loss and future. In addition, twice daily community meetings are a key program component. Evaluations are limited and the program does not include a parenting component (James, 2011). F&CS may benefit from exploring this model for ideas without adopting it in its entirety.



7) Multi-Systemic Therapy

Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) is an intensive clinical intervention designed to work with families, with a focus on the youth at risk. MST aims to address the factors that directly cause and maintain severe antisocial behaviour in youth and their families, such as chronic violence and substance abuse among young offenders (Aos, Phipps, Barnoski, Lieb, 2001). “MST is delivered in an intensive, individualized manner to meet each family’s unique needs as they relate to child psychopathology, peer relational problems, academic performance, neighbourhood characteristics, family functioning, and support available to the family system” (Schoenwald et al., 2003b, cited in Ellis, Weiss, Han & Gallop, 2010, p. 858). Therapeutic work is based in the home, school, and/or community setting, over a period of 3 to 5 months, where caregivers are considered to be essential agents of change. There are nine principles that guide assessment and treatment, such as: understanding the youth’s social ecology, focusing on systemic strengths, and promoting long-term maintenance of the positive change (Ellis et. al, 2010). MST has a strong research base. Studies have shown promising results in preserving the family unit when working with youth at risk and their families; it is said to be an effective alternative to out-of-home placements (Ogden, Halliday-Boykins, 2004; Henggeler, Melton & Smith, 1992). However Littell (2008), in synthesizing the research, argues that its effectiveness is debatable.

Recommendations

The purpose of this report is to explore new interventions to support youth in the child welfare system and their families within Waterloo Region. The goal is to reduce the number of children that cross over from Family and Children Services to youth justice systems and to reduce the severity and number of delinquent activities. Successfully meeting this goal will require the work of F&CS as well as other local agencies and community volunteers. The scope of this report does not allow for recommendations of specific programs to address these issues. However, the evidence outlined should be used to justify a continued focus on early interventions to improve outcomes for children. These interventions should focus on supporting parents, addressing mental health and addiction issues, and preventing exposure to maltreatment. The five recommendations focus on targets at the primary, secondary and tertiary level to improve the care of youth at the highest risk of becoming crossover children. Primary preventions focus upon individuals who face risk factors which lead to an increased likelihood of becoming a crossover child. Secondary preventions target individuals facing risk factors for an increased likelihood of becoming a crossover child. Finally, tertiary preventions occur once someone has become a crossover child. These recommendations present goals that if achieved will reduce the number of crossover children and ensure those children who do cross over do not become repeatedly involved in the justice system. Below each recommendation is a brief write up of how Waterloo Region can work to meet the goals set out in the recommendations.

Primary Prevention

1) Reduce the stigma attached to youth at-risk

Having a caring and dependable adult in a youth’s life is a strong protective factor against delinquent behaviour. Building a Waterloo Region culture where all teens are treated with respect by adults will develop an expectation amongst children that they should become productive adults. To this end, a campaign will be introduced to end stigma that is currently associated with at-risk youth and to encourage adults to become involved in the lives of all children. In 2002 the WRPCPC introduced the Look Deeper Campaign with a similar goal to reduce stigma. Ten years later is an appropriate time to revisit this project. To encourage adult involvement, a continuum of participation



will be introduced and encouraged. At one end of the continuum is the idea that all children should be treated as individuals with the potential to do good deeds regardless of their behaviour. In other words, adults will be encouraged to focus on separating youths' actions from youth as individuals. The other end of this continuum will call on adults to become active in the lives of children in their community. Many different forums of activity will be encouraged including becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister, volunteering as a mentor or becoming a foster parent. This work will be led by the WRCPC through the Violence Prevention Implementation Committee. It will be built on the Look Deeper Campaign by bringing a number of community partners together to help craft messaging and to provide logistical and financial support.

Secondary Prevention

2) Minimize the number of moves children in care experience

Once a child is in care, multiple changes in residence are a significant risk factor for criminal justice system involvement. F&CS recognizes this risk and is working to reduce the number of residential moves. In addition, they have been working with local school boards to reduce the number of changes in schools children in care experience. By providing a stable school for children in care, continuing these efforts should help to reduce the number of crossover children in Waterloo Region.

3) Increase the number of kinship placements and kinship relationships for children in care

F&CS has begun an innovative Family Finder program to assist children in care to make contact with family members. Sometimes this contact can lead to a placement and permanency for the child. While other times it, builds a beneficial relationship with a caring adult. This program is extremely promising and should continue as it is expected to improve outcomes for F&CS children, youth and families..

Tertiary Prevention

4) Decrease the use of group home placements

The literature identified two projects, the Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care and the Teaching Family Model, designed as alternatives to group home placements. In addition, F&CS previously ran a pilot program called the “Langford Model”, which was a staff run group home alternative. The Langford Model ended due to cost considerations however Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care and the Teaching Family Model are both seen as cost effective alternatives to group homes. Exploring cost effective alternatives to group homes is one way F&CS could reduce their use. Alternatively group home placements can be prevented by ensuring a number of options exist for placing children before a group home becomes necessary.

5) Eliminate recidivism among crossover children

The academic literature suggests five programs, the Stop-Gap Model, Aggression Replacement Training, Positive Peer Culture, the Sanctuary® Model and Multi-Systemic Therapy, which may prevent crossover children from becoming repeatedly involved in criminal acts. Current programming offered to group home and crossover children should be reviewed with an eye for opportunities to improve existing programming or to implement one of the programs suggested by the literature. During this review a focus should be placed on assessing the degree to which mental health issues are being addressed for crossover children. In addition, an examination should be conducted to ensure that children living in care are not repeatedly ending up back in court for minor breaches of their conditions.



Conclusion

Child welfare systems have been criticized as slow to adopt evidence-based knowledge (James, 2011). However, Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region and other Waterloo Region agencies have placed an emphasis on using research and evidence to guide local practice. This report is a continuation of this approach.

Crossover children represent a significant challenge and opportunity for Waterloo Region. Kids in care are disproportionately involved in the local justice system (Salmen, 2010). Youth in care, who become involved in the justice system, present a challenge as they are at a high risk of recidivism (Cottle, Lee & Heilbrun, 2001; Ryan, Hernandez, & Herz, 2007; Moffitt, 1993; Ward, Day, Bevc, Sun, Rosenthal & Duchesne, 2010; Herz, Ryan & Bilchik, 2010). Therefore addressing the issues faced by crossover children represents a significant opportunity to reduce long term rates of crime and violence within Waterloo Region.

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