

# Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada

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## **Prevention – Investing in Canada’s Youth**

House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance  
Submission to the Pre-budget Consultation, August 2011



Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada  
Clubs Garçons et Filles du Canada

# Executive summary

## About Boys and Girls Clubs

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is a leading provider of quality after school programs that support the healthy physical, mental, educational and social development of children. One of the largest youth-serving agencies in Canada, we reach children and their families in 700 community service locations across Canada through our association of over 100 Clubs. We are in neighbourhoods where we are most needed, including large city centres, suburbs, remote rural communities and First Nations Reserves.

To expand our reach and deepen the impact of our after-school programs, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada has partnered with private sector companies that see in Clubs an opportunity to contribute to the development of the next generation and to make a difference in communities across the country. Every federal dollar invested in our programs leverages four from the private sector.

Five generations of young Canadians have had the time of their lives, playing, learning and developing essential life skills through safe, caring Club environments and enriching programs. They have built a strong foundation upon which they can stand and grow into healthy, responsible and confident adults.

Canada needs young people to lead productive and rewarding lives, and make positive contributions to their community, to society and to the economy. Building a strong foundation for all children should have a prominent place in Canada’s financial planning.

## Our Recommendation

The criminal justice system has an important role to play in community safety. However, the proportion of spending between that system and crime prevention is not aligned with the evidence showing the cost-benefit of investing in prevention programs.

We are very concerned that the government is preparing to invest a substantial amount of funding in the criminal justice system – including an estimated 2.1 billion to retrofit and expand prison facilities in addition to the 15 billion spent annually on the criminal justice system rather than increasing its investment in crime prevention and social development for young people.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada strongly recommends that the 2012 budget include an increase in funds allocated for crime prevention, commensurate with new investments in the criminal justice system. We call on the government to:

- Redirect \$375 million from the criminal justice system to crime prevention, an amount representing only 2.5 percent of total costs related to dealing with crime.
- Direct a portion of this investment to after-school recreation programs proven to be successful in addressing known risk factors for crime.
- Commit to multi-year funding to existing reputable organizations working with young people who stand to benefit most: Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis children and youth, youth involved in gangs, young girls and young people living in poverty.

This investment in youth crime prevention will help sustain Canada’s economic recovery and secure its future prosperity. Tax revenues will increase as more young people successfully complete their education and enter the workforce. Young people will make better life choices and avoid entering a costly criminal justice system, saving tax dollars. Fewer crimes mean fewer victims, reduced costs to victims of crime and safer communities for all Canadian families.

## What we know about risk factors and crime

Young people under age 25 form approximately 30 percent of the Canadian population. They represent an even greater portion in Northern and First Nations communities where half the population is under 25. Many of them are struggling with issues that are known risk factors for crime: poverty, isolation, disengagement from school and unemployment.

Youth violence is a complex phenomenon caused by multiple factors, and no single strategy will suffice to prevent it. However, strong evidence shows that youth crime and violence are reduced by effective crime prevention programs for children and youth focusing on positive youth development. Canadian parliamentary committees and task forces as well as reports from international organizations such as the UN and the World Health Organization concur.

It is well understood that young people most likely to be drawn into criminal activity are living in low-income circumstances, experience social isolation, generally are less successful in school and have less hope for later success in life. More than 70 percent of those who enter federal prisons have not completed high-school; 70 percent have unstable job histories; four out of five have substance-abuse problems when they are convicted; and two out of three youth in the criminal justice system have been diagnosed with two or more mental health problems.<sup>1</sup>

Violent youth crime is most often gang-related and gangs have a powerful appeal to youth without opportunities – offering status, profit, protection, mentoring, affiliation and excitement. These are normal developmental needs being fulfilled in unhealthy ways.

Statistics Canada recently reported a declining rate of crime committed by youth over the past decade, with the crime rate falling 7 percent in 2010. They also reported a steady decline in the severity of youth crime over the past 10 years, and a 6 percent decrease in 2010. Unfortunately, while property crimes, such as vandalism, graffiti and defacing public property have been on a sharp decline since 1992, violent crimes, such as murders, beatings and robberies have been on the rise – the youth violent crime severity index is 5 percent higher than in 2000.<sup>2</sup>

Canada should invest in constructive alternatives and in the primary prevention supports that are needed to keep our young people on a positive path to adulthood. We need to equip young people with the life skills to make the right choices to say ‘no’ to drugs, violence, gangs and other negative behaviours.

There is strong evidence that involving youth in community activities and volunteerism is the best prevention against youth disengagement and negative behaviours. We know that access to supportive relationships with adults and peers, as well as involvement in engaging activities and learning experiences are essential to the ability of children and youth to become healthy, successful and contributing adults.<sup>3</sup>

## Prevention is part of the solution

To achieve long-term impact, government investments need to address the context in which youth live and provide those who stand to benefit the most with the experiences they need to be successful.

One of Canada’s pre-eminent researchers on youth crime, Dr. Michael Chettleburgh, states that “supervised, high-quality, challenging after-school programs have been shown to be an effective buffer against delinquency and victimizations and to benefit children greatly... These programs are already everywhere across Canada, but their chronic underfunding renders them incapable of addressing our growing gang problems.”<sup>4</sup> A report to Public Safety Canada’s National Crime Prevention Centre identified after-school recreation as a promising tool to prevent crime (premised on the belief that providing pro-social opportunities for young people in the after-school hours can reduce their involvement in negative behaviour in the community).<sup>5</sup>

Further, James Alan Fox, a well-known criminologist in the U.S. suggested that “after-school activities targeted at the “prime time for juvenile crime” (such as the Boys and Girls Clubs) all have payoffs far greater than the investment.”<sup>6</sup> He recommends that we “identify and promote healthier means for [young people] to achieve the same need-fulfillment, constructive ways to feel good about themselves and their prospects for the future, while at the same time having fun. This... is where youth enrichment initiatives play a significant role, and a role that, given ongoing trends, needs to be expanded.”

The key to effective interventions is that they are long-term and reliable. Many effective programs have been undermined by being time-limited or ending after the completion of the pilot-phase. Ensuring the availability, reliability and wide accessibility of successful youth crime prevention programs must be our first priority. Youth themselves emphasize the importance of having access to programs that are welcoming and safe, and that are consistently available. Sustaining programs through multi-year investments and public policy is a key ingredient to achieving any lasting impact on delinquency, youth crime prevention and positive youth outcomes.

## A sound investment that saves

The social and economic costs of crime are approximately \$31.4 billion annually. When intangible costs are taken into account, the estimated total costs of crime in Canada is \$99.6 billion.<sup>7</sup> Understandably, it is an issue Canadians want to see addressed.

The criminal justice system has an important role to play in community safety. However, the proportion of spending between that system and crime prevention is not aligned with the evidence showing the cost-benefit of investing in prevention programs. The criminal justice system - including police, courts, and correctional services – accounts for \$15 billion dollars per year.<sup>8</sup> These costs are likely to be increasing as policing costs alone amounted to \$12 billion in 2010.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the National Crime Prevention Centre of Public Safety Canada has an annual budget of \$63 million, with \$45 million in grants and contributions going to community-based prevention programs.<sup>10</sup> This represents less than 0.4 percent of the federal criminal justice budget.

Social interventions, such as recreation, leadership development and educational support yield positive, measurable benefits. Research suggests benefits can be realized in as little as three years, with a 25-50 percent reduction in crime within 10 years.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, compared to other measures of crime control, crime prevention through social development is cost-effective. One study found that it cost taxpayers seven times more to achieve a 10 percent reduction in crime through incarceration than through social development.<sup>12</sup> A dollar for enriched child care saves \$17 in criminal justice costs.<sup>13</sup>

Society benefits when young people are diverted from the criminal justice system. The \$90,000 to \$125,000 that it costs, on average, to imprison a young person for a year could be used instead to fund a full year's worth of recreational activities for approximately 50 youth, targeting known risk factors and helping to reduce their risk of becoming involved in crime.<sup>14</sup>

Early prevention measures result in savings for taxpayers and reduce the costs sustained by victims of crime. They work for young people, who are more likely to finish school, enter the workforce and pay taxes. And they work for taxpayers who will not have to pay the exorbitant costs associated with having more people enter the criminal justice system. In the longer term, they avoid the social costs associated with a life of crime, estimated at 2 million dollars.<sup>15</sup>

Reactive measures are a very costly way of dealing with crime. Given planned changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act which will likely increase the number of youth in custody, the government should ensure that more is done to prevent young people from entering a costly criminal justice system.

## Boys and Girls Clubs – an effective solution

Every year, Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada engage over 200,000 children in safe, accessible environments, where every one of them can achieve their full potential. Clubs provide the key elements of community support that research demonstrates are essential for enabling healthy development and positive outcomes for children and youth.

- Caring relationships with non-parental adults
- A mix of programs that meet children’s developmental needs
- A place to belong and contribute to the community
- Encouragement in academic achievement and employment

Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada have developed programs in the areas of primary prevention, intervention and crime reduction with the main emphasis being preparation for successful adulthood. We provide the essential components of what research tells us is needed for prevention and what young people themselves say they need – meaningful activities, supports to education, youth employment, volunteer opportunities, social and life skills, mentors and adult role models.

In a 2002 study, US Senator and now Vice-President Joseph Biden noted that wherever there is a Boys and Girls Club, there is a significant reduction in crime.<sup>16</sup> Our Clubs help young people build the skills and abilities that allow them to solve problems, overcome disadvantages, and deal with life’s challenges by making positive choices.

A national survey conducted by Ipsos-Reid determined that “Boys and Girls Club alumni view their experiences as highly positive, critical to their success, and for many, essential to their survival. Participation in Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada provided valuable benefits that have proven to last a lifetime.” 73 percent say their involvement with the Clubs helped them avoid trouble with the law, 95 percent say it provided them with valuable life skills and 97 percent say they are better off today.

Programs, such as the highly successful Boys and Girls Club of East Scarborough’s *Youth Employment and Local Leadership* program and the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa’s *Project Early Intervention*<sup>17</sup> were funded as pilot projects and ended even though evaluations demonstrated their effectiveness. *Project Early Intervention* for instance, provided support to children and youth aged 6 to 12 living in a high-needs social housing community. Participants had been identified by the schools and justice system as being especially at risk of engaging in delinquent behaviour. *Project Early Intervention*’s life skills development program, homework club, sports and recreation opportunities led to significant improvements for participants and illustrated the effectiveness of a multi-faceted approach that also provides an environment where children can practice what they have learned. Funding for the initiative ended despite it being identified as a promising crime prevention initiative.

## Recommendation for Budget 2012

The government has committed to stronger crime control measures and is set to invest a considerable amount of funds into the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system is an important, but insufficient, and very expensive deterrent to crime. Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada asks the government to increase funds allocated for crime prevention, commensurate with new investments in the criminal justice system.

**We strongly recommend that Budget 2012 redirect \$375 million per year from the criminal justice system into crime prevention programs** that will reach those who would benefit the most: Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis children and youth, youth involved in gangs, young girls and young people living in poverty.

This allocation of funds would represent 2.5 percent of the federal criminal justice budget, and half of the 5 percent allocation recommended by the Horner Commission to tackle risk factors associated with crime.<sup>18</sup> By providing adequate base funding, strengthening the capacity of organizations to expand and enhance programs, and supporting evaluation to measure long-term impact, the government would ensure that its funds are effective in reducing crime and protecting Canadians.

Young people have spoken strongly in favour of programs that provide them with opportunities to gain skills and confidence. They want positive environments they can count on over time and in which they can build trusting relationships. We would thus like to see more than half of the government’s investment allocated to community-based crime prevention programs for children and youth, with long-term funding commitments for programs that have been proven effective in crime reduction and positive development.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada recognizes that sustainable solutions to tackling youth violence will require a commitment from all orders of government, from communities and from families. Comprehensive strategies focused on social development and mechanisms to support effective and ongoing collaboration are required.

We call upon the federal government to provide the necessary leadership in these endeavours and to develop public policy responses to crime and victimization that are preventive and proactive. All Canadians benefit when young people are supported to become responsible adults, contributing citizens and active members of the workforce. Canada’s economic recovery and future prosperity depend on it.

## **CONTACT**

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- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. (2010). Police personnel and expenditures. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/101215/dq101215c-eng.htm>.
- <sup>10</sup> NCPC funds multi-year programs that support effective and cost-effective ways to prevent and reduce crime by addressing know risk-factors in high-risk populations and places. Their \$63 million budget (\$45 million of which goes to grants & contributions) was renewed in 2008 and is now permanent. However, the bulk of the funding to community-based crime prevention initiatives is time-limited to a maximum of 5 years.
- <sup>11</sup> Canadian Council on Social Development. “Child & Youth Crime Prevention through Social Development”, When Kids flourish, Crime doesn’t. <http://www.ccsd.ca/cpsd/ccsd/>.
- <sup>12</sup> International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (1999). Crime prevention digest. Montreal: ICPC.
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- <sup>14</sup> Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. “The Cost to Incarcerate Youth”. <http://www.preventingcrime.net/library/>.
- <sup>15</sup> Cohen, MM (1998). “The monetary value of saving a high-risk youth”, Journal of Quantitative Criminology 14, pp. 5 – 33. These costs have likely increased over the last decade.
- <sup>16</sup> Senator JR Biden, Jr. (2002). “Safe Havens, Safe Children: Boys and Girls Clubs and the Fight Against Juvenile Crime”, Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs, United States Senate.
- <sup>17</sup> Summaries of these and other successful youth crime prevention projects are highlighted on the National Centre for Crime Prevention’s website at: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/ncpc-pubs-eng.aspx> or <http://www.securitepublique.gc.ca/prg/cp/ncpc-pubs-fra.aspx>.
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