



MEDIA RELEASE

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada releases paper showing preventative measures are far more effective than punitive ones in reducing Youth Violence and calls for a National Strategy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: MARKHAM, ON (December 17, 2008) – Graham D’Souza knows the lure of finding brotherhood in a gang. At 13, he was considered a “B.G.” or baby gang member and started dealing drugs. By 18, he was arrested for armed robbery.

But it wasn’t until he was shot outside a Toronto nightclub two years ago that the 25-year-old decided he had to turn his life around. He found a mentor at the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club and got involved in an after school, life-skills program. These days, he’s running a music studio at the same Club, teaching other troubled youth how to write rap songs while offering them lessons in how to get out of a life of crime.

Graham is just one face behind the statistics in a paper released by **Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada (BGCC)** today which shows that preventative measures far outweigh punitive ones in curbing youth violence. Indeed, Graham’s story is a telling example of how providing enriching after school programs to younger teens, as well as opportunities for job experience to older youth in high-risk neighbourhoods can reduce incidents of violent crime among this population. In fact, the paper, *Creating Positive Alternatives for Canadian Youth: Strategies to Address the Origins of Youth Violence*, shows that violence can be reduced by as much as an astonishing 60 per cent when teens and older youth are offered opportunities for positive mentoring and skills development when not in school.

The paper, prepared by one of Canada’s leading, national children’s charities providing affordable, healthy development programs to 200,000 children and youth annually, also reveals:

- A criminal career that begins in adolescence costs society \$2 million a year.
- Compared to other measures of crime control, crime prevention through social development is much more cost effective. It costs taxpayers seven times more to achieve a 10 per cent reduction in crime through incarceration rather than through social development.
- More than 70 per cent of those who enter federal prisons are high-school dropouts; 70 per cent have unstable job histories; four out of every five have substance abuse problems when they are convicted; and two out of every three youth in the criminal justice system have been diagnosed with two or more mental health problems.

The report recommends devising and implementing a comprehensive national strategy for addressing the roots of youth violence. Among its recommendations:

- A national youth outcomes strategy that outlines Canada’s youth development goals and strategies, enabling collaboration between all levels of government.
- Crime prevention policies focused on training and employment.

- A comprehensive investment plan for the expansion of current after school programs promoting recreation, social and life skills development.

"Clearly, this paper shows that urgent action is needed," says Pam Jolliffe, President and CEO, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada. "What's missing right now is a national strategy to deal preventively with youth violence. Law and order approaches alone are not enough. We believe there needs to be federal investment in a comprehensive strategy to tackle youth violence in Canada by providing positive opportunities for our youth at highest risk. Otherwise, Canadian society risks losing even more young people to violence."

The spate of gun violence that has erupted across the country this past year -- including in cities like Vancouver, Calgary, Hobbema, Winnipeg and Edmonton, as well as Toronto -- underlines the need for a national strategy, Jolliffe says. Recent figures from Statistics Canada buttress the BGCC report. StatsCan figures show that the incidents of violent crime committed by people between the ages of 12 and 17 have more than doubled since the mid-1980s. Since 1997, homicides committed by youth have jumped 41 per cent, according to the federal agency.

About Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is a leading, national provider of programs to children and youth that support the healthy physical, educational and social development of close to 200,000 young people and their families each year. In 700 community locations across Canada, clubs offer after-school programs in physical recreation, technology, the arts, literacy, personal growth and more. Many clubs also provide meals, emergency shelter, family support programs and other support to children, youth and families at risk. Boys and Girls Clubs have been helping young Canadians to discover, develop and achieve their potential for over 100 years. To learn more, visit www.bgccan.com.

We would be pleased to make both president, Pam Jolliffe, and Graham D'Souza available for media interviews. Ms. Jolliffe can speak to the broader issues surrounding youth violence and the need for a national strategy while illuminating what's behind the report's figures. Mr. D'Souza is not only able to tell his story, but he can speak to how his music program is transforming other troubled youths' lives.

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