

Street Youth Not Just An Urban Issue in BC

March 26, 2001

Burnaby, BC

Young people are living on the street in both large and smaller BC communities, according to a new report released today by The McCreary Centre Society. The report, "No Place to Call Home: a profile of street youth in British Columbia," presents results of a study of over 500 youth aged 12-19 who are living on the street, or are involved with street life, in six BC communities. Included in the research are youth from Vancouver and the Lower Mainland, Victoria, Prince Rupert, the Sunshine Coast and the Fraser Valley.

Most street youth have at some time experienced physical or sexual abuse, and most have run away or been kicked out of home, the study found. About half of the youth say they have an addiction problem, and about 25% are involved in the sex trade. Risky behaviours often began at an early age, even before the youth became a teenager.

The study shows that troubled youth from smaller centres tend to migrate to the cities, adding to the number of youth on the street in Vancouver and Victoria. In the cities, most street youth live in shelters or abandoned buildings ("squats"). Yet not all street youth are literally homeless, the report states. Suburban and non-urban communities also have sizable populations of youth who are involved in high risk behaviours on the street, but these youth tend to be younger and are more likely to live with parents or guardians at least part of the time.

Other key study findings include:

- Over 1/4 of street youth have attempted suicide in the past year.
- Over 1/3 have been in government care, including foster care or group homes, and nearly 1/2 have spent time in a custody centre.
- Although most street youth have been expelled or suspended from school at some time, about 2/3 say they are currently attending school.
- Nearly 2/3 of street youth in Vancouver and 1/3 in Victoria come from other provinces.

The study offers some hope for optimism, suggesting that many street youth could benefit from programs and services to support a healthy transition to adulthood. "Despite their apparent alienation from school and family," the report notes, many street youth "continue to have hopes for a better life and to reach out to adults for guidance." The McCreary Centre Society urges use of the new research to identify opportunities "to help these adolescents find and take advantage of their undiscovered potential."

The McCreary Centre Society is a non-profit, non-government organization which focuses on youth health research and information. Funding for the street youth study

was provided by Health Canada, Population and Public Health Branch, BC/Yukon Region.

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