

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week is Not a Time to Celebrate: Criminal Justice**

**Surrey, British Columbia** Finding out a child has had a run-in with the law is a parent's worst nightmare. But at least that child has a parent to care for them and help them out of the situation. Some children don't have the luxury of parental guidance. A close look at the teens in British Columbia's youth justice system will bring into clarity a single glaring pattern. One large section of society is getting involved with crime at shocking – even outrageous – rates. **In the midst of B.C. Child and Youth in Care Week, this is certainly not something to celebrate.**

Disturbingly, more than one in three or **35.5 per cent of youth in foster care in this province become involved with the criminal justice system**. This is an astounding statistic. Here is another: of youth in care, one in six have been in youth custody compared to less than one in 50 of the general youth population. Indeed, more youth who are in care or have been in care will become involved in the criminal justice system than will graduate from high school. Once teens in care enter the youth justice system, their likelihood of graduating from high school drops to an appalling 13%<sup>1</sup>. Something is broken.

At times, foster youth even identify being in custody with being safe and secure. They express a heartrending fact: **At least they are housed, getting fed regularly, and have structure in their lives while imprisoned.** It can be somewhere that they feel they belong, instead of being lost out in a world where they feel like they don't fit in. A world out on the streets or with foster guardians and housemates who seem strange and unknown.

The impact on society of the rates of youth in care involved in the criminal justice system is immense both financially and socially. Youth need positive adult role models in their lives to help support them and guide them. **They have even stated that they rank having a permanent adult figure in their life as more important than having their basic needs met.** They also need safe and loving homes.

**Shouldn't the government and British Columbians be more interested in putting time and resources into providing for these needs for foster youth instead of paying for their incarceration?** Perhaps a thoughtful rearranging of priorities and funds could benefit these teens in our communities and help them grow into the healthy, contributing, and functioning adults that we need for our future.

**About SOS Children's Village BC**

SOS Children's Villages is the world's largest non-governmental, non-denominational child development organization for orphaned and abandoned children. It has existed for over 60 years with presence in 133 countries and over 550 villages. British Columbia is home to the only SOS Children's Village in Canada. SOS Children's Village BC provides stable homes, a supportive and healing Village environment, and community-based family care programs to help foster children and youth in need grow into caring, self-reliant adults.

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**We hope you will be inspired to pick up our 'dark side of foster care in BC' series that lasts until Friday.**

**For more information please contact:**

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*Please visit our Media Room: [www.sosbc.org/news-events/media-room](http://www.sosbc.org/news-events/media-room)*

<sup>1</sup> Source: *Kids, Crime and Care*, Joint Special Report, by the Representative for Children and Youth and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, 2009.