

NEWS RELEASE



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Taking 'extra measures' to help vulnerable youth in BC New referral tool for police

It happens more often than we might care to admit: youth who come into conflict with the law are reprimanded and released, only to re-offend and escalate their criminal behaviour. A new referral tool produced by the BC Centre for Safe Schools & Communities at the University of the Fraser Valley and "E" Division RCMP will help police redirect youth to services that can help prevent them from advancing toward a life of crime.

The project, called 'Extra Judicial Measures Database for Vulnerable Youth in BC', provides operational police officers with easy access to information that can assist them in referring youth offenders to mental health and drug addiction services in their communities. It houses provincial, regional, and local contact information for designing supportive interventions for youth who come to the attention of police.

The BC Centre for Safe Schools & Communities has been working in close partnership with the "E" Division RCMP, Crime Prevention & Program Support Services Unit – Youth Strategies Section, headed up by Insp. Terry Kopan, and Abbotsford Police Department. "The goal of the Extra Judicial Measures database is to enhance our front-line officers' ability to respond effectively and sustainably to youth crime by addressing the risk factors which are often-times the root cause of a youth coming repeatedly into conflict with the law," Kopan says. The database will also enable greater citizen/community participation in the youth justice system through community programs and services for drug addiction and mental health services targeted specifically for youth.

"Although the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) states that police must consider referring troubled youth to community programs, the option has been largely underutilized," adds Irwin Cohen, Professor and Research Director of the BC Centres at UFV. "There is a growing need to strengthen community partnerships by providing tools like this database to support police services. As first responders, police are well situated to prevent youth from continuing down criminal pathways."

Phase one and two of the project, which involved designing and populating the databases, are now complete. The third phase, now underway, involves field tests by several RCMP detachments and Abbotsford Police Department, who also provided initial feedback and recommendations on the tool.

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The field test phase will be completed in March 2011 after which information gained from pilot sites will be used to create a supplementary guide suggesting how police services can work within their communities to harness local knowledge about any further services that should be added to the database.

This project was made possible through a federal grant from the Department of Justice Canada Youth Justice Fund (Youth Justice Anti-Drug Component). Other parties involved in the development and testing of the tool include the Department of Justice Canada, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at UFV, Centre for Public Safety and Criminal Justice Research in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at UFV, the Abbotsford Police Department, Williams Lake RCMP, Fort St. James RCMP, and Maple Ridge RCMP.

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