

MEDIA RELEASE

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UNITED WAY AND COMMUNITY TACKLE YOUTH CRIME

In recent weeks, there has been a lot of talk about youth crime in Winnipeg: car thefts, gang activity and brutal attacks. Our community is crying out for a solution. While many feel it is time to crack down on young criminals, United Way of Winnipeg and its partner agencies are making big strides in addressing the root causes of crime.

Research shows the hours between 3 and 6 pm are peak hours for juvenile crime. After-school programs are vital to our community as they have a proven track record of keeping Winnipeg's youth out of crime. "After-school programs allow kids to build positive relationships and develop confidence," said Mike Owen, Chair of the Coalition of Community Based Youth Serving Agencies. "It's critical that children have a safe alternative to the streets, a place to grow, develop skills and experience new things that will allow them to overcome barriers that prevent them from realizing their potential and become contributing members of our community."

Recent studies found that students who spend three or more hours alone per day show an increased risk of drug and alcohol use, anger, depression and behaviour problems. Frank Cormier, a Criminology Field Coordinator at the University of Manitoba, says too many young people are socially and emotionally deprived. "When we, as a society, fail to meet people's basic needs, we create one of the most common factors contributing to criminal behavior," said Cormier. "Poverty can provide a motivation for theft; lack of a caring and supportive family can provide the motivation to join a gang; a lack of hope can lead to alcohol and substance abuse. The fact is that children whose needs are met rarely steal a car, or stab someone, or burn down a house."

As Cormier states, many children's needs are not being met. Enforcement is only part of the solution. "It's important to recognize that crime reduction begins with crime prevention, and that includes all aspects of social development," said Chief Jack Ewatski, President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. "Crime reduction is more than just adding new officers to our streets or creating tougher penalties. We need to put a greater focus on developing and strengthening the social programs that address the root causes of crime."

Right now, people throughout our community are working together to give youth the opportunity to make positive life choices. Thanks to the generosity of Winnipeggers, more than 16,000 youth in our city are benefiting from thirty different mentorship programs and after-school activities every year. "We've seen firsthand the work that United Way supports, and the positive results," said Mike Krebs, a volunteer who sits on United Way's Youth Relations Council and United Way's Community Investment Committee. "Winnipeggers want to see a reduction in crime and greater opportunities for youth; they want strategies to fight poverty, and they want their neighbourhoods to be safer and stronger. When people support United Way, they are directly supporting practical, sustainable and effective work that is addressing what matters to them most in their community."

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