

Kids really looking for change, hope

by Wendy Elliott/The Advertiser

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Locked up youth at the Waterville jail got caught.

The cause of their crimes: boredom, settling beefs or frustrations, drugs and other addictions.

The incarcerated youth took part in a Safer Streets and Communities Task Force forum last spring, and their words echo the comments of youth free in our community.

Youth report a lack of things to do. Most wanted more sports and anticipated their drivers' licenses.

Things they saw as helping to prevent crime included, obviously, being held in detention; YM/YWCA programs, Boys and Girls Clubs, sports to watch and take part in, family and having a sense of belonging: community, to these youth, means having a place to live and someone who cares.

People youth respect would do the best job sharing messages against crime. Family members are at the top of that list; people who have been in trouble and are now doing better are also on the list.

"Be there for your kids and they will grow up straight," commented one.

Some know they come from inadequate homes. They are looking for people who care and will help, and they want respectful treatment from authority figures.

Youth in care want to remain in the province because their aim is to go back home. Some believe agencies, like community services and family and children's services, are impersonal.

"They don't give a shit about me."

Time in Waterville has made most of these youth decide not to reoffend. Three thought they would be in adult jail within the next five years. Two, though, felt being in Waterville is better than community life.

"It's better to be here than on curfew and getting into trouble."

Youth want more teachers in classrooms, smaller classes and fewer distractions. Too many kids in school rooms promotes conflicts - outside and inside school. Troubled youth all understand, though, going to school is important. Suspensions, youth point out, prevent school attendance and give them more time to get into fights and drugs. In-school suspensions would not make a difference: most would just skip.

“Nothing would keep us there.”

Youth in trouble want high school credits and more options in their lives. Apprenticeship programs help youth see school can lead to work.

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