



Time Out III

A profile of BC youth in custody

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McCreary
Centre Society

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YOUTH HEALTH ♦ YOUTH RESEARCH ♦ YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

McCreary Centre Society is a non-government not-for-profit committed to improving the health of BC youth through research and community-based projects. Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to identify and address the health needs of young people in the province.

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This report was originally published using data from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). It has been updated to include data from the 2013 BC AHS.

Images are used for illustrative purposes only. Any person depicted in this report is a model.

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Key findings

One hundred and fourteen youth were surveyed between August 2012 and January 2013 while in custody in British Columbia. This is the third time the McCreary Centre Society has surveyed youth in custody. The report shows:

- ♦ Youth in custody experienced very challenging life circumstances in their formative years, including high rates of housing instability, family problems, bereavement, abuse, and victimization, as well as challenges at school. For example, most youth (87%) had at least one person they were close to who had died, including losing someone to violence (34%), suicide (32%), and overdose (30%).
- ♦ The majority of youth surveyed had a history of involvement with the youth justice system. Seventy percent of youth had at least one family member who was criminally involved and for 29% of youth this was a parent. Youth whose family was criminally involved were more likely to be in conflict with the law from an early age.
- ♦ The health profile of youth in custody is very different to that of youth in mainstream school. For example, when compared to youth who completed the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey, youth in custody were less likely to live with parents, and more likely to have been in government care, and to go to bed hungry. A greater percentage of youth in custody also experience health challenges, such as having a mental or emotional health condition, substance use problems, or a history of physical and sexual abuse.
- ♦ The majority of youth in custody in 2012 (65%) had lived in a foster home, group home, or on a Youth Agreement at some point in their lives, with 32% of youth living in government care at the time they entered the custody centre.
- ♦ Sixty-five percent of youth reported at least one health challenge. The most common were behavioural problems (48%) and mental or emotional health conditions (26%).

- ♦ Youth engaged in a range of health risk behaviours before entering custody, including high rates of substance use, driving while intoxicated, and risky sexual behaviour. Some youth also engaged in risk behaviours while in custody, such as misusing someone else's prescription medication.
- ♦ There were some changes in risk behaviours between 2004 and 2012. For example, in 2012 the percentage of youth who had tried marijuana or who drove after drinking in the 30 days prior to entering custody was lower than in 2004.
- ♦ Aboriginal youth remain overrepresented in the youth custody system. However, the focus on Aboriginal programming at Prince George custody centre is encouraging, as almost all Aboriginal youth in custody in Prince George found the programming helpful.
- ♦ Most youth felt at least somewhat part of their community outside of custody. Youth who felt quite strongly connected to their home community were more likely to report having good or excellent general health (92% vs. 73% who felt less connected). They were also more likely to think this was their last time in custody (74% vs. 54%) and to see themselves in a job in five years time (75% vs. 49%).
- ♦ Maintaining contact with family and friends while in custody was an important protective factor. Youth who had visits from family or friends were less likely to report experiencing extreme anxiety, stress, or despair in the past month.
- ♦ Youth who felt there was an adult connected to the custody centre who cared about them were more likely to report better health than those who did not feel that an adult connected to the centre cared. For example, they were more likely to rate their health as good or excellent (91% vs. 71%), as well as to think this would be their last time in custody (75% vs. 53%), to have post-secondary plans (64% vs. 23%), and to have future job aspirations (74% vs. 46%).

Introduction

Between August 2012 and January 2013, 114 youth were surveyed across the three British Columbia custody centres located in Victoria, Burnaby, and Prince George.

This is the third time that McCreary Centre Society has surveyed young people in custody in BC. The last time the survey was conducted was in 2004, when 137 young people aged between 12 and 19 years answered questions about their health, experiences in custody and the community, and plans for the future.

Since 2004, a number of changes have been made to the youth custody services in BC. Enrolment at the three custody centres has declined. Services for female offenders have been centralized in Burnaby. Prince George has specialized in the provision of services for Aboriginal offenders. Victoria has undertaken a trauma-informed practice self-assessment to assist in the development of enhanced mental health programs and services.

Custody centre	No. of youth surveyed (%)
Burnaby	65 (57%)
Prince George	20 (18%)
Victoria	29 (26%)

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

In fiscal year 2012-13 there was an average of 85 young people in custody in BC on any given day, of which 16% were female. This is a decrease from 153 in fiscal year 2004-05, and indicates that only youth who have committed the most serious offences or have significant offence histories are currently in custody in BC.

About the survey

The survey was based on previous versions that had been used in 2000 and 2004. It was updated to include new questions of specific interest to Youth Custody Services, and which reflect changing trends in adolescent health.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Youth completed the survey in small groups of four to eight. It took most youth 30 to 60 minutes to complete the survey. Unless the group requested otherwise, a McCreary researcher read the survey questions aloud to assist youth with literacy and comprehension challenges.

Limitations

All youth who were in custody when the surveying took place were invited to participate. However, barriers such as literacy levels, English language challenges, competing court dates or other appointments, and mental health or behavioural challenges prevented some youth from taking part. Given that there is currently an average of 85 youth in custody at any one time, it is likely that the 114 youth who took the survey are representative of youth in BC's youth custody system.

About the report

The report includes some comparisons to the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) results. These are included to illustrate the many challenges that youth in custody have experienced in their lives, compared to their same age peers in mainstream schools across the province.

Occasionally the terms 'virtually no youth reported' or 'almost no youth reported' are used in this report. This means that less than six youth answered this way but the actual percentage has been removed to reduce the risk of deductive disclosure.

Among youth who did complete the survey, not all youth answered every one of the 145 questions. While this is not unusual among youth surveys, it is noted in the text with the symbol # if 20% or more of youth did not answer a question. Unless otherwise noted, at least four out of five youth answered the question.

The number of females surveyed was relatively small (21), which made gender comparisons difficult. Nevertheless, when significant differences between males and females were found, they are noted in the text.

All comparisons and associations in this report have been tested and are statistically significant at $p < .05$ unless otherwise noted. This means there is a less than 5% probability that the results occurred by chance.

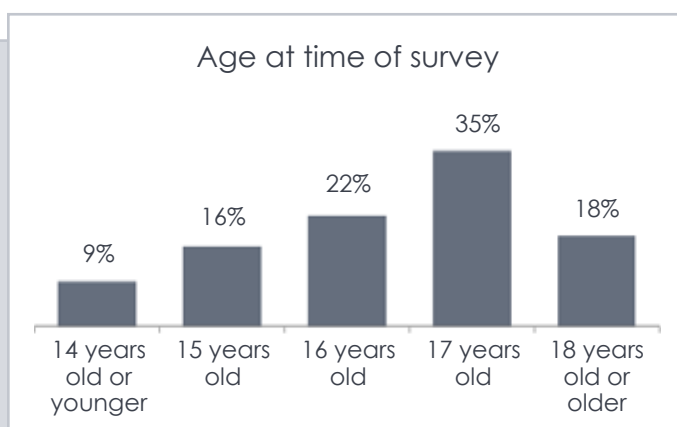
Graphs and charts show frequencies that are not necessarily significant at every point.

Background

Eighty-one percent of BC youth in custody who were surveyed were male and 19% were female, with the majority aged 16 to 18 years old.

Similar to 2004, the majority of youth identified as Aboriginal and/or European, and 10% did not know their ethnic or cultural background.

Twenty percent of youth spoke a language other than English at home most of the time. The most common non-English languages spoken at home were Aboriginal languages. Other languages youth spoke included French, Spanish, Mandarin, Korean, German, Russian, Tagalog, Persian, Arabic, and Hindi.



Most common ethnic or cultural backgrounds	
Aboriginal	52%
European	48%
Latin, South, or Central American	10%
African	6%
Don't know	10%

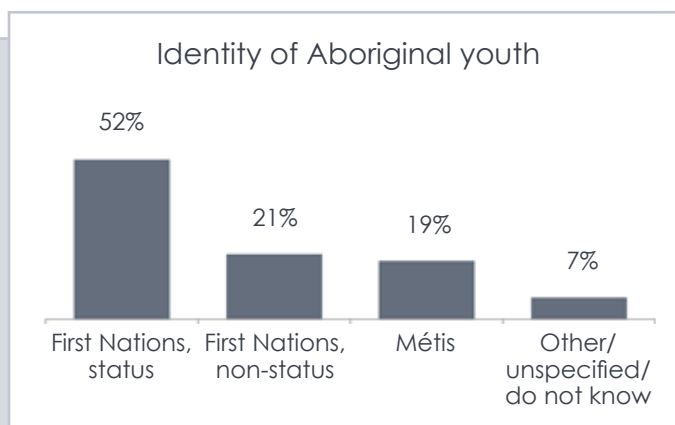
Notes: Youth could select more than one response. A small percentage of youth identified as West Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian.

Aboriginal youth

Aboriginal youth remain overrepresented within the justice system, with over half of survey participants identifying as Aboriginal. Seventy-four percent of youth in the Prince George custody centre who completed a survey were Aboriginal, compared to 39% in the Burnaby or Victoria centres.

Sixteen percent of Aboriginal youth reported they spoke a traditional language at home most of the time. Language revitalization may be having a positive effect as all Aboriginal youth who spoke an Aboriginal language had positive future aspirations (such as being in school or having a home or a job).

Among Aboriginal youth, 48% had ever lived on a First Nations reserve and 17% were living on reserve when they entered custody.



Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.



Sexual orientation

The majority of youth (85%) identified as completely heterosexual, 7% were bisexual, and the remainder identified as mostly heterosexual or noted that they did not have sexual attractions. No youth identified as lesbian or gay. There were no differences in the sexual orientation of custody youth between 2004 and 2012. Among Aboriginal youth in 2012, 9% identified as being Two Spirit.

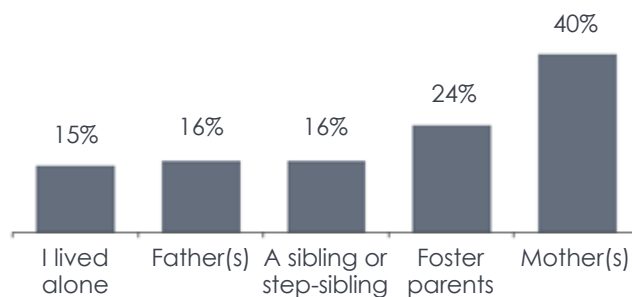
Home life

When asked who they usually lived with when not in custody, youth most commonly lived with at least one parent. This was also the most common living arrangement for youth in mainstream school. However, while 85% of youth who completed the BC AHS lived with their mother/stepmother, only 42% of youth in custody did so.

Similarly, 71% of youth in mainstream school had their father/stepfather present in their home compared to 19% of youth in custody.



Most commonly reported people youth lived with in the community



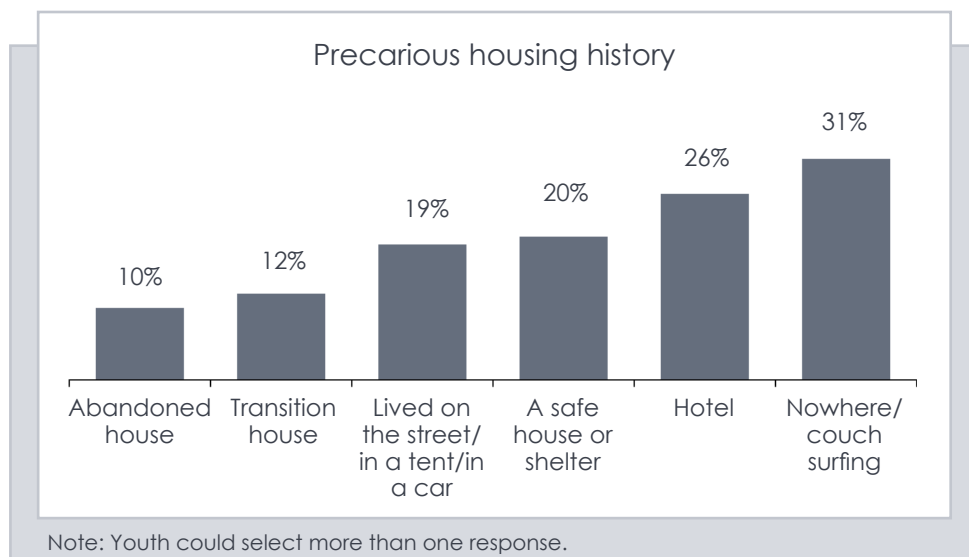
Note: Youth could select more than one response.

Among youth who completed the custody survey, almost one in four lived with foster parents and 15% lived alone. Other living arrangements included living with children or youth not related to them, their own or their partner's children, grandparents, other adult relatives, adults not related to them, or their parent's partner.

The most commonly reported places youth had lived in their lifetime were their parent's home (65%), a foster home (50%), a group home (43%), another relative's home (40%), or their own place (31%). Over half of youth (51%) had lived in precarious housing (such as a hotel or transition house or been absolutely homeless) and 21% had been on a Youth Agreement.

Most youth had a history of unstable housing. For example, over half of the youth (52%) had lived in three or more different types of living situations in their lifetime, including precarious and non-precarious locations (such as living with a parent, relative, or in their own home).

38% of females and 14% of males had lived in 5 or more different types of living situations in their lifetime.



9% of youth had both run away and been kicked out of their home 3 or more times in the year before they entered custody.

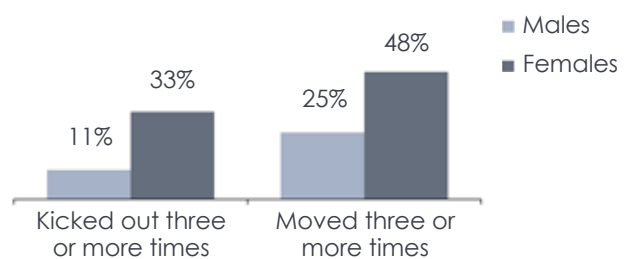
The majority of youth moved at least once in the past 12 months (60%), and 30% had moved three or more times (48% females vs. 25% males). In contrast, 22% of students in school moved at least once.

Forty-three percent of youth were kicked out of their home in the past 12 months, with females three times more likely than males to have been kicked out on at least three occasions.

Although females were more likely to have experienced housing instability and to have been kicked out of home in the past 12 months, there were no gender differences in rates of running away from home. Almost half of male and female youth in custody ran away from home at least once in the past year (49%), with 28% having run away three or more times in this 12 month period.



Changes in living situation in the last 12 months



Government care experience

The majority of youth (65%) who completed a survey had experienced some form of government care (i.e., had lived in a foster home, group home, or been on a Youth Agreement) at some point in their lives. (This compared to 4% of youth who were attending mainstream school and completed the 2013 BC AHS). Additionally, more than one in three (38%) youth in custody had experienced at least two types of care.

Among all youth surveyed, 32% were living in some form of government care at the time they entered custody.

More than one in five youth had been on a Youth Agreement at some point in their lives. However, almost none were on a Youth Agreement at the time they entered custody.

The percentage of youth who had lived in a foster home or group home was similar to 2004.

Type of government care (among those who had care experience)

	In this type of care at time of entering custody	Ever in this type of care
Foster home	27%	54%
Group home	21% [#]	52%
On a Youth Agreement	NR	42%

Note: Youth could select more than one response.

[#]: Twenty percent or more youth who completed the survey did not answer this question.

NR: Not releasable due to risk of deductive disclosure.

Aboriginal youth were nearly twice as likely as non-Aboriginal youth to rate spirituality as important to them.

Income

Youth were asked about their income in the month before they entered custody. Eight percent had no source of income, and 83% had obtained money from illegal sources (such as selling drugs or stealing).

Spirituality

When asked about their spirituality, 41% of youth felt it was not important to them, with the rest finding it at least a little important, including 11% for whom it was very important. There were similar findings for the importance of religion.

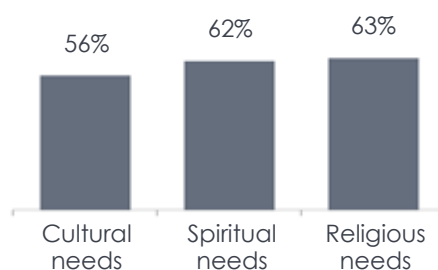
Sixty-five percent of youth in custody reported that they had cultural needs, 63% had spiritual needs, and 69% had religious needs. The majority of youth reported that their cultural, spiritual, and religious needs were being met while in custody. However, among those who indicated having needs, 44% of youth were not having their cultural needs met, 38% were not having their spiritual needs met, and 37% were not having their religious needs met.

Sources of income (among youth who obtained money in the month before entering custody)

Drug dealing or drug runs	63%
Theft/robbery	57%
Other illegal activities	39%
Parents/family	37%
A legal job	31%
Gambling	19%
Panhandling	9%
Child welfare/ward of the courts	7%

Note: Youth could select more than one response.

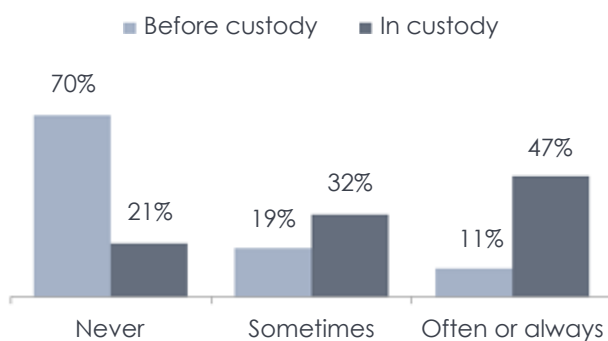
Youth whose needs were being met in custody (among those who identified needs)



Going to Bed Hungry

Youth were asked how often they went to bed hungry because there was not enough food to eat. They were more likely to report going to bed hungry often or always in custody than in the community (47% vs. 11%). Males were almost four times more likely than females to report going to bed hungry often or always in custody (54% vs. 14%). In comparison, 1% of youth in school went to bed hungry this often.

How often youth went to bed hungry because there was not enough food to eat



Involvement with the criminal justice system

Current involvement

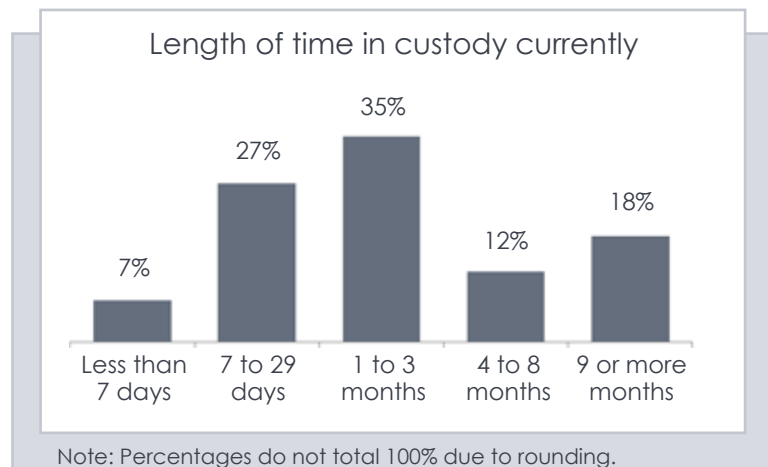
About half of youth surveyed (51%) indicated that they were currently on remand (and not yet sentenced), while 28% were sentenced to open custody, 16% were sentenced to secure, and 4% reported they were both currently on remand and sentenced.

Most youth sentenced to either open or secure custody had been in custody one to three months, while most youth on remand and not yet sentenced had spent between a week and three months in custody.

Youth most commonly reported currently being in custody for breach of probation requirements or administration of justice offences such as failing to appear in court (58%), assault/uttering threats (37%), robbery (36%), and weapons offences (31%).

Older youth (aged 17 years and above) were more likely than youth aged 16 and younger to be currently serving a sentence for a weapons offence (47% vs. 17%). Older youth were also more likely to have previous charges or convictions for a drug offence and a weapons offence.

Females were more likely than males to be charged with or found guilty of a breach or administration of justice offence (81% vs. 52%).



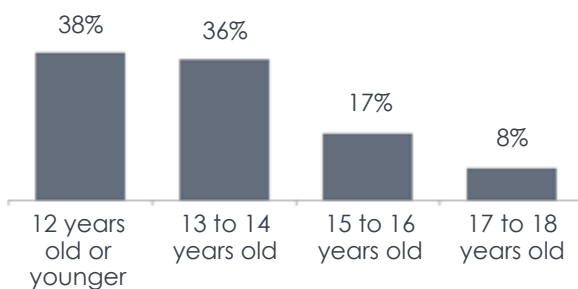
Previous involvement

Similar to 2004, the majority of youth in custody had a history of involvement with the youth justice system. Most youth had been charged with or found guilty of an offence in the past, with only 12% indicating that their current offence was their first charge or conviction.

Most youth (64%) had first been detained or held in police cells or in a youth custody centre before the age of 14, with over a third being 12 years old or younger when they were first detained (16% were under 12, so could only have been detained by the police and would not have been held in custody).

78% of youth had previously served time in custody.

Age when first detained and held in police cells or youth custody centre



Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.



The most common offence that youth had been charged with or found guilty of in the past was assault/uttering threats. Other common offences included breach or administration of justice offences, robbery, and weapons offences.

Among youth who had ever been charged with or found guilty of a breach or administration of justice offence, 69% had been in custody previously, while 26% indicated that this was their first time in custody. Forty-two percent of youth who were currently in custody for a breach had previously served a custodial sentence for a breach.

Most common charges or convictions		
Offence	Currently charged with or found guilty of	Previously charged with or found guilty of
Assault/uttering threats	37%	62%
Breach or administration of justice	58%	60%
Robbery	36%	45%
Weapons offence	31%	44%
Drug offence	12%	31%
Theft (excluding car theft)	12%	31%
Break and enter	21%	31%
Car theft	9%	26%
Kidnapping	6%	6%
Other offences	12%	13%

Note: Youth could select more than one response.

Gang involvement

When asked about their level of gang involvement, 28% reported being in a gang, although a higher percentage (52%) reported that members of the community outside of custody saw them as gang-involved. Also, 54% had friends who were in a gang, 31% had family in a gang, and 45% knew other people who were gang-involved.

Criminal involvement of family and friends

Seventy percent of youth knew of at least one family member with a criminal record. Twenty-nine percent had one parent with a record and 17% indicated both of their parents had a criminal record.

Youth who had someone in their family with a criminal record were more likely to be in conflict with the law at an early age (12 or younger) compared to those who did not have relatives with a criminal record (43% vs. 23%). Youth who reported both their parents had a criminal record were more likely to be first detained before their 13th birthday (67% vs. 31% of those whose parents did not have records).

Forty-two percent of youth reported that most or all of their closest friends had been charged with or convicted of a crime. Females were more than three times as likely as males to have friends who were not criminally involved.

Compared to youth whose family were not gang involved, youth who had a family member in a gang were more than twice as likely to be in a gang themselves.

Health profile

75% of youth had seen a dentist within the past 2 years.

Similar to 2004, the majority of male and female youth rated their health as good or excellent.

Health challenges

Youth were asked about physical, mental, emotional, and developmental challenges. Sixty-five percent reported at least one such health condition. The most common were behavioural problems and emotional or mental health conditions.

In comparison to youth who completed the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey, youth in custody were more likely to experience a number of health challenges. For example, 10% of youth in school had been told they had a mental or emotional health condition compared to 26% of youth surveyed in custody.



In 2012, 61% of youth with a health condition or disability reported having one type of condition, 24% reported having two (e.g., a mental health or emotional condition and a physical disability), and 16% reported having three conditions and/or disabilities. Females were more likely than males to have multiple conditions.

Although not directly comparable with 2012, in 2004 2% of youth reported that they had a physical disability, 4% had a long-term illness, and 7% had a mental or emotional health condition. (The 2004 question asked if they had a health condition or disability that prevented them from doing things other youth their age could do and did not ask if they had been diagnosed with a learning disability or behaviour problem.)

Sixty-one percent of youth with a health condition or disability felt they needed prescription medication for their condition. Among these youth, the majority (79%) reported that they took prescribed medication.

Females were more likely than males to report having an emotional or mental health condition.

Youth who reported health conditions and disabilities	
Behavioural problem (e.g. conduct disorder, problems with anger)	48%
Mental or emotional health condition (e.g. depression, eating disorder)	26%
Learning disability (e.g. dyslexia)	13%
Long-term medical condition (e.g. diabetes, asthma)	8%
Physical disability (e.g. deafness, cerebral palsy, use a wheelchair)	5%

Note: Youth could select more than one response.

76% of youth had at least one diagnosed health condition, 32% reported having three or more diagnoses, and 9% had been diagnosed with six or more conditions.

Specific health conditions

Youth were asked whether they had been diagnosed with a variety of specific health conditions such as epilepsy, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and depression.

The most common diagnoses were ADHD, addiction, depression, and FASD. More youth reported ADHD in 2012 than in 2004 (46% vs. 33%). There were no gender differences in 2012 except that females were more likely than males to report a diagnosis of depression (52% vs. 19%).

More than one in three Aboriginal youth (36%) reported having been diagnosed with FASD, and virtually all youth in custody who had been diagnosed with FASD reported being of Aboriginal descent. Aboriginal youth in custody in 2012 were more likely to have been diagnosed with FASD than in 2004 (36% vs. 19%).

Most commonly diagnosed health conditions	
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD/ADD)	46%
Addiction problems	26%
Depression	26%
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD/FAS/FAE)	21%
Anxiety disorder or panic attacks	17%
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	17%
Bipolar Disorder	13%
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	9%

Sleep

Before entering custody, 57% of youth slept less than eight hours a night, with 37% typically sleeping for five hours or less. In comparison, 47% of youth in mainstream school slept less than eight hours a night. A third of youth reported that they slept less in custody than outside custody, while the rest slept the same amount or more.

Injuries

In the year before entering custody, 56% of youth had been injured seriously enough to need medical attention, including 13% who had been injured three or more times.

Youth who had been in a physical fight in the past year were more likely to also report having been seriously injured in the past year (62% vs. 35% of those who had not been in a fight).

Males who slept for 8 hours or more a night in custody were more likely to report good or excellent mental health (84% vs. 62% of those who slept less than eight hours).



Mental health

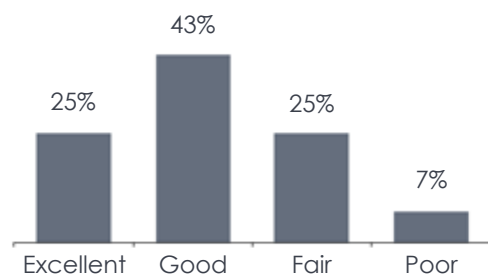
55% of youth rated their general health and mental health similarly, while 29% indicated their general health was better and 16% that their mental health was better.

The majority of youth surveyed (68%) described their current mental health as good or excellent. Twelve percent reported they had not felt anxious, worried, or stressed in the past month. However, 25% felt so anxious and stressed that they could not work or deal with things. Additionally, 17% felt so much despair (sadness, discouragement, or hopelessness) that they could not function properly. This rate was comparable to 2004.

Youth were asked about a number of DSM-IV conditions. Sixty-seven percent of youth reported that they had ever been diagnosed with a specific condition such as depression, anxiety, autism or ADHD. Males and females were equally likely to have at least one of these diagnoses; however, females were more likely than males to have two or more diagnoses (57% vs. 33%).



Youth's mental health ratings



Over half of youth (54%) reported that they had a family member with a history of mental health problems (such as schizophrenia or depression). For 29% of youth, this family member was one of their parents, and for 8% it was both parents. Youth who had a family member with a mental illness were more likely to have at least one mental health diagnosis themselves (86% vs. 65% whose family did not have a mental illness), and were more than twice as likely to have been diagnosed with depression.

Youth were asked to think about their life inside and outside of custody. The majority of youth reported feeling happier and less anxious or nervous when in the community. Males were more likely than females to report feeling happier out of the custody centre, but there was no gender difference for ratings of anxiety.

Feelings in custody versus in the community			
	In custody	Out of custody	No difference
Less anxious or nervous	16%	54%	30%
Happier	8%	77%	15%

Although males and females were equally likely to have self-harmed, females were more likely to have self-harmed 6 or more times (29% vs. 7% of males).

Self-harm

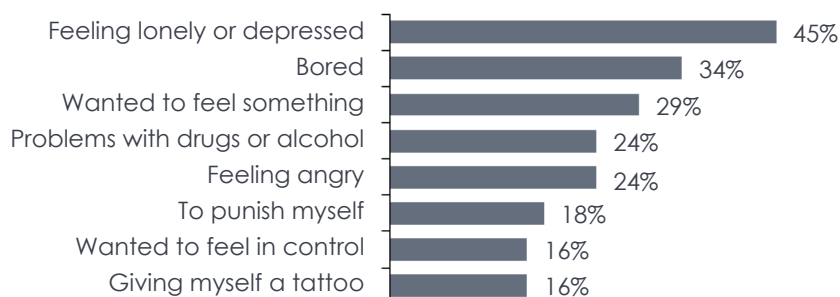
In the 12 months before entering custody, a third of youth had deliberately cut or injured themselves without trying to kill themselves.

Similar to 2004, 16% of males and females had self-harmed since entering the custody centre. The majority of these youth (81%) had also deliberately hurt themselves before entering custody.

Some youth were at greater risk of deliberately harming themselves while in custody. Those at higher risk included youth who indicated they had been diagnosed with three or more conditions, such as ADHD, depression and an addiction problem (30% vs. 12% of youth with fewer than three diagnoses); those who were serving their first custodial sentence (30% vs. 12% who had been in custody previously); those who had been discriminated against while in custody (26% vs. 11%); and those who had been bullied while in custody (28% vs. 10%).

Young people were asked about the reasons they had deliberately cut or injured themselves the last time. Among youth who had self-harmed before entering custody but not while in custody, the most common reasons for their most recent self-harm were feeling lonely or depressed. In comparison, boredom was the most common reason identified for self-harming while in custody.

Most common reasons for deliberately self-harming the last time (among those who had self-harmed)



Note: Youth could select more than one response.

Suicide

As in 2004, 13% of youth in custody had seriously considered suicide in the past year. They were more likely to have considered suicide if they were experiencing extreme stress (33% vs. 8% of youth reporting lower levels) or despair (44% vs. 7%).

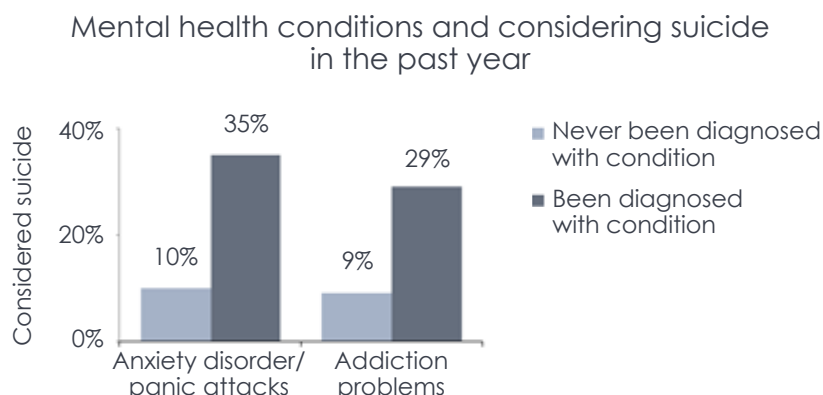
Youth were also more likely to consider suicide if they had been the victims of bullying either before or since they had been in custody; if they had ever been diagnosed with anxiety disorders, panic attacks, depression, or addiction problems; or if they had multiple diagnoses (33% of those with three or more diagnoses considered suicide vs. 8% of those with less than three diagnoses).

Similar to 2004, 10% of youth had attempted suicide in the past year. This was above the rate seen among youth who completed the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey (6%). Among youth surveyed in custody who attempted suicide, the majority made such a serious suicide attempt that they needed medical treatment. Six percent of youth reported that they had attempted suicide while in a youth custody centre.

Among those who had attempted suicide, the most common reasons for making their last suicide attempt were feeling lonely or depressed (52%), feeling angry (48%), feeling stressed (37%), because a family member or friend had died (33%), or because they were bullied (22%).

Most youth (87%) had at least one person they were close to who had died, including losing someone to violence (34%), suicide (32%), and overdose (30%).

44% of youth had a family member who had attempted suicide, and 9% reported these attempts occurred within the past year.



Sexual health

89% of youth had not used a condom or other barrier the last time they had oral sex.

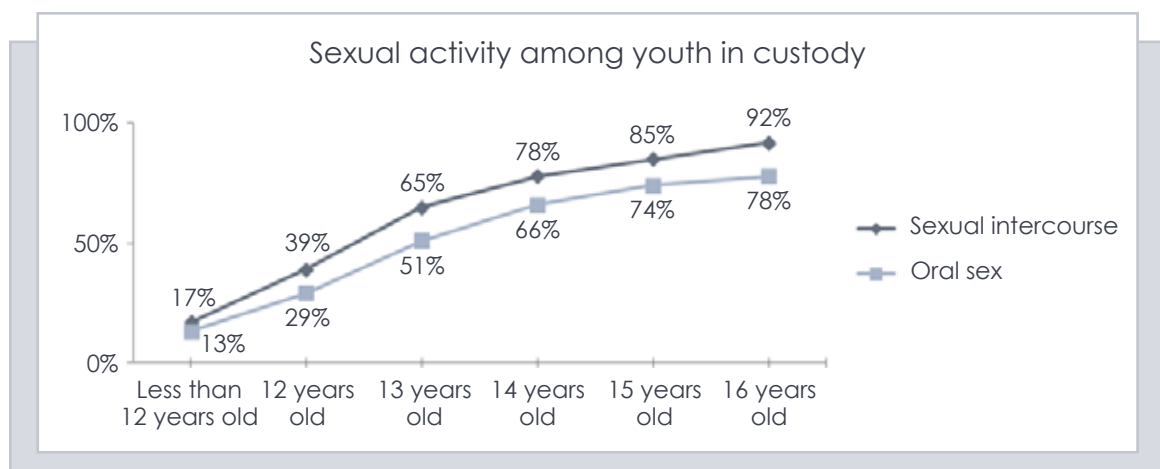
Oral sex

Seventy-seven percent of youth reported having engaged in oral sex. While there was no gender difference in rates of giving oral sex, males were over twice as likely as females to have received oral sex (74% vs. 35%). Among youth who had participated in oral sex, 67% reported first doing so between the ages of 12 and 14 years, and 17% when they were 11 years old or younger.

Sexual intercourse

Eighty-nine percent of youth had ever had sexual intercourse. Rates of intercourse were similar to 2004 for females but there was a decrease in the percentage of males who ever had sex, from 97% in 2004 to 85% in 2012. Youth in custody were four times more likely to have had sex than their peers who completed the school-based BC Adolescent Health Survey.

Among youth who had ever had sexual intercourse, the most common age to have sex for the first time was 13 years (27%). This was unchanged from 2004. Eighteen percent first had intercourse when they were age 11 or younger (compared to 4% of youth in mainstream school who had ever had sex).



Among youth who had sexual intercourse, the majority (65%) had not used a condom or other barrier the last time they had sex. This is almost double the rate seen among youth in school.

Similar to rates in 2004, 14% of youth in custody who had sexual intercourse reported having been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Youth who had a diagnosed STI were equally likely to use a condom the last time they had sex as their peers who did not have a diagnosed STI.

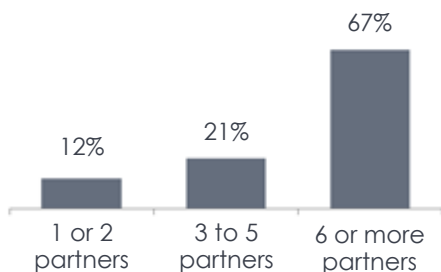
Six percent of youth in custody reported having sex (oral and/or intercourse) with another resident while in the youth custody centre.

Two thirds of youth who ever had intercourse indicated having had 6 or more sexual partners in their life.

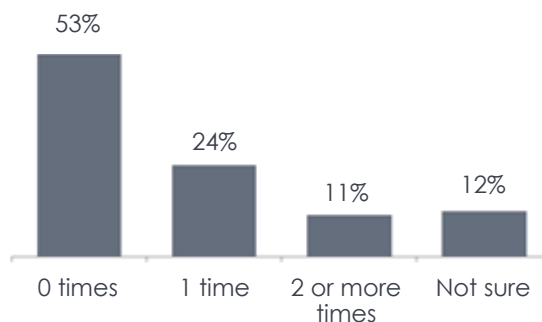
Pregnancy involvement

Consistent with results from 2004, 35% of youth reported ever having been pregnant or caused a pregnancy. This rate is higher than that seen among youth in schools (1% in 2013).

Number of sexual partners
(among youth who ever had sex)



Number of times ever pregnant or
caused a pregnancy



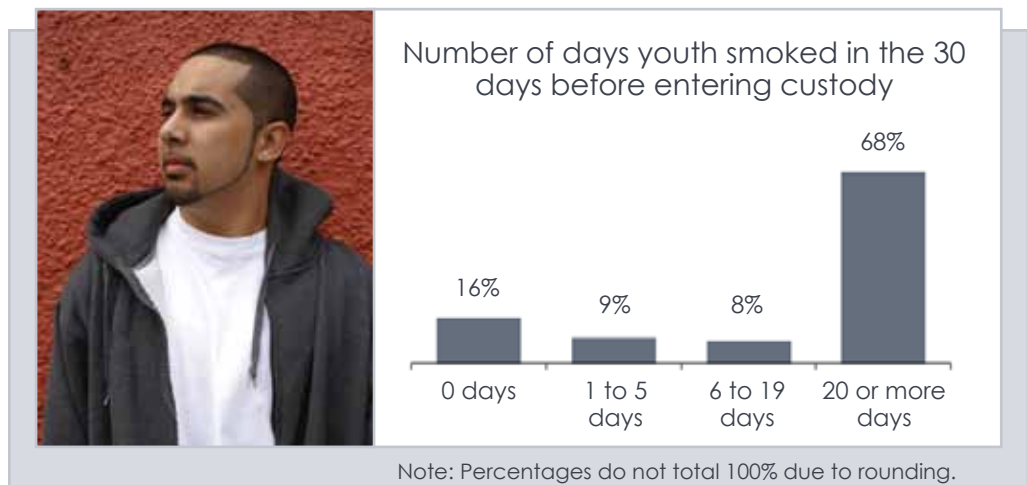
Substance use

Smoking

The majority of youth had smoked tobacco in the month before entering the custody centre and 65% were daily smokers (i.e., they had smoked every day in the month before entering custody). In contrast, only 2% of youth in school were daily smokers.

Alcohol

Ninety-seven percent of youth in custody had ever tried alcohol. Among those who had tried alcohol, 73% were 12 or younger when they had their first drink.

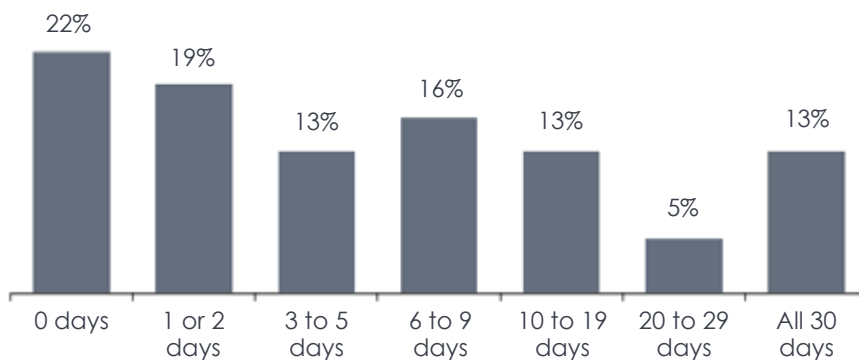


Eighty-seven percent of youth drank alcohol at least once in the 30 days before they entered custody, with 22% drinking on 20 or more days. Females were more likely than males to have drunk every day before they entered custody (33% vs. 11%). In contrast, 1% of males and fewer than 1% of females in mainstream school drank every day.

Seventy-eight percent of youth in custody reported binge drinking at least once during the 30 days before they entered the custody centre. Binge drinking was defined on the survey as having five or more drinks of alcohol within a couple of hours.

Youth in custody were more likely to have drunk alcohol, to have drunk at a younger age, and to have drunk to excess than youth surveyed in school.

Number of days youth binge drank in the 30 days before entering custody (among youth who drank alcohol)



Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

In the 30 days before entering custody, 55% of youth had used marijuana on 20 or more days and 44% had used every day.

Marijuana

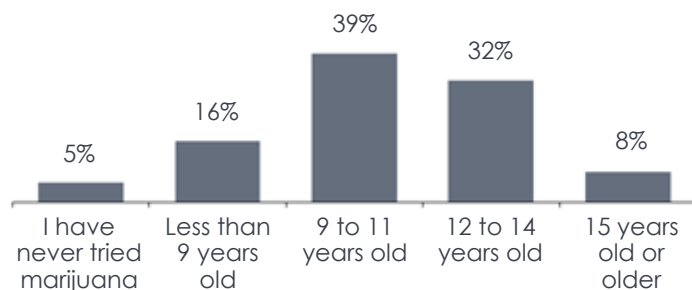
Unlike in 2004 when all youth had tried marijuana, 5% of those surveyed in custody had never tried it in 2012. Twenty six percent of youth surveyed in school had tried marijuana. The most common age for first trying marijuana among youth in custody was between 9 and 11 years.

Other drug use

Most youth had used a substance other than marijuana or alcohol in their lifetime (88%). Eight percent reported using one type of drug other than alcohol or marijuana, while 58% had used five or more different types (e.g., hallucinogens, inhalants, amphetamines), including 8% who had used ten or more different types of drugs. In contrast, 17% of youth in mainstream school had ever tried a substance other than marijuana or alcohol.



Age when youth first tried marijuana



The use of prescription pills without a doctor's consent, heroin, and inhalants rose between 2004 and 2012. Youth in 2012 were also more likely to report using these substances three or more times in their lifetime: prescription pills without a doctor's consent (58% vs. 31% in 2004), heroin (19% vs. 8%), and inhalants (16% vs. 7%). Rates of intravenous (IV) drug use were similar to 2004, with 13% having ever injected a drug.

The 2012 survey asked youth separately about their use of some specific substances: 70% had ever used ecstasy or MDMA and 32% reported having used ketamine or GHB.

Females were more likely than males to have ever used crystal meth (52% vs. 30%), and less likely to have used steroids without a prescription.

Lifetime use of drugs (other than alcohol and marijuana)			
	2004	2012	Change
Cocaine	80%	74%	–
Prescription pills without a doctor's consent	50%	69%	↑
Mushrooms	80%	67%	↓
Hallucinogens (including ecstasy, ketamine, GHB)	68%	73%	–
Amphetamines without a doctor's prescription (including crystal meth)	63%	41%	↓
Heroin	20%	32%	↑
Inhalants	14%	24%	↑
Steroids without a doctor's prescription	NA	15%	NA

– No statistical difference between 2004 and 2012.

↑ Use of this substance rose between 2004 and 2012.

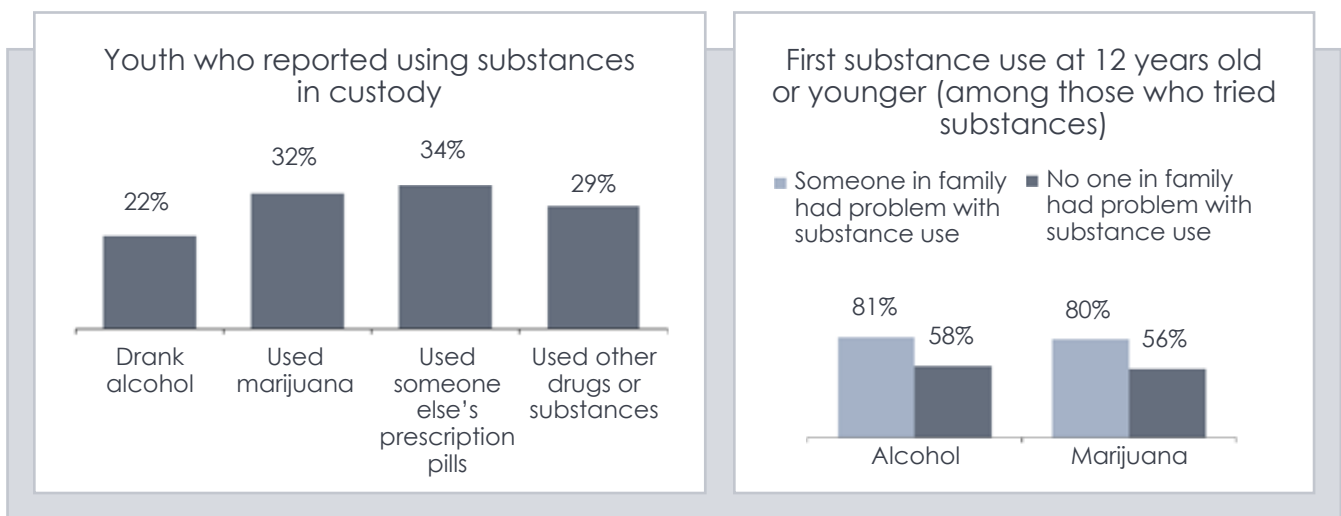
↓ Use of this substance declined between 2004 and 2012.

NA: The 2004 survey did not include a question about use of steroids without a doctor's prescription.

48% of youth reported using alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs while in the custody centre.

Similar to 2004, 65% of males and females had used substances other than alcohol or marijuana in the 30 days before entering the custody centre.

The majority of youth reported a family history of problematic substance use, with 28% indicating that one of their parents had a problem, 17% indicating both parents had a problem, and 37% that other family members had a problem. Youth who felt that someone in their family had a substance use problem were more likely to report having tried alcohol or marijuana at a younger age, and also to report having binge drank in the 30 days before they entered custody (88% vs. 62% of those whose family did not have a substance use problem).



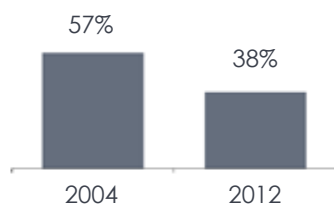
Driving after substance use

Most youth did not have a driver's license (79%), although 16% had their learner's license. However, the majority (62%) had driven a car after consuming marijuana and over half (55%) had driven after drinking alcohol.

The percentage of youth who drove after drinking alcohol in the 30 days prior to entering custody was lower in 2012 than in 2004, including the percentage of those who had done so on two or more occasions that month (28% vs. 40% in 2004).

More than a third of youth had driven after drinking alcohol in the 30 days before entering custody, and 16% had done so on 4 or more occasions in that month.

Drove after drinking alcohol in the 30 days before entering custody



Abuse, violence, and discrimination

62% of youth had witnessed a member of their family being abused or mistreated.

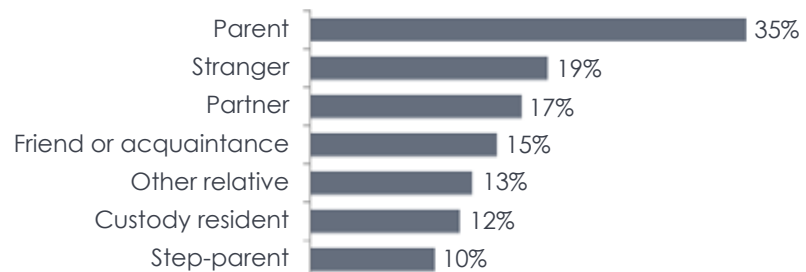
Physical Abuse

Comparable to 2004 (but almost five times higher than rates seen among youth in school), 63% of youth had been physically abused or mistreated at some point in their life.

However, while there was no gender difference in 2004, nearly all females in 2012 had been physically abused compared to 57% of males. More than half of females had been physically abused by a romantic partner (57% vs. virtually no males). This rate was more than three times higher than in 2004.

Youth most commonly reported that the perpetrator of their physical abuse was their parent (67% of females vs. 26% males). As in 2004, 12% of youth reported being physically abused by other custody residents.

Most commonly reported perpetrators of physical abuse



Note: Youth could select more than one response.

Sexual abuse

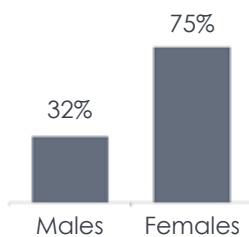
Comparable to 2004, 41% of youth had been sexually abused. This rate included youth who indicated on the survey that they had experienced sexual abuse as well as those who indicated ever being forced to have sex or those who reported first having sex before the age of 12. The rate is almost five times higher than that seen among youth surveyed in school.

As was the case in 2004, females were more than twice as likely as males to have experienced sexual abuse. Specifically, females were more likely to report sexual abuse by a parent, friend/acquaintance, partner, or stranger. Females most commonly reported having been sexually abused by a stranger (47%). Virtually no youth reported having been sexually abused by another custody resident and no youth indicated they had been sexually abused by custody staff.

Twelve percent of youth indicated that they had traded sex in the 12 months before entering custody. They most commonly reported doing so in exchange for shelter (70%), money (64%), and/or drugs (50%).

The percentage of youth in custody who reported sexual abuse by a stranger increased from 4% in 2004 to 13% in 2012.

Ever been sexually abused



Weapon carrying

The majority of youth (72%) reported carrying a weapon in the month before entering custody. Youth who indicated they were part of a gang were more likely than those not in a gang to report carrying a weapon on six or more days in the past month (83% vs. 45%).

Physical fights

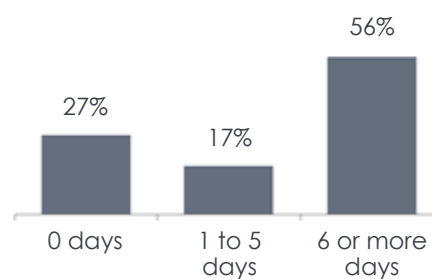
Eighty-three percent of youth had been in one or more physical fights in the year before entering custody, with 30% having been in 12 or more fights. Males and females were equally likely to have fought, and rates of fighting were comparable between 2004 and 2012.

Bullying

In the 12 months before entering custody, 29% of youth reported being teased by another youth, 18% were intentionally excluded from a group or activity, and 45% had been physically attacked or assaulted by another youth on at least one occasion. Additionally, 59% reported that they themselves had teased another youth, 45% had socially excluded someone, and 66% had physically assaulted another youth.



Carried a weapon in the 30 days before entering custody



Thirty percent of youth reported having been bullied or picked on by other residents in custody and 54% indicated having personally bullied or picked on another resident. Sixty-eight percent of youth who had been victims of bullying also reported being a perpetrator.

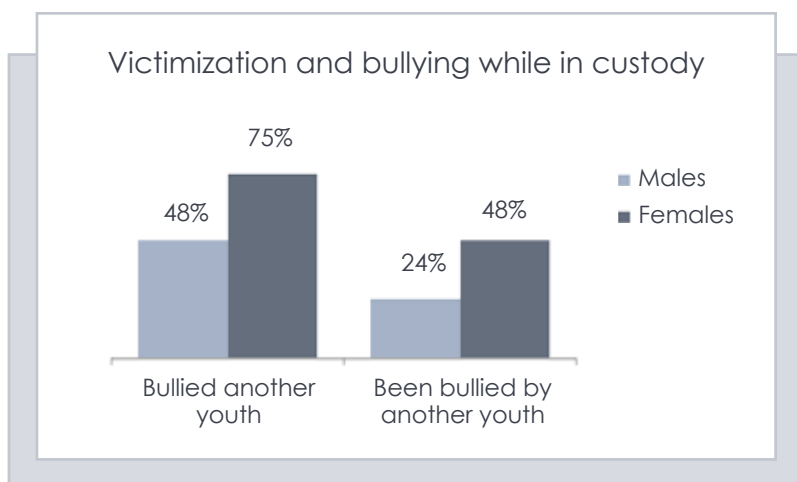
Although there was no difference in rates of being victimized between those serving their sentence in an open or a secure unit, youth serving a secure sentence were more likely to indicate having bullied another resident.

Forty-six percent of youth felt that staff never or rarely knew when a resident was being bullied or picked on in the custody centre, while 25% thought staff often or always knew.

The percentage of youth who felt that staff never or rarely intervened to stop bullying rose from 23% in 2004 to 44% in 2012. However, those who felt that staff were aware of bullying at least some of the time most commonly indicated that staff intervened to stop it (61%).

Males and females were equally likely to be both perpetrator and victim of a physical attack.

Females were at least twice as likely as males to have been teased or purposefully excluded.



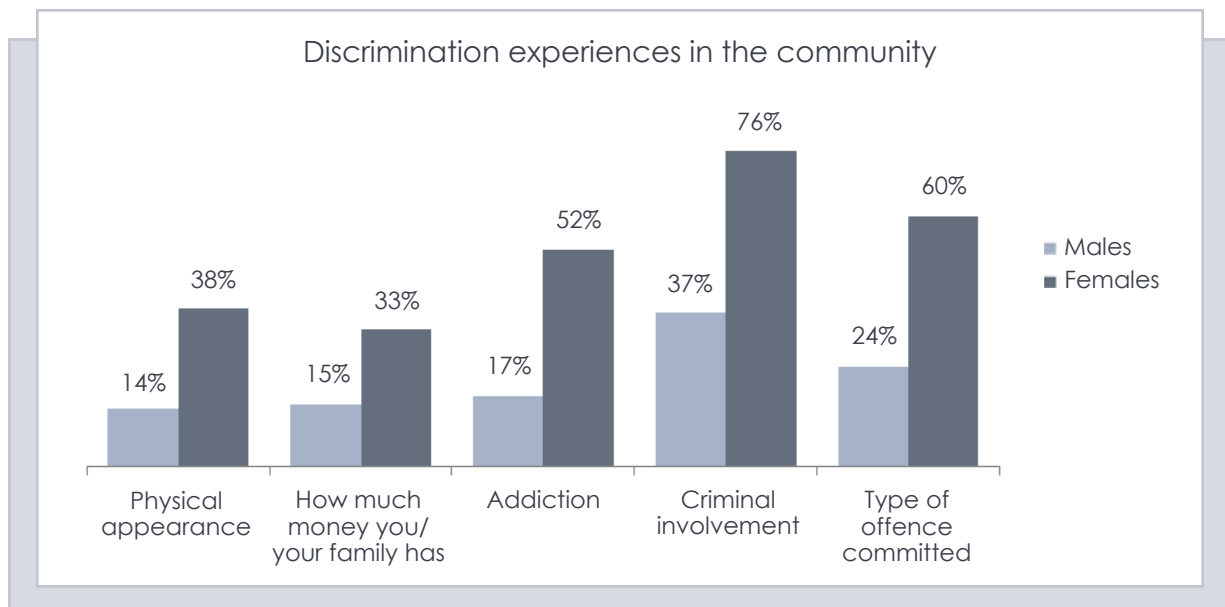
Aboriginal youth were more likely than non-Aboriginal youth to have been discriminated against in the community because of their race, ethnicity, or skin colour.

Discrimination

Rates of youth who experienced discrimination were similar to those in 2004. Most youth (63%) reported ever having been discriminated against in the community with females more likely to report discrimination (virtually all females vs. 60% of males).

Within the community, youth most commonly reported being discriminated against for their criminal involvement (45%); the type of offence they committed (31%); being seen as different (26%); an addiction or perceived addiction (25%); and their race, ethnicity, or skin colour (23%).

In custody, 23% reported discrimination by custody staff and 32% by custody residents. Youth most commonly felt discriminated against by other residents due to their physical appearance (15%), their ethnicity (11%), and being labeled a “snitch” (9%). They most commonly reported discrimination by custody staff for their criminal involvement (9%), the type of offence they committed (6%), their physical appearance (6%), and their ethnicity (5%).



Safety in custody

Similar to 2004, the majority of male and female youth reported feeling safe in a variety of locations throughout the custody centre. Only a small proportion (8% or less) indicated rarely or never feeling safe in these locations.

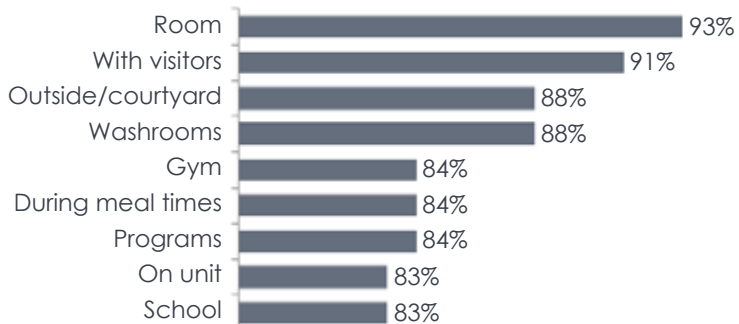
When asked to compare feelings of safety in custody and in the community, 47% reported feeling safer outside of custody, 10% felt safer in custody, and 43% felt equally safe in both settings.

As in 2004, 58% of youth had been physically restrained while in custody (65% males vs. 33% females). Thirty-five percent felt that, on at least one occasion, custody staff had used too much force when restraining them.

When asked about perpetrators of abuse, almost no youth listed custody staff as perpetrators of physical abuse. However, as in 2004, 19% of male and female youth responded on another survey question that they had been physically abused or physically mistreated by a staff in custody, excluding physical restraint.

62% percent of youth always felt safe everywhere in the custody centre.

Often or always felt safe in custody centre



School

The majority of youth who completed a survey reported that they were studying at an age-appropriate grade level (67%), while 23% had completed a lower grade than would be expected by their age, and the rest were working at a higher grade level.

School experiences prior to custody

In the three months prior to entering custody, 44% of youth were enrolled in an alternative program, 14% were in mainstream school, and 41% were not in school. In the month before entering custody, 39% attended school regularly (26% often attended and 13% always attended).

Ninety percent of youth reported that they had been suspended or expelled from school at some point. Reasons included threatening, assaulting or fighting other students (64%); smoking, drinking, or using drugs at school (61%); not attending class regularly (58%); having a weapon at school (46%); threatening or assaulting a teacher (28%); and starting fires (12%). Females were less likely than males to report being suspended, kicked out, or expelled for having a weapon at school (19% vs. 53%).

Despite high rates of dropping out of school and other challenges within the school system, more than half of youth had educational plans beyond high school.



Youth's educational plans

Complete high school	63%
Trade school or community college	28%
University (including law and medical school)	22%
Continue education but unsure when will finish	22%
Apprenticeship	15%
Do not expect to finish high school	10%
Haven't thought about it	7%

Note: Youth could select more than one response.

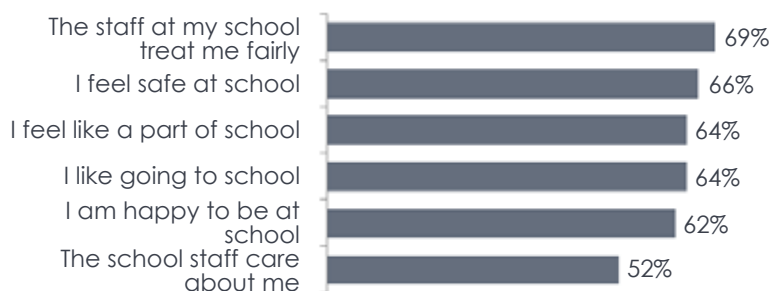
Seventy-eight percent of male and female youth had dropped out of school in the community at some point and 28% had not returned to school after dropping out. Youth who had ever dropped out were less likely to expect to finish high school (44% vs. 70% of those who did not drop out).

School in custody

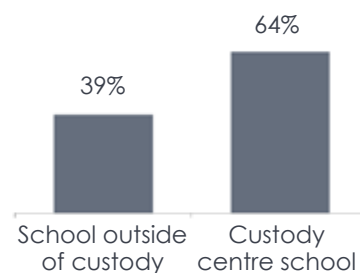
Almost all youth reported attending school at the custody centre. They generally had more positive feelings about school in custody than school in the community.

Youth who reported that there was an adult connected to the custody centre who cared about them (e.g., a staff member, a volunteer) were more likely than youth without this positive relationship to like going to school in custody (76% vs. 47%); to be happy there (73% vs. 49%); to feel like a part of school (73% vs. 51%); and to feel safe there (78% vs. 50% of those without an adult in the centre who they felt cared about them).

Youth who agreed or strongly agreed with these statements about school in custody



Youth who liked going to school



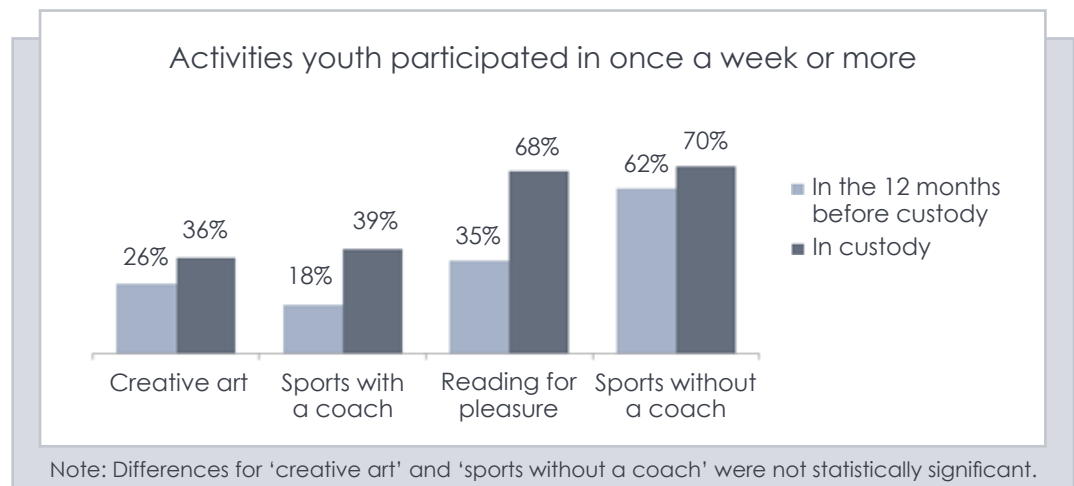
Leisure activities

Youth were nearly twice as likely to take part in organized sports while in custody than when they were in the community.

In the 12 months before entering the custody centre, youth participated in a range of leisure activities with 88% taking part in at least one activity. Males and females most commonly reported playing informal sports without a coach (62%) and reading for pleasure (35%) at least once a week. Youth also participated weekly in creative arts such as drawing, writing, and poetry (26%); sports with a coach (18%); volunteering (13%); yoga (10%); and a range of other activities.

While in the community, males were more likely than females to report weekly participation in informal sports (67% vs. 43%), while females were more likely to take part in a creative art such as drawing (45% vs. 21%).

Once in custody, playing informal sports (70%) and reading (68%) continued to be the most commonly reported weekly leisure activities among youth. Twelve percent reported no involvement in leisure activities.

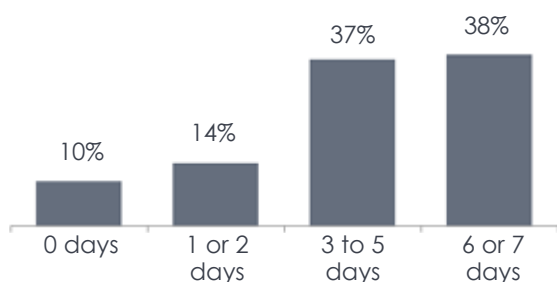


Thirteen percent of Aboriginal youth reported weekly involvement in traditional or cultural activities while in custody, which was similar to their rate of involvement in these activities outside of custody. Youth in the Prince George custody centre were more likely to engage in traditional or cultural activities than youth in the other centres.

Males were more likely than females to play sports regularly in custody. For example, they were more likely to play informal sports four or more times a week (58% vs. virtually no females).

More than half of youth (61%) who had been in custody at least a week indicated that they were physically active on four or more days in the past week. This included taking part in any form of exercise or activity for at least half an hour that made them sweat and breathe hard. Males were more likely to engage in this level of physical activity almost every day or every day (46% vs. virtually no females).

Days exercised in the past week (among youth who had been in custody at least seven days)



Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.



Life in custody

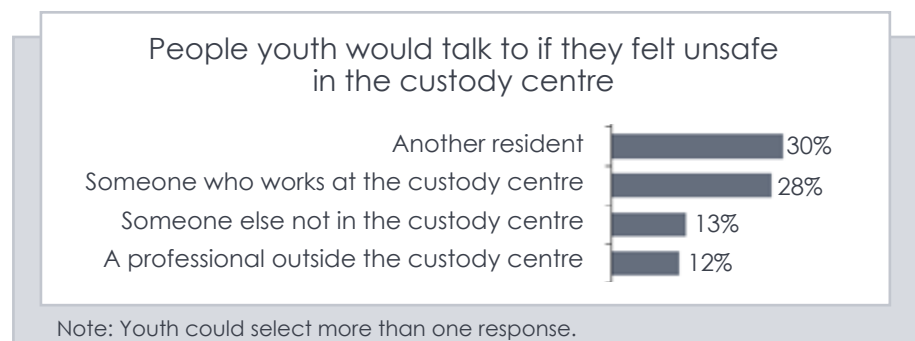
43% of youth never received visits from family or friends while in custody, and 13% did not have any contact with their family or friends.

Contact with family and friends while in custody

Twenty-three percent of male and female youth had family or friends visit them at the custody centre at least weekly, while 34% had less regular visitors. Seventy-one percent spoke to their family or friends on the telephone once a week or more, and 13% received letters once a week or more. (It is important to note that youth are generally not allowed to have visits from friends who are also youth, so friends likely refers to adult friends they had contact with.)

Relationships in custody

Just over half of youth (55%) identified an adult connected to the youth custody centre who they felt cared about them (such as a staff member, a volunteer visitor). A similar percentage (57%) felt they could talk to someone if they felt unsafe in custody, including another resident, someone who worked at the centre (such as staff, advocate, teacher), or a professional outside of custody (such as a lawyer, probation officer, social worker).



Females were more likely than males to report that they would talk to someone who works in the custody centre if they felt unsafe (57% vs. 21%). Males were generally more likely than females to say they would not talk to anyone at all if they felt unsafe. Additionally, male repeat offenders were twice as likely as first-time offenders to say they would talk to no one.

Youth were asked if they felt that staff at the custody centre treated residents fairly and with respect. Thirty-eight percent indicated that all or most of the staff treated residents fairly and with respect, while 44% felt that some of the staff did, and 18% indicated that few or none of the staff did.

Rights

Most youth understood their rights while in custody. They knew they had a right to make a formal complaint (91%), have visits with their family (88%), have reasonable opportunity to use the phone (87%), and be told why they were being searched (65%). However, 42% did not know they had a right to look at their personal information held on file at the custody centre.

Just over 40% of youth had ever made a formal complaint. Among those who had made a formal complaint, 21% indicated that somebody had helped them make their complaint, and 34% felt that the youth custody centre responded respectfully to their complaint.

Youth Custody Services strives to ensure that staff members on the female housing units are female. Virtually all females reported that staff in their unit were the same gender as them most of the time or always.

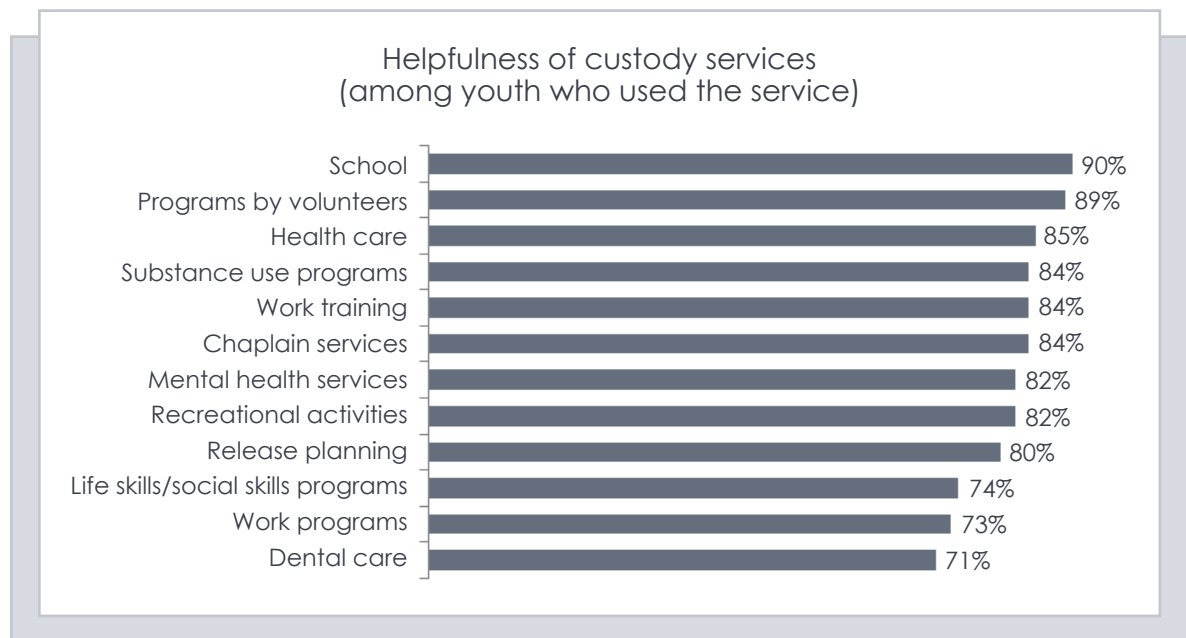
Youth in 2012 were more likely to indicate going to school in custody as well as accessing health care and mental health services than their peers in 2004.

Services in custody

The majority of youth reported using the services and programs provided in the custody centre.

Most youth found the services they accessed to be helpful. Youth rated all the programs they used as being similarly helpful in 2012 and 2004, except they were less likely to indicate in 2012 that life skills programs had been helpful (74% vs. 89% in 2004).

Among Aboriginal youth who accessed Aboriginal programs, 75% found them helpful. In Prince George, virtually all Aboriginal youth found the programming helpful.



Youth with FASD appeared to find programs in custody particularly helpful, with virtually all rating as helpful services pertaining to work, life skills, physical health, mental health, and school.

The presence of helpful programs or services was associated with positive future aspirations. For example, helpful life or social skills programs were associated with youth anticipating having a home of their own in five years. Helpful chaplain and volunteer-run programs were associated with having job aspirations. Youth who found work programs helpful while in custody were more likely to have only positive aspirations for the future, and were especially likely to see themselves in a job in five years.

When asked if there were enough programs or services in the custody centre, 63% of females felt there were enough programs or services for females, while half of males thought there were enough programs or services for males. Males who felt there were enough programs for them were more likely to report having only positive aspirations for the future (79% vs. 48% of males who felt there were not enough programs).

Among youth who indicated having a health condition or disability, 25% felt there were enough programs or services for youth with disabilities at the custody centre, and 46% felt there were not enough. The longer these youth had been in custody, the less likely they were to think that there were enough specialized programs and services for youth with a health condition or disability.

One third of Aboriginal youth felt there were enough Aboriginal programs available in the custody centre, another 37% felt there were not enough programs, while the rest did not know. There were some differences among the custody centres: 62% of Aboriginal youth in the Prince George centre feeling there was enough programming for Aboriginal youth compared to 23% in the other two centres.

88% of youth who did volunteer work saw themselves in a job in five years compared to 58% of those who did not volunteer.

Life after custody

63% of youth had been involved in making decisions about their release plan.

Youth understandably had a range of feelings about leaving custody. The majority (95%) were very excited to leave, but 31% were also nervous about leaving, and 11% did not want to leave. Additionally, 63% felt strongly or very strongly that this would be their last time in custody.

Most youth had a place to live when they left custody (87%), and 76% knew where to access help after they left custody.

Help to prevent re-offending

When asked what would help to prevent them from re-offending in the future, youth most commonly answered that job training or job opportunities, better or more school programs, and/or participation in a different social group would be helpful.

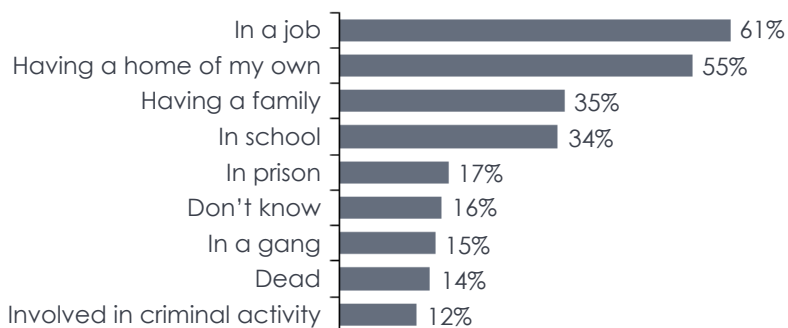


Positive future aspirations

Youth in custody were asked where they saw themselves in five years time. The majority saw a positive future for themselves, such as anticipating having a job and/or a home of their own. Over a third saw themselves with a family and/or in school.

“[We need] rehabilitation and services to help youth before and after custody.”

Where youth saw themselves in 5 years



Note: Youth could select more than one response.



Protective factors

As this report has illustrated, youth in custody have experienced a range of risky behaviours and negative life experiences, but the presence of protective factors such as supportive environments and helping relationships may assist even the most vulnerable youth to overcome challenges.

Sense of competence

The BC Adolescent Health Survey has shown that youth in mainstream schools who are able to identify something they are good at are more likely to experience a host of healthy situations and behaviours than youth who do not identify any areas of competence. Similar positive associations were found among the 73% of youth in custody who indicated there was at least one thing they were really good at.

Youth in custody most commonly reported excelling in sports (42%); the arts such as music, drawing, or writing (13%); and relationship skills such as helping others (12%). When youth indicated having a positive skill (as opposed to no skills or skills in risk behaviours such as crime or substance use), they were more likely to have post-secondary plans (59% vs. 26%) and to see themselves with a home of their own in five years (63% vs. 38%).

Community connectedness

Community connectedness has also been shown to be a protective factor. Youth in custody who felt quite strongly connected to their home community were more likely to report having good or excellent general health (92% vs. 73% who felt less connected). They were also more likely than less connected youth to see themselves in a job in five years time (75% vs. 49%).

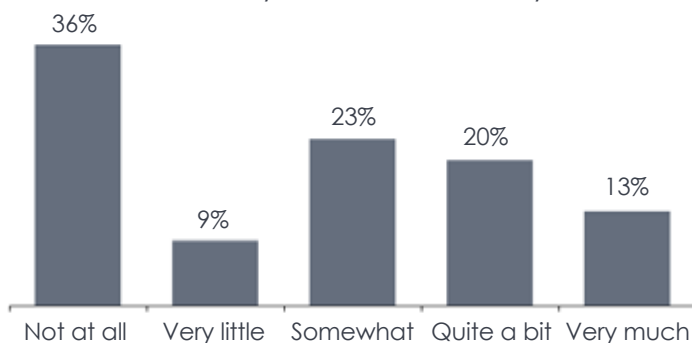
Understandably, fewer youth felt connected to the custody community they were living in, but a third felt quite or very connected. If youth felt even somewhat connected to the custody community, they were more likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent (74% vs. 55% of their less connected peers).

Maintaining relationships in the community

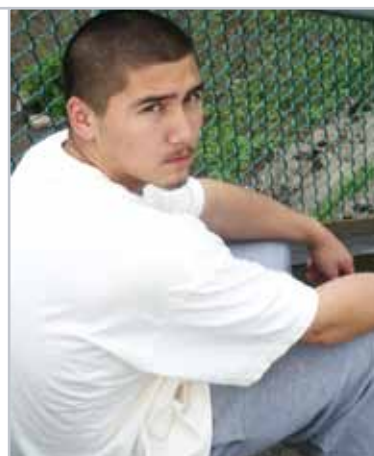
Maintaining connections with their family and community had many benefits. For example, youth who had visits from family or friends were less likely to report experiencing extreme anxiety or stress in the past month (17% vs. 37% of those whose family or friends never visited) and extreme despair (12% vs. 28%). Similar results were found for youth who maintained phone contact with family or friends.

Youth who felt strongly connected to their home community were more likely than less connected youth to think this was their last time in custody.

How much youth felt like a part of the custody centre community



Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.



Females were more likely than males to feel their friends outside of custody would be upset with them for beating someone up or being part of a gang.

Friends

Friends play a key role in adolescent development. Youth in custody were asked how their friends would feel about their involvement in various risk behaviours (such as beating someone up, being part of a gang, or dropping out of school). They felt that their friends in the custody centre were generally less likely than their friends outside custody to disapprove if they engaged in risk behaviours.

Around a third had friends outside of custody who would be upset with them if they were part of a gang, dropped out of school, or got pregnant or got someone else pregnant. Fewer said their friends in the community would be upset if they beat someone up (16%), got drunk (12%), or used marijuana (10%).

Youth whose friends outside the custody centre would be upset with them if they were involved in various negative behaviours were less likely to report that they had done a range of risky activities, such as getting in a physical fight in the past year, binge drinking, dropping out of school, or being gang-involved.

Youth with friends in the community who would be upset if they were part of a gang were more likely to have only positive future aspirations (such as having a job, home, or family; and being in school), to rate their overall health as good or excellent (94% vs. 75% of those whose friends would not be upset if they were in a gang), and to think that this would be their last time at the custody centre (82% vs. 53%).

Having pro-social friends was also linked to feeling part of the community. For example, males who reported their friends outside of the custody centre would be upset with them if they beat someone up were more likely to feel like a member of their community (60% vs. 27% of those whose friends would not be upset).

Having supportive peers in the custody centre was also important. For example, virtually all youth who reported they could talk to another resident if they felt unsafe rated their health as good or excellent, and they were more likely to see themselves having a home in five years (71% vs. 49% of youth who did not feel comfortable turning to another resident).

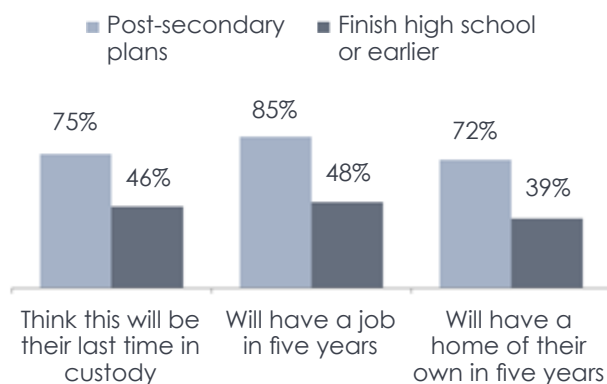
School connectedness and post-secondary aspirations

Having a sense of connectedness to their school in custody was associated with positive aspirations. For example, ratings of good or excellent health were more likely among those who felt school staff cared about them (90% vs. 72%) or who felt safe at school (90% vs. 60%) than among those who did not have this sense of connectedness. Furthermore, those who felt happy at their school were more likely to have post-secondary plans (72% vs. 44%) and to rate their health as good or excellent.

Youth with post-secondary plans (apprenticeship, trade school, community college, university) were more likely to think this was their last time in custody compared to youth who planned to finish their education with high school.

Having post-secondary plans was associated with positive future aspirations, such as having a job and a home in 5 years time.

Education plans and other future aspirations



Males who had 3 or more adults who cared about them were nearly twice as likely to report good or excellent mental health than those with 2 or fewer.

Supportive adults

Despite often challenging family circumstances, most youth reported feeling connected to their family. The majority of male and female youth (57%) indicated that the parent or guardian who had spent the most time raising them cared about them very much. Eleven percent felt that their parent or guardian cared very little or not at all.

Feeling supported by adults has many benefits for youth. Almost three quarters of youth (72%) indicated that there was an adult in their family who they could talk to if they were having a serious problem. Similarly, 73% had an adult outside their family who they could talk to.

Although a few youth had no one or only one person who they felt cared about them, 6% had two adults that cared about them, and the majority (86%) had three or more.

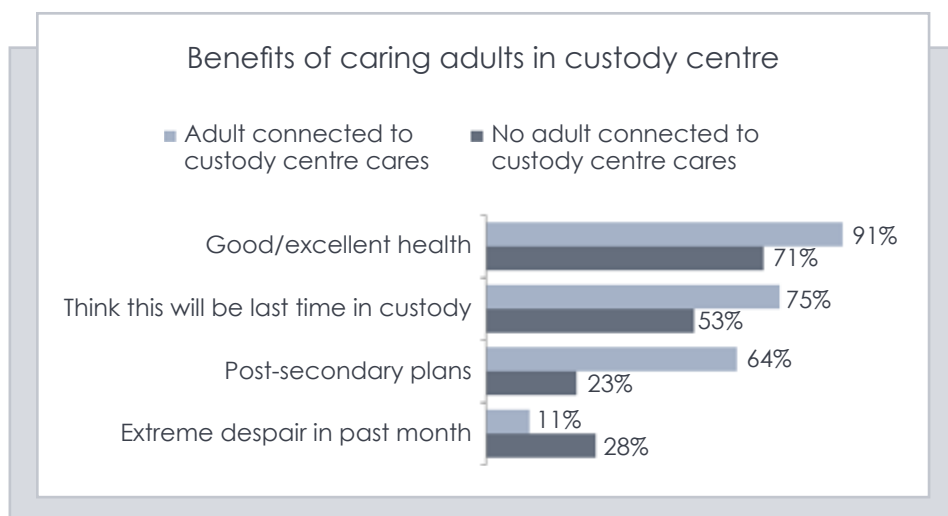
Having more caring adults in their lives was linked to better mental health. For example, youth who had three or more caring adults in their lives were less likely than youth with two or fewer to report feeling extremely anxious, worried, or stressed in the past month (17% vs. 67%).



Adults both within the custody centre and outside had an important role to play in youth's lives. For example, youth who felt they had someone (other than a professional) to turn to outside custody if they felt unsafe were more likely to see themselves in school in five years (57% vs. 30% who did not feel they could turn to someone outside custody).

Youth who reported there was an adult connected to the custody centre who cared about them were more likely to report feeling like a part of the community in custody (41% vs. 21% of those without a caring adult in custody). They were also more likely to rate their health as good or excellent, and were less likely to feel extreme stress and despair in the last month.

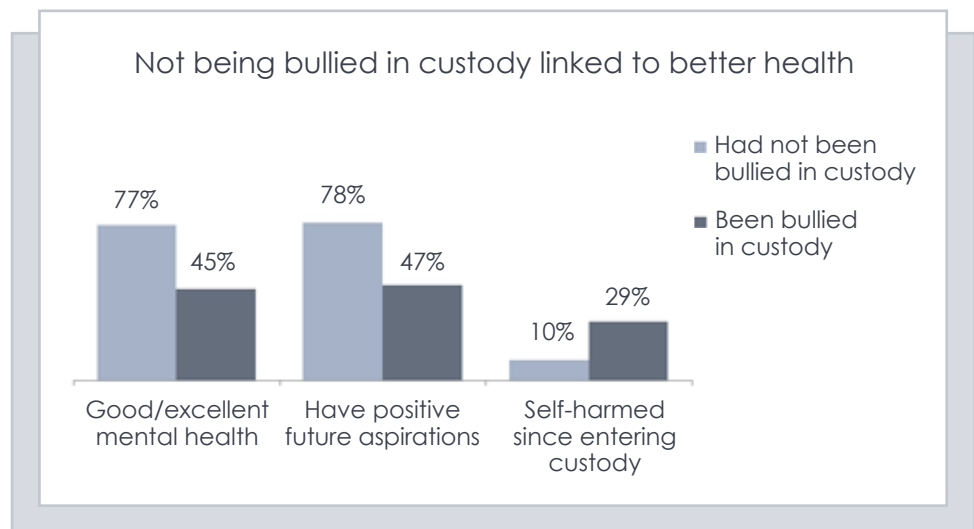
Youth who reported there was an adult connected to the custody centre who cared about them were more likely to report that this was their last time in custody, to have future job aspirations, and to have post-secondary plans.



Supportive environment

Being in a custody centre environment that was free from discrimination and bullying was associated with positive health. Youth who were not subjected to any type of discrimination in the custody centre were more likely than those who felt they were discriminated against to report good or excellent mental health (76% vs. 51%). They were also less likely to have thought about suicide in the past year and to have self-harmed while in custody (11% vs. 26%).

Similarly, youth who had not been bullied in the custody centre were more likely than victims of bullying to rate their mental health as good or excellent (77% vs. 45%). They were also less likely to report suicidal ideation in the past year, self-harm in custody (10% vs. 29%), and stress (17% vs. 41%) and despair (10% vs. 31%) in the past month. In addition, males who had not been bullied were more likely than peers who had been bullied to indicate they had only positive future aspirations (78% vs. 47%).



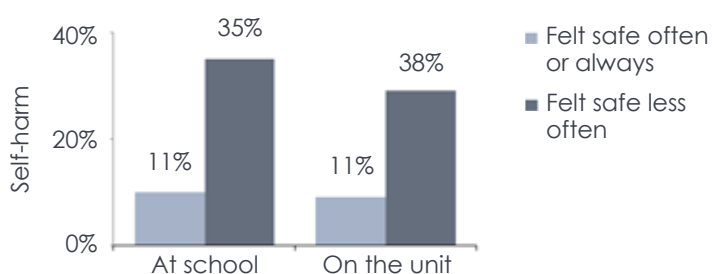
Feeling safe in the custody centre was linked to lower rates of self-harm while in custody. For example, youth who felt safe often or always at the centre's school or on their unit were less likely to self-harm than those who felt safe less often.

Youth who reported low conflict involvement while in the custody centre (had not been bullied, had not bullied another youth, and had not been physically restrained by staff) were more likely to report having only positive future aspirations. These individuals were also more likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent compared to those who had been involved in bullying or had engaged in behaviour that resulted in physical restraint (87% vs. 63%).

*"I love the centre
and the staff."*

Males and females who had low conflict involvement while in custody and also reported not using any illicit substances since entering the custody centre were more likely to see themselves in a job in five years time (83% vs. 56% of those who did not report this) and to agree that this would be their last time in the custody centre (83% vs. 58% of those who did not report this).

Feeling safe in custody locations linked to lower rates of self-harm



Youth who took part in at least 2 weekly physical activities were less likely to report despair in the past month than those who were less active.

Engagement in activities

Weekly engagement in physical activities in custody (such as sports, dance, or yoga) had positive associations with health.

Males who participated in at least one weekly physical activity in custody were more likely than those who did not to report good or excellent health (87% vs. 53%) and to feel they would have a home of their own in five years. As well, males who participated in weekly organized sports were less likely to feel extreme stress or despair in the past month and were more likely to report their mental health as good or excellent (84% vs. 62%). Finally, among males who had been in custody at least a week, those who reported that they had participated in high energy physical activities on at least six of the last seven days were less likely to feel extreme stress recently.

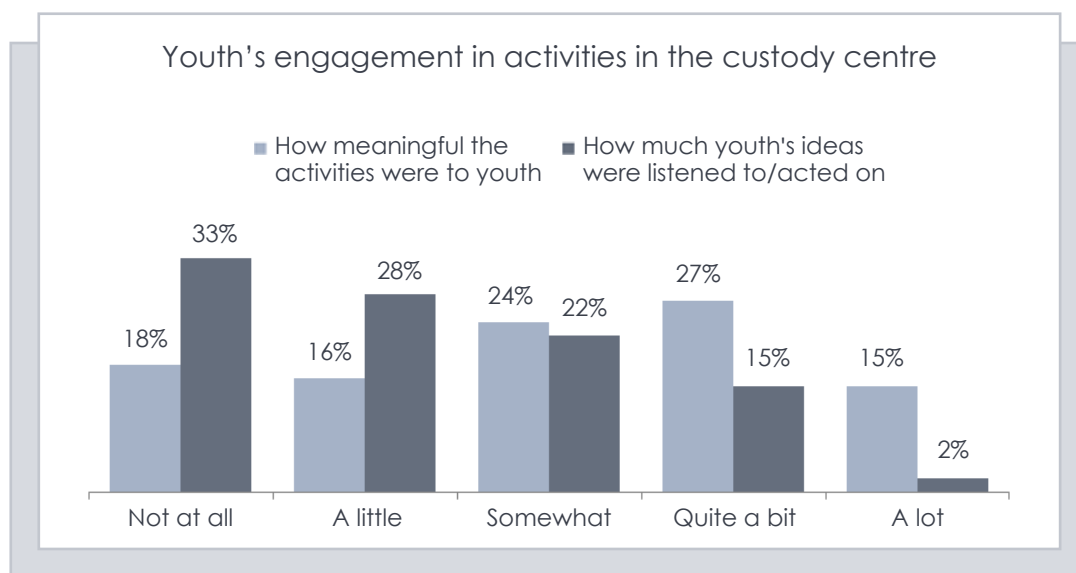
Those who took part in at least two other types of leisure activities (such as art or reading) on a weekly basis while in custody were also more likely to have post-secondary plans (64% vs. 36% who participated in fewer activities) and to see themselves in a job in five years time (74% vs. 52%).



Meaningful engagement in custody activities

Meaningful engagement in activities has been linked to healthy development among youth in mainstream schools. Youth in custody were therefore asked about the meaningfulness of the activities they engaged in and how much they felt their ideas were listened to and valued.

Most youth felt that the activities they took part in while in the custody centre were at least somewhat meaningful to them. However, fewer youth felt that their ideas were listened to and acted upon in these activities.

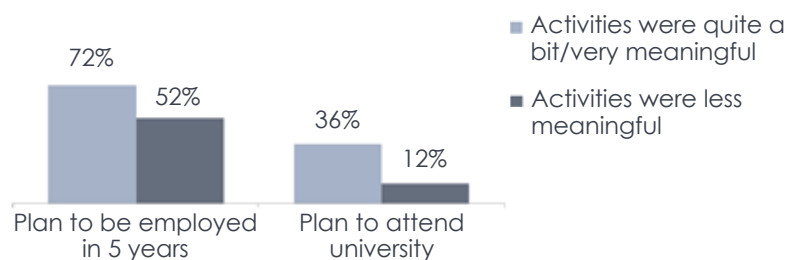


Youth who had been in custody 4–8 months were at least twice as likely as those who had been in for shorter or longer periods to feel that their ideas were listened to or acted upon.

Youth who felt that the activities they took part in at the custody centre were meaningful, and that their ideas were listened to and acted upon in these activities, were less likely to report extreme levels of stress or despair compared to their peers who felt less engaged. Meaningful engagement was also associated with plans to pursue post-secondary education and to be employed in five years time.



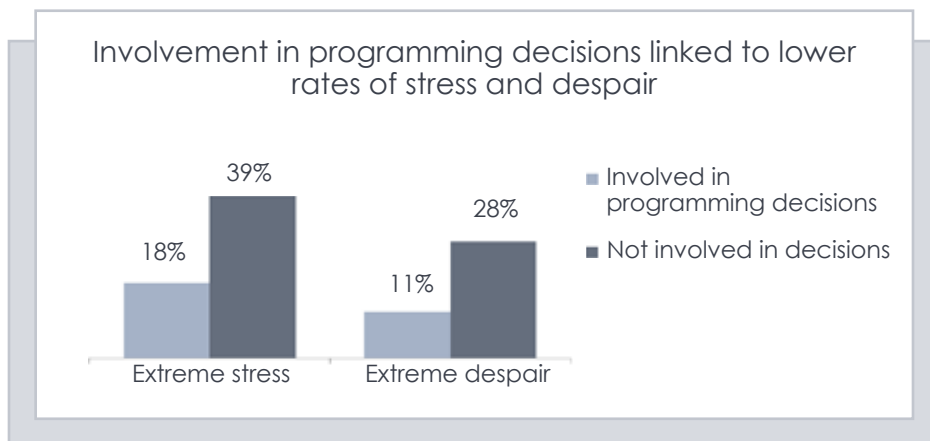
Meaningful engagement in custody activities linked to healthy aspirations



An important aspect of meaningful engagement is involvement in decision making. Two thirds of youth reported that they had been involved in making decisions about the programs they participated in at the centre. These youth were more likely to see themselves having a home of their own in five years (67% vs. 37% of those who were not involved in program decisions), and were less likely to have experienced extreme stress (18% vs. 39%) or extreme despair (11% vs. 28%) in the past 30 days.

Furthermore, youth who were involved in making decisions about their release plan were more likely than those who were not involved to know where to access help once they left custody (83% vs. 61%) and to anticipate living in their own home in five years (65% vs. 38%).

Youth involved in program decisions reported more positive mental health.



Final words

This report echoes many of the findings of a 2009 internal report by Gretton and Clift, (*An Examination of Mental Health Needs Among Youth in British Columbia*), which looked at the mental health challenges of youth in custody in BC. Both reports show that many youth who enter custody have experienced major trauma, have a diagnosed mental illness or learning disability, have substance abuse issues, and are suffering acute mental health challenges, as well as challenges in their lives outside of custody such as school disengagement, family criminal involvement, and unstable living conditions. Both studies also found that females often report higher rates of substance use, trauma, abuse, and victimization.

There were some differences between youth's self-report in 2012 and the findings of the 2009 study which included more formalized testing and access to youth's personal records. For example, in 2012 more youth were reporting that they were at an age-appropriate grade level. This is likely because the youth self reports reflect their perception of their current academic performance. It also highlights the inclusive and supportive environment created within the custody school setting where youth have the opportunity to catch up on missed studies and work at their own pace.

Youth in custody have lacked the safe relationships, stable homes, and supportive environments that most youth in BC experience. This report highlights the marked contrast between the life experiences of youth in custody and their same age peers who are in mainstream schools across the province.

Yet this report also shows that when youth in custody have caring adults in their lives, the opportunity to engage in healthy activities, and a supportive environment in the custody centre, they have many of the same positive aspirations as their more advantaged peers. This is particularly encouraging given that more than one in five youth in custody has FASD and many others have other lifetime health and learning challenges which means they will likely interact with service providers throughout their lifetime. If these youth can find supportive adults within those services, they will experience better outcomes.

Since 2004, Youth Custody Services in BC has undergone many changes including a restructure which is more culturally appropriate and includes more gender-specific programs and services. These changes appear to be having a positive effect on the youth who enter custody. Yet there remain some areas which require further improvements as reflected in the rates of youth reporting going to bed hungry and using substances while in custody. These are currently under review by Youth Custody Services.

