THE REVIEW OF THE

rootsofyouthviolence

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FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

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THE HONOURABLE ROY MCMURTRY   DR. ALVIN CURLING

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Executive Summary

Introduction

When Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty asked us to undertake this review in the aftermath of the fatal shooting of a high school student at school, he had the wisdom not to simply ask for short-term ideas about how to deploy yet more law enforcement resources to try to suppress this kind of violence. Instead, he asked us to spend a year seeking to find out where it is coming from — its roots — and what might be done to address them to make Ontario safer in the long term.

This turned out to be a most challenging assignment. Ontario is a large and diverse province. The issues are complex and controversial. Time was limited, and both the pressures and expectations have been high. We nonetheless thank the Premier for this opportunity and commend him for the initiative he took in placing the focus on the long-term well-being of Ontario and its residents.

In undertaking this work, we joined a conversation rather than starting one. Our work, although focusing on a more fundamental analysis than has often been the case, did not begin in a vacuum. In provincial and other governments and, perhaps most importantly, in communities across this province, many individuals have combined compassion with passion to help address the violence in our society.

However, we found no overall policy in place to guide this work and no structures to coordinate the efforts of those doing it. We found a focus on problems rather than on the roots of problems, and on interventions once the roots had taken hold rather than on actions to prevent that happening.

Overall, our analysis brought to light a number of underlying issues that call for attention in a structured and sustained way. While this "roots" analysis has by definition caused us to focus on often very deep and sometimes divisive problems and has perhaps in some areas given our report a negative tone, we believe that our plan for the future is positive. With good communications and sustained and visible commitment, it will earn and receive significant public support.

Fundamentally, we believe that the public in Ontario does and will support an approach based on the efficiencies of aligning governments and communities to get at entrenched social problems in a collaborative way, an approach that features working in neighbourhood partnerships in the most disadvantaged areas to build strong communities and to nurture healthy, well-educated and engaged youth. And that is what we call for, along with a governance structure to ensure that change happens in a coordinated and sustained way.

Before outlining our findings, we want to acknowledge the wise counsel and excellent advice we received from the two bodies our terms of reference identified as key partners: the City of Toronto and the United Way. In particular, Nancy Matthews, on behalf of the city, and Frances Lankin, on behalf of United Way Toronto, brought to our work a wealth of expertise and experience, and were instrumental in helping us appreciate the full scope of the issues before us, and the kinds of sustainable responses necessary to address those issues.

We also want to note that while this executive summary provides a fairly extensive digest of our report, the complexity and interconnectedness of the matters we cover are such that those who wish to fully appreciate the issues and our approach to them should consult the main volume.

Ontario at a Crossroads

We acknowledge that Ontario has been making progress on certain of the issues we identify. Much of its work on early childhood learning is very much in the right direction, the full-day learning initiative for four- and five-year-olds has the potential to be powerfully transformative, the increased spending on education is impressive, and the appointment of a Poverty Reduction Committee at the Cabinet level is inspirational. And both before our work started and fairly frequently throughout it, the government made program announcements that are consistent with the directions we propose.

For example, during our mandate the Ministry of Education amended the *Education Act* to address some of the concerns expressed to us by both educators and the community around "safe schools" issues and their disproportionate impact on racialized and marginalized students. Other announcements included funding for more psychologists, social workers, child and youth workers and guidance counsellors in schools (August 2007), the appointment of Dr. Charles Pascal to recommend the best way to implement full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, the expansion of the Pathways to Education program (both November 2007), additional funding to keep schools open for community use (February 2008), the establishment of 34 new Parenting and Family Literacy Centres

(May 2008), and funding for Big Brothers/Big Sisters Canada and other community groups to provide role models and mentors in schools (June 2008). Other examples of government initiatives that may help address the roots of violence involving youth are discussed in Chapter 8 and noted elsewhere in our report.

All of these programs support our conclusion that Ontario is starting to make some progress in addressing the roots of violence involving youth. But in other ways, serious problems remain. The positive announcements to which we refer do not form part of any comprehensive strategy for youth because Ontario does not have a coordinated strategy for its youth. The very serious problems being encountered in neighbourhoods characterized by severe, concentrated and growing disadvantage are not being addressed because Ontario has not placed an adequate focus on these concentrations of disadvantage despite the very serious threat they pose to the province's social fabric. Racism is becoming a more serious and entrenched problem than it was in the past because Ontario is not dealing with it. The significant new investments in education are not reaching many of the children who need the most help because long-identified barriers to learning are not being addressed. Ontario's youth justice system is harming some youth because it has no overall coordination, remains punitive in ways that are not strategic and permits increasingly problematic police-community relations.

That said, our point is not to unduly critique the present government for the ongoing effects of past policies, most of which it inherited. Instead, our point is that Ontario is now at a very important crossroads.

The trends we identify in our report, although largely masked by the overall stability of the crime figures, suggest that Ontario is incubating an increase in youth violence, and in more serious violence. These trends are deeply troubling. They include the increasing concentration of violent crime among younger people, the increasing frequency with which guns and knives are being used in disputes that might previously have been settled with fists, the increasing intensity and ferocity of the violence, the increasingly public nature of extreme violence, the growth in the prevalence of both guns and gangs, neighbourhoods trapped in a downward cycle of disadvantage and being challenged to provide the solidarity and positive role-modelling needed to help stem the violence, and a broader community inclined to write off these youth and these communities because they see them as the source of this problem rather than its victims.

In these developments, we see powerful signs that core social bonds are being stretched beyond the breaking point. As those bonds break, violence is normalized, sensibilities are brutalized and communities are isolated. The sowing of the seeds for community retreat, the ceding of public space to violence and the silence that arises from the fear to speak out all increase the opportunities for violence.

The summary our consultants prepared of the Neighbourhood Insight Sessions we conducted makes for very troubling reading. It pulls together what we heard in Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo, and in four Toronto neighbourhoods. Similar messages are found in the report of our consultation with urban Aboriginal youth across the province.

In the neighbourhoods we visited, we heard about gun violence, violence around drugs and drug dealing, robberies on the street, swarmings, verbal abuse, intimidation, threats, gangs, claims of turf, attacks with knives, fights at school, violence in sports, domestic abuse, sexual assaults, dating violence and violence that flows from systemic issues such as racism, inequality and poverty.

In these neighbourhoods, we also heard about impacts this violence is having on communities. These included fear in neighbourhoods being on the rise, a code of silence taking hold, communities and youth being stereotyped and becoming desensitized to violence, violence becoming an acceptable way of dealing with conflict, gangs proliferating, police presence increasing and leading to harassment, students having more difficulty focusing on school, teaching becoming more difficult, schools being unsafe, youth suffering from depression and social service agencies increasingly unable to keep up with the demand for services.

The worst impacts are being felt in neighbourhoods that are often already isolated from the rest of the community because of the circumstances of poverty. What is particularly disturbing is that many of these communities are largely composed of members of racialized groups. We trace in Chapter 4 how racism and other barriers have concentrated poverty in these groups, and how the housing market has then driven them into concentrations of those who suffer from high levels of poverty.

When poverty is racialized, and then ghettoized and associated with violence, the potential for the stigmatization of specific groups is high. That stigmatization can, in turn, further reduce opportunities for those groups. If we allow these trends and impacts to grow in intensity and impact and fail to mobilize as a society to address the conditions that give rise to them, the prognosis for the neighbourhoods and for the future of this province could be grim.

At the same time, we need to note that Ontario is in the relatively early phases of this degree and kind of violence. And, importantly, even the most disadvantaged communities in our province have good leaders, positive networks and many committed individuals working every day to strengthen and solidify them and to make them safer.

It is because this balance still exists, however precariously, that we consider Ontario to be at a crossroads.

Understanding the Roots

Ontario is at this crossroads in large measure because the roots of violence involving youth have not been comprehensively understood, articulated or addressed.

As we set out in Chapter 3, in seeking to understand those roots we did not start from the assumption that circumstances such as poverty were necessarily the roots of violence involving youth. If they were, we would be a far more violent society than we are now given the extent of these conditions and circumstances.

Instead, we felt that we first needed to understand the mindset of the youth who are at the core of the public's concern: the ones who walk our streets and enter our schools with guns or other weapons and seem to place no value on human life. Our analysis accordingly reasoned back from the state of mind that puts no value on human life and leads to vicious assaults or killings, and to shootings in public places that also senselessly endanger far more people than the intended victim. We believe it is only if we find and address the conditions that give rise to that state of mind that we will be able to stop the growing number of youth who think that way.

It takes a certain desperation for a young person to walk our streets with a gun. The sense of nothing to lose and no way out that roils within such youth creates an ever-present danger. That danger arises from the impulsiveness of youth and the lack of foresight with which they often act. The unfortunate — and often tragic — reality is that it often takes very little provocation or incentive to trigger that latent violence once we have let the immediate risk factors develop. This most often puts other youth in danger's way, but can do the same for any of us, because it creates a reality in which violence is unpredictable — unpredictable in location, unpredictable in cause and unpredictable in consequences.

This is what lies at the heart of what often seems like inexplicable violence and of the devastating community impacts we set out in Chapter 5. It is why we need to be deeply concerned about the present state of affairs in Ontario. It is why we must identify the immediate risk factors for violence that exist within some youth, and then identify and address the conditions that give rise to them.

What then are the immediate risk factors — the ones that create that state of desperation and put a youth in the immediate path of violence? While no set of factors can explain all violence, we are persuaded that youth are most likely to be at immediate risk of involvement in serious violence if they:

◆ Have a deep sense of alienation and low self-esteem

◆ Have little empathy for others and suffer from impulsivity

◆ Believe that they are oppressed, held down, unfairly treated and neither belong to nor have a stake in the broader society

◆ Believe that they have no way to be heard through other channels

◆ Have no sense of hope.

Our experience and our work on this review make it clear to us that most youth who feel connected to and engaged with the broader society, and who feel valued and safe and see a positive future for themselves in it, will not experience these conditions and will not commit serious violence. Indeed, many of the youth who meet the above descriptors will also not do so, because no triggering event or circumstance will occur to unleash their feelings, or because society manages to intervene in time. But when such a trigger does manifest itself before that intervention, as it all too often does, it is they who are far more likely to explode in a very harmful way.

We believe that starting from this understanding is important because it allows us to move from identifying the immediate risk factors for involvement in serious violence to analyzing the conditions in which they arise. And once we identify these conditions — the roots — strategies to address them can be put in place.

For us, it is the roots — the conditions in which the immediate risk factors can grow and flourish — that require the urgent attention of the Premier and his government because the costs of failing to identify and address them will be ongoing, tragic and high.

What Are the Roots?

Based on our identification of the immediate risk factors for violence involving youth, we go on in our report to outline the major conditions in which those factors grow and flourish within our society. We review how each of the many roots we identify can lead to one or more of the immediate risk factors. Our focus is on the effects, rather than the existence, of these roots.

While we discuss each root separately, many, if not all, of them frequently interconnect and intertwine in ways that create devastating cumulative impacts for far too many of our youth. These interconnections must be recognized in long-range comprehensive strategies to address the roots of the serious violence that confronts us as a society.

We will not attempt in this executive summary to summarize all of what we have said about the various roots. We will, though, provide an outline of some of the most pervasive of them, starting with poverty. We stress that these are roots of the immediate risk factors such as alienation and lack of hope, and are by no means direct gateways to violence involving youth.

Poverty

Poverty does not directly cause violent crime. If it did, then given the extent and depth of the poverty among us, our levels of violence would be truly frightening. Most people living in poverty are working hard to hold down one or more uncertain, low-wage jobs, to improve their skills or education, to hold together families and communities against a bombardment of negative circumstances, or sometimes are doing all three. All Ontarians should admire their hard work and their strong commitment to a society that fails them in so many ways.

But poverty without hope, poverty with isolation, poverty with hunger and poor living conditions, poverty with racism and poverty with numerous daily reminders of social exclusion can lead to the immediate risk factors for violence, identified in Chapter 3. We say "can lead to" because numerous protective factors or counterweights operate to block these risk factors arising for many, even in the worst of conditions, or act to mitigate and contain them where they are created. But, at present, there is both too much poverty and too little by way of counterweights to prevent poverty being a central issue for anyone concerned about the extent of violence involving youth in this province.

In our view, poverty can lead to a lack of self-esteem, the experience of oppression, a lack of hope or empathy or sense of belonging, impulsivity and other immediate risk factors through three different but linked pathways:

◆ The **level** of poverty: the depth of relative deprivation experienced by those in poverty

◆ The **concentration** of poverty in definable geographic areas, where negative impacts grow and reinforce each other, and strain when they do not eliminate the capacity of families and communities to provide positive counterweights

◆ The **circumstances** of poverty, in which services and facilities that most of us take for granted are not locally available or are denied by reason of cost or accessibility, or both, to those who need them the most, eliminating from the lives of far too many the positive factors that can impede the growth of the roots of violence involving youth.

High concentrations of people living in poverty, substandard housing, poor community design, limited public services, few stores or businesses, restricted transportation and employment options, few positive role models or mentors, no places for recreation or the arts or just to gather, the barriers that Ontario's own social assistance laws and regulations place in the way of people who want to get ahead through employment or education and the other circumstances flowing from poverty that we discuss in our report all combine to be powerful sources of the roots we have identified.

Racism

In 2005, the Supreme Court of Canada stated that "racial prejudice against visible minorities is…notorious and indisputable… [it is] a social fact not capable of reasonable dispute" (R. v Spence, [2005] 3 S.C.R. 458, para 5).

Deep concerns about this sad state of affairs pervaded our consultations. We were taken aback by the extent to which racism is alive and well and wreaking its deeply harmful effects on Ontarians and on the very fabric of this province.

Racialized groups are highly diverse, and the manifestations of racism affect them differently. Most encounter subtle and systemic barriers, including "glass ceilings" and other limits on their ability to participate fully in society. Others, in particular Aboriginal people and African-Canadians, continue to also suffer from a seemingly more entrenched and often more virulent form of racism.

In our discussions, we heard not only of deteriorating police relations with racialized youth, but also of barriers to creating a representative public service and teaching force, of an education curriculum that discourages racialized youth because it does not include people like them in the history of this province, of a lack of opportunity and role models in many parts of society, and of the continuing and devastating impacts of racial profiling in many aspects of day-to-day living in this province. And yet, there are fewer public structures in place in Ontario to address this reality than we had in the past.

Our report speaks in terms of racism, not race. Race has nothing to do with violence. No race is inherently more violent than another. There are well-documented circumstances that would produce alienation and the other immediate risk factors in any group, and the sad reality is that in Ontario, a disproportionate number of racialized groups are subjected to those circumstances.

But while race is not something that can create the immediate risk factors for violence involving youth, racism is. Racism strikes at the core of self-identity, eats away the heart and casts a shadow on the soul. It is cruel and hurtful and alienating. It makes real all doubts about getting a fair chance in this society. It is a serious obstacle imposed for a reason the victim has no control over and can do nothing about.

The very real potential for this to create the immediate risk factors should not be hard to understand. How can it not erode your self-esteem to feel that, no matter what you do or what you achieve, you can be excluded or undervalued simply because of your race? How can it not be alienating to know that you can be or have often been stopped by the police or followed in a store or denied housing for that same reason? How could your willingness to study and work hard to get ahead not be eroded by a clear sense of having more limited prospects than others, and how could that not reduce your sense of hope?

And, as well, when you look to society's major institutions for leadership in confronting these insidious realities and find almost no focus on this issue, how can all those feelings not be made more deeply hurtful and exclusionary?

For all of these reasons, it is apparent to us that all of the immediate risk factors for violence involving youth can easily arise from the diminished sense of worth that results from being subject to racism and from the often accurate inference of what that racism means for hopes of advancing, prospering and having a fair chance in our society. When, as is so often the case, racism is combined with poverty and other sources of serious disadvantage discussed in our report, its central role in the issue that concerns us is all too evident.

Community Design

The conditions of the communities where young people live not only greatly affect the quality of their lives and the opportunities available to them, but also how they perceive themselves, society and their role in it.

Regrettably, right across Ontario, there are many examples of poor planning and poor design of the built and the developed natural environment, creating places that make some youth feel powerless and isolated, leading them to believe that their options are as limited as their horizons. These negative factors include physical and psychological isolation from the broader community; bleak landscapes with no inviting places to gather or play and little usable green space; a lack of adequate and accessible social and physical infrastructure; limited or non-existent transportation services; and unsafe streets, common areas and passageways.

Youth in many neighbourhoods are cut off from the wider community by geography or a lack of access to transit, and for these same reasons find job searches and getting to jobs challenging. The same circumstances leave many parents with little time to parent or engage with their children's schools or their community.

A major concern of those we met was the lack of anywhere for youth to go. We found neighbourhoods characterized by unwelcoming environments and a disturbing lack of places for youth to gather, play or create. This leaves youth with the greatest need for such facilities with no positive outlet for their energy and time, no space or facilities for creative self-expression and no place that fosters contact with coaches and other positive mentors. When these youth hang around, for lack of anything better to do, they are then often stereotyped and harassed for so doing, further driving their sense of alienation.

There is a similar lack of space for organizations seeking to work with youth, particularly organizations led by youth themselves. This further reduces the number of services and programs available to the youth who need them the most.

Issues in the Education System

Education is universally seen as one of the best ways out of poverty and as a sound investment in the future of individuals, families and communities, and thus in the social fabric of our entire society. Although education is increasingly well-resourced in Ontario, we found that five elements of the system are among the roots of the immediate risk factors for violence involving youth. They are the safe schools policies, the curriculum, the approach sometimes taken to guidance and counselling, the composition and training of the teaching force, and criminalization.

The safe schools provisions of the *Education Act* promoted a policy of "zero tolerance" for "bad" behaviour in schools. Some of that behaviour is indeed serious and requires a strong response. But, under those provisions, many youth have been suspended or expelled from school without a full consideration of their circumstances and without adequate supports to maintain their learning or occupy their time in positive ways. There is a wide consensus in the community that the safe schools provisions have had a disproportionate impact on racialized students, students with disabilities and youth whose parents are not adept or at ease in dealing with teachers and school administrators.

We recognize that the recent amendments to the *Education Act* in relation to the safe schools provisions are a positive step. But we believe they fall short of what is required to

deal with the serious systemic issues that were brought to our attention. And Ontario will have to deal with the long-term consequences of the previous policies, in force between 2001 and 2008, and the gaps in the new policy for a long time to come.

Another of the other major concerns about the education system in Ontario is the issue of the curriculum. Previous reports have noted that the curriculum is "largely reflective of European presence, settlement and development of Canada and as such provides little or no incentive for Black Canadians to develop pride in their African heritage" (Four-Level Government/African Canadian Community Working Group, 1992: 78). The same could easily be said about Aboriginal people.

For youth who are developing their identities, this signals that races other than Europeans have not made valuable contributions to the social, cultural and economic development of Canada and the world; they and their families are of lesser importance to society; they can only succeed in certain subjects; and their success and/or achievements may not be recognized. It is clear that students who do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum will experience a lesser degree of attachment to the education system.

Another concern is guidance counsellors who have not been trained to have an in-depth understanding of the complexity of the factors that affect the ethno-racial youth who seek their advice. For many, guidance advice often appears to be given from a perspective of low expectations based on the ethno-racial background of the youth.

Similarly, students, families, communities and advocates have long been struggling with the low expectations some teachers have for racialized students and, in particular, Black students. As well, they have continuously raised the issue of the absence of teachers who have the training to understand the particular nuances and struggles experienced by racialized children, and of the lack of role models for their children. Seeing teachers and administrators from their own race and colour can help youth have the will to succeed and can give them hope in their ability to do so. It can also help students from other backgrounds see these youth more positively.

The last issue is criminalization. Expulsions and suspensions put many youth on the streets for extended periods and lead to more interactions with the police, increasing the potential for criminalization. At the same time, zero-tolerance policies have led many schools to call in the police for activities that would have been addressed by the schools alone in earlier times. This has also led to the increased criminalization of many marginalized youth, with consequences we discuss below.

Family Issues

Most families provide secure and safe places for children to grow and learn. But many do not. Families can be divided, abusive, or struggling emotionally or financially. Some youth have no family. Without the support of a strong family, alienation, low self-esteem, a lack of hope or empathy, impulsivity and other immediate risk factors for involvement with violence can set in and take hold of a young person, especially if the youth is also experiencing other roots of the immediate risk factors, such as poverty, racism or mental illness. A severely troubled home life can have a damaging effect on a youth's interest in school, ability to learn and interactions with peers and teachers.

As the portrait of the Canadian family continues to change, social programs, policies and structures, often based on the nuclear family model, are failing to serve a growing number of families. Many single parents cope with the daunting task of raising children alone very well, but many need additional support to do so, especially if they are dealing with those additional stresses. When those supports are provided, children can be raised with hope and bright expectations. In the result, it is not the structure of the family, but rather the stresses bearing on the family relationships that can create immediate risk factors for violence involving youth.

An increased presence of fathers, and particularly Black fathers, is often cited as a force for keeping young Black men away from the arena of violence. Yet the experts and individuals we consulted in the course of this review, regardless of their faith, race and sex, expressed the belief that nurturing, encouragement in school, recognition, attention to mental health, respect, opportunity, good housing and sufficient positive reinforcement of race, faith and culture are critically important factors in a youth's life. Where a father is present, what is important to the outcome is not that presence alone, but the degree of responsibility the father assumes for child-rearing and his participation in imparting positive values.

Youth from immigrant or refugee families are often the most vulnerable to the conditions that can give rise to the immediate risk factors for violence involving youth, including racism and poverty. Parents who are recent immigrants or refugees dealing with urgent settlement problems may not be able to turn their attention to difficulties their children are having in school, or they may be unable to help because they cannot communicate with the teachers or are reticent to engage with authority figures. Schools often lack the capacity to help them adjust or the creative outreach that would make them welcome, and settlement services to assist them are often far short of what is needed.

Some young people grow up without any family at all. Some live in foster care for their entire youth and others are homeless and live on the street. Youth in foster care who are

transferred from home to home never know what it is like to belong to a family. The lack of a sense of belonging or a feeling of security can cause them to feel alienated and to have no sense of hope, belonging or opportunity. Youth who live on the street are often the victims of violence, and the harsh reality of street life can lead to these and other immediate risk factors for violence.

Children and youth in the child protection system often "cross over" to other systems, such as the criminal justice system. We were told that a disproportionate number of youth in the young offender system have been in the care of child welfare authorities in Ontario, and that there is a trajectory from the children's services sector to the young offender system.

Health

Health plays a role in the development of the immediate risks factors for violence involving youth. Certain health issues are closely linked to some of the other roots that we have already discussed, rather than being roots in themselves. Examples include nutritional deficits, physical inactivity, obesity or eating disorders, which have links to the roots of poverty and urban design. Other health issues, such as mental health and substance abuse, can be viewed as direct roots of the immediate risk factors for violence involving youth, particularly alienation, impulsivity and no sense of belonging.

Mental health is an often-overlooked, but very significant, issue for youth. Of course, the majority of young people who experience mental health issues are not involved in violence, but the consequences for them and their families can be serious.

Across cultures, about one in five Ontario children and youth experience a mental health or behavioural disorder requiring intervention, but we were advised that 80 per cent of them do not receive mental health services or support. This lack of treatment allows the mental health condition to worsen and its effects on the youth (and their alienation, impulsiveness and self-esteem) to grow. It adds pressure and stress to the families of these youth and can lead to the youth disrupting the lives of classmates, friends and peers.

Of particular concern to us is that preschool and younger school-aged children who suffer from mental illness receive the help they need. The earlier the mental health intervention, the higher the chance of a successful outcome.

Lack of a Youth Voice

The sense that many youth already have of being alienated from society is reinforced when they do not have opportunities to be heard in areas that directly and immediately affect their lives. This can lead to a negative concept of self, a greater distrust of authority, a sense of powerlessness and a sense of exclusion from the broader community.

And yet, our experience over the past year was that youth brought many fresh insights and inspired solutions to the issues we were grappling with. In many ways, youth and youth-led organizations are best-positioned to know what will work for other youth. The absence of their voices in many areas of immediate importance to them sends a message of limited opportunity as well as excluding the youth perspective from many decisions.

Lack of Economic Opportunity for Youth

There are many barriers for youth from disadvantaged communities who seek opportunities. These include things as simple as the lack of transportation to get to a job interview and as deeply complex as racism. The experiences of parents being denied the ability to use all of their skills and experiences can also play a devastating role.

Many youth lack role models to inspire them, or people who can help them prepare for an interview or deal with the early weeks on a job site. Others have been conditioned to believe that they have little to offer, or learn all too early that their postal code alone will act as a bar to employment.

Many youth are frustrated and angered by their inability to support themselves or their families. When these and other factors are combined with the high value our society places on economic success and possessions, the consequences for self-esteem and any sense of hope, opportunity or belonging can be serious.

Issues in the Justice System

In our report, we outline our concerns that Ontario's youth justice system does not have an overall strategy or coherent vision for youth justice in Ontario. Three ministries operate parts of it, with no ministry in charge, no overall policy direction, and no ministry with the mandate to look across the whole system to identify the best ways to allocate the roughly $850 million it spends each year.

There is clearly a lack of strategic thinking about how youth justice can affect the roots of violence involving youth. At present, that system is too often deployed in counterproductive ways. We see this as leading to two ways in which the immediate risk factors for involvement in violence can be created.

The first is through over-criminalization. We, of course, do not take issue with the use of the justice system to address crime. We do, however, raise concerns about excessive reliance on the justice system for minor matters that do not involve violence. Criminalization can cause youth to see themselves as having no other future and can change for the worse the way they are seen by their peers, families, schools and communities. It can severely restrict both their opportunities and their own sense of those opportunities. It can lead directly to criminal associates. It can destroy hope and feed alienation.

We accept that criminal charges are necessary in many instances, but feel that the decision to criminalize should be a strategic one, taken in full awareness of the consequences. Where it is used unwisely, the youth justice system has the potential to create risks for future violence rather than reducing them.

The second issue has to do with interactions between police and youth, primarily but not only minority youth. In many parts of our province, these interactions are characterized by undue aggressiveness. Again, we do not take issue with where and how the police deploy their forces, but with the ways in which some officers use their powers. We do so in the context of deep appreciation for the hard and often-dangerous work police officers perform on our behalf, and respect for the professional way in which most of them carry out their responsibilities.

But some do not act professionally. It was made clear to us that when policing is done in an aggressive manner, when youth are singled out for attention because of their race and treated with a lack of civility, they can become alienated, lose self-esteem and feel that they have less hope or opportunity in this society. As well, the communities of which they are part can lose faith in the police and can cooperate less in the resolution of crime and the maintenance of public safety. When this happens, the approach to policing increases rather than addresses the roots of violence involving youth.

Concentrations of Roots

One of the central features of the advice we are giving the Premier is the need to focus attention and resources on specific locations across Ontario where the roots of violence involving youth are finding particularly fertile ground. It is clear to us that many of the circumstances that can lead to the immediate risk factors for violence involving youth — the roots of such violence — grow and are nurtured in specific places.

We believe that Ontario needs to focus on addressing the roots where they are the most entrenched and damaging: in neighbourhoods characterized by high concentrations of poverty. We see such an approach as being based on the following key rationales and elements:

Focusing on the Roots of Violence Involving Youth: Areas where multiple roots intertwine to generate the immediate risk factors must be identified and given priority in order to make the largest structural and most sustainable impacts on the roots.

Asset-Based: This involves looking in each neighbourhood to determine what is working already, and to find and support local sources of strength. What is important is that the operating orientation not be to simply focus on naming problems.

Tailoring: Addressing the roots of violence involving youth requires understanding the particular constellation of issues affecting a neighbourhood and its capacities and strengths, and then providing the flexibility to adapt broader policies and programs to these local circumstances and their unique intersections.

Community Building: If local problems are to be addressed on local turf and if solutions are to grow out of local strengths, it follows that residents and local agencies must have significant roles in setting policies and priorities. These roles strengthen the community, which, in turn, leads to the stronger community itself reducing the impact of the roots, while beginning to remove them.

Collaborative: The place-based approach both requires and facilitates collaboration among governments and with communities in ways that get the greatest value from the initiatives and assets of each.

We are encouraged in this approach by the experience in England and in Toronto. Both have brought a powerful new focus on disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In England, this was done through a national strategy that focused major government departments on what they could do to improve the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, including by

working through local strategic partnerships involving the local authority, community residents and agencies serving the community.

In Toronto's case, the city aligned its own departments around 13 priority neighbourhoods and now organizes itself at the local level to understand and meet the needs of those specific neighbourhoods through neighbourhood action teams. These are being transformed into partnerships with residents and agencies to further advance this work. This has not only brought renewed attention to these areas and the issues they face, but as well has driven greater collaboration and coordination at city hall itself. Both examples demonstrate the power of this concept to not only improve neighbourhoods, but also align governments around that important objective.

The first step in using a place-based approach to address the roots of violence involving youth is to identify where there are concentrations of disadvantage that nurture those roots. The process to identify these places must be objective and based on clear and appropriate criteria that resonate with communities.

We discuss in our report the approaches taken to this task in Britain and Toronto. We then outline a methodology for doing this on a provincewide basis in Ontario. It uses five indicators of disadvantage and then, drawing on readily available and highly reliable data from Statistics Canada, compiles them into an Index of Relative Disadvantage. This index can then be used to compare all of Ontario at the level of small geographic units composed of about 400-700 people each, permitting a very precise assessment of where the greatest needs lie. As with the other approaches to this issue, it does not identify individuals, but rather places. We understand that this approach could, with any necessary fine-tuning, produce data early in 2009.

This methodology allows areas to be ranked in order of disadvantage, or compared to provincial, regional or local baselines. We propose that once those data are available, the Province then work with municipal governments where the highest concentrations are found to refine the assessment of disadvantage in light of local information. This local information could include the services available or not available to ameliorate the disadvantage. It could also provide vital information to define the boundaries of an area for focused work, having regard to possible groupings of the small areas identified by the index and to local geography and social patterns that suggest natural neighbourhood boundaries.

Once the most disadvantaged areas are identified, the Province can then develop Neighbourhood Strategic Partnerships to bring together governments, communities and community-serving agencies to develop local plans to improve the conditions in these neighbourhoods and work collaboratively to implement them. This will provide a powerful new way to address some of the deepest roots of violence involving youth.

Pivotal as this approach can be, its use does not replace the need to deploy broader instruments of public policy to address the roots wherever they arise. While particularly devastating where they combine in a physical place, the roots we have identified can grow anywhere and must be addressed wherever they do.

Addressing the Roots

Our work led us to conclude that a social opportunity strategy is needed across all sectors in Ontario to mobilize the social capital and other assets in our communities to address these roots and their concentrations. We must convert the grounds that now nurture the immediate risk factors into new grounds that produce hope and opportunity.

Most of our report focuses on that task. We do, though, go on to address the interventions that are still required at the individual level to deal with those youth who develop the immediate risk factors about which we are so concerned. We do this briefly as there are already established programs on which to draw, with the main need now being to focus on and increase ways to integrate the community into the delivery of those interventions that the evidence shows work best. We also add our voices to those calling for a ban on handguns in Ontario, for reasons we set out in our report.

Overall, to create sustainable hope and opportunity for Ontario, we believe that an approach based on four pillars is essential. These pillars will, collectively, provide a repaired social context, a youth policy framework, a neighbourhood capacity and empowerment focus and a new integrated governance system to align and sustain action to address the roots of violence involving youth.

Pillar 1: A Repaired Social Context: Social Opportunity and Anti-Racism

This pillar will bring together strategies to address the level, the concentrations and the circumstances of poverty, along with tightly related issues including racism, housing, education, mental health, family and community support, transportation, and the justice system. This will provide a targeted and measurable long-term strategy to move from social exclusion to social inclusion, creating greater opportunities for the young people who lack them now.

In this pillar, we discuss the kinds of social context changes that we believe are necessary to address the roots of violence involving youth. These roots have grown over a number of years. They were not created by one party or government or segment of society.

Just as those policy omissions and commissions grew over time, so will it take time to remedy them. There are initiatives such as anti-racism, addressing the circumstances of poverty and mental health, and starting to build community hubs that can and should be advanced immediately, while others will take varying amounts of time to initiate, with implementation times ranging from months or years to possibly a generation.

We stress this point to be clear that the breadth of our analysis does not mean that we are suggesting that everything we touch on in this pillar can be done at once. We do not claim to have all the details or choices resolved. We primarily provide broad directions in the social context pillar, recognizing that well-planned and incremental progress will be the most sustainable. What we are unequivocally calling for is a firm commitment to making Ontario's social context work for everyone and a move away from piecemeal and sporadic initiatives.

For reasons set out in chapters 4 and 5 of our report, we emphasize the issues of poverty and racism, and particularly those physical spaces where they intersect. But we wish to stress that the roots of violence involving youth also arise in other places and contexts and can manifest themselves in Ontarians of all backgrounds. Alienation, lack of hope or empathy and other immediate risk factors are powerfully, but far from exclusively, driven by the intersection of racism and poverty. Although often the best way to get at the most pernicious intertwinings of the roots is to work with and within the most disadvantaged communities, the measures we discuss in this pillar must also be applied more widely.

We will not attempt to summarize here all the advice we set out under Pillar 1. Instead, we will briefly note several of the areas dealt with there to illustrate the approach we have taken. A list of the major areas we address in Pillar 1 is found in the recommendations section of this executive summary, along with highlights of our advice for each and a reference to where the balance of our advice can be found in the report.

As Pillar 1 makes clear, we see a pressing and vital need to reduce poverty and address the circumstances that accompany it. It is unacceptable that being poor should also mean having substandard services in a wide array of areas, ranging from housing to recreational and arts facilities to transportation.

We believe that in the spirit that created publicly funded education, hospitalization and medicare, it is time for all of us to recognize that the most disadvantaged among us should have access to excellent public services. This is not just a matter of human

dignity; it is a matter of addressing in a cost-effective way the high potential that otherwise exists to generate the roots of violence involving youth.

We also believe that the Province should start immediately on the longer-range task of undoing the economic segregation that has come to characterize some of our cities. As we demonstrate, high concentrations of disadvantage create huge long-term social costs and will require a sustained, steady accumulation of successes to reverse the current, and very troubling, trends.

There is an equally clear and compelling need for urgent action on the ever-more-entrenched racism in the province. We believe that the collection of race-based statistics, as has been routinely done in England for some time, is an essential first step. We cannot ascertain where the problems are, how to address them, what the best solutions are and what is working if we have no data. We see such statistics being required throughout the justice system and in the domains of education, health, housing and employment.

We believe that the Province should require that all public sector bodies have action plans to address the systemic racism within their domains. In relation to policing, we also suggest short-term initiatives to try to address some of the flashpoints that continue to exist in the relationship between front-line police officers and many youth. These initiatives are the establishment of police-youth issues committees in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the provision of neighbourhood-based training on anti-racism for front-line officers. For the longer term, we note the need for a culture shift within policing and put forward the concepts that officers should be "assessed for competence" in matters of race and that the performance measures for local commanders should include community relations and support. And we similarly give advice on immediate actions and longer-term actions that could be taken to address the racial disconnect between schools and many students and families.

We point out the urgent need for youth mental health services — a need that arises in the context of education, families, communities and the justice system. We believe that youth mental health services need to be universally available and should be delivered through community-based clinics linked to the community hubs we are proposing. Ontario needs to identify these health conditions early and to make sure that community-based, family-centred treatment is available as soon as they are identified.

Ontario also needs to bolster its health promotion efforts, including encouraging healthy activities and addressing child obesity through recreational and nutritional initiatives at schools in the crucial 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. time period. Many told us, and research confirms, that this time period is "prime time for crime," so providing positive programming that engages youth at school for those hours will produce numerous benefits (see Gottredson et al., 2001: 61).

We note a number of other issues in relation to youth, including the importance of a voice and economic opportunities for youth and the need to make sports and arts programs available to youth, particularly those living in disadvantaged areas. Well-resourced and readily accessible arts and recreation facilities should be available on a reliable, sustained basis, and youth should be involved in designing the programs to be offered in those facilities.

In many of the initiatives we have outlined, we see an important role for youth workers. We believe that well-trained and properly paid youth workers can play critical roles in bridging youth, schools and communities, in helping connect youth to job and recreation opportunities, in providing outreach and connection in relation to mental health services, and many other significant ways of connecting with youth. But to do so, the role of youth worker has to be recognized as a very important function. There needs to be stability in their funding, some potential for career advancement and ways to allow youth workers to connect with each other to share best practices, develop strategies and renew their own energy and commitment.

In relation to our concerns about the justice system, we were encouraged by the presentation made to us by the deputy minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services in May 2008. That presentation included the following insightful comments, which were echoed by several senior police officers on other occasions:

> Ontario can best prevent youth from becoming involved in criminal activity through investments in education, social services and creating opportunities for disenfranchised youth.

> Police and corrections/rehabilitation interventions cannot effectively address youth violence in the absence of education, social service and employment supports that address the root causes and provide alternatives to engagement in crime.

We agree and believe that there needs to be a much more strategic approach to the operation of the justice system. That approach would require those exercising the discretion that exists within that system to think about the consequences for the roots of violence involving youth when they act.

Overall, we believe that Ontario, while moving in the right direction in recent years, is still overcharging youth and relying on incarceration to an excessive extent. We do not dispute the need for police interventions, nor for serious sanctions where serious conduct is involved. We are, however, very concerned that the justice system is invoked for many youth in ways that can increase rather than address the immediate risk factors for violence.

There is a clear need for more coordination among the three ministries that operate parts of the youth justice system. We discuss in our report the lack of that coordination and the ways we believe a Youth Justice Advisory Board could remedy that situation. This board, composed of experts from a wide range of domains including education, mental health, policing, prosecution, defence counsel, victims services and child welfare would report jointly to the three ministries. It would look across the whole youth justice system to consider how that system can best contribute to the government's goals for youth, how it can be more strategic in relation to the roots of violence involving youth and how resourcing can be better balanced to ensure that the police and others have a full range of options when dealing with youthful offenders.

For example, at present it appears that community sanctions and other effective alternatives to the court system receive less than 10 per cent of the funding for the youth justice system. The police made it clear to us that they would use more alternatives if they were available. To support a more balanced role for the justice system, the board could well recommend that there be a more balanced resourcing. It seems to us to be fundamentally wrong that an expensive and sometimes counterproductive formal justice system is universally available and can be invoked by any police officer at any time with a simple piece of paper, while the alternatives are funded only if and when discretionary funds are freed up, and are often difficult and complex for a police officer to access.

Our report notes that when the powers bestowed by the justice system are not used properly or wisely, the result can be alienation, a sense of injustice, a lack of hope and other immediate risk factors for violence involving youth. Based on past experience, we expect that what we say about the justice system and, in particular, the police, may well receive a significant amount of attention.

We consider it important to note here that we stress at several junctures in our report the many ways in which we value the work of the police and the justice system, and the professionalism that permeates their work. In particular, we acknowledge and believe we understand the dispiriting and often-dangerous conditions in which some policing has to be carried out.

We fully appreciate that the neighbourhood conditions we describe in chapters 4 and 5 create enormous challenges for those who police these communities, as well for as those who live in them. The same conditions that facilitate crime — rundown areas and buildings, limited through streets, poor sightlines, dead ends, dark stairwells and corridors, overcrowding — all create risks for police officers as well as potentially hardening their attitudes to those who are forced to live in these conditions. In light of these conditions, we applaud the countless ways individual officers go beyond the

call of duty to try to support youth and prevent crime, as well as carrying out their often-onerous enforcement obligations.

In doing so, we reflect the views of most Ontarians who hold the police and justice system in very high regard. Indeed, that high regard is in part responsible for the reaction when an individual or community feels that they have been dealt with unfairly. It is to the credit of the police and the entire justice system in Ontario that people expect them to adhere to high standards, as those expectations are based on the reality that most of the time, they do. By the quality of their work over many years, and their integrity, they have set a high standard for themselves.

When they fail to meet that standard, dashed expectations add to the anger and frustration of individuals, and sometimes to the alienation of whole communities. This is especially so when policing or the justice system evinces racism or countenances excessive force or incivility or a lack of respect for basic rights and freedoms we all should enjoy. The police, in particular, have a great deal of discretionary power as well as widespread respect, and with that comes great responsibility to uphold high standards at all times.

We hope that our readers will keep these perspectives in mind when we also set out the very strong views we heard from a great many people about the ways some in the justice system conduct themselves, about certain unduly aggressive police strategies, about racial profiling and about the fact that, overall, there has not been the kind of change that could reasonably have been expected by now having regard to the many independent and highly respected reviews, which over the last 30 years have found those concerns to be anchored in reality.

We believe that the specific justice advice in our report, together with our emphasis on working locally and on an overall governance structure for aligned and sustained change, will allow the Province to build on the many previous reports we discuss, and on the solid reputation that the police and the justice system for the most part enjoy, to bring about the change that has been sought for so long.

This leads us to make one additional observation about our report's approach to these issues. It would be unfortunate if what we say in the report about the conduct of some police officers, and others within the justice system, took the focus off the many other, and often deeper and more pervasive, roots of the immediate risk factors that we discuss in our report. The justice system issues are raised because, for some youth, they lead to or reinforce those roots. We deal with the justice system in a fair amount of detail because it is complex and its misuse can not only produce the immediate risk factors, but can also undo much excellent work being done in other areas to address those factors. This is not, however, in any way to lay at the feet of the justice system the bulk of the responsibility for the concerns we raise throughout the report.

Pillar 2: A Youth Policy Framework

Building on the early childhood learning framework, which has anchored programming for children up to age six, this pillar will provide a comprehensive framework based on developmental stages and outcome goals to guide the policy and program decisions of all orders of government, the community and agencies. It will foster strategic decision-making and policy coherence across the numerous sectors concerned about violence involving youth.

An important part of the framework will be the necessity of bringing youth-led organizations into both delivery and policy roles. It is youth who must have key roles in the design and delivery of this strategy, as they will pay the heaviest price if it does not succeed.

Ontario does not have a coordinated policy for its youth and should be working towards one. We believe that the Province urgently needs a youth policy framework that is informed by research about the developmental and transitional stages through which youth pass and that focuses on desired outcomes for them. It would not be about who does what nor about control, but would set out an evidence-based, outcomes-focused framework to serve as a guide for program development and priority setting by communities, agencies and the various orders of government.

We see such a framework as having three main components: a vision, a set of shared principles and an articulation of defined key outcomes, accompanied by targets and timelines for achieving them.

We propose a vision that would of course value youth as critically important for the ongoing strength of this province and recognize that their future is our future. It would be premised on ongoing generational renewal and on a shared understanding that all youth should be safe, valued and trusted; have the opportunity to grow, learn, play and achieve their dreams in healthy, inclusive and seamlessly supportive neighbourhoods; be treated equitably according to their individual circumstances; be educated and nurtured; be mentored and supported in developing a secure sense of belonging; and also be listened to and involved and, as they grow older, given real responsibility — all so that they may reach their full potential.

The principles we propose include:

◆ Respecting youth by involving them in determining and addressing their needs

◆ Recognizing racial, gender and other differences among youth

◆ Organizing programs and interventions around the strengths of each youth and the circumstances in which they live

◆ Reflecting the realities of the developmental and transitional stages youth pass through as they grow

◆ Ensuring that programs and services are increasingly based on proven best practices; make appropriate connections among youth, their families, schools and communities; and are truly accessible.

Given a vision and principles, Ontario's youth policy framework should not attempt to prescribe the specific means to help youth develop, but rather should set out the desired outcomes for them.

We see the potential for specific outcome goals in a number of areas, ranging from poverty to education, mental health and interactions with the justice system. The value of outcome goals, such as increasing graduation rates or improving health determinants, is that they measure results achieved, rather than work done. This means, for example, that, rather than measuring how many youth a program has served, we measure what difference the service made in their lives. We set out below in our discussion of measurement some key considerations that should govern the approach to these outcome goals, but stress here that they are central to the alignment of Ontario's work to address the roots of violence involving youth.

To be meaningful, outcome goals must be accompanied by a commitment to measured and relentless progress towards them (published indicators), along with clear timelines and specific accountabilities for meeting those indicators.

Pillar 3: A Neighbourhood Capacity and Empowerment Focus

This pillar will enhance or create local centres, often based around schools, in which opportunities and services for youth and their families can be maximized and community cohesion fostered. They will provide space and services, but just as importantly, will form hubs in which communities can anchor ever-increasing amounts of local policy-making, priority setting and program delivery. This pillar also includes supports for resident engagement, stability for key service providers and new funding mechanisms for core community building organizations.

In addition to repairing the social context in which the roots grow, Ontario needs to address the lack of community cohesion and the fragmentation of programs and services that exist in many disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Areas of concentrated economic disadvantage all too easily nurture those roots and, if not addressed, will keep producing new generations of youth with the immediate risk factors for violence. The continuing violence and fear of violence that will result will have the obvious and tragic consequence of rendering those neighbourhoods ever more fragmented and isolated, and will perpetuate and deepen their disadvantaged condition, leading to yet more violence, and possibly an entrenched underclass.

Our third pillar accordingly centres on how the Province can help the most disadvantaged communities come together in ways that support and enhance their existing and evolving strengths so that they can become cohesive and vibrant places to live. We identify four linked ways these principles can be used to build cohesive and strong communities:

The first is by creating community hubs, wherever possible anchored in school facilities. These hubs would not only provide programs and services, but, just as importantly, would provide space and facilitate connections so that communities can coalesce to play increasingly larger roles in setting priorities, developing policies and providing activities and services for their residents. We join with those who see schools as natural hubs. Schools are near most residents, have already been paid for by the public and go unused most of the time.

We note some modest initiatives by the Province to support the community use of schools, but identify the many ways in which this falls short of what is needed. We encourage the Province to fund facilities managers, such as existing community service providers who have facilities management expertise, to lease school buildings for the non-school hours and to operate them on behalf of the local community. This would include engaging with the community to ensure that programming matched community needs and ensuring that space was available for the community to gather for its own purposes.

The second is by actively assisting communities to come together to form stronger networks of mutual support and involvement. This involves supporting resident engagement workers to undertake the often-arduous task of finding ways for busy and often-isolated residents to work together and take ownership of their community and, ultimately, play a role in its governance. Recognizing that this kind of engagement is best done around concrete objectives of tangible benefit, we note that working around the development of the new community hubs would be an ideal way to get this process started.

The third way would be by providing streamlined and stable funding mechanisms to maximize the responsiveness, capacity and stability of the numerous agencies on which governments now rely to deliver many of the core services that are necessary to address the roots of violence involving youth.

Governments have increasingly relied upon agencies to deliver services, but have done so through short-term contracts, which fail to cover the full costs of service delivery. This creates enormous problems for agencies, including making it very difficult for them to recruit and retain experienced staff. This, in turn, puts the local community at a disadvantage, because both programs and the staff to deliver them are often transitory.

We outline in our report a model that used to operate in the province to address these kinds of concerns and could be a starting point to seek a solution as a matter of very high priority. We go on to provide some interim initiatives, which could smooth out some of the roughest bumps on the road in the meantime. These include the Province improving the coordination of its own process for contracting with community agencies and providing support for small bodies that could help local service providers coordinate their efforts in a given community and work in more cooperative ways than the current funding regime makes possible.

We also propose establishing at a university or college a Centre for Excellence through Program Assessments to conduct outcomes-based assessments of major programs and serve as a best practices resource for government, community service providers, funders and agencies. This body could also serve as a resource to promote good evaluations of smaller-scale programs.

The fourth initiative involves ensuring that, in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, in addition to the service-providing bodies, there are (a) at least one general-purpose, youth-led organization addressing the roots of violence involving youth based on local priorities, (b) the small team of individuals noted above who work to coordinate services and improve access to them, and (c) funding made available to support resident engagement and community participation in planning and programming the community hubs referred to above.

Because of the need to provide stability for resident engagement and for youth-led organizations, and having regard to the political sensitivities around some of what they may do, we propose an arm's-length funding and monitoring board for these activities in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods. We believe that the other responsibilities we outline can best be accomplished through the designation of a lead ministry for community building.

The initiatives we outline in this pillar deal with strengthening Ontario's most disadvantaged communities. There is a significant and ongoing link between

disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the roots of violence involving youth. For that particular purpose and in these specific communities, we believe that the Province must fund or ensure the funding of the required structural initiatives.

This is by no means to say that the Province must assume all the costs of services in disadvantaged communities. Provincial funding of the social infrastructure we propose for disadvantaged communities does not absolve the other orders of government of their responsibilities for services. The matters we address in Pillar 3 are matters of core social infrastructure. They are the building blocks for the strong communities needed to address the roots of youth violence and, so, stand in a category of their own.

Pillar 4: Integrated Governance

> This pillar will provide new governance mechanisms to enable the provincial government to provide an effective, coordinated and efficient approach to the broad range of issues affecting violence involving youth. These mechanisms are essential if the rest of the overall strategy is to work.

> As these new provincial mechanisms are being put in place, the pillar also provides a community-based approach through which the Province's integrated governance mechanisms can develop strategic partnerships with the other orders of government to set priorities, develop policies and deliver services, and collectively begin to listen to and work with communities in ways that support their cohesion, capacity and meaningful involvement in governance.

There are three central aspects to the governance proposals we are making. Together, they will provide an effective and sustainable way to address the many deep and tenacious roots of violence involving youth that we have identified.

First, and fundamentally, the provincial government must organize itself to drive forward and sustain an integrated long-range strategy across the many ministries that have important roles on this issue. Without an effective governance structure at the provincial level, our experience tells us that no meaningful progress can be made.

We highlight the need for structural change within the provincial government because the issues that must be addressed are not only large, complex and spread across many ministries, but also interact with each other and play out in economically and socially diverse communities across the province. Addressing the numerous and intertwined roots we have identified requires coordination across a dozen ministries, many of which

have limited experience in working with each other on these kinds of issues. It also requires working effectively with the other orders of government, building local relationships and supporting community development in ways that the provincial government has not done in recent years.

Without governance mechanisms that cut across the many silos that now exist in the provincial government and facilitate aligned engagement in communities, any edifice of piecemeal change will rapidly collapse.

New provincial mechanisms are also needed to send a signal of resolve and commitment. Without alignment at the provincial level to break through the silos to prioritize, drive, coordinate, fund, monitor and report on the many provincial initiatives needed to address the roots of violence involving youth, there will be little reason to hope for anything beyond some modest ameliorations of the status quo.

Based on the principles identified in governance research we commissioned and our own experience in government, we believe that a strong Cabinet committee with an operational as well as a policy focus and a clear mandate to set an overall corporate agenda including coordinated plans for individual ministries, and then to monitor and oversee their implementation, would best drive the agenda forward. This Cabinet committee would be different in function from the ones used in the current government and would draw its inspiration from a Cabinet committee on race relations on which we both served.

To do its job, the committee needs to be supported by a dedicated staff secretariat. We believe this needs to be positioned within the Cabinet Office to give it the profile and influence that will be required to manage this complex task. We see the secretariat being responsible for providing policy advice to the committee, but also for working within the bureaucracy on a day-to-day basis to ensure that the directions set by the committee and approved by Cabinet are carried into action. We also see it having a key role in ensuring good public reporting against defined outcome goals. Other governance initiatives at the provincial level are set out in the recommendation section of this summary.

Second, the provincial government must work with the other orders of government to create both the structures and the relationships that permit the coordination of the relevant activities across governments. We suggest to the provincial government that its focus should be on working in communities on concrete initiatives with other orders of government, rather than developing intergovernmental agreements. We take this approach because of the need for early action and because we believe that, if agreements are needed, they will be better if they are informed by experience on the ground with the specific kinds of issues involved.

While we firmly believe that the federal government has in many ways abdicated the important role it should be playing on the roots issues, we suggest that the Province not invest a great amount of time or energy in trying to bring the federal government to the table. The Province should be vocal in its expectations and should seize every available opportunity to involve the federal government, but should in no way delay its own initiatives to seek that involvement.

Third, the Province must work with the other orders of government to bring communities into the governance framework in meaningful ways. In the disadvantaged communities identified through the process we set out above, we believe that the Province and the other orders of government should form a Neighbourhood Strategic Partnership with community-serving agencies and community residents. We see these partnerships as being crucibles of collaboration and being responsible for developing and then implementing local plans to address the roots of violence involving youth. These plans would focus on local ways to achieve the outcome goals for youth set out in the youth policy framework. They would involve mapping what is already available in the community, identifying gaps and developing plans based on maximizing the strengths and assets of the community to achieve the outcome goals.

Planning, Accountability, Advice and Recommendations

Ontario is well past the point where "go forth and do good" is an acceptable approach to public or social policy of this magnitude. We must first know where we are going, how we will get there, how we will know whether we are making progress and how we will know when we have arrived.

That is why our proposed youth policy framework (Pillar 2) calls not only for a shared vision and agreed-upon principles, but also asks the Province to articulate its overall policies for youth using specific outcome goals. We are confident that Ontario's public service could produce a good initial set of such goals within a year.

While the outcome goals and the data available to measure them will be refined and improved over time, three core principles can be stated now with considerable certainty. First, it is of critical importance in our context that, to the greatest extent possible, the outcome goals include floor targets and not just use averages. Essentially, a floor target sets a minimum acceptable level of attainment. It is how we as a society express our fundamental bottom lines.

An example of a floor target would be that no neighbourhood should have an obesity or diabetes rate more than a defined per cent above the provincial average, or that no school should have a graduation or literacy rate below a certain figure. Using floor targets avoids the reality that if an average is used, the target can be met by having the best-off improve their performance even if the worst-off make no progress at all or even fall further behind. Averages hide a myriad of policy and program sins, and they fundamentally fail to identify the neighbourhoods or individuals needing the most help. By contrast, floor targets are particularly useful in taking policy-makers to the place where the problems are being created, and not just where they surface. When we measure against this kind of standard, we will immediately see where extra help must go.

The second important principle in this area is the need to track racial and other relevant differences in the achievement of outcome measures. This allows us to ensure that we can identify and address systemic barriers and thereby ensure that all members of our society have a fair opportunity to fulfil their potential. We called for the collection of race-based statistics in Pillar 1 and will not repeat that analysis. We do, however, want to stress how integral such information is to addressing key sources of low self-esteem and alienation.

The third principle for the use of outcome measures is that, whenever possible, they should be supplemented by a further commitment to reduce the gap between the most successful and the least. In our context, we will not nurture a sense of optimism, hope and belonging by raising outcomes for youth who see themselves still falling behind the rest of society.

The remaining issue is to set annual or sometimes two- or three-year targets for progress towards the goals. These indicators are essential to fine-tuning the strategy from time to time and to accountability and maintaining public support. They provide an opportunity to work towards commitments that can be seen and felt in the short run, and thus help motivate service providers and the public alike.

We see it as vital that the outcome measures and interim indicators be public and well-communicated, with the communications materials including contextual and analytical information on the accomplishments being made and any barriers being encountered.

Recommendations for the Premier

Introduction

As will be clear from our report, our core conclusions are that:

- ◆ The roots of violence involving youth are widespread, interconnected and deep.

- ◆ These roots have placed Ontario at a crossroads from which matters could get much worse if action to address them is not taken.

- ◆ Only an aligned and sustained commitment, led by the provincial government, will effectively address the roots we have identified.

The structures required to act on those conclusions can be defined with considerable confidence, having regard to experience elsewhere, our research and our consultations. We accordingly make specific recommendations at the structural level. At the level of individual programs or initiatives we generally offer advice rather than providing detailed recommendations. We take this approach because of the clear need for coordinated planning and close work with communities, agencies and other governments to determine the specifics of what needs to be done in each community across this highly diverse province to address the very serious issues we have surfaced.

Fundamentally, we strongly believe that, starting this fall, the Province must put at the heart of its overall agenda a sustained, aligned and structural response to the roots of violence involving youth, based on the four pillars we have proposed and complemented by an effective community-based intervention strategy for youth who are already involved in, or perhaps on the verge of, serious violence. In summary, the four pillars are:

A repaired social context to make Ontario's social context work for all Ontarians by addressing the roots of violence involving youth, including poverty, racism, poor housing, youth mental health, education, the need for supports for families and youth engagement, and issues arising in youth justice.

A youth policy framework to guide and coordinate policies and programs for youth by reference to developmental stages and outcome goals.

A neighbourhood capacity and empowerment focus to strengthen communities through initiatives such as schools as hubs, supporting resident engagement and stable funding for agencies that serve disadvantaged communities.

> **Integrated governance** to drive and coordinate work across the Ontario government and to work effectively with the other orders of government and with the strengthened communities.

To build and maintain support for the needed action, we are also convinced that the Ontario government must implement an effective communications strategy to bring the main findings of our report to the attention of the public. It should focus on the serious risks of failing to act now to address the circumstances that are producing alienation, a lack of hope and belonging and the other conditions we have identified as being the immediate risk factors for serious, explosive and unpredictable violence involving youth.

Structural Recommendations

1. The Ontario government must immediately put in place a governance structure that can align and sustain over the long haul the work required from a dozen or more ministries, and at the same time can also support effective collaborative work with other orders of governments and with communities.

2. The governance structure should be headed by a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and Anti-Racism, or a central body with equivalent authority, with a clear mandate to develop a corporate agenda, approve coordinated work plans for ministries, monitor progress and report regularly to the public against published indicators of progress.

3. The committee should be supported by a dedicated secretariat within Cabinet Office to provide policy advice and oversee, on the committee's behalf, the work by ministries to produce and implement coordinated plans to effectively address the roots we have identified. The secretariat should also have a research capacity to identify emerging needs and responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of the structural initiatives established to advance this agenda.

4. The Cabinet committee should meet periodically with a small number of external associate members, who would bring relevant experience and expertise to its deliberations, and should be supported by a Premier's Advisory Council on Social Inclusion and Anti-Racism to ensure that a variety of perspectives, including those of youth, informs the work of the committee on an ongoing basis.

5. Internal alignment mechanisms should be put in place to ensure sustained and coordinated progress at the provincial level, including performance agreements

for senior officials, impact analyses, public reporting, public sector agreements among ministries and a number of cross-ministry units.

6. The Province should create a comprehensive youth policy framework for Ontario to provide overall direction for the myriad of programs affecting youth. The framework should be developed in consultation with communities, youth and service providers and should include a vision, a set of principles and a series of specific outcome indicators to align programs to meet common goals and to measure whether progress is being made over time.

7. The Province should adopt the place-based approach we have outlined, in which a pivotal although not exclusive focus is placed on addressing the roots of violence involving youth by working within and with the neighbourhoods where those roots are concentrated and where they are producing a downward cycle of disadvantage and violence.

8. To identify the neighbourhoods for the place-based approach, the Province should employ the Index of Relative Disadvantage we have proposed to determine on a provincewide basis the areas where disadvantage is most concentrated. Once the index results are available, the Province, through a lead ministry for community building, should immediately open discussions with the affected municipalities to identify local factors, such as the availability of services, for inclusion in the determination of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and to define the boundaries of such neighbourhoods.

9. Within the identified disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the Province should support and ensure the funding of the following structural initiatives:

   ◆ Community hubs to provide space for community activities, including for meetings, recreation and the arts, and service providers. Wherever possible, these hubs should be based in or near schools.

   ◆ Full access to schools for community activities and services, by having a body with facilities management and program experience lease the premises in school off-hours and engage with the community to identify priorities for the use of the space.

   ◆ A Neighbourhood Strategic Partnership (NSP) to bring together the Province, other governments, community residents and service providers. The NSP would provide a forum for collaboration to develop and help

implement a local plan to address the roots of violence as they manifest themselves in each disadvantaged community.

◆ An arm's-length funding board to support local initiatives to bring residents together to form networks of mutual assistance and community involvement, to plan the use of the hub and to participate in governance initiatives through the NSP, and also at least one youth-led organization to engage and serve youth based on local needs and priorities.

◆ A local coordinating body to help improve access to the services offered in the neighbourhood and to move towards better coordination amongst them.

10. With particular reference to the disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the Province should engage with community-serving agencies to develop a mechanism to provide streamlined and stable funding, and continuity of service, for agencies meeting key community needs.

11. The Province should, by the summer of 2009, prepare and publish an integrated plan setting out how ministries, and combinations of them, will work at the provincial and at the local levels to address the roots we have identified.

12. The Province should commit to measuring and publishing progress towards defined outcome goals as a central part of its approach to the roots agenda. To the greatest extent possible, the outcome goals should include minimum standards of achievement, a level below which no institution or community should fall (known elsewhere as "floor targets"). Progress towards those targets should be tracked by racial and other relevant differences.

Advice on Specific Initiatives to Address the Roots

Our report also offers extensive advice on how to respond to each of the roots we have identified. We primarily frame this as advice rather than as detailed recommendations because we believe that the most effective actions arising from our findings will be those taken with a full understanding of the capacities of Ontario's ministries and their potential to work outside their silos, of the issues they are already pursuing, of the realities on the ground across the province, of the competing priorities, and also with the kind of engagement of other governments, experts and communities that was outside our mandate and time frame.

In our view, only an integrated and collaborative approach to the roots will succeed. That is why we propose a body at the centre of government with the mandate and resources to consider our advice, situate it within the context of the balance of the government's agenda, determine priorities, make linkages among ministries and with other governments and manage a process of both building and being responsive to communities across the province. Only this kind of body and approach will be able to produce a coherent, long-range plan for the province capable of effectively responding to the intertwined and entrenched nature of the many roots we identified. This need not be a lengthy exercise: given a major focus by the ministries and with the leadership structure we propose, we believe that the planning exercise can be completed and the coordinated plans made public by the summer of 2009.

For ease of reference, we list below the major areas where we call for action and set out brief examples of the advice we have provided in our report, along with a reference to where our full advice can be found. Although these issues are presented individually, for ease of reference, actions to address them must be fully integrated if they are to be effective. To give but one example: providing a youth with even the best mentor will accomplish little if that youth goes home every day to a dysfunctional family and to cramped, substandard and depressing living conditions, attends a school that discourages their achievement, has an unaddressed mental health condition or lives in a neighbourhood where there is nothing to do but hang around aimlessly or get involved in anti-social activities.

13. **The Province must address the level of poverty in Ontario, its concentrations and the many invidious circumstances that accompany it.** In addition to reducing the level of poverty, this should include promoting economic integration by ensuring that there is affordable, good quality housing in many different neighbourhoods and by substantially improving and diversifying the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods so that people do not leave as soon as their economic circumstances permit. Among other initiatives we outline, it should also include ensuring that high-quality services, recreational and arts facilities, parks and schools are available to those who are the most disadvantaged, and that neighbourhoods are safe. Overall, where people live should not itself produce the immediate risk factors for their being involved in violence. (Volume 1, pages 229–238)

14. **The Province must articulate more effectively its commitment to anti-racism and should address this urgent issue as a major priority in its response to our report.** As a key anchor for other initiatives, we suggest that the Province should require all ministries and public sector agencies to develop and publish a specific anti-racism plan with measurable objectives and timelines. (Volume 1, pages 238–245)

15. **The Province must take steps to bring youth mental health out of the shadows.** The Province should enhance prevention through programs that promote health, engagement and activity for youth. It should also provide locally available mental health services that afford early identification and treatment for children and youth in the context of their families and schools, that are culturally appropriate and that are integrated with the community hubs we propose. (Volume 1, pages 246–247)

16. **The Province must remove the barriers and disincentives to education that exist for many children and youth.** We suggest a number of ways in which this can be done, including by ensuring that teachers and administrators better reflect the neighbourhoods they serve, developing and providing a curriculum that is racially and culturally inclusive, addressing the continuing concerns about the safe schools provisions, better connecting schools to families and communities and providing ongoing educational and mentoring supports and incentives to encourage students to remain in school, engage in learning and seek further education, especially in priority neighbourhoods. (Volume 1, pages 248–251)

17. **The Province must implement local, integrated, culturally specific services for families of all forms.** Our advice is that supports to families should begin with prenatal care and should include creative outreach to early-years programs and the new all-day learning initiative for four- and five-year-olds. Services for children and their families should be fully integrated, and particular attention should be given to youth who do not have, or do not live with, families. After-school programs should be available from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. to promote good nutrition and positive activity, and to help keep youth off the streets in what many consider to be prime time for crime. Among other initiatives, the Province should also implement programs to familiarize families, including new settlers, with and connect them to community structures and supports. (Volume 1, pages 251–256)

18. **The Province must increase the supply of decent, affordable housing units, diversify their locations and improve standards within both public and private accommodation.** This should be accompanied by measures to improve transportation services for disadvantaged areas and ensure that the physical environment does not promote crime, but instead provides safe and welcoming places for gathering and play. Community markets and other ways of fostering cohesion should also be facilitated, and stores and businesses should be brought back to neighbourhoods that lack them. (Volume 1, pages 256–257)

19. **The Province must recognize the value of sports and arts in supporting learning, development and creativity of youth.** The Province should work with municipalities, school boards and community agencies to remove barriers that include income level, transportation and a lack of usable space. The Province should move to immediately embed accessible sports and arts programs in the priority neighbourhoods. (Volume 1, pages 257–260)

20. **The Province must work actively with communities and agencies to assist every child and youth to have access to at least one adult who provides nurturing and support, and towards providing youth with a voice in matters that affect them.** Among other initiatives to support youth engagement, the Province should put in place training, standards and supports for mentors across the province, and all sectors working with youth should adopt meaningful and sustained measures to include the youth voice in their governance structures. (Volume 1, pages 260–262)

21. **The Province must support the contribution of youth workers to initiatives that address the roots of violence involving youth.** The Province should recognize that youth workers bridge the divide between youth and their communities and schools, provide counselling and connectivity to the most disadvantaged youth and serve as role models, especially when they are from the same neighbourhoods or share similar circumstances. (Volume 1, pages 262–263)

22. **The Province must work with and encourage the private sector to create meaningful, long-term employment opportunities for youth.** The Province should adopt a broad strategy to prepare youth for work and to help marginalized youth obtain and maintain it. The private sector should examine barriers to opportunity and employment of youth and work with the Province to shape holistic programs that provide learning opportunities leading to meaningful sustained employment and leadership development opportunities for youth. (Volume 1, pages 263–267)

23. **The Province must bring coordination to the three ministries that operate parts of the youth justice system, ensure an overall policy focus and support a more balanced approach to resourcing by establishing a Youth Justice Advisory Board.** The Province should also take steps to reduce the over-criminalization of Ontario youth compared with those in other large jurisdictions, and to reduce the ways in which the powers of the justice system can be misused to produce alienation, a lack of hope or opportunity and other immediate risk factors for violence. Overall, all parts of the justice system need to adopt a more strategic approach to youth. (Volume 1, pages 267–289)

Related Advice

24. To complement the roots strategy we have put forward, the Province should adopt a community-focused strategy to enhance its capacity to successfully intervene with, treat and reintegrate those youth who have committed acts of violence or have a propensity to do so. This strategy should, to the greatest possible extent, rely on initiatives that have been proven to work in similar contexts.

25. To reduce the risk of serious violence where those interventions have not been made or have not succeeded, the Province should continue to press the federal government to implement a handgun ban in Ontario, and should also explore every feasible initiative it might take itself to minimize the risks while the federal government continues to permit these guns in Ontario apartments and homes.

26. Having regard to the practical and jurisdictional reasons why our review did not seek to study violence within First Nations in Ontario, the Province should meet with First Nations leaders to consider the potential applicability of our advice to those communities and to consider whether a specific additional review concerning them is warranted.

27. Pending those discussions, the Province should act immediately to ensure that programs and safeguards are in place for children from First Nations communities who must move away from home to attend high school and to ensure that services are available to families who relocate to be with their children.

Perspectives on Implementation

As discussed earlier in our report, we believe that a comprehensive and coordinated plan is essential to make progress on the roots, considering their number, complexity and interconnections.

In that respect, we have provided a broad and multi-faceted framework to address the roots of violence involving youth. We appreciate, however, that our report is being submitted at a point in time when the Province faces economic challenges, when it must deal with multiple priorities, and when its flexibility to immediately implement a bold reform agenda will face limits. We similarly understand that the government, working with its partners, will be best placed to determine the optimal timing and sequencing for the recommendations that we have put forward.

While we are mindful of these constraints, we also believe that the government must respond proactively to implement the advice that we have provided. In general terms, it is our view that the Province can make substantial progress towards preparing its integrated plan by next summer. Within this context, and based on our discussions with stakeholders, we offer the following views on how some of our key recommendations could be advanced.

Recommendations for Priority Implementation

We believe that there are three key areas where progress can and should be made independently of the government's overall planning process, in addition to the early action that we hope will follow release of the report of the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction later this year. We accordingly make three further recommendations to the Premier for urgent action in the following areas:

28. **Children's Mental Health**: This issue affects many aspects of the roots: the stability of families and the ability of parents to work and parent, how youth develop with their peers, how they do in school, how they interact with the justice system and their life chances overall. We believe that one or more associations with expertise in youth mental health should be retained immediately to prepare a plan for universal, community-based access to mental health services for children and youth for the earliest possible implementation. They should also prepare plans for all interim investments that are feasible within the limits of the available professional expertise in Ontario. In a province with a health budget of $40 billion and a youth incarceration budget of $163 million, we believe that the $200-million estimate of the cost of providing universal youth mental health services is manageable within this government's mandate.

29. **Anti-Racism**: It is tragic — not ironic — that 30 years ago this November, Walter Pitman entitled his report on police minority relations: *Now Is Not Too Late*. Since that time, 30 separate groups of five- or six-year-old children have started Grade 1 and many have gone through their school years without seeing sustained progress on these issues. For many of them, now *is* too late — their lives marred, their futures circumscribed and their faith in this society quite justifiably shaken. And many of them are the parents of children in the system now, with little reason and sometimes no ability to instil hope in those children.

To lay the foundation for the extensive action required to address this growing problem, the Province should proceed immediately to develop the methodology for the collection of race-based data in all key domains. As well, to ensure that action is underway before the summer of 2009 to address the pressing issues that arise in police-minority relations in a number of neighbourhoods, we believe the provincial funds that we propose for youth-police liaison committees and for front-line officer training programs should be put in place as quickly as possible.

Additionally, the Province should take immediate steps to put in place measures that will ensure that teachers and school administrators better reflect the neighbourhoods they serve.

30. **Steps Towards Community Hubs**: There is an overwhelming consensus in favour of building community hubs and, accordingly, no reason to delay action on that front. In neighbourhoods where it is clear that the Index of Relative Disadvantage will demonstrate a high level of disadvantage, or where similar methodologies have already done so, the Province should promptly initiate discussions with the municipal governments, to begin to plan for a hub if none exists and in particular to determine the availability of recreational and arts facilities. Where the latter facilities are lacking, the Province should work actively with the Ontario Realty Corporation and the municipality to lease alternative space for youth and youth services until a hub is developed. Another winter and spring should not go by in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods with there being no safe place for youth to gather and play.

Short-term Building Blocks

In addition to the three areas that we have just canvassed, we believe that the government's implementation priorities in the short term must focus on putting a number of key building blocks into place, upon which the success of our advice will ultimately depend. The actions in question are set out below:

◆ Establish a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and Anti-Racism, or equivalent, and the Premier's Advisory Council. Designate the lead ministry for community building and appoint the head of the Social Inclusion and Anti-Racism Secretariat.

◆ Staff up the Secretariat to commence work on the coordination of the government's action plan and on the youth policy framework and retain research services to develop outcome targets.

◆ Hold focused discussions on the Index of Relative Disadvantage with a view to finalizing it in time for an initial data run in early 2009. This will identify areas for conversations with municipalities to select and define the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods for the priority actions we outline.

◆ Retain a body or bodies with relevant expertise to prepare a plan for universal access to mental health services for children, along with plans for more immediate services investments, particularly to ensure that those in custody or care needing such services get them as soon as possible.

◆ Initiate work, in consultation with the Ontario Human Rights Commission, to develop a provincewide methodology for the collection and use of race-based statistics.

In the case of the first two items, the Province must move quickly to put in place the necessary governance structures. In the case of the other recommendations, and subject to discussions with municipal governments and community groups, we believe that substantial progress could be achieved within six months.

Short to Medium-term Initiatives

We believe the Province must also work to make steady progress on the following components of our strategy and appreciate that several will require more in depth consultations among ministries and with municipal governments, agencies and community groups.

◆ Oversee continuing efforts of ministries to develop action plans having regard to directions set by the Cabinet committee and the advice in this report and establish working groups with key communities, agencies and experts to advance this work.

◆ Establish the fund for youth-police community liaison committees and for the initial short-term anti-racism training programs.

◆ Ensure that priority planning for a representative teaching force in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is underway.

◆ Develop the youth policy framework, with as many outcome goals as possible in the time available.

◆ Launch an assessment of recreational, cultural and other hub needs with municipalities in areas identified as likely to be determined as areas of high disadvantage when the Index of Relative Disadvantage is run.

◆ In identified disadvantaged areas that lack space for youth to gather, play or create, seek out leasing opportunities, including with the Ontario Realty Corporation, to make such space available while planning for hubs and recreation and arts centres gets underway.

◆ Establish the funding board for youth-led and resident-engagement organizations with the objective of having some of these in place in the summer of 2009.

◆ Begin discussions with the community agency sector on ways to streamline and stabilize their funding, involving municipal governments and other funders as appropriate.

Towards Full Implementation

We believe that, assuming good progress is made on the building blocks and other initiatives, other key components of our strategy, listed below, would then fall into place. While the availability of resources and the need to consult with partners will dictate the pace and timing of implementation, we believe that some work can occur to advance these objectives within the first year.

◆ Appoint the Youth Justice Advisory Board.

◆ Start the negotiation process to have facilities managers operate schools as hubs in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, as they are identified.

◆ Identify a university or college home for the institute for excellence through program assessment.

◆ Finalize ministry implementation plans and public service agreements for approval.

◆ As disadvantaged neighbourhoods are formally identified, work with municipalities to define areas for joint effort and begin to establish Neighbourhood Strategic Partnerships, or work within existing equivalent structures.

◆ Provide initial grants to youth-led organizations and resident engagement organizations in the identified disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

◆ Complete and publish the government's action plan.

As we have noted, the roots we have identified will require sustained and aligned attention over the long haul. The government's plans will provide the details of how it proposes to approach that task. For our part, we strongly believe that whatever those plans may be, the government should continue to engage and involve the public in this endeavour through regular and highly accessible public reporting of progress based on published outcome goals and interim indicators in all key areas.

Conclusion

Although we now formally conclude our work on this report, we emphasize that our commitment to the issues it addresses did not start when the Premier asked us to undertake this review, and it will not end with the submission of this report. Whether in official capacities, if the Premier wishes, or as private citizens, we will continue to be active participants and willing partners in the work that must be done to ensure all youth in this very rich province lead safe, healthy lives in healthy families and healthy communities.