

The typical profile of a persistent offender was described to the Committee by Pat Gorham, of the Island Alternative Measures Society. She is project coordinator of programmes to Cape Breton Island youth in conflict with the law.

This youth may be contending with a combination of the following burdens: poor school performance, social isolation, troubled family life, poor peer relations, poor anger management, low impulse control, tendency to blame others, low self-esteem, drug and alcohol abuse, a sense of boredom and futility, and an alternative or anti-social value system. When this kind of person adds criminal activity and conflict with the law to the mix, we have a very poor candidate for citizenship. This is the person in our communities we must reach and change. (74:5)

The Committee heard that these background factors can serve to identify children at risk of becoming frequent and serious offenders. And early interventions targeted to these youth can produce positive effects. Dr. LeBlanc told the Committee that in his experience a long-term social development measure such as a pre-school program that prepares disadvantaged children for school can produce a long-term impact. (75:6) Successful interventions must begin early however, he said:

If you wait until elementary school, it is almost too late. Preventive action directed at young children from disadvantaged areas must be taken in pre-school years. (75:12)

An early childhood program often mentioned to the Committee during its hearings is the Perry Preschool Project.³³ It was developed and implemented in Michigan in 1962, and is an example of the benefits of early investment in children. For two years children aged three and four from deprived families received daily preschool programs for 2.5 hours per day and a home visit once a week for 1.5 hours. The children were followed up to age 19 along with a control group that did not participate in the preschool project. Compared to the control group children, more project children completed high school, attended post-secondary schools and were employed; fewer were dependent on welfare and had an arrest record.

A cost-benefit analysis of the Perry Preschool Project showed that for every \$1 invested in a one-year program, there was a return of \$5. This figure was reached by estimating the value of the decreased demand for public services from those who participated in the program. It was found that the pre-school participants absorbed fewer public resources because they were more likely to have finished high school and to be employed as adults, and less likely to commit criminal offences.³⁴ Irvin Waller informed the Committee that these estimates of the cost-effectiveness of early intervention programs were produced by accountants with the General Accounting Office of the U.S. Congress. (70:13)

The Committee agrees with the testimony of witnesses that chronic young offenders display a myriad of problems that, in effect, marginalize them from the mainstream of society and weaken their commitment to its laws. It believes that the quality of people's lives can be improved and safe communities can be created through effective policies and targeted programs that unblock opportunities and foster a sense of self worth.

³³ Barry MacKillop and Michelle Clarke, *Safer Tomorrow Begins Today*, Canadian Council on Children and Youth, Ottawa, 1989, p. 5.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7.