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the Protection of
Children's Rights,
Mumbai

901B, Emgee Greens,
Indiasteelex, complex,
M.T.V. Road, Wadala
(E), Mumbai 400 037,
India

Tel: +91 22 32562807

Email:

roshniudyavar@gmail.com

Head Office

5167 Jean-Talon,
Suite 370
Montreal, Quebec,
Canada

H1S 1K8

Tel: (514) 593-4303

Fax: (514) 593-4659

Email: ficcaa@osde.ca

Editorial Team:

Ricaardoe Di Done

Angela Ficca

Roshni Udyavar

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Children Speak

Vol. 10, No.38, January February 2010

A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

The recent incidents of shoot outs and violence in schools and colleges in Canada, and earlier in other parts of the Western World, have exposed a fundamental flaw of an advanced civilian society. It indicates for one that economic progress is not necessarily an index that ensures happiness of the people in that country or region.

The two major features in this issue highlight the need for preventive measures - carefully planned interventions on high risk children, which can be far more effective than costly post-incident solutions such as detention centers, treatment facilities and legal measures.

In an exclusive interview with Dr. Louis Morissette, M.D., FRCPC, Head Psychiatrist for the Adolescents' Ward, Philippe-Pinel Institute of Montréal; Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Université de Montréal, Tube Family convinces us that government funds to prevent

violence can be better utilized in investing into sustainable child and youth development programs rather than gun registry projects.



Ricaardoe Di Done

The second feature - excerpts from the Third Annual Kristin Anderson Moore Annual Lecture, December 2009 by Philip B. Uninsky, JD, Executive Director of the Youth Policy Institute, Inc. highlights the parameters of sustainability in Evidence Based Programs and its results among children and youth at risk. Dr. Uninsky brings forth ideas that can be adopted by any institution anywhere in the world.

Lastly, Dan Seymour, Chief of the Gender and Rights Unit of UNICEF's Policy and Practice Division looks back at 20 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child - what we have achieved and the challenges that lie ahead. ■



Is Gun Control an Infallible Remedy for School Tragedies?

Tube Family.com

TubeFamily.com, Montreal, January 19th 2010 – The media attention that surrounded the École Polytechnique of Montreal and Dawson College tragedies leads us to believe that these incidents, which seem to justify the law on the registry of firearms, will remain forever engraved in our collective consciousness. While exaggerated and unexpected sums were invested in this program, few taxpayers know that the legal use of weapons with restricted circulation has been closely supervised for several years in Canada.



Ricaardoe Di Done, Founding President, TheoDone Publisher & Dr. Louis Morissette, M.D., FRCPC, Head Psychiatrist for the Adolescents' Ward, Philippe-Pinel Institute of Montréal; Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Université de Montréal

Legislation to reduce criminality is obviously fundamental in a country that is characterized by tolerance and pacifism more than by brutality and fear; Ricaardoe Di Done met with Dr. Louis Morissette at the Philippe-Pinel Institute in Montreal to better understand what are the real origins of violence and the means that can help prevent it from erupting again with the consequences that we know. Dr. Louis Morissette knows this subject very well. He is the Head Psychiatrist responsible for the Adolescents' Unit of the Institute Philippe-Pinel since 1983 and psychiatrist on the units of expertise and treatment. He is also a Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Université de Montréal. In addition to his private practice in psychiatry for adolescents and adults, Dr. Morissette has also acted as an expert witness before the courts and other institutions (Court of Quebec, Youth Division, Criminal Court, Family Court, the

Board of examiners of Ontario as well as the Disciplinary Committee of the Collège des médecins of Quebec.)

By taking a closer look at violence, Mr. Di Done discovered that it is caused by many factors. Violence is very often the outcome of negligence or physical and psychological abuse experienced during formative years, all of which could have been avoided. It leads us to believe that the gun registry project results more from opportunism than an honest interest in the public's wellbeing. While people still have strong feelings regarding these tragic events, very little has been done for them to have the information that is necessary to understand what is truly at stake. Convincing citizens that two billion dollars were required to register weapons acquired legally is like pulling the wool over their eyes. Besides, it is inadmissible that this decision – which does not prevent unstable individuals from

Is Gun Control an Infallible Remedy for School Tragedies?

obtaining dangerous weapons – diverts our attention from educational and preventive measures that have proven to be highly effective. If the objective is truly to reduce violence, then it is urgent to invest in our youth and our families by giving them access to programs that will allow them to resolve their problems and overcome difficult circumstances. Research on this topic is

abundant in Canada. Are politicians unaware of it?

Why sponsor additional research on school dropout, on violence and on other social issues when qualified experts have already presented valuable methods that can be put into practice? Why is it that the solutions offered by Canadian specialists are not taken into account, while their recommendations are not only respected but also

implemented in other countries? Why do we continue to claim that Canada is a paradise for children while so many young people and families continue to suffer? Do our leaders hope that citizens will go on believing in this illusion for very long? (To view and listen to the interview video, visit, www.tubefamily.com ■

Evidence Based Programs in Action: Policy & Practice Insights from a Success Story

The Third Annual Kristin Anderson Moore Annual Lecture, December 2, 2009

Philip B. Uninsky, JD, Executive Director of the Youth Policy Institute, Inc.

The Partnership for Results (the “Partnership”) is a model of local governance designed to implement a broad spectrum of evidence-based programs (EBPs) for the benefit of youth at risk.

For a decade, it has operated in Cayuga County in Central New York, which includes the City of Auburn. It has sustained its programs after initial federal funding from the Departments of Education, Health & Human Services and Justice, and it has proven to be replicable. Most importantly, the Partnership is having a profound, positive impact on the lives of children and youth and their families:

- It has reduced levels of juvenile violence, criminal offending, and destructive risk taking by children and youth – the arrest rate for juvenile delinquency and young adult criminality has declined by 49% (compared to 24% in Upstate NY as a whole); placements in juvenile detention are down by more than 50%; use of alcohol and marijuana has declined by over 30%; and schools are safer, with reductions of over 55% in fighting and crimes of violence on school property.

- The Partnership strives to reduce the exposure of children and youth to violence in all settings (home, community, and schools) and to improve their resilience (to prevail in adversity). We can claim important results - hospitalizations of youth as a result of assaults have declined by

over 40% (while they have increased in Upstate NY); the admission rate to foster care as a result of abuse and neglect has decreased by nearly one-half; independent outcome evaluations indicate that nearly two-thirds of students receiving mental health prevention and short-term interventions experienced substantial improvements socially and emotionally, with a greater capacity to manage problems at home and school (including significantly lower levels of suspensions).

- Safe schools, reduced levels of violent and disruptive behaviour, and the introduction of effective curricula have promoted academic engagement and achievement – in the City of Auburn, the percentage of 8th-graders meeting or exceeding NYS learning standards on state-wide exams has increased from 49% to 81%; there has also been a 30% increase among 8th grade students meeting or exceeding English Language Arts standards.

Cayuga County, NY, is located to the west of Syracuse, the county has a population of 85,000, including 30,000 in the City of Auburn. The county and surrounding areas of Central NY have experienced an accelerating erosion of the industrial base for 2 decades. When the Partnership began, the County was exhibiting many of the signs of acute distress typical of

regions in prolonged economic decline, with rising levels of physically aggressive behaviour and substance abuse among youth, increasing rates of intra-familial violence and child abuse and neglect, and steady declines in academic engagement and achievement.

This presentation has three overarching goals. The first of these goals is to identify the essential (that is, non-negotiable) elements of the Partnership model. The second goal is to outline (as a policy matter) lessons learned and approaches to successful replication. The Partnership is currently engaged in 2 large-scale replications – one in a rural community in Central NY and also in Washington D.C. – and the learning is definitely an ongoing experience.

I will begin with a third goal, which is to identify the 4 laws of children and family systems dynamics that help guide the design of the Partnership. Before turning to these laws, I think it is helpful to glance at the growing body of research that underscores how pervasive and complex are the vulnerabilities of children. Thanks to OJJDP's recent report on the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence¹, for example, we now have an accurate measure of the levels of victimization by physical aggression: more than 60% of the children and youth surveyed were exposed to violence in the past year, either directly or indirectly; nearly one-half were assaulted at least once. Nearly 4 in 10 were victims of direct physical violence 2 or more times in the previous year and more than 1 in 10 were directly victimized 5 or more times in the last 12 months.

There is no clear algorithm that links a specific mix of adverse experiences to non-normative and destructive behaviours.

Nonetheless, there is a strong body of evidence indicating that exposure to multiple risk factors increases the probability of dysfunctional behaviour.

Not all children exposed to multiple risks develop behavioural, academic, or mental health problems. But when they do, the ability of our service system to diagnose across service needs is extremely limited. The problem is compounded, in many

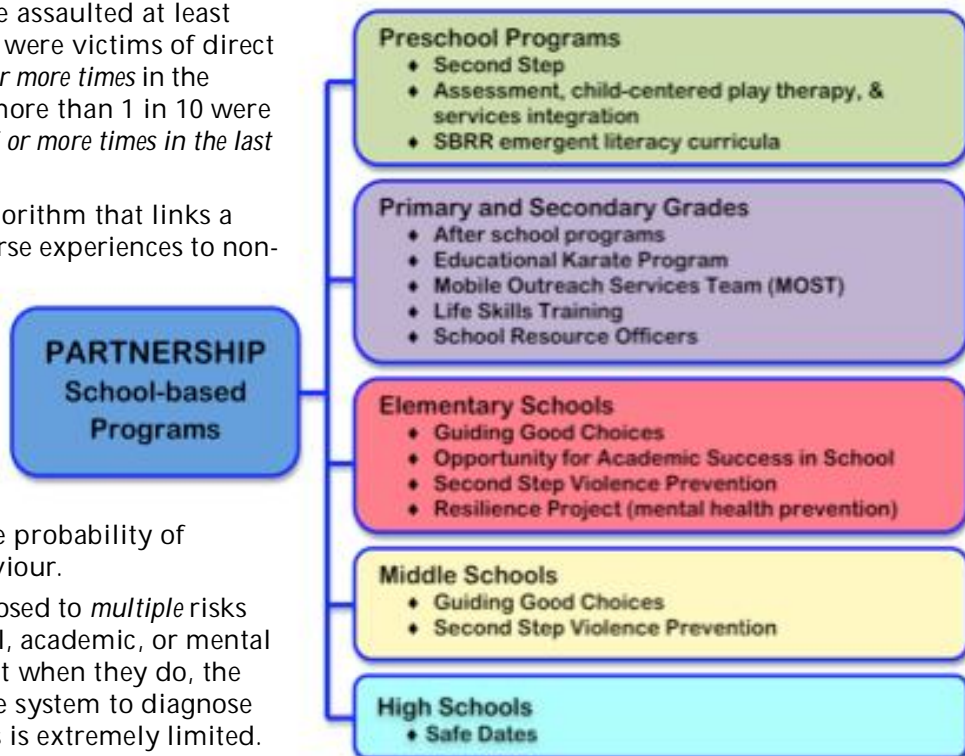
There is no clear algorithm that links a specific mix of adverse experiences to non-normative and destructive behaviours. Nonetheless, there is a strong body of evidence indicating that exposure to multiple risk factors increases the probability of dysfunctional behaviour.

communities, by the recent erosion in the capacity of the services system. This brings us to the **first law of children and family systems dynamics: Problems with complex origins have simple, easy-to-understand ... and wrong answers.** The efficacy of many interventions such as mental health services^{2,3} is restricted

by limited knowledge about co-occurring risks and disorders (such as family violence, a parent's incarceration, and substance use). Circumscribed, single system responses to complex problems mitigate the effectiveness of interventions. It is clear that we need to understand more about vulnerable children across systems in a timely and rights protective manner to avoid generating simple, easy-to-understand, and wrong (or partial) answers.

Which leads us to the **second law of children and family systems dynamics: Just as much as nature abhors a vacuum, the system of restrictive placements abhors an empty bed.**

Children and youth are placed in high-cost juvenile detention centres, residential treatment facilities, and other forms of restrictive placements because those beds are there. But we all know that prevention and early intervention services (in health, mental health, juvenile justice, and substance use) are generally more effective and cost less than addressing problems

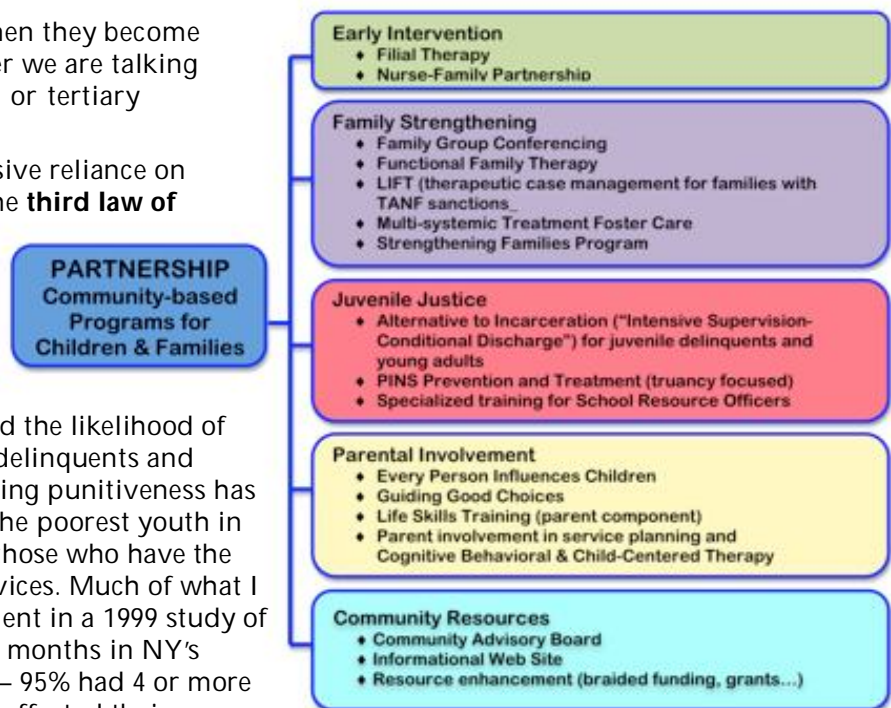


with intensive services when they become acute. This is clear whether we are talking about primary, secondary, or tertiary prevention.

Contributing to this excessive reliance on restrictive placements is the **third law of children and family systems dynamics – what goes up, rarely goes down.** With rare exceptions, the greater severity of the penal law over time has increased the likelihood of incarceration for juvenile delinquents and young adults. This increasing punitiveness has been felt most acutely by the poorest youth in the community of colour, those who have the least access to support services. Much of what I have just discussed is evident in a 1999 study of youth who spent at least 6 months in NY’s juvenile detention centres – 95% had 4 or more risk factors that adversely affected their normative development. Many of these risks were unknown to human services and juvenile justice professionals before incarceration. Incarceration rates in NY increased through the ‘80s and ‘90s, even though it was common knowledge that rehabilitation was far from achieving its intended goals. Indeed, given the high rates of re-offending, one almost tempted to say that recidivism is most strongly predicted by a single variable – prior incarceration.

Given the range of risk factors at play in the lives of children, it is clear that a broad spectrum of preventive and early intervention EBPs is needed in most communities. Before the Partnership began its work, however, little was known about introducing preventive EBPs simultaneously across all of the systems that are concerned about children and their families - education, health care, mental health care, substance abuse, child welfare, family court and law enforcement. Is there a cumulative effect? Are EBPs more likely to be effective if they are thick on the ground, organized in a pipeline from primary prevention to tertiary prevention, serving children of all ages and in all the contexts in which they live? The answer that the Partnership provides is **“yes”, but only if a form of local governance is in place to provide essential supports** (such as technical assistance, training, and assessment) **and to maximize the capacity of each EBP to serve those most likely to benefit from the program or service.**

In most respects, the Partnership model is a deliberate exercise in applying social and political science to practical service. The Partnership relies on EBPs and research-based



practices and it clearly embraces research in a wide range of fields. It is an expression of the **fourth and final law of children and family systems dynamics:**

The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese. The Partnership agenda is the careful, observant (and living) rodent, adopting only those programs and practices that are borne out by experience. We have assiduously avoided rushing to be first with a significant innovation, and we have avoided the new, promising, but not necessarily proven. Put another way, the Partnership model is an assertion that we can promote the positive development of children while maintaining a high level of fidelity to proven programs. The six essential elements of the Partnership’s model for integrating EBPs are as follows:

(1) Multi-disciplinary screening and assessment: The goal is to identify multiply-at risk youth early in the development of problems and to provide qualified professionals with thorough assessment of resiliencies and risks. The Partnership developed its own screening and assessment instruments. It convened an expert panel psychometricians, psychologists, and other researchers, who developed a 2-tiered assessment process. The first stage is a screening instrument implemented by teachers — the *Observation Checklist* — which screens for the early onset of symptoms related to mental illness, substance abuse, exposure to violence and cognitive disabilities. The Checklist educates school staff about behaviours that are likely to result in the need for extensive services if they are not addressed.

(2) **Local governance:** An essential part of the model therefore involves developing a quasi-governmental entity; as mentioned above, it is directed by agency leaders from education, human services, and law enforcement who actively collaborate to achieve the Partnership's mission.

(3) **A Memorandum of Understanding** developed by this quasi-governmental entity detailed the way it would collect, store, and use child and family-based data – *explicitly and only for comprehensive assessment, treatment, and service integration.* The Memorandum included the consent form agreed upon by all the participating agencies.

(4) A fourth essential element of the Partnership model involves the **development and administration of interagency databases.** All relational databases facilitate the ongoing evaluation of programs critical for maintaining fidelity and accountability. They avoid the accumulation of a Sargasso Sea of data, which one enters seeking answers to critical questions but from which one never emerges.

(5) As a result of these first essential elements, this unit of local governance **serves as a single point of integration of services** (but not a single point of access); As a single point of integration, clinical and case management staff (whether they work for the Partnership or member agencies) help to ensure continuous and comprehensive interventions, linking families with those services likely to best address their problems.

(6) A 6th essential element is **to implement a “public health” spectrum of EBPs.** These form a continuum of prevention and early intervention programs that operate in natural settings (and hence are highly accessible and less likely to be stigmatizing) and which serve a broad range of needs for children of all ages.

The implemented EBPs achieved a high level of efficacy for a variety of reasons. The institution of local governance, with planning, implementation, and coordination supports, orchestrated a rapid and simultaneous implementation of over 20 EBPs, permitting implementers to serve those most eligible to benefit from the program.

In conclusion, I would like to draw your attention to a fundamental outcome of the Partnership model in the City of Auburn. Too often, because of a limited adherence to the program model, a widening of the eligibility

Children and youth are placed in high-cost juvenile detention centres, residential treatment facilities, and other forms of restrictive placements because those beds are there. But we all know that prevention and early intervention services (in health, mental health, juvenile justice, and substance use) are generally more effective and cost less than addressing problems with intensive services when they become acute.

criteria, or an impending decline in funding (among other causes) EBPS suffer from a regression to a lower mean. In the case of the Partnership, programs have been sustained and maintained their efficacy. We have, in terms of academic achievement⁴, no less than a general progression TO A HIGHER MEAN. All children, given the right support, are capable of thriving regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or threats to their resilience. ■

1. Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Ormrod, R., Hamby, S. and Kracke, K. (October 2009). *Children's Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey.* *Juvenile Justice Bulletin.* OJJDP. Washington, D.C.: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227744.pdf>

2. According to a recent report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, one in ten youth (12-17 years old) has severe mental health problems that impair their ability to function at school, home, or in the community, and one in five has a diagnosable mental health disorder. *New Freedom Commission on Mental Health.* (2003). *Achieving the promise: Transforming mental health care in America. Final report (DHHS Pub. No. SMA-03-3832).* Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

3. *Children and youth living in low-income households are at greater risk of experiencing mental health problems* Howell, E. (2004). *Access to children's mental health services under Medicaid and SCHIP.* Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.

4. *Accompanying slides delineate, over the last decade, substantial increases in the percentage of students in Auburn City schools who met or exceeded NYS Math Learning Standards. In particular, among middle school students, whose test scores have risen slowly (if at all) in many communities, there was, in Auburn's two middle schools) a 56% and 76% increase over the decade in the percentage of students who met or exceeded NYS' Math Learning Standards.*

(Child Trends Data Bank)

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”

Illicit ammunition fuels violence in Kenya

A new cache of 30,000 bullets was seized by police in Narok, a town on the outskirts of Nairobi (Kenya) on 1 February 2010. The ammunition was found at the premises of a man already facing charges for a separate arms seizure. In December 2009, police found 100,000 bullets, six guns and an assortment of military gear in the property of businessman Munir Ishmael, also in Narok town.

The bullets were manufactured by government-owned Kenya Ordnance Factory Corporation, which only produces ammunition for Kenyan security forces or government agencies. Police have traced the source of the bullets to a government armoury in Nairobi. Munir Ahmed, his wife and Administration Police Chief Armourer Joseph Maritim were charged with illegal possession of arms and are currently facing trial.

Camlus Omogo from IKV Pax Christi, an IANSA member in Nairobi, said: "This revelation brings to the fore questions as to how secure is the factory, including how the bullets are distributed to the armed forces. It seems there is weakness in the control of the production and distribution or there might be cases of corruption within the factory."

Over the past months, allegations have been made about state ammunition finding its way into civilian hands. A study by the Small Arms Survey provides strong evidence of a systematic unofficial initiative to supply government ammunition to the Turkana pastoralist in Northern Kenya. The police supply almost 50% of the ammunition that circulates illegally in Turkana, ostensibly to allow the pastoralists to defend against rival groups in Sudan and Uganda. This practice not only fuels the armed violence in Turkana but also makes ammunition available for use in crimes ranging from roadside banditry to targeted assassination.



Turkana youth in Northern Kenya. The region is awash with weapons, which fuel the ongoing conflict between communities. Photo: IRIN - Anthony Morland.

The Turkana North District lies in one of the most conflict-prone regions in the East and Horn of Africa and the use of guns is connected to cattle rustling, roadside ambushes, crime and commercial vendettas. The competition for land and natural resources, inter-ethnic rivalry, poor governance, criminal activity and a steady supply of guns and ammunition are the local dynamics that give rise to insecurity.

This is an opportunity for Kenyan government to radically revise its procedures on the management of arms and ammunition by security forces, but more importantly to address the problems that underlie the demand for guns in regions like Turkana. The government must provide security to communities that, at present, have to protect themselves", added Camlus Omogo.

(IANSA is a global network of around 800 civil society organisations working to stop the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons. Our members include survivor support groups, human rights activists, public health professional and research institutes.)

Convention brings Progress on Child Rights, but Challenges remain

Twenty years of the CRC: 1989-2009

By Dan Seymour



In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child became the first legally binding international convention to affirm human rights for all children. While great progress has been made on child rights in the past 20 years, much work remains to be done. Dan Seymour, Chief of the Gender and Rights Unit of UNICEF's Policy and Practice Division, offers his assessment (excerpts)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) represents a major milestone in the historic effort to achieve a world fit for children. As a binding treaty of international law, it codifies principles that Member States of the United Nations agreed to be universal – for all children, in all countries and cultures, at all times and without exception, simply through the fact of their being born into the human family.

Worldwide impact

In every region of the world, we find numerous examples of the CRC's impact on law and practice. In 1990, Brazil followed ratification of the Convention with a new Statute of the Child and Adolescent based on its principles.

The CRC was the first international convention to be ratified by South Africa, leading to changes such as the prohibition of corporal punishment and development of a separate juvenile justice system. The Russian Federation also set up juvenile

and family courts in response to the CRC, while Morocco established a National Institute to Monitor Children Rights.

Finland took a number of new measures for children inspired by the Convention, such as a plan for early childhood education and care, a curriculum for the comprehensive school, quality recommendations for school health care, and an action plan against poverty and social exclusion. And Eritrea issued its Transitional Penal Code, with penalties for parents or guardians who neglect, abuse or abandon their children.

Challenges ahead

This wide acceptance of the CRC can give the misleading impression that it is neither challenging nor new. Yet the very idea that children are the holders of rights is far from universally recognized. Too many children are considered to be the property of adults, and are subjected to various forms of abuse and exploitation.

The recognition that children have a right to a say in decisions affecting them, articulated in Article 12, is not only disrespected on a regular basis; its very legitimacy is questioned by many. In fact, the contrary is evidenced by the way the humankind allocates its resources, the limited attention it gives to

ensuring the best for its children, the way it conducts its wars.

Foundation for change

That the world fails to respect the rights of its children is clear in the alarming numbers of children who die of preventable causes, who do not attend school or attend a school that cannot offer them a decent education, who are left abandoned when their parents succumb to AIDS, or who are subjected to violence, exploitation and abuse against which they are unable to protect themselves.

We cannot claim that the Convention has achieved what needs to be achieved. Rather, it has provided all of us with an essential foundation to play our part in changing what needs to be changed.

This 20th anniversary of the CRC reminds us, most of all, of what we have left to do. The Convention demands a revolution that places children at the heart of human development – not only because this offers a strong return on our investment (although it does) nor because the vulnerability of childhood calls upon our compassion (although it should), but rather for a more fundamental reason: because it is their right. ■

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