

CHILD & FAMILY

Almost half of parents with HIV died without custody plans, L.A. study

LOS ANGELES — Almost half of parents living with HIV died without custody plans for their children, according to a study published in *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, April 2004. "Custody planning is a slow and unstable process in families affected by HIV."

The project at a Los Angeles AIDS clinic set out to describe and to examine predictors of making custody plans by parents living with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection. The custody plans of 296 parents living with HIV for 708 children were examined over 5 years, with at least 85% reassessed annually.

The researchers found that over time, increasing numbers of parents living with HIV made custody plans for all of their chil-

dren (23.8%-52.8%), typically with extended family members. However, parents change plans frequently, and 44.8% of parents living with HIV died without custody directions.

Custody planning was less likely:

- in families with only adolescent children,
- when parents had a partner,
- when parents were depressed.

Parents' disclosure of HIV status, physical health status, substance use, and ethnicity were unrelated to making custody plans.

The research was conducted by the AIDS Institute, Center for HIV Identification, Prevention, and Treatment Services, University of California, Los Angeles.

Manitoba acts to improve shelter system for children at risk

WINNIPEG — Family Services and Housing Minister Christine Melnick announced an action plan that responds to recommendations from the Office of the Children's Advocate for improvements to the short-term shelter system for children who are at risk.

The province's action plan identifies four key steps to be addressed immediately:

- creating 50 new spaces with foster care resources for children under age eight;
- establishing an implementation committee to further address major recommendations;
- increasing supports for shelter workers; and

- hiring more staff for licensing and monitoring of shelters.

The Manitoba government has already taken steps to redirect resources from shelters to alternatives and strengthen on-site supervision and management of the shelter system.

The implementation committee will be led by Joy Cramer, executive director, Child Protection Branch, Manitoba Family Services and Housing; and Dr. Denis Bracken, professor of social work, University of Manitoba. The committee includes representatives from the three Aboriginal child and family services authorities and the child and family services general authority.

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B.C. settles with Jericho Hill School alumnae who were abused

VICTORIA — A \$15.6 million negotiated settlement between the B.C. government and deaf and blind students who were abused while attending the Jericho Hill School between the 1950's until its closing in 1992 has been approved by Justice Mary Humphries of the B.C. courts.

Justice Humphries called the settlement fair and reasonable and stated that a factor in her decision was the recognition that the provincial government was motivated throughout by its sense of responsibility for the students who attended the school and for their parents.

The agreement includes:

- the creation of a \$2 million Jericho Legacy Trust, which is to

be used to enhance education and employment opportunities for the former Jericho students and for the B.C. deaf community as a whole.

- \$10.5 million for individual compensation and the creation of a distribution plan to be developed by the plaintiffs;

- an acknowledgement of the abuse by the Minister responsible for the school;

- expanded counselling services, and improved access to advanced education programs; and

- memorial plaques to be erected at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and at the B.C. Provincial School for the Deaf.

Shut Toronto youth detention centre immediately, coroner's jury demands

TORONTO — Shut down the Toronto Youth Assessment Centre immediately, demanded the Coroner's jury studying the death of 16 year old David Meffe. (The Ontario government had already set June 30 as its closing date target.) According to Youth Advocate Judith Finlay, the institution, a former adult jail, has a history of suicide attempts and gang violence. She had recommended immediate closing of the centre and the current residents relocated to other centres.

Among the 40 recommendations are:

- an end to isolation for inmates of suicide watch;
- training for staff on suicide risks;
- conducting strip searches in private;
- an end to the practice of having inmates clear up a scene of death;
- zero-tolerance policy on peer violence;
- transfer health records

Health status and behaviour may be lower among northern and rural youth

OTTAWA — Teenagers (12-17 years) in Canada's northern regions, especially girls, are more likely to report lower self-rated health than their counterparts in major metropolitan regions, according to a study by Statistics Canada, comparing various regions in Canada.

Among the findings were that:

- 17% of girls in rural regions and 15% of girls in northern regions rated their health as "excellent," compared with 33% of girls in major metro regions;

- 23% of boys in northern regions rated their health as excellent, as opposed to 36% of boys in metro regions;

- 30% of boys in small town areas were overweight, compared with 25% nationally (based on the internationally recognized Body Mass Index);

- About 9% of boys were obese, compared with just 6% nationally;

- Girls in northern regions were the most likely to smoke, at 21% compared with 15% of girls nationally. No significant

differences were found between regions for boys;

- Defining heavy drinking, as having five or more alcoholic drinks per occasion once or more per month;

- Boys in small metro regions had the highest rate of heavy drinking, at 30% compared with 20% nationally;

- Only 13% of boys in major metro areas reported heavy drinking, well below the national average.

Girls in major metro regions were the most physically inactive. They were more likely than boys to be physically inactive in each of the major metro, mid-sized metro, small city and small town regions.

The report, "Health status and behaviours of Canada's youth: a rural-urban comparison" was published in the March 2004 issue of *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin*, Vol. 5, no. 3 (21-006-XIE, free). The study, is based on the 2000/01 Canadian Community Health Survey, which examined the health status and behaviours of 13,174 youths aged 12 to 17.

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Lockout at Yellow Brick House ends with new agreement

AURORA, ON — Yellow Brick House shelter and the Canadian Union of Public Employees reached an agreement that ended a 69-day lockout for outreach counsellors.

The three-year agreement includes a new salary scale with

wage increases of between 2 and 10 per cent. In a separate settlement, a voluntary leave monetary package was negotiated and made available to all shelter and outreach counsellors who chose to leave the agency.

A key issue in the contract negotiations, a workplace re-organization plan, was not included in the memorandum of agreement between the union and the employer. CUPE had argued that a re-organization scheme should be dealt with separately from contract negotiations.

The proposed re-organization plan would introduce mental health assessment and addiction counselling to the shelter. Such

Kids mental health centres close

TORONTO — Children's Mental Health Centres in Samia, Leeds-Grenville, and Kingston have been hit with program cuts, shutdowns and layoffs. Others are expected to follow, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union reports.

OPSEU claims the cuts will put more pressure on the health care system, the education system, and the justice system, "all of which are more expensive and less appropriate ways of dealing with children in crisis." It will also put pressure on the children's aid system.

"The whole system of children's mental health is a house of cards ready to collapse," said Deb Gordon, Chair of OPSEU's Child Treatment Sector. "The average wait she noted for treatment for children and families in crisis is currently 21.6 weeks."

OPSEU recommends ending competition for funding with other sectors such as Children's Aid, and the development of Social Policy that ensures stable funding for children's mental health centres.

OPSEU's Child Treatment Sector represents about 2,000 child and youth in 27 child treatment centres.

519-332-6594

between institutions and mark all records of suicide risks.

Int'l rehab plans do not aid girl soldiers

EDMONTON — Aid programs designed to rehabilitate war-affected populations fail to address the needs of children, particularly girls, who often receive no support at all, experts said at a conference on children and war.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs overwhelmingly focus on men. In Sierra Leone, for example, men and boys made up 92 per cent of those participating in DDR programs.

Women and girls have been abducted by warring parties and forced to serve as fighters, scouts, cooks, porters, spies and sexual slaves. They may also volunteer because of poverty, or concern for their safety or for ideological reasons.

Rehabilitation projects "systematically discriminate against women," said Michael Wessells, a child protection specialist for Christian Children's Fund and a psychology professor at Randolph-Macon College.

Ontario to overhaul adoptions

TORONTO — The Ontario government is hoping to find families for more of the 8,900 children who remain Crown wards while thousands of aspiring parents try to adopt from abroad, is planning a major overhaul of adoption laws and procedures.

 **Don't run out of time**

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May 11, June 8,
July 6, at 5 pm

services at women's shelters are controversial among women's rights advocates.

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