



NewsRelease

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CRIME-PREVENTION PROGRAMS EXPANDING: CHOMIAK

Attorney General Dave Chomiak announced the province's 50th Lighthouses site today, preceding program enhancements and a further expansion of the community crime prevention initiative announced in last month's throne speech.

"Manitoba's Lighthouses receive more than 125,000 visits by young people every year, many of whom are at risk for crime and gang involvement," Chomiak said. "Lighthouses help lead youth away from crime and toward better futures, and our government is committed to further expanding this successful program."

The province today announced new Lighthouses sites at Gilbert Park and Norquay School in Winnipeg, Wapanohk School in Thompson and in Black River. The Lighthouses initiative provides funding to schools, friendship centres and other community facilities to provide recreational, educational or social after-hour activities organized by and for youth.

All young people deserve an opportunity to build friendships while playing soccer or watching a movie in a safe, supervised environment as a positive alternative to the influence of gangs and drugs, the minister said.

The Lighthouses program is part of a suite of crime-prevention initiatives aimed at high-risk youth including the successful Spotlight program for gang-involved young people and the province's innovative Turnabout program directed at youth too young to face sanctions under the federal Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA).

"Where the province has the authority and jurisdiction, we have been able to make significant progress in dealing with crime," Chomiak said. "Continuing to build on pioneering initiatives like Spotlight, Turnabout and the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act will work towards making a real difference in our communities."

Chomiak noted both the Turnabout and Lighthouses program will be expanded this year. The government will also unveil significant enhancements to the Lighthouses program including expanding its scope and extending the operating hours at some sites.

A recent independent evaluation of the Lighthouses initiative by Kaplan and Associates found

the program “made a very real and important difference” in the lives of the youth and families involved in the study. The case studies in the Kaplan report found that before attending Lighthouses programs, many of the young people involved did not have affordable access to positive recreational activities, had rocky home lives and risk factors for potential criminal involvement, and had been involved in some illegal activities. They and their parents confirmed that positive changes followed their involvement in the programs.

“We know that building safe communities demands long-term investments combining stiff penalties for illegal activities with meaningful crime-prevention programs that address the root causes of crime,” Chomiak said. “Our government is committed to building on our multi-pronged strategy to reduce crime on our streets and enhance public safety.”

The minister noted the province has made historic investments in additional police officers both in Winnipeg and communities across Manitoba. Widely emulated initiatives such as the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act have resulted in more than 237 shutdowns of drug dens and prostitution houses, while investment in fetal alcohol spectrum disorder treatment and screening programs and Manitoba’s Healthy Child program address some of the core causes of crime, particularly crime committed by young people, he added.

Chomiak said the province will continue to work with Ottawa to strengthen Canada’s criminal laws to ensure there are tough penalties for serious crimes. The government is committed to leading a Manitoba mission to Ottawa later this year to discuss proposed changes to the YCJA and Criminal Code.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION ATTACHED