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Summer camps offer free fun for Vancouver kids affected by justice system

By Shadi Elien

The executive director of the [Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver](#) doesn't think the Canadian government is providing any programs that fit the "special and very unique needs" of children whose parents have found themselves tied up in the criminal justice system.

So, the society, which supports women and youth involved with prison or the courts, is taking matters into its own hands. Starting on Monday (July 12), it will host 96 children between the ages of six and nine in six weeklong day camps.

"Canada is the only country that doesn't recognize these children, and we're trying to address it," **Shawn Bayes** told the *Straight* by phone.

The goal is to address the stigma that kids might feel when a parent is incarcerated and give them a safe place to talk about that experience. Bayes explained that the purpose of the camps isn't to offer therapy or counseling but rather to provide kids with an opportunity to "be normal in an environment where nobody would judge them".

Four summer camp leaders will guide 16 kids each week to outings that include Vancouver Canadians baseball games, the Maplewood Farm, and tea at the Hotel Vancouver, along with other cultural and social activities.

"We want them to learn about themselves and their relationship to the world," Bayes said. "It's important to make them feel that they are no different than any other child."

The summer camps are free to participants. According to Bayes, including transportation and lunch, the program will cost the society about \$250 per child. The money is being raised from private donors.

Bayes hopes to make the summer camps an annual program and eventually make it available to older kids who want to participate.

Space is still available for the camps. Interested parents or caregivers can call the society at 604-520-1166 for registration details.

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