



REBECCA LAMBERT

YOUTH INCARCERATION: A LOOK BEHIND LOCKED DOORS

Good evening everyone, my name is Rebecca Lambert, and I am very honoured to be presenting to all of you on a topic in which I am very passionate about: youth incarceration, more specifically the reality for troubled youth within our youth criminal justice system.



After having completed a practicum at a youth correctional facility, and having spent over 100 hours observing what goes on behind closed doors, the reality of youth corrections is nothing like it has been portrayed by the government, public or the media.



The issue that I have witnessed is that incarcerated youth are not fully receiving appropriate resources, programs and support once behind bars. There is a lack of appropriate structure and an overabundance of leniency. There are not enough aspects within that are beneficial enough for proper reintegration and rehabilitation.

THE GOVERNMENT SAYS THEY PROVIDE:

EMPOWERMENT

HEALTH

SUPPORT

STRENGTH

FAMILY

COMMUNITY

REHABILITATION

ENGAGEMENT

REINTEGRATION

The government of Canada claims that they aim at ensuring punishments for youth crime, while providing a healthy and supportive environment that empowers youth to build on their strengths, help them through their rehabilitation journey and facilitate engagement with their families and the community for better reintegration.



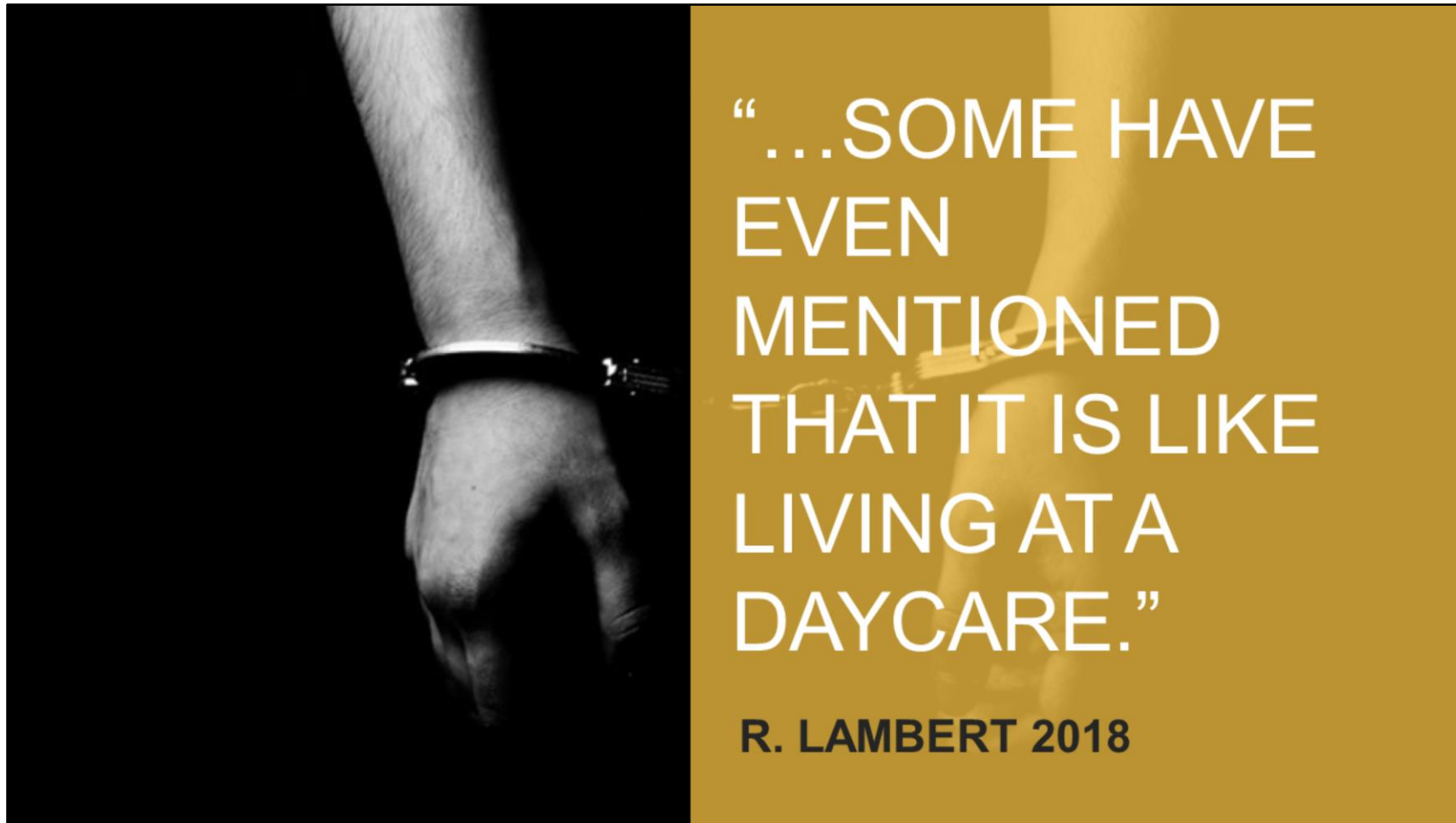
Within the Youth Criminal Justice Act it states that through multi-disciplinary approaches, take reasonable steps to prevent youth crime by addressing its underlying causes, to respond to the needs of young persons, and to provide guidance and support to those at risk of committing crimes.



This information that the government is feeding us is not the full reality. The government paints this picture that once youth enter custody, they are receiving the support they need by addressing challenges and needs in order to properly guide them into adulthood. From my experience, this is not fully accurate.



On the other hand we have the media portraying this idea that youth jail is a dangerous, violent, strict punishment facility that is extremely troubling for youth, along with the idea that youth crime is increasing in vast and unmanageable numbers, as is the seriousness of the crimes they commit.



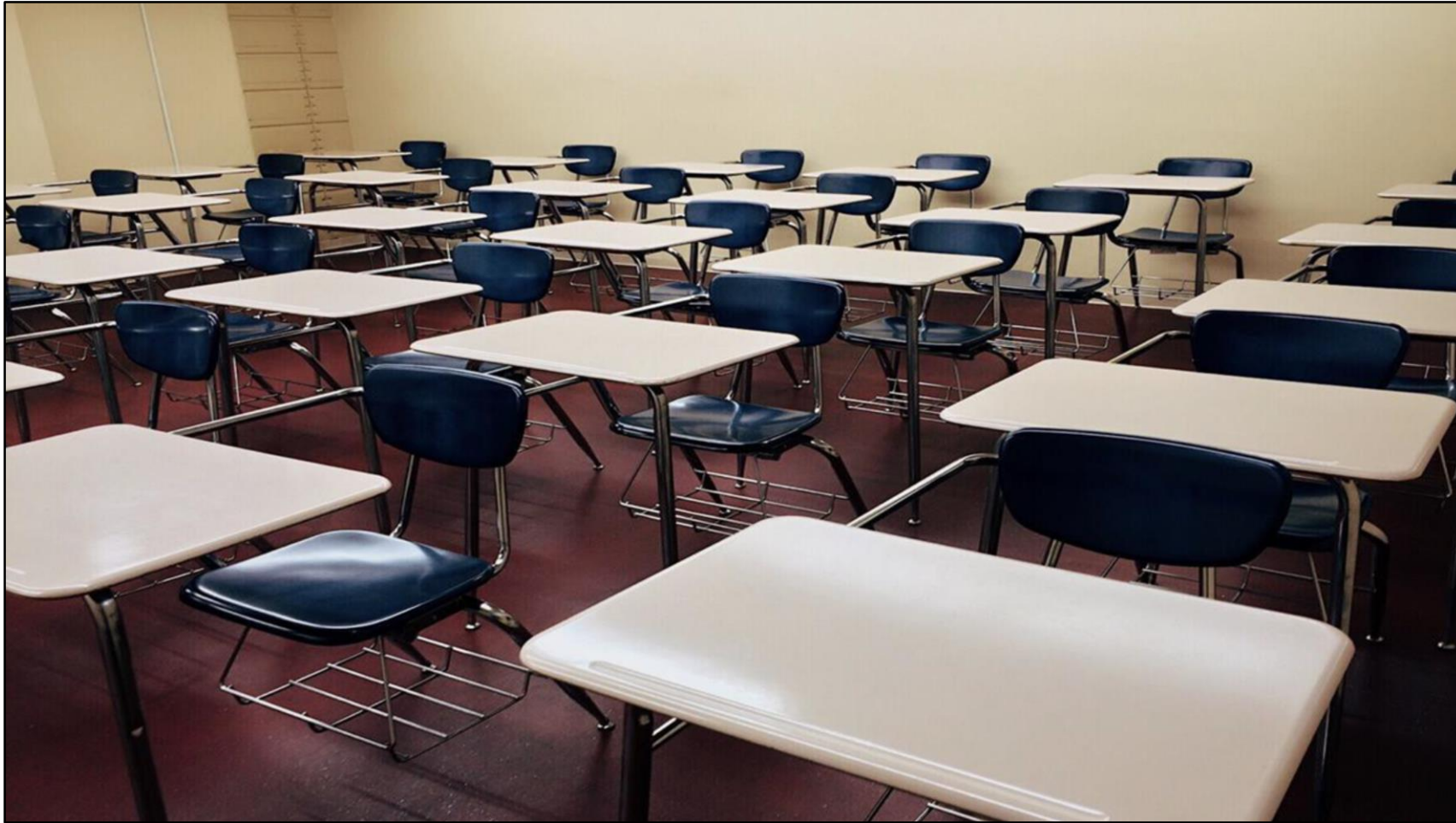
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R. LAMBERT 2018

The reality is that this is not the case. There seems to be a lack of appropriate and encouraging programs, resources and support. Youth described the facility as nothing more than a daycare. It appears that there is too much of a focus on providing a pleasant environment rather than helping them change or succeed.



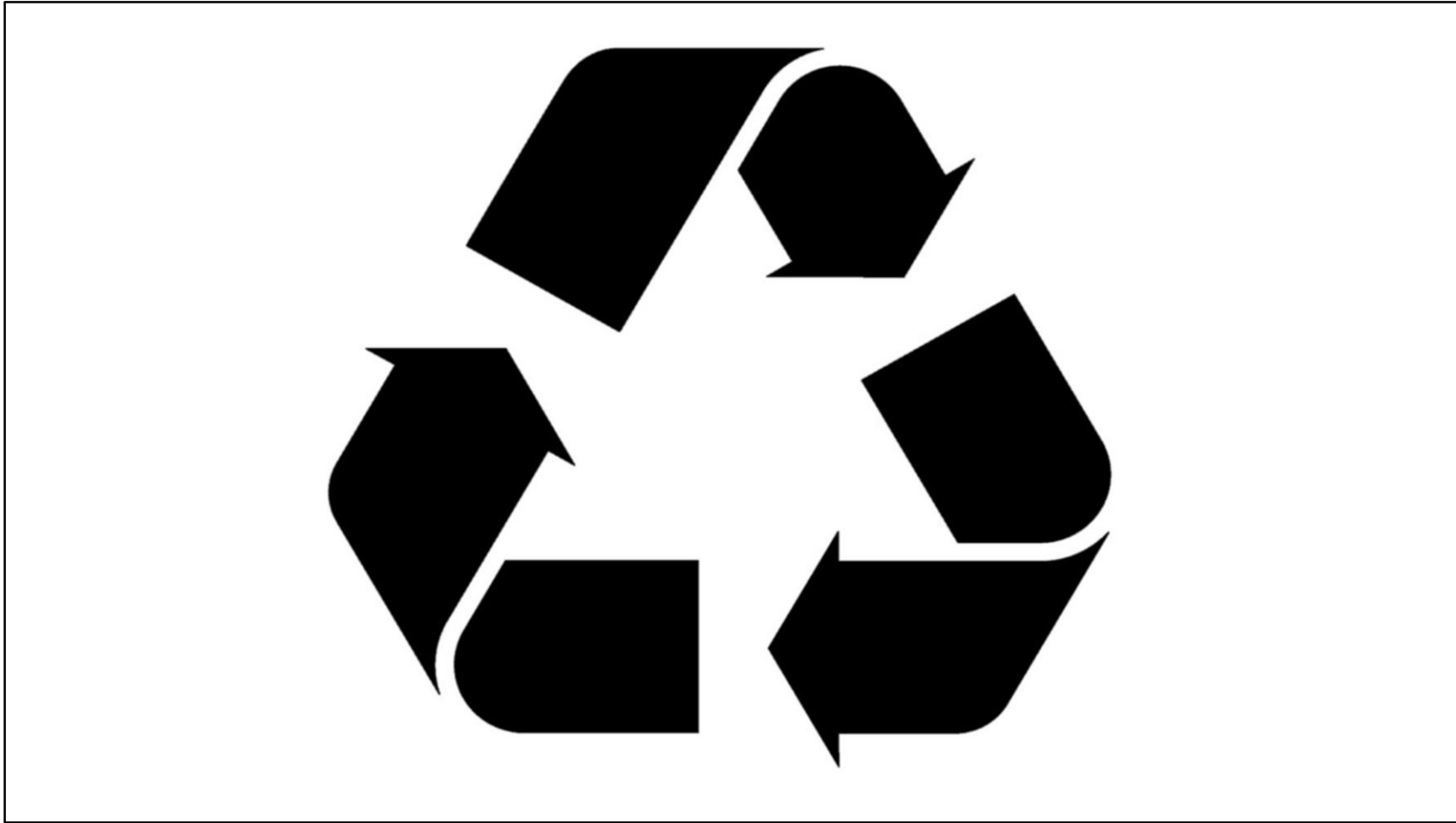
They receive good food, have cooking and baking classes almost everyday where they have a large amount of freedom with regards to what they cook, they have access to movies, video games and entertainment, a TV on unit, and they have special days where they have take-out pizza.



They have the option to attend school (20 minute blocks), and if they don't then they simply remain in their living area. They have limited responsibilities other than custodial unit duties or jobs if they have been hired. There also doesn't seem to be enough positive relationship building or guidance. Many claim that life inside is better than when they are released.



It appears that the relaxed environment these kids experience, which could be seen as a good thing, is ultimately negative and is in a way not beneficial for the youth's reintegration efforts, as it is taking away from proper and appropriate programming.



This is so important because the perception that we have of youth incarceration and that youth are being given the proper guidance and support is not the full truth. Yes, they have occasional optional programs for resume building, but the relaxed environment and lack thereof have an impact on youth recycling through.



When they enter custody with this type of environment, it is not impacting them in a way that is helping them succeed. I have witnessed many of the youth that enter the facility coming back in over and over again, or are coming in because they want to.

NOT THE
CASE FOR
EVERY
FACILITY IN
CANADA



I realize that the way it was at this facility is not the case for all youth facilities cross Canada, but from my experience this is the local context. It is the reality, and this is what is happening behind closed doors.



Change needs to happen. Youth require proper guidance and support with appropriate disciplinary measures that help them reintegrate. We claim that this is happening, but it is not happening enough. This also goes for the need for more encouragement within the facility. Many reenter their previous negative environments and do not know how to move forward.



Recently, the government cut funding for a transitions program, why did we do this? Youth need programs that can help them once released, and these include mandatory transition and reintegration programs, personal development and growth, goal setting, employment...



...as well as computer skills programs, communication programs, programs that help youth overcome adversity. Limit the focus on allowing television, video games, baking, pizza nights and implement more programs, resources and support...



...towards accomplishing what our government and the Youth Criminal Justice Act set out to do in the first place. Good things can come from creating an appropriate atmosphere. To conclude, I feel that youth are not being offered enough to better themselves.



There need to be more programs and support aimed at reintegration and rehabilitation, and approaches that take reasonable steps to prevent recidivism and promote success. We need to be aware of the type of treatment youth are receiving, and reevaluate current processes. Thank you.