

Round Table # 2 – Vancouver Island North

April 27, 2012

We want to thank all of the participants in the Vancouver Island North roundtable for taking the time to share their ideas, identify issues and discuss possible solutions to prevent and respond to criminal activity in their communities.

Roundtable Format

A total of 31 people attended the BC Policing Plan roundtable in Nanaimo on April 27th, 2012. Participants included local government representatives, representatives from First Nations communities and agencies, victim service and community support organizations and policing agencies. The goal of the roundtable was to capture constructive input from participants towards defining priorities and solutions on policing, crime prevention, and public safety in their community and for the province. To that end, participants were divided into three groups and engaged in six different cafe-style discussions throughout the day, including:

1. Problems with criminal activity
2. Responses to criminal activity
3. Crime prevention
4. Public safety
5. Core policing responsibilities
6. Police and crime prevention resources

For each topic, participants were asked to identify key issues, solutions and priorities.

Key Themes

The following key themes emerged from the group discussions.

Crime Prevention: Need to address domestic violence, mental health issues and the use of drugs and alcohol as part of improving crime prevention activities and the delivery of programs in communities. Learning how to prevent repeat offenders from manifesting and addressing visual displays of crime such as graffiti was also discussed. Supporting at-risk groups, especially youth and those with mental health issues and the homeless population was identified as important to the prevention of crime.

Funding: Ensuring that there is consistent and sustainable funding for crime prevention programs. Funding criteria tend to favour crime prevention pilot projects or new projects as opposed to ongoing programs; it may take some time for a pilot project or a new project to either secure ongoing funding or prove its value beyond one funding cycle.

Community Relationship Building: “the police are the public and the public are the police”. Improved relationships between members of the community and police require a breakdown of existing barriers. Police need to be more accessible and visible and the public needs increased familiarity with the officers in the community. Participants discussed the importance of working with the public and other agencies in rural settings as critical to addressing public safety.

Rehabilitation and Support Programs: Assisting those in need of additional support and social services will remove them from the justice and healthcare system, freeing up valuable policing and health care resources.

Education and Awareness on Key Issues: Building community understanding and knowledge in support of crime prevention.

Continuum of Service: Identify policing not as a standalone entity but as a component in the social system for improving the quality of life of citizens through social programs, education, mental health services, crime prevention, and law enforcement.

Proactive Policing: Due to the limited resources of police services, policing agencies are currently unable to allocate sufficient resources to build lasting relationships with community groups and implement effective proactive strategies focusing on prevention and awareness.

Community Engagement: Policing services sometimes perceive difficulty reaching out to the community to obtain dedicated involvement on issues other than “hot topic” issues. Members of the community believe that police services need to make more of an effort to engage and involve the community.

Summary by topic

1. Problems with criminal activity

Issues:

- The presence of repeat and prolific offenders in the Justice system
- Homelessness and the increase of transient population is contributing to an increase in criminal activity
- Increase in domestic violence is having an impact on communities
- The prevalence of drugs and alcohol
- Increase of individuals with mental health issues that don't have sufficient support services available to them are contributing to criminal activity
- Graffiti as it relates to broken window syndrome, is propagating an increase in crime

Top Priorities:

- Education and awareness around drugs and alcohol

- Leadership: people need to assume their role and responsibilities within all levels of leadership
- Identifying what an affordable housing model looks like and finding links between housing and social services
- Domestic violence units
- Engage service groups because they have money and are dedicated to finding solutions (such as Rotary clubs) although – grants are now sparse from these groups

Priorities and Solutions:

- Organized crime initiatives such as dress codes in bars and scanners for driver's licences
- Graffiti task force and dealing with nuisance behaviour
- More government support to provide services to vulnerable citizens such as those with mental health problems or addiction
- The development of a community position to act as a Social Justice Advocate
- Adhering to the philosophy of restorative justice
- The sharing of information about program delivery to identify best practices by allowing for more oversight so that detachments can be open and increase dialogue
- Reassure the public through visibility and police presence
- Use the internet and social media to communicate good news stories, achievements, and acknowledge individuals within the community for accomplishments
- Youth education on drugs, gangs, and community pride and awareness
- Increased access to social services such as affordable housing, women centres, grants, and community events
- Creating awareness of the key problems within communities and solutions available
- More policing: numbers, dollars, visibility
- Obtaining adequate and consistent finances and resources
- Universal cost sharing in police services to efficiently distribute funding
- Clearly defined roles for agencies and what their responsibilities are
- Improved consistency within the justice system for convictions
- More crime analysis to better identify and prepare for crime influxes and to take preventative measures

2. Responses to criminal activity

Issues:

- Resources not available for Domestic Violence Unit
- The updating and refreshing of preventative programs such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program, which seeks to prevent the use of controlled drugs, membership in gangs, and violent behaviour
- The system is not able to support individuals who desperately need assistance

- Management of individuals who require social assistance end up being managed by police which takes up police resources and causes increased overhead
- Need health facilities and detox centers to manage individuals with mental health and addictions
- Lack of sufficient court time and court backlogs: need to identifying what is causing this
- Court does not address individuals' needs: as a result public perception is affected and there is a continued waste of police resources as people go in and out of court
- Dealing with remand days – travel days – court attendance - all equate to wasted police resources
- Lack of facilities for long term care offenders who face mental health issues
- RCMP spend time dealing with individuals with substance or mental health issues: resources wasted – individuals not treated properly
- Health facilities are strained because resources are allocated to individuals with mental health and addiction issues
- Lack of long term, sustainable funding for community organizations
- Understanding from Government that all communities' needs are different: what works in one community doesn't work in others – issues are different

Top Priorities:

- Best Practices for specific programs (for example, Prolific Offender Program)
- Increased engagement at the community level
- Find a way to integrate community and police – have community and police work closer together
- Mandate and legislation is needed to ensure coordinated and efficient services are provided
- Increase resources for Victim Services programs in the communities based on increase in crime

Priorities and Solutions:

- Collaboration and partnerships in communities: multiple partnerships, inter disciplinary teams (multi dimension) involving all stakeholders
- Parenting and Teaching is vital to crime prevention through social development so police can focus on prolific offenders
- Community organizations (chamber, social service agencies) identify what programs are important to contribute to, and in what way they should be supported such as providing resources or fund raising
- Police awareness of what the communities issues are
- Update and continue to use the DARE and HOPE programs
- Prolific Offender management: property crime reduced by 30% in community – individuals who are identified in the Prolific Offender Program are a priority – Multiple organizations are working together in this program

- Police revisiting Prolific offenders when they are incarcerated to check in and show the individual that they matter
- Using community Intelligence: information is then tasked out on problem individuals to multiple agencies, such as who are the drug addicted individuals in a community
- Community Strategy for re integration: Parole, Victim Services, Police and community working together to address individual's challenges
- Interaction between RCMP and other emergency response agencies
- Graffiti taskforce: database kept of all offenders – property owners paint over vandalized property promptly to maintain appearances and public perception of the community

3. Police Core Responsibilities

Issues:

- Lack of institutional flexibility in providing services that meet the unique needs of individual communities
- Lack of continuity with regime changes in government
- RCMP backfilling: it takes too long to fill vacancies.
- Responders must look beyond immediate responsibility – don't just look for the criminal offence but the social issues present at a call that other agencies might be able to be proactive on. Need to be able to respond in a contextual way
- Justice system that community perceives as not working

Priorities and Solutions:

- Form a board of governance and distribute appropriate power to communities which would incorporate an element of local governance
- Push some of the responsibilities back to community
- Need more inter-agency communications
- Set goals and objectives and connectivity between law enforcement, social services and the community
- Community priority setting through dialogue and relationships
- Visible leadership from the municipal, provincial, and federal levels
- Annual planning to define accountabilities
- Clear channels of communication to allow the public and agencies to collaborate
- Making dialogue a part of ongoing communications strategy
- Finding new and innovative ways to engage the public: it is hard to engage them unless it is a hot topic
- Bike patrol and ambassadors for the community
- Nuisance property and social disorder committee

4. Crime Prevention

Issues:

- Crime and crime prevention are interrelated and must be treated as such
- In order to make a difference the whole community has to be involved
- Removing the silos amongst agencies
- In some areas there is too much going on - need to focus on certain priorities and do them well

Top Priorities:

- Community-based multi sector task forces- getting all the groups together
- Key is working with youth- they are the future
- Important to manage high risk youth to ensure they do not fall into deviant behaviour or gang-related activities

Priorities and Solutions:

- Mentoring and tracking information and issues such as with high risk youth
- RCMP to be seen as maintaining safety, and the duties they perform are clearly differentiated from MCFD or Social Workers
- In small communities, the volunteer fire departments work well with RCMP
- An increase in Citizens on Patrol programs
- Developing the Domestic Violence Coalition
- Involving the community is a key aspect of effective implementation of restorative justice
- Funding toward programs for youth and cultural programs
- Graffiti program – clean-up with community members addresses “broken window syndrome” whereas when graffiti is left, it creates an expectation that is acceptable in the community
- Engage community in all kinds of problems that public are interested in
- Meet with community and hear their concerns to encourage more community engagement
- Look at challenges as opportunities to explore solutions
- Youth and Elder programs with police involvement

5. Public Safety

Issues:

- Dispatchers at 911 do not understand Aboriginal cultures
- Some first nation individuals are not open to calling 911, they do not have trust that officers will arrive in time
- Homelessness is an issue – they are very visible and the general public see these individuals as a threat and interprets the condition of the community as such
- Ineffective justice system: perception exists that justice system doesn’t work – repeat offenders – revolving door
- Criminal legislation is overridden by Judges and the courts

- Lack of education on where the crimes are being committed, who is the offender, crime stats and data
- Relocation of officers after they have built relationships in communities: major loss to the community, relationship building has to be recreated
- Negative media stories on policing: no public defence of police

Priorities and Solutions

- Developing an effective communications and media strategy
- Cultural sensitivity when hiring for dispatchers and officers – need to learn and understand aboriginal culture
- Public needs to reconnect with their community: have folks invest in their community
- No cookie cutter approach: all communities are different, needs are different
- 911 is available for public at all times
- Timely response to all calls – all emergency services are responding
- Visibility of Police officers – seeing them on the street
- Strategic Communication – creating awareness campaigns on police initiatives and how the public can get involved
- Cooperation of first responders (victim services, police, firefighters, paramedics): all working together to respond to an emergency situation
- First nations Policing officers in communities – Aboriginal Gang Awareness Unit in BC
- Enable and encourage positive media communications – positive stories
- Building personal relationships between community and police
- Police are fully engaged in the community

6. Policing and crime prevention resources

Issues:

- Inadequate funding and resources to maintain current with community needs
- Responsibility often falls on RCMP as opposed to other agencies
- Lack of community engagement and involvement
- Integrated Road Safety Unit (IRSU) program: funding and removing operational silos
- Being proactive as opposed to reactive to crime
- Socially minded and policing from the perspective of the public
- Provincial and municipal split or division of who's responsible for what
- Provincial resources lacking in surrounding communities; city resources have to go to surrounding communities
- Increasing demand and burden on the courts from a small number of cases using large amounts of resources

Priorities and Solutions:

- Volunteers such as having the community get involved with preventing break-ins

- Volunteer leadership – need support and leadership in order for these programs to be successful
- Create timely and broad awareness through social media
- Allocation of resources appropriately across the province – address high costs of homicide investigations vs. street policing
- Need provincial wide FBI style responsible for “high crimes” such homicides and fraud
- Integrated Road Safety Unit (IRSU) program – one advantage is people aren’t ticketed (which is a negative experience) by their local officers