

Round Table # 3 – Thompson Okanagan

May 4, 2012

We want to thank all of the participants in the Thompson Okanagan 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 63 people attended the third BC Policing Plan roundtable in Kelowna on May 4th, 2012. Participants included local government and aboriginal community representatives, victim services, community support organizations and police 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 four groups and engaged in four different cafe-style discussions throughout the day, including:

1. Problems with and Responses to Criminal Activity
2. Police Core Responsibilities and Crime Prevention Resources
3. Crime prevention
4. Public safety

Key Themes

The following key themes emerged from the group discussions:

Public Safety through Communication: People feel safer in their community when they know effective programs such as Block Watch are in place. Building relationships requires better communication and visibility between the community and the police. Sensationalism by the media about crime results in public misunderstanding of the real situation and misalignment of expectations and resources. Increased public education about public safety and how resources are allocated and measured would create a more accurate understanding of the real issues communities are facing.

Police Core Responsibilities: Police core responsibilities should not include providing social services as they are neither counsellors nor social workers. Prevention and support programs should be funded adequately to meet community needs so that police are not unnecessarily burdened.

Funding: Apply funding in the right places by investing in long term strategies (example, crime prevention) and not short term fixes. Look for incentives for municipalities to put

money into crime prevention and other community policing strategies. There should be a provincial police funding formula that is fair and equitable. Everyone should be paying the same for police services regardless of where they reside.

Lack of funding is an issue across all services. If more police officers are added, there also needs to be more funding into the infrastructure which supports policing such as halfway houses, corrections, and the courts.

Volunteering and Community Involvement: There needs to be a continuum of support across the justice system and social sectors. Volunteers are a necessary component in supporting these agencies. Funding should be allocated to a volunteer coordinator whose mandate would be to bolster volunteer numbers, provide recognition to volunteers and manage volunteer programs.

Collaborative and Integrated Approach: There should be more of a comprehensive community response to address some of the issues faced by police (for example, people with mental health and/or addiction issues). This would enable police to focus on the type of criminal activity that they are trained and equipped to respond to.

Integrate community resources so that police officers don't have to respond to calls that should be handled by other agencies (for example, social services, community-based drug/alcohol addictions programs, etc) which would result in a more effective and appropriate use of resources. Involving all key relevant stakeholders is necessary in identifying where redundancies and shortcomings are occurring so that services can be optimally distributed

Sharing of information: Confidentiality and information sharing policies and legislation impede agencies from working collaboratively. Integrated Case Assessment Teams work well when police and justice system agencies partner with community and women's service organizations.

Diversity of Community Needs: Rural and urban communities have different needs and impact each other in many ways. For instance some communities have significant gang issues and organized crime. The needs of the community and the services available to the community vary depending on the size of the community and how services are funded. Services tend to be concentrated in larger urban centres and it is more difficult for people living in rural areas to access them.

The influx of visitors during peak times is a problem in tourist areas. In these communities, strategies must be developed to address the seasonal demand for law enforcement personnel. Rural and urban communities need to communicate and coordinate their strategies so that criminal behaviour is not just displaced from one town to another.

Lower police visibility in rural areas may lead to people underreporting crime. Criminals target rural areas because they can carry out their activities with less risk of being noticed and reported.

Crime Prevention: Police visibility such as foot patrol and bikes enhances public safety. Strategies such as increased lighting in parks and on roads, and video surveillance were cited as examples of initiatives that make people feel safer.

Chronic homelessness has an impact on criminal activity in communities. Inadequate and unaffordable housing perpetuate social problems that underlie aspects of criminal activity. Social problems are intertwined with criminal activity and are often the root cause. There is a need for collaborative crime reduction programs with youth and First Nations representation on the committees supporting these programs

Integrated Strategic Planning: Annual Performance Plans (APP) are key for police planning. This planning goes beyond core policing to defining what initiatives communities are looking for the police to address. Working with the community and other agencies to identify best practices and how they are applicable across the Province will help integrated planning efforts.

Provincial and Municipal governments need to invite Aboriginal communities to program planning committees addressing policy. Support greater networking between local agencies, leveraging local knowledge and expertise, rather than awarding contracts to outside parties.

Removal of Bureaucratic Obstacles: There is inadequate prosecution of criminal behaviour, such as domestic and sexual violence (example, staying charges, or sending the charge back to police). Slow and inadequate justice system legislation is creating backups in the courts. Coordinating the development of province-wide policing and justice system strategy was recommended.

Summary by topic

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

1. Problems and Responses to Criminal Activity

Issues:

- Violence Against Women (VAW) and Domestic Violence (DV) policies and training require partnerships between police, healthcare, and the justice system
- Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs) is an underlying cause of criminal activity
- Drug trafficking in schools is affecting youth and can lead to a criminal lifestyle
- Demand for illicit drugs leads to criminal activities such as grow-ops
- Gangs are fueled by the drug trade, and when they enter communities they have a sense of control over the community. Gangs are well organized and know who is going to buy or sell drugs, and how to manipulate the market
- There is insufficient post-incarceration support for prolific offenders; without this support the likelihood of reoffending is high
- There is a lack of oversight on prolific offenders while they are in the legal system (such as when they are waiting for court dates or on probation)

- Without proper social support, mental health issues can manifest as criminal issues
- The geographic location of certain communities that are close to the border presents a unique challenge in dealing with drug running and trafficking
- Lack of border security allows for easy smuggling access for criminals
- The lack of police capacity results in reactive policing; agencies are forced to choose their priorities and emphasis is placed on call response
- Police should maintain a higher level of sensitivity when dealing with vulnerable or marginalized people
- Police needs to work with the aboriginal community in removing barriers, stereotypes and bias
- Need to address the unique social challenges facing aboriginal communities to aid in crime prevention and crime management of issues such as gangs and prolific offenders
- There is no early intervention system in place; a young person at risk must be caught engaging in criminal activity before the criminal justice system can act, especially on issues related to drugs and drug trafficking
- Hiring more officers is not necessarily the answer: more officers generate more cases, stalls in court, and impacts court capacity. All components of the justice system must be resourced adequately to allow the system to function effectively
- Provincial resource shortcomings impact municipalities: police and community agencies with limited resources end up having to fill in the gaps (for example, mental health)
- Centralizing services into larger regional centres impacts smaller communities by limiting their access to primary response services such as detox or rehabilitation facilities

Priorities and Solutions:

- Vernon's Integrated Case Assessment Team – police and justice system partnering with Ministry of Children and Family Development and community and women's service organizations-performs tasks such as building safety plans, and assessing criminal orders which reduces breaches significantly as almost all accused are found guilty. This results in a more efficient use of resources and reduces duplication.
- Immediate Roadside Prohibition (IRP) -administrative process diversion program works well and removes burden on the courts
- Youth programs such as DARE (Drug Awareness Resistance and Education) is effective
- Youth involvement programs such as Cadets and Boy's and Girl's Club keep youth active and reduce the likelihood of deviant behaviour such as vandalism
- Prevention programs such as CrimeWatch, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and other volunteer programs are useful
- Prolific offenders program (property crime, primarily) has significantly reduced crime in the communities – it was recommended that the program be expanded to domestic violence and drunk drivers.

- First Nations service agencies should be invited to sit on Prolific Offenders Program committees, especially since First Nations tend to be over-represented within the program.
- Restorative Justice is effective in making victims and community at large feel engaged and empowered. These programs also have the potential to save money and decrease court backlog
- Increase collaboration and relationship-building between stakeholders by identifying a cross-agency designate in each organization who can help establish roles and responsibilities and build integrated management relationships among agencies
- Invite people from different community organizations to share ideas on procedures and mandates which will help law enforcement agencies understand where the gaps and unidentified opportunities lie.
- Support greater networking between local agencies and leverage local knowledge and expertise
- Stronger cultural relationships, partnerships and agreements are needed with Aboriginal communities. Penticton Indian Band and RCMP have developed a protocol which resulted in strengthening their partnership, building trust and has resulted in an increase in reports of crime; Native liaison officer comes to the reserve which builds trust

2. Police Core Responsibilities and Crime Prevention Resources

Issues:

- Victim Services and crime prevention programs are mandated by Province but not fully funded by the Province
- The police funding formula is not consistent with community needs as it is based on population and not criminal activity
- The cost of managing crime and punishment is far greater than the cost of preventing crime
- Funding can be disproportionate to the geographic size of detachment. Rural areas receive resources and funding based on small population size but are required to service large geographical areas including backcountry and marine areas
- There is inequality in the level of police service individuals receive and how much they pay towards policing services
- A lack of funding is an issue across all services
- Adding more police also requires additional funding for infrastructure such as transition houses, corrections, and courts: there has to be a continuum of funding across the justice system and into social sectors
- Funding should be pooled and allocated across agencies based on needs

- Individuals get released from hospitals because they don't have a psychiatric diagnosis. Police end up picking them up and taking them to Kamloops psychiatric hospital only to be told there is no bed or the individual cannot be admitted. Because there is no bed, the individuals end up being released or put in cells. The entire time a police resource is tied up escorting the individual to various agencies and services, trying to find fitting accommodation
- Agencies such as the National Crime Prevention Centre hands out pilot funding for new programs but when the pilot stops, funding is gone
- Need to find ways to help police work smarter and faster – there is too much paperwork (administrative burden placed on police officers)
- Increasing demands from the courts (e.g., around disclosure) are placed on police officers
- Police core requirements have become more complex due to increased expectations from the province and time intensive due to the increased paperwork required
- Domestic violence should be housed under the same ministry – Justice. Currently domestic violence programs are housed under the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Participants felt it should stay under the Ministry of Justice as it is part of the justice system
- The *RCMP Act* is old and needs to be revamped – there is a need to give the RCMP the tools and authority to be able to fill vacant positions
- The charge approval process is creating another level of bureaucracy: The high standard of charge approval is set by the Crown yet police must ensure the quality of investigation. Whether police should be the ones laying charges is something the Province should examine.
- Freedom of Information issues: police are unable to share information with community agencies and vice versa (e.g. between RCMP and Min. of Children and Family development) – they can't share information about youth at risk for example, creating inefficient barriers
- Government has brought in some good legislation though police don't have the resources required to enforce it all
- In rural areas there is a perception that the police will do nothing so they don't report crime. Expectations are lower in rural areas.
- A disconnect exists between province and municipalities around funding priorities with respect to policing
- Police are performing duties beyond their scope of practice due to shortcomings in social programs
- The RCMP have been taking on more and more functions and trying to be everything to everyone – we need to define the mandate of police
- Responsibilities vary between communities: there doesn't seem to be a formula for service allocation between small municipalities, rural areas and larger municipalities

- Many communities do not perceive crime prevention as a component of police core responsibilities. There is a need to clarify what policing core responsibilities are
- Hang-up 911 calls are a huge problem and a burden on police resources who have to respond to those calls
- Need to have someone dedicated within detachment to crime prevention
- There is a need to develop protocol between aboriginal community's private security company and the RCMP

Top Priorities:

- Devising better funding formula to ensure everyone is paying evenly for policing services regardless of where they live
- Provincial government should mandate a minimum level of victim services in regional districts that refuse to implement a tax for these services.

Priorities and Solutions:

- Identifying agencies with best practices and implementing practices province-wide
- Increase funding for training: lobby government for more money to provide better access to community resources and the expertise to provide training to build community connections
- Ensure community members are educated on how dollars are spent and how the police budget process works
- Training programs on victim services are needed for both police and the public
- Paying for proactive and core policing – if a municipality wants more core policing then it must provide funding
- A more realistic measurement tool is needed for allocating resources, taking into account the unique needs of urban and rural areas, as well as the size of the municipality
- Examine and restructure crown policy on charge approval
- Determine the viability of restorative justice alternatives in certain circumstances
- Freedom of Information Act (FOI) impacts police ability and agencies to share information
- There is a need for political will to make changes that will improve things at the appropriate levels within law enforcement agencies and the government
- Integrate community resources so that police officers don't have to respond to calls that should be handled by other agencies
- Search and rescue (SAR): identify within detachment 1 SAR person to become the expert and respond to calls
- Provide more social service facilities dealing with mental health, detox and rehabilitation

- Educate the community through brochures, at schools and through agencies about what police do so that community members don't end up calling the police for minor incidents (ie hurt animal on side of the road)
- By-law officers and conservation officers are not readily available 24/7. There is usually only 1 by-law officer for a big region so they don't make themselves available to the public. As a result police pick up the calls that these officers can't respond to
- Need to train dispatch operators so that they know how to deal with a variety of complaints more effectively and know the region they operate in

3. Crime prevention

Issues:

- Public are not calling crime stoppers because the calls are not being answered due to lack of capacity in detachment to respond to calls
- System falls apart when issues get to Crown and Courts – there seems to be a lack of understanding in effectively identifying and managing mental health and addictions issues
- Displacement of Repeat Offenders and crime – due to the effectiveness of the Prolific Offender Program in large centres it drives offenders to smaller communities where less resources are present
- Organized Crime and drugs are a big issue: vulnerable people are getting recruited into organized crime
- PRIME is costing too much – isn't giving us what we were told it would – it is labour intensive
- The funding model for crime prevention needs to change – both a lack of funding and a lack of understanding as to who provides the funding are major issues
- Changes in the duration of funding committed to programs such as the Aboriginal Justice Strategy create challenges in maintaining programs and their effectiveness
- Programs that are offered in Municipal detachment cannot be implemented at the Provincial level because the resources aren't there in Provincial detachments
- Sustainable funding is important to allow for development in crime prevention programs
- There has been no increases in First Nation Policing Budget – the result is more demand with less funding and resources
- All emphasis is placed on the offender and not the support of victims
- Without appropriate resources the likelihood of criminal re-offense is very high. It is not the role of police to take preventative measures yet a great deal of police time is spent dealing with repeat offenders.
- Police are spending time shepherding people to services and taking on the role of social services
- The cost of volunteer coordination and recruitment: security clearances, recognition, training and supervision
- The number of individuals who volunteer is decreasing

- The volunteer demographic tends to be younger seniors who only commit to a few initiatives
- Training of volunteers is a challenge – time, manpower to training, need to invest to give them the necessary skills

Priorities and Solutions:

- The visibility of Police – allowing police to work overtime or on their time-off in the community has made an enormous difference in engaging the public
- Youth programs that offer anger management, addictions, mental health, sexual health and high risk behaviour education and support are needed
- Restorative Justice – alternative to first time offenders (helps prevent and reduce crime) as it keeps people out of the system
- Raising income assistance rates to address poverty – address related crimes and organized crime
- There is value in using alternative approaches – restorative justice, community courts, family preservation courts to address foster care issues
- Involve youth at a young age to mitigate potential involvement in organized crime later in life
- Address social isolation – everyone can and should be included in community
- Sustainability and coordination of volunteer groups
- Volunteers are necessary in the continuum of policing services – having an individual within the community in a paid position who recruits, trains, and recognizes volunteers would support this need
- Tax deduction for volunteers (volunteer hours for tax benefit) to encourage more people to volunteer their time
- Volunteer pooling to reduce burnout among volunteers and effectively staff different volunteer agencies such as Citizens Patrol, Speed Watch, and Traffic Control
- West Kelowna Community Policing association extends reach of RCMP – with many volunteers
- Prolific Offender Management Program: tracks prolific offenders and is having success by maintaining contact with them and knowing their whereabouts.
- DARE – police in schools important for rapport and relationship building
- Integrated Case Assessment Team (ICAT) – high risk referral, RCMP member runs through system and if an individual is deemed high risk all members of team come together for risk assessment and safety planning
- Grants need to be provided for more than 3-5 years in order to measure results – measuring results takes time and needs to be funded accordingly
- Grant application process needs to be reviewed – it currently rewards the best proposal writers instead of rewarding the programs that actually need the funding
- Agencies at the Federal, Provincial and Municipal levels need to work with First Nations Communities to expand dialogue and address issues together

- Remove and relax confidentiality between policing agencies to ensure information can be shared
- Create a collaborative mental health model to address mental health issues in communities
- More partnerships and communication within the community – it is important knowing what others are doing
- Locate jurisdictional overlaps to avoid duplication and ensure priorities don't get skewed – Funding formulas and policing and health boundaries don't allow sharing of resources for these issues

4. Public Safety

Issues:

- The influx of population during peak times is a big problem in tourist areas. These people are unknown to the police and the community, and these groups generally contribute to the increase of drugs and partying in the community
- Business community concerned with increased theft and vandalism during tourist season
- Not enough police resources to manage the influx of people into communities
- The media creates a perception that crime is rampant and skews the real issues communities are facing. Media focuses on allegations against police services and not enough on the positives
- Negative media leads to public misconceptions and mistrust in police
- Visible crime such as prostitution, drugs, and social disorder including the transient population and loitering youth reduces the feeling of community safety
- Problem is the transfer of RCMP members (constant transfer in and out) does little to foster community relationships: small communities have a life span for RCMP members
- A repercussion of successfully combating crime in one small community is that criminal activity is merely displaced into the surrounding communities.

Top Priorities:

- Increase police visibility
- Build relationships and increase communications within the community and police
- Increase education in the community: teaching trust, not fear

Priorities and Solutions:

- Communities need to communicate their initiatives to surrounding areas to develop strategies to address the root cause of crime and increase crime prevention.

- Integrated Case Assessment: Working together for the safety of the community (such as in Vernon and Penticton). There needs to be more public awareness on such programs
- Marketing programs effectively to the public to help with public confidence and improve the feeling of community safety
- In First Nations communities the focus is on drug- and alcohol-free programs. Community members have been working to increase awareness of these programs within their own community.
- Citizen on Patrol and Crime Watch gives law enforcement extra eyes and ears and supports the idea of community based policing
- DARE program is a tool that is used to effectively reach out to youth
- Partner for Safe and Effective Communities: All non-profits meet once a month, identify problems and create an action team to address issues
- School liaison programs are effective: teachers and police work together to reach the kids; police build relations with the schools and the children
- The Neighbourhood Issues and Resolution Committee (NIRC): The program involves bylaw enforcement department to help with the issue of social disarray in communities and educate the community as to who to call and when to call
- Block Watch, Rural Watch and Speed Watch work well as they engage the community and lead to safer neighbourhoods
- Annual performance plan (APP) is key for police planning because it looks beyond core policing and into specific initiatives that the community is looking for the police to address each year
- Tripartite agreement (First Nations): dedicated police service that can focus on first nation problems and issues. It would be more effective if the First Nations police officer came from the community that he/she serves.
- Youth programs that are youth driven: educate youth and engage them in conversation on their impact on public safety.
- Crime Stoppers are a big support to police
- Help communities feel safer by increasing police visibility during peak seasonal times: the greater police visibility the greater the community sense that police are active
- Hire students for the summer to work with law enforcement in high density tourist areas
- Positive media messaging: important to inform public of the good things that are happening in the community
- RCMP to work directly with community leaders and speak to the community on a regular basis
- Environmental factors: increased lighting in parks, roads, and Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) make people feel safer
- Identify risk factors and the root causes of criminal activity to better prevent crime
- More significant and meaningful consequences for violent crimes (more deterrence)
- Increased public education on police initiatives and the real issues facing communities