

Round Table # 5 – Greater Vancouver

May 22, 2012

We want to thank all of the participants in the Greater Vancouver 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 52 people attended the fifth BC Policing Plan roundtable in Vancouver on May 22nd, 2012. Participants included local government representatives, victim services and community support organizations, aboriginal representatives 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 four groups and engaged in four different cafe-style discussions throughout the day, including:

1. Problems 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:

Integration within and among communities is crucial to promoting and enhancing crime prevention and public safety activities and behaviours. Police should continue working to build comprehensive relationships with all social and cultural groups within the larger community. Humanizing the police force through increased visibility and community interaction will contribute to building better relationships and community trust. Police priorities should be determined through dialogue with the community by bringing everyone together in a community process. The process of relationship building is interrupted and affected by transferring and reassignment of community based officers; it takes time and energy to rebuild relationships. Building layers of community champions to respond to issues is a key component to sustaining community involvement.

Communication and education is a priority. Having the Vancouver Police take a proactive position by informing the public of their initiatives through multiple channels such as social and mainstream media is effective. Communications strategies should be designed to address public safety as well as public perceptions of safety. Communities must work together and take responsibility for public safety. Public safety perception is greatly influenced by the culture, demographics and history; all of which exist within each community.

Crime prevention and intervention programs that are proven to work should be identified at the provincial level to help target actions aligned with community vision and province wide methodologies. As local and provincial government move more toward transparency, accountability and value for money, they will require evidence based information to justify expenditures. Programs should be based on provincial standards with a clear evaluation process to gauge program effectiveness in different communities. Both mandatory programs as well as optional programs should be available to allow them to customize the services they receive based on their needs.

Long term thinking and funding are needed to ensure programs are sustainable and address long term solutions. In addition, some programs have benefits that are difficult to measure in the short term. Multi-year funding for crime prevention is needed so that the effectiveness of such programs can be measured and best practices can be identified. Political terms and government policies are not conducive to funding long term programs which typically take longer to demonstrate results but can be more effective than short term solutions.

Investing in youth early helps to prevent criminal behaviour. Education, mentoring and interaction with youth have shown positive benefits. Interaction in schools and involvement in after school programs can be an effective way to curtail youth from gang and criminal activity. We need to invest in youth through a more holistic approach and design programs that begin as early as pre-school.

Allocating existing police resources more efficiently may assist with budget cuts and funding uncertainty. As local community based services are cut back, police are being asked to perform duties that are outside their scope of training and therefore are not always delivering the quality of service(s) that they strive to and are expected to deliver. Filling the gap between the front end services that police provide and support services that must be filled through more comprehensive social care, mental health and addiction services would help ensure that the right people with the right training are addressing community needs and free up police resources for core policing functions.

Identifying best practices in other jurisdictions could help police develop effective law enforcement programs (e.g., crime prevention and crime reduction programs) and work with community agencies to support an effective continuum of social services. Inefficiencies exist in the justice system that are creating backlog in the courts and also creating frustration and scepticism in the public eye.

Provincial leadership with respect to evaluation processes and performance measures for policing and crime prevention would promote greater consistency of services, effective data and information sharing between agencies, and comparative analysis.

Summary by topic

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

1. Problems and Responses to Criminal Activity

Issues:

- Gang impact on vulnerable youths being introduced to drugs and criminal behaviour
- Cases of domestic violence that go unreported, or where the victim does not want to proceed with charges
- A large proportion of crime goes unreported, especially in aboriginal communities
- Combating organized crime requires a lot of resources and time; currently the provincial resources are not sufficient to be effective
- Most complaints pertain to low level crime such as property crime, graffiti, break-ins, and vehicle thefts
- Domestic violence and the resulting intergenerational trauma
- Increases in the number of aboriginal youth gangs
- White collar crime such as identity theft, cyber-crimes, Ponzi schemes, mail theft, credit cards, and debit machines
- Gambling – there is an increase of young people gambling online
- Substance related crimes such as drug dealing, trafficking, grow ops, and, alcohol related crimes
- Human trafficking for sex trade or for labour
- People move away from communities with excessive crime, or hide from the community because of crime
- Existing restorative justice programs are under-utilized
- New immigrants are finding it difficult to integrate into communities; as a result both parents and children have a higher likelihood of participating in criminal behaviour
- Existing links between the health and criminal justice sectors do not offer long-term sustainable support to individuals with mental health issues, but instead continuously cycles them through the medical and criminal justice system
- The justice system is not effectively managing repeat offenders as they are ending back up in the community. The justice system (courts) should make the protection of victims and communities their primary goal.

Priorities and Solutions:

- Better training for police officers on family violence in support of breaking the cycle of violence in family units
- Long term sustained education and funding programs for children and families;
- Inform people about the issues in their community in a manner that engages them to get involved or take action (eg, Block Watch)
- Involve the Ministry of Education to educate youth about public safety and creating youth programs designed to keep them out of criminal activity
- Ensure programs are aligned with the community wants and needs
- Identify who is responsible for managing programs in the community; how programs are funded, and staffed

- Create school district partnerships with agencies to achieve sustainable funding to address youth related issues
- Clearly define for the public what criminal and health issues are and how they are managed differently
- Define measures for success on programs responding to criminal activity – measurement of effectiveness
- Build stronger social bonds between community members to improve trust and a sense of community belonging
- Build community knowledge to help in developing an accurate perception of criminal activity and identifying the real issues that must be addressed
- Promote physical education and healthy living for both youth and adults
- Develop an overarching provincial strategy to address drug addiction
- Review root causes of crime and identify effective treatment rather than incarceration
- Allocate more proportionate amount of the health budget to address mental health and addiction
- Increase training for police to manage mental health and addictions as first responders; education is needed to better understand current trends and issues facing communities
- Utilize more video conferencing for court cases and police testimony to speed up the process
- Develop provincial programs such as a common pawnshop identification registry and provincial strategy to address marijuana grow ops that can be utilized across all jurisdictions
- Enhance traffic safety programs, especially for immigrants on BC road rules and pedestrian safety awareness and education

2. Police Core Responsibilities and Policing and Crime Prevention Resources

Issues:

- Police agency core responsibilities are continually expanding due to increased needs for social services that are not being met
- Crime prevention should be the focus of the entire community and not just the responsibility of police
- Environmental design needs to be considered as a crime prevention tool (e.g., well-lit streets)
- The role of police needs to be clearly defined to reduce the disconnect between what the public perceives as a police responsibility and what is realistic to expect from police
- High turnover of police inhibits long-term relationship building with communities, especially for rural communities
- Sensationalism in the media distorts public perception of the real crime and safety issues in their communities.

- A strategy for succession planning in police departments is required as many senior members are set to retire
- There is a need for better information and data sharing across community agencies
- Increased administrative work is taking up a sizable portion of the officer's time and resources
- There is a need to better identify at-risk people and have the resources in place to support them
- Restorative justice is applied inconsistently across communities: in some cases the referral process is not working well and is under utilized
- Public engagement should be increased as law enforcement agencies need to strive to better educate the public and non-profit organizations about their role in preventing and responding to crime
- Accountability needs to be improved and clearly defined through independent review and auditing of law enforcement agencies
- Integration of services must happen at the provincial level to increase cooperation and reduce competition among agencies
- There is a need to dedicate more time to rehabilitate offenders; current programs seem to be primarily focused on victims
- Compassion fatigue is an issue: police resources get tired of repeatedly dealing with the same issues and challenges
- The current funding model needs to be examined and methods such as regionalization should be considered to better direct resources where they can be used most effectively
- Need to keep stats current and develop methods for obtaining accuracy in data collected/alternatives to official crime stats as a large proportion of crime currently goes unreported
- Sister Watch is a good example of a program where police officers are directly involved in helping a vulnerable population (women in the downtown eastside)
- The Surrey Wrap Project between Surrey School District, Surrey RCMP and the BC Integrated Task Force is a good initiative as it provides intensive wraparound services to at risk youth who exhibit signs of gang behaviour.

Top Priorities:

- Staffing enough front line police officers to effectively respond to calls
- Need consistent community funding for crime prevention and social development programs
- Increase training requirements for officers
- Solve the 'revolving door' problem by providing services linked to prevention, intervention and rehabilitation
- Avoid duplication of resources and achieve direct funding through amalgamation

Priorities (Core Responsibilities) and Solutions:

- Respond to serious criminal offenses and follow up on calls with investigations
- Enforce laws and maintain order
- Hold people accountable through court process
- Keep adequate records on lower priority offenses to make sure they can be addressed when resources become available
- Engage the community in the policing process to allow people to have a voice and express their concerns
- Police have to understand the social environment of the people they serve
- Police need to be aware of community resources available so they can refer people to where they can obtain the support or aid required
- Ensure there is effective internal discipline and police keep their own members accountable
- Intelligence gathering and statistical analysis of crime data are helpful investigative tools
- The responsibility of police is to act as mediators, community leaders, and educators in improving the quality of life of citizens through crime prevention and law enforcement
- Maintain greater understanding of new laws to keep abreast of ongoing changes in legal process
- Traffic safety and traffic control are a priority of police agencies
- Provide adequate compensation and training for police officers.
- Establish processes to regularly engage communities and community resources. NEST (Neighbourhood Integrated Service Teams) are effective at addressing local issues in a coordinated manner.
- Creating specialized units to deal with major issues such as domestic violence
- Integrated programs such as Car 86 (a program combining social workers and police responding together in the same vehicle) or IHIT (Integrated Homicide Investigation Team) are working very well and need to be maintained
- PRIME is an example of a data and information sharing program helping police agencies share information across municipal and regional boundaries
- Outreach efforts within communities through social media (VPD Twitter account) are working well

3. Crime prevention

Issues:

- The response time for non-emergency calls is far too long
- Policy in managing criminal events such as domestic disputes are not being followed correctly creating inconsistencies in the services provided by police
- There are no measures currently in place to accurately determine the effectiveness of crime prevention initiatives

- Relationships with minority groups need to be improved and efforts need to be made to better understand their needs
- Within the current system issues have to reach a certain threshold before they are addressed (e.g., a young person has to actually be caught breaking the law) and by then the impact is far greater than if preventative measures were taken sooner
- Current funding for restorative justice is too small to have a visible impact
- There are no consistent standards for evaluating best practices in crime prevention
- Layers of bureaucracy are creating inefficiencies in the justice system
- There is hesitation to provide money for crime prevention initiatives due to the inability to measure and assess the effectiveness
- There is a lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the public and law enforcement with respect to crime prevention
- Society sees police as a solution to social problems; expectations must be more realistic
- There is a lack of time and resources to take concepts for integrated programs and put them into practice
- There are not enough policing resources to implement proactive policing approach
- Relationship building with communities is an intangible asset that cannot be measured when assessing levels of funding
- A disconnect exists between what is happening at the service delivery level and leadership in police agencies
- Absence of police board in RCMP jurisdictions – there is no direct voice for the people of the communities
- Drug addiction and possession needs to be treated as health issue and not just an offence warranting jail time
- Downloading mental health issues from the province onto police is a regular occurrence
- Loss of municipal/designated police force members to RCMP due to higher paying positions

Top Priorities

- Provide support to members of the community with addictions or mental health issues
- Provide culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate services
- Look beyond short term costs of an investment to the long term outcomes
- Evaluate programs and set standards by which they can be measured
- Enhance communication between police and communities
- Increase referrals to community justice (restorative justice)
- Support investment in youth before they enter into the justice system
- Provide better access to training and training subsidies
- Continue cultural sensitivity training for police to educate and break down barriers

- Provide evidence-based, consistent and well-funded anti-gang and anti-drug programs for youth
- Improve access to information and data to aid in the prioritization of programs and initiatives
- Provide provincial, standardized crime prevention programs from which communities can choose to implement
- Increase collaboration at all levels and not just on the local level
- Maintain a leadership role in evidence based policing in Canada
- Receive acknowledgement from stakeholders that crime prevention is a shared responsibility

Priorities and Solutions:

- Ensure services are available for persons with addictions, in particular in the Downtown Eastside Vancouver. Mental health and childhood abuse/difficult family situations are closely related
- Communities used to have neighbourhood liaison officers who didn't directly solve the problems in the community but ensured the problem was being solved
- Identify a compendium of crime prevention programs at the provincial level, mandating some programs while making others optional
- Increase accessibility to support centers such as detox and rehabilitation facilities
- Provide mandatory cultural sensitivity training for all law enforcement
- Provide funding for an aboriginal policing unit and improved victim services for aboriginal communities
- Implement a real time crime centre that knows criminal event patterns, movement of criminals across boundaries, etc. (i.e., centralized intelligence centre)
- Police priorities should be determined through face to face dialogue with the community. Bring everyone together and make it a community process. Those most affected by the issues need to be better engaged such as youth, seniors, aboriginal people and others. It needs to feel like the community is creating it. There is so much power/wisdom/insights from community engagement; it increases safety and public perception of police being someone you can turn to for help. Public safety is something that is in everyone's interest.
- Public education of policing – people would appreciate knowing what police are doing. If people can access this information from police directly rather than media, internet, it would be better. This is the age of “open data”.
- High turnover in RCMP policed communities can be difficult for communities as one of the most challenging tasks is rebuilding relationships
- Provide multi-year funding for crime prevention programs and make sure the effectiveness of the program can be measured and best practices can be identified
- Need an evaluation process for crime prevention programs that can be used to compare results across different agencies

- For each risk factor that makes youth susceptible to crime there is a resilience factor that can help to mitigate risks
- Retired/outgoing RCMP acting as liaisons could help new officers get to know communities
- Reach out to new immigrants and marginalized individuals to build an inclusive environment within communities
- Engage the development industry in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design— Developers should consult with police agencies about optimal design to deter crime on major new developments. Interest is there but there are limited police resources to fulfill this role.
- Intelligence gathering and intelligence led policing are working well in reducing crime
- Provide services that link children, youth and families together
- Tap into communities to see what works. Try to find out what works in that community and how can we support more of that. Avoid cookie cutter approach. Allow aboriginal communities to determine programs.

4. **Public Safety:**

Issues:

- There is no clear understanding of what community factors influence public safety, what is missing from certain communities and how it can be restored
- Police and community programs alike need to foster “inter-culturalism”, not just multiculturalism. If we’re geographic neighbours we need to work together on community safety and crime prevention.
- The perception of public safety is distorted and inconsistent with what the reality is
- Defining public safety and who is responsible for maintaining it
- Public safety is undermined in certain areas due to community members being intimidated by perpetrators from cooperating with police
- Difficulty in managing the perception of public safety as it is greatly influenced by the culture and demographics that exist within each community
- Police are relocating or being reassigned after only a few years creating a disruption in the relationship between police and the community
- The amount of funding, and how efficiently current funding is being utilized is an ever present issue
- Police are expected to take on too great of a role in public safety in addition to managing crime prevention, acting as counsellors and providing social service support
- Lack of social support services such homeless shelters and rehabilitation centers
- Inefficiencies exist in the justice system that are creating backlog in the courts

Top Priorities:

- Build layers of community champions to respond to issues
- Building connections between individuals in the community is important, such as police building relationships with community members
- Increase media accuracy in reporting crime and highlighting the real issues
- Communications strategies should be designed to address public safety as well as public perceptions of safety. Police should communicate, inform and educate the public, such as having the Vancouver Police take a proactive position in informing the public on their initiatives through mainstream channels such as social media

Priorities and Solutions:

- Police need to provide current information to the public about public safety so that the public can have an accurate view of public safety issues.
- Integration of marginalized individuals such as those with mental health issues into the community
- The whole community must work together to share a universal sense of public safety
- Have police work to build comprehensive relationships with all social and cultural groups within the larger community
- Expand co-operative programs in high crime areas such as Vancouver's downtown eastside that engages the community on what is happening around them
- Humanize the police force through increased visibility and community interaction to build better relationships and community trust
- Identify where a broader, more visible police presence is effective and where a more subtle approach is appropriate
- Survey the community at large to gather their opinions on public safety
- Streamline the justice system by changing the charge approval process which creates delays
- Take a more holistic approach to crime prevention
- Create an online system to allow for the electronic reporting of crime
- Use social media to allow citizens to connect with law enforcement and voice their thoughts and concerns
- Create better relations between police and the media
- Increase information sharing between the agencies.
- Build the continuum of involvement between community, volunteers, security and police