
Round Table # 7 – North Coast & Nechako

June 1, 2012

We want to thank all of the participants in the North Coast & Nechako regional 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 29 people attended the Seventh BC Policing Plan roundtable in Prince Rupert on June 1st, 2012. Participants included local government representatives, First Nations, 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. Police Core Responsibilities
4. Crime Prevention
5. Public Safety
6. Policing and Crime Prevention Resources

Key Themes

The following key themes emerged from the group discussions:

Awareness and understanding of community and First Nations culture are important in delivering effective responses to criminal activity and crime prevention strategies, as well as promoting positive police-community relationships. Children and youth that are educated in their cultural traditions are less likely to engage in criminal activity and feel more commitment to their community. Many instances of criminal behaviour could be better managed and addressed if the culture and family values of the community were integrated with the methodology and practices of police. RCMP understanding of the Aboriginal political framework is also important in order to build strong and long-lasting relationships with the community.

Resources for mental health and addictions are limited and consume a large portion of police resources that could be allocated to other activities that police are better equipped and trained to address. It is especially difficult to dedicate a resource to manage and facilitate collaboration and information sharing between agencies in small remote communities.

Drug and alcohol abuse are significant drivers of criminal behaviour and gang activity in the area. Most rural communities do not have the infrastructure and resources to adequately address drug

and alcohol issues. Most resources serve as reactive or short-term services and do not adequately address these health issues within the continuum of care that is needed, particularly among men who have come into contact with the criminal justice system. Many people with drug and alcohol issues are not getting adequate treatment and are often in and out of the criminal justice system. Unmanaged substance abuse in households leads to numerous health and safety related issues and perpetuates a cycle of addiction and violence in families.

Poor economic conditions in remote communities are one of the primary root causes of criminal activity. It was suggested that regionalization and de-centralization initiatives by the Provincial Government to base services in these areas would help to create jobs and stimulate the local economy.

Supporting youth and healthy living through recreational facilities and organized sport was identified as a priority. Educating youth on the benefits of leading a healthy active lifestyle, and providing a positive environment help at-risk youth to be more resilient against negative influences.

Limited resources are available across the spectrum of police, mental health, justice system and social services in rural and remote areas. Many services operate on a limited capacity over a large geographical area and few communities have the ability to coordinate services to address the root causes of crime. Police are doing a good job but cannot adequately meet all the needs that rural communities are facing for criminal activity and public safety. Creative solutions must be found in order to address these unique needs such as through crime prevention through environmental design and the engagement of community members as auxiliary support for these services.

There is disillusionment with the justice system. This is the result of the community failing to see due process take place because of inefficiencies and delays and the inability of the system to properly sentence and rehabilitate prolific offenders. As a result, members of the community are less likely to report crimes or work with police.

Summary by topic

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

1. Problems with Criminal Activity

Issues:

- The fear induced in the community by gangs and violence is stopping people from reporting crimes and working with police
- Domestic violence and sexual abuse are major issues that often occur behind closed doors, which either go unreported or are reported years later, which can create challenges to investigating these cases
- The level of communication between law enforcement and the community is not effective in emphasizing the magnitude of community issues such as drugs
- Addiction and the cycle of addiction in families due to the lack of support or rehabilitation services
- The accessibility of drugs and the emerging prevalence of new and dangerous chemical-based drugs in the community

- Sexual assaults/sexual abuse of young girls related to drug and alcohol use
- Petty street crime, vandalism and B & E's related to drug and alcohol use and poor economic conditions
- Emerging (and little understood) crimes such as elder abuse, human trafficking, internet luring, cyber bullying and web/internet scams – participants unsure of the scope of these issues in their communities
- There is a lack of resources in providing social services which include programs such as counselling, safe houses, and social workers to educate and work with families. Also lack of services for offenders
- Frustration with legal system that takes too long for cases to be concluded, and that is seen as a revolving door that does not rehabilitate or support individuals who are likely to reoffend
- A culture of close family ties and fear of children being taken into care of Ministry of Children and Family Development, notably in the aboriginal community that results in a code of silence resulting in poor communication with police
- Youth are not supported effectively, which perpetuates the cycle of social disorder in families and the community. Youth have to break the law before they can be referred to services and by then it is already too late
- Criminalization of people who are just trying to meet their basic needs, instead of aiding them in meeting those needs
- The evolution of technology is changing how criminals operate and the public is not being educated to protect themselves from cybercrime
- The perception that there is no incentive to report issues within the community due to how ineffective the justice system is
- As the community begins to feel less safe, the sense of community and relationships break down as people retreat within their homes
- Awareness that crime problems in Prince Rupert may worsen with expansion of port activities and need to be thinking forward

Priorities

- Addressing the root causes of criminal activity including economic conditions and the lack of opportunities, mental health issues, and addiction
- Share information with the community about crime trends and problems
- Equip people with the life skills they need to take advantage of opportunities and be successful through education
- Increase resources to process cases through the justice system more quickly and include treatment/resources the offender needs to address underlying causes of their criminal behaviour
- Localize more resources: regionalization of jobs and opportunities
- Establish cross cultural programming in communities
- Provide treatment facilities and services for men and youth

2. Responses to Criminal Activity

Issues:

- Funding programs based on population is not the most appropriate means of allocating resources to address domestic violence issues
- RCMP posting of two years is too short to build strong relationships with the communities they are stationed in
- There are not enough resources in the justice system to adequately respond to the issues they are dealing with such as mental health and addictions
- The charge approval process is challenging for police officers and often times charges are not approved
- There is a lack of offender support programs, as well as a consistent presence of a community probation officers to manage these individuals
- Victim Service programs are competing with other programs for resources, which compromises the consistency and effectiveness of the programs
- First Nations communities are subject to both federal and provincial laws which at times are not aligned
- Bootlegging is a major issue on reserves

Top Priorities:

- Deal with hard drug issues
- Focus on youth education and prevention and develop a long term vision on crime prevention
- Build community awareness
- Address capacity issues with the court process
- Focus on the root causes of crime, specifically alcohol abuse
- Address the bootlegging of alcohol
- Provide youth offenders with support so that they can be effectively rehabilitated
- Address the RCMP funding cut backs and the effects they have had on northern communities
- Provide cross cultural and sensitivity training for all the justice system resources
- Support initiatives that will allow police to build or enhance trust in communities at the local level
- Mandate domestic violence training for Police
- Address the lack of affordable housing and support facilities available for marginalized individuals
- Support and fund alternatives to the court process such as Restorative Justice
- Domestic violence initiatives that leave the family in the home and have the abuser removed
- Work on building better communication practices between the Provincial government and communities

Priorities and Solutions:

- Build strong relationship with RCMP and work with local media for public awareness around drug abuse and alcohol abuse
- Develop Offender Management programs such as curfew management in support of trying to positively shape the behavior of offenders
- Establish youth empowerment programs to get youth involved so that are less likely to become involved with drugs, crime or alcohol abuse
- Establish DARE programs in schools and policing on the streets
- Support community initiatives that coordinate police and community members working together to respond to criminal activity
- Support approaches such as Violence Against Women In Relationships Committees. These committees are effective in communicating across the sectors and developing an understanding of the continuum of service being delivered and coordinated for victims
- RCMP need to focus on being more integrated and connected within the community and bring experienced officers into the community
- Provide new RCMP personnel with background information and insight on the communities they are transferring to
- Work on violence prevention issues through youth prevention
- Provide alternatives to the criminal justice process
- Police training needs to be evaluated and adjusted to fit the specific community's needs
- Explore the feasibility of crime prevention techniques through environmental and social design
- Focus on Aboriginal Youth Justice programs around drug awareness

3. Policing and Crime Prevention Resources

Issues:

- Police are not equipped to deal with mental health issues
- There is a shortage of resources to deal with mental health and addictions
- Takes too long to get people the support services they require
- Health and Justice are closely related ministries that operate in silos
- Remote communities have poor access to the resources they need to address community issues
- There is a lack of consistency in program delivery when there are position changes in leadership roles in the RCMP
- Technology for personal communications are inadequate – cell phones often don't work due to lack of support infrastructure
- RCMP resources are stretched too thin to provide fulltime policing to all small communities

- Provincial support programs are offered through multiple ministries but there is no cohesion between them
- There is a need for long term investments in programs and stable funding
- Need to build trust and strong relationships with police

Top Priorities:

- Maintain an aboriginal community liaison position
- Establish support services and housing for mentally ill and those with substance abuse issues
- Educate and involve the community in teaching and raising children and youth
- Build a sense of community through teaching about culture and traditions
- Provide more Provincial policing resources in Prince Rupert area to support outlying communities
- Improve justice process to increase confidence amongst the public
- Establish longer terms for resident workers such as the RCMP

Priorities and Solutions:

- Incorporate the culture of the community into the services being provided
- Empower communities to help themselves
- Establish shelters similar to the Damp Shelter – where someone is intoxicated and not violent can stay overnight to sober up
- Establish DARE programs in all communities
- Provide communities with adequate recreation programs for youth
- Have individuals in law enforcement dedicated to key areas such as crime prevention
- Establish citizen groups like Citizens on Patrol to provide eyes and ears for the community
- Support School and Aboriginal liaison positions which are working well

4. Crime Prevention

Issues:

- Violence is an issue in the community, especially amongst youth
- Elder abuse is not being adequately addressed
- The impact that unhealthy living has on communities such as the proliferation of diabetes
- Poverty is one of the root causes driving youth to crime
- No preventative or educational programs are available to help abusive men
- Services are not available in a timely manner for women who are affected by violence

- There is a disconnect between the family values and culture in the community and the laws the justice system are enforcing
- The community tends to wait for the government to lead action on community issues – the community needs to take responsibility and action on community issues
- There is a failure to notify the community and the victims when offenders are released
- The community is not entirely aware of the crime prevention initiatives that are taking place

Top Priorities:

- Create school programs for youth
- Focus on parenting skills emphasizing training for first-time parents
- Providing education and awareness on personal wellbeing, community issues, and crime prevention for all members of the community is key
- Provide support options and alternatives for both victims and offenders
- Build relationships and a mutual understanding between the community and police
- Utilize resources more effectively when dealing with the root causes of crime such as drugs and alcohol
- Look at expanding the Urban Aboriginal Justice Strategy
- Regionalize opportunities and growth by the government to better support smaller communities in the province
- Ensure that initiatives are results driven
- Commitment by law enforcement to accountability and reporting to stakeholders
- Increase Police visibility
- Focus on the safety of seniors and preventing elder abuse
- Address mental health issues
- The Provincial Government really needs to see firsthand the challenges faced by remote communities
- Share best practices and programs that have proven to be effective
- Create a paid position within communities as a resource whose mandate is crime prevention

Priorities and Solutions:

- Support sports programs which keep community members busy and improve quality of life by promoting fitness and bringing the community together
- Identify the root cause of crime and criminal behaviour to address the underlying problems
- Establish bike patrols, they work well as increasing the officer's visibility in the community

- Establish programs such as CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) which has been proven to be effective when crime prevention resources are limited
- Build cultural awareness to strengthen communities
- Focus on prolific offenders
- Establish committees such as the Violence Against Women In Relationships committee which is working well in our community through open communication
- Work with children and parents on preventing sexual abuse – also tells the community we are watching over the children
- Increase referrals from Crown to Aboriginal Justice Program – this increases the value offenders place in themselves and increases their connection to the community
- Identify youth who are at risk of involvement in criminal behaviors early and provide supports and interventions. The NCPC funded project Building and Sharing Culturally Responsive Crime Prevention Approaches in Aboriginal Communities is a great example of a program to help communities implement culturally relevant crime prevention programming
- Support increased visibility initiatives, police also need to show that they respect and believe in the community
- Focus on increasing volunteer numbers to supplement policing resources
- The RCMP should not be expected to create solutions for all community issues
- Build transparency and trust between community and police
- Support crime prevention by educating the community on healthy living and lifestyle choices

5. Public Safety

Issues:

- A sense of public safety is a matter of context and perception; the majority of the time people feel safe in their communities depending on the area and time of day
- There are isolated rural areas and the communities there do not have good communication or awareness on initiatives pertaining to public safety
- The leniency criminals experience in the justice system enables them to continue to be prolific offenders and does nothing to prevent them from reoffending
- Fear of retribution is a major issue in obtaining witnesses to crime

Top Priorities:

- Support Community Policing and enhance police visibility in the community
- Increase community awareness on issues and the initiatives and services available to address them; encourage community volunteerism and involvement in public safety initiatives to ease the demands on police to administer these programs
- Strengthen and enforce enhanced sentencing through Court Services; Ensure court orders are actively monitored

- Increase resources and funding to policing
- Use resources effectively to meet the needs of northern communities and the unique challenges they face
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- Become more aware of the benefits of Aboriginal Policing in remote Aboriginal communities
- Increase training for officers on sensitivity and dealing with family related issues
- Plan and improve the physical environment to discourage criminal activity
- Provide more resources and options to deal with drug dealers to get them off the street

Priorities and Solutions

- Increase RCMP visibility in the neighborhoods
- Support infrastructure through home inspections and education on better practices to create safe home environments
- Provide timely response to emergency calls
- Provide safe shelters to ensure safe environments for citizens in need
- Identify and remove the drug dealers from the community
- Support Citizens on Patrol, Police Bike Squad, and Community Policing which all work well
- Provide individual safety planning for victims escaping domestic violence
- Increase visibility of police in targeted areas where there are public safety issues and criminal activity occurring
- Increase cross cultural awareness to de-escalate the potential for tensions between different youth from different cultural backgrounds
- Communities need to be more proactive and involved in countering drug dealers and following through with commitment to testify against charged drug dealers
- Utilize citizens on patrol members to support police
- Police services must use community resources and information in remote areas to be effective as they do not have a permanent presence
- Public acknowledgement of citizens who do good work in their community
- Increase access to some form of affordable public transportation for remote communities

6. Policing Core Responsibilities

Issues:

- Police are spending a great deal of time with individuals with mental health and drug and alcohol addictions issues simply because no other facilities exist to support them, or they are not available when they are needed
- Police are expected to fulfill a number of roles in the community. As a result, they are unable to focus and excel at key duties within their traditional core responsibilities
- The expectations on police are somewhat unrealistic

- Having officers transferred every 2-3 years creates major setbacks in the development of community relationships
- The major delays that exist in the court system translate into delay and waste of police resources
- RCMP programs for mentoring youth need to be better coordinated
- The amount of administrative work officers are required to do in relation to their policing is taking away from the time they can spend in the community
- Programs are being cut, even if they are proven to work and be effective

Priorities and Solutions:

- Develop partnerships between the RCMP and the community
- Establish more effective communication channels between the RCMP and the community on identifying issues and creating solutions
- Develop a holistic approach to better manage mental health issues and addictions; ensure hours of service are aligned with needs
- Define where the services agencies offer overlap, or are redundant, and where there is collaboration or opportunity for collaboration
- RCMP should conduct annual performance plans with the local community to determine local priorities
- Provide cultural sensitivity training for RCMP to better relate to the cultural groups in remote communities
- Provide an accessible list to the public on what services are available for them, what their purpose is, and what the benefits are
- Take a tougher stance in dealing with major issues within the community, such as using the forfeiture act when prosecuting drug dealers
- Justice reform initiatives that will address the system delays and lack of consequences; quicker processing would improve resources available for policing
- Increase commitment and dedication towards the community tri-partite agreement by all parties to increase its effectiveness
- Get the right First Nations candidates into RCMP positions
- RCMP need to support programs that are already in place in communities
- Clarify the core responsibilities of police for both the police and the public; anything police do should have a public safety focus/element
- Seek methods to ensure RCMP detachments have a mix of more experienced members and new recruits
- Ensure new RCMP members receive adequate field training, without providing a strain on local detachment resources
- Empower the community to invest in themselves through volunteering and participation
- Expand the role and capabilities of Social Services to take responsibilities back from police so that the Police can focus on their scope of practice