
Round Table # 9 – Northeast & Cariboo (Fort St. John)

June 14, 2012

We want to thank all of the participants in our second of two roundtables in the Northeast & Cariboo 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 13 people attended the ninth BC Policing Plan roundtable held in Fort St. John on June 14th, 2012. Participants included local government, aboriginal representatives, victim services 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 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
3. Crime Prevention and Public Safety
4. Policing and Crime Prevention Resources

Key Themes

The following key themes emerged from the group discussions:

Private investment in community services is required to aid local agencies in providing adequate services, law enforcement, and traffic safety to the community. Large local industries are driving community growth which is creating new challenges related to the influx in residents and the strain created on local infrastructure and facilities that require additional resources to support.

Specialized policing services dedicated to addressing specific issues in the community are needed. Specialized services would provide consistent and accountable support for crime prevention, domestic violence, unsafe driving, prostitution and drugs.

Drugs and drug trafficking are directly related to a large proportion of crime committed in the community. Due to the booming population, and the wealth generated by local industries, illicit drugs are in high demand. Managing the accessibility of drugs is difficult for law enforcement, as a large number of unsecured chartered flights transport workers to work camps in the region. Cooperation between local agencies and private companies are needed to address these drug channels into the community

Resources for proactive policing such as Bike Patrol help to promote engagement between the officers and the community and build upon the public's perception of safety. Due to the administrative burden facing officers and the large number of additional responsibilities they are tasked with, it is difficult to allocate resources to crime prevention and proactive initiatives.

Increased communication between stakeholders which include local law enforcement and support agencies, the provincial government, media, community members and private industries. This would allow for more accurate information sharing and education on what is currently working well in the community, what the key issues are, and how they can be most effectively addressed. By allowing for representation from all parties, buy-in from the entire community on key initiatives will be easier to obtain and successfully implement.

Summary by topic

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

1. Problems with Criminal Activity and Responses for Criminal Activity

Issues:

- Violent offences including homicide, assault, kidnappings linked to the drug trade
- Family (domestic) violence
- Mental health issues
- Vandalism and property crime
- Average age of population is 29; making a lot of money with little life skills
- There is a high cost of living in the community
- Addictions to gambling, drugs, or alcohol that instigate crime
- Although industry (which fuel the economy of the region) have security measures to prohibit drug and alcohol use and abuse on company property, they are ineffective in preventing the problem
- Franchise gangs tied to larger criminal organizations from urban centres
- Sexual exploitation of women and youth
- The demographics of the community and significant disposable income is driving the increase on the demand for drugs
- Drugs and trafficking are able to grow because of ineffective security on transportation
- Drugs are arriving in the communities on chartered flights and transport trucks on highways
- Youth violence and glamorization of fighting including the posting of fight videos on social media sites
- Vehicle related issues more specifically in Fort St. John including unsafe driving practices, impaired driving, speeding, pedestrian accidents; not being effectively enforced
- Currently there are not enough resources and support services in the community to deal with addictions or marginalized people in need of assistance

- Communities such as Profit River are dysfunctional in part because the community is not supported with programs and services, but also community members lack skills and supports to manage their income and money is spent on drugs and alcohol. There is money but a lack of programming available to help this community
- Police are having to act as social workers which takes them away from their core duties
- The senior community is vulnerable to crime but does not receive additional support

Priorities

- Work with First Nations leadership to build life skills for members of First Nations communities such as developing budgets and creating good spending habits to improve quality of life
- Local industries need to take a far more active role in supporting community programs, living standards and issues created by their industry
- An example of an effective industry-based initiative is providing an individual for community development that invests time and resources in youth programs such as DARE (Drug Awareness Resistance Education) and PARTY (Preventing Alcohol Related Trauma in Youth)
- Partnerships between police and companies are important to obtain necessary funding and resources to support the community
- Multi-year funding is required to ensure long-term sustainability of programs and give programs a chance to evolve
- More social infrastructure such as youth centers and transitional housing facilities are required to help prevent crime
- Traditional Culture Camps and traditional justice that support cultural learning for people who have come through the justice system should be available
- Fund an interdiction drug enforcement unit that can aid in combating the transportation of drugs to the community and through to more northern regions
- Legalize marijuana, tax it and use the proceeds to invest into preventative programs
- The CVAP (Crime Victim Assistance Program) needs to be explored - service providers need to have a clear understanding of the benefits available to victims of crime so they can provide the best possible assistance to clients
- Community policing partnerships are needed to accurately address public safety issues
- RCMP conducting bike patrols during the summer months increases police visibility and reassures the public
- There is a need to get more positive messages communicated through the media to the public

2. Police Core Responsibilities

Issues

- Policing is currently reactive not proactive
- There is a shortage of officers

- There is too much administrative work required for officers to perform their duties which takes them away from active duty
- Too many things are being asked of police services

Top Priorities:

- Increase the visibility of police in the community
- Commitment to adequate long-term funding
- Community safety
- A Violence against Women unit is needed – we need to develop police officers and increase their capacity to address issues related to violence against women
- Focus on organized crime
- Well trained officers are needed – currently, there are many junior/rookie police officers deployed in this region
- Tests like Meyers Briggs should be a required during police training at Depot

Priorities and Solutions:

- Spend effort, time and funding on public safety and protection
- Educate the public about the role of police and set expectations appropriately – sometimes the public have unrealistic expectations of the police
- Look at using social media more effectively and take ownership of the messages that go out to the public about police
- Utilize ICE (Integrated Child Exploitation) Unit and target criminals the community is not necessarily aware of
- Continuous education for policing to keep them aligned with community needs
- Define and focus on core activities
- Put in place rigorous testing for recruits
- Work to build the positive image of the RCMP
- Keep RCMP members in the same community for a longer period of time for more effective relationship building

3. Crime Prevention and Public Safety

Top Priorities:

- A dedicated police unit for crime prevention
- Support frontline policing
- Public education around crime prevention
- Engage the public on community issues
- Provide access to more police resources when needed in the community
- Work with public to identify needs

Priorities and Solutions:

- Keep refreshing and sustaining the many programs which are already available in the communities including Speed Watch, Citizens on Patrol, Rural Crime Watch, DARE, PARTY, and the Restorative Justice Program
- Engage the public through roundtables and consulting as to what is needed and what will work
- Evidence-based community programs are needed that are supported by data and results
- Stiffer sentences are required to unclog the courts – especially for repeat offenders
- Solar powered speed reader boards will reduce speeding
- Implement a long-term crime prevention unit that is fully funded
- Increase police visibility to create a sense of safety in the community through initiatives such as bike patrols

4. Policing and Crime Prevention Resources

Issues:

- Currently there are not enough members for managing seasonal work in the local detachment resulting in having to draw resources from specialized sections just to be able to respond to calls
- Adequate resources exist to respond to crime but police are being taken away from general duty to be put in Crime Reduction Units.
- There is little support for crime prevention and crime reduction initiatives
- Communication is limited as information sharing across agencies is challenging

Top Priorities:

- Develop a long term crime prevention strategy with the appropriate funding allocation
- With the newly developed crime prevention strategy, identify crime reduction initiatives
- Recruit a community liaison person to work with people and communities to help build strategies and interventions in collaboration with law enforcement
- Focus on collaboration to develop cooperative responses to the major issues in the community
- Design a program to coordinate relationship building between new and existing officers with other support services and the community
- Create a Violence in Relationships Unit
- Dedicate resources for drug enforcement
- Combat root causes of crime such as drug addiction
- The community would like to see positive actionable outcomes from the roundtable sessions

Priorities and Solutions:

- Crime reduction initiatives are working well in North District which focus on prolific offender management and crime hot spots in communities
- Policing resources could be used more effectively if there were more efficiencies or support staff for completing necessary paperwork
- Keep the Bike Patrol program because it is working very well
- Maintain the Restorative Justice program. It is working very well and diverts cases away from courts
- Hold large community events that bring everyone together
- Continue with the successful program of Blueberry River Against Gangs (BRAG) which supports youth who are vulnerable to gang recruitment
- Explore technology and equipment upgrades to help streamlining policing processes
- Create support facilities for youth that provide drug rehabilitation and a safe place to live