

EDUCATION: ITS ROLE IN CRIME PREVENTION

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Juvenile crime does not just happen. Children learn to commit crime just as they learn other things. If we accept the well established principle that crime is dependent upon two essential ingredients, namely *a need and opportunity*, then we must accept that these ingredients are learned. When a learning pattern is established, and appearance before a Juvenile Court cannot be expected to solve the problem. It can however be the start of, or part of, an education process which attacks these two ingredients in order to achieve the crime prevention aim.

Crime Prevention comes most naturally to us when we understand the need for it. One way to understand this need is to experience crime as the victim. The other way involves education about a specific crime, its consequences, the reasons why it is a crime, the means of preventing it and our responsibilities to each other particularly in relation to crime.

I advocate education about law/crime starting in school in the earliest possible years. I believe it should be part of a social science/human behaviour course carrying through all levels to matriculation standard. Accent should be placed upon concern for others being the basis of all law. After all, protection of life and property, the main aim of our policing system, can only be achieved by people being concerned about each other. I also suggest that the education must be much broader than formal school education, and this requires co-ordination in many areas of society.

The formal education system requires a lot of energy and resources for its upkeep. This energy and these resources are supplied by the community who expect a return in the form of people trained with the necessary skills to maintain the community.

It is when our education system fails in this purpose that much energy is lost, and no society can remain intact if it has a heavy expenditure on a failing education system. Are we wasting energy by concentrating so much on the scientific aspects of education at the expense of the social implications of this knowledge?

The informal education of a child must also be considered. Too often we forget that each of us is a teacher. Every time we suggest leaving some job to the experts are we in fact teaching children not to care. In the area of crime for example; don't worry about it, there are experts who are responsible for its solution and prevention. Further, what quality of teaching is



given by lay teachers? How much is incorrect? How much incomplete? This problem is acknowledged by Ann DEVESON in her book "Australians at Risk", when she speaks of the lack of information supplied, or the lack of access to information suffered by all persons who do not have an "in" to social institutions. The "in" she speaks of is achieved through communication and learning. In parallel with this is an apparent lack of expertise on the part of institutions which prevents them from focusing on real areas of need and adjusting to a changing social reality. In this age when man is questioning every facet of living, where some of the most profound questions come from children, do we have the expertise, and are we taking the time to provide the emotional answers as well as the intellectual ones?

Courses in schools need to be given by teachers with the aid of resource people from the community. Resource people can include police, social workers, lawyers, sociologists, criminologists, prison wardens, and other people with an interest in this field of education.

This must be reinforced however by parental, youth leader and ultimately peer group influence about the need for ordered society to conform to some standards, if it is to survive.

Whilst growing and learning children are cautioned each time they make a mistake. The first caution is always justified but what of the fifth or sixth? Informal education is taking place each time and it may well be that the child is learning; to break the rules doesn't matter because I just get cautioned. The caution to which I refer is often given by a different person each time. This complicates the system as we all represent teachers or authority but we don't know about the previous cautions.

When this is viewed in the area of crime and involves criminal or non-acceptable social behaviour arousing community interest, the fact that a caution has been given, and, the need for some form of punishment must be communicated to all other "teachers".

In a country town, should a teenager adopt an anti-social behaviour pattern, it is noted by the community and, after the first caution a more serious disciplinary measure is likely to be taken. This system operates in small communities *because* they are small and communication channels are more open. In large metropolitan areas it requires effort to open up these communication channels. School teachers, police officers, social club organisers, court officials, justices of the peace, ministers of religion, social workers, and concerned citizens must be encouraged to meet together to discuss their problems and problem people who can be expected to come under further notice. This information may influence any action taken at a later time and will form the basis of any antecedents report submitted in court. This will enable the Court to be better informed from a wider spectrum of the community and will ensure a balanced decision. This may also ensure a quicker appearance before a formal court or other form of disciplinary panel.

The final consideration in the crime prevention process involves the part to be played by the offender and the community at large. Here again I believe we fail to use lines of communication effectively.

Historically convicted felons could have a letter "F" branded on their forehead. I don't suggest that we need to go that far to make the community aware of anyone's involvement in crime, but the community certainly needs to be involved in any reformation process.

In this case it is necessary to consider both the individual and the public at large. Anyone who is found guilty of crime can be punished in a variety of ways. The three main ways being imprisonment, a fine, or being placed on a bond with or without incurring a suspended sentence. The general public while not always agreeing with the severity or lack of severity of a sentence acknowledge that imprisonment or a fine *is* a punishment that some reformation is possible and therefore accept the individual back into the social circle. The individual can feel secure within himself because he can show a physical sign of punishment and claim reformation. But what of the "bond" situation?

Here we have a convicted person who returns to the same pressures and environment after receiving the sentence as he

left prior to the court appearance. No publicity is given to all the requirements of the "bond" so the public feels cheated as the inference is that no punishment has been awarded. The individual feels insecure because he can't or won't show the physical evidence of punishment. This insecurity plus the "cheated" attitude displayed by some of the public will alienate him from the community and must surely force him to seek the protection of his old peer group. The group which probably influenced him originally to commit crime. It seems to me that this must be contrary to the intent of the "bond" reformatory process.

The community must know the conditions of any "bond" entered into by any individual. They must be encouraged to take an active part in ensuring that all the conditions are met. The action taken by the public should be of a positive kind, e.g., encouraging the individual to enter a new circle of friends, rather than the negative approach of reporting all breaches of bond conditions to the police. This is once again — leaving it to the experts. Further the community must be informed to the point where they really understand the psychological pressure which a "bond" imposes on a person. How he is required to change his friends, his attitudes and his behaviour patterns all of which he has learned in his home environment, but is still required to live and work in the same environment.

Information can counter any attempt by the individual to gain prestige on the false pretence that a "bond" is no punishment and therefore is to be dismissed as such. It is natural for human beings to seek prestige and to justify their actions. Understanding this fact and recognising it when it happens is vital if we, as a community, are to play our part in the reformatory function. This is particularly important where juveniles are concerned when they have been placed on a "bond".

Communication with other young people while they are at school in a lecture situation can ensure that the offender's peers are fully aware of the meaning of the word "bond" and the very real punitive value inherent in it. This knowledge can be expected to prevent crime and to assist with the reformation process by removing the opportunity to gain prestige from the court appearance.

Prestige for both the offender and the community is still available but without the mistrust and ignorance which allows negative feelings to arise. I see education as the vital ingredient, but it will only happen when a wide cross section of the community integrates with the common objective — Crime Prevention.

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