

“STRATEGIES FOR INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY IN CRIME PREVENTION”

PAPER IS A SUMMARY OF MATERIAL PREPARED BY:
SENIOR SERGEANT D.M. SMITH
SENIOR SERGEANT D. BLIZZARD
INSPECTOR B.A. OLDFIELD

Research and Development Department, Victoria Police

My first reaction to the Australian Crime Prevention Council theme — “The Alienated Generation” — was to relate the question to the policing role within the context of the Victorian community.

For some time prior to the evolution of this theme, the Victoria Police, Department of Research and Development had concluded that our Force had, through a number of factors, become a generation of police becoming alienated from the community it served.

In the mid and late seventies, a number of studies conducted under the auspices of that Department — through the Melbourne University Criminology Department and through the newly emerging applied studies campuses at Chisholm and Phillip Institutes of Technology — began to highlight areas of alienation.

We seemed “out of touch” with community needs and expectations of a police service.

It was apparent we disagreed from a philosophical base with professionals in the rehabilitation services — we were publicly arguing with the legal profession and pressure groups concerning police powers — and losing — we were under attack in other areas for a failure to act decisively in domestic violence disputes — child maltreatment, failure to curb ever-increasing juvenile crime — organised crime — vice — corporate crime and burglary began to reach epidemic proportions threatening man’s perception that his “home was his castle”.

The Brixton-Toxteth press reports hadn’t helped, as the media orchestrated comparisons with the Victorian scene. Fear of crime was a day-to-day reality in the lives of the silent majority. Morale in the Force itself was a matter of concern and police perceptions of the public reflected an attitude of “them versus us”.

Budget constraints and manpower shortage added to the depressing scene. The cause required identification.

There seemed no particular phenomena in Victoria that had not been experienced in other western civilizations. World trends generally indicated a steady increase in criminality.

An examination of styles of policing adopted elsewhere in the world identified some positive strategies; but the first task was to clearly identify the cause or causes of our alienation.

It can most easily be described in this way.

Reactive Policing

Over the past several decades the nature of policing has evolved in line with societal change. Altered standards and patterns of behaviour within society, together with urbanization, mobility and communication have influenced the policing function in becoming demand-led or reactive to problems.

This emphasis on reactive policing has taken the policeman away from his historical role within the community and made him a faceless, authoritarian figure, working in isolation from those people on whom he ultimately depends. It has contributed greatly towards reinforcement of a ‘movie cop’ stereotype, and an unreal expectation of police in the minds of citizens. The populace has in turn been encouraged to

PRESENTED BY:
INSPECTOR
B.A. OLDFIELD,
VICTORIA POLICE



withdraw from their historical, logical and ‘contractual’ obligations towards policing.

Failure on the part of the police to adopt such a contract results in a loss of public confidence. This leads to a lessening of self esteem on the part of police personnel. It has a direct bearing on police morale and as a consequence police performance and efficiency are both seriously reduced.

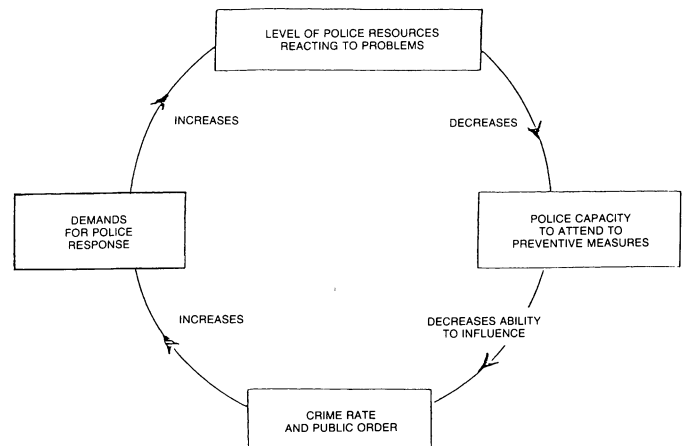
The repercussions of failing to cope effectively with this problem have already been felt overseas, in the United States of America and more recently in the streets of the United Kingdom. Sir Robert Mark aptly described police recently, as:

“We who are the anvil on which society beats out the problems of social inequality race prejudice weak laws and ineffective legislation . . .”

INN Australia, especially in the light of such growing problems as unemployment, increased poverty and other divisive social issues, it will surely be just a matter of time, rather than mere speculation, before the overseas experience will be repeated here.

The end result of a reactive policing style, if not balanced with other strategies, leads the service into what has been named “The Reactive Spiral”.

THE REACTIVE SPIRAL



Source: 'Neighbourhood Policing', London Metropolitan Police, 1981.

How can this process be balanced or reversed?

Future police policy must endeavour to shift responsibility back towards where it rightfully belongs, in the wider community. Police have an obligation to mobilize and activate social controls against crime in the community. As Colin Moore and John Brown reflected when writing on innovative community policing programmes introduced by the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall, John Alderson:

“Policing should therefore remain a negotiated contract between the public and the police so that they both identify that the maintenance of law and order is a co-operative

rather than a delegated responsibility. The police on their side must do what they can to put back into the hands of citizens problems of control in their communities, whilst society on its side must recognize that the making of communities capable of containing crime is a task for all and that crime control is not the sole province of the police."²

The strategy of policing which is at the other end of the spectrum is a proactive approach, or as Moore and Brown describe — contractual.

Proactive Policing

To meet the present and envisaged challenges facing police in the fields of crime, public order, traffic and community service, greater emphasis should be paid to the proactive capability of policing. Proactive policing can be defined as:

"All police functioning that results in a planned course of action to influence an event positively, before it occurs."

Proactive policing seeks to influence the environment in which police activity takes place and emphasises a planned preventive approach to the task.

Each style of policing needs to be viewed as complementary to each other.

In terms of the Victorian situation there appeared an obvious imbalance. Mr. Justice Lusher, in his report as the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Force, reported:

"It is obvious that the numbers and resources available to police could never by themselves achieve the function assigned . . . a Police Force itself at odds with the community will not achieve any appreciable degree of effective policing. Within the existing structure and values of society it is by the maintenance of the relationship and balance between the community and the police that an acceptable degree of law and order can be maintained with the least stress; that rights and duties can be sustained and a peaceful and safe community be maintained. The acceptance of this relationship may be more valuable than men, weaponry, or other technical policing aids."

Proactive Model

These and other factors have moved Victoria Police Force policy in recent years towards a proactive approach to policing, as is expressed in a revised Organisational Philosophy.

Overstretched resources battling to respond to increasing public demand will sooner or later falter, unless time can be devoted to police crime prevention activities which are aimed directly at reducing the incidents causing the demand.

There is now a growing recognition that the problem of crime in society is one which requires effective input from all sections of the Criminal Justice System and other government agencies. Their failures today, and those of society as a whole, are the policing problems of tomorrow.

It was in this context that the Research and Development Department embarked upon a pilot programme to test a proactive aspect of policing loosely labelled "Community Involvement". A logo was adopted to set the theme — "Working together to fight crime and disorder in our society."

The Police/Community Involvement Programme (P/C.I.P.) was developed, in line with the restated Victoria Police objectives and organisational philosophy, to provide closer co-operation between police and the public in the prevention of crime and disorder at the local level. The programme was introduced as a Pilot Project within the Westernport Police District.

Thirteen police personnel were seconded to the Project to develop, implement and evaluate crime prevention projects within the local community. P/C.I.P. staff operating within the objectives of the Pilot Project, were required to consult with local police and a wide variety of government and community

agencies and organisations with the view to facilitating co-operative efforts in common interest areas. The thrust of the Programme concentrated initially in the Frankston area with focus on involvement with schools and local resource groups. To ensure the smooth operation of the scheme it became necessary for the group to develop and adopt a number of innovative measures. These initiatives occurred in the areas of operational procedures, data collection and analyses systems and management processes.

Many significant projects were developed and implemented with the enthusiastic involvement of broad and varied sectors of the community. Details relating to a number of these projects, accompanied by the measurement of police and community participation, are contained in this report. Some results of research carried out by the group provide evidence as to the potential for this type of initiative at the local level.

The ultimate success of a police organisation is measured by the public in terms of the extent to which they feel secure from criminal attack upon their person and property.

The importance the public, and police, place upon the type of crime prevention projects undertaken in this Programme has been clearly demonstrated by the level of acceptance and involvement throughout the community.

Prior to the commencement of the Pilot Project an attitude survey involving a number of police attached to various operational sections at Frankston was conducted by the Victoria Police Management Services Bureau. The purpose of the survey was to collect data as to attitudes and opinions relative to the police function.

The survey questionnaire was administered to representative samples of workers in the social welfare field and students in the 16 years of age bracket. This was carried out to gather data as to the perceptions of these groups regarding the police function and to measure attitudinal variance.

Results

Adequacy of Police Service. A high proportion of respondents felt it was unsafe for members of their families to walk alone in their neighbourhood after dark. (Police 90.9%, welfare workers 83%, youth 67%). However, all groups felt that the local police did a good job in preventing and controlling crime, despite lack of manpower.

Social Control. There was a general agreement between the groups as to the need for social control. All groups agreed that police should be actively involved in bringing about change in society although welfare workers and youth respondents had a high proportion of responses in the "no opinion" category. However, very few respondents were actually in disagreement.

Crime reduction. There was a high level of agreement between groups that police should be concerned with the causes of crime as well as its prevention and control. While a clear majority of police thought crime prevention and control was primarily the responsibility of the citizen, welfare workers and youth were less clear, revealing that they were not sure whose responsibility it was.

At the end of the first twelve months, some 75,000 people in the Westernport Police District had participated in crime prevention projects as depicted in the attached tables. Some 50-odd projects were embarked upon and tested.

At the middle of 1983 a greater depth had been reached in participative problem solving and planning with the community.

The strategy of Proactive Policing within the Victoria Police Department is emerging in other areas of the Force structure. Some examples are:

TABLE OF P/C.I.P. PROJECTS

| PROJECT TITLE | PURPOSE | POLICE/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT | NUMBER OF PEOPLE PARTICIPATING | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| | | | 1981 | 1982 (Projection) |
| Safety House | Preventive measure in protecting children from harassment travelling to and from school. | District Police, Crime Prevention Bureau, teachers, parents, media. (23 schools – Westernport District) (28 schools — other Districts) | 1,633 2,271 | 2,450 3,400 |
| Elderly Citizens and Crime Prevention | Reduce crime victimisation of elderly citizens through crime prevention education. | C.I.B., police, elderly citizens' groups, service clubs | 1,100 | 2,000 |
| Off Road Motor Cycles | Reduce problems caused by off road motor cycles by establishing recreational motor cycle park. | Police, City of Frankston Municipal Recreation Officer, Neighbourhood Employment Development Scheme, Frankston Motor Cycle Club, Department of Youth, Sport and Recreation, residents. | 60 | 500 |
| Problem Youth | Identify and assist community groups dealing with problem youth. | D.C.W.S., Pines Forest Youth Club, Pines Forest Community Centre, Y.M.C.A. Outreach Programme, Blue Light Disco. | 500 | 1,000 |
| Honorary Probation Officers | Assist in developing a community based probation officer service. | District police, D.C.W.S., Honorary Probation Officers' Association. | 60 | 60 |
| Mornington Peninsula Holiday Period | Crime prevention during Christmas holiday period on Mornington Peninsula. | District police, Rosebud Foreshore Committee, National Parks Committee, service clubs. | 100 | 200 |
| Persistent Offenders | Define the persistent offender's problem from a police perspective with view to alleviating problem. | Local police. | 50 | |

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|--|---|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| | | | 1981 | 1982 (Projection) |
| Schools Appraisal | Provide information for development of crime prevention education projects within schools. | District police (11 stations), teaching staff (106 schools) | 220 | |
| The Police Role — Primary Schools | Introduce students to police role by providing positive contact with police. | District and specialist police units, teachers, pupils (6 schools). | 2,880 | 40,000 |
| "Police and You" Secondary Schools Legal Studies | Introduce a segment on the police role and citizen responsibility to middle and upper level secondary school students. | District police, teachers, students (9 schools). | 1,300 | 2,500 |
| "Bike-Ed" | Improve student knowledge of road laws and road courtesy/reduce road toll. | District police, teachers, students, local business, City of Frankston (30 schools) | 950 | 2,500 |
| Bike Identification | To deter bicycle theft by ensuring proper identification marking of bicycles. | District police, rotary clubs, schools. | 5,000 | 10,000 |
| Miscellaneous Service to Schools | Promote responsible attitudes to law and order issues/promote awareness of police role/improve communication with young people. | Local police, teachers, students, various agencies (50 schools) | 12,000 | |
| Anti-shopsteal | Reduce shopstealing. | District police, teachers, students, Chamber of Commerce, Retail Traders' Association, media (25 schools) | 7,000 | 20,000 |

TABLE OF P/C.I.P. PROJECTS

| PROJECT TITLE | PURPOSE | POLICE/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT | NUMBER OF PEOPLE PARTICIPATING | |
|---|---|---|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| | | | 1981 | 1982/83 |
| Small Business Security | Assist managers of small business to minimise their crime risk through the preparation of a small business security manual. | Crime Prevention Bureau, Detective Training School, Frankston Chamber of Commerce, Frankston Retailers Association, Small Business Development Corporation, Chisholm Institute of Technology. | | 30 |
| Peninsula Alcohol and Drug Dependents Committee | To alleviate the problems alcohol/drug abuse at local level. | City of Frankston, Frankston Community Hospital, general practitioners, pharmacies, schools, health and welfare workers. | 21 | 30 |
| Victims of Crime Assistance League | Promote assistance to victims of crime through the establishing of V.O.C.A.L. Branch at Frankston. | C.I.B., community volunteers, victims of crime. | | 110 |
| Neighbourhood Watch | Test the effect of a neighbourhood watch project in minimising crime within a defined residential area. | Uniform Branch, Crime Car Squad, C.I.B., Collator, Crime Prevention Bureau, local residents. | | 170 (Projected 600) |

- Recruit training has been adjusted to incorporate Human Relationship skills — communication skills — group dynamics;
- Task Forces are being used as a strategy to meet specific problems as they are identified.
 - Operation Delta — Street Kids, Child exploitation
 - Operation Innocents — Sexual abuse of children.
 This incorporates the rapid deployment of specifically skilled and experienced groups of police to work proactively and reactively in specific areas. The community is informed of the extent and parameters of the problem through the media.
- The Media Liaison Section of the Force has been strengthened and police now join in public debate on issues related to law and order and community dysfunction. What is the situation in 1983? The contribution of proactive policing in Victoria can be simply expressed in this measure. Four years ago, our media reflected concern as to the survival of the Chief Commissioner and questioned the length of his stay in office.

Last week in Victoria, the Chief Commissioner of Police was given a new honour and that honour reflects a change in community attitude to police.

He was given the title of "Father of the Year".

We, in the Victoria Police Force, view the youth of our community as the future of our society. We reject the generalisation that the youth of today the the "alientated generation". Our experience with youth during the development of both formal and informal community involvement policing, is that the vast majority of young people are positive in their approach to a changing society. They look for guidance and leadership towards responsible citizenship.

We do concede that there is a growing minority of young people who are disadvantaged in receiving the degree of care, guidance and leadership so necessary to the personal development of our youth, both as individuals and responsible members of our community.

The fundamental responsibility for proper development of our young rests squarely with the basic socializing units of society, the family being the first and most important. The education system should complement this development and the norms of our society reinforce the standards to be aimed for.

Our role, and that of other agencies, whether government sponsored or otherwise, who play a part in the development of youth, is simply to reinforce where possible, the notions I have mentioned.

Where this is not possible, due to irretrievable family breakdown, every effort should be made, and by this I mean a co-ordinated effort involving educationists, police, health and welfare organisations, to develop youth away from the notion of alienation through the process of developing individual skills and community responsibility.

This positive and co-ordinated approach is not in evidence today. If we cannot make this a practicality then we are certainly contributing to a future alienated generation.

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