Contemporary Comments

Hassle-Free Policing and the Creation of Community Space[*]

Introduction

Police around the country are increasingly having their attention drawn to the importance of respecting the rights and needs of young people in their interactions with them. This is reflected, for example, in official policy statements in New South Wales and Victoria, where the stated aims of new 'youth policy' require that children and young people be treated fairly and with respect; police are to work to reduce youth crime; courts are to be used as a last resort; police are to support and involve victims; and police are to work towards positive social change.

How to translate such sentiments into operational practice is, however, going to be a challenge. It requires significant alteration of existing police practices in relation to young people. It also requires the development of alternative models of policing to ensure that youth rights and safety, maintenance of public order and youth crime reduction will be achieved in a satisfactory way.

The aim of this paper is to explore some of the measures which police might consider in attempts to improve their relationships with young people. The paper begins by briefly summarising some of the major issues pertaining to police-youth conflict, as perceived and experienced by each party. It then examines the reasons for this conflict in terms of the social status of young people, transformations in the nature of public space and current demands on the police. The remainder of the paper then attempts to chart out a series of practical approaches and strategies based upon the idea of *youth-friendly policing*. The intention of such policing is both to reduce the hassles experienced by police in their relations with young people, and to address the concerns of young people about police harassment in public spaces.

Police-youth conflict

A number of community and academic reports in recent years have highlighted ongoing tensions between young people and the police, including conflicts at the street level.

From the point of view of young people, the difficulties encountered with police cover a range of issues. Some of these include:

- *perceptions of unnecessary police intervention*:
  There is a high rate of contact between young people and the police on the street. The use of 'name-checks' and various 'move-on' powers to remove groups of young people from certain city sites, especially shopping centres and malls, strikes many young people as being unfair and unjustified.

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- *regular experience of verbal intimidation and threat of violence*:
  When police make contact on the street, they often do so in ways which are heavy-handed, and which make young people feel that they are always under suspicion of having done something wrong. The arbitrary stopping, questioning and detaining of young people without apparent good cause reinforces youth resentment toward authority figures. The style of much street policing is based upon threats, and appeals to the intrinsic and unquestionable authority of the uniform. The police do have enormous coercive powers at their disposal, and it is these which allow some officers to wield their personal authority in a manner which is intended to frighten and put off young people.

- *experience of physical violence as 'normal' part of contact with police*:
  There is evidence which demonstrates that, for some groups of young people, police contact is often accompanied by violence of some kind. The use of physical violence is particularly widespread in relation to indigenous young people, and is especially unpleasant to people with a long and contemporary history of coercive government intervention. In many cases, 'kerb-side' justice is perceived as simply part of the normal routine of street policing in relation to these groups.

- *experience of direct and indirect racism*:
  Recent work has demonstrated that in many local jurisdictions young people are subjected to openly racist abuse and intervention practices. Young indigenous people are particularly susceptible to these kinds of attacks. Increasingly, there is also evidence that young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are liable to excessive police contact, and greater than normal incidents of physical injury arising out of this contact. For young people from other than English-speaking backgrounds (and many indigenous young people) difficulties have been reported with respect to the language used and the negative attitudes of some police officers.

- *perceptions of under-policing in cases of youth victimisation*:
  One of the paradoxes of youth crime and policing practices is that young people are themselves among the most likely groups to be victimised (often by other young people), yet may be reluctant to contact the police when this does occur. Special difficulties often present themselves in the case of young women who have been sexually assaulted. A further problem arises in cases of racist violence, where the mainstream practices of the police may mean that young people will not bother to report such violence because of their perceptions of how police may respond (or fail to respond) to this kind of victimisation.

From the point of view of the police, there are likewise a number of experiences and perceptions regarding their contact with young people which can be observed. Some of these include:

- *perception of lack of respect by young people for the law, and law officials*:
  There is a sizeable proportion of police who do not feel that young people today have enough respect for legal institutions, and for the police — who are trying to do a difficult job under trying conditions. This is fuelled by negative contact with some groups of young people on the street.

- *experience of constant hassles from young people on the street*:
  Lack of respect is demonstrated as well by persistent name-calling and abusive actions directed at police by some young people. Sending the police up is not uncommon, nor

is baiting the police in various kinds of chase-games (including in some instances the use of stolen cars).

- *experience of lack of cooperation by some young people*:
  The degree of cooperation displayed by young people and their attitude toward the police are important factors in how police respond to young people when contact is made. Not surprisingly, those young people who have been stereotyped as being particularly threatening or troublesome (such as 'youth gangs') also tend to be the most problematic from the point of view of police intervention.

- *concern with poor attitudes and demeanor of some young people*:
  Historically, much police work has relied upon informal 'cues' regarding which young people are 'respectable' and which are not perceived as 'respectable'. The attitudes and demeanor of contemporary young people are likewise subject to scrutiny, and modes of dress, style, music and street-use contribute to police perceptions that some young people, particularly the unemployed and homeless, are 'no hopers' who require a firm hand.

- *experience of verbal and physical violence directed at police by young people*:
  There is evidence to suggest that police are themselves often subject to both verbal taunts and direct physical assault in their dealings with some young people. Punches, kicks and having objects thrown at them are not uncommon, and indicate a high degree of physicality in some types of police-youth altercations. This can sow the seed of resentment among police, and make police wary of young people as potential threats to their person.

- *acknowledgment of youth dilemmas but having necessity for police action*:
  Many police well understand the social and economic problems experienced by the young people with whom they come into contact, and the need by young people to have somewhere to 'hang out'. This expresses itself in a real ambivalence as to whether or not the police should attempt to regulate the public space use of young people, or whether a policy of non-intervention would be better. However, often the actual practice of policing is related more to immediate government policy or police operational directives than any attempt to deal directly with the source of the ambivalence regarding what ought to be done.

There are then significant conflicts and problems associated with mainstream policing of young people. These difficulties are felt acutely on both sides, and each party may feel aggrieved by the actions (or inaction) of the other.

Urban space and police-youth issues

To place police-youth conflict into perspective we need to consider what is happening in the lives of each, and the nature of the physical and social environment within which they are being brought together.

The status of young people in society

Youth social indicators show that children and young people are over-represented among the unemployed, the poor, those who commit suicide, and traffic accident fatalities. The problems experienced by a growing proportion of young people — to make ends meet, to find secure, full-time employment, to cope with stress and educational competition, to forge a meaningful social identity — have, however, been transposed in such a way as to make young people themselves 'the problem'.

The very lack of social and economic power exercised by young people means that they are easy targets for campaigns which pathologise their behaviour, which further denigrate their status and rights, and which make them appear to be the agents of their own lack of opportunity.

The general disregard of youth rights, and lack of coherent action in dealing with the plight of the young, has in turn created the conditions for the emergence of a cohort of young people who are truly disenchanted with the present system. Many young people are alienated from key social institutions such as schools, health services, law enforcement and community groups. Many are living in social circumstances where basic survival necessities (for example, food, shelter, clothing) are more important than those opportunities and structures crucial to enchancement of social functioning (for example, community networks, educational places, jobs).

Yet, current government policies have tended to be ever more selective in terms of support benefits, allowances and services to young people. Furthermore, they are often organised around principles of coercion and systemic demand reduction, rather than the meeting of youth needs generally. Economic rationalism at a policy level has translated into privatisation of education and schooling (accompanied by user-pay fee structures), funding cuts across a range of public institutions such as health and welfare, and deterioration of local amenities especially in neighbourhoods with a low tax base or little political power to garner needed community resources.

The general social pressures on young people today are more profoundly felt in the case of specific categories of young people, many of which have a unique relationship with the police. For example, indigenous young people are not only poorly positioned economically and socially in Australian society, they suffer the continuing legacy of racist colonial policies and generally negative interactions with the police. The contours of the relationship between police and indigenous people continue to be shaped by the historical role of the police in armed conflict with Aboriginal resistance fighters and police interventions in removing children from their families. Furthermore, contemporary incidents of racist abuse, and evidence of systemic differences in the use of police cautions, use of arrest, patterns of offence charges, and refusal of bail applications, point to major ongoing problems.

Other groups of young people have likewise experienced difficulties with police due to their particular position in society. For instance, ethnic minority young people, particularly those from refugee backgrounds, are now frequently coming to the notice of the police due to both apparent increases in criminal activity, and media hype regarding the presence and dangers of 'ethnic youth gangs'. On the other hand, young gay men and lesbians continue to complain about the lack of adequate police responses to street victimisation and hate crime linked to their sexual preferences.

The powerlessness of young people generally in relation to broad political-economic processes, and the special disadvantages and discriminations experienced by certain categories of young people, is undoubtedly having an impact on both youth activity (for example, as witnessed by high suicide rates) and public perceptions of young people (for example, as threats and 'outsiders'). How young people think about themselves, and how police view young people, will have repercussions for the ways in which they relate to each other on the street.

Restructuring of urban space

A significant aspect of police-youth relations is that much of the contact takes place in public venues such as the street, shopping centres, malls and beaches. If we are to understand

the nature of police-youth conflict then we must appreciate how changes to the urban environment have radically altered the public activities and public presence of young people.

Over the last few decades a major change has occurred in urban spatial relations. Recent research, for example, has demonstrated that Australian cities are now exhibiting patterns of ghettoisation not unlike that found in the United States. That is, whole communities of people are now being locked into distinct suburbs, with poor amenities, poor job prospects and poor resources at the community level. Residential, industrial and commercial districts are being re-moulded due to the impact of new technology, the flight of capital and new patterns of workplace organisation (including outsourcing of corporate production to smaller units rather than big industrial enterprises such as factories). For those young people trapped into living in an urban ghetto situation, the availability of leisure and recreation venues and activities is a major problem, as is the lack of better quality education and full-time paid work.

Studies of rural communities indicate that the issues of 'what to do' and 'where to hang out' are not confined to particular metropolitan sites. Rather, the closure of services and public institutions, including schools and public transport for example, in some country areas is having a devastating effect on young people in these areas (as demonstrated in higher than average rates of youth suicide). Again, the lack of paid work and high quality and accessible public amenities are at the heart of many of the problems experienced by young people in both country and city areas.

A compounding factor in the choice of activities and venues for young people is the general demise of publicly owned publicly accessible space within which they can interact. The 'village commons' or 'town square' is dead — having been replaced with the commercial venues of the privately owned shopping centre.

The mass privatisation of public space has had major ramifications with regard to the use of public space, and the regulation of public space. 'Community space' can be conceptualised as space which is multifunctional in nature, and as such caters to a wide variety of community interests. 'Commercial space', on the other hand, is designed primarily with business interests at heart, with any community concerns subordinated to these purposes. This space is for the sellers and buyers of goods and services. From a planning and design point of view, the advent and construction of the mega-shopping centre is from first to last a search for private profit. Any activity within the precincts of such centres is therefore meant to be oriented toward consumption and commercial trading activity.

In order to ensure the smooth running of the commercial enterprise, many privately owned centres rely upon a combination of private and public policing. Thus, security guards often work in tandem with State police to make sure that disruptive or criminal behaviour is minimised. Even where city sites are publicly owned, the same principles of spatial regulation usually apply. That is, the public mall is patrolled with a view to excluding those people seen as potential or actual threats to retail activity, tourists or other 'legitimate' users of such spaces.

The difficulties for young people in this type of social context is that very often they are the prime targets for private and public police intervention. This is because they usually travel and hang out in groups, which may be regarded as disturbing to other customers or users of the space. Or, they are perceived as non-consumers, or at best marginal consumers, and hence not suitable patrons within the shopping centre confines. The visibility, perceived lack of financial power, and behavioural patterns (that is, hanging around in groups, making noise) of young people make them unwelcome visitors in such venues.

The disappearance of alternative community spaces, combined with the attractions of large numbers of people and diverse activities in these centres, plus easily accessible transport routes, generates a strong pull on young people to spend their time where they do. The centres also actively encourage the young consumer with movie theatres, amusement arcades, late opening hours and so on.

The marginalised economic position of many young people coupled with the push-pull factors which draw them into commercial spaces helps explain their presence, and activities, in large numbers in the modern shopping centres and malls. This, in turn, sets in train attempts to regulate youth on the part of the relevant authorities (for example, managers, retail shop owners, other customers, police), and attempts by young people to use these spaces as they want to and not as dictated by the commercial imperative.

For many young people today, the conflicts associated with their presence in the public domain are linked to the lack of youth-specific public space (that is, spaces designed with their particular spatial interests in mind) and lack of youth-friendly space (that is, spaces designed with their particular activity needs in mind). The fight for space of their own manifests itself in resentment at the intervention of authority figures in their activites, especially when no law has actually been broken.

Demands on police

From the point of view of the police, there are a number of issues surrounding young people's use of public space which influence how and when they might intervene. These relate to both the wider political climate within which police perform their tasks and duties, and the immediate context of police-youth contact.

The rise of the 'law and order' debate in recent years has been manifest in political campaigns in New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and most recently in the South Australian elections. A good deal of the debate has focussed on controlling perceived antisocial behaviour on the part of young people. The debate has furthermore been (mis)informed by lurid newspaper and television reports on purported 'juvenile crime waves' and by sensationalistic reports of 'ethnic youth gangs' terrorising particular neighbourhoods.

The ideological vision perpetrated by such media accounts, supported by the rhetorical hyperbole of politicians out to win votes, is one which firmly entrenches negative images of young people in the public eye. As with other citizens, members of the police are not immune to the constant barrage of emotive reporting which basically escalates 'youth crime' to be a priority problem in society. Repetition of lies and distortions inevitably has an impact over time, and influences how we view young people, and youthful behaviour generally.

A related aspect of the law and order debate is the move to institutionalise the regulation of young people via various leglisative measures. In New South Wales, this has taken the form of the *Children (Parental Responsibility) Act*, and greater attention being given to the extent and nature of police powers to intervene in the lives of young people. Regardless of objective need for such legislation or increased police powers, the point is that where police are given the 'green light' to use such powers, then invariably there will be the temptation, if not the necessity, to do so in practice. Yet, how police use their powers, and discretion, has major implications for their overall relationship with young people.

Further to this, it needs to be acknowledged that the current emphasis on 'doing something' about the supposed 'youth problem' is by and large equated with doing something of a coercive nature. That is, young people are being forced to comply with legislative and

authority dictates. Alternative non-coercive measures and approaches tend not to have either the same institutional legitimacy or popular appeal.

In the case of immediate operational tactics and strategies, the police on the beat are under pressure from different quarters to perform their work in particular ways. This pressure might emanate from the top-down in the form of specific operational campaigns (for example, cleaning up of Redfern, or 'Operation Sweep' in Perth), or from the preferred operational emphasis of the local station command.

In country towns, analysis has shown that often it is local business and professional people who put pressure on the police to 'solve' perceived crime problems. For example, a study of the north-east of New South Wales showed that the local elite were instrumental in creating a sense of 'law and order' crisis, one which was principally directed at the indigenous population. In the urban centres, there is similar pressure by retail traders and commercial interests to protect their interests by moving groups of young people away from commercial districts. Such pressures from the 'community' are extremely difficult to ignore or to avoid.

There is, then, considerable pressure on police to use highly interventionist and often harsh measures to 'clean up' the streets. Individual police officers, especially those with a close residential attachment to an area, may find it difficult to go against the grain in such circumstances. Nevertheless, there are countervailing influences which offer scope for the adoption of other kinds of approaches — those which promise more constructive and healthier relationships between police and young people. It is to these that we now turn.

Proactive policing and professional practice

Achieving a better relationship between young people and the police needs to be founded upon measures which incorporate young people into local decision-making processes and community life generally. The police are important players, at all levels, in this process.

Initially it can be said that, given the lowly status of young people in Australian society, it is essential to rethink what it is 'to be young' today. Specifically, it is essential to *restore citizenship* to young people. Much recent government and policing policy has, in effect, been directed at reducing the intrinsic rights of young people as full citizens.

In general terms, there is a need to reaffirm the basic rights of young people as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, of which Australia is a signatory country. The Convention is a comprehensive document which provides a detailed survey of the cultural, economic, social and legal rights of young people. It is a document which every police officer who deals with young people should become familiar. The spirit, as well as the letter, of the Convention provides a very useful framework for how children and young people should be dealt with and treated in society.

The Convention identifies a number of areas and issues where police could be directly involved in preventing the victimisation of young people (for example, economic exploitation). It also highlights the requirements of the criminal justice system to respect the special needs and rights of young people when it comes to welfare and criminal justice matters. It recognises the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly — which is relevant to any discussion of street policing and public space issues. Importantly, it also outlines the basic principles of intervention when a criminal offence has occurred:

> States Parties recognise the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognised as having infringed penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society. [Article 40]

To put this slightly differently, the Convention alerts us to the importance of treating young people with respect and dignity at all times, and this is significant insofar as respect for mainstream institutions is itself something to be *earned* by these institutions.

Restoring citizenship implies that arbitrary intervention, racist treatment and general abuse of police powers have no place in contemporary policing. Preventing and condemning routine abuses of and reliance on violence involving young people is essential. The dignity and respect granted the police service as a whole also depends upon it.

A second area where more needs to be done is that pertaining to public space itself. Here the agenda is one of *restoring community*. A big issue for young people is that they are constantly made to feel that they are 'outsiders'. This is confirmed daily for them in the form of exclusionary policies and coercive security and policing measures which are designed precisely to remove them from the public domain. For young people this is often seen as unfair (given that they have nowhere else to go) and unwarranted (given that they have not done anything wrong).

Recently there have been some interesting attempts to incorporate young people into discussions and negotiations over the uses of public space. For example, some shopping centres now employ part-time youth workers and provide youth-specific services and activities as a means to encourage less conflictual relations with young people. Similarly, in some localities, young people have been drawn into design and planning processes associated with new recreation and leisure facilities.

These attempts are significant for a number of reasons. First, they indicate that rather than being treated as threats to the community, young people are in fact important members of the community. Second, they represent a shift in thinking away from the use of coercive and authoritarian measures toward more inclusive and developmental measures, which incidentally, are often much less expensive (for example, hiring youth workers rather than security guards). Third, they rely upon a multi-agency approach that implicitly if not explicitly recognises that public space issues traverse a range of interest groups (for example, local councils, business owners, young people, police, security guards, youth and community workers). Such strategies thus acknowledge that addressing public space issues requires a degree of community consultation and negotiation if meaningful change is to occur.

The idea of restoring community is one which hinges upon seeing young people as integral to any public space strategy. In a nutshell, it means restoring public confidence through youth participation, rather than through heavy handed and sweeping forms of coercive intervention.

The police can play an important part in both of these processes of restoring citizenship, and restoring community. In specific terms, however, the nature of police involvement will be contingent upon a number of factors:

- **Accountability and human rights**

A consistent concern voiced by those who are critical of negative types of police intervention has been that police be accountable for their actions in relation to young people. This

accountability can refer to specific incidents of abuse or harassment, in which case the officers involved need to be officially taken to task.

In addition, however, accountability also can refer to broader issues such as 'to whom' one should be accountable, and 'according to what criteria'. Here it is crucial that police do what they can to open up lines of communication with local young people to find out what they think the issues are, any problems in police practice they might be experiencing, and what they think could be done to remedy particular trends or problems. In essence, community accountability means that police have to respect and take into account a range of perspectives, including and especially those of young people.

Accountability also requires a basic understanding of human rights in the use of police discretion. Generally, the use of discretion should be guided by the idea that, as members of the community, police have much to lose if there is an abuse of discretion or a perception that abuse is occurring. Arguments favouring strong checks on the use of discretion can also point to the fact that harsher penalties or adoption of ever more coercive measures, as advocated by some sections of the community, may in fact contravene universal human rights concepts and instruments.

A potential means of ensuring ongoing community accountability is to develop local mechanisms whereby police performance can be constantly evaluated (with a view to improving relations, rather than having a punitive and reactive emphasis). This might involve ongoing assessment from young people (and others) via consultations and questionnaires. Any such measures, however, should be designed in such a way as to enable community feedback on general policing issues, not simply or solely individual complaints.

- **Education and in-service training**

The difficulties and sense of alienation experienced by many young people today provide an important backdrop to their presence and behaviour in public places. It is vital, therefore, that police working with young people be informed about both general processes affecting young people (for example, unemployment, the stresses associated with educational competition) and local dynamics affecting youth livelihood and opportunities.

To communicate with young people requires empathy and a sensitivity to their status and position in society. Most young people do not set out to be 'bad', or 'criminal' or to engage in anti-social behaviour. Adoption of a strict law enforcement approach is often the worst strategy to adopt given the multiple factors associated with youthful offending. The idea of peacekeeping and a more wholistic approach, involving many different social agencies, offers a more positive and constructive method of assisting young people to use public space in a more responsible manner.

In addition to study and information on youth issues generally, it is important that police engage in cross-cultural sensitivity training (for example, to identify and appreciate cultural and religious differences which impact upon youth behaviour and police perceptions of this behaviour). As part of this, it is essential to examine issues surrounding the use of professional interpreters and how best to deal with language barriers in the course of police work. Furthermore, however, it is also important that police be provided with anti-racist education which can expose the conscious or unconscious biases which are often at play in police-youth relations involving indigenous and ethnic minority young people.

Training in particular skills, such as interpersonal communication, will make it easier to work with young people. In a similar vein, it is useful to undertake training in alternative

dispute resolution techniques, with an emphasis on mediation and peacekeeping skills and strategies.

- **Problem-solving approaches**

Rather than reacting to specific incidents (for example, youth 'riots') or proactively attempting to clear the streets of young people, a much more creative response to public space issues is required. In particular, it is important to go beyond dealing with the effects of street-level conflict (for example, particular episodes of violence or police-youth conflict) to consider the broad reasons why certain problems keep recurring. For example, if a particular site or a particular group of young people (or police officers) continually comes to public notice, then the underlying causes of this need to be investigated. It could be that a licensed premise is implicated in the periodic unruly behaviour of its patrons, or that a certain police officer has an especially bad reputation among young people for being authoritarian or intimidating.

Problem-solving approaches demand that police draw upon a wide variety of information sources. This in turn requires open communication lines between police and members of a local community, including young people themselves. Open communication also means communication which is public rather than secretive. The point is not to 'fight crime' by gaining intelligence about certain 'criminals'; it is to foster a sense of community through honest and open dialogue across a range of social and legal issues. Programmatically, this will require thinking about specific ways in which young people can be brought into police policy formation and community problem-solving ventures — that is, enlisting young people to deal with young people.

In practical terms, it is useful for police to develop local registers of youth resources — people, services, funding bodies, capable young people themselves — to which young people with whom the police have contact on the street may be referred. In many cases, the 'problem' is not essentially one of law-breaking or criminal behaviour, but one relating to the welfare, financial, social, health and emotional needs of the young person. Where law-breaking has occurred, it would be useful for police to develop a variety of diversionary options, such as youth occupational or recreational opportunities, which could be used as part of the general dispositions available in dealing with young offenders.

Intervention of any kind should be informed by a degree of conciliation and attempts to resolve issues diplomatically and coherently. The use of formal cautions and arrest, in this context, means that the use of coercion will be seen as a last resort (rather than preferred strategy) and as 'fair' from the point of view of young people who realise that this is sometimes required. The emphasis should be on conflict resolution and extensive use of diversionary and informal measures.

- **New models of professionalism**

Rather than treating the public with suspicion, or relying upon the use or threat of coercive force, addressing public space issues requires more than ever a new style of policing. Community policing does not mean better ways of policing the community — it means working with all sectors of the community to try to prevent crime and resolve conflict before it gets out of hand.

This kind of police work in many ways demands a more professional approach than may previously have been the case. It requires constant study of local conditions and greater intellectual effort being put into problem-solving. This new model of professional practice relies upon a high degree of lateral thinking (rather than recourse to simplistic, 'easy' solu-

tions such as traditional coercive policing), and greater management skills insofar as it involves more active participation with members of the community (rather than reliance upon in-house police procedures).

Competent and professional policing today requires an officer who is multi-skilled, who listens to people from diverse backgrounds and with different viewpoints, who makes judgments based upon analysis of patterns and trends, and who exercises caution in the use of coercive force.

As part of this style of policing, one strategy in dealing with young people is to explicitly articulate what the range of policing options actually are, and the reasons why the police choose specific options under particular circumstances. Such information can be provided both reactively (after an incident or event) and proactively (as part of routine communication). When young people know where they stand, and what the various options are, they are more predisposed to accept police action as 'fair', even when subject to sanctions themselves.

- **Resources and institutional processes**

The ways in which young people and police interrelate depends on the training, shared experiences and policy frameworks available or developed within the police service. For a positive, constructive form of policing to emerge it is essential that a number of things happen within the service itself. For example, any 'youth policy' must be more than simply words on paper — it requires constant evaluation and practical examples of application.

More generally, the police service as a whole must be called into account through periodic reviews of the allocation of resources (for example, education and training packages) and staffing (for example, number and training of youth liaison personnel) in the area of police-youth relations. Associated with this it is imperative that senior police take the lead in promoting community policing as the mainstream model of policing, rather than an adjunct to the more traditional forms of policing.

Accountability in this framework should also be tied to specific community and organisational rewards for police who attempt to develop better rapport with members of the local community and who primarily utilise non-coercive methods. For example, the police service could provide internal preferments and status for those street police who have a demonstrated record of using traditional coercive powers as a last resort. Similarly, formal recognition could also be given to officers who actively attempt to develop 'best practice' models and examples which might be of benefit to the service as a whole.

It is important as well that police take an active role in dispelling the myths surrounding youth crime and youth gangs. Young people in public spaces are often the targets of concerted media campaigns. The social authority of the police means that they are in a prime position to counteract media distortions regarding youthful behaviour. It also opens the door to publicise alternative strategies which reduce public fear of youthful crime (for example, innovative situational crime prevention strategies to minimise public disorder during festive events).

Conclusion

The issues surrounding police work involving young people in public spaces are complex and multi-faceted. Many of the tensions in police-youth contact stem from sources well beyond the scope or nature of the direct interaction that takes place. The vulnerability and low social status of young people in society, the impact of sensationalistic media portrayals of

young people, the recent transformations in urban public space, the effect of government cutbacks in needed services and benefits — all of these impinge upon the activities, behaviour and visibility of young people in the public domains of the shopping centre, mall or street.

While these kinds of issues are sometimes presented as outside the control or mandate of the police, there are nevertheless a range of things which police can do to both assist in the tackling of the hard social issues, and in re-defining their own specific police tasks. For example, if conflict is occurring in a particular shopping centre, the police can play a useful bridging role between interested parties (for example, managers, retail shop owners, youth workers, young people) and so help to influence how the 'public space' (even though it may be privately owned) might be shared and used by different groups at different times. The key is to engage in lateral thinking about the causes, and possible solutions, to problems before, during and after any sort of conflict occurs.

In day-to-day terms, the police have a responsibility to encourage and foster positive social change by demonstrating concretely their commitment to human rights, harm reduction and conciliatory social processes. To a certain extent this means that police will have to relinquish control over some facets of their job, insofar as open, honest two-way communication necessarily implies a shift in 'accountability' from abstract rules and regulations to flesh-and-blood people. More specifically, multi-agency approaches and cooperation, and genuine liaison strategies involving young people, demands that police be willing to accept that sometimes their perspectives, and preferred decisions, are not always the best. Listening to others, particularly the most oppressed or disadvantaged groups of young people, is essential if we are to move beyond antagonism and critique.

The point is not that police have to abrogate their general mission as police officers — rather, they have to extend themselves as professionals if they are to undertake the main tasks of their mission in a constructive and, ultimately, more effective way. The police occupy a crucial position in society, and in the lives of young people. Building new relationships with young people at the local level, and developing new 'best practice' models based upon actual experiences and shared wisdom, is an important step in putting the abstract pronouncements of departmental 'youth policy' into practical and lasting effect. Young people need to know that policing is for their protection, too.

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