THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER IS TO DESCRIBE BRIEFLY SOME OF THE LESS known features of Julalikari's night patrol program and express a note of caution to communities thinking of adopting the scheme. In making these comments, it is hoped that communities can be helped to make informed decisions and avoid failures.

Over the last couple of years Julalikari's Night patrol has gained considerable attention. Interest has been aroused by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody's detailed examination and recommendation that the program be adopted elsewhere. It has obvious relevance both to the current debate on Aboriginal/police relations and to those seeking to improve community management of alcohol problems. There is even international interest with Council members now discussing the program in Papua and New Guinea.

Julalikari Council is a town camp organisation of about 900 Aboriginal people in the remote Northern Territory town of Tennant Creek; whose total population is approximately 3,000. With reduced mining activity, the town's economic base has contracted, enterprises have suffered, and the white population has declined. Alcohol abuse is a major problem in the community, both indoors and outside.

The night patrols have been operating since the mid-1980s. The starting date is not clear, for the community began the program without the tiers of bureaucracy and welfare assistance which would otherwise have recorded it.

The night patrol began because there was nothing else. While it was not obvious to government agencies, it was tragically clear to the Julalikari Community that something had to be done if the escalating violence, trauma and death in the town camps was to be halted. At the time there were no "Beat The Grog" campaigns, no suitable rehabilitation resources, no drive to improve community management of alcohol and little recognition that better relations between police and Aboriginal people was urgently needed.

What is The Night Patrol Program?

What is the night patrol program? A senior Northern Territory police officer has provided the following description:
The Council patrol operates a roster system of volunteer persons who conduct mobile patrols of the town area and camps at night. The patrol assists in removing intoxicated persons from the streets back to their residence and camps, as well as handling minor disputes that arise in the camps. As a general rule, councillors at each camp now contact the Council patrol in the first instance, however if the matter is serious, the police are called immediately.

This commonly held view is only partly correct, and in need of some elaboration. Five main points can be made about this description.

Firstly, while the patrols are based on a roster system, there are some important parameters. It is the Julalikari elected Council that makes the weekly roster, not the paid Council administrators. The rosters are not open to anyone. Participants must be approved by the Executive. Most of the Executive regularly participate and all of them take part in the camp meetings, even the elders.

Because the rosters include Executive members, the patrols are frequently led by some of the most influential and authoritative members of the town camps. Thus the Executive have a practical and intimate knowledge of the program. In a sense the patrol is the Council and the Council is the patrol. So while the roster formalises who is doing service at any given moment, all the Executive are eligible for call-up.

Secondly, a basic principle of the patrols is their voluntary nature. This principle is vigorously held. It is argued that one does the job because one cares for the community. If it were paid work, some might do the job with the wrong attitude and for the wrong reasons.

For Executive, voluntary patrol work may exceed thirty hours or more per week. For some on roster, it may mean a full day's work on their normal job and then a twelve-hour night shift. This is a huge amount of effort and calls for immense dedication.

Camp leaders and Council Executive are now attempting to reduce the burden of work by encouraging younger members of the community to participate. It is hoped that not only will their participation relieve the older people but that it will give the younger ones a new perspective, and show them what a pain in the neck they can be when drunk.

Thirdly, mobile patrols are often more patrol than mobile and that includes both tyre rubber and shoe leather. Patrols may consist of two women walking up and down the main street at sunset keeping an eye on some young drinkers or "rascals", as they say in Papua New Guinea. Patrol duty may be having the vehicle parked at the sports' grounds on basketball night to provide both a Council presence and a radio base for all manner of reasons.

The patrol vehicle has a much wider function than police vans. It is constantly in use. With its communications radio it is able to inform
Executive members where each member is and can collect individuals and provide transport as necessary.

Fourthly, the object of the patrol is not to "assist in removing intoxicated persons from the streets". This is a frequent cause of misunderstanding for the police and the general public. The object is to resolve problems in town camps and special purpose leases; to settle disputes when they begin and not after they have exploded, drawing in extended families or entire tribal groups.

It is the Council's experience that by resolving disputes at an early stage the destructive cycle of alcohol-induced "paybacks", anger, guilt, misunderstanding and frustration can be short-circuited. By publicly discussing and resolving these tensions the Council and community are able to spend more time on building rather than defence.

Lastly the quote suggests that "serious matters" are the province of the police and the night patrol are junior helpers. This is quite incorrect. The community does not suspend its care or concern for its members because matters are serious; quite the reverse.

Where police have been required the immediate task of the patrol is to support the police and assist them and the community communicate with each other. Their role is also to collect information and provide a council presence that will be used later in community meetings. This is a serious task that complements the serious business of the police.

Public attention has been drawn to the program's attempts to overcome problems with police and policing, to reduce heavy-handed police surveillance and resolve conflicts in an Aboriginal way. What is less well known but equally important is the essential part community meetings play in the program and the way these meetings have come to affect the whole Council.

Community Meetings

Community meetings are held when there has been confrontation during the patrols or in the course of camp life. Camp meetings are called by the councillors and generally held on the following day. The aim of the meeting is to mediate the disputes. Outsiders are rarely permitted to attend.

The success of the patrols has strengthened and deepened the authority of the meetings. In turn the meetings have supported the patrol by promoting communication and understanding amongst a very diverse group of town campers and reaffirming the collective intolerance for unacceptable behaviour.

In the course of the meetings, the patrol's policy, protocols and rules are constantly under examination. Thus for instance, early in the life of the program, it was found that the productive efforts of single men and women on patrol was not what was wanted and had to be stopped. More recently, on a dark night, with little moon a "serious matter" that included the police ended with patrol members in gaol. Patrol workers now wear distinctive shirts while on duty and carry an identity card with their photograph.
At these meetings unacceptable behaviour is condemned and offenders may receive a public dressing down. There may be some machismo in being given a hard talking to by the police or local magistrate. There is none in a community meeting of peers. The importance of this process cannot be understated. In communities that suffer from a high incidence of alcohol abuse one of the first things that disappears is frank, public, non-intoxicated discussion of the problem. With this disappearance comes a deepening of the problems. Julalikari is turning this process about through its community meetings.

**Addressing Alcohol Related Problems**

As the program and meeting procedures have matured so has developed an ethic of council sobriety. Patrol rosters exclude problem drinkers—senior executive members must be sober people as drinking on council property is prohibited. This ethic is a major strength in Julalikari's corporate structure and underpins its dignity and authority.

With Julalikari members meeting regularly and discussing community problems and patrol matters, the ground work has been done for the council to widen its activities. Nearly all patrol matters deal with alcohol related problems. Thus a logical act for town campers was to have the Liquor Commission formally declare some areas "dry", while some areas have been left "wet" drinkers' camps. This declaration has the force of law: the police can remove drinkers and alcohol from dry camps. For the patrol workers and community it clarifies where drinkers may and may not be.

With wet and dry camps a subtle difference is also developing. The quality of accommodation and family life for families in non-drinking camps is steadily improving and people are becoming aware in their own lives of the heavy cost of alcohol abuse.

**Coordination of Administrative Roles**

The functional relationship between the councillors and Julalikari's administration needs comment. The function of the latter is to ensure fuel is available, mechanical repairs are done and radio communications are manned and operating. The daily management of the program, the community meetings, rosters and dispute mediation are all done by the councillors.

Over time the night patrol has expanded its contacts to include more government agencies and law enforcement bodies. It is the administration's role to develop these contacts, provide an educative role and sort out problems. One example recorded in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody is the meetings held between the Council and the visiting magistrate:
In those meetings the magistrate gained an appreciation of what the community thought of the sentencing process and how they believed offenders could be discouraged from offending without penalising innocent members of the family of the offender . . . Members of the community were invited to give their comments as to the sentences which the magistrate had administered to offenders in the past, and where they expressed disagreement about sentences the magistrate invited suggestions from the community about the type of sentences which they thought appropriate. (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, vol. 3, p. 76.)

More recently the Council has participated in negotiating with the police an "Agreement on Practices and Procedures" that formalises protocols of the police and the council patrol.

The general effect of the Council's educational program with the police, magistrates, legal aid and parole board has made the judicial system in Tennant Creek more responsive to the night patrol. Sympathetic law enforcement bodies certainly help a great deal.

Even though mutual respect has grown and there is recognition that both police and patrols are necessary, the relationship is a fragile one. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody speaks of the deep animosity many Aboriginal people have towards white law. This animosity will not disappear overnight. It is the task of the council staff to try and explain this perception to law agencies, and to explain how patrol workers are not apprentice police; or present in order to hide the consequences of high Aboriginal unemployment, poor housing and education and policies of assimilation. They are to provide bridges between white and black law, to further self-determination and self-management.

**Cautionary Words**

To conclude this paper some cautionary words are in order for people interested in duplicating the program.

A danger which people must be aware of is the program's appeal to politicians sensitised to community law and order problems and to police administrators faced with declining budgets and increasing policing problems. For these people, programs such as the Tennant Creek night patrol mean fewer police, an Aboriginal organisation responsive to law and order, and a township with a modicum of racial harmony. Yet it is not the task of the night patrol to cover over the cracks in poor alcohol legislation or the consequences of denying basic human rights in health, education, employment and the right to enjoy one's own society and culture.

It is necessary to try and understand the Aboriginal perspective. One should not accept the narrow categorisation that places Aboriginal efforts like the night patrol into a law and order box. Julalikari's night patrol is a service of care to the community in the widest possible sense.

Questionable support also comes from that part of the community that believes Aboriginal people should be made to clean up their own "debris". While Julalikari refuses to accept this role it is very difficult not to feel sorrow and anguish for community members so labelled. Little assistance is given to
the publican who sells as much alcohol as he can to Aboriginal people and then finds the front of his pub has been demolished. Little sympathy is available to shop owners who refuse to employ Aboriginal people, are overtly racist, yet dependent on Aboriginal money. How much help should such operators get from a voluntary Aboriginal program?

A final comment needs to be made concerning Aboriginal organisations. They are as subject to fashion as any other group of people. Schemes like the patrols are topical and smart grant applications are now riding the new wave coming from Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Funding should not be an issue in considering the program. To make it dependent on funding is to lock it into performance indicators, quarterly reports and the Canberra men in grey. Cars, radios networks and offices are all nice but not necessary, more important is community commitment and dedication.

Conclusion

Frankly, given Julalikari's experience, it is difficult to imagine how some Aboriginal organisations, councils and health services can seriously consider community patrol programs. Some organisations have their eye too much on funding opportunities and demonstrate little real care or love for their members. Some groups have weak administrative systems and lack community support. Too many organisations have executive and administrative problem drinkers that make them quite unsuitable to support any programs like the "Beat The Grog" campaign or night patrol. Julalikari's patrol scheme works. It works because it has been designed to meet the particular and unique requirements of the community. More importantly it is, with pride and commitment, owned by the town campers who wish to care and nurture their members. It works because it has no other agenda but to serve the community. All these things can be repeated elsewhere.

References