Encouraging Good Citizenship within Schools

Bob Shaw
Inspector
Victoria Police

The Victoria Police have long been committed to their state's youth, and its members over the years have given freely of their time in an effort to guide young people away from destructive or antisocial behaviour. This tradition is ongoing with the formalisation of programs aimed at keeping the younger members of society out of trouble. Victoria was the first state to introduce Blue Light discos and presently operates a program to encourage discipline among children participating in sports. The foremost endeavour of the force in this area has been the introduction of the Police/Schools Involvement Program, which seeks to encourage good citizenship through education.

As all Australian states now have Blue Light discos, this will not be discussed at any length in this paper, but the Victoria Police's two main initiatives, Operation Olympus and Police/Schools Involvement Program will be outlined in some detail.

Operation Olympus

The major aim of this project is to encourage self-control and discipline among young people and target those who are participating in a contact sport. It consists of an end of year award being given to the most disciplined club in a league. These trophies are made available by the police to those leagues catering for under sixteen and under fourteen years sport, who are desirous of participating. Response so far has proved to be very encouraging and it is hoped to increase the size of the program significantly very shortly.

The Police/Schools Involvement Program

The Police/Schools Program commenced operation in July 1988, in response to certain concerns of the Chief Commissioner Mr Glare. An Inspector was tasked with the research, development and coordination of a scheme whereby young people could receive education in good citizenship, and basic moral values. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mr Crabb, was also a firm supporter of the concept and provided funding for fifty additional police, as well as the development of the idea.

This has now become a reality in Victoria and the force is well in the process of placing the fifty personnel into schools to ensure that training is given to our youth in
this vital area. Already some very positive feedback from the schools involved (many of which see both the value and the need for this type of education) has been received.

**The effect of morality on crime**

The effect of the system of values and norms on the crime rate appears to be somewhat more effective in preventing crime than a system of dedicated law enforcement. A study of crime rates in Edinburgh as compared to cities of a similar size in the United States showed that the Scottish city had only a fraction of the problems of its American counterparts. This experiment was commented on by Commissioner Avery, who stated:

> This is not indicative in his view of the comparative superiority of the Scottish Police, but has to do with the social norms and humanity's methods of getting people to observe them. He suggests that the effects of law enforcement agencies are puny compared with the extensiveness and intricacy of these other behavioural regulators (Avery 1981).

If we accept this view, then there is a responsibility within society for the reinforcement of moral rules and to ensure that all citizens are not only made aware of them, but are given the proper reasons for obeying them.

**The Need for the Program**

**Crime**

Not unlike most of the western world, the crime rate in Victoria has reached an unacceptably high level with serious offences and crimes of violence escalating despite major efforts on the part of the police. Traditional reactive police methods appear to be doing little to stem the rising tide of antisocial behaviour.

In 1988, the Chief Commissioner Kel Glare gave his answer to the crime problems as being to educate the young. In a press release he said:

> An anti-crime program which teaches basic rights, obligations and responsibilities, together with the consequences of breaching the criminal law, could and should be integrated with all other programs aimed at eliminating the causes of crime.

While not being palatable to the more traditional elements in some police circles, it is interesting to note that Sir Robert Peel, who laid the foundation stones of modern policing, stated that the basic mission of the police was not to repress unlawful conduct by force and punishment but to **prevent** crime and disorder from occurring. It would seem that an education program as outlined by the Chief Commissioner falls quite neatly within the basic mission statement.

In the 1987-88 *Annual Report* of the Victoria Police certain disturbing statistics were outlined. In this period, a rise in violent crime of 19 per cent was noted, as was the following observation of Mr Glare:

> Since 1945 the number of major crimes has increased from 21,483 to 310,534. In 1987/88 an increase of 1345 per cent. While the population has more than doubled from approximately 2 million to 4.2 million in that period, the figures indicate a disproportionate and disturbing upward spiral.
If we consider how the community would have reacted to offences such as the assault and robbery of elderly people in 1945, as compared with now, we would see a marked difference in attitude. A reaction of horror and demand for justice would have swept society in the earlier years. This type of crime, which does not seem to be isolated these days, is considered just another offence in today's modern world.

Alienation

Another concern of the Victoria Police is that we have tended to move away from the public we serve. This seems to have been inevitable with the rapid increases in technology and population, where police have had to become more mobile in order to meet demands for their services. It has resulted in a loss of personal contact which was originally established with the old-time foot policeman. Father John Brosnan who served as the Chaplain of Pentridge Prison for thirty years was quoted as saying: 'If priests and police would walk among the people more and drive around in their motor cars less, we'd all be better off' (Prior 1985, p. 107).

What is needed is a means of getting the police interacting with the public to form a closer relationship. More positive contact will hopefully remedy this situation and this should commence at an early age. It is argued that if a child's first contact with police is positive, then it will take a great deal of negative influence to turn this perception around. The same applies in the opposite case.

Children also need to be given information on how and why the police do their job and where they (the police) fit into society. Complaints have been lodged against members of the force which result directly from ignorance and lack of understanding of why particular actions are being taken.

Similarly, many children fail to see the police as being human. Children appreciate seeing a police car and talking on the radio, but they are surprised to know that police marry and have children. Their perception of police is that they are machines.

Positive contact as well as the provision of information is needed. As well the police force is a vital part of any police schools program and serves to further enhance respect for law and order.

Overseas Initiatives

The consequences of crime

The concept of police-in-schools is not new and has been operating overseas and interstate for some years now. The Chief Commissioner saw first-hand, a program in operation in Florida (USA) called 'The Consequences of Crime'. This was the idea of Judge Clifton Kelly of the Florida Circuit Court who had the unpleasant task of sentencing to death, a 16-year-old youth who had kicked to death and robbed an elderly woman. Kelly noted that in his opinion, the youth appeared to have received no moral training in education at all. He then looked at what legal education was being given to school children in the Florida school system. Much to his disgust, he found that students were being taught how far they could push the law before they broke it, and what their legal rights were when they did, rather than being persuaded not to break it in the first place. Kelly and an educator Sherman Wantz wrote a program which teaches what the outcomes are of criminal conduct and encourages people not to break the law.

The value of this project was officially noted when the Florida Legislature made 'The Consequences of Crime' compulsory teaching in that state. Mr Glare was most impressed with the effect that the program had in turning peer pressure against the
disruptive elements in a class. Instead of being looked up to as rebels, they were seen as idiots and sanctioned out by the majority of children. The program is taught by teachers and encourages police input.

*Project DARE*

Project DARE is an initiative of the Los Angeles Police and Education Departments and is aimed at the city's horrendous drug problem. Uniformed police officers teach the program over a seventeen-week period to children aged nine to eleven years, and seek to impart a positive self-concept and resistance to peer pressure as well as giving alternatives to bad behaviour. It has been evaluated as being successful in changing attitudes towards both police and drug abuse.

There are various programs throughout the world as well as interstate and in all cases studied the results are:

- an improved perception of police;
- a drop in unlawful behaviour directed at school premises;
- better attitudes to authority; and
- better attitudes to school work.

*Aims And Objectives*

*Aims*

In answer to identified problems in Victoria, certain major aims were formulated which meet with the corporate goals of the Victoria Police. These are:

- to reduce the incidence of crime in society;
- to develop a better relationship between police and youth in the community;
- to create in young people an understanding of the police role in the structure of society;
- to extend the concept of crime prevention into the Victorian school system; and
- to equip young people with the necessary skills to avoid dangerous or threatening situations.

*Objectives*

Specific behavioural objectives for the program have been set and it is hoped that after the program that children will:

- demonstrate the values, responsibilities and obligations society currently deems valuable;
- state the consequences of a person's actions regarding unlawful behaviour;
- demonstrate sufficient self-esteem and skill to say no to drug abuse and other antisocial behaviour;
- engage in positive interactions and consultation with police members; and
- state the basic role of the police and the legal system in Victoria.
Program Operation

The thematic approach

The Police/Schools Involvement Program has developed six major themes which are designed to fit within the Ministry’s curriculum framework. These themes are as follows:

- the role of the police;
- the legal system (courts);
- rights, rules and responsibilities;
- the consequences of our actions;
- keeping ourselves and others safe;
- drugs and alcohol (life skills).

Some themes will run for only a short time, whereas themes like 'drugs and alcohol' will run throughout the school year.

Why police input?

With police actually taking the program to schools, it will ensure that the type of education advocated by the Chief Commissioner will be given to Victorian school children.

School Resource Officers (SROs) have been instructed to work in closely with the school communities in the areas that they are operating and to cooperate with school councils and members of the teaching profession. The main instructions given to these members are:

- they are not at the school in their roles as law-enforcers;
- they are not there to gather intelligence and that any information obtained should be handled with discretion. (Naturally if a serious matter comes to light, the SRO is expected to pass it on);
- SROs will not carry firearms into the school grounds; and
- SROs will not act in the capacity of school disciplinarians.

Operational duties

It has been the experience of proactive initiatives in this state that the participants in some have been branded as 'plastic police' or 'kiddy cops' and their duties labelled as 'the soft option'. Measures have been taken to attempt to keep these sorts of perceptions to a minimum. A previous initiative saw police based at a location away from operational members and issued with instructions that they were not to perform any operational duties at all. This served to engender a feeling of hostility between the two camps and made it difficult for the proactive initiative to attract staff.

The first consideration for this program was the accommodation of the SROs. It was considered highly desirable that these members, where possible be placed at operational police stations in order to have them seen as 'part of the crew'. By this means it is hoped to give them more acceptance with their peers.

While SROs will be engaged on full-time duties in schools, they will also be encouraged to make themselves available periodically for an operational shift. Similarly, school holidays are somewhat longer than police leave and it is expected that when SROs are not required in schools, they will be used for operational police duties. Hopefully this will go a long way toward discarding the 'plastic police' tag, as
well as keeping SROs up-to-date with current trends in society and the ever-changing world of modern policing.

Dress

It is considered important that SROs be seen as members of the police force at all times, and thus should wear full police uniform while in schools. During activities such as sports days, it is hoped to equip members with tracksuits bearing the police insignia to assist in reinforcement of identity.

Training

Upon appointment to the program, members are given two weeks' training in teaching methods and effective communication at the Hawthorn Institute of Education. This aims to equip the SROs with the necessary skills to enable them to communicate successfully with children of primary school age, as well as giving them credibility in the eyes of teachers and the rest of the school community.

It is considered necessary to have the SROs trained by an outside body, as the necessary expertise in primary teacher training did not exist within the force, as well as the fact that teachers' unions and parents' groups saw external training as a creditable means of preparing police for school-based duties.

The first training course was conducted in February 1989, and saw twenty students graduate. Feedback from members who attended, indicated that the course was highly job related and very professionally conducted by well qualified people.

Evaluation

Because of the number of outside organisations interested in the progress of this program it has been deemed necessary to brief an external evaluation consultant to conduct the program. Funding for this has been promised from the Ministry for Police and Emergency Services.

Secondary school pilot program

Early in the development of the program, the Officer in Charge of the Warrnambool Police was approached by Mr Duncan Stalker, the principal of the Warrnambool Technical School. Mr Stalker had recently returned from a trip to the Northern Territory and was most impressed with the school-based constable program in operation there. It was decided to place a police member at Mr Stalker's school, who would carry out duties similar to those in the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

The results in attitudinal change will be fully evaluated at the end of the school year, but perceptions thus far, are that the program will prove to be a major success. There have been several instances where an anti-police attitude has been turned around completely. The results already obtained in other states which have conducted these programs is positive.

Conclusion

The concept of school-based policing is not new, but the Victorian program and approach certainly is. Chief Commissioner Glare sees this project as being an investment in our future generations. The results will not be felt overnight, and we must be prepared to wait for the harvest when it hopefully arrives in years to come.
We now have a chance to attack crime at the grass roots level and prevent it through education of the forthcoming generation. It is our responsibility to make sure that we take positive action to check the spread of crime. As Seneca, the Roman statesman and philosopher, said in 65 AD, 'He who does not prevent a crime when he can, condones it'.

References