Community Based Initiatives in Crime Prevention

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A common perception throughout Australia is that Corrective Services are not linked to community based crime prevention programs. This perception certainly holds for Victoria.

The Community Based Corrections Division of the Office of Corrections in Victoria has established ten Regions throughout the state, which are responsible for:

- the maintenance of credible community based correctional services including supervision, counselling, personal development, community work and referral services for offenders consistent with Parole Board, courts and community requirements and expectations and to maximise the proper use of alternatives to prison and without unwarranted intrusion, ensure effective supervision and facilitate an offender's personal development.

Within regions, the role of staff has been to link offenders into services which exist within their own community. The objective is to reintegrate the people who have been incarcerated or found by the courts to be in need of community alternatives to incarceration. However, Community Based Corrections' role is seen by some offenders as an intrusion into their daily lives. This disruption to their routine is considered by some offenders to be more difficult to cope with than the total loss of freedom encountered in prison.

Offenders being released from prison and those coming from the courts are assumed to be involved in crime prevention programs—programs aimed at addressing some of the reasons which would appear to have contributed in some way to the offending behaviour.

Placement of offenders with community agencies such as counselling services, psychological services, educational and drug rehabilitation groups, is aimed at improving the situation for offenders and hopefully reducing their likelihood of re-offending.

Community Based Corrections' role as a crime prevention agency is a linear one. We tend to limit our involvement to the fulfilment of community and court expectations ensuring compliance with requirements of orders.

While most of us are happy to continue in this linear fashion, the Ringwood Office of Corrections has taken a unique approach to its role as a crime prevention agency within the community.

As a social control agency within the community we have linked with the Croydon community and been able to take a lateral approach to our traditional role in crime.
prevention. This does not mean that we have altered our focus, but rather have widened our horizons. Through our involvement within the local community we have been able to provide insights to that community about its offenders. We have at the same time been emerging from the shadows of the penal system to establish our own credibility for the knowledge and skills we possess in dealing with offenders in a community setting.

**Bonnemaison**

In 1988 as part of the build up to the state elections in Victoria, the government announced the BLAST Program (Building a Law Abiding Society Together). The BLAST Program proposed the development of a Bonnemaison type of program here in Victoria.

The Bonnemaison program was a French initiative in the early 1980s in which the French equivalent of our local government bodies provided funding to community groups developing crime prevention programs. What Bonnemaison did to prevent ongoing crime was to ask social workers to identify problem groups in the community and develop programs aimed at diverting these young people away from the antisocial behaviour in which they were involved.

One of their programs took young people involved with gangs which harassed and assaulted train travellers, and paid them a salary to attend drama workshops. The workshop produced a video in which the youths portrayed their lives on the Metro. It was claimed that this program directly reduced the likelihood of these young people continuing the activity which brought them to the attention of authorities.

**Croydon Good Neighbourhood Program**

The Good Neighbourhood Program initiated by the Victorian State Government is different from the French program in that it makes money available for proposals which will assist not only the identified offenders, but will also help prevent young people from getting into a position where they might offend.

In brief terms, fifteen councils across the Melbourne metropolitan and Victorian country areas were approached by the state government with a $10,000 seeding grant. This was to be used to initiate a Good Neighbourhood Committee.

Following this seeding grant, up to $40,000 could be accessed via submission and an additional $20,000 could be gained from the government on a dollar for dollar basis with money raised by the community.

The City of Croydon was one of the first local government bodies to take up the invitation. They approached a number of existing government bodies in the area and interested community representatives inviting them to become involved in their committee.

It was suggested to council that the Regional Manager and one member of staff who had worked with offenders in that municipality, would be interested in being part of the committee.

The committee, once finalised, comprised 20 personnel from diverse backgrounds including academics, professionals, retired people, youth workers, police and students. In the first few weeks there was discussion about the causes of criminal behaviour. After the third week, the group decided it was time to do something concrete, rather than continue a debate in search of a single answer.

The group proposed the following initiatives: information liaison officers for schools, a shuttle bus for the area, a practice facility for garage bands, discounted tickets for local cinemas, an Outward Bound type adventure course, a ‘no wine bar’, and a program which to date has received a lot of media attention Australia-wide, a ‘safe train’. All members of the committee are committed to these seven proposals and all members of the committee assisted in developing these proposals.
Realising the potential of developing programs, the committee's proposals were costed and the state government granted the committee a further $40,000. As yet no submission has been made for the further $20,000.

**Student Information Officers**

These came about because a headmaster, who was on the committee, explained the difficulty in getting information about activities to young people and to parents. Schools have traditionally had newsletters sent home, but information in these letters did not appear to reach the target groups of students and parents.

Youth workers also discovered that student-to-student word of mouth achieved excellent results in conveying information about activities.

The student information officer would be a paid position. Students nominated by their school would be paid $20 per month to take on the active role of disseminating information about activities occurring within the community to other students. They would attend training programs and regular meetings at the council where information on activities and events within the City of Croydon would be provided to them.

**The Bus**

The shuttle bus program identified the need for a better transportation system within the local community. Young people who attended activities in the area would, because of the lack of after-hours bus services, or lack of parental interest, or due to the disinterest of youths in being answerable to parents, find themselves walking long distances during the late hours of the night. This problem was conveyed to us by the police, the young people themselves, as well as by youth workers who were trying to run programs for these young people.

Making use of a bus belonging to the City of Croydon, the youth workers made themselves available to take young people home following Council-run activities at the local hall. They found themselves travelling around the district for three to four hours after an event and also discovered that a lot of youth came from neighbouring municipalities.

The committee then gained support from a local church group who not only offered to provide a bus but also provided bus drivers for this service. They were happy to have 'the bus' which is traditionally used by Sunday school groups, painted to attract young people.

Approaches made to commercial companies to run such a service met with a great deal of hesitation and concern for the safety of their drivers, yet given the response to date from young people, this bus could be commercially viable.

An interesting aside is the safety aspect of the bus proposal. While having initially been established to counteract the poor after-hours public transport services, it has become a safety bus for many young people who would otherwise themselves be at risk either of offending or of being offended against.

**Garage bands**

Having initiated the idea of garage bands, we discovered that garage bands and the encouragement of garage bands really started during the 1960s in Liverpool, England. Liverpool Council informed us that support of garage bands was undertaken as a means of addressing the high level of youth offending.

To the youth workers in the City of Croydon, many young people had expressed an interest in being part of a band or associated with a band. They wanted a facility in which to practice without the constant restraints of family and neighbourhood.

This proposal gained financial support from Rage Without Alcohol and the QUIT campaign. Though money was available though the Good Neighbourhood program, these
two groups provided additional funding and consequently we were able to get a facility and also purchase equipment. In addition, professional rock bands came into the area to provide training days for potential musicians.

A monastery donated an unused squash court in a sparsely populated area. The Office of Corrections thought that through its contacts it would be able to provide materials for the development of this court into a viable practice studio.

To date the young people with an interest in this project have donated a lot of their own time to get this project off the ground. The building is in a gully on the church property with very poor access. It was envisaged that Office of Corrections clients would develop appropriate roadways; however, the young people themselves decided to take the initiative and consequently held working bees to get access into the building.

Within the next few weeks offenders already on Community Based Orders will rebuild the facility.

Discount Cinema Tickets

While a number of the cinemas in Melbourne offer discount admissions on Tuesday nights and student concessions at most other screenings, it is still a very costly exercise for young people to attend the cinema.

The committee looked into subsidising cinema tickets and making these discounted tickets available to students, unemployed young people and those receiving social security payments.

An approach was made to the owner of the local cinema, whose response was quite encouraging. He was not only prepared to pilot the program of discounted tickets, which would initially be subsidised by the Good Neighbourhood program, but be prepared to continue the program without financial backing.

All tickets including the existing discounted tickets would be subsidised a further $1.50 on the presentation of a discount voucher and proof of being a student, unemployed or receiving social security payments. These vouchers would be available at schools, at the local CES and at local CYSS programs. They would also be made available to the police for distribution. The cinema owner expressed interest in encouraging family groups to attend his cinema. He proposed his own subsidy for family groups at his cinemas.

This idea has already gained a great deal of support and interest from young people in the community.

The Great North-South Walk

Outward Bound courses have existed for quite some time and are popular in the community. These types of courses have been tried and are still in use in many states of Australia as programs for young offenders.

The Croydon proposal stems from the belief that young people who come to the attention of police and the courts could be assisted if their level of self-worth and self-esteem was raised.

The proposal was for an Outward Bound type course, which would be called 'The Great North-South Walk' and would be held in the Western District of Victoria. It would be conducted over nine days and consist of trekking, canoeing, bike riding and a community work project. Fifteen young people between the ages of 14 and 19 would be invited to attend.

This trek is to occur in late July. To date, clients of the Office of Corrections, Community Services Victoria and young people identified as at risk by their own families, by the courts and community youth workers have been enrolled in this adventure.

All equipment including bicycles, canoes, wet weather gear and trekking equipment has been donated. The money set aside for this program is mainly to be used in employing an
experienced Outward Bound instructor who will take primary responsibility for the program. Staff of both the Office of Corrections and the City of Croydon will also be participating in the trek.

'No Wine' Bar

It had come to the attention of the Community Corrections Officer responsible for supervising clients in the Croydon area that a high percentage of the younger offenders under her supervision had alcohol problems. It was also felt that for many young people few options for entertainment existed other than in local hotels where peer group pressure demanded young people consume alcohol, irrespective of their age.

A 'no wine' bar was proposed. This would be an environment which had all the social draw cards of a hotel or entertainment facility but without the presence of alcohol.

This does not mean that the bar would serve low percentage alcohol drinks but rather, non-alcoholic cocktails. Cocktails that would be visually interesting and pleasing to the palate.

To develop a range of non-alcoholic cocktails a competition was arranged between all Melbourne Metropolitan colleges with Hospitality Courses. The competition culminated on Friday, 28 July 1989 at the Box Hill TAFE hospitality schools restaurant and prize money totalling $2,000 was given to the young people presenting the best non-alcoholic cocktails.

In conjunction with this competition, a business plan is presently being developed with the assistance of the Business School from Outer East College of TAFE. This proposal is aimed at developing a self-sufficient commercially viable facility in which the cocktails developed will be available along with food and entertainment.

The garage bands referred to earlier will have the opportunity to use this facility for a public appearance and 'the bus' will be linked to this facility.

As a commercial venture, this proposal will be seeking financial support from business groups and the community. To date, support has been gained from Outer East TAFE College in terms of a business plan and from Croydon Council who have indicated their preparedness to provide this project with a home.

This proposal should result in the development of a highly viable entertainment facility which, while being available for young people, will also be available to the broader community during the remainder of the day.

Safe Train

The one proposal which has received a great deal of media attention has been that of a 'safe train'.

Although a number of perceptions of this program have been conveyed to the community by both politicians and the media, the initial proposal was to rent a two carriage train which would start at Lilydale and stop at all stations through to Ringwood before continuing express to the city. The train would depart at approximately six o'clock Friday and Saturday evenings and would return from the City, going express from the City to Ringwood at approximately midnight. Parents and interested persons could greet the train at stations between Ringwood and Lilydale.

This proposal was developed not simply because trains were considered unsafe to travel on, but because many of the assaults that took place, occurred late at night when few people were on the trains or stations. By increasing the numbers of people on the trains and on the platforms, it was felt that the likelihood of offences occurring would decline.

As an enticement to get people on the trains, two policemen would be employed to travel the train and entertainment would be provided in these two carriages. Entertainment would take the form of a jukebox and/or live entertainment.
This program should be finalised within the next month or so, at which time state
ministers for transport, police, representatives of the railways and unions will meet to discuss
the implementation of this proposal.
While all people would be encouraged to use the safe train and age would not be a
limitation, people under the age of 13 years would be discouraged from travelling without
some form of parental supervision. Individuals displaying antisocial behaviour, such as
drunkenness or hooliganism would not be permitted on the train and their behaviour would
be reported to their parents by the police if necessary.

Networking
This committee has seen the effective development of networks. Each of the programs has
led to the development of extensive involvement with other parts of the community and an
awareness of all participants of each other's activities.
Examples of cooperation are many:
- schools have been much more aware of the need for efficient communication.
  They have been made aware of how the Office of Corrections' clients can assist
  them in grounds maintenance, for example;
- sign-writers, the church and council maintenance staff combined to develop 'the
  bus';
- churches, local musicians, government organisations such as Quit and Rage
  without Alcohol and the manpower of the Office of Corrections joined forces for
  the garage bands;
- a local cinema owner has, with the support of the Good Neighbourhood
  committee, been able to express his commitment to the community;
- Outward Bound programs, government departments, individuals dealing with
  offenders and councils joined to implement 'the Great North-South Walk';
- TAFE Colleges, the Australian Bar Tenders Guild, soft drink companies have all
  joined forces to develop the 'no wine bar' concept;
- police, unions and ministers, along with the community as a whole have all got
  behind the safe train proposal; and
- young people have not just been assisting in the formulation of programs but have
  been active in their implementation.

The networks that are developed in this way are beneficial, not only to the programs
being developed but also to all participants.

Related Benefits
From an Office of Corrections' point of view, this has not only highlighted our profile in the
community, but has linked us with positive entrepreneurial approaches to crime prevention
within the community.
This idea of Student Information Officers has the potential to revolutionise the flow of
information within all schools. Should it prove to be successful it may be replicated within
other groups in the community.
The success of 'the bus' may find other community groups being prepared to donate the
services of their vehicles to assist when public transport is unavailable. It may also prove to
bus companies that it is commercially viable and safe to provide such a service in this and
other unserviced areas.
Discounted cinema tickets may encourage other cinema owners to replicate the
initiative. Cheaper tickets and family concessions may see cinema attendances increase,
improve the profitability of smaller cinemas and see family units use this as a form of family activity.

The concept of 'the Great North-South Walk' may also provide a viable sentencing option to courts and the contacts now developed will be used to run similar Office of Corrections programs statewide.

Viable alternatives to alcoholic beverages which can be served in both licensed and public facility may flow on from the 'No Wine Bar' proposal. It may also result in entertainment venues being developed for this relatively untapped market.

Reductions in the numbers of carriages on late trains to increase the numbers of people in carriages may result in safer more frequently used public transport.

**Conclusion**

As individuals and organisations we have a responsibility to use our knowledge and experience in conjunction with the community and its resources to develop strategies for crime prevention, particularly amongst young people.