Crime in South Australia is at no greater level than elsewhere in Australia and is still significantly behind many other western countries. However, South Australian crime rates continue to increase. Policing is now at a crossroads, because traditional methods can neither reduce nor contain crime, and innovative ideas must be considered so that the situation may be improved.

The approach to policing in South Australia has changed considerably in recent times, and it was realised that, if the South Australian police were to make any progress in the fight against crime, then the community would have to be fully involved. Consequently, the concept of community policing was introduced as a priority. The public has always known that individuals and the police are equally responsible for crime prevention, yet reintroducing the idea of police and the community ‘working together’ continues to be a challenge.

Traditional policing has concentrated on maintaining law and order, as well as the investigation and detection of crime, and the goals of policing are:

- to protect life and property;
- to preserve the peace;
- to maintain law and order;
- to prevent and detect crime; and
- to assist the public in circumstances of personal emergency.

In the past, crime prevention has relied mainly on ‘deterrence by example’ and the sight of a large police officer in uniform. This was also the time when policing was entirely reactive. The police force reacted to reported crime in the same way that a fire brigade reacts to a call about a fire: they rushed forth, dealt with the reported situation, and then returned to base to wait for the next call. Of course, answering calls to assist members of the public is still an
important police function-as is the detection of criminals-but it is only part of the whole policing picture.

A proactive police response has been developed and such schemes as Operation Noah operate nationally to give the public a chance to become involved in the fight against illegal drugs. Other initiatives have been targeted toward the reduction of specific crimes in which the police and public can respond together, for example, Operation Paradox and Operation Keeper.

Operation Paradox was a phone-in aimed at the reduction and detection of child abuse. In an eight-hour period, the operation resulted in 341 telephone calls. These telephone calls created 132 investigations, and led to ten arrests. The unveiling of this usually hidden crime was most successful in raising public awareness of the extent of the problem.

Operation Keeper was another anti-child abuse campaign which commenced on 18 February 1991 and was based within a particular suburb of Adelaide. The assistance of other government agencies was enlisted and a task force of experienced police officers formed. The operation has proved highly successful with forty-four arrests for 174 offences. A number of investigations are still pending: 90 per cent of which are expected to result in court appearances. This operation also uncovered the activities of five hard-core paedophiles. Whilst Operation Keeper was successful, the causes of child abuse have also to be addressed using a multi-agency approach and community assistance. This has resulted in the specialised training of ten Criminal Investigation Branch officers to deal with the sensitivities of child abuse.

Regional Response Groups

The creation and use of regional response groups within the South Australian metropolitan police areas gives an ability to provide high profile policing to identified trouble spots. Although this is a preventative measure, it has helped reduce some community fear of crime. A reduction of crime has also been noted in areas of previously poor reputation and the initiative has been seen by many members of the public as very positive. A selection of the more noteworthy activities of the regional groups include:

- one offender was apprehended for illegal use of a motor vehicle which led to a clear-up of over sixty similar offences;
- a further four offenders were later arrested, clearing up a total of 100 to 150 illegal-use offences;
- three persons were arrested resulting in the recovery of two stolen cars and $15,000 worth of goods;
- a gang of youths were arrested for stripping cars in the Port Gawler area, which is a well-known dumping place; and
- yet another man was arrested for his involvement in hundreds of break-ins over a period of four years, the profits of which were used mainly to support a drug habit.
In the past it has been said that 60 to 80 per cent of economic crime of a predatory nature has been to support a drugs habit, but now a new kind of problem is emerging. Robberies of a more personalised nature, yielding a poorer return, are now being seen. Also, furniture, bedding and food is being stolen in house breaks. Violence on the streets is occurring due to increasing numbers of young people on the streets and this is being further stimulated by alcohol use. These signs are telling us that the reactive role is no longer, by itself, a satisfactory role for police. Even moving to a more proactive mould in targeting problems is still, to a certain extent, reactive as police are still chasing crimes that have been committed.

Community Policing

As a proper extension to police activities-looking to a preventive philosophy—the South Australian police have joined in an ambitious program of community policing and crime prevention methods involving the wider community. The community policing and crime prevention schemes which are currently in use in South Australia include:

- **Police Aides Scheme**: This scheme requires the involvement and training of Aboriginal people to police traditional lands and laws accepted by local communities. (Because of its success, the Police Aides Scheme has now been introduced to a suburban area with a large Aboriginal population.)

- **Neighbourhood Watch/Rural Watch**: These well known community policing schemes have expanded in South Australia to incorporate 318 schemes within thirty-two areas. Some individual areas have adopted their own initiatives, such as parental awareness or security assistance for the aged.

- **Business Watch**: Business Watch is a Neighbourhood Watch type scheme for non-residential areas, and has been introduced into the inner-city business districts of Adelaide. Traders are involved in self-help ideas to prevent shop stealing and hold-ups, and offer a ‘safety shop’ refuge to visitors or customers who may feel threatened by criminal activity.

- **HomeAssist**: The HomeAssist scheme developed with the assistance of Federal, state and local governments to improve the quality of life for the elderly, disabled, and those of limited financial resources. The aim was to improve their home security, and thereby reduce the fear of crime. Two police officers have been employed by home and community care to assist in the implementation of this scheme which is being coordinated by over thirty local councils and service agencies. The police officers have serviced over 6,000 people with either advice or a full security survey since November 1990.

- **Police Deputies Club**: This is a constant contact club designed to promote crime prevention awareness and community responsibility amongst primary school children. Since its launch in December 1989 it has attracted over 11,000 children.

- **School Watch**: This is a joint police/education department scheme designed to reduce theft, arson and vandalism in participating schools by involving staff, students, parents and local residents in crime prevention activities focussed on those schools. A police officer has been seconded to the education department as part of the project team. An initial pilot scheme in a ‘problem’ high school significantly reduced the incidence of crime.
• Blue Light Activities: These activities have been expanded to include camps and nightclubs as well as up to ten discos. The camps involve street kids, Aboriginal children, and problem youth, as well as identified youth leaders and school groups.

• Together Against Crime: Regional Together Against Crime committees have been formed. Local police are involved in crime prevention units, and local 'Bonnemaison' style committees are now established in several suburban and country townships.

• Juvenile Diversionary Cautioning Scheme: This scheme, which began operation in February 1989, aims to divert juveniles (particularly Aboriginal juveniles) from the criminal justice system. Results of an evaluation of the first twelve months show that the program is successful and that police use of discretionary powers had increased, reducing arrests in favour of other alternatives. However, over the same period the number of all street offences increased.

Other schemes such as Transit Watch and Hospital Watch involve the police and other government agencies in an effort to reduce criminal activity in certain environments. From these examples it can be seen that the South Australian police are involved in many different efforts aimed at reducing crime.

Problem Oriented Policing

A proactive crime prevention measure that is being trialled in a suburb of Adelaide ensures that police patrol personnel look at causes of crime and potential crime in particular areas, rather than just dealing with incidents. This often requires the enlistment of expertise from other agencies. To date there has been remarkable success, plus an increase in job satisfaction for those involved.
Looking For Causes of Crime

Observations worldwide indicate the following as the main causes of crime:

- under-achievement in education;
- economic downturn;
- lack of employment opportunities;
- boredom;
- drug experimentation;
- exploitation by associates with drugs;
- violence and crime committed;
- fear inducing activities;
- racism; and
- alcoholism.

This is not an exhaustive list, but is a collection of causative factors, particularly when the more common crimes of breaking and enter, car theft, robbery and street violence are considered. Knowing the causes then, the challenge for the police and the community is to:

- become problem solvers;
- become total service providers; and
- integrate with the justice system.

Other solutions include:

- the harnessing of the wider organisation of entities, groups and agencies into a concerted effort against crime;
- restoring social values—there is a great opportunity for church leaders to encourage and lead a drive towards increased values;
- the government and private enterprise providing more employment opportunities; and
- community representative groups, such as councils, representing their residents with stated policy and action.