Human service organisations must be proficient at communication to bring about productive change. Communication is important for the service provider who must relate to community groups to bring about their integration. It is the skills of the service providers that are important, as they act as enablers, catalysts, educators and coordinators. Service providers can help to bring about change through consensus or conflict resolution. They may also empower a group so that the group itself can bring about social change. However, service providers are members of human service organisations; organisations within a community that provide services which can be categorised as Function Specific, Special Mission or Cross Community (Weiner 1982, p. 410).

Function Specific Communication

Function specific organisations provide specialist services which address needs in such broad fields as education, health, police, corrections, social security and recreation. Within function specific organisations, relationships exist in both lateral and longitudinal directions, and a network arises when people talk with each other and share ideas, information and resources. Network communication needs to be continuous and should involve a variety of methods. It is also supportive but does not have to be based on friendships.

The function specific networks are links between autonomous teams within an organisation. These teams work together to make the organisation an effective unit. These types of networks are particularly important in a...
number of areas, particularly in information gathering. With a network, only that information currently required can be selected and acquired. For example, within the police force, different units share information and resources which assist each group to advance its objectives and reduce duplication.

Special Mission Communication
Special mission human services participate in special tasks or efforts targeted at specific groups within a community. For example, intellectually disabled individuals who are associated with particular agencies may have programs developed for them which require the resources of other organisations. In this situation there is a need for an external network. The specialist needs required by an individual cannot be met by one organisation alone: other specialist organisations must be accessed for expertise and resources, and in this way, each organisation’s respective objectives are furthered.

A special mission network consists of a set of interrelated units. Each unit has its own separate job to do but does it within the context of the broader task—the units help themselves by helping each other. Networks are able to access people or resources by ‘cutting through’ the organisations which use them.

Cross Community Communication
There are some community needs which cannot be accommodated by a particular agency, but require input from several, if not all, community organisations. This requires powerful links between autonomous organisations and in order to deal with complex community issues, new teams must be established which are able to cooperate and communicate effectively. Community needs are usually complex issues which affect a large proportion of the community. For example, crime and crime prevention is too complex an issue to be dealt with by any single special mission or function specific group. It requires input from many function specific organisations incorporating all areas of government and the community.

At a time when there are increasing demands on services and decreasing resources, the expectation remains that services be improved. Networks occurring between human service providers and within and between organisations have the advantage that they allow for economic sharing of information, knowledge and resources. Networking allows organisations to continue with their work, provide innovative and effective outcomes, and contribute towards achieving larger, more meaningful goals.

In Victoria, a unique experience has been the Good Neighbourhood Program which is an organisation developed to identify and address the broad social issue of crime prevention. The Good Neighbourhood Committees (established as a result of a seeding grant) successfully brought together individuals and organisations to take responsibility for a social issue within the community. These committees implemented initiatives aimed at impacting on the social problem of crime. Members came from a wide range of backgrounds—business, police, corrections, churches, social services, local
government, politicians, schools and other interested individuals. Each individual committee member was also part of an external unit which had its own networks, contacts, resources and information. This mix of individuals ensured a dispersed network, with varied kinds of membership. Although not a large group, the diversity of the networks within the Good Neighbourhood Program ensured successful integration and access to resources, ideas and information. This communication may otherwise have only been gained through slow moving official channels. The Good Neighbourhood Program networks in Croydon resulted in:

- a local church group establishing an after-hours Saturday bus service to transport young people within the community;
- discount cinema tickets being provided by a local cinema owner following an approach by a local optometrist and student;
- a Saturday night ‘safe’ train which provides safety and entertainment to and from the city. It is manned by police and volunteers and met by volunteers on its return;
- facilities for garage bands being established with the assistance of a local monastery, music shop, council, the Office of Corrections and young musicians; and
- adventure camps, Student Information Officers and a non-alcoholic wine bar being developed through the assistance of police, schools, local councils, the Office of Corrections, Community Services Departments and a local supermarket.

The results of this innovative approach to the social problem of crime has provided the Croydon community with something tangible for their efforts. Whether crime has been reduced as a result of these initiatives can always be debated, but the Good Neighbourhood Program is able to say, categorically, that crime prevention has been achieved through the implementation of programs. This is evidenced by a lack of violence on the safe train, the garage bands which give a direction to energy of otherwise dislocated individuals, a bus service that reduces the boredom associated with walking long distances late at night, cinema tickets which give young people an inexpensive entertainment opportunity, and young ‘at risk’ people who are now given the opportunity to take part in adventure camps and shown that their lives can be more productive and purposeful.

**Networking in the Community**

The value of networking in the community is unlikely to be disputed. Real issues to be decided are: what is meant by networking and how does one go about networking? There are two major ways of viewing networking arrangements.

The first networking method places a great concentration on process. So much so, that one can become totally absorbed and involved in the process.
for its own sake. The attraction of this method is in its safety. When and if things go wrong, one can point to the fact that all the correct steps were followed.

The second method of networking is results-oriented and involves considerable risk taking. If the desired result is not achieved, the group involved is vulnerable to blame for any use of unorthodox methods. There can be no falling back on the safety of accepted process. Individuals and organisations need to be very aware of the risks involved in results-oriented networking. Preference is clearly for a result-orientated networking structure, but it is recognised that this can only operate within a very supportive organisational environment.

How to Organise a Community Structure-The Normal Process

Having arrived at an issue, an auspice agency would form a committee. Focusing on the issue, this committee would contact relevant groups in the community and ask them to provide a representative to meet with the committee. The representative would be required to report to the committee on various items pertinent to the issue. It must be noted that, with some issue areas, a formal structure would not exist. For example, unemployed youth cannot always be represented by a formal group. In this situation, a lengthy and involved procedure occurs in trying to find a representative for that group.

Having formed a committee, the tasks required to deal with the issues must be established. This is usually accomplished by surveying large quantities of information on the topic: this is often time-consuming. In surveys where the direction is uncertain, a wide range of studies may occur which, when examined, rarely show a relationship with the statistical material relating to the issue.

How to Organise a Community Structure-An Alternative

The Good Neighbourhood Program, Croydon

In commencing the Good Neighbourhood Program in Croydon, the topic at hand was widely advertised by word of mouth, letters and general publicity, and people who were interested were asked to come forward. This type of advertising encourages the involvement of people who may not be directly connected with the issue, and such individuals may have both the necessary time and skills required to assist in research.

Three different types of surveys were available to the Good Neighbourhood Committee. The first was a formal survey which had been conducted two years previously. This questionnaire related to a number of issues, but particularly to public transport and safety issues, and had been answered by 200 young people. The second survey was very thorough. It was conducted through a local TAFE College which exhaustively sought information from young people regarding their entertainment options.

The third survey was a less expensive and far more effective method. For this survey, one of the committee members visited local secondary schools in the Croydon area. A talk was presented to several classes from each school.
and it commenced with the statement that the best idea suggested by the class would get $20. On every occasion that this technique was used, the young people were extremely sceptical; they could not believe that anyone was prepared to offer them money for an idea. However, when a student volunteered an idea, it was written on the blackboard and the remaining students were told that, unless a better idea came forward, that student would receive $20. Soon, students were working frantically in groups to originate project ideas relating to identified problems. At this point, the money had become a secondary issue. The majority of students had concluded that, if someone was prepared to offer money, they must be quite serious about using the information gained. As a follow up to this survey technique, when programs were designed, they were brought back to the original group for fine-tuning. A continuing relationship is maintained by informing the group of their idea’s progress.

At the first three meetings of the Good Neighbourhood committee, members tried to work out the problems that caused young people to be involved with crime and what some of the solutions might be. Some fairly elaborate processes were worked through to try and solve these problems. However, this proved frustrating and it was decided to look at the issues and problems which had been raised in our discussion with the students and which were important to the wider community. These problems included issues such as a lack of transportation, lack of money, lack of entertainment options, and lack of information for young people. These issues were adopted by the committee and were worked through to find solutions.

When a program design is looked at in a committee, each member should have equal participation in the process. It is often forgotten that each member has different skills and different interests. For example, some people are able to speak well at public forums, others are much better suited to speaking in small group situations or in writing down their thoughts. Similarly in program design, some people are able to generate effective programs because of their experience and others are not.

In the Croydon Good Neighbourhood Program, the proposed programs from the surveys were detailed by council officers and brought back to the community group for discussion, acceptance or rejection. This discussion was important as it allowed committee members to manipulate the proposals into a workable form-to take the raw program design ideas that had been generated and to fine-tune them. For example, the police could fine-tune programs to point out what is practical and feasible. This information was then used to modify the programs so that they would work.

The issues of crime prevention can be very broad in their scope and it is a challenge to those working with community groups to assist in developing smaller-scale strategies which result in a local benefit. Rather than continue to look at global issues on a global scale, the Croydon Good Neighbourhood committee reduced issues to a local and more manageable level.

Another important aspect of the committee’s community networking is the process of using individual’s abilities. It is always recommended that projects be put into action utilising the skills of those people best capable. For example, a local businessman, who had been quiet in relation to the surveying of our needs and had been inactive in relation to the program design, took upon himself the project of implementing one of the devised programs. This
project resulted from an expressed need by young people for cheaper movies at weekend times, particularly when they were not studying and they were allowed out by their parents. The businessman went with the young person who had originated the idea and spoke to the cinema managers. Initially, there was little response, but because of his knowledge and capabilities, the businessman pursued the matter until one cinema owner accepted the proposal and took $1.50 off the ticket price for any movie at any time for a student.

In networking within a community it should be recognised that the great majority of people do not want to be on committees, but are out there waiting to be asked to contribute to the committee in some small way. It is quite easy to get community support and assistance when one asks. For example, the Croydon Shuttle Bus program has a volunteer group which provided the bus. Driver training was paid for twenty volunteers, and these volunteers (together with their bus) now provide a rostered service to required venues. It was not the desire of this volunteer group to be on a committee that met, to be the committee secretary, or to get involved in committee structures, yet these volunteers were quite happy to do the work required to ensure the success of the program. Similarly, many community volunteers have been prepared to meet the late train on a Saturday night (12.30 a.m. Sunday morning) and ensure that those leaving the train disperse without any incidents or trouble. These volunteers are the action part of the community network. They are not involved in all the other aspects of the Good Neighbourhood Program because they do not want to be involved (although they are welcome to become involved further, should they wish).

Another major element of the normal committee is its extravagant bureaucracy. Often worse than state and Federal governments or huge private enterprise monoliths, a committee will frequently spend a lot of time on procedures and will insist that there be no decisions or no expenditure without the full voting authority of the whole committee. Of course, all this bureaucracy takes time.

One of the things that was found in the Good Neighbourhood Program in Croydon was that the ability to be non-bureaucratic leads to effective action which greatly involves the community. The example given previously of the businessman negotiating a successful deal with the local cinema is also an example of how to deal with things in a non-bureaucratic way. The committee gave the businessman the authority to go away and negotiate whatever he thought appropriate knowing that he had the full backing of the committee. The committee did not expect the results achieved, yet were quite happy with them. A committee should establish the broad parameters within which each member can operate-the major guideline being ‘get a result’.

Many community groups are prepared to offer a considerable amount of assistance in specific areas. There are often gaps in the whole program implementation which people cannot be found to fill. These gaps should be taken by paid staff—even though they may be boring, awkward, unpleasant and difficult—so that the program can keep moving.

What has not been stated explicitly is that individuals want action to occur quickly. When committees work through the common form of community networking, action takes a long time. To get a program off the
ground, early results are required to encourage the committee (and others who are on
the fringe) that the program undertaken is a worthwhile initiative.

Significant victories are needed very early in the program’s development and these achievements need to be publicised-by informal word of mouth, public speaking, or the media. The community needs to be aware of the program and the committee needs credibility and prominence. The knowledge that a particular organisation, program or committee gets results will inevitably lead to other community groups wanting to become a part of the program.

Conclusion

The essentials to effective community networking are to:

• allow people to be involved to the level they wish;
• take bite-size pieces of the larger problem;
• recognise that people have particular skills;
• work with people who are interested in the subject;
• always look to the end result;
• be action-based;
• be as non-bureaucratic as possible; and
• achieve results early in the process.

There are many resources for crime prevention in the community. It is a matter of effectively networking them to get results.

References