COMMUNITY CRIME PREVENTION
TOWARD SAFER COMMUNITIES

Colin Hicks

The theme of this conference concerns the private sector and community involvement in the criminal justice system. It should be said at the outset, however, that crime prevention through community development and the development of the Safer Community program is not seen by the community as part of the mainstream criminal justice system. While central government may view the initiatives as contributing to broad criminal justice goals, local governments and communities are more likely to see the initiatives as contributing to the enhancement of secure environments in which people live. The distinction is an important one. Communities are reluctant to be seen as a part of the formal systems of crime control.

New Zealand has not experienced in any real sense a comprehensive or coherent strategic approach in the ordering of responses to crime. Like many countries the criminal justice system has grown and responded to the incidence of crime, and the seriousness with which crime is perceived. The notion of system in this respect is not always apparent. Rather, fragmentation of effort often prevails.

In terms of crime prevention the police have assumed the major responsibility for organising responses, along with the private security industry, and the community generally. Mostly, those responses have been related to what is known as situational crime prevention, concerned with reducing opportunities for crimes to be committed.

Although many community groups and other organisations are involved in community development work, there are few that focus on crime prevention per se. There is little evidence of programs or approaches that might be described as crime prevention-specific.

No one agency of government, either at central or local government level has a responsibility for crime prevention. There is no one agency responsible
for coordinating the efforts of the variety of agencies that could be said to contribute in various ways to reducing the likelihood that crime will occur.

The links or inter-dependencies between social policy areas are not recognised explicitly and resources are not always allocated according to agreed priority criteria. In short, crime prevention activities have been fragmented and not seen as a significant item in the menu of responses to crime from a central government standpoint.

**Defining Crime Prevention**

For the purposes of this paper crime prevention is defined as any purposeful activity which directly or indirectly reduces the likelihood that a crime or crimes will occur. By implication the prevention of victimisation is included.

Of course, that is a broad description which deserves further refinement. Both situational and social crime prevention activities find expression in the programs of Safer Community Councils, and together may be described as community-based crime prevention.

Although activities designed to influence the prevention of re-offending (by those already subject to some form of supervision within the criminal justice corrections system) contribute to crime reduction or prevention overall, for the purposes of this paper activities to prevent recidivism are not taken into account.

Finding a balance between defensive and offensive crime prevention approaches may be important. Prevention policies need to be developed with that in mind and the control of unintended side-effects need to be monitored. Increased crime prevention activities or publicity campaigns about crime may generate increased fear of crime in a community, for instance.

**The Safer Community Concept**

The models of crime prevention tend to create an artificial distinction between situational and social approaches. In practice the distinctions between the models is less clear-cut.

Prevention of an exclusively situational nature may tend to mobilise communities which are the least vulnerable such as with Neighbourhood Support, and widen the gap between safe and unsafe zones in residential districts. A concentration on a social crime prevention approach may lead to programs that make people "feel good" but cannot be demonstrated to have any real impact on crime and antisocial behaviour.

An approach that employs both situational and social crime prevention models, and shapes them to suit local conditions would seem to be desirable. That is what has been the aim for with the development of the Safer Community model in New Zealand.

The Safer Community approach is founded on the belief that when communities begin to "own" the problems of crime they will be motivated to work to solve those problems or minimise the effects of crime. An inherent aspect of the model is that there are gains in mobilising people and other
resources to identify and work together to create safer communities, and to reinforce feelings of individual and community security.

Pivotal to the concept is the notion of political leadership. That is, the idea that elected officials need to demonstrate or reflect the concerns of the community and be prepared to be involved directly in responding to crime and insecurity.

Other key elements of the concept are the importance of identifying and determining needs (through safety audits and consultation); coordinating resources (people, funds, and ideas); and channelling those resources and energies into positive and proactive activities.

The origins

There is nothing new in the idea that individuals and communities should help themselves. The Royal NZ Plunket Society, for example, was founded on the belief that mothers (in particular) were to be given some support and guidance so that child health could be maintained, and ill-health preventive measures activated, without the need for intensive professional medical intervention.

Most responses to crime have been direct and have involved crime control approaches. The accent has been on apprehending, prosecuting, and sentencing those persons identified as criminal. Little effort has been directed at the root causes of crime, or toward managing the problems of crime in the community.

Today, with the growing concern about crime and its effects, and the costs both socially and economically of such behaviours, new approaches need to be found. A recognition that the traditional, reactive responses initiated from within the criminal justice system are no longer sufficient has led to a conclusion that crime prevention through community development can play an important role in contributing to broad social objectives, and help reduce the reliance on the formal systems of control. Overseas experiences suggest the value of such change, or shift in emphasis.

The French model

A realisation that repression and punishment were not capable (essential as they might be to the conduct of a criminal justice system) of tackling the underlying social problems and situations that give rise to crime, motivated the development of the French model. In essence, the French approach has been to identify the social "causes" of crime, and develop partnerships (between levels of government and with community and sectoral interests) of cooperation and coordination. The responses have been directed at the causes, rather than the symptoms; at the situations that make criminals, rather than the criminals themselves.

Other models

Similar initiatives have developed in many other countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, the USA, and in Europe. In some countries, such as Sweden, the community development model tends to be
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directed at creating Safe Communities, particularly with preventing personal injury and harm, either intended or unintended. Road Safety, anti-violence, and occupational health and safety may therefore be embraced by such an approach. The overlap with the Healthy Cities or Healthy Communities approach is apparent.

*The movement*

Fashions come and go in the field of responding to crime, like most other industries. At present there is a worldwide propensity to search for more cost-efficient and effective ways of responding than the traditional, and a developing trend is to adopt proactive rather than reactive strategies. Crime prevention is on the ascendency, and NZ has not been immune from the tide of opinion. The police have anticipated much of the movement with their community oriented policing methods and organisation.

The idea of mobilising communities to take responsibility for preventing crime is capturing the imagination of decision-makers worldwide to the extent of becoming an international movement. Collaboration between the European Forum of Local Authorities, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the US Congress of Mayors has seen the organisation of international conferences, and coordination mechanisms for the dissemination of information developed. Many formal and informal links exist between and within countries in the development of the notion of crime prevention through community development.

*The rationale*

For central governments there is a considerable attraction in trying to find ways of reducing fiscal exposure or risks in criminal justice matters. If this can be effected by investing in preventive measures rather than expensive enforcement and correction systems, then so much the better.

The responsibility for responding to crime has fallen generally on central governments. Whenever a spate of offending occurs the cry goes up for more police, or harsher penalties. Governments are expected to react to protect the public after the event, and little or no acceptance of community responsibility for responding to crime is registered.

To rely on the formal systems of control to maintain "law and order" is not only costly but also in the extreme can be undesirable. If the development of formal systems of control are somehow a response to the perceived "breakdown" of the informal systems of management and social control then there is likely to be a benefit in supporting and enhancing the informal systems rather than the formal. That is at the heart of the community crime prevention approach.

The crime-prevention-through-community-development or Safer Community approach seeks to allow communities to share that responsibility by processes that empower the community. That is, through identifying needs, and deciding what actions to take to meet those needs.
Devolution
In the NZ context there has been a perceptible shift of responsibility and function between central and local government, particularly in relation to the delivery of some social services.

The processes of devolving those responsibilities or functions may be problematic but there is little doubt that local governments and communities are being asked to shoulder greater responsibility for the delivery and management of many services, which may range from education and health to roads and bridges.

In terms of the delivery of crime prevention services local government has had little direct involvement (except for the Safer Community Pilot Program), but, neither has central government: therefore, a possible transfer or sharing of function would not challenge any traditional structures.

Partnership
The need for well-planned and executed initiatives between agencies and levels of government in matters of preventing crime is being recognised. If a broader crime prevention strategy is to be developed involving the whole community a partnership model needs to be promoted.

Partnerships or collaboration and coordination both between agencies, and between governments is important. But, so too is the development of partnerships between local government and the community. The Safer Community approach outlined later in this paper provides an example of how partnerships could be built, and how local people might become involved in crime prevention activities and programs.

Accountability
The idea that those responsible for decision-making affecting the lives of people should be held accountable for their decisions is part of our democratic organisation. A refinement of that principle in the context of Safer Communities is to minimise the distance and the accessibility, between those charged with making decisions, and those to whom they are answerable. It is felt that this can be enhanced at the local level more easily than at central government level. For instance, it is difficult for central governments to respond adequately to particular crime problems at the local level.

Efficiency
By coordinating and focussing resources to meet identified needs or problems it may be expected that there will be efficiency gains. That is, more might be done by fewer resources provided that fragmentation and duplication of effort is minimised, and inter-dependencies are managed.

Effectiveness
It takes many different approaches and activities to produce good crime prevention outcomes. Effectiveness should be enhanced by developing partnerships of cooperation and collaboration, and adopting strategic
planning practices in the realm of crime responses generally, and crime prevention in particular.

**Privatisation**

The trend toward individual and community self-reliance, and the growing involvement of the private sector in responding to crime accelerates the processes of privatisation in society of recent years.

However, there is a more subtle, but not cynical privatisation aspect that can be presumed. It has become commonplace to sheet home to governments that it is their responsibility to maintain "law and order" and respond to crime. News media editors have a penchant for echoing what they perceive to be the wishes of the general public, and reminding responsible ministers of their duties. Little or no reflection is given to the responsibility of individuals, and communities to respond positively, and appropriately to crime. It is an interesting observation that when someone is convicted of a criminal offence they must accept full responsibility for their deed before the law. Yet, no corresponding moral or legal responsibility exists on others to prevent such offences.

**The Safer Community Pilot Program**

In February 1989 an Inter-departmental Officials Committee identified a number of objectives that could form the basis for developing a national crime prevention strategy. However, it was not until the establishment of the Prime Ministerial Safer Community Council in July 1990 that the first real step toward employing a coordinated approach was taken.

**Prime Ministerial Council (PMSCC)**

The PMSCC, made up of key ministers of government and the Mayors of four territorial local government bodies, was convened to guide policy development and to provide leadership. It was felt the new venture required as much authority and political commitment as possible. The Council is serviced by a Crime Prevention Administrative Unit from the Department of Justice.

**Timetable of Events**

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>Program launched Inaugural PMSCC</td>
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<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>Second meeting PMSCC</td>
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<td></td>
<td>September</td>
<td>All Safer Community Councils established</td>
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<td></td>
<td>October/Nov</td>
<td>Coordinators appointed</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Monitoring methods agreed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>October</td>
<td>Setting-up process evaluation conducted</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>Program evaluation begins</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December</td>
<td>Research Evaluation due</td>
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The Safer Community Councils

At the first meeting of the PMSCC the framework for the development of the pilot program was decided. That is, each participating local authority would establish a Safer Community Council whose members would be drawn from community interest groups or be nominated by social service agencies. Each Safer Community Council was responsible for preparing its own agenda to contribute to crime prevention and enhance community safety according to agreed guidelines.

The aims of the Safer Community Councils have been to:

- Plan for a safer community, and provide leadership as appropriate.
- Coordinate the efforts of agencies and groups working to enhance community safety.
- Provide a forum in which these agencies and groups can discuss crime prevention issues and concerns with a view to devising agreed strategies and promoting new initiatives.
- Involve a wide spectrum of community organisations and groups in planning, sponsorship, and implementation of crime prevention projects and activities.
- Foster local initiatives for the enhancement of community safety and to provide appropriate support and/or to support applications for assistance from central funds.
- Evaluate crime prevention programs and projects in the community that contribute to community safety.
- Raise awareness of the steps which individuals and groups can take to enhance individual and community safety.

Coordinators

Each Safer Community Council was responsible for appointing a Coordinator to liaise with community groups concerned with crime prevention and to coordinate the activities of agencies in the local area.

The Coordinators have been involved in setting-up the Safer Community Councils, and facilitating the development of a base from which the work of the Councils could proceed. Much of the work has been concerned with building community awareness about the problems and endeavouring to reduce unreasonable levels of fear about crime that may exist in a particular community.

It should be said that a most positive feature of the development of the Pilot Program has been the calibre of the Coordinators. It should also be noted that the smooth conduct relatively of the program owes a lot to their skills and fortitude, and to the fact that they have all been with the program from the beginning.

Projects

There is no doubt that the Safer Community concept has much to offer. The four participants have contributed greatly to the pool of information, knowledge and experience in the operation of such community-oriented organisations.
Two years (less in effect, of course) has been a very short time in which to expect positive, measurable crime prevention results. It is worth noting that the effectiveness tests that are applied to new approaches, such as crime prevention measures, derive from higher expectations of "success" than the more traditional systems of control. Nevertheless, it is probably true to say that sufficient activities and enthusiasm have been generated at local level to assert confidently that the pilot program has been effective, and worthwhile replicating.

The four Safer Community Councils have demonstrated that:

- There is value in communities "owning" the problems and determining the responses to those problems.
- There is value in developing an appreciation of the range of crime problems, and planning to focus resources in the area of most need.
- There is value in coordinating resources (ideas, energies and funds) and determining specific targets.
- There is value in building networks and laying the foundations for community development and cohesion where that seems to be lacking. This can be achieved by maintaining relationships with community groups and organisations and cooperating with other local government initiatives.
- It takes a lot of different approaches and a variety of projects to contribute effectively to crime reduction per se, and that no one approach contains the "answers" to crime prevention or the maintenance of community and individual safety.

It might be argued that two years has not provided enough time to trial the safer community approach. Perhaps the best test of the worth of the model has been the interest the pilot program has generated, even without any deliberate publicity outside the pilot program areas. Already there are a number of territorial local bodies keen to adopt the approach, or to join any expansion of the scheme.

It could be contended that "good" effects produced during a pilot program or evaluation period, might not be replicated in any expansion. It could be also true that an extension of the present term of the pilot program by, say, another year, may still not be sufficient to achieve any measurable results in terms of the levels or incidence of crime in a particular area.
Funding

The Pilot Program was established on the basis that central government would provide a limited amount of funding that might be matched either in money or kind by the local government organisations participating in the program. The resourcing arrangements were seen as an expression of the partnership between central and local government in this enterprise.

When the Councils were established it was agreed that central government funding would be provided from existing votes (police and justice on a fifty-fifty basis). The funding was to be as follows:

- Each Safer Community Council was to receive $40,000 as a contribution toward the employment costs of a full-time Coordinator (to be employed by the particular local body).

- Each Safer Community Council would also have access to project funds up to $30,000 per annum. $15,000 would be met from the Justice Vote and paid to the Councils directly. A further $15,000 per Council would be made available at the discretion of the police commander in whose district the Council operated.

It was understood that Councils would be free to raise funds as they saw fit, and to obtain additional resources as appropriate.

The Crime Prevention Administrative Unit

At the inaugural meeting of the Prime Ministerial Safer Communities Council (PMSCC) it was agreed to establish within the Department of Justice a unit to facilitate the development of the pilot programs, and to act as a link between central and local governments in the joint endeavour.

In practice it has meant providing support, information and expertise for the Safer Community Councils and their Coordinators.

Should the Safer Communities model be expanded it would be appropriate to consider the need for a permanent unit that could continue to provide the sort of services now delivered, as well as enhancing those services. In particular, the authority to coordinate or influence central government resources in relation to crime prevention activities would be desirable.

It may be important for any re-vamped Crime Prevention Administrative Unit to be seen to have some independence from the mainstream criminal justice agencies. The reasons for this have been previously identified.

Monitoring and evaluation

A research study of the setting-up process covering the first year of the operation of the pilot program was completed in November 1991. The study highlights the positive as well as the negative elements of the program as a whole, and provides a useful base in the preparation of guidelines for any future developments.
In some cases the Safer Community Councils have monitored and evaluated their own projects, and through the planning processes initiated are able to measure progress against objectives set for themselves.

An evaluation of the Pilot Program is due to be completed in December 1992. The research, commissioned by the Department of Justice, is being undertaken by Gray Matter Research Ltd (Gray 1991) and is designed to meet the following brief:

- To document the objectives, and expectations of the Safer Community Program.
- To describe the conduct of the Pilot Program in the four participating areas.
- Provide a record of the significant projects in the four Pilot Program areas including any indications of their "success" or "failure" as evidenced by change or the prospect of change.
- Ascertain any distinction between the project activities of the Safer Community Councils and other activities carried out in the local communities.
- Investigate and describe the relationships between the Safer Community Councils and relevant central government agencies, particularly any negative or positive effects on the "success" of the Pilot Program.
- Determine the public knowledge of, and reaction to the Pilot Program (in the four participating areas).
- Summarise, and analyse the views of key central and local government, and community members on the extent to which the Pilot Program has met, or has the potential to meet its objectives and realistic expectations held for the approach.

Prospects

In September 1992 the Prime Minister convened a meeting of the PMSCC at which a number of important decisions were taken. These related to:

- A willingness in principle to facilitate the development of new Safer Community Councils on the understanding that the territorial local authorities seeking to establish them demonstrated a commitment and readiness to do so.
- Authorisation for further developmental policy work to be undertaken, including funding proposals.
Agreement in principle that the Safer Community Program is worthy of enlargement to other geographical areas consistent with a national crime prevention strategic development.

A preliminary stage in the development of a national crime prevention strategy has been completed. Further work is proceeding on an interdepartmental basis, at official level, for the Cabinet Strategy Committee.

*Further development options*

The Safer Community Pilot Program has been developed in a "low key" manner. Little publicity outside the pilot areas has been given to the program, and the aim has been to take a controlled or measured approach to any developments from a national standpoint.

It is expected that any further developments will conform to the pattern established from the outset. For instance, it is unlikely that the size of the program will grow rapidly beyond the pilot stage (due for completion in December 1992). The reasons for this relate to the need to consider how ready local government and communities are to adopt the model, and to the belief that the program will require careful monitoring if adequate management is to be effected. It also relates to the belief that fanfares and "big bang" styles are inappropriate in the field of crime prevention.

The possibility that an enhanced Safer Community program might contribute in significant ways to the desired outcomes of the government-of-the-day leads to the need to put any partnership arrangements between central and local governments on a contractual basis. It is envisaged that Safer Community Councils might bid for resources on the strength of their proposals to undertake projects that contribute positively to national crime prevention objectives, and add to the sum of responses to crime.

The Safer Community model is not a panacea. It will have limitations in being able to deliver some products. But, it does have a potential to facilitate the implementation of a number of crime prevention related activities. For example, the organisation at local level is well placed to be a vehicle for delivering and coordinating nationally initiated campaigns. Campaigns related to road safety and family violence are but two examples where governments could contract with Safer Community Councils.

The development of a national crime prevention strategy offers the opportunity for those at local level to know how their efforts can contribute to the wider effort in responding to crime in the community and allows those contributions to be valued appropriately. This is an important element in sustaining community participation.

A number of local government bodies with knowledge of what has been happening in the Pilot Program areas have taken the initiative to establish, or work toward the establishment of Safer Community Councils. This trend, which is likely to continue, amply demonstrates that the concept of safer communities has attraction for local leaders.

When the Safer Community approach was first developed it was intended that partnerships would not only be formed between central governments and local governments, but also between central government
and Tangata Whenua. Such an arrangement was felt to offer an appropriate expression of partnership within the spirit of the Treaty of Waitangi. No such arrangements have been effected, but it is to be hoped that any enlargement of the program might accommodate a partnership or partnerships with Maori.

**Conclusions**

Most good ideas require dedication and commitment to make them work. It has been the efforts of a small group of people in each pilot program area that has allowed satisfactory progress to be made. Key players have been the Coordinators themselves, and the chairpersons of the Safer Community Councils.

The results to date are most encouraging. Networks have been established and good organisational models have been developed for different types of communities. The experiences within the pilot areas have provided a sound base to build the program to cover a larger proportion of the population. Although no precise measures of how the Pilot Program has influenced criminal offending, or the incidence of crime are available, at a local level there is a strong belief that good effects are being produced.

A number of factors seem to be converging to suggest that the time is right in New Zealand for the development of new ways to respond to crime. The old ways are proving to be ineffective and costly. The doctrines of punishment, deterrence, and retribution are coming under greater scrutiny, and communities are wanting to see more positive actions to improve security.

The critical questions relate to the political will, both at central and local government level, to recognise that responding to crime is best dealt with as a bipartisan issue, and the need for sound preparation if the crime prevention through community development is to be effective. Communities need to understand and support the approaches, and feel that they can participate to enhance individual and community security.

Any widely held view that central governments are imposing something on the community with the introduction of such crime prevention activities will reduce the likelihood that the approach will be effective. The Safer Community model is mostly about building "bottom-up" rather than "top-down" responses to crime.

**References**


**Postscript:** Since this paper was presented at the Conference, a Crime Prevention Unit has been established (October 1993) in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The main purposes of the Unit are to coordinate crime prevention activities and resources at a central government level, and to facilitate the development of crime prevention initiatives at a local level, including the Safer Community program.
The following list is indicative of the range and type of projects initiated as a result of the Safer Communities Program.

- A pilot scheme to assist children with deficient reading skills
- A short term campaign aimed at reducing the fear of crime
- Seminars on shop thefts
- Drug and alcohol information
- Policing of "dog nuisance" in one community
- A trade show on home security
- School programs about crime prevention
- Promotion of an age concern program
- Support for Maori wardens
- The employment of "grey power" community support constables for the elderly
- Working with gangs
- Revival and assessments of neighbourhood support programs in specific areas
- Provision of programs for "at risk" children
- Assistance with the provision of indoor sporting facilities
- A program for the elderly
- The promotion of ethnic tribunals for dispute resolution
- A variety of youth programs, including a poster competition, song contest, theatre promotions, a forum for secondary school students, organising a "Krypton" competition, and safer community awareness programs.
- An anti-graffiti campaign, coupled with a targeted confidence/leadership program
- Organisation of crime prevention "awareness" events
- After-school activities programs
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- Environmental scanning and safety-audit exercises
- The development of a youth-ethnic program—associated with a truancy program
- The organisation of a "safety week"
- A youth incentives program
- A concerted approach to environmental design
- PatROLS of a town centre (ravaged by vandalism) by Samoan community, backed by local business association
- Ensuring that the target groups have a say on the Safer Community Councils
- Developing networks, and maintaining communication
- Profiling a district to better target crime prevention programs
- Incentive weekends for "at risk" youth
- Targeting rugby, and rugby league clubs regarding excessive use of alcohol at clubrooms
- Participation in crime prevention related campaigns and activities
- Establishment of a community "drop-in" centre
- Project to improve local shopping centre and encourage people to want to use the area as a place for meeting people etc.
- Production of video and other publicity material
- Outdoor pursuits program, and follow-up scheme.