



From the Ground Up: Municipal crime prevention initiatives

Introduction

Municipalities play a key role in crime prevention. As the order of government closest to citizens – responsible for policing, housing, social services, recreation and public works – municipalities are well positioned to work with local groups to establish effective community-based programs. A number of municipal crime prevention activities have been supported by the Safer Communities Initiative.

Grassroots action; national umbrella

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), which represents municipal governments across Canada, has long been an advocate of crime prevention through social development. Among other activities, it is encouraging the establishment of local crime prevention councils and formulating tools to help municipalities combat drug-related crime.

This publication is part of the Caledon Institute's crime prevention series of community stories, produced in collaboration with the National Crime Prevention Centre. The series documents promising approaches to crime prevention through social development.

Local crime prevention councils

Over the past two decades, Canadian communities have been taking a more planned approach to crime prevention. Many have established crime prevention councils to oversee the development and implementation of strategies. These councils usually include community members as well as representatives of municipal council and agencies, such as the police. Features of effective councils include a direct reporting relationship to the municipal council, and support and resources from the municipality.

There are many reasons for a municipality to create a crime prevention council. Community groups often lack sufficient resources and expertise to plan, implement and evaluate effective crime prevention programs. A crime prevention council can give leadership and encouragement to community groups, help people working at the neighbourhood level access the latest information and coordinate the activities of different agencies. It can help to identify and analyze patterns of crime in a municipality, so that trends can be recognized and action taken.

FCM is encouraging the development of municipal crime prevention councils as part of its involvement in the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention. In a project supported by the Crime Prevention Part-

nership Program, FCM assessed available information on local crime prevention councils and published a user-friendly primer on how to establish such a council. The manual describes in detail how to plan a crime prevention program – from initial research into local crime problems, through development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of an action plan. Practical appendices include useful information such as a sample statement of Mandate and Strategic Directions for a crime prevention council, and terms of reference for the job of Crime Prevention Coordinator.

The *Primer on Municipal Crime Prevention* pulls no punches, analyzing unsuccessful as well as successful approaches. It points out that: “Goals should be SMART: Specific and precisely defined, Measurable, Achievable and Realistic, with a Time-frame attached. Unfortunately, crime prevention councils often define their successes in terms of process rather than results... . Just as businesses set profit targets to keep their activities on track and to form the basis for judgments about their success, so should crime prevention planners pay attention

to whether or not their programs actually prevent crime... . Be careful when you select strategies. Programs that work in one context will not necessarily work in another.”

The primer is a good starting point for municipalities that want to begin developing a crime prevention council. FCM also organized a national roundtable in the fall of 2000 to bring together municipal representatives, community groups and others with an interest in crime prevention councils to promote networking and the sharing of knowledge. Participants in this roundtable agreed that many communities need more training and information about crime prevention and about the structure and role of local crime prevention councils. FCM hopes to continue to involve more communities in forums to learn about crime prevention programs and councils.

Preventing drug-related crime

Drug-related crime is a major concern for Canadian municipalities, with some reporting that 70 percent of local crime is related to sub-

National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention

The National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention aims to reduce crime and victimization by addressing their root causes through a social development approach. Social development is a long-term, proactive approach directed at removing personal, social and economic factors that lead some individuals to engage in criminal acts or to become victims of crime.

With an investment of \$32 million annually, the National Strategy enables the Government of Canada to help communities develop projects and partnerships that will prevent crime. The Strategy focusses particularly on children and youth, Aboriginal people and the personal security of women and girls. It includes the Safer Communities Initiative, a Promotion and Public Education Program and the National Crime Prevention Centre. The National Crime Prevention Centre is responsible for implementing the Strategy.

The Safer Communities Initiative is designed to help Canadians undertake crime prevention activities in their communities. It includes four funding components: the Community Mobilization Program, which helps communities develop approaches to crime prevention and undertake activities that deal with the root causes of crime; the Crime Prevention Investment Fund, which aims to establish reliable information on what works and what is promising in reducing the risk factors associated with crime and victimization; the Crime Prevention Partnership Program, which supports the involvement of organizations that can contribute to community crime prevention through the development of information, tools and resources; and the Business Action Program on Crime Prevention, which involves national and provincial/territorial business and professional associations in helping communities prevent crime, share information and encourage community mobilization.

Safe & Sound

The Waterloo Community Safety and Crime Prevention Council is a crime prevention partnership supported by the Regional Municipality of Waterloo in Ontario. It includes representatives of the community, social service organizations, neighbourhood support groups, police, media, and the education, health, planning, justice and corrections systems. With assistance from the Crime Prevention Investment Fund, the Council is implementing *Safe & Sound*, a three-year pilot project to build safer, stronger neighbourhoods.

Through *Safe & Sound*, neighbourhoods with conditions that place them at risk are being supported to develop and implement crime prevention plans through a unique combination of ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ activities. It was up to neighbourhoods themselves to decide if they wanted to participate in the project. There was considerable enthusiasm: 11 neighbourhoods applied, from which three were selected according to a list of criteria which balanced need and capacity. These neighbourhoods are developing ‘horizontal’ crime prevention plans to try to minimize risk factors over which the community has control. Actual activities will be determined by neighbourhood residents, but may include such efforts as local beautification projects, job skills training and mentoring of youth.

According to Christiane Sadeler of the Crime Prevention Council, the project is in its early stages: “We are trying to find out who is in the neighbourhoods, who are the natural leaders.” It is hoped that the three neighbourhoods will have plans that can be presented to Regional Council in early 2001.

The ‘vertical’ crime prevention plans focus on the linkages between community life and decisions made at higher levels of power. This part of the project recognizes that empowering communities cannot reduce crime if government policies and programs have unintended adverse impacts or cannot accommodate neighbourhood initiatives. Christiane has been working with more than 80 agencies connected to the Crime Prevention Council to assess policies and programs that affect at-risk neighbourhoods and indicate if changes are needed. “My job has been trying to get the partners in a state of readiness to work at a neighbourhood level,” she says, “so that if neighbourhoods decide they want to do something, service providers should be more ready to deal with them.” Some of these policies go beyond the municipal level to decisions made at higher levels of government. In these situations, the Crime Prevention Council engages in broader public education and advocacy efforts.

As the project unfolds, it will be evaluated to see whether its approach leads to longer-term community leadership of crime prevention efforts. The evaluation also will consider if crime prevention partnerships improve the awareness of local decision-makers about the impacts of their policies on the risk factors associated with criminal behaviour.

stance abuse. FCM is developing a Municipal Drug Strategy with support from the Crime Prevention Partnership Program.

The Municipal Drug Strategy will complement the federal government’s plan, Canada’s Drug Strategy. Like the federal plan, it focusses on prevention, partnerships and a balanced approach to reduce both the supply of, and demand for, drugs. The four pillars of the strategy – awareness, education, prevention and treatment – will complement local law enforcement efforts. The emphasis is on local action under the

umbrella of a national coordinated effort.

To achieve the objectives of the strategy, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities is collaborating with the Health and Enforcement in Partnership Committee. This committee is co-chaired by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. It includes representatives from health and addiction organizations, law enforcement agencies (including the RCMP and the Department of the Solicitor General), Health Canada and the National Crime Prevention Centre.

Removing Barriers

The National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention recognizes that Aboriginal people face unique barriers that contribute to victimization and crime. *Removing Barriers*, a project coordinated by the City of Calgary and supported by the Community Mobilization Program and other partners, has been addressing some of the concerns of Aboriginal people in an urban area.

In the early stages of the project, focus group consultations were held with members of the Aboriginal and Métis communities in Calgary, and then with front-line workers and service agencies. 'Listening circles' in November 1999 brought together 175 community members, service providers and service agency leaders to discuss barriers, issues and solutions, and to develop a strategy for action. Reg Crow Shoe, a respected elder from the Treaty 7 area, coordinated the process to ensure that respect and culturally appropriate consideration were given to all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and traditions. In the listening circles, issues and possible solutions were identified in eight areas affecting Aboriginal people: justice, human rights, education, employment, funding, health, social services and housing. According to Linda Manyguns, who worked on the project for the City of Calgary, the process worked because it was nonconfrontational: "People didn't have to defend their institutions' practices and decisions."

On April 14, 2000, the information and recommendations from the process were wrapped in a buffalo hide holder and presented to four elders representing the Métis Nation, Treaty 7 First Nations, other Aboriginal people in Calgary and the non-Aboriginal community. This ceremony formally transferred ownership of the listening circle process to the community. During the next year, it is hoped that representatives of the Métis and Aboriginal communities will receive community development training to continue the change process without direct involvement from the City.

Faced with serious problems, Calgary took the approach of letting the community decide what issues were important and how these should be addressed. The respectful process has helped to improve relationships between Aboriginal people and service providers in the City, building a foundation for future progress in crime prevention through social development.

FCM has worked with the Health and Enforcement in Partnership Committee to develop an action plan that includes a 'model municipal drug strategy.' The Federation plans to encourage and support communities to implement the model strategy, and will assemble or develop tools that municipalities can adapt to local needs. Ideally, FCM wants to promote the type of partnerships and representation by different organizations locally that it has had with the Health and Enforcement in Partnership Committee, so that this is really a grassroots effort.

Municipalities are on the front lines of crime prevention. By working in partnership with their communities and other orders of government, local governments are helping Canadians build safer communities.

Ann Simpson

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For more information on the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention, call (toll-free) 1-877-302-6272, or visit the website at www.crime-prevention.org.

Limited quantities of this publication are available in alternate formats (Braille, disk and audiotape).

Cette histoire communautaire est également disponible en français.

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