



Indigenous Community Policing – Building Strength from Within

Introduction

Community policing provides a way for more formal aspects of the law and justice sector to engage with communities. In an attempt to offer a more culturally appropriate service to the members of their communities, indigenous community policing organisations around the world are beginning to police themselves in an effort to divert their members away from the formal law and justice sector. This knowledge note looks briefly at the experiences of two quite different community policing initiatives: the Māori Wardens in New Zealand and the Nyoongar Patrol in Perth, Western Australia in order to explore this process. This knowledge note then concludes by discussing how issues of cultural legitimacy, appropriateness and trust mean that these organizations are able to provide a service which successfully acts to divert their members away from the formal law and justice sector while also providing a useful point of articulation with that system.

Community policing

In the vast majority of the literature, community policing is seen as a form of joint effort between formal policing organisations and communities. This collaboration is designed to foster beneficial ties between police and community members in order to provide more robust and sustainable solutions to problems of crime and disorder within the communities. Part of the rationale for this form of policing is to improve the responsiveness of policing agencies to the particular law and justice issues faced by communities. It does this by providing a form of contextual interface between the community and formal policing agencies. In doing so, one of the key aims of this form of policing is also to increase levels of trust between the community and the police – especially in communities where trust of police is

historically low. Flowing on from these two issues of responsiveness and trust, community policing is also seen as a way in which policing agencies can more appropriately deal with the issue of cultural difference. While recent years have seen police agencies around the world become more culturally and ethnically diverse workplaces, the issue of culturally appropriate policing is still high on the list of issues to be dealt with by these agencies. All of these issues are heightened in countries like Australia and New Zealand where their respective indigenous populations have incarceration rates much higher than other groups in the general population. While community policing as described above is practiced in these countries, other forms of community policing (some with very long standing records) are gaining credence as credible and alternative parts of these countries law and justice systems.

Other forms of community policing

While community policing has been a relative success, measured at the very least by the degree by which community policing programs have been adopted around the world, this is not the only way in which communities are engaging in policing activities. In the wake of sustained high levels of contact between indigenous groups and the law and justice sector indigenous communities in Australia and New Zealand, as well as indigenous communities in countries as diverse as Canada, Papua New Guinea and South Africa, are working in partnership with government agencies and other community groups to establish and run their own community policing initiatives.

These community policing initiatives come in a number of forms and varieties. As well as providing early street level interventions to reduce the number

of indigenous people entering the criminal justice system these groups are also providing interventions to address social and welfare issues of at risk indigenous people along a range of issues including alcohol and substance abuse, family violence, parenting skills, homelessness and truancy. In looking to describe the services that that these groups it is useful to use the term 'policing' in the broader way in which Bayley and Shearing (1996: 592) use it to describe approaches based on 'anticipatory regulation and amelioration' rather than the reactive approaches generally used by formal policing agencies. In exploring the role that these organisations can play in community policing this knowledge note will look briefly at two quite different initiatives: the Māori Wardens in New Zealand and the Nyoongar Patrol in Perth, Western Australia.

Māori Wardens

Established under the Māori Social and Economic Advancement Act (1945), Māori Wardens were formed in an effort to help Māori communities police themselves. Created as a volunteer organisation (although with some recurrent funding being provided for administrative matters by the central government) with 17 districts spread across New Zealand which aligned with the boundaries of the Māori District Councils, Māori Wardens were empowered under the act to provide the following services:

- Prevention of riotous behaviour;
- Prevention of drunkenness;
- Maori may be ordered to leave a Hotel;
- Disorderly behaviour at Māori gatherings;
- Retention of car keys;
- Imposition of penalties by Māori Committee.

Alongside these formal roles, with their minimum powers of sanction, Wardens also acted to provide order at Tangihanga (funerals), Hui (gatherings) and local and national Māori events as well as patrol streets in a number Towns and Cities around New Zealand. In addition, they have historically acted to provide advice to families on issues as diverse as truancy, parenting skills, family violence and budgeting. In recent years they have been especially active in preventative programs in the alcohol and substance abuse field. These roles are all carried out under their broad organisational mandate of 'the advancement of Māori well being' – or in Māori 'aroha

ki te tangata (compassion and care for people)'. As such the Māori Warden organisation's structural values are heavily dependent on key Māori values of aroha (compassion); manaakitanga (caring and sharing); and whanaungata (relationships).

Created in an era of rapid urbanisation and associated process of de-tribalisation in a government environment of assimilation, Māori Wardens have struggled in recent years to attract new members. From a peak of over 1100 standing Wardens in the early 1970s the national Māori Wardens Association's membership is now around the 600 mark. In addition, a Māori social and cultural renaissance in the last twenty years and the associated process of retribalisation has seen the importance of the Māori District Councils, to which Māori Warden Associations were aligned, decrease in prestige and standing in the Māori community. However, despite a decrease in the standing of the Māori District Councils the Māori Wardens Association still manage to garner a high degree of support and trust within the broader Māori community.

Nyoongar Patrol

The Nyoongar Patrol System was established in April 1998 after the Aboriginal Advancement Council, in collaboration with government and non-government agencies, identified the need to provide a service for indigenous young people frequenting Northbridge (a suburb in central Perth) who were at high risk engaging in antisocial and criminal behaviour. Staffed initially by CDEP¹ participants Nyoongar Patrol was designed to provide street level interventions in the CBD, parks and reserves in order to minimise indigenous people committing unlawful offences or innocent people becoming victims of crime.

Initially providing services only in Northbridge, Nyoongar Patrol became an incorporated society in 2001 and expanded its services to three other localities around the city. Nyoongar Patrol now provides services in the following areas in the broader Perth Metropolitan area which have high levels of activity of at-risk indigenous individuals:

¹ The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program is an Australian Government funded initiative for unemployed Indigenous people outside of major urban and regional centres which provides activities which develop participants' skills to assist them move into employment outside the CDEP organisation.

- parks and reserves in the City of Perth;
- the Town of Vincent;
- the business centre of Midland (City of Swan); and
- Fremantle (City of Fremantle)

While having no power of official sanction the patrol members work with the local community to prevent public drunkenness, homelessness, antisocial behaviour and alcohol related family violence in the parks and reserves around the CBD. The Patrol basically functions to provide an alternative diversionary mechanism to detect and provide early intervention to indigenous people who are at risk of self-harming, family violence, homelessness and substance misuse on the streets, parks and business centres of certain parts of the Perth Metropolitan area.

Nyoongar Patrol has two levels of community participation in its organisational structure. The Executive Management committee members is made up of indigenous people elected by the Nyoongar community throughout the four Perth regions in which the Patrol is active and an advisory committee which draws its membership from government and non-government agencies in the Perth metropolitan area. While the Advisory Committee provides monthly feedback on the performance of the patrol and identifies hot spots for interventions to curb crime in their localities the Executive committee, and particularly the elders who sit on that committee, provide cultural input for the delivery of culturally appropriate forms of intervention and strategic advice. Funding for Nyoongar Patrol is provided by state government agencies, local governments, and the local business sector. Although all of this funding is on a year-to-year basis and there is no assured continuity of funding which means that much of the organisation's administrative time is spent sourcing funding.

Nyoongar Patrol is not unique. A number of other indigenous communities in Western Australia and around Australia as a whole have created similar night patrols. The point to note with Nyoongar Patrol is its longevity compared to other patrols established around the country and the fact that all of the members of its patrols are paid now employees and so are not dependent on the CDEP scheme for funding.

Discussion

In many respects the two organisations discussed above are quite different in a number of ways

including their formal organisational structure and the spread of their service delivery. Despite these differences these organisations are similar at base in that their approach is based on 'anticipatory regulation and amelioration' rather than the reactive approaches generally used by formal policing agencies. In other words, these community policing organisations include aspects of what is commonly identified as community development in their work. The success of these approaches is evidenced by a number of factors of which the most important is the high degree of support they attract in their respective indigenous communities. Other factors which attest to their success include the increased positive attention being placed on the Māori Warden Association by New Zealand Parliament and the New Zealand Police Force and Nyoongar Patrol winning a major Community Services Award in partnership with the City of Perth.

Despite the increasing number of Māori and indigenous Australians in the respective police force's in the two countries, and the existence of other quasi-community initiatives such as the Aboriginal Police Liaison Officer's (APLOs) in Western Australia both of the community policing organisations play a valuable complementary role to the services provided by these other agencies. These initiatives are characterised by both their distance (but not separation) from the formal policing sector, and other aspects of the formal law and justice sector. This distance from the formal sector provides these organisations with an ability to be more flexible with the approach they utilise in their delivery of service as well as helping to increase their level of trust within their respective communities which have a historic distrust of the formal policing sector.

While these organisations are characterised by their distance from the formal law and justice sector they are nonetheless connected to it. Nyoongar Patrol thus have a formal Partnering Understanding with the Western Australian Police Service which helps provide a structure for information sharing between the two agencies in order to help the two organisations fulfill their respective mandates effectively as possible. A similar relationship exists between Nyoongar Patrol and a range of other government and non-government agencies involved in the formal law and justice sector. This is also the case with Māori Wardens.

These organisations provide not only a valuable mechanism to divert indigenous individuals from the formal law and justice sector but also act as a point of articulation with this formal system. They act to provide a linkage between the formal and community systems of policing which is something that more traditional forms of community policing have not been

able to achieve effectively over time. They are able to do this through their strong links to the local community – as they are that community. The ownership of these initiatives that flows on from these linkages leads to high levels of trust and sustainability which in turn helps with their effectiveness in providing a complementary service to that provided by formal state policing agencies and other organisations involved in the state law and justice sector. A note of caution flows on from this in that given that this level of distance may be a key factor behind their success, reformers need to be aware from the possible problems that might flow from trying to bring these forms of organisations too closely in line with formal policing agencies.

Conclusion

The success of Māori Wardens in New Zealand and the Nyoongar Patrol in Perth, Western Australia provide an interesting lens to explore the role that indigenous community policing organisations around the world are playing in policing themselves in an attempt to divert their members away from the formal law and justice sector. As this note has shown, part of this success can be traced back to issues of cultural legitimacy, appropriateness and trust. However, as this note has also shown part of this success could also be traced back to the degree in which they are

seen by the community as being distant (but not necessarily separate) from the formal policing sector, and other aspects of the formal law and justice sector. This distance from the formal sector provides these organisations with an ability to be more flexible with the approach they utilise in their delivery of service as well as helping to increase their level of trust within their respective communities which have a historic distrust of the formal policing sector. These organisations are able to effectively mediate between the formal and informal aspects of policing in order to provide a service which successfully acts to divert their members away from the formal law and justice sector while also providing a useful point of articulation with that system.

References

Bayley, D.H. & Shearing, C.H. (1996), “The future of policing”, *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 585-596.

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