

# Protecting the community requires co-operation

by Bob Brown and Doug LePard

Public safety is vitally important to all Canadians, yet resources are shrinking relative to the ever-increasing challenges and public expectations of accountability have never been higher.

One positive result of these changing dynamics is increased co-operation and collaboration between public safety agencies, regardless of their disparate mandates. Further, collaboration between criminal justice agencies and the public is increasing in a variety of ways.

Commitment to increased collaboration is evident from infrastructure changes to grassroots initiatives. For example, a ceremonial signing of the British Columbia Police Code of Ethics document was held in January at the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC). The code "outlines fundamental principles, guiding values and primary responsibilities that guide and govern the conduct of police officers in their relationships with the public, the policing profession and its partners and themselves, personally," according to the JIBC web site.

Here's an excerpt from the code:

*In addition to the policing profession, we are responsible to other professions that also serve the public. We must always co-operate with other police and law enforcement professionals and with all those in the criminal justice system in order to develop an open, just and impartial justice system. As well we must always strive to co-operate with other public service professionals in order to advance the public good. This involves the sharing of information in a relationship-building manner that celebrates the interdependent nature of professionalism promoting the goals of the justice system.*



The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) Mission Statement is consistent with the BC ethics code, stating that the service is part of the criminal justice system and respects the rule of law. It helps protect society by "actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens, while exercising reasonable, safe, secure and humane control," the statement highlights.

The statement "offers practical guidance for today and inspiration for meeting the challenges of tomorrow," according to its introduction.

"Along with other law enforcement agencies across the country, we are committed to the protection of the public and the maintenance of a just and peaceful society," according to Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Minister Anne McLellan. "We are all partners working towards one ultimate goal: building strong and safe communities."

Clearly, community safety is both a present and future challenge, one which was readily accepted by the leadership of the Pacific Region of the National Joint Committee (NJC) of Senior Criminal Justice Officials at their meeting in August 2004. The Pacific Region routinely breathes life into the NJC Mission Statement, which highlights "the promotion of effective partnerships to improve the administration of criminal justice in Canada."

Effective partnerships need the full co-operation of all those involved. Striving for co-operative interdependency need not undermine the partners' respective independence.

The right leadership can shift the theoretical and inspirational to the operational. Oliver Wendell Holmes suggested that people can be divided into two classes: those who go ahead and do something and those who sit still and inquire why it wasn't done the other way. Here are some examples of where inspiration shifted to perspiration, resulting in enhanced community protection:

- All convicted sex offenders are registered with the police under the Staffordshire, England MAPPA program (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements), reported David

Griffiths, head of business development of England's National Probation Directorate. They cannot move without police permission; police and parole officers monitoring the most dangerous offenders work out of the same office to better co-ordinate their efforts. The program dramatically reduced the risk posed by such offenders – 98.7 per cent complied with registration and monitoring procedures, according to a July 2004 report.

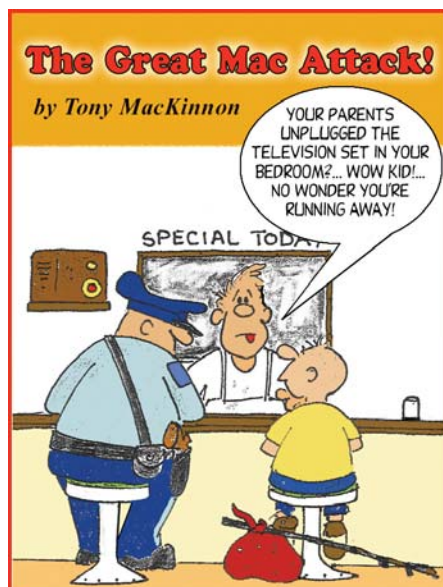
- The National Resource Center for Police-Corrections Partnerships (NRCPCP), established in 2004, was created to deliver a partnership framework for law enforcement and community corrections agencies at five regional locations throughout the US. NRCPCP promotes sustainable partnerships between police and community corrections agencies through training focused on building and maintaining partnerships.

Criminal justice agencies must work together to maintain and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of each other and the administration of justice as a whole, according to Penal Reform International (PRI). All agencies have their own specific objectives and mandates and sometimes these can conflict, but in the end can be expected to work towards the same overall goal – fair administration of justice for all.

Most agencies are interdependent and cannot achieve their specific objectives — or in some cases even exist — without the others, PRI notes. This mutual dependency makes interagency co-operation essential. Of course, this is not to say that criminal justice agencies should surrender their independence but simply identify objectives they share with others in the criminal justice system.

Lastly, interagency co-operation should not be viewed merely as a 'project,' which, by their very nature, are limited in time, purpose and scope, PRI states. Interagency co-operation is an infinite affair, necessary to maintain the chain, part of the ordinary day-to-day operations of all criminal justice agencies.

The basic mission for which the police exist is to prevent crime and disorder, according to Sir Robert Peel, the father of modern policing. In viewing the crime prevention 'mission,' University of Ottawa Criminology Professor Ross Hastings cautions against the potential for "the overreliance on community and partnerships." He highlights among his concerns that "participants in partnerships bring different expectations and capacities to the table and those with the most power can exercise disproportionate control. In practice, this can mean that partnerships serve their interests as much as those of the community." Notwithstanding this legitimate concern, strong leadership should and can mitigate any potential shortcomings.



Leadership is also fundamental to our collective criminal justice system mandate—protecting the community; that requires inspiration, leadership, co-operation and ‘perspiration.’ The NJC organized a partnered ‘community protection conference’ and ensured various system components were well represented both as delegates and presenters. Community participation was also deemed critical.

This venture was accepted in partnership by the following three primary agencies:

- British Columbia Crime Prevention Association (BCCPA)
- British Columbia Association of Chiefs of Police (BCACP)
- Pacific Region National Joint Committee (NJC)

The two-day conference, entitled ‘Community Protection is Paramount: Coordinating the System’s Response to High Risk Offending,’ was held in Richmond, BC in Feb. 2005. The theme evolved around two primary criminal justice goals: community protection and crime prevention. It was accepted that system co-ordination was critical to achieving these goals.

“This conference is another example of how much more we can accomplish when we engage in true consultation and when we work together towards a common goal,” said Chief Constable Jamie Graham of the Vancouver Police Department. “We all recognize the need for independence, but we also know that we are interdependent as well. Each of our agencies – whether we’re in law enforcement, cor-

rections, the Crown, or even offender-supporting groups – serves the same customer: the public. While we approach public safety from different angles, our end goal is always the same: public safety for everyone. We can best achieve that objective by working well with each other and with the community.”

The conference “marked a significant step in enhancing our service’s partnerships with other criminal justice agencies, including the police, the Crown and provincial corrections,” noted Don Demers, CSC Pacific Region Deputy Commissioner. “We are tied by a common goal and that is to protect the community. All the various criminal justice components contribute to our objective of safer communities, but we can achieve so much more by staying in close contact, keeping each other informed and in working more closely together.”

The critical issue now facing the numerous partners involved is ensuring the positive momentum does not falter. Interagency co-operation must be an infinite affair and we must find more ways and means to enhance our constructive interdependency while maintaining our respective independence.

Accomplishing this worthy goal requires inspiration, leadership, co-operation and perspiration, but the contribution it can make to safer communities is well worth the effort.

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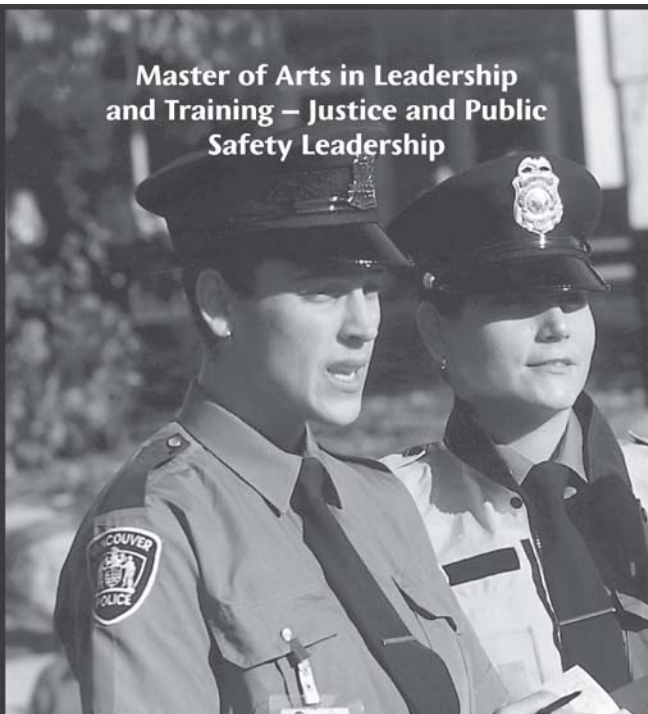
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