

Winnipeg Roundtable

November 28th, 2003

Participants at the Winnipeg Roundtable identified a number of needs which must be met for effective crime prevention in their community:

- Inclusion of Aboriginal history and knowledge in the educational system. Some examples are the teaching of traditional languages (Rossbrook House) and cultural programming (Ma Ma We).
- Educational opportunities for young people, especially young men, who need both time and financing to pursue an education that will give them real opportunities in the future. Governments and bands need to take responsibility in that regard.
- Effective employment training programs which provide young people with a sense of opportunity – examples include programs now available at Boys and Girls Clubs and Rossbrook House, and the Manitoba Hydro program to bring young women into the science and technology fields.
- For business to get involved, especially for skills and employment training. Examples are Manitoba Hydro, the Boys and Girls Club, and the Louis Riel School Division.
- Address men's emotional issues concerning how they relate to partners and children. Thunderbird House provides models of these sorts of programs.
- To provide young people with both discipline and caring – examples include some work in group homes (Maeengan Linklater), in schools (Louis Riel High School), in youth centres (Youville Centre), and in open custody facilities outside Winnipeg (Art Shofley's example).
- To provide recreation which is accessible – and could include transportation – and which includes sports but also addresses a variety of other interests
- To provide role models, such as people who have successfully left the gang lifestyle – as at Thunderbird House.
- For programs to be coordinated, to cover all aspects of the issues – to work with families, whole neighbourhoods and communities. Dina Juras mentioned that the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) is interested in these kinds of comprehensive projects.
- Better relationships between police and the community.

Participants:

- Dina Juras, National Crime Prevention Centre
- Giselle Campbell, Manitoba Hydro
- Mike Owen, Winnipeg Boys and Girls Clubs
- Troy Rupert, Circle of Life Thunderbird House
- Wayne Helgason, Winnipeg Social Planning Council
- Bernadette O'Reilley, Rossbrook House
- Susan Cameron, Pluri-Elles
- Yvette Preston, Youville Centre
- Maeengan Linklater, Youth Governance Secretariat
- Art Shofley, Winnipeg Aboriginal Youth Cities Project
- Pat Leblanc, Teen Stop Jeunesse
- Sheila Lynch-Mondor, Louis Riel School Division
- Rachel Charrette, Onashowewin
- and a representative from Youth Justice Committee, who arrived late and left early – her name remains unknown!

Organizers:

- Wayne Helgason, Executive Director, Winnipeg Social Planning Council
- Anna Kirbyson, Communications Director, Winnipeg Social Planning Council
- Suzanne Gessler, Intern, Winnipeg Social Planning Council
- Janet Creery, Communications Officer, Canadian Council on Social Development

Notes from Roundtable discussions

(Note: This is **not** a complete transcript.)

Mike

The problem is that programs are fragmented. Each department looks at one specific thing – usually there are other things as well. Funders should be advised to consult with service providers about this issue.

Susan

Bullying intervention can only work with parents who are concerned, and with kids who are at school.

Also, schools don't assess kids for disabilities or challenges very well. They just get shunted aside, then they "live up" to that expectation. Statistically speaking, there are a lot of people in the penal system with low education levels.

We need to overcome barriers for participation in recreation – for example, by providing transportation.

Mike

A lot of communities have needs but don't get resources. By the time kids are 12, only 30% are involved in hockey.

Susan

And that also an issue – not everyone wants to play sports, but that's what the built environment provides for. There are lots of rinks, but not a lot of rooms.

Art

Our community, the Aboriginal community, has a history of marginalization and a high population of youth. We are a community used to one form of justice and that's punishment. The justice system, by its own admission, realizes that it's failing. But the problem continues – they're still putting our people in jail.

When our people have gone into the jails to provide appropriate support, the jails see that it's valuable. They have seen that funding for Aboriginal programs works – and without them, the prison situation is volatile.

But in places where youth are incarcerated, and they hire cultural workers and elders, they don't treat them with respect, don't fund them or pay them properly. That spills over into the schools. Just recently, the mayor welcomed the Aboriginal people into this city – a nice gesture, but a little overdue. When I speak with youth, they say the biggest problem is that they don't understand their own history and culture. In the educational system, we still have a whitewashed version of Canada.

We are starting to have cultural programming through Ma Ma We. But there is a general feeling that you have to be white to fit in. People are conditioned to be punished. Teach them something else. Their dads, grandpas, and uncles have been incarcerated. Kids need to learn how to handle conflict.

Sister Bernadette

There was cultural programming at Rossbrook House – we had a volunteer teaching traditional language. The kids loved it. But the volunteer teacher had to leave, and we can't get funding for that now.

We had six little kids, the youngest was nine, come into Rossbrook House drunk. The police had come and dispersed a party because people were drunk – they had no consideration for the fact that these were children.

Mike

Police started community policing in some areas. But they have lost their social conscience in terms of keeping the peace.

Representative from Youth Justice Committee

The YCJA says that the criminal justice system should be responsive to the needs and backgrounds of youth who are in conflict with the law. It seemed positive. But now youth are not coming to our program as much, because they are just cautioned and then let go.

Yvette

I think this community could really use more support for men. There is a lot for women. With young men, no matter how hard they try, they seem to sink further and further behind. If they don't have the proper education (if they haven't completed high school), they are sent for "training" which is, in truth, hard labour. They may also end up paying child support. Education is really expensive.

Troy

I agree strongly – why not address men's' problems before they abuse women?

Our program teaches respect for women and how to be more responsible caregivers for kids.

Most of our clients are young men who want to distance themselves from the gang lifestyle. That's hard because the parties and exciting lifestyle meets a lot of needs. Trying to go legitimate means they have to start at zero and humble themselves by accepting menial work. They say they want to educate themselves, they want to go to school.

Pat

Lots of women go back to school because they get child support with welfare, but they are allowed not to work.

Yvette

Young men don't get any acknowledgement of their paternal roles – we could use some kind of paternal benefit.

Troy

Bands are not taking responsibility to fund their members' education – the majority say they are refused by the bands.

Giselle

When they leave the reserve, they lose their rights to education and support.

Sister Bernadette

Young men were unable to keep their jobs at Rossbrook House because of the gang issues. Now we have received a grant to do more significant training and employment support, and that is working. They need to see a future.

Mike

We have a program where we pay kids to be in employment training program. It has really reduced the gang activity. Many have been able to find summer jobs.

It's a big culture shock coming to Winnipeg from the reserve. Employment training often starts too late.

Giselle

There should be more members of the business community involved. We needed Aboriginal women in science and technology at Manitoba Hydro, so we made a long-term investment. It's a four-year program which takes young women through their educational pursuit from beginning to end. We provide funding supports for things like transportation. It also includes cultural ceremonies, healing. We see cycles being broken.

We choose the girls at random – so have a whole spectrum of girls. We have girls who at 14 and very motivated and others who are very at-risk.

Mike

We have had a significant amount of corporate investment in the Boys and Girls Club over the last two years. Their standards are higher and their evaluations are more relevant.

Giselle

There needs to be a tighter relationship between business and the community. Baby-boomers are leaving; we need to be more pro-active.

Art

Youth say that their addictions are one of the main problems. No real effort is being put towards that.

Sheila

At the Louis Riel School Division, families and schools are working together on crime prevention programs. Communities are working with businesses.

Maeengan

Working with Aboriginal youth, you really need to instil some hope and a sense of opportunity. I was working with 17-year-olds in a group home. What they needed was caring and discipline. I had that modeled in my upbringing, so I was able to provide it. I felt like that character in the Dirty Dozen. A lot of these kids have entrepreneurial skills – it's just that they're pushing the wrong product.

Yvette

I would really encourage everyone to understand that loving means setting boundaries and being able to respond in a sensitive and appropriate way to a child's emotions.

Troy

There just isn't enough public awareness – people are sheltered from this reality. Our staff are like those in the Dirty Dozen. The majority have street experience – have lived it – have a unique ability to go in, they know the Indian Posse, Native Syndicate. They have respect in their communities. Their message to youth is about pain and consequences, about reality. It's so useful to have these role models.

Sheila

They need role models, they need nurturing, they need hope and opportunities. I have had gang members cuddling up on the couch with me and doing stencils. If you don't have that nurturing at a young age, you just keep looking for it. We have to start young.

Art

We are asked to focus on one age group – fine, but what about neighbourhoods? The whole community needs to work together.

A lot of kids in trouble with the law have a connection with the youth centre. It's like a jail – probably the worst in Canada. It has a very negative impact – they make associations which are negative. Open and closed custody ends up being the same.

I have been other places where youth are incarcerated. Some of those places are run by women with nursing backgrounds – it's nurturing. I saw pups being brought into a youth centre. It gave the kids expertise, and they would get up at 3:00 in the morning to take care of the pups.

Sheila

They need love as well as rules to follow

Rachel

You have to be holistic – can't work just with children. Kids want continuing help, and if they can't get it, it feels like you are giving up on them.

The open custody facility is outside the city – there are no supports available there.

With issues like car theft, a bit of nurturing and incentives to be good can be successful.

There is also the issue of transferral of child and family services to First Nations. We need to have our own court system.

Troy

Working in isolation doesn't cut it. Kids tell you they are dealing with probation, addictions. I would recommend the development of a safe school charter, with restorative justice and conflict resolution.

Representative of the Youth Justice Committee

Restorative justice is available, but only to first- and second-time offenders.

Dina

It's important to have prevention before the criminal justice system, to overcome the root causes. There is also a lot of hidden crime that we don't pay much attention to.

We need a holistic approach at every level to see that synergy. Inclusion is key. We need to find when and how we can be allies. We are looking at bringing different sectors together – working on “comprehensive” projects.

I fear that the people who are most marginalized will not be included. There are a lot of people who have capacity, but they are marginalized anyway.

Giselle

You have to go beyond the job – go meet the parents. It's not really our role, but we have to do it.

Sheila

It has to be our role.

Giselle

Yes, but supports are not there for teachers to wear all those hats

Susan

Nobody is paying for special needs education. Children don't vote. They should have more of a chance.