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***From the Desk of Dr. John Winterdyk, Interim President
Tracing the evolution of Crime Prevention in Canada: "we've come a long way..."***

Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association, March 2013 Column

Recap:

In our first column, I spoke generally about why crime prevention could/should play a major role in our criminal justice response to 'crime control'. In essence, it was noted that our current criminal justice system is getting increasingly more expensive and questionably no more effective, or efficient. This, in spite of dramatic advances in forensic technology, court room infrastructure, better trained law enforcement officers, and even better correctional programming. While not trying to trivialize the point too much, the criminal justice system as we know it is essentially a *reactive* mechanism that attempts to deal with crime and deviance after it has already occurred. And we all know that if you give anymore lead in a foot race – all things being equal – the chances that you'll catch the lead runner are slim. However, admittedly, the criminal justice system with its \$13+ billion budget may, in some instances, be the better 'runner'. However, in the first column we suggested a viable alternative which is garnering increasing attention; especially in Alberta, is crime prevention (CP). CP is about being *proactive*. If one can identify the risk, or opportunities, in advance then you can also initiate measures to reduce the likelihood of having to chase the 'runner'.

In an effort to show how CP has evolved to play a major role in our efforts to enhance public safety in Canada; in this column, we provide a brief historical retrospective view of the evolution of crime prevention.

Times are a changing:

From the time of Confederation in 1867 and leading up to the mid-1990s, attention to crime prevention ebbed and flowed with strategies evolving around situational (e.g., target hardening – deadbolts, street lighting, house alarm systems, etc.) and social development initiatives (e.g., improving housing opportunities, providing young people with constructive outlets, improving social conditions, etc.).

Various research reports in Canada and international have shown that social development programs for young persons' yield positive, measurable benefits within three years and have yielded reductions in crime of 25% to 50% within 10 years.

A major shift for Canadian crime prevention occurred in the late 1980s when after a series of meetings in Europe, the first European and North American Conference on Urban Safety and Crime Prevention was held in Montreal, Canada. The meeting eventually led to the establishment of the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC) in 1994. The ICPC has become an international hub for crime prevention initiatives around the world.

Another major boost for Canadian crime prevention also occurred in 1994 with the establishment of the now former National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC). For the first five years (1994-1999) the budget was just over \$9.5 million – and as was formally noted – considerably less than had been recommended by a committee in the House of Commons!

Although it would be easy to offer critical commentary on why the budget was less than proposed, the initiative in supporting the NCPC would appear to have played a role in the decrease in crime rates since the mid-1990s. In fact the current crime rates are lower than they've been in over 30 years! Arguably, some this may be attributable to an aging population, better enforcement practices, etc. but the steady decline in crime has coincided with a steady growth in the diversity, scope, and scale of investment in crime prevention efforts. In fact, the decline in crime rates in a number of other countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand all coincide with their increased level of attention given to crime prevention.

While no one has formally taken direct claim for the positive impact of the efforts of the NCP Council, an additional boost for crime prevention in Canada occurred in 2001 when the Federal Government of Canada announced an investment of \$145 million in the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention (also referred to as the National Strategy). Simultaneously, however, the NCPC lost its funding and in 2007 the National Crime Prevention Centre was established with Public Safety Canada and was given essentially the same mandate as the initial iteration of NCPC. (Ironically, the 'new' iteration uses the same acronym – NCPC). The 'new' NCPC represented a formalized effort to acknowledge and support evidence informed ways to deal with crime and victimization.

As part of its mandate, in 2007 the Centre prepared a strategic action plan titled: *A Blueprint for Effective Crime Prevention*. The plan incorporated some of the key principles of the United Nations' Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime and thereby acknowledging some of the universal ideas of crime prevention. These principles will be explored in a future column.

Whereas previous initiatives of crime prevention in Canada focused on addressing the underlying structural factors of crime (e.g., poverty, lack of opportunity, poor housing, etc.), the current focus of crime prevention has evolved to focus on reducing the risk/incidence of victimization and re-offending (i.e., through treatment, intervention, and reintegration).

The concept of crime prevention while simple in its objective has evolved to reflect the complexity of crime and the intricacies of maintaining public safety. In many respects Canada, and in particular Alberta, have been leaders in this regard. However, the future of crime

prevention in Alberta, and in Canada, can only truly succeed if we continue to support multi-agency/Ministry involvement and ensure sustainability through proper funding and evidence-informed results. Assuming that political ideologies do not get in the way of the evidence informed research and good sense, the future for crime prevention should continue to evolve and lead to a brighter and safer society for all.

If you'd like to learn/hear about anything specific in this column please feel free to contact us, and we'll be happy to explore the options of perhaps trying to use your request as a theme for one of the upcoming monthly issues. Meantime, thank you for reading this column and visiting the ACCPA website.