

# JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY

## CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### DEFINING CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Crime Prevention through Social Development (CPSD) is:

- Proactive
- Long-term
- Guided by social and economic factors that give rise to crime

A CPSD program must be:

- Targeted at those who are at high risk for future offending
- Coordinated with other crime prevention initiatives
- Accessible to individuals and families

Efforts to reduce crime in Western society have been mostly reactive. When the criminal law is violated, offenders are picked up by police and face incarceration and various other penalties. A reactive approach to crime reduction uses the threat of sanctions to deter offenders and the general public from committing criminal acts.

Alternatively, a proactive approach works to prevent criminal activity by focusing on the conditions that give rise to crime. Many of the factors linked to crime are social or economic in nature. Family stress, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, poverty, and crowded living conditions may predispose individuals to engage in criminal behaviour.



CPSD, or Crime Prevention through Social Development, is a proactive, long term approach that is concerned with the socio-economic conditions that give rise to crime. CPSD uses programs and services already available in the community that provide support in the areas of education, social housing, health, and social services.

The family is the fundamental social unit in Canadian society, and

recognizing this, most CPSD initiatives focus on the family rather than the individual. Mediation and counseling for families under stress, subsidies for food, clothing, childcare, transportation, and child development programs may be included in a CPSD initiative targeted at those at high risk for offending. CPSD programs are easily accessed by clients and are coordinated with other crime prevention programs.

## RISK FACTORS AND CRIME

Although the word 'cause' is sometimes used to describe the relationship between certain variables and criminal activity, its use leads to the false conclusion that certain risk factors inevitably lead to crime. While a number of social, economic and demographic factors are related to crime, none can be said to cause it.

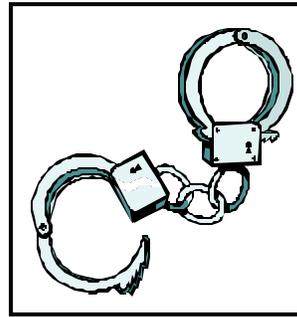
Research has found that males are more likely to offend than females. It is not understood precisely why this is so, but it has been suggested that because criminal behaviour typically involves aggression and risk-taking, both of which are seen to be male characteristics in our society, males are more prone than females to offending.

Age is also associated with criminal activity. Although adults commit the majority of offences, youths aged 12 to 17 are over-represented in both property and violent offender populations. Adults aged 18 to 34 account for the great-

est proportion of offenders. It is not clear why certain age groups are more likely to offend, but there is evidence to show that greater proportions of young people live in poverty than any other demographic group.

Poverty is a significant risk factor for involvement in criminal activity. While research concerning the relationship between poverty and crime does not show that poverty *causes* crime, Canadians living in poverty are over-represented in the offender population. The socioeconomic difficulties faced by those living in poverty, such as poor nutrition and health, crowded living conditions and child abuse or neglect, may increase the likelihood that an individual will become involved in criminal activity.

Not only are young people more likely to be affected by poverty, so are certain ethnic or racial groups. And like youths, these groups are, not surprisingly, over-represented in the of-



fender population. In Canada, Aboriginals are more likely than other Canadians to live in poverty. Aboriginals also account for a disproportionate number of inmates in provincial and federal correctional facilities.

Whether Aboriginal Canadians actually commit more criminal offences than non-Aboriginals is hotly debated, and has not been determined. However, there is much evidence to suggest that discrimination in the criminal justice process, combined with the prevalence of social and economic hardships faced by First Nations communities, significantly influence the over-representation of Aboriginals in correctional facilities.

## Offender Statistics

- In 1998, the number of youths aged 12 to 17 was 2,451,900 or about 8% of the total population, yet youths accounted for 19% of all offenders charged.
- In 1998, 514,742 males, both adults and youths, were charged with a criminal offence, while 109,649 females were charged.
- In 1997, 25% of offenders had less than a grade 8 education and half claimed to come from dysfunctional families.
- In 1996, 2% of the total population was Aboriginal, but 17% of inmates were Aboriginal.

Sources:

Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Canadian Crime Statistics 1998.

Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Juristat, vol. 19, no.5.

Solicitor General Canada. Myths and Realities: Dispelling Myths About Canada's Criminal Justice System.

# CRIME PREVENTION IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES:

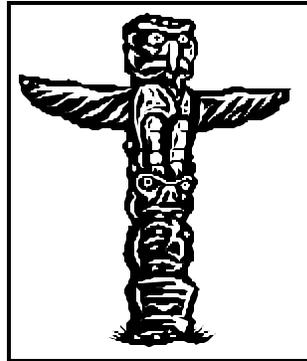
## THE ABORIGINAL HEAD START INITIATIVE

Research has shown that early childhood experiences contribute to an individual's chance of offending. Aboriginal children in Canada face greater hardships and disadvantages than other groups of children, and can benefit from CPSD programming directed specifically at addressing their special needs in a culturally sensitive manner.

The Aboriginal Head Start Initiative (AHS) was launched in May of 1995 and now serves between 3,000 and 4,000 Native children per year. AHS projects assist parents

in contributing to their children's mental, emotional and social development. The AHS initiative is based on the American Head Start Program, which has proven effective in reducing drop-out rates and delinquency.

There are now over 100 AHS projects operating across Canada, typically running 3 or 4 days per week in a preschool setting. Essential components of AHS projects include Aboriginal culture and language, pre-school education, nutrition, and health promotion. Parents



involved in the initiative have indicated that they are satisfied with the progress that their children have made. Given the willingness of Native families to participate, AHS is sure to reduce offending rates of Native youths by giving them the skills early in life that they need to achieve success in their communities.

*Aboriginal Head Start is based on caring, creativity and pride flowing from the knowledge of traditional beliefs within a holistic and safe environment.*

*~from the Aboriginal Head Start statement of principles*

- AHS PROJECTS FEATURE:**
- Culture and language components
  - Pre-school education
  - Nutrition and health promotion
  - Parental involvement

- Neighborhood Coalition's Impact**
- Reported crimes were reduced by 46% from 1990 to 1993
  - 45% reduction in violent crime from 1990 to 1993
- Source: International Center for the Prevention of Crime. 100 Crime Prevention Programs to Inspire Action Across the World.

## THE NEIGHBOURHOOD COALITION TARGETS SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN MONTREAL

In 1990, Little Burgundy, a neighborhood within the greater Montreal area, experienced a rash of violent crime. The drug trade in the area had also grown, and community residents were growing increasingly insecure. To address residents' concerns about crime in their area, the

Neighborhood Coalition was established among several community groups.

Social development initiatives included in the Coalition's agenda include assistance for families with drug and alcohol problems, encouraging investment and job creation within the community

and increasing citizen involvement and interest in neighborhood activities. Building stronger bonds between members of the community may, in itself, reduce offending as individual's feel less isolated and have greater to motivation to serve, not harm, their neighbors.

## CPSD INITIATIVES REDUCE OFFENDING

A number of longitudinal studies recently completed show that CPSD programs really work to reduce offending. One study looked at the effects of 3 early intervention programs designed to enhance parental abilities and cognitive skills of children aged 6 and under. It was found that all 3 of the programs studied contributed in a reduction in delinquency. One of the programs, Hawaii Healthy Start, had the greatest impact. Child neglect and abuse cases were reduced by 62% and it was estimated

that 42 cases of child abuse had been prevented.

Another study investigating the impact of the Seattle Social Development Project, targeting children from grades 1 to 6, showed that CPSD can reduce crime. Almost one-fifth fewer participants reported committing violent delinquent acts than individuals in the control group.

Other programs studied, including Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Job Corp in the United States, were found to

have had a significant impact on offending rates of their participants.

Why are these programs so successful? The answer is clear: social development programs can reduce offending because they target the risk factors that give rise to crime, while creating bonds between individuals and their communities.

Source: International Centre for the Prevention of Crime. Crime Prevention Digest II: Comparative Analysis of Successful Community Safety.

## GETTING STARTED: IMPLEMENTING A CPSD INITIATIVE

The implementation of a CPSD initiative requires the participation and cooperation of agencies responsible for crime prevention and those involved in community development and providing services. Once an agency has identified its vision of a safer community, and has researched successful CPSD strategies, partnerships should be established with other groups who share the same vision.

When a working group has been established and a specific CPSD program is at the design stage, a decision must be made with respect to the target group and the issues

that will be the focus of the project. For instance, your group may decide that male teenagers in the community should be targeted and their employment readiness improved through the project.

The next step in implementing a CPSD initiative is to take stock of the existing resources available to your group and the talents and strengths of group members. Finally, your program can be initiated and evaluated.

While the 6 basic tasks need not be followed in the linear order presented here, they are essential for your group to see its work translate into a reduc-

### 6 Basic Tasks of CPSD Program Initiation

1. Raise your awareness of CPSD
2. Identify your vision of a safer community
3. Connect with those who share your vision
4. Choose the issues on which the project will focus
5. Take stock of the existing resources and strength of group members
6. Implement and evaluate your project

tion in offending and other social problems in your community. Crime is best prevented by proactive solutions, and CPSD can truly reduce crime if people are willing to put in the time and effort into CPSD strategies.