



Perspectives on Crime Prevention

The Involvement of Non-Government Organisations

Nigel Whiskin, Chief Executive, Crime Concern

Ladies and Gentlemen

I have been given two titles for this talk. The first as it appears in the programme – “Perspectives on Crime Prevention – The Involvement of Non-Governmental Organisations,” and the second title which was given to me was “Non-Government Participation in the Criminal Justice System”.

I am not sure whether the organisers intended to give me a multiple choice for this afternoon’s session, or whether it reflects the greyness, the lack of precision about what we mean by crime prevention and where it fits into the big picture.

Be that as it may, since you have been so kind to invite me to this side of the world to your wonderful country and hear about your excellent work on crime prevention, I will try to deliver both.

First, let us distinguish between two types of participation in both the criminal justice system and crime prevention:

Voluntary effort, and Voluntary organisations.

I hope we can agree on a definition for voluntary effort. This means the unpaid contribution of time, skill and personal effort by ordinary people. Sometimes it is highly structured and organised, sometimes it is more by way of self-help.

In England and Wales, the contribution which ordinary people make to every aspect of the criminal justice system is quite remarkable:

Special constables	15,902
Magistrates	29,000
Probation volunteers	2,726
Victim support helpers	6,500
Crime prevention	93,000

There is no shortage of people willing to give their time. The strengths of voluntary effort include infusing new energy and commitment. It gives the public a stake in the service, and it enables the professional worker to give better service.

On the other hand, voluntary effort requires training, organisational and resource inputs. The government has consistently failed to recognise that these inputs are crucial to the effectiveness and efficiency of the voluntary effort, and that with more investment in the infrastructure of the voluntary sector, a much better range of services and support could be provided.

Professionals too, particularly in the police and probation service have tended to regard special constables and voluntary associates as being a threat to the quality to the professional service by respective organisations, and as cheap labour.

In the probation team I worked in some years ago, we tried to use volunteers. Our philosophy was quite simple. We wanted ordinary members of the public to provide personal support to the probation clients. We

picked as volunteers lively, energetic people prepared to give us two hours a week at a minimum, mature in outlook, but with energy and enthusiasm. One case in particular stays in my mind. It concerned a 14-year boy who was placed on probation for stealing. He had been brought up in a Dorset village. His parents, in search of work, moved into the centre of Bristol. Their terraced house was bounded on one side by gas holders and a large scrap yard. On the other side was the concrete jungle of a motorway flyover, and at the back was the greyhound racing stadium. Their street was in the middle of a multi-racial area where there were at least 67 different nationalities. So this lad from the Dorset village was suffering a culture shock. He was not getting on well at school because he was a little slow and couldn’t read very well. He became the butt of

jokes and this made him very frustrated and sad. He was not very well able to stand up for himself.

The volunteer assigned to him was in her last year of a second degree at university studying to be a teacher. She set out to improve his reading with some personal tuition. Not for her the typical literacy tutor book – “Here is Janet”, “Here is John”, “Here is Pat the dog, they love to play”.

She sat down with the lad and with the aid of a tape recorder, recorded some of his stories of the Dorset village he came from – fishing in the brook, about granddad’s runner beans, about the village post office and about the mates he left behind. She wrote these stories up into a series of books and taught him to read from them.

It took a lot of time, a lot of commitment, a lot of ingenuity, wit and skill, far beyond anything which we as professional probation officers could offer or, indeed, dream up. That story, in a way, illustrates the great richness which ordinary people can bring to professional services and to their fellow human beings.

I turn now to look at the non-governmental organisations’ contribution to the criminal justice system. There are problems of definition. I am going to presume that you don’t want me to talk about the security industry and the tremendous growth which has taken place over the last few years in companies which offer guarding and patrol services, electronic monitoring and a whole range of other security services to both the private

and public sector. I am going to assume that we are talking about what used to be called voluntary organisations, which I characterise as being independent, not-for-profit, and not carrying out any statutory function unless under specific contract. You may want to add to this definition a little later on. In the UK there are a number of national bodies which make a number of contributions to the criminal justice world. These include:

- NACRO – National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
- The APEX Trust, which concentrates on employment programmes for people who have been in prison
- The Society of Voluntary Associates who provide a whole range of training projects for volunteers.
- Howard League of Penal Reform.
- Prison Reform Trust.
- There is my own organisation, Crime Concern.
- There is Victims Support which looks after the interests of local schemes.
- There is the Police Foundation, an independent body which conducts research into various aspects of policing.

Organisations like NACRO have a number of different functions. These include:
 Campaigning
 Representing

Policy Development
 Social Innovation
 Research and Development

If you take an organisation like NACRO, in its service-providing function alone, it runs advice and day centres, it has pioneered a number of accommodation units, hostels, bedsit schemes, it runs education and training units, it developed a huge network of employment programmes, both for young people and long-term unemployed, it set up a range of youth programmes and projects on housing estates and provides a wide range of training programmes, mostly aimed at workers in voluntary organisations.

Now, in addition to the national organisations, and I should say that my list is not exhaustive – there are, I believe, some 4,000 local voluntary organisations providing accommodation schemes or day centres, or play schemes, literacy schemes of one kind or another, which can be harnessed to meet the needs of offenders. Now, at their best voluntary organisations have a vital contribution to make because they are independent of the system and can therefore be more flexible. They can be more innovative. They can act as a catalyst. They can afford to fail now and again and blaze a trail, and they are generally speaking highly cost effective and I take the view that the government could

invest much more in voluntary organisations without affecting their independence or the other admirable qualities to which I have referred to, and could use them as first step organisations to deliver services.

Now I want to turn to the non-governmental contribution to crime prevention. Unlike our European neighbours, we are as a nation very much interested in crime prevention. This is shown with three kinds of organisations: Neighbourhood Watch Crime Prevention Panels Youth Crime Prevention Panels

There are now about 100,000 Neighbourhood Watch schemes in England and Wales covering 5 million households. We know from the British Crime Survey that about 70% of the population would join Neighbourhood Watch if there was a scheme to join. So something like 1 out of 4 houses is covered by a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

The downside of this picture is that we think that about half of the schemes exist in name only. Very few have actually been wound up, but a large number do not appear to do very much – stickers are distributed, a couple of lectures are given on household security, and that seems to be it. Another quarter of the schemes are doing a reasonably good job,

and another quarter are doing quite an exciting job.

Neighbourhood Watch (N.W.) in England and Wales, supported by the police, has grown remarkably rapidly since the first scheme was set up in the Cheshire village of Mollington in 1982. Distribution of NW varies quite widely between different police forces, about 30% of households are covered in Cheshire and the Metropolitan Police area, but in the Welsh county of Gwent, less than 1% of households are covered – a situation which reflects the priority which the police have given to the movement.

Early fears that NW would turn into some kind of vigilante movement have proved unfounded over the years. There is growing evidence to suggest that NW has helped reduce the incidence of household burglary in some areas.

Talking to NW co-ordinators, they are convinced that the establishment of the scheme has helped create a better sense of community and has brought people together, and indeed in one of the most interesting schemes in the country, in Bedford, the area co-ordinator spends her time organising social events because she argues that “if you want us to look after each other, then we have to know each other, and we would rather get to know each other at social

The responsibility of the individual citizen runs far deeper than cooperating with the police or accepting jury duty or insuring the safety of his family by installing adequate locks – important as they are. He must respect the law, refuse to cut corners, reject the cynical argument that “anything goes as long as you don’t get caught.”

Most important of all, he must, on his own and through the organizations he belongs to, interest himself in the problems of crime and criminal justice, seek information, express his views, use his vote wisely, get involved.

In sum, the Commission is sure that the Nation can control crime if it will.

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functions, than we would listening to lectures on window locks and bogus callers".

Herein lies the great problem with NW – that it has got caught in a narrow range of duties relating almost exclusively to household security. There is a definite limit to people's interest in locks and bolts and bogus callers, and if we want to sustain people's interest, then we must have a richer menu of activities. The best NW schemes are now moving on and become a general neighbourhood watchdog concerned with making the neighbourhood look a nicer and cleaner place – that's good crime prevention, setting up play schemes for children, and after the recent spate of terrible child murders in Britain, it demonstrates how much this kind of activity is needed, if only to reassure anxious parents. Visiting services to the housebound, as well as acting as an advocate for the neighbourhood in terms of getting proper services from the local authority and the police have all become a function of the scheme.

There are now many variants of NW. These include:
Business Watch
Farm Watch
Marina Watch
Pub Watch
Play Watch
Crime Prevention Panels (CPP's)

There are now some 500

CPPs in England and Wales. Most are run by the divisional Crime Prevention Officer, who acts as secretary to the group and most are concerned with raising public awareness about the need to take crime prevention measures of one kind or another.

There are a lot of question marks at the present time about the effectiveness of CPPs and whether they are worth the investment which the police have made in them.

Rather more promising are Youth Crime Prevention Panels. There are now about 400 of these groups, mostly based in schools who carry out a range of crime prevention activities. These include basic crime prevention measures such as property marking, but some rather more innovative approaches focus on tackling crime problems within the school community, concerns about drink and drug abuse, as well as bullying, sexual and racial harassment.

One panel, for example, at a girls' school, following an incident in which two people were sexually assaulted, took a survey of staff and pupils in the school to find out where in the two women felt afraid or had been subject to attack or abuse. This survey was conducted in a very professional manner and written up into a report which two of the girls, aged 14 and 15 presented to the local town council. Needless

to say, the council were impressed with this piece of work and the way it was presented, and acted on the recommendations of the report which included improving street lighting in a number of places, redesigning walkways, removing overgrown hedges and shrubs and changing the times of a number of police patrols. An excellent piece of local crime prevention by young people.

Well now ladies and gentlemen, we come to Crime Concern.

It is an independent organisation. It was set up in May 1988, became fully operational 2 and a half years ago. It is registered as a charity and a company limited by guarantee. It has an Advisory Board comprising representatives from the police, business community, the voluntary sector, local government, trade unions and so on, and we enjoy and have worked hard to win all-party support.

Our mission is to help create safer communities. Our method is to work in partnership with local authorities, business, the police and the voluntary sector.

To achieve this, we have a grant of half a million pounds from the Home Office towards our core costs, which are about £850,000 a year. But for every pound that the Home Office give us, we are expected to raise £3 for

crime prevention programmes and projects. So we have a fundraising target each year in the order of £1.8 - £2 million. This was never going to be easy because we have to compete with the English Chamber Orchestra, Children's Hospitals, local swimming pools, Save the Children, and a host of other equally good and probably more worthy causes. Two factors have added to the burden:

The first is the general economic situation and the effects of a very sharp and severe recession.

And second is the pressure which has been put on the voluntary sector by the financial stringencies which local government has had to introduce as a result of the attempt to introduce the poll tax – a fiasco which I am sure you have looked on with as much bewilderment and amazement as we have at home. Many local authorities have withdrawn their funding to voluntary organisations, so there are more and more of us pestering business for fewer and fewer resources. It is a tough market place.

I should add, too, that the business sector is particular about how it invests its money, so what we are able to do in terms of practical programmes and projects is determined not so much by need, as it is by the perception of the business community as to how this will enhance the company

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image or create a marketing opportunity.

We have nevertheless a vision about Crime Concern. I will admit that that vision is not yet in sharp focus, but we are getting there. And that vision has a number of elements to it which I would like to share with you as I come to the end of this presentation.

First, we believe that Crime Prevention should change its name to Community Safety, and should aim to put as much energy into the prevention of criminality as we have into reducing the opportunities to commit crime.

Secondly, we believe that we should have a much better delivery system for community safety and this should be based on local government, which at the end of the day, is responsible for our environment – physical and social, and to some degree economic. When you consider that local government has a big part to play in planning, transport, lighting, schools, housing, social services, and so on; to exclude them from the community safety piece is ridiculous. They should be at the centre of it, and to deliver effective community safety, we obviously need partnerships and we need partnerships which include the police, the probation service, the voluntary sector and the business community. Now what would the content of a community safety strategy look like.

We think there are five elements:

First, we need to look at what we can do to reduce the opportunities to commit crime. This means upgrading household security, it means getting businesses to adopt crime prevention strategies, local authority departments to adopt crime prevention strategies, and so on.

Second, we need to look very hard at what we can do to prevent criminality and to

introduce a broad range of measures designed to remove crime from the agenda of the next generation. We know from the work in North America of the value of targeted pre-school education opportunities in high risk crime areas. We know much can be done through effective management of schools. We know how much can be done by improving housing, opportunities, positive parenting programmes, improving access to training opportunities, educational opportunities, and work opportunities. We know what can be done to improve leisure and recreation opportunities for young people.

Third, we need community development. We know there are a large number, (we estimate in Britain about 600) high crime residential areas, and we know that these areas can be turned around by involving local people in redesigning the physical, economic and social infrastructure. There is a need to systematically work at these high-crime areas which produce not only a disproportionate amount of crime, but significantly a disproportionate number of offenders.

Fourth, we need to do more about the care and resettlement of offenders in the community, particularly high-risk youngsters and those returning to the community from prison. We spend a great deal of time arguing about the need to reform the prison system, we have not spent the same amount of time setting up planning and experimenting with measures which can hold this difficult group of people in the community, and reduce the number of offences which they commit. We know, for example, that young offenders with a track record of offending commit between three and four times fewer offences when they are



employed or in training than they do when they are not. There is great promise in pursuing this line.

Fifth, we need to do a great deal more to support the victims of crime. We can learn a lot from victims about how to prevent crimes recurring, both to them and other people, and we can do a great deal more working back from the victims' experience to tackle some of the most vulnerable groups in the community – young people, children, violent crimes against women, and the pernicious effects of racist crime.

From all this, I hope you will see that the non-governmental contribution to crime prevention is potentially rich. It has flexibility, it is certainly close to the ground, it can represent the victims of crime as well as offenders, it has certainly pioneered a lot of new programmes and it is mostly cost effective. But it is under threat, and the threat comes from a lack of investment by central and local government.

Nigel Whiskin started his working career in the building industry as a managerial trainee working

for companies in Luton and Amptill.

After some years he joined his father's property developing business before leaving to become a probation officer.

He worked in the St Paul's area of Bristol specialising in the use of voluntary associates and working with young, black offenders.

In 1972 he joined NACRO as Regional Organiser for South Wales and the South West setting up accommodation schemes. He helped set up the first Prisoners' Newspaper and the first Victim Support Scheme. In 1975 he became Principal Organiser and set up NACRO's crime prevention work and set up NACRO's Employment Training sector which developed 20,000 places for offenders under the MSC programmes.

In September 1988 he was appointed Chief Executive of Crime Concern.

In September 1990 he was appointed Visiting Fellow (Crime Prevention) to the University of Loughborough. At the same time he was appointed the UK correspondent to the European Forum on Urban Safety.