WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE – OR WHO'S IN CHARGE OF THIS PARTNERSHIP ANYWAY?

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In his famous study of late twentieth century western culture, <u>The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy</u>, Douglas Adams presents us with many moments of spectacular confusion and frustration that should give pause to those of us seeking to promote a partnership approach to crime prevention.[1]

Perhaps the best known of these is the discovery that the answer to the Great Question – the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything is in fact forty-two! Truly, this is a discovery of no value in the absence of an understanding of what the ultimate question really is. So by pursuing a headlong rush to solve a question that is not properly understood in the first place we also arrive at an answer that we don't understand. As a result, we not only still have the original problem we started with, but now we also have a solution we can't use – a situation that will be very familiar to many involved in community based crime prevention.

But Douglas Adams' insights do not stop there. His book opens with the destruction of the earth by an inter-stellar construction fleet intent upon clearing the way for the construction of a hyperspatial express route. Needless to say Earth residents were unaware of the plans to demolish their planet because they had never seen the plans, as they were on display in an inaccessible part of the galaxy.

While earth residents were certainly annoyed at the consequences of this particular failure in communication and bureaucratic process, Douglas Adams goes on to tell us that this annoyance was nothing compared to anger of the owners of earth. As he explains, the earth was created as a vast organic computer to work out what the actual question was that forty-two was the answer to. Apparently earth's owners were also unaware of the plans for earth's destruction and were appalled to discover it had been destroyed five minutes before the calculation of the ultimate question was to be completed. As he puts it:

"Ten million years of planning and work gone just like that…. Well, that's bureaucracy for you."[2]

Well, let's bring the lessons of these simple examples of disastrous planning and partnerships back to our mundane experience of trying to build workable and effective crime prevention partnerships.

What they show is the potential for negative impacts on even the most well developed and well-focused programs. It is therefore essential that such problems be addressed at the program planning and development stage. To merely hope that collaborative and co-operative processes will simply emerge as a program goes along is to deny history. Collaborative program management is about power sharing – the sharing of responsibility for success and failure. It is also about sharing decision-making responsibility and authority. And it is about effective communication.

In order to achieve an effective collaborative relationship the first thing that has to happen is the development of a philosophy of partnering – not just partnership agreements.[3]

Partnering has been described as a working relationship with a high level of trust and close co-operation between two parties that contract with each other to accomplish mutually beneficial outcomes. Partnering is a form of implicit contract that, although not legally binding, is self-enforcing because it is in the interests of both parties to honour the agreement.[4]

Some of the elements of effective partnering include:

- Commitment;
- Equity;
- Trust;
- Mutual goals & objectives;
- Continuous evaluation;
- Leadership;
- An open-ended and ongoing relationship; and
- Timely communication and responsiveness.

But can we find how these factors might operate in creating effective crime prevention partnerships? I'd like to briefly discuss two examples from different settings. One I would suggest is an example of a successful partnership. The other is a more complex issue that I would describe as a work in progress.

The first example illustrates how a community can move beyond the frustration of trying to deal with a problem they feel has been visited upon their community and about which government agencies appear to have little interest, to a powerful problem solving partnership. In particular it illustrates the importance for communities of doing what we have called "learning the language of government".[5]

The example I am talking about is how the Bondi Beach Christmas/New Year events were moved from riot to celebration.

Over a number of years, Bondi Beach had become the unofficial venue for Christmas celebrations for the backpackers in Sydney over the summer. By 1995, it had grown to the stage that there was around 20,000 people gathered in the sun between the beach and the road at Bondi. Alcohol, and to some extent, other drugs, were a significant feature of the Christmas celebrations for the backpackers.

Bondi Beach is also a popular spot for other parts of the community of Sydney. Prominent among these is a large group of car enthusiasts whose homes were mostly in the Sydney's Western suburbs. The promenade between the beach and the shopfronts that line Bondi Beach had become a favoured location for these young males to meet and show off their machines.

The 1995 Bondi Beach riots began in the evening of Christmas Day. After sunset the Beach grew cold and the estimated 20,000 back packers from an informal beach party left the Beach and milled about blocking Queen Elizabeth Drive. At about 9.30 p.m. aggressive groups of male youths arrived in their cars and contested the space. Violence erupted with an estimated 1,000 people fighting and throwing missiles.

Police attempted to move and disperse the crowd but the crowd turned hostile on the police, trashing police cars, obstructing traffic and throwing bottles. Several people were injured, as were police, and serious damage was caused to six police vehicles. No arrests were made due to the extreme congestion of people and the danger confronting police and bystanders.

On New Year's Eve, the "car enthusiasts" came back without cars. Fearful bus drivers carried aggressive and abusive young males across the city to Bondi. By 11.30 p.m. the crowd was estimated at 15,000 and growing, peaking at 2 am at 20,000. There were bashings (groups provoking and attacking single males) and stabbings in the Park.

Again the crowd turned on the police and Bondi Park became a no-go area for police for 5 hours.   During the course of the evening 12 people were arrested with some 20 charges being laid, mostly concerning 'affray' and 'riotous behaviour'. Police also arrested three people after serious assaults - 1 juvenile charged with 'malicious wounding' and two adults charged with 'assault with a weapon' (stabbing). All three were convicted and sentenced. Police report that all arrests in 1995 were a direct result of the celebrations and ensuing affray.

Between Christmas 1995 and Christmas 1996, the Bondi Beach community went through a process of confronting the problem of crime and violence that had become a part of their community. What they did was to determine a course of action that would allow the event to proceed, while at the same time ensuring that it was a safe and happy celebration.

The key to their successful travelling of a path to a safer event was process by which the Bondi Beach Community Safety Committee took an inclusive and realistic approach to the problem. In practice, they adopted a risk management strategy and engaged in a community strengthening process. Developing effective partnership arrangements was integral to the process.

Thus, in the words of the consultants to the initiative, the Bondi Beach Safety Plan was about more than restoring safety. It was also about building community confidence in the community's ability to work together and solve problems. It was also about building community in the sense of cultivating networks of association of people who care about community safety and are willing to act to make a difference. [6]

This way not only do we restore an image of a community which is safe and confident, we also get people meeting, talking and exchanging ideas about community safety and how to do it. There was a collective learning and skilling in the techniques of safety taking place at Bondi Beach. Bad ideas and inefficiencies were identified, new ideas entered and new leaders were revealed.

The process by which the Bondi Beach community arrived at this result has been called moving from riot to Rio – from violence and disorder to community celebration. Essentially, they recognised that the energy that had been directed into conflict and violence could be redirected into celebration and sharing.

This strength of this approach was not immediately obvious to the members of the Bondi Beach Community Safety Committee. Like others before them, the options they initially considered ranged from supporting a major police security action, through to the path they finally adopted which was to stage a managed event that sought to engage the whole community. Not as mere spectators, but as full participants, in the model of the Carnival.

The result was a 1996 Christmas/New Year that was completely free of the violence and mayhem that marred the 1995 events.

The Crime Prevention Division has conservatively estimated that the costs to Government of the 1995 riots were in the vicinity of $370,000.

Taking into account the NSW Government contribution of $150,000 to underwrite the 1996 event, it is estimated that by creatively solving the public space problem of fear and violence at Bondi Beach saved at least $220,000. And this does not place a dollar value on the reduction in community fear and increased confidence in the use of that extremely valuable asset.

While the Bondi Beach experience is impressive in terms of the reduction in crime and direct savings to Government, it is also a good illustration of the broad range of major social and community benefits that flow from an effective partnership approach to crime prevention.

However, the real test of effective local crime prevention is whether it can be sustained and whether there are lessons that others can learn from it. Certainly Bondi has gone on to repeat its Christmas/New Year celebrations without any special Government support and without any repeat of the violence of previous years.

In other words, all of the necessary components for effective partnering were present in the work of the Bondi Beach community as they set about dealing with their local crime problem. Commitment, equity and trust were all evident in large measure. There was also clear leadership coming from the community itself as well as a commitment to an open-ended and ongoing relationship that kept sight of mutual goals and objectives. Communication was timely and responsive and most importantly there was a willingness to undertake continuous evaluation.

The other example I would briefly describe for our examination of partnering in crime prevention comes from quite a different world. In recent years drug use has come to be well understood as a prime driver for crime. The challenge for crime prevention is how to break that link. Drug-crime diversion programs have assumed a certain significance. These programs can take many forms, but one of the most complex is the drug court. The drug courts approach originated in a formal sense in the USA around ten years ago and has only come to Australia in the past few years. Admittedly, the practice of courts referring drug involved criminals into treatment is not a new one. However, what are new are the highly structured processes that are intrinsic to the drug court model.

And herein lies the challenge. Programs like Drug Courts seek to intervene with individuals on multiple levels and with a mixed set of goals. These goals typically include reduced criminal involvement and improved health and social functioning. Strategies for the achievement of these goals may not always be mutually supportive. As such there are many opportunities for conflicts to develop in managing drug crime diversionary programs.[7]

The specific issue to focus on here is the apparent conflict that can emerge between some of the goals of the health and welfare system and the criminal justice system in trying to deal with a drug affected individual and break the drug-crime cycle.

Essentially it is a clash of cultures – or when worlds collide.

For drug-crime diversion, the core problem arises when coercion by the criminal justice system is used to direct people into compulsory treatment. The rationale for the criminal justice coercion is that treatment works – a claim that treatment providers are quite understandably anxious to endorse. However, the truth is that on an individual basis alcohol and other drug treatment doesn't always work. Mind you, it is fair to say that for many people, the rehabilitative qualities of incarceration are also elusive. So these are far from perfect systems that we are dealing with here.

So what are these competing goals? They can be characterised as a form of competition between a focus on community protection – a goal of the criminal justice system – and a focus on protecting the individual – a goal of the health/welfare sector. While acknowledging that this is a gross oversimplification that does a disservice to the genuinely humane motivations of those who become involved in drug-crime diversion programs, let's look at the argument.

It is argued that the legitimate and appropriate focus of the criminal justice system's involvement in drug-crime diversion is on the protection of the community. Thus the goals of the criminal justice system are:

- To prevent recidivism;
- To protect the community;
- To rehabilitate offenders;
- Exact just and appropriate levels of punishment (in line with community expectations); and
- The achievement of appropriate forms of compensation for victims.

So, ultimately the criminal justice system has a loyalty to the community.

The health and welfare sectors have an equally appropriate focus on the need to protect the individual, most particularly from him or herself. This manifests itself in action and programs designed to achieve:

- Individual rehabilitation;
- Improved health and reduced health risks;
- Improved personal relationships; and
- Increased psychological well being.

In order to achieve this, the program loyalty must be first and foremost to the client.

So, the two major professional groups involved in the drug-crime diversion process can come to develop two quite different views of the individuals they are working with.

For the health/welfare professionals the framework they work from is seeking to promote individual autonomy, individual well being, engagement and motivation. For the criminal justice professional, they work from a framework in which their powers are externally imposed on the individual. These powers derive from the State and the wider community and in practice mean that they are not specifically concerned with the individual's motivations but their actions and, particularly, the consequences of that action. In other words, the criminal justice system does not overly concern itself with why the person is robbing other people – rather, it just wants them to stop and will use whatever powers the State enables it with to achieve that result.

At its worst, the conflict that these competing goals and clashes of culture can produce have been characterised as a conflict between people who think they are God and those who behave as though they are. I hasten to add that we don't propose to suggest which group is which.

So here we have a system at a stage where it could develop in one of two ways. On the one hand it could collapse into conflict and open warfare. This could result in the type of scenario presented at the start of this paper. This would see competing goals and a lack of understanding (or even willingness to communicate) result in the destruction of the earth and the loss of our ability to find the ultimate question to life, the universe and everything. Or a genuinely collaborative partnership could evolve - one that sees new relationships and new ways of operating producing genuine benefits for individuals and the wider community.

The signs for drug-crime diversion programs are promising. There is evidence of an increasing willingness to set aside professional preconceptions and jealousies and accept the need to focus on shared goals and outcomes. The NSW experience is demonstrating that human services and criminal justice professionals are more willing to engage in open-ended and ongoing relationships in which equity and trust are key values and drivers of practice.

There is also clear evidence of the emergence of one of the most important indicators of a developing long-term partnering arrangement. That is an increasing willingness to develop a shared language - a commitment to understanding that the narrow definitions associated with some terms have to be dispensed with. A simple example of this is the emerging understanding that the process of drug testing can have a very different meaning and purpose for a health professional (ie a **therapeutic** value) to an officer of the court (ie a **forensic** value). To work together there needs to be both an understanding of the value of each definition as well as a shared meaning.

Time will tell. But the blueprint for effective partnering exists and there are plenty of examples just like Bondi where new modes of operation have produced the results that were sought. So perhaps the ultimate advice is to be found on the cover of the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy itself – DON'T PANIC.

[1]   Adams, D (1992) <u>The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy. A trilogy in four parts.</u> London, Pan Books

[2]   Ibid p134

[3]   Bennington L & Cummane J (1999) *Partnering relationships in the public sector* in <u>The Quality Magazine</u>, August 1999, 8-15.

[4]   Domberger S, Farago S, Fernandez P (1997) *Public and private sector partnering: A re-appraisal* <u>Public Administration</u> 75,4,777-787

[5]   Shipway C & Homel P (1999) *Safer Cities and Towns: Crime Prevention Planning in Rural NSW* a paper presented to the conference <u>Crime in Rural Communities: The Impact, The Causes, The Prevention</u> AIC/UNE 1 March 1999.

[6]   Dunstan, G & McDonald, R (1997) *From Riot to Rio. The Transformation of the Bondi Beach Riots Christmas Day and New Year's Eve 1995-96* The Magnificent Events Company (available through the Crime Prevention Division, NSW AGD)

[7]   Belenko S (1998) *Research on drug courts: a critical review* <u>National Drug Court Institute Review</u> 1(1)