

**COMMUNITY CRIME PREVENTION AND ALCOHOL
AND DRUG ISSUES IN MACKAY
AN EXAMPLE ILLUSTRATING THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE NEW
QUEENSLAND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY CRIME
PREVENTION**

John Mallett
Mackay / Whitsundays Crime Prevention, Queensland



*Paper presented at the
Crime Prevention Conference
convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology and the
Crime Prevention Branch, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department
and held in Sydney, 12-13 September 2002*

Abstract

Community crime prevention requires the involvement of the community in solving crime-related issues of concern – ‘Local Solutions to Local Problems’. It also seeks for the community to feel safer, more together, and more effective.

Over the past three years, a local community crime prevention group has been active in identifying local links between drugs and crime, and building strategies to address those links.

The group has

- examined local statistics linking crime and drug (including alcohol) usage
- convened a community-based drug reporting workshop, to document anecdotal information about local drug use,
- championed a collaborative approach to tackling drug-related issues,
- been an active player in the Mackay Alcohol and Other Drugs Community Partnership.

This paper analyses Mackay’s experience of using community crime prevention to address links between crime and drugs, and explores the development of a community problem-solving process applicable to provincial cities. Mackay’s experience provides an example of how Queensland’s new Strategic Framework for Community Crime Prevention may be operationalised.

Introduction

At 3 pm on the Sunday afternoon of 31 August 1997, Mackay experienced a gun shoot-out in a city thoroughfare between two rival bikie gangs – the Odin’s Warriors and the Outlaws – both of whom have their headquarters within Mackay. Six people were taken to hospital as a result of the altercation; one man lost the sight in an eye. According to newspaper reports, Police collected 60 spent shells, but none of them were fired from the weapons seized. The seized weapons bore no fingerprints. Fifty-three people – only four of whom lived in Mackay – were arrested and charged with ‘causing an affray’, but no one was found guilty in the ensuing Court case. (*Daily Mercury* 1997 1998 & 1999)

The believed reason? A fight over drug territory and distribution networks.

Beginning with the Community

Three months after the shoot-out, a survey into community attitudes towards crime and crime prevention, identified that ‘drug taking’ was the fourth most-witnessed crime in Mackay from a selected list. (Whelan & Begg 1998) What was witnessed? What types of drugs? In what contexts? We don’t know, as the survey did not ask those questions.

And during the same year as the shoot-out and the community survey – 1997/98 – Police statistics show that Mackay and the Whitsundays had the second-highest per-capita rate of drug offences of any region in Queensland: second only to Cairns. (OESR 1999: 4) However, subsequent years have shown a much lower drug offence rate, although it has seemed to trend between 5 and 10% above the state average. (Queensland Police 1999, 2000, 2001)

Again, though, the interpretation of these figures is questionable. How many of these offences were for marijuana, how many amphetamines, how many heroin, or other drugs? We don’t know, because Queensland is the only Australian state which does not give a break-down for drug offences by type of drug. Are these figures reflective of a worse drug problem in Mackay than elsewhere? Or are they the result of a greater policing effort than elsewhere? Or more effective policing? Or a more concerned public, giving more accurate or more frequent information to CrimeStoppers? Are these figures the result of more drug transactions on the street, rather than in private?

From available statistics, we know that across Queensland:

- More than four-fifths (82%) of recorded drug offenders are male, but drug-related offences are increasing at a faster rate amongst women than men. (OESR 1999)
- More than half of Queensland’s drug offenders are aged between 15 and 24, and another 37% are aged 25 to 39. Very few are aged more than 40. (OESR 1999)
- Young people aged 15 to 24 are three times more likely than the total population to be drug offenders. (OESR 1999)
- Drug offences account for 7% of Queensland’s prisoners: that is, their main crime leading to their imprisonment relates to illicit drugs. (Government Statistician’s Office 1999)
- Further, some 60% of all crime, and 80% of property crime is drug-related – including alcohol. (Qld Govt 1999b: 4)
- More recent research, from the Australian Institute of Criminology, links a possible increase in crime in regional Australia to the suspected increase in drug use. (Williams 2001)

To gain support, community crime prevention must engage with the community around issues of concern to the community. (Qld Govt 2002a: 24-25) As illustrated by the above evidence, drug-related crime was one of those issues.

A Collaborative Approach

The concept of community crime prevention has much to offer a community grappling with emotive and difficult issues like problem drug use. Bringing sectors together into a partnership structure enables the community to share different knowledge about drugs use and misuse, recognize different values, identify different approaches to tackling the issue, accumulate resources, and monitor the effectiveness of actions from different perspectives and interest groups. For example, consider the interests of these sectors.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Local Government | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A safer community• Be seen as responding to community concerns |
| Police | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To reduce supply• Increasing community awareness through CrimeStoppers and Neighbourhood Watch, to engender more information leading to prosecutions |
| Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often the victims of drug-related crime |
| Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treatments for problem drug users• Using drugs to enhance community and individual life |
| Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protect our young people• Support for families with drug-related problems• Support for victims of crime• Community concerns about the 'proliferation' of drugs |
| Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Giving children and young people the information and guidance to make wise choices for life |
| Aboriginal & Islander communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protect our young people• Support for families with drug-related problems |
| Youth workers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helping young people 'pick up the pieces'• Seeking better community solutions |

Collecting and Collating Local Data

At the suggestion of the Queensland Police, a community crime prevention group in Mackay hosted a drug-reporting workshop in late 1999. (Martin 1999) Twenty-six people attended the workshop, coming from all the community sectors involved in drug issues in Mackay: health, policing and crime prevention, youth, community, Aboriginal and Islander communities, schools, and parents. The workshop, which was facilitated by the Queensland University of Technology, collated and documented what was collectively known about drug consumption patterns in Mackay, and how effectively drug-related issues were being managed. (Davies Maxwell & Davey 2000) Each sector presented their own summaries on drug consumption and drug-related problems in their various sectors.

From the perspective of documenting information about drug use in Mackay, the data collected was patchy.

Information from drug treatment services, and Police figures on drug offences, showed increasing problematic usage, particularly of amphetamines – which is the major illicit drug of concern in Mackay. (Fletcher 2001)

The workshop found, though mainly from anecdotal evidence, a movement from oral to injecting amphetamines, and at earlier ages. Binge use was quite common, and poly drug use was increasing. Cannabis and amphetamines were generally locally sourced. Many agencies were surprised at the ease with which consumers could purchase illicit drugs in Mackay, at relatively little cost.

School principals and guidance officers listened to the successes and frustrations of health service workers, youth workers shared the ‘hidden’ problems often co-existent with drug use, and parents shared their experiences of life at home, with sons/daughters with drug problems on a 24-hour-a-day, 7 day-a-week, 365-days-a-year basis.

Albeit that the amount of quantitative information which could be gleaned from the workshop proved less than we might have expected, the workshop revealed considerable qualitative data about perceptions and drug concerns, including

- Insufficient multi-disciplinary networks and collaboration between key community and government agencies.
- Need to increase and enhance local community responses.
- Insufficient diversity of treatment facilities.
- Insufficient education and support services for parents and schools.
- Geographic and cultural isolation.
- Parental drug and alcohol use.

(Davies Maxwell & Davey 2000: 6-7)

Leadership

The publication of these results caused quite a stir, particularly between parents and the community who wanted greater access to local drug treatment facilities and a reduction in drug-related problems, and under-resourced government and community agencies who were charged to deliver these goods.

The community crime prevention group reconsidered its options, and determined to take a lesser role. The group, together with other agencies, approached our local Member of Parliament, and raised the possibility of a community partnership to tackle drug-related issues on a much broader front than only crime. The Member for Mackay Mr Mulherin agreed, and, over several meetings, the Mackay Alcohol and Other Drugs Community Partnership (hereinafter the ‘Drugs Partnership’) was formed in mid-2000.

The Drugs Partnership comprises any interested member from the community, and is directed by a Steering Committee of 17 members, equally representing community and government interests, and coming from all sectors with an interest in the subject:

- Local government
- Drug Rehabilitation Action Group
- NarAnon family support group

- Aboriginal and Islander communities
- Media
- Youth workers
- Seven government departments, and, until recently, the
- Mackay Crime Prevention Partnership.

A critical element of the MA&ODCP was that it brought together people from so many different backgrounds and interests, with vastly different understandings of drug issues, and with different and sometimes conflicting propositions on what should be done. Members of the Drugs Partnership faced a choice: to build an action plan from which to tackle all these differences – with only the resources which members brought – or continue in conflict.

Action

Progress may have seemed slow and painstaking at times, but after two years and in looking back, some remarkable local progress has been made.

- The local hospital admission procedures have been explained and discussed. A poster was designed to advise people with drug problems seeking admission to the hospital, and their families, as to what services are offered, and referral to other alternatives if hospital admission is not appropriate. A quality feedback loop to/from the community is also in the process of being designed.
- A review of alcohol and other drugs services in Mackay was undertaken and completed by the Queensland Government. (Fletcher 2001)
- The Queensland Government is establishing a 10-bed drug residential and community support service in the next twelve months. The Drugs Partnership has been involved in the planning for this service, advising how it might best operate to meet Mackay's needs.
- Relationships between families with drug problems and organisations offering drug treatment services are much improved.
- Community organisations – notably DRAG and Team Freedom – are undertaking drug education programs within schools, within quality standards set in collaboration with Education Queensland, and using quality programs developed elsewhere.
- The Drugs Partnership has provided leadership and direction in community responses to drug issues.
- Media stories on drugs are more likely to take a 'helpful' and service-oriented approach. (MAODCP 2000, 2001, 2002)

An Evaluation

As with so many areas of crime prevention – and also in community development and community engagement – there has been scarce evaluation of 'what works, what doesn't, and what is promising', with relation to preventing drug-related crime. (Graycar McGregor & Makkai 2001; CROCCS & MRCSD 2002)

In an effort to demonstrate and document good practice in these fields, the Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet has recently conducted an analysis of the operations of the Mackay Alcohol and Other Drugs Community Partnership. This case study describes the history, context, key outcomes and learnings for government and community, of a significant community engagement activity in the Mackay region. Unfortunately, the report of the case study is not yet available.

From the perspective of the Queensland Government's new *Strategic Framework for Community Crime Prevention*, and my work as a practitioner in community crime prevention, I would suggest that the following are some of the factors which have contributed to the successes of the Drugs Partnership.

1. Ownership

The Mackay community better recognises that they have drug-related problems which need to be dealt with. (Qld Govt 1999, 2002b: 4) Much less frequently, parents are saying that 'there isn't any help' with drug-related problems. No longer are some citizens (and community leaders) saying that Mackay doesn't have a drug problem.

2. Working Inclusively

Seventeen members from different community and governmental sectors and organisations have worked together to provide leadership and implement strategies in response to community concerns. (Qld Govt 1999, 2002b: 3)

3. Access to Supports

For the many questions and feelings of isolation which arise, parents are now more aware of the Government's 24-hour Alcohol and Drug Information Service. Or they may access the new DRAG telephone service, or seek help through a NarAnon support group or Team Freedom. For medical questions and services, the traditional services through ATODS and the Base Hospital have been enhanced. (Qld Govt 2002b: 6)

4. Access to Data

Mackay has two authoritative reports, detailing drug concerns in Mackay. (Qld Govt 2002a: 23-25)

5. Assessment of Alternative Solutions

Mackay organisations have displayed a commitment to 'what works' in planning responses to identified drug-related needs in Mackay, in its development of a Mackay model for a drug residential and community support service, and its commitment to quality in drug education in schools. (Qld Govt 1999a)

6. Raising Standards

The Partnership has worked to provide the basis for building effective community strategies, and seeking outside assistance in developing 'good practice' responses to local issues. (Qld Govt 2002a: 26-27)

7. Empowerment

The Partnership has gathered information and collated local data to demonstrate local needs for additional services in Mackay. The Government has listened, and is seeking to work with the local community to provide good quality and effective services, tailored to local needs – including the participation of the most vulnerable groups in Mackay, the Aboriginal and Islander communities. (Qld Govt 2002c; Ife 1997)

8. Capacity Building

The social learning, through the Drugs Partnership and numerous other initiatives, is building Mackay's capability and capacity to respond appropriately to problematic drug use. (Qld Govt 2002b: 4)

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the many people from government departments and the Mackay community, with whom I have shared much learning on drug issues the past two years: particularly members of the MA&ODCP and Mackay Crime Prevention Partnership.

I am also indebted to reporter Bruce McKean, from Mackay's *Daily Mercury*, for his assistance in researching the shoot-out and aftermath.

References

- Centre for Research on Community and Children's Services & Mackay Regional Council for Social Development 2002 *Community Development: Best Practice and Benchmarking – a Workshop*. Authors, Mackay.
- Daily Mercury* 1 September 1997, 2 September 1997, 1 February 1998, 5 February 1998, 18 March 1999, 19 March 1999.
- Davies, A., Maxwell, J. & Davey, J. 2000 *Community Based Drug Reporting Working Group – Mackay*. Queensland University of Technology, Carseldine.
- Fletcher, L. 2001 *A Review of Alcohol and Other Drugs Services in Mackay*. A Report by the Review Steering Committee, established under the auspices of the Mackay Alcohol and Other Drugs Community Partnership. Queensland Health, Mackay.
- Focus on the Family Aust 1998 *How to Drug Proof Your Kids – An Education, Prevention and Intervention Program*. Author, Clayton Vic.
- Government Statistician's Office 1999 *Prisoners in Queensland*. Author, Brisbane.
- Graycar, A., McGregor, K. & Makkai, T. 2001 "Drugs and Law Enforcement." Paper presented to the ADFQ *Winter School in the Sun* Conference, Brisbane, 2001. Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
- Ife, J. 1997 *Rethinking Social Work: Towards Critical Practice*. Addison Wesley Longman Aust, South Melbourne.
- Lord Mayor's Illicit Drug Taskforce 1999 *Summary of Taskforce Report*. Brisbane City Council, Brisbane.
- Mackay Alcohol & Other Drugs Community Partnership 2000, 2001, 2002 *Minutes*.
- Mallett, J. 2000 "The Mackay Community-Based Drug Reporting Workshop." Paper presented to the *2000 Winter School in the Sun & 18th IFNGO Conference for the Prevention of Drug and Substance Abuse*, Brisbane, 3-6 July. Alcohol & Drug Foundation of Qld, Brisbane.
- Mallett, J. 2001 "Two Steps Forward, Two Steps Back, Circle to the Left and Promenade. Community Crime Prevention and Drug-Related Issues in Mackay." Paper presented to *The Character, Impact and Prevention of Crime in Regional Australia* Conference, Townsville, 2-3 August. Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
- Martin, Insp P. 1999 Private Briefing to the Mackay Crime Prevention Partnership. *Minutes* of the Mackay Crime Prevention Partnership, March.
- Martin, J. 2000 "Development and Implementation of the Brisbane Drug Action Plan." Paper presented to the *2000 Winter School in the Sun & 18th IFNGO Conference for the Prevention of Drug and Substance Abuse*, Brisbane, 3-6 June. Alcohol & Drug Foundation of Qld, Brisbane.
- Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy 1998 *National Drug Strategic Framework, 1998-99 to 2002-03: Building Partnerships*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Office of Economic & Statistical Research 1999 *Illicit Drug Offences*. OESR, Brisbane.
- Penington, D. 1999 "A Historical Perspective of Drug Use in Australia." Paper presented to the *Australian Conference on Drug Strategy*, Adelaide, 28 April. South Australian Police, Adelaide.
- Queensland Government 1999a *Queensland Crime Prevention Strategy – Building Safer Communities*. Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Brisbane.

- Queensland Government 1999b *Queensland Crime Prevention Strategy Statistical Profile*. Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Brisbane.
- Queensland Government 2002a *Building Safer Communities: a Crime Prevention Manual for Queensland*. Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Brisbane.
- Queensland Government 2002b *A Strategic Framework for Community Crime Prevention*. Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Brisbane.
- Queensland Government 2002c *Community Engagement Division – Directions Statement*. Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Brisbane.
- Queensland Police Service 1999 *Police Statistical Review 1998/99*. Queensland Government, Brisbane.
- Queensland Police Service 2000 *Police Statistical Review 1999/2000*. Queensland Government, Brisbane.
- Queensland Police Service 2001 *Police Statistical Review 2000/01*. Queensland Government, Brisbane.
- Whelan, S. & Begg, C. 1998 *Creating Perspective: A Blueprint for Crime Prevention and Community Safety by the Community for the Community*. ACRO Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Inc, Lutwyche Qld.
- Williams, P. 2001 *Illicit Drug Use in Regional Australia*. Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No 192, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.