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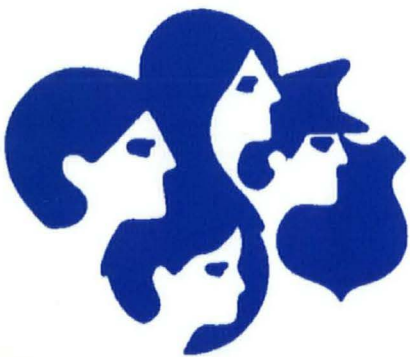
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RCMP Community Policing



Models of Aboriginal
Policing

Canada

Models of Aboriginal Policing

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There are many models of policing services in operation within Aboriginal communities across Canada. These models vary in the level of RCMP participation, from full RCMP detachments on reserve land, through to completely autonomous Tribal police services, with various stages between. Several examples of models which are currently in place in Alberta and Manitoba are described here.

Identifying the appropriate policing model for a community will ultimately depend on the needs and desires of each specific community. This document is intended to serve as a starting point and source of information, from which an Aboriginal community, together with the police, can begin the process of developing an appropriate model of policing.

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Assumption RCMP Detachment

Assumption is an isolated Dene-Thà reserve in north-western Alberta, about 900 kilometres from Edmonton. With a population of 1200 people, this community has the highest crime rate in rural Alberta. A large majority of the crime is alcohol related, and much of it is violent. Unemployment is high, family violence and abuse are serious problems, and like many isolated communities, there is little to keep the young people busy, other than getting into trouble.

Contrary to popular belief, however, Assumption is not all bad news. There is an active movement from within the community to resolve the problems facing Assumption and the Dene people, through community healing, counselling and traditional Native approaches to problem solving. As a result, there is a very active and effective Community Consultative Group here. The community has also just elected an entirely sober Chief and Council for the first time ever.

The community of Assumption presents a unique policing challenge, which is being met by a full RCMP detachment on the reserve.

There are six RCMP members working at Assumption Detachment, who also police the nearby community of Rainbow Lake. The detachment office is located in the heart of the community, just down the road from the store and recreation centre, and the detachment members all live in the community too.

Sgt. Dan Fudge is the Detachment Commander here. He has worked for many years in isolated Aboriginal communities, and is happy to be stationed in Assumption. He believes its problems are not insurmountable, and can be overcome with a concerted, cooperative effort within the community.

The community of Assumption has a long history with the RCMP, and wants to maintain and improve this relationship. Sgt. Fudge is impressed with the level of community interest and involvement in policing here. The community is tired of having the same people cause trouble for everybody over and over, and wants the situation to change. Each Community Consultative Group meeting is attended by several official committee members, as well as six or seven, and sometimes as many as twelve, community members who attend to listen, ask questions, give input, and raise issues of concern to them. Meeting times are announced over the local radio and television stations, as are any plans or programs to attack problem issues, decided on at the meetings.

The Committee has been an excellent tool to improve the level of understanding between the RCMP and the community. Many people have attended meetings to ask questions about laws and police policies, and have left with a better understanding of why the police do the things they do, and how investigations are carried out. The RCMP members who attend these meetings also gain an understanding of the issues and concerns of the people they are policing, and learn more about the way the Dene people approach problem solving.

Since the Committee was created, it has requested that the police become more strict in enforcing certain laws, asking for more Checkstops for impaired driving and license checks. The Committee, the police and the Band Council have made a joint request to all the businesses in the area to control their sales of hairspray and solvents to youth. Arrangements have also been made to air the detachment's library of safety, health and crime prevention videos on the local television station for the benefit of the community.

The Committee is also looking into starting an traditional justice committee, to allow diversion from the justice system, joint sentencing of youth by Elders and Justices of the Peace, and the use of traditional approaches to punishment and problem resolution, such as spiritual counselling.

A member of the Consultative Committee, who is an Elder, has also been invited to attend detachment meetings to provide cross-cultural training and insight to the RCMP members.

It seems the RCMP are well accepted by the people of the Assumption reserve, and will be providing policing services here for many years to come. Sgt. Fudge would like to see some Dene members stationed here. He is encouraging and supporting two community members who have applied to join the RCMP, and hopes to see more recruits from the area in the future.

Hobbema Satellite Detachment

The village of Hobbema, Alberta is approximately 100 kilometres south of Edmonton, near the Samson, Ermineskin and Montana Nation reserves. On December 6, 1991, an RCMP satellite detachment was opened in the village, to serve as a base for policing the approximately 10 000 people in the area.

These Cree communities, which had previously been policed from the Wetaskiwin Rural Detachment sixteen kilometres away, were quite happy with the RCMP as a police service, but had begun to ask for more accessible policing. Recent Aboriginal Justice Inquiries and Reports had also emphasized the need to move to on-reserve policing where possible, instead of policing from a distance. It was hoped that moving the police station right into the community, with a full-time police presence, would help enhance police-community relations, and reduce crime.

The members relocated to work out of the Hobbema Satellite were "hand-picked" from the Wetaskiwin Detachment. All the members had experience working in Native communities, and were willing to move here. Currently, there are eight Constables and two Corporals at the satellite, with plans to increase the complement by one Staff Sergeant, and three Constables.

There is also a small Force of Native Band Constables here, called the Four Nations Law Enforcement. Two of these unarmed officers work along-side the RCMP members on each shift, performing general policing duties under RCMP supervision. They receive their training at the Solicitor General's Provincial Police College. It is currently uncertain what the future of this Native force is; whether the RCMP will continue to retain responsibility for Category "C" serious offenses, or whether the Band Constables will eventually become full-fledged police officers able to carry out the total complement of policing duties.

The detachment was opened in a small existing building in the village of Hobbema, but plans are in the works to build a new, modern, Band-owned detachment office, actually on reserve land, which will be rented out to the RCMP.

Since the RCMP have relocated to the reserve area, they have been able to become more involved in the community, and work with other community agencies to resolve community problems. An inter-agency committee to address the issue of family violence has been set-up, with representatives from the police, social agencies and the Band's prevention coordinator. The committee is looking for alternatives to the criminal justice system, and preventative approaches appropriate to the community. Response time to incidents has been drastically reduced, making the community feel safer and closer to the police, and the more accessible location has allowed people to make personal, walk-in complaints, which were never possible before.

The number of incidents prevented by a permanent police presence can never be accurately known, but the members of Hobbema Satellite Detachment have reported that since the satellite was opened, murders have been reduced to nearly zero, from seven or eight each year.

The Band Council and other community members have been providing positive feedback to the RCMP on their work on the reserve. Everyone seems very pleased to have the police so close and visible. The RCMP is making a greater effort to increase their cultural understanding also, which has nurtured their relationship with the community here. The Detachment has even hired an Elder-in-Residence to provide cross-cultural training to the members, and increase understanding on both sides.

It is currently expected that this satellite office will eventually become a full detachment, with 100% Aboriginal RCMP membership within ten years. Until this time, the community seems quite satisfied with the current situation, and the policing service they are receiving.

Peigan Nation Satellite Detachment

Since early 1992, the Peigan Nation Reserve, in southern Alberta, has been home to an RCMP Satellite Detachment. This office was opened, in the town of Brocket, on the reserve, after both the community and the members of the Pincher Creek Detachment, who were policing this reserve from a distance, began to realize that the policing service being provided to this community could be improved.

The main detachment is located in the town of Pincher Creek, but a large percentage of its calls for service were originating from the reserve 20 kilometres away. Band members were becoming dissatisfied with long response times and the considerable distance from the community to the detachment. The community was feeling distanced from the police; there were nearly 2000 people living in and around Brocket, but due to distances and limited resources, the only time many of these people saw the police was when they came to the reserve to arrest people. The community was generally happy being policed by the RCMP, but they wanted a permanent, visible police presence.

In order to provide this presence, six Pincher Creek detachment members, including several Aboriginal members, were re-located, to work out of a small office in a space provided in the community centre. On December 20, 1992, the office relocated once again to a newly renovated building next door to the new high school.

Since this satellite office opened, feedback from the community has been much more positive. Community members like having the police easily accessible. Members try to spend time each shift doing paperwork in the office, so that they are present for walk-in calls, or to provide information. They also visit the schools and are seen in the community on a regular basis. The satellite office has no permanent support staff. It is planned to relocate a secretary or stenographer on a part-time basis soon, but even when there is no one in the office, community members are reassured that a member is somewhere close by to respond to their call.

The members are also happy with the new arrangement. They feel more part of the community, and find that their presence and participation in the community are doing wonders for their public relations – they are seen as real people, not just as the "bad guys". They have also seen a reduction in complaints since they have arrived, and believe their presence has a preventative effect, as people considering mischief will reconsider when they know the police are actually in town.

The member in charge of the Peigan Nation Satellite Detachment meets with the Elders for community consultation, and feels the Elders have been instrumental in the smooth transition of moving the Detachment office on the reserve, and the community acceptance of the members themselves. This detachment has also hired an Elder-in-Residence to act as a cultural and spiritual resource person for the detachment.

Plans have been made to negotiate a tri-partite funding agreement for this satellite detachment,

so that the RCMP may continue to provide policing services to this Aboriginal community. It is hoped that eventually it will become a full, independent RCMP detachment, with 100% Aboriginal RCMP membership at this office in the next 5 years.

Siksika Nation Police Service

The Siksika Nation, a 2700 member Blackfoot band near Gleichen, Alberta, has been trying for many years, with varying degrees of success, to form their own independent police service. With the support of the RCMP and the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada, this is now becoming a reality. The Siksika Nation Police Service is evolving into an autonomous Native police service.

Prior to 1990, a Tribal police force, funded by the Band and the Department of Indian Affairs, existed on the Siksika Nation reserve. This group had the authority to enforce Band by-laws, but the RCMP were still responsible for the regular policing of the reserve from Gleichen Detachment. In 1990, the Band decided to begin to develop the By-law force into a legitimate policing service.

The Band's Police Commission started to hire and train new members, from the community, to respond to and investigate Category "A" incidents, such as minor thefts and other summary offenses, with the aim of increasing their responsibilities as they gain experience and confidence. Responsibility for more serious incidents remained, for the time being, with the RCMP.

Negotiations with the Solicitor General were started, to develop a tri-partite funding agreement for policing services under the new First Nations Policing Policy, and in April 1992, they signed the first tri-partite agreement in the West.

In March 1992, the ten members of the Siksika Nation Police Service graduated from the Alberta Solicitor General's Police College and went to work at neighbouring RCMP detachments for their Recruit Field Training period. Currently, the Siksika Police and the RCMP are working together under official protocols, in a "team policing" arrangement, allowing them to accompany the RCMP on ride-alongs and to observe and assist in investigations of serious offenses. The RCMP provides afterhours telecoms support and incarceration facilities which the Siksika Police Service are lacking.

Some difficulty has been experienced with finding and maintaining an experienced Chief of Police to lead this new police service, so the community requested the assistance of the RCMP. As a result, Corporal Bruce Barkley from Gleichen Detachment was seconded to serve as Chief until an experienced chief could be hired, or a member of the police service could gain the necessary experience. The Police Commission hopes to hire a new chief in the near future, but Corporal Barkley will be kept on as Operational NCO, to ensure a smooth transition of command.

Corporal Barkley also consults with the community, both formally and informally, to ensure that the police service, under his direction, is responding to the needs of the community. Although he is not Aboriginal, he has been well accepted by the Siksika Nation as their Police Chief, and is grateful for the experience he has gained from working in this Aboriginal community.

Currently, the RCMP is carrying out regular audits of the Siksika Police Service. Review and Implementation Committees have also been set up by the provincial government, to monitor and direct the development of this fledgling police service, and make the decision to increase their responsibilities when appropriate. The Police Commission is also still in place to act as a liaison between the police and the community and to respond to any complaints against members which may arise.

The Siksika Police are a group of young, energetic, motivated people, who are flourishing under Corporal Barkley's supervision. According to Corporal Barkley, force morale is very high and feedback from the community has been very positive; the Siksika Nation is proud to have its own police force made up of its own Band members. The members like working in their own community, because, although they may have to deal with friends or relatives, they feel respected, and are able to use their training and discretion to help their community solve its own problems.

Corporal Barkley believes the RCMP secondment option has been a very positive choice for this community during the development of its police service, as he has been able to share his years of experience and training with the new police members and the Police Commission, and help them develop their own police service - another step in the process of self-government.

The implementation and evolution process is slow, but steady. Corporal Barkley is confident that in just a few years, with the continued support of the government and the RCMP, his secondment will no longer be necessary, and the Siksika Nation Police Service will be a fully independent Native police service.

Saddle Lake Satellite Detachment

In November 1990, the RCMP opened a store-front satellite office in Saddle Lake, a Cree community of 5000 people in central Alberta, south-east of Edmonton. The community was requesting improved response time and more visible policing, than the St. Paul RCMP Detachment, 30 kilometres away, was currently able to provide them. The community was willing to make office space available to the police on the reserve in order to ensure this increased level of service.

Saddle Lake has a strong and active Band Council, which has been working for many years to ensure that there is a comprehensive system of social services available on the reserve, including the police. Both the council and the RCMP also believed that a permanent RCMP presence would improve both police services to the reserve, and police-community relations by making the police more easily accessible and approachable, and allowing them to be seen in roles other than strictly enforcers of the law. A larger, more permanent police presence would also allow the police to become more involved with other agencies on the reserve, in resolving community problems.

The RCMP members who work out of Saddle Lake (and are also responsible for policing the neighbouring community of Smokey Lake and the Good Fish Reserve), feel the move was a good decision and are happy to be stationed there. They are closer to their calls, and the atmosphere is more relaxed and open than in a larger detachment, and they are able to get to know the community much better.

Moving the RCMP directly onto the reserve also gave the local Band Constables more opportunity for training and supervision, and, as a result, would give them more credibility in the eyes of the community. There has been a tribal police force on the Saddle Lake reserve, off and on since the early 1970's, but its success has been limited for various reasons. Currently, there are three Band Constables who have received training at the Solicitor General's Police College, and work with limited powers of enforcement and investigation, with the RCMP. The community is coming to respect these tribal police, as they respect the RCMP members at the detachment.

A Police Commission was set up by the Band just after the satellite opened, to act as a separate body from the Chief and Council, monitoring, supporting and consulting with the RCMP and Band Constables in their work on the reserve, and acting as an official liaison between the police and the community. The Saddle Lake Police Commission is very concerned with supporting the RCMP's efforts to re-introduce community policing approaches to their service, and fostering a community approach to problem solving. Members of the Police Commission also sit on interagency committees which are using a team approach to solve problems such as drug abuse and family violence on the reserve.

The morale is good at this detachment and everyone seems happy with the setup. Although prisoners must still be taken to St. Paul because of a lack of incarceration facilities in Saddle

Lake, the satellite recently received a PIRS terminal, and the members are working to start a Victim Services Unit on the reserve, funded through the provincial court Fine Sur-charge Program.

The future of policing on the Saddle Lake Reserve looks very promising. The Police Commission is currently looking into setting up its own autonomous police force, but everyone is aware that this will require a great deal of time, effort, and cooperation between the Band and the RCMP. Several of the members stationed at the Saddle Lake Satellite Detachment are Aboriginal, including the NCO i/c. The current plan is to increase the percentage of Aboriginal RCMP members at the detachment, with the goal of 100% Aboriginal membership within the next five to ten years.

In the short-term, the Police Commission, the Band Council and the satellite detachment members are discussing the establishment of a traditional tribal justice system for youth, which will allow youth in conflict with the law to be diverted from the criminal justice system, and dealt with in traditional native ways, such as spiritual counselling.

Blood Tribe Police

The Blood tribe reserve is the largest reserve in Canada, in both population and land area. It lies 150 km south of Calgary, stretching between the city of Lethbridge and the town of Cardston, in southern Alberta. Six thousand, five hundred people live on the Blood reserve today.

The Blood Tribe first began their own police force in 1981, in an attempt to improve policing service to the reserve and to take a further step toward self-government. The members of the Blood reserve were feeling alienated from their police. The nearest RCMP detachment was off reserve land, in the town of Cardston. Response times were long due to the great distances involved (at times up to 60 miles), and limited police resources meant the RCMP could only answer incident calls – there was no time for pro-active community based policing. Historically, the RCMP and the Blood Tribe had maintained a strong and positive relationship, but this connection was now becoming strained due to a perceived lack of understanding on both sides, and political pressures on the reserve to reject non-native intervention.

An initial five-year pilot policing project was started, but unfortunately it was doomed to failure. From the start, there was no consistent commitment on the part of the Band to provide funding, equipment and facilities to support the tribal police. A new police station was designed and built, but there was not enough money left over for remaining equipment needs. Training courses and facilities were not easily available and recruitment practices were poorly controlled. The Police Commission was not created until the tribal policing project had been in place for some time and, as a result, the chief and council became reluctant to hand over a percentage of the decision-making authority with which they had traditionally been endowed. Tribal politics only served to increase these negative feelings. In 1986, except for a nominal force of band constables, the responsibility for the policing of the Blood reserve reverted to the RCMP.

Two years later, in 1988, having learned from these mistakes, a tribal police force was attempted again, this time with better planning, and financial and logistical support from the Band, the province and the RCMP.

For the first few years of the new project, the RCMP maintained overall control of policing for the reserve. The Blood Tribe Police were given limited duties, and worked one-on-one with experienced RCMP members. The RCMP and the Blood Tribe Police Commission (this time in place early on in the project), worked together to modify RCMP policies and practices to suit a smaller, local force. Today, the Blood Tribe Police have had over five years to gain experience in policing, and since September 1992, they have been responsible for the complete range of operational policing duties on the reserve.

Currently, there are 17 members on the Blood Tribe Police working out of its headquarters building in the town of Standoff. The RCMP are still working with the Blood Tribe Police to improve the supervisory and management skills of the more senior members of the Force. The present Chief of the Blood Tribe Police has been hired from outside the reserve, but it is hoped to eventually replace him with a Blood Tribe member, most likely the Deputy Chief.

Recruits to the Blood Tribe Police are selected from the Band, and their basic training is carried out at the Alberta Solicitor General's Police College. Recruit field training for new members is then completed at RCMP detachments neighbouring the reserve.

Negotiations are currently under way to establish a tri-partite funding agreement with the Provincial and Federal governments to ensure stabilized funding into the future. The RCMP still provides a monthly audit and in-service training courses, and maintains formal protocols with the Blood Tribe Police, to assist each other and share duties where necessary.

The relationship between the RCMP and the residents of the Blood Tribe Reserve has improved greatly since the early 1980's, thanks to efforts made by both the RCMP and the Blood tribe members, and the support which the RCMP has provided in creating the new tribal police service.

The majority of people on the reserve are very proud to have their own native police force, and feel more ownership and responsibility for policing their community. There is still a strong history between the Blood Tribe and the RCMP, however, and most people here believe the relationship will be maintained and improved in years to come.

Louis Bull Tribal Police Service

The Louis Bull Tribal Police Service, located on the Louis Bull Reserve near Hobbema, Alberta, was the first fully autonomous, Native-governed police service in Canada. It began with limited powers of enforcement, in July, 1984, and by 1987 was granted authority by the Alberta government to investigate all categories of crime.

Before the creation of the Louis Bull Police Service, the reserve was policed by the RCMP from the Wetaskiwin Rural Detachment. The community, however, was not completely satisfied with the service they were receiving. Response times were long due to limited manpower and the large area the police were required to cover, and crime rates on the reserve were soaring. The Elders and council felt that a local, Band-funded police service could provide more visible, more thorough policing.

Although the Louis Bull Service has been in existence for nine years, it has not been without its problems. Running a small police force, especially one with such a high police to population ratio (1:150), is expensive. There has been a very high turnover of personnel in this time period, in part due to the uncertainty of funding from the Band.

As the Louis Bull Service was the first of its kind, it also experienced some resistance from governmental sources in the beginning. Currently, however, the service is running smoothly, with Chief Constable Bob Reid, an ex-OPP member, as chief, one Sergeant and five Constables. Negotiations are currently being carried out, and the Band expects to sign a tri-partite funding agreement with the Federal and Provincial governments in the very near future, which will guarantee funding for the next few years at least. Chief Reid feels this more secure funding arrangement will be a great benefit to Aboriginal police forces like his, and will help to ensure their future success.

The community and their police have a very positive, trusting relationship. Chief Reid has an open-door policy with the community, and receives calls directly from community members to discuss problems, concerns and complaints against his members. He encourages his members to participate in community activities and sports leagues, and all the members of the service make themselves very visible in the community at all times. The community feels free to bring their problems to the police, and the police are happy to direct their resources to these areas of mutual concern. The Police Commission, which is a separate body from the Band Council, monitors the activities of the Louis Bull Police Service, and acts as an official liaison between the police and the community.

Chief Reid has also been able to recently resolve some old crime files he had never expected to re-open, due to the trust he has built up with the community. In fact, the Louis Bull Police claim a 72% drop in crime rates on the reserve since they took over policing it, and provincial statistics show a 94% clearance rate for investigations, as compared to a provincial average of 39%; facts which Chief Reid attributes to the existence of a 24-hour police presence and an intimate police-community relationship available from such a small, independent police service.

The relationship between the Louis Bull Police and the RCMP is also very friendly. According to Chief Reid, the RCMP were very supportive in helping the Band set up its own Force. They provided training for its members and advice to the Police Commission. The two police services still cooperate as much as possible, and share the workload, serving court papers, covering calls or providing back-up when the other service is very busy. The Louis Bull Police also have a contract with the RCMP and the city of Wetaskiwin for cell-space, as the small Louis Bull office has no incarceration facilities.

Today, initial training for Louis Bull Police members is carried out at the Alberta Provincial Police College, and in-service training is provided, on agreement, with the Calgary City Police and the Canadian Police College in Ottawa. The Service has grown and matured enough that they are able to provide their own recruit training, no longer relying on the RCMP or other forces. There is still some difficulty in securing funding for members to attend all the training courses they would like, and as the Force is small, it can be difficult to cover their shifts while they are in training.

Although 5 members of the Louis Bull Police are Aboriginal, including the Second-in-command, none is originally from the Louis Bull Reserve; a conscious choice made by the Band and Police Commission, to avoid conflicts of interest. The Service did begin an Auxiliary Constable Program in January of this year, to increase community participation in policing.

When asked about the future of the Louis Bull Police Service, chief Reid envisions its expansion into a regional Native police service, for the Louis Bull reserve, the neighbouring reserves of Samson, Ermineskin and Montana, and possibly including other reserves and Bands across the province.

Dakota-Ojibway Tribal Council Police

The Dakota-Ojibway Tribal Council (DOTC) is an assembly of 8 Sioux and Ojibway Bands in southern Manitoba, who have united to form one regional political council. The DOTC centrally governs services and resources for these reserves. There are many Native tribal councils and assemblies across Manitoba and the rest of the country. Arrangements like this allow for better programming and planning for all member Bands, combining the resources and political power of each individual reserve into one driving force.

In 1977, the DOTC undertook a pilot project to create its own regional Native-based police force- a force which is still in existence today.

Currently, the DOTC police service has 7 detachments serving 8 reserves, and all but 6 of its 28 members (including the Chief and two Deputies) are Native. Each detachment is commanded by a Corporal. Training for new members is carried out at the RCMP Academy in Regina, and in-service training is taken with either the RCMP or Brandon City Police.

The DOTC Police Service is officially still in pilot project status, and receives basic funding from the Provincial government (12%), and the Federal government (86%), but a tri-partite agreement is currently being negotiated to re-distribute this balance of funding, and ensure more secure long-term financial stability.

The DOTC is responsible for supplementing the funding and maintaining facilities and equipment, but unfortunately, the council often has other priorities, and the police have to make do with what is available. The force has no central dispatch, and conditions and housing arrangements in some detachments are very poor. Plans are being made to improve this situation in the near future.

There is a Police Commission in place, whose members include representatives from Federal and Provincial Solicitors General, RCMP and DOTC Police representatives, and eight reserve community members. The Commission guides and directs the DOTC Police's senior members, and consults with the general council and individual communities to set policing priorities and goals.

The DOTC Police serves a large area, and like any regional police force, it finds itself called on to be all things to all people. Official protocols are in place with the RCMP to cooperate and share workloads where possible, especially on such serious crimes as assault and murder.

Throughout the DOTC Police's lifetime, the RCMP have provided training, guidance and logistical support. Warren Fontaine, a member of the DOTC Police since 1980 and Deputy Police Chief since 1989, describes the working relationship between the RCMP and DOTC police as "tremendous".

Like many Aboriginal forces, the DOTC Police have found that Native officers working in Native communities are able to use a great deal of mediation, negotiation and diversion in their work. A concerted effort is also being made to increase the amount of pro-active, community-based work the DOTC Police does, following a recommendation by the 1991 Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in Manitoba.

Although there have been some problems and political disputes over the years, the DOTC's member communities are generally happy with their police, and value the presence of Aboriginal police officers in their communities. The members of the DOTC are hopeful that policing the DOTC reserves will become easier, once guaranteed funding is achieved, and they have more resources to dedicate to pro-active community-building programs and projects.