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Factors Related to Successful Mobilization of Communities for Crime Prevention

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine certains facteurs liés à la réussite des efforts de mobilisation des collectivités en vue de prévenir la criminalité. Il se penche sur le concept de mobilisation communautaire et sur les attentes qui s'y rattachent au chapitre des politiques relatives au rôle des collectivités en prévention de la criminalité ; il met en lumière certains des enjeux fondamentaux et des obstacles qui se sont dégagés d'expériences récentes de mobilisation de collectivités pour prévenir la criminalité au Canada et ailleurs ; il s'interroge sur ce que nous enseignent ces expériences au sujet de la mobilisation communautaire à l'égard de la prévention de la criminalité. Il prend fin sur une discussion des facteurs qui contribuent à une mobilisation efficace et qui pourraient orienter les efforts de mobilisation futurs.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores factors related to successful mobilization of communities for crime prevention. It explores the concept of community mobilization and the related policy expectations regarding the role of communities in crime prevention; highlights key issues and challenges that have emerged as a result of recent experiences in mobilizing communities for crime prevention in Canada and elsewhere; and, reflects on what can be learned about community mobilization for crime prevention from these experiences. It concludes with a discussion of factors that contribute to successful mobilization which could guide future mobilization efforts.

Introduction

It is largely taken for granted that communities have an important role to play in preventing crime and fostering community safety. Crime control agendas in most western democracies reflect this view and underscore the importance of community engagement and participation and partnerships. This expectation is based on the widely-held belief that many crime and community safety issues emerge from local, specific contexts and thus are rightfully “owned” at the community level. Locals experience crime problems first hand and thus have valuable knowledge that may be critical to the success of an intervention. Moreover, the long term success and sustainability of positive changes are seen as inextricably linked to the level of community involvement and ownership of strategies – particularly when institutional resources to address crime are scarce.

Over the years, various strategies have attempted to mobilize communities for crime prevention. In Canada, interest in community mobilization for crime prevention began to gather momentum in the 1980s, particularly in relation to evolving community policing and community safety strategies. In 1994, the federal government initiated the *National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention*, explicitly promoting integrated action and assistance to communities to help them develop and implement community-based solutions to crime problems. In particular, the Strategy’s *Community Mobilization Program* supported a range of activities to assist communities in addressing local crime and victimization issues – particularly those communities deemed to be ‘high risk/high needs.’ The current federal “Blueprint for Effective Crime Prevention” (NCPC, 2007) continues to acknowledge the importance of community-based crime prevention through the *Crime Prevention Action Fund (CPAF)*.¹

The purpose of this article is to reflect on efforts to mobilize communities. It will specifically address the following questions:

- What is community mobilization for crime prevention?
- What are the policy expectations concerning community involvement in preventing crime?
- What are the issues and challenges in this area?
- What more do we need to learn about how to successfully mobilize communities?

¹ See “Blueprint for Effective Crime Prevention” at www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cpl/_fl/bp-en.pdf

This article builds on a study of community mobilization and crime prevention commissioned by the *National Crime Prevention Centre* in 2001 (Hastings & Jamieson, 2001). This study included a review of published and grey literature on community mobilization and capacity development, which was subsequently updated in August, 2007 with the support of the *Institute for the Prevention of Crime*. The 2001 study also included consultations with community mobilization experts, including government officials, academics and practitioners, in a variety of sectors and disciplines. The current article also incorporates insights from *Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC)*, an action research initiative on neighbourhood revitalization undertaken by the *United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada, The Caledon Institute of Social Policy, and Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement* from spring 2005 to spring 2007. The project took place in five Canadian neighbourhoods located in the cities of Halifax, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Regina and Surrey. This project has generated a wealth of knowledge about the theory, design and implementation of integrated, collaborative policies and strategies to revitalize “distressed” neighbourhoods and address a range of quality of life issues.² In this article, insights on community mobilization processes from this project, as seen through the lens of crime prevention, are highlighted.

What is Community Mobilization for Crime Prevention?

“It’s not much different from community development – it refers to communities that have got some support and resources to do something...”

“What you are trying to do is enable (empower) people and encourage and inspire community members and leaders to work together...”

“It is the ‘how’ – bringing resources to bear on the goal.”

“It’s about community engagement.”

“Community mobilization involves breaking down barriers to connect people so as to connect assets that you need to create a sturdy platform for action...”

– Comments from consultation participants in Hastings & Jamieson (2001).

² See www.ancommunity.ca for a full description of this project, including resources and tools produced. The author conducted a summative evaluation of the ANC project and insights from that study are also considered in this discussion on community mobilization for crime prevention.

There is a consensus, based on scientific evidence, that “communities matter” in crime prevention (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2006; Sherman, Farrington, Welsh, & MacKenzie, 2002). Yet, despite a great deal of attention to the role of community in crime prevention, the scholarship on community mobilization for crime prevention is limited. Because of the lack of rigorous studies, community mobilization for crime prevention remains largely of “unknown effect” (Walsh & Hoshi, 2002). The literature reviewed for this article revealed that this lack of focussed study on community mobilization is not unique to the crime prevention world. Indeed, there is no single definition of the term or theoretical framework for community mobilization, regardless of the field of interest, be it health, education, social service, international development or the environment (Hastings & Jamieson, 2001).

Turning to the broader literature on community development, common definitions and theoretical concepts are still lacking in this multidisciplinary field (Hustedde & Ganowicz, 2002; Poppel & Quinney, 2002). The term “community mobilization” quickly blends and blurs with other terms and related processes, such as community-building, capacity development, citizen engagement and participation (Banks & Shenton, 2001). In practice, these processes are relatively fluid parts of the dynamics of community development and change. They frequently overlap in practice. As our consultation process also revealed, policy makers and practitioners understand and apply the term in many different ways, including as a strategy, technique and an outcome (Hastings & Jamieson, 2001).

In practice, community mobilization in the crime prevention context has focussed on efforts to muster community members to participate in carrying out a largely pre-set agenda, or has been vaguely interpreted to mean the assembling of local resources to address local problems through a range of programs and strategies (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2006). A few scholars have begun to cast crime prevention in the community development frame (Lane & Henry, 2001 and 2004). Although more work is required to develop a fully integrated framework for understanding community mobilization, for the purposes of this paper community mobilization is understood in broad terms as a process of preparing a “community” for action and change (Hastings & Jamieson, 2001). It is also important to acknowledge that much more work is required to evaluate the role and effectiveness of community mobilization as a tool in crime prevention.

Mobilizing Communities for Crime Prevention

Sifting through the literature and experience to date, it is possible to distinguish three key, interrelated types of efforts to mobilize communities for crime prevention, each of which is linked to a specific agenda:

- Mobilization in support of law enforcement to reduce and prevent crime (typically initiated and led by police agencies);
- Mobilization to advance change within the criminal justice sector (typically initiated and led by interest-specific community activists or groups); and
- Mobilization to advance a broader vision of community safety and well being (initiated in a variety of ways, and typically led by a broader collective or coalition of institutional players and community members).

An overview of each of these types of mobilization efforts is provided below.

Community Mobilization in Support of Law Enforcement

Community mobilization emerged as an important policing tool in the late 1980s with the emergence of community policing (Rosenbaum, 2007). By using tactics such as foot patrols and neighbourhood mini-stations, law enforcement officials sought to increase access to local knowledge, improve police-community relations and engage citizens as active participants in service delivery. Community advisory committees, citizen patrols and neighbourhood, street or rural watch programs are early examples of this type of mobilization to reduce opportunities for crime, and increase community solidarity. Shifting more responsibility on residents themselves to address problems of crime in their own neighbourhoods was seen as a particularly attractive strategy for reducing opportunities for crime in the face of diminished resources for policing services.

Over time, community mobilization efforts initiated by law enforcement have become more strategic in nature, concentrating on mobilizing residents in troubled neighbourhoods and crime “hot spots.” (Rosenbaum, 2007; Shuck & Rosenbaum, 2006). For example, the *City Heights Neighborhood Alliance* project led by the San Diego Police Department aimed to “mobilize” resident participation to address crime problems, train community members to address neighborhood safety and quality of life issues, improve collaboration between institutional players and the community and develop a sustainable approach to neighbourhood organization and management (Stewart-Brown, 2001).

Similarly, the Toronto Police Services' *Community Mobilization Program* seeks to "identify shared community values, and to support and empower communities to build the capacity necessary to resist and/or prevent crime and disorder" (Toronto Police Service, 2007) through community-based workshops. In the United Kingdom, the *New Deal for Communities* strategies aim to foster community involvement by training local residents in problem-oriented policing in an attempt to boost the community's involvement and increase its capacity to solve its own problems (Adamson, 2004; Crawford & Lister, 2004).

At the same time, research questions the effectiveness of these mobilizing strategies in preventing crime, particularly in troubled neighbourhoods and when police-community relations are strained (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2007). These efforts also require police officers to take time to acquire local knowledge by getting to know residents and by building and sustaining relationships within the community (Crawford & Lister, 2004). Yet doing this has proved challenging, and police are often left wondering why citizens do not become involved (Wells, Schafer, & Varano, 2006). One possible explanation is that policing organizational culture views law enforcement as "real policing" and undervalues or is resistant to community work (Adamson, 2004). Another is the limited knowledge about what actually influences citizens to become and stay involved, and the strategies that may effectively engage them (Wells et al., 2006). Nevertheless, policing strategies infused with the philosophy of community policing and the commitment to work together with residents continue to offer "hope" (Comack & Silver, 2006).

Community Mobilization to Advance Change Within the Criminal Justice Sector

Grass-roots movements have a history of employing community mobilization tools to challenge the status quo and develop alternative strategies for action within the criminal justice sector. For example, beginning in the 1960s, women's groups in many communities began to coalesce and mobilize to raise public awareness about violence against women and to advocate for the need for prevention and an improved criminal justice response to this issue. Over time, activists and advocates have become increasingly involved in collaborative attempts with the justice system to change policies and practices so that institutional structures and processes are more responsive to the needs of diverse populations. Efforts to make Canada's criminal justice system more sensitive and responsive to the social context, such as the circumstances of Aboriginal Peoples and ethno-cultural groups, are other examples.

Community Mobilization to Advance Community Safety and Well-being

"The purpose of community mobilization is to facilitate change within the community to alter the basic patterns of social interaction, values, customs, and institutions in ways that will significantly improve the quality of life in a community. ...[it] attempts to change the everyday environment in communities in ways that will result in better outcomes for everyone living within a designated geographic areas."

– Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Model Programs Guide (2007).

"It's a better term than community development, but it depends on what assumptions are used and where a community is starting. Real community mobilization and change is a long-term process...e.g. 20 years."

– Comment from consultation participant in Hastings & Jamieson (2001).

With the emergence of the concept of crime prevention through social development (CPSD) in the mid 1980s, community mobilization for crime prevention was integrated into the larger enterprise of addressing the "root causes" of crime. CPSD linked community mobilization for crime prevention to larger community development frameworks which focused on a broader vision of community safety and well-being and engaged a wider range of actors from both within and outside the community. Targeted interventions to address individual risk factors, integrated social polices and programs to reduce the structural inequalities that contribute to crime, and strategies to mobilize and engage communities in the enterprise of developing healthier and safer communities all came to the fore. In Canada, much of the impetus for community mobilization can be attributed to the *National Crime Prevention Strategy* which provided community-oriented project funding to mobilize communities and to increase their capacity to prevent crime problems. Unfortunately, there have been few systematic scientific evaluations of these projects; much of the enthusiasm for community mobilization around crime issues is still based on faith rather than on a rigorous understanding of what works.

Projects aimed at quality of life improvements to communities, such as *Action for Neighbourhood Change*, *Vibrant Communities*,³ and the *Comprehensive*

³ A national action-learning initiative including a range of communities across Canada, and focused on reducing poverty through multisectoral and comprehensive efforts. See www.vibrantcommunities.ca.

Community Initiatives movement, have begun to tease out principles to guide effective mobilization and community-building work. Since these approaches are horizontally and vertically complex, involve a multiplicity of factors, and encompass diverse and dynamic interventions, it should be of no surprise that the knowledge base is taking time to develop. The need to further advance a common language and theoretical understanding of community change and improve capacity to qualitatively and quantitatively evaluate a broad range of outcomes (issues identified well over a decade ago by Kubisch, Weiss, Schorr, & Connell, 1995) is still pressing, and requires our further attention and investment.

Mobilization Techniques and Processes

No two communities are alike, and as a result, mobilization efforts across communities are context sensitive and tend to differ in orientation and approach. Community mobilization draws on a range of techniques and processes to organize and assemble a community's resources for action. Assessing the local context and motivation and readiness for action and change through listening, learning and information gathering is a key starting point (Gorman, 2007; Hastings & Jamieson, 2001; Levitan-Reid, 2006). Community mobilization is a dynamic process, and there is frequently a great deal of overlap and interplay between the stages within community change processes. Who "leads" the mobilization effort, the style of leadership, and the relationship of the community to that leadership are also very important factors (Torjman, 2007a).

One of the common features of community mobilization efforts is a focus on communication, engagement and outreach. The *Action for Neighbourhood Change* project provides various examples of commonly used mobilization techniques. For example, door-to-door outreach to explore issues and identify resident concerns helped to engage residents in several of the *Action for Neighbourhood Change* project neighbourhoods. Community meetings and events to encourage dialogue and discussion (ranging from kitchen table meetings to community hall events) were a starting point for residents to think about and share their views on problems of local concern (Levitan-Reid, 2006). Creating interagency dialogue and linkages early on in the mobilization process also helped pave the way for developing future relationships and partnerships among and across institutions and services. These early efforts also helped to strengthen the broader "systems of support" necessary for community work to flourish (Gorman, 2007).

In the ANC example, mobilization efforts were also closely linked with capacity strengthening efforts. Skills training for community residents in problem solving, strategic planning, conflict management, and community organization were particularly helpful in empowering residents and opened the door for them to become fully involved in project tasks such as planning and organization, animation and facilitation, and research (Gorman, 2007; Levitan-Reid, 2006).

Much attention has been paid to assessing the formal and informal capacities of a community. Asset mapping exercises have become a core methodology for community work in this area (Torjman, 2007a). This includes identifying formal and informal community leadership capacities and networks for change. Efforts to rebuild, revitalize and strengthen communities so that they are safer and healthier places to live have also spawned a virtual industry of "how to" tools and resources on community-building. These include a range of ideas that can inform and help shape community mobilization processes (see Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Kretzmann, McKnight, Dobrowolski, & Punttenney, 2005).⁴

In practice, community development practitioners typically refine and adapt a range of tools and techniques to specific community contexts and through "dialogue and observation they seek to uncover what works and what does not" (Levitan-Reid, 2006). Systematic study and evaluation of how community engagement, mobilization, and capacity development tools and techniques are actually used, and of their effectiveness within community change processes, would still be beneficial.

Expectations for Involving Communities for Crime Prevention

Expectations for community involvement in crime prevention are expressed in various ways. Community residents may be called upon to help officials identify community safety priorities and work with institutions and agencies to ensure that these priorities are addressed. Among other things, they may be asked to volunteer on municipal crime prevention councils and citizen advisory committees, participate in neighbourhood safety audits and patrols and join in on clean ups of public spaces and playgrounds. Community meetings are convened to solicit their views on what is wrong – and what can be changed – in their communities.

⁴ Also see the University of Kansas Community Tool Box at <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/>. In Canada, projects such as Vibrant Communities (www.tamarackcommunity.ca) and *Action for Neighbourhood Change* (www.anccommunity.ca) have developed resources and tools to facilitate community engagement and community-building, based on experiences and learnings from Canadian communities.

Governments, for their part, foster the “working in partnership” enterprise, encouraging interagency coordination and collaboration, and offering project funding, tools and resources to support communities in tackling specific crime problems. Local institutions and service providers are given incentives to link, partner and work together and may take on ‘intermediary’ or bridging roles between various players and residents.

Meaning of “Community” in the Crime Prevention Context

While there has been a lot of enthusiasm about the role of the community in crime prevention, the use and benefits of “community” as a policy instrument in preventing and controlling crime have also been criticized (Crawford, 1995; Hastings, 2005). Many of the basic issues surrounding community mobilization for crime prevention relate to more fundamental questions and tensions about the role of community and its use as a policy instrument. It is worthwhile to briefly reflect on the meaning of community in the crime prevention context.

Historically, the “community” has always been an important theme in crime prevention and social control. Community has been identified as both a cause of, and a solution to, crime problems. These problems are frequently associated with the notion of loss of community and its attendant problems of social disruption, disorganization and isolation.

Paradoxically, during the same period of lament over the loss of community, decentralization, diversion, de-institutionalization and decarceration strategies have been put in place, shifting much of the burden of responsibility for addressing crime problems to the community (Cohen, 1985; Crawford, 1995; Rochefort, Rosenberg, & White, 1998). The notion that “community” is a resource that can be tapped, or to which the responsibility for crime and social control can be devolved, is very attractive to authorities (Crawford, 1995). The claim that community-based responses are more efficient and cost-effective than institutional ones is compelling to the state and individual taxpayers alike. It is also a claim that shifts the responsibility to the local community and, by so doing, directs attention away from the limited successes of state institutions in controlling crime and reducing victimization.

In a general way, the focus on community has also been seen as a way of rekindling civic engagement, with the expectation that it will result in outcomes such as a more vibrant and civil society, better policy making, and stronger communities (Philips & Orsini, 2002). At the same time, a growing

body of scholarship identifies an alternative motivation behind the state’s focus on community involvement and engagement on issues of community safety and crime prevention. For example, to Crawford (1995), the move signals a shirking of responsibility on the part of governments to address and respond to local concerns related to crime and crime prevention. Moreover, implicating citizens in the process can lead to a wider penetration of social control (Crawford, 1995).

Why, from a policy perspective, has the shift to community been so appealing? As Rochefort et al. (1998) note, community functions as a policy instrument on several levels. By appealing to the “community,” policy makers have a “legitimate” means of bypassing established power structures and institutional arrangements, including those put in place by other orders of government. Community can also be used as a means of identifying or selecting sites for intervention and service. Alternatively, the community itself can be defined as the target of intervention or it can serve as a setting for service delivery. Perhaps most compelling, the concept of community can provide an ideological framework for legitimizing diverse systems changes.

The ambiguity of the concept of community is another reason for its appeal. This ambiguity makes the concept amenable to numerous interpretations, thereby rendering it instrumental to a variety of interests. Thus, policy makers and practitioners of various stripes can appropriate the concept and recast it to suit their own needs. At the same time, its use evokes positive images and remains virtually risk free:

The rhetoric of empowerment and partnership permeates community-based policies, implying that these policies reflect the values, interests and concerns of ordinary citizens and neglected groups. (Rochefort et al., 1998)

In sum, “community” represents an ideal policy vehicle since it has broad appeal, generates positive associations, permits multiple interpretations and allows representatives of different constituencies to claim it as their own.

Issues and Challenges

Community involvement in crime prevention is based on the assumption that communities can be readied to participate in crime prevention and that when given the opportunity, they are willing to do so. Yet there are some underlying tensions concerning the role of “community”.

From the community development perspective, self-government, participatory democracy, bottom-up decision-making and empowerment at the local level are desirable and have the potential to contribute to crime prevention (Lane & Henry, 2004). Yet in practical terms, developing democratic, inclusive processes and finding ways to equitably share power are enormous challenges. It takes time and adequate support to residents to allow them to participate effectively and develop confidence in their capacity (Arthurson, 2003). Establishing the right structures and processes to enable community residents to be meaningful partners and equitably participate alongside services and agencies has proven challenging in many neighbourhood regeneration efforts (Torjman, 2007a).

Problems concerning participation are quickly amplified when “hot button” issues like neighbourhood crime problems are involved. Community policing and community-based crime prevention schemes in Canada and elsewhere (e.g. Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States) have long struggled with the issues of getting residents to volunteer their time and energy, and of creating the conditions for meaningful participation.

From a “governmentality” lens, empowerment of the local can be disconcerting when communities take actions that are not aligned with government priorities, funding criteria and accountability requirements. Communities may identify immediate crime and safety concerns in their neighbourhood that they expect the police to address. But, as the *Action for Neighbourhood Change* project revealed, often their priorities require investments that relate to broader quality of life improvements such as improved garbage pick up, cleaner streets, better lighting, greener spaces, better housing, improved social services, better police-community relations, employment opportunities, or recreational opportunities for youth. Many of these issues relate to neglect or erosion in community infrastructure. Aside from volunteer neighbourhood clean-ups, graffiti paint-outs and potlucks (which may have value in their immediate effect and can also help to bring residents together), these issues are difficult for institutional authorities and services to respond to quickly.

In addition, government funding policies, structures and processes are not well-equipped to support, or necessarily aligned with, community priorities. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that efforts to horizontally manage issues which cut across government mandates, streamline funding approaches, and effectively measure results, require greater improvement (Auditor General of Canada, 2005 and 2006). As the *Blue Ribbon Panel on Federal Grants and Contribution Programs* noted, this includes addressing the “morass of rules and red tape that undermines accountability and hampers sensible reporting

and evaluation” (Lankin & Clark, 2006). Neighbourhood revitalization projects like ANC and initiatives in other jurisdictions have struggled with the inherent contradiction between the rhetoric of local empowerment and control and the imperative that projects meet centrally determined funding criteria and be evaluated against fixed outcome objectives (Diamond, 2004; Gorman, 2007).

What really needs to be addressed is the mismatch between the rhetoric of the value of community involvement and the failure to provide policy support and the resources and tools needed to make it happen. As the *External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities* noted in its 2006 report, fundamental change in the relationship among all orders of government, as well as new approaches to partnerships, governance and innovative strategies is what is needed to truly strengthen community capacity and resiliency. Given the social, economic and environmental challenges facing many communities and neighbourhoods, the bigger picture is all about community building and resiliency. Involving “community” in crime prevention is only a very minor piece of the community change puzzle.

There are also tensions within the community mobilization process itself. A prerequisite of mobilization efforts is that a community be ready, willing and able to act. The experiences of approaches such as *Operation Weed and Seed*, an American initiative to “weed out” criminal activity in targeted high-crime areas and then “seed” the area with social and economic interventions to stabilize and revitalize the neighbourhood, revealed how challenging it can be to overcome the lack of trust of institutional services such as the police and welfare authorities. Creating appropriate structures and processes for meaningful and equitable involvement, and sustaining community interest and momentum are complex and frequently underestimated tasks (Bridenell & Jesilow, 2005). Fear of retaliation by other community members, and culture and language barriers are other factors that may contribute to isolation and hamper participation. Negative perceptions and stereotyping of residents living in troubled neighbourhoods may also influence the way that institutional services relate and interact with residents. In turn, residents may resent the spotlight on their neighbourhood’s negative characteristics and shy away from participation to avoid the stigmatization that is often part and parcel of such initiatives (Miller, 2000; Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2006).

It should not be all that surprising that mobilization efforts go off course or fade away. Some research has begun to focus on individual, neighbourhood, and other contextual factors that influence citizen involvement and participation in

crime prevention (see, for example, Pattavina, Byrne, & Garcia, 2006; Wells, Schafer, & Varano, 2006). This research suggests that predictors of citizen involvement are complex and methodologically difficult to disentangle: they vary depending on neighbourhood risk levels, local crime prevention intents and approaches, and a host of individual and neighbourhood social control factors. We are thus still a long way from understanding the interplay between these factors and participation, and what actually works.

Factors in “Successful” Mobilization for Crime Prevention

“Taking a community from ‘zero to mobilization’ takes an incredible investment, it is not just an experiment.”

– Key informant, Action for Neighbourhood Change Summative Evaluation.

Our understanding of the dynamics of community change and effective crime prevention practice needs to grow considerably. However, based on experience to date, there are some key points to consider in guiding future efforts to mobilize communities for crime prevention.

Mobilization is Not an End in Itself

If mobilization efforts are to be effective, it is important that communities focus energy and resources on what is contextually relevant given their particular circumstances. As Sherman et al. (1997) note, access to accurate information about their community, and knowledge and information about what works – or at least what is promising – is also needed. Practitioners must work with the community to carefully consider the context and nature of the crime issue being addressed. They should also assure that the particular prevention method will have the desired results, and specify how the results will be measured. For example, neighbourhood watch and citizen patrols are among the most common forms of community mobilization for crime prevention, yet evaluation evidence suggests that such programs have a negligible effect on neighbourhood crime, resident fear of crime, and social cohesion (Rosenbaum, 2007; Shuck & Rosenbaum, 2006). Mobilization efforts linked to a broader vision of community safety and well-being require comprehensive planning and resources to implement. As well, patience is needed as the desired impacts on crime will likely be incremental – and possibly elusive – for some time.

Have Reasonable Expectations of What Can Be Achieved

It also flows that the short and long-term results that can be reasonably expected from any given mobilization effort should be clearly stated. This should take into account the nature of the issues being addressed, the local community context, the time and resources available, and how and when results will be practically measured. This is particularly important in broader community initiatives where crime may be one of myriad problems to be addressed, and results – in terms of quality of life changes – may require fundamental changes that take a long time to take effect and are challenging to sustain.

Assess Local Conditions, Community Capacities and Readiness to Change

Close attention to local conditions and community “readiness” to change is a fundamental requirement for mobilization. In the initial stages of mobilization, strategies to assess local conditions, capacities and readiness to change should focus on engaging in formal and informal conversations and building connections with community residents and institutional players. As noted previously, door-to-door surveys, as well as small and large group forums are ways of learning more about local conditions and fostering local leadership. They are also often effective ways of engaging community residents and institutional players in dialogue on their issues and priorities.

Establishing trust among institutional players and with residents is also key in the early stages of mobilization and throughout the process. It is important that efforts be made to engage, listen to, and learn from all parts of the community. This may require specialized skills and tools, and a concerted effort to gather the perspectives of marginal populations who reside within the community. Using culturally-appropriate outreach strategies and tools in diverse neighbourhoods is very important. Hiring some staff from within the community who speak the languages and know the cultures can help to facilitate access to residents and foster engagement. At the same time, neutral yet attentive and skilled outside “facilitators” may help people to exchange views in open and constructive ways, and to build common ground (Gorman, 2007; Lane & Henry, 2004; Levitan-Reid, 2006).

Opportunities to integrate and align with the existing community infrastructure, as well as areas where new infrastructure is required to move forward should also be identified. Strategies to engage and mobilize the community’s “systems of support” – the organizations and agencies mandated

to serve residents, as well as the businesses, volunteer organizations, faith communities, and service clubs that can play a part – should also be considered. These organizations and their staff may also require training and ongoing mentorship to acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills to support and foster community mobilization efforts.

Capacity Development Investment

Community capacity has been defined in this article as the community's relative ability to undertake collective action (Hastings & Jamieson, 2001). Capacity includes many assets or dimensions, such as (but not limited to): a shared sense of community; individual and collective knowledge, skills and ability; infrastructure; and enabling policies and systems. Without doubt, some level of capacity is necessary for effective community mobilization. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that it is always possible to find and strengthen capacity even in the most troubled communities. An ongoing challenge is to find ways to identify and build on both formal and informal community capacity. Investment in capacity development requires careful consideration, and it is important to view community diversity as a strength. As has been the case in other neighbourhood revitalization efforts, the *Action for Neighbourhood Change* project reinforced the lesson that capacity is necessary for productive neighbourhood revitalization efforts. This capacity can take time to nurture and develop (Levitan-Reid, 2006). It also demonstrated that skills training and mentorship opportunities for community residents are a valuable way to equip and empower them to participate in efforts to address local concerns (Gorman, 2007). Residents may also be enabled to take a fuller part in crime prevention activities if education and training on effective approaches is also available (Adamson, 2004).

Resources

Community mobilization takes time, resources and patience. It is important to fully plan how much time and what type of resources will be required to achieve measurable results in the community. Time-limited project funding may play a pivotal role in getting certain things done, but broader investments in community infrastructure and partnerships are usually required to sustain activities over the long term.

Concluding Thoughts

On the surface, community mobilization for crime prevention seems like a good idea, but we need to be more critical at the outset and ask:

- To what end are communities being mobilized, and to whose agenda and interests?
- What results can be expected?
- Is the mobilization effort meaningful, realistic and a good use of community energy, resources and time?
- What strategies can best be employed to reach out to residents?
- Who should be involved? Why and how?

Many of the issues and challenges concerning community mobilization for crime prevention relate to broader questions concerning the role of community as a policy instrument. At the public policy level, issues concerning healthy, safe and sustainable communities are becoming more pressing.

It is crucial that all orders of governments heed calls to work together to pursue better integrated and forward-looking approaches to quality of life issues in the communities and the neighbourhoods that are being targeted for intervention. Consideration of the importance of “place” and greater harmonization of policies and programs to support community efforts to pursue their future vision, as recommended by the *Expert Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities* (2006), is a possible starting point for integrated action. In addition to crafting achievable goals and objectives, this should involve support for local strategies and networks that can move communities beyond reliance on pilot and demonstration projects.

Meanwhile, on the ground, crime prevention practitioners could learn more about the process of mobilization from neighbourhood revitalization experiences to date. Especially important is the lesson that crime and safety issues are likely only one of a myriad of issues of concern to the community. Although a crime event may be a catalyst for action – it is not necessarily the driver for change or the most important community priority for change. Conversely, community development and mobilization should not be seen as a panacea for crime prevention (Lane & Henry, 2004).

Experience shows that successful mobilization processes need to be contextually relevant, sensitive to the vision and priorities of the community (as it emerges or evolves), inclusive and welcoming to all and relevant to areas where the

community or neighbourhood collectively points its energy. It is important to build in flexibility and capacity to assess, respond and adapt to the evolving nature of community interests and change. Careful and continual assessment of local conditions, motivations and capacities, and achievable results is required. A style of leadership that moves away from traditional “lead and follow” approaches towards one that builds trust and fosters relationship building within the community, and in relation to existing systems of support, is necessary (Torjman, 2007a).

Another lesson for crime prevention practitioners is the need for better understanding of the complexity of community change and the concepts, processes and techniques that can situate and guide mobilization. Organizational training and mentorship on theories of change, community development, community mobilization and capacity development could help to better equip crime prevention practitioners with the knowledge, expertise and skills needed to play an effective and appropriate role in community mobilization efforts. The human dynamics involved in community change efforts are paramount; learning how to reach out and communicate in ongoing, inclusive ways is key (Chaskin, 2003).

It is reasonable to believe that community mobilization for crime prevention – particularly in the broader frame of community development – has merit, despite current gaps in knowledge and limitations to the evidence base. In practice, greater recognition of the time and resources it takes to meaningfully engage and mobilize communities is needed. Support for capacity development needs to go hand in hand with these efforts. If the ultimate goal of crime prevention is truly about community safety and well being, then adequate support for community mobilization and capacity development should also be reflected in public funding schemes and factored into the timelines for the work.

Further application and study of the concept of mobilization as it applies to the crime prevention field, as well as systematic study of the mobilization processes and techniques in practice, would be helpful. Policy and practice-relevant evaluations, which use qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the intent, process, outputs and effects of mobilization through the crime prevention lens would shed light onto what works, why and how. Since the boundaries between community development, mobilization and capacity building are so permeable, such studies will likely spill into the broader territory of community change. This will help the crime prevention field to better discern and refine the factors, conditions and processes that will contribute to the prevention of crime, and to community safety and well-being.

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