

REVIEW OF YUKON'S POLICE FORCE 2010

Aboriginal Courtworkers and Community Justice Workers

Meeting Date: June 7, 2010.

Present: Council of Yukon First Nations Aboriginal Courtworker (x2), Dena Keh Justice Coordinator, Dawson Community Group Conferencing Society -Community Justice Coordinator, YG Community Justice Coordinator, YG Justice Summer Student

Dialogue Summary:

Community Involvement and Engagement

- New RCMP members do the most damage to the trust built in the community by older members.
- Recently there has been a shift from RCMP involvement in the community (coaching sports, informal meetings with community etc.) to a more limited RCMP role in community and arrogant attitude.
- RCMP rotation period changes members too often for effective community engagement and 'training'.
- Community policing is predicated upon real tangible community involvement by the RCMP.
- The process of someone changing their 'reputation' benefits a great deal from interactions with RCMP outside of their 'official capacity' or professional role. Playing ball hockey for fun is an example of the kind of interaction that creates an opportunity for both RCMP members and people with a criminal past learn about one another in a non-adversarial environment.
- New RCMP members come out of depot with a lot of energy-but they don't understand that element of community policing, being part of the community, talking to people, de-escalating incidents, being available in general for the community.
- Proactive policing, such as stationing an officer at a 'flashpoint' in the community is respected by the community. The Dawson City practice of putting a member in 'The Pit' on weekends was acknowledged as creating a 'calming' effect on the environment.
- The unique nature of the Yukon compels people to perform many different jobs in the community all of the time. RCMP cannot take off the uniform when living in a small community, which is the same for many other community members. This is both an opportunity and liability for building legitimacy depending on how it is used by the RCMP.

- Community engagement outside of the professional capacity helps to make the RCMP become more than just RCMP in the eyes of the community, it assists in 'humanization' of the member breaking down barriers to deeper relationships.

RCMP – First Nation Relationship

- The negative aspects of the historic RCMP-First Nations relationship impacts current relationships.
- There is a perception that non-aboriginal people receive better policing services than First Nations, people with active criminal proceedings, 'hippies' or transient workers.
- When issues of inequitable policing services are raised there is a perception that the RCMP are dismissive of these complaints, creating more distrust and negative relationships.
- There is a perception that the RCMP uses too much violence, particularly during incidents with First Nations and vulnerable populations. Aboriginal Courtworkers and Community Justice workers receive a large number of these complaints.

Officer Conduct/Service Orientation

- When less-experienced RCMP members don't comply with direction or commitments of higher ranking officers, it discredits the force.
- Community Justice Worker try to act at the interface with the RCMP, but the process of 'training' RCMP members continually (every few years due to placement schedule) discredits the process and 'wears down' Community Justice Workers.
- In a small community everyone wears multiple 'hats.' When interacting with the police, there is a perceived change in attitude when someone puts on the 'hat' of the Aboriginal Courtworker or the Community Justice worker. The RCMP are perceived as treating people in a position of authority with more respect than the 'common' person. You shouldn't have to 'legitimize' yourself to get respect from a community member, RCMP or not.
- Examples of RCMP bias regarding erroneous assumptions were noted. This bias destroys the RCMP legitimacy created by the other members.
- The destructive potential of bias in schools and by the RCMP against particular youth was noted. There have been some role model RCMP members and these should be noted as a counterpoint.
- The power of RCMP discretion, particularly in choosing to lay charges, in the Yukon is substantial, it is a source of friction among populations that feel that discretion is used to deny them access to policing services (notably among people with criminal proceedings against them).
- For the RCMP to work well in Yukon they have to know that their role as assisting, helping, serving, protecting...the use of their discretion to say 'no charges will be laid' is a source of friction...what can someone do when they are denied?

- The RCMP complaints process is viewed as ineffective and unresponsive. Community Justice workers try to bypass the process by going directly to the local detachment commander - with mixed results.

Training

- Some communities deeply resent the idea that they are 'training grounds' for RCMP to learn skills and then leave. "...we don't want to be guinea pigs, we want veteran officers instead of young ones who just want to get this process over and go off to the big city..."
- The ways in which the RCMP contributed to public safety were largely understood to be 'regular' police work like patrolling, enforcing traffic laws. Particularly effective initiatives were not noted.

Police Review 2010

- Policing Review process is reactive, predicated upon high profile incidents, discredits the process as Aboriginal Courtworkers and Community Justice workers have been working on these issues continually for years. "...only when there is an incident, then people care..."

Ideas for Action:

1. Strengthen local and regional RCMP oversight mechanisms.
2. Implement independent investigations of complaints against RCMP.
3. Improve response times in Watson Lake.
4. Improve system of dispatch which is located in Whitehorse, and which creates unacceptable delays in the communities, particularly for victims of domestic violence.
5. Improve RCMP complaints process to be more responsive and localized.
6. RCMP awareness that although complaints, investigations and other matters that might seem 'trivial' or 'low priority,' they impact the lives of the people involved.
7. New members must take the time to learn about the community, particularly regarding Community Justice Programs and protocols.
8. Senior officers who have a good rapport with the community should introduce and mentor new RCMP members to the community, and to effective community policing.
9. Eliminate real or perceived biases within RCMP, with regard to First Nations, people with active criminal proceedings against them and 'hippy' or migrant worker populations which results in less respect and lower quality policing.
10. Community-based policing initiatives should be strengthened and expanded; in particular there should be more training and support for pre-charge diversion into the Community Justice Programs.

11. RCMP policy should ensure that people don't perceive or experience bias in RCMP use of discretionary powers.
12. Encourage RCMP engagement and involvement in the community, particularly with youth.
13. Develop community agreements which outline the expectations of the community and the RCMP.
14. Foster an expectation of RCMP volunteer work and engagement with the community, aside from the strictly professional obligations.
15. Establish a process outlining community expectations of the RCMP members and detachment with a focus on creating a shared plan for all to work together. Participants would include the municipality, the local First Nations and the RCMP (and other stakeholders?).
16. Consider and address the issue of 'over enforcement' and the use of inappropriate levels of violence, particularly against vulnerable populations.
17. Utilize community resources such as CJC, nurses, etc. to familiarize new members to the community, and in particular with community members who have mental health issues.
18. RCMP should explore options to better utilize community resources to address incidents, including calling parents, Elders or Chief and Council to help with problematic individuals. "You might get more results if you know and use the community to help you do policing."
19. Consider options for community involvement in the recruitment process for new RCMP members.
20. RCMP interactions with Elders or community members should be respectful.
21. RCMP should properly identify themselves when attending a complaint, and prior to physical restraint. This will help to minimize unintentional assault of a police officer.
22. Recruit RCMP members with experience working in First Nations communities.
23. Increased RCMP and community collaboration and positive relationship.
24. Each detachment should have a dedicated officer assigned to Community Justice initiatives (ie. Dena Keh).
25. Continuity in RCMP leadership and local membership is strongly recommended to take maximum advantage of existing relationship building processes.
26. Cultural orientation training, even the training given to new First Nations employees should be used by the RCMP in the community orientation process.