

The Use of Volunteers in CRIME PREVENTION

By James D. Jorgensen

"We have met the enemy and it is us..."
Pogo

There is little doubt that aside from inflation, crime ranks as the top social problem in America today. It stubbornly defies solution despite the expenditure of billions of dollars in personnel and technology at all levels of government. Several years after the passage of a "safe streets" act our streets are not safe. The cities that were declared "impact" cities have not reflected the hoped for reduction in crime despite well intentioned and, in most cases, well conceived and managed programs. It is safe to say that if there is a way to buy our way out of the problem we have been unable to find it.

While the Congress is now skeptical of the efforts made to reduce crime, they would be mistaken to conclude that the money spent in this venture has been totally wasted. There is evidence that some successful models for crime prevention have been found. While we have not purchased the hoped for solution to national crime, we have learned more about what is feasible and what is not. That is a great deal more than we knew prior to the passage of the omnibus Crime Control Bill.

At the same time we experimented with possible solutions to the crime control, we also expanded the various elements of the criminal justice system such that it now stands as a "criminal justice industry." This is a serious dilemma because we may well have created a bigger dysfunctional system which will in turn intervene unproductively in the lives of increased numbers of people it processes. If to be processed by the system is to be associated with more criminal activity on the part of the "consumer" we may well have purchased crime production rather than crime prevention.

Citizen response to crime has varied. On one end of the continuum, people have come to the aid of the criminal justice system in great numbers in the form of volunteers in probation, parole, corrections, and in prevention and diversion programs. On the other end of the continuum, vigilante groups have formed and in some instances these groups have taken the law into their own hands. The movie-goers who flocked to cheer Charles Bronson as he killed muggers in the movie Death Wish attest to

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the depth of citizen rage, particularly in the inner city. Somewhere in the middle exists a feeling of apathy and fear reflected by people staying behind locked doors at night.

Rehabilitation of the offender is rapidly being abandoned as a national goal. Whether it was ever feasible or not, efforts at rehabilitation on balance haven't yielded much more than benign neglect, and it has been extremely expensive. Given the limits of our resources, the economics of crime control favor prevention over rehabilitation. As a society we have arrived at the same conclusion Joseph Malins did in his poem, A Fence or an Ambulance:

'Twas a dangerous cliff, as they
freely confessed,
Though to walk near its crest
was so pleasant;
But over its terrible edge there
had slipped
A duke and full many a peasant.
So the people said something
would have to be done,
But their projects did not at
all tally;
Some said, "Put a fence around
the edge of the cliff,"
Some, "An ambulance down in the
valley."

But the cry for the ambulance
carried the day,
For it spread through the
neighboring city;
A fence may be useful or not,
it is true,
But each heart became brimful
of pity
For those who slipped over
that dangerous cliff;
And the dwellers in the high-
way and alley
Gave pounds or gave pence, not
to put up a fence,
But an ambulance down in the
valley.

"For the cliff is all right, if
your're careful," they said,
"And, if folks even slip and
are dropping,
It isn't the slipping that hurts
them so much,
As the shock down below when
they're stopping."
So day after day, as these mis-
haps occurred,
Quick forth would these
rescuers sally

To pick up the victims who fell
off the cliff,
With their ambulance down in the
valley.

Then an old sage remarked: "It's
a marvel to me
That people give far more
attention
To repairing results than to
stopping the cause,
When they'd much better aim at
prevention.
Let us stop at its source all
this mischief," cried he,
"Come neighbors and friends, let
us rally;
If the cliff we will fence we
might also dispense
With the ambulance down in the
valley."

"Oh, he's a fanatic," the others
rejoined,
"Dispense with the ambulance?
Never!
He'd dispense with all charities,
too, if he could;
No! No! We'll support them
forever.
Aren't we picking up folks just
as fast as they fall?
And shall this man dictate to us?
Shall he?
Why should people of sense stop
to put up a fence,
While the ambulance works in the
valley?"

But a sensible few, who are
practical too,
Will not bear with such nonsense
much longer;
They believe that prevention is
better than cure,
And their party will soon be
the stronger.
Encourage them then, with your
purse, voice and pen,
And while other philanthropists
dally,
They will scorn all pretense and
put up a stout fence
On the cliff that hangs over the
valley.

Better guide well the young than
reclaim them when old,
For the voice of true wisdom is
calling,
"To rescue the fallen is good,
but 'tis best
To prevent other people from
falling."
Better close up the source of
temptation and crime

Than deliver from dungeon or
galley;
Better put up a strong fence
around the top of the cliff
Than an ambulance down in the
valley.

One of our established truths is that citizen participation is an absolute necessity in any strategy to reduce crime. Indeed, three major commissions: The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, and The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals have all concluded that crime prevention is everyone's business. Despite this, there has been no great rush of citizens to prevent crime, probably because when asking, "What can I do as a citizen?" there have been too few concrete answers. This paper will attempt to answer the question of, "What can I do?"

Before proceeding with this task, I should like to define the terms volunteer and volunteering as well as the term citizen participation. In my view, citizen participation can be viewed as a less pro-active level of volunteering. Volunteering can be viewed as the initiating of action and the offering of help, while citizen participation is just that, participation. Obviously both behaviors are necessary in crime prevention and this paper will deal with both in the context of volunteering.

Let us take, for an example, a burglary prevention program known as operatory identification. In this program personal property is marked with the owner's Social Security number, and all items are registered with the police department. The theory behind this is that property that is marked and registered is less likely to be fenced. One level of citizen participation is to mark and register the property and list it with the police; the other level, a more pro-active level, would be that of serving on the advisory board of the program and promoting the concept among other citizens.

In regard to the term prevention, I am defining this term as any actions taken to prevent the occurrence of

criminal "activity." There are three levels to be considered in dealing with this term: primary, secondary, and tertiary. The first is synonymous with intervention before the occurrence of criminal behavior. Secondary prevention refers to intervention initiated to relate to manifestations of serious behaviors before they run their full course and become full fledged criminal behavior. Tertiary prevention connotes intervention to change criminal behavior to non-criminal behavior. It is rehabilitative in nature, but preventive in the sense that any criminal behavior has the potential to become worse if not stopped.

As a framework for discussing preventive activity I am suggesting planning for three levels of preventive activity in relation to five elements of crime, namely: 1) the offender, 2) the victim, 3) criminal justice system, 4) the criminal act itself, and 5) the environment in which the crime is committed.

In this paper it is my intent to discuss each of the elements of crime in relation to the three levels of prevention and additionally speak to the possible roles for volunteers in crime prevention activity.

THE OFFENDER

Obviously if we are to direct primary preventive efforts toward the would be offender, these efforts must be directed toward a population that is not yet showing signs of criminality; in other words, the so called "normal" population. To put it another way, we would view each child at birth as a potential future criminal. When we think of prevention in primary terms, it is necessary to think broadly and inter-relationally. For example we know that unless a child obtains the necessary protein early in life, there will be a limit to the development of the brain which will in turn inhibit learning, which in turn is related to delinquency. In this context there is a relationship between a soybean field in Kansas and an inner city youth dependent upon the potential protein in those soybeans. The primary preventive acts in this view would be that of assuring psychological stimulation, providing the physical comforts necessary for safety, and developing an environment

for growth. In this sense we could envision the volunteer working for well baby clinics, promoting child nutrition programs, promoting day care centers and high quality education programs, to name just a few.

There are several early warning signals that might call for prevention at the secondary level. Truancy and other behavioral and learning problems in school suggest that the child is having trouble with a vital social institution. The runaway youth may be reflecting the strains of family life. Substance abuse and other behaviors which may bring a youth into the hands of social and legal agencies, could well be a point in time and space where the child could be served by the volunteer. The National Information Center on Volunteerism in Boulder, Colorado has studied several volunteer programs in prevention and diversion and the roles of volunteers include crisis intervention, counseling, foster parenting and sheltering, befriending, recreation, advocacy for services, and many others.¹

At the tertiary level of prevention we have seen a great deal of activity. In terms of sheer numbers of volunteers, the Ambulance in the Valley is still the highlight of our preventive work. The well established roles for volunteers bear mentioning here, however. Volunteers in probation, parole and corrections have served both adults and juveniles as counselors, job finders, advocates and brokers. They have and will continue to perform the vital service of linking the offender to the community and in so doing serve to stabilize and in many instances to return many offenders to useful participation in society.

THE VICTIM

Just as we have viewed the total population as having potential for future criminal behavior so must we view each citizen as a potential victim. *If we could achieve the goal of educating all potential victims of crime to avoid victimization, crime would be reduced to so called victimless crime!* A primary prevention approach to victims is geared to teaching the citizen such precautions as avoiding certain crime provoking situations such as walking alone in certain areas at certain

times, locking doors, carrying money and many other awareness approaches. Much of this is currently being done through the media, but much of what we know about change suggests that person to person contact might better achieve the goal of getting people to avoid victimization and of course that suggests another role for volunteers: that of public educator.

The secondary prevention approach to victims would be that of having an array of services available for would be victims. Such programs include the "Bod-Squad" anti-rape escort services on many college campuses. Such services are volunteer operated and have had the effect of markedly reducing the incidence of this crime. Other examples include the provision of mobile grocery stores for elderly shoppers or transportation services for senior citizens who might become purse snatch victims. The possible utilization of volunteers in such programs is quite obvious.

To the actual victims of crime, volunteers can and do perform a wide range of services. The National Information Center on Volunteerism has documented the viability of several programs across the country which find volunteers as advocates and counselors.² Preventive measures to re-educate victims toward avoidance of further victimization are important steps in crime prevention, but just as important are the goals of getting victims to assist in giving evidence to the police and in furthering the prosecution of offenders. Volunteers can also be of assistance to victims in securing insurance, compensation, and restitution for damages which resulted from crime. With states increasingly recognizing the need to assist victims of crime, there will undoubtedly be an increased need for volunteers in this area.

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

If we have learned anything in our nation's two centuries of history, it is that much of our crime stems from the tendency for legislatures to pass laws to cover contingencies which cannot be resolved through the mere enacting of a law.

Shakespeare noted, "Nothing is either good or bad but *thinking* makes it so." If this is true, then much

crime can be prevented by redefining at regular intervals what a particular community considers bad enough to be defined as crime. To criminalize behavior ultimately places it in the criminal justice system which is already overloaded beyond its resources. Citizen participation is necessary to determine the fundamental question of what problems to criminalize and what problems to handle through other systems. Primary prevention measures which might be assisted through volunteer efforts might include study committees to explore alternative means of dealing with community problems and panels of community consultants set up to advise criminal justice deciders. Citizen anti-crime councils are excellent examples of volunteers working to continually redefine and reconceptualize problems.

In order to maximize the use of the volunteer in the criminal justice system volunteers must be available at the points of entrance to the system. Keeping the system flexible enough to provide alternatives to early labeling and preventing deep penetration into the system can be achieved by having a volunteer capability in providing services such as day parole, release on recognizance, accepting direct referrals from police such as Partners does in Denver. We have learned that if the criminal justice system is to have a diversion capability there must be some program to divert to. Volunteers can be a vital force here.

At the tertiary level of prevention in the criminal justice system, volunteers are currently performing many other jobs besides that of the well established job of counseling offenders. They are: Advisory Council Member; Arts and Crafts Teacher; Recreation Leader; Program Coordinator and Administrator; Employment Counselor; Foster Parent; Information Officer; Neighborhood Worker; Office Worker (clerical); Public Relations Officer; Community Education Counselor; Record Keeper; Tutor and Education Aide; Religious Guidance Counselor.

THE CRIMINAL ACT

It is sometimes difficult to envision primary prevention in regard to the criminal act. In doing so it is necessary to envision any behavior as having the potential of becoming a crime. One of the standard approaches

to primary prevention of the criminal act is to vie for control of the time of people. If youth is involved in supervised recreation, from the standpoint of time they are less likely to commit an offense. A primary preventive strategy then would be that of vying for as many youth hours as possible with pro social alternative activities. Volunteers are, of course, naturals to provide this type of service.

At the secondary level we can approach the phenomena of the criminal act as a crime about to happen. In this context youth running through an alley might be viewed as a preliminary to bike theft, particularly if previous bike thefts have been preceded by such activity. Volunteer "neighborhood watch" programs are appropriate in addressing this problem and have the possibility of keeping behavior from deteriorating into crime. Such a watch might view an elderly shopper carrying a purse alone on a street as "a crime about to happen"; and give this special attention.

We can gain many lessons from criminal acts that have been committed. In Denver the computer was fed data on place and times of previous crimes such that special police units could reasonably predict which parts of the city should receive the most intense patrolling. One criminal act is only part of a bigger pattern and can be important from the "lessons gained" perspective. Citizen participation in reporting crime in this sense becomes vital to completing the big picture.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The primary prevention of the environment from crime would necessitate viewing any piece of geography as a site for a criminal act. Prevention would necessitate designing buildings with utilization of space which discourages criminal activity. Many of our housing projects would have been much less inviting to crime had social scientist and architect collaborated on design. Adequate lighting and other prophylactic measures lend themselves to volunteer promotional efforts.

Secondary prevention of the environment from crime can be seen in many of the "target hardening" activities such as fitting doors with dead

bolts, neighborhood watch of neighbor's properties and developing the sense of neighborhood which causes people to become concerned about others.

Finally, in tertiary preventive terms, the neighborhood at the point it becomes the focus for increased crime would need to be addressed with such measures as neighborhood patrols, volunteer police auxiliaries and increased police patrols. All of these approaches have built in volunteer roles.

We have examined the three levels of prevention as they relate to the various elements of crime, spelling out some of the ways and means by which volunteer power can be utilized to prevent crime. A fair question that might be asked is, does this work force exist? My contention is that it does. A 1967 Harris Poll revealed that over one-third of a nationally representative sample of 1,200 people said they would be willing to perform volunteer correctional services.³ If a sizeable proportion of these people could be induced to work in crime prevention we would, indeed, be challenged to mobilize them through training and management.

I believe that volunteering is a spirit that has deep roots in American society. From our beginnings, two centuries ago, we have been a volunteering people. I can think of no better way to begin this third century of national life than with a declaration of interdependence that in essence says we must rely on each other to keep ourselves from being the victims of crime. If, as Pogo says, "The enemy is us," let us recognize this and do something about it. For, in the words of the late President John F. Kennedy, "In this world, God's work must truly be our own."

References

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²"Volunteers with Victims Director," Volunteers for Social Justice, August 1973, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 7

³"The Public Looks at Crime and Corrections," Correctional Briefings, Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, No. 2, Washington D.C.