Crime and violence prevention in an urban Indigenous community

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SUMMARY: *This paper considers the delicate issue of high crime rates in a disadvantaged population, and explores the appropriateness of existing crime and violence prevention strategies. The paper reports on a collaborative research project carried out in a small Australian city in 2002–2003 by the local police service, Indigenous community members and a university. The project gathered information about the extent and nature of crime in the local Indigenous community, existing crime prevention initiatives and Indigenous community members' perceptions of these initiatives. The key points emerging from this project were: the persistence of social divides separating Indigenous populations and non-Indigenous institutions such as the police service; the impact of these divides on the effectiveness of crime prevention activities; and the importance of face-to-face relationship-building in overcoming these social divides and improving the effectiveness of crime and violence prevention.*

I. INTRODUCTION

THE LINK BETWEEN marginalized minorities and high rates of crime, including violent crime, is a difficult topic to navigate. On the one hand, even acknowledging that some ethnic or social groups are disproportionately associated with violent crime can lead to stereotyping and further marginalization of members of these groups. On the other hand, high statistics on arrest and conviction rates of certain groups can also be interpreted as evidence of discrimination against these groups by the mainstream legal and criminal justice systems.[1] Both of these points are important considerations when researching the crime rates of marginalized minorities. Even more important is the ability to move beyond the statistics to understand how members of these groups themselves characterize crime and violence, their causes and potential solutions. These perspectives can shed new light on mainstream approaches to crime prevention, showing how these are flawed, where they work well and how they can be improved.

II. BACKGROUND

THIS PAPER REPORTS on the results of a collaborative research project in a small Australian city carried out in 2002–2003 by the local police service, a university and local Indigenous Australians. Although the city (popula-

tion about 30,000) maintains the feel of a large country town, in the context of Australia it is a "regional city" – a rapidly growing major service, trade and residential centre for the surrounding area. The population is predominantly Anglo-Australian, with a small minority of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. In the 2001 Australian census, 3.4 per cent of the local people identified themselves as Indigenous Australians.[2]

This project responded to a general awareness that crime was an "issue" for the urban Indigenous population. Though comprising only a small proportion of the general population in the study area, Indigenous people are sharply over-represented both as victims of crime and as offenders. The project gathered information about the prevalence of crime, both violent and non-violent, in the local Indigenous community, as well as existing crime prevention initiatives. Finally, this research documented the disjuncture that existed between the promising efforts of the police at crime prevention and the needs and approaches of Indigenous community members.

The project involved both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, who met to discuss key issues and methodologies in a series of project meetings (documented as part of an action-research process). The Indigenous researchers included a group of six undergraduate students who played a central role in project design and data-gathering. These students participated actively in project meetings, and helped define the scope, research questions and methodology for the project. They then gathered data from interviews, focus groups and surveys in the local community, as well as from visits to key agencies and from their own observations, recorded in journals, of work carried out in the local police station. Members of the police service met regularly with the students and other project researchers to discuss the research-in-progress; they also hosted three students as front-desk trainees at the local police station, and provided data on topics such as arrest rates.

III. THE ISSUES

THE STARTING POINT for this project was the recognition that crime and violence were serious issues for Indigenous people, and needed to be researched in more detail.[3] The statistics indicate the severity of the problem:

- in 2001, the Indigenous imprisonment rate for adults in Western Australia was 21 times the non-Indigenous rate;[4]
- Indigenous people in Western Australia are victims of violent offences (57.66 violent offences per 1,000 people) at more than five times the rate of non-Indigenous people;[5] and
- Indigenous women, in particular, bear extra risk of violence; the great majority (71.9 per cent) of Indigenous victims of violent crime are women.[6]

Issues of crime and violence also affect Indigenous youth. In Western Australia in 2002, the detention rate for Indigenous juveniles (males and females under the age of 18) was *38 times* higher than the detention rate for non-Indigenous juveniles.[7] While non-violent crimes such as burglary, theft and motor vehicle offences predominate among these youths, there are also significant cases of assault and other violent crime; Indigenous juveniles were responsible for about half of all assaults by juveniles.[8]

This paper refers to both *crime* and *violence* as issues for Indigenous Australians, recognizing that there is both difference and considerable

1. As an example, the recent riot in Redfern, Sydney (February 2004) was in response to the accidental death of an Indigenous youth in an alleged police chase (according to some Redfern community members), an incident that some community members saw as evidence of police persecution of Indigenous youth. This situation followed on from longstanding tensions between the police and the Indigenous community in that suburb. See Mundine, Mick (2004), "Redfern riots 'A tragedy for all'", *The World Today*, 16 February, transcript available at http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2004/s1046114.htm).

2. Self-identification is an internationally accepted approach to determining Indigenous identity (Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations (1996) Report of the Working Group established in accordance with Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1995/32 of 3 March 1995, E/CN.4/1996/84. Fifty-second Session, 4 January 1996, Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda, page 7.) The Indigenous people (also referred to as "Aboriginal") are understood to be the original inhabitants of Australia, and belong to

many different language groups in different parts of the country.

3. See Memmott, Paul, Rachael Stacy, Catherine Chambers and Catherine Keys (2001), "Violence in Indigenous communities", Crime Prevention Branch, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Canberra.

4. Loh, Nini and Anna Ferrante (2003), "Aboriginal involvement in the Western Australian criminal justice system: a statistical review, 2001", report prepared by the Crime Research Centre, the University of Western Australia for the WA Department of Indigenous Affairs, Perth, Western Australia, available at http://www.dia.wa.gov.au /Publications/Files/CRC_ Report2001. pdf (accessed July 2004).

5. Data from 2002. See Fernandez, John A and Nini S N Loh (2003), "Crime and justice statistics for Western Australia, 2002", Crime Research Centre, the University of Western Australia, available at http://www.crc.law.uwa.e du.au.

6. See reference 5. As a comparative statistic, less than half (45 per cent) of non-Indigenous victims of violence were women.

7. See reference 5.

8. See reference 5, Table 4.5, page 126.

9. See reference 3 for a discussion of different forms of violence.

10. The interpretation of "assault" is an interesting issue here; it is unclear whether these are aggravated or non-aggravated assaults. In some cases, "assault on a police officer" may well be related to resisting arrest: "When the police grab you and you shake off their hands" can be interpreted as assault.

overlap between the two terms. For instance, some crime (for example, burglary or drug offences) is not violent *per se*, yet it is still a serious social issue, and one which may even lead to or be associated with violence. Some violence, on the other hand, is not recognized as a crime: either because it is not formally reported (as in the case of physical assault when no charges are pressed), or because it stands outside legal definitions of crime (for ested specifically in crime and crime prevention, and thus limited itself to acts which are legally defined as crime. However, the study also took into account the fact that not all incidents of criminal violence are formally reported to the police, or charged. Thus, project discussions included a broader consideration of violence, referring specifically to criminal violence against other people, whether or not it was formally reported as a crime.

Specific local quantitative data collected during the course of the project indicated that, in the local area in 2001–2002, people identifying themselves as Indigenous Australians were responsible for 32 per cent of recorded aggravated assaults (assaults with a deadly weapon and/or assaults that caused serious bodily harm), 38 per cent of non-aggravated assaults and a notable 80 per cent of assaults on a police officer.[10] Non-violent crimes such as burglary and possession of drugs also involved disproportionately high percentages of Indigenous people. At the same time, it was also clear that most crimes in the area were committed by non-Indigenous people (1,152 of 1,436 processed crimes). Thus, the question arose of the validity of focusing specifically on "Indigenous crime". Was an Indigenous-specific focus constructive from a social justice perspective, or did it serve to implicate the non-offending majority of Indigenous people while ignoring the (numerically greater) incidence of non-Indigenous crime? Qualitative data from meetings and interviews conducted during the course of the project indicated that, although Indigenous crime rates appeared to be disproportionately high, only a few families were involved in offending behaviour and the great majority of local people (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) had few or no dealings with the police.

Nevertheless, several issues of concern were articulated in interviews and focus groups with the local Indigenous community. Key among them were family (or "domestic") violence, particularly violence against women,[11] feuding between families, and truancy for local high-school students. Domestic violence is a crime; feuding *per se* is not a crime, but feuding among families often leads to violent criminal offences such as assault. Truancy, on the other hand, is of concern primarily because of its long-term implications for Indigenous youth.[12] The kinds of criminal offences involving local Indigenous people in the study town generally varied from month to month, but family violence was cited informally as one of the more common reasons for contact with the police.

Family violence is a complex issue and one which is not unique to the Indigenous community. Abuse directed at family members can take many forms, but physical assault (of spouses – male or female – or other family members) was most cited here. Examples included assaulting family members with weapons such as iron bars, blocks of wood, stones or knives, as well as fist-fighting and kicking. Associated criminal charges may vary from assault causing bodily harm, to manslaughter or murder. Assault is a crime, yet women victims in particular are often reluctant to press charges – or even to speak about it, due to a fear of "payback" or revenge attacks from partners or their relatives.[13] With the exception of violent punishment for adultery in traditional Indigenous law, assaulting men, women or children is not an acceptable part of Indigenous Australian cultural practice.

Nor is it considered acceptable in this Indigenous community; rather, interviews indicated that family violence can be very distressing for Indigenous people who witness it (such as young people and neighbours). For instance, one 16-year-old girl "…*hears her parents argue all the time*" and "…*has seen her mother being constantly and viciously abused.*"[14] Indigenous community members were concerned about such situations. Some felt that police were not taking family violence seriously enough; police were perceived as slow to respond to calls and reluctant to make arrests.

This project attempted to understand some of the reasons for the disproportionately high incidence of crime and violence in the local Indigenous community. Interviews and focus groups conducted by Indigenous student researchers explored the reasons perceived by local Indigenous people for crime and violence in their local area. One focus group of Indigenous tertiary students discussed the specific topic of family violence and identified a range of contributing factors, including: alcohol use; jealousy; lack of parenting education among members of the "Stolen Generation", who may have been raised in institutions or by a series of foster parents;[15] money not being spent on necessary items in the home; and "no steady guidelines or set boundaries". Identified reasons for crime among young people included personal factors such as jealousy and negative attitudes, as well as bad feelings between different families due to long-running feuding, peer and family pressures (including "family problems" and family break-up), and socially accepted substance misuse.

These were the factors that these Indigenous people identified as relevant to the issue. Many of them had directly observed the kinds of behaviours under discussion. While their reflections are useful, it is also clear that, in any given case, all, some or none of these factors could be at play. Nor are the factors identified (jealousy, substance misuse, peer and family pressures, etc.) specific to Indigenous people. Underlying contextual factors, such as real or perceived racism against Indigenous people, feelings of dispossession or disempowerment, and cultural dissonance between Indigenous and mainstream Australian culture were also likely to have had some influence. Although they were not specifically discussed in interviews or focus groups, they are very much a part of the social context in which local Indigenous people live.

Stolen Generation experiences are an example of the contextual factors that specifically affect Indigenous Australians. The "Stolen Generation" refers to those people affected by the Australian state policy of removing Indigenous children of mixed descent from their families and institutionalizing them or having them adopted by non-Indigenous families. Removal of Indigenous children from their families was authorized in Western Australia until as recently as 1972.[16] Other contextual factors that affected Indigenous people specifically in the past included the concentration of Indigenous people on reserves, along with various other segregation policies. Jonas makes the point that, in a discussion on violence in Indigenous communities, the impact of such structural violence must not be overlooked.[17] He cites Simpson:

> "*It is violence to move people forcibly from their place of birth and to dump them in strange places.... It is violence to separate family members by policy…. The obvious physical violence that reaches wide attention is the merest tip of the iceberg of such ignored, routinized, structural violence.*"[18]

Other forms of "routinized, structural violence" result from these historical experiences. These include persistent racism in Australian society toward Indigenous Australians, disproportionately high unemployment

11. In Australia, "…there is no issue currently causing more destruction to the fabric of Indigenous communities than family violence" yet, "…overall, there is still not enough action being taken to address this issue with the priority and urgency that it requires" according to Jonas, William (2003), "Social justice report, 2003", Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, Sydney, Chapter 5. Jonas, as well as Memmott et al. (2001) (see reference 3), makes the point that the term "family violence" better reflects Indigenous people's experiences than the more narrow term "domestic violence"; this preference for the term family violence was also apparent in the study area.

12. These would include the prospect of dropping out of school, fewer future options, higher likelihood of unemployment, and even increased involvement in crime. A recent study by the Australian National University and the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, for instance, found a positive correlation between high school retention rates and lower rates of property crime. See Kaszubska, G (2002), "Schools best to curb crime", *The Australian*, October 1, page 8.

13. Bennett also makes the point that indigenous women suffering from violence "…may be unable or unwilling to fragment their identity by leaving the community, kin, family or partners." See Bennett, B (1997), "Domestic violence", *Indigenous and Islander Health Worker Journal*, page 14 (quoted in Jonas (2003), see reference 11).

14. For more on the issue of young people witnessing family violence, see Indermauer, David (2001), "Young Australians and domestic violence", Trends

and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice Series No 195, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

15. See HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) (1997), "Bringing them home", report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney.

16. Hall, Stephen (1995), "No better than anyone else: a discussion paper on the role of the churches and related organizations, religious orders and missionary societies in Indigenous child removal and institutionalization", Social Responsibilities Commission of the Anglican Church in the Province of Western Australia, page 11.

17. See reference 11, Jonas (2003), Chapter 5.

18. Simpson, M A (1993), "Bitter waters: effects on children of the stresses of unrest and oppression", in Wilson, J P and B Raphael (editors), International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes, Plenum Press, New York, page 603.

19. See, for example, Altman, J C (2000), "The economic status of Indigenous Australians", Discussion Paper No 193/2000, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, the Australian National University, Canberra; also see reference 3, page 30.

20. See reference 3, pages 2 and 10–23.

21. Homel, R, R Lincoln and B Herd (1999), "Risk and resilience: crime and violence prevention in Aboriginal communities", *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* Vol 32, No 2, pages 182–196.

rates and high levels of welfare dependence for Indigenous people, lower levels of home ownership, and overcrowded housing.[19]

The literature suggests that the causes of Indigenous violence include underlying contextual issues specific to Indigenous people, in addition to the kinds of situational factors and specific triggers to violence that community members identified in this study.[20] Thus, the underlying contextual issues create a social environment in which Indigenous Australians are more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to find themselves in situations that promote violence. "Forced removals" and "institutionalized racism" have been identified as factors contributing to increasing the risk of Indigenous Australians being involved in crime.[21] Yet, deep structural causes may have encouragingly simple solutions. Interviewees in this study cited access to desirable opportunities (for instance, playing sport or getting a good job) and the support of family members and peers (in one case, "sensible cousins") as factors which helped young Indigenous people choose to avoid crime.

IV. CRIME AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION: INITIATIVES AND PERCEPTIONS

THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY in this small city is fairly fragmented, organized primarily along family lines, with no system of community-wide Indigenous governance. Local Indigenous people come from different parts of the country and different Indigenous groups, yet share a common Indigenous Australian identity. Despite differences and internal conflicts, members of this Indigenous community undertake a range of innovative initiatives to affirm the importance of their culture and to provide opportunities for local youth. These include a Career and Culture Expo, an annual public cultural festival, a football carnival, youth outings and various other programmes. Informal family networks in the Indigenous community also offer considerable social support, as do more formalized social support initiatives such as a drug action team, an emergency cash fund, occasional workshops held by the local Indigenous health service on topics such as family violence, and a mentoring programme for at-risk youth.

Thus, there are a range of relevant initiatives within the local Indigenous community itself that are generally not understood to be specifically "crime prevention" programmes or initiatives. Rather, these initiatives take an indirect and holistic approach, often targeting the situational and contextual issues underlying crime and violence, and focusing on creating support structures and opportunities for community members. This broad "social development" approach to crime and violence prevention, as compared to a narrow focus on preventing crime,[22] makes sense from the perspective of the Indigenous community, and is increasingly recognized in the literature as an effective strategy for crime prevention. Focusing on social development is understood to enhance such "protective factors" as cultural resilience, personal controls and family controls.[23] A recent study of violence-prevention programmes in Australian Indigenous communities noted that such initiatives included cultural-strengthening programmes, counselling and education services, and holistic violence-prevention programmes, in addition to more specific initiatives that focused on behavioural reform, community policing, dispute resolution, justice and the provision of refuges.[24]

In the study area, while more holistic approaches are generally consid-

ered effective, student researchers found that their effectiveness is perceived by community members to be limited by the lack of communication between agencies/programmes and the wider Indigenous community. Local Indigenous people are not always aware of the activities and opportunities on offer. Also, such activities are often small-scale and occasional, and there are few ongoing sources of support for community members besides the informal support of family members (who themselves have many demands upon them). Finally, student researchers identified a few programmes and services in the wider community that dealt with issues such as violence against women. However, they found that Indigenous people were accessing them only infrequently.

The main police initiative in response to crime in the local Indigenous community has been the appointment of Indigenous police liaison officers, known as APLOs, who have a complex and often demanding role. They visit schools and homes; they liaise with the Indigenous community and do preventive work; and they assist with incidents of crime and violence involving Indigenous people, including follow-up with affected families. They also perform an important referral role, communicating information to community members about other agencies and their services.

As part of the project, the student researchers created and conducted an informal, anonymous survey of 50 Indigenous community members, which gauged community attitudes toward the police and opinions about the APLO programme. The key issues identified were:

• **Power and authority**. APLOs were not police officers, but occupied a position with less power. They did not, for instance, have the authority to arrest. Since there were no Indigenous police officers in the area, the consequence was that Indigenous people in the police force were in noticeably less powerful positions than those occupied by non-Indigenous people.

• **Involvement in the community and communication**. Some respondents felt that the two local APLOs were not well known in the Indigenous community, and should become more involved. There was the perception that APLOs were not always available when needed (due to their workloads). It was hoped that APLOs could help people talk through their problems, rather than just coming when someone had to be arrested.

• **Resourcing**. There were only two APLOs covering a large area (not just the study city but also surrounding towns) – compared to about 70 (non-Indigenous) police officers. There were also no male APLOs, which was identified as an issue in terms of working with Indigenous men. It was generally understood that both male and female APLOs were needed in order to deal effectively with community issues.

Senior local police officers concurred with the need for more APLOs, and understood the time pressures on the current ones, yet had been unable to identify suitable candidates interested in taking up additional APLO positions.

The difficulty in recruiting additional APLOs may have been related at least partially to the perception of the police service by members of the Indigenous community. The anonymous survey identified clearly negative attitudes towards the police. Though not all community members shared this negative view, several key issues emerged regarding perceptions of police effectiveness:

• Some community members cited poor cross-cultural **communication** between the police and the Indigenous community. Survey respondents noted that: "…*police officers come across that they know who you are and what*

22. Capobianco, Laura and Margaret Shaw (2003), "Crime prevention and Indigenous communities: current international strategies and programmes", International Centre for Crime Prevention, Montréal, Québec, July, page 6.

23. See reference 21; also reference 22, pages 6–8. For more information on "risk" and "protective" factors, see Catalano, R F and J D Hawkins (1996), "The social development model: a theory of anti-social behaviour" in Hawkins, J D (editor), *Delinquency and Crime: Current Theories*, Cambridge University Press, New York; also, Waller, I, D Sansfacon and B Welsh (1999), "Crime prevention digest II. Comparative analysis of successful community safety", International Centre for Crime Prevention, Montréal, Québec.

24. See reference 3, pages 59–74.

your problems are before they even know the situation...”; “*…some [officers] are effective but others don't work well with Indigenous people from my perspective…*”; “*…[police officers] can be more understanding instead of judging…*”, and “*…learn to really listen…*”; “*…[police officers] don't really understand Indigenous people and they don't really want to.*”

• Some community members felt that the police did not **respect** Indigenous people. Survey respondents spoke of “*…not enough consideration, too much heavy-handed tactics*”; and some police officers were perceived to have “*…attitude problems… no respect for our people and ways.*” It was also noted that: “*…Indigenous people don't respect police because police don't respect them.*” The student researchers who worked with the police service during the project experienced surprised reactions and even suspicion, initially, from fellow community members when they explained that they were taking on a traineeship with the police.

• There were also issues with the perceived speed and effectiveness of police reaction to complaints, and the police **being there** when needed. Victim support was also perceived as an important service that did not appear to be available in any formal way in the local area, other than via a women's refuge and a referral service for female victims of domestic/family violence, both of which had limited uptake by Indigenous women.

• Finally, people expressed a desire for police officers to be “*…**involved** with the community and Indigenous activities.*” One student commented that police officers used to “*…know all the families on a friendly basis*”, but this had changed as the population of the area had grown.

These factors were perceived to reduce the effectiveness of the police in protecting the Indigenous community from crime and violence. As one interview respondent put it: “*The police need to help alleviate the tension of family feuding within the community*”, yet, “*…the way Indigenous people view the police and the way police view Indigenous people needs to be changed first.*” As a result of these concerns, the police force is considering a professional development workshop in cross-cultural awareness for all officers, in order to improve their understanding of Indigenous people, their culture, history and ways of effective communication.

V. CONCLUSIONS

THIS RESEARCH PROJECT explored the issue of crime and violence in a small urban Indigenous community. It identified crime and violence – particularly intra-family violence and inter-family feuding – as disproportionate problems for the local Indigenous community, even though many Indigenous people had little or no contact with the police. The local Indigenous community had various strategies for dealing with the underlying causes of crime and violence, but the effectiveness of these strategies was hampered by lack of communication within the Indigenous community itself. Meanwhile, the ability of the local police service to deal with and prevent crime and violence in the local Indigenous community was diminished by the social divide separating the Indigenous community and the police. This divide was characterized by a lack of communication and lack of understanding of issues between two very different cultures. As a result, the police approach to crime and violence prevention did not meet Indigenous community needs, while the Indigenous community's approach to crime and violence prevention (informal social supports, creation of

opportunities) was not strongly reflected in police practice.

APLOs were seen as a promising approach to crime prevention, demonstrating police awareness of a need for cross-cultural "liaison" between police and community. Yet, weaknesses in this approach were apparent from the community responses: APLOs were too few, too under-resourced and unable to compensate for a lack of communication and understanding with other members of the police force. APLOs also ended up being too busy to carry out the sort of time- and relationship-intensive crime-prevention activities that would have fit with the Indigenous community's holistic view of crime prevention. A solution to bridge this divide would be the recruitment of more Indigenous people – as APLOs, as police officers and in other roles.

Indigenous community approaches to crime and violence prevention relied heavily on social support within the Indigenous cultural context. Initiatives were often not referred to as "crime prevention" at all. Yet, they were still attempts to address issues that underlie crime and violence, using a broader social development approach. When considering crime-prevention initiatives, community members valued, above all, contact and interpersonal communication. Thus, APLOs were seen as helpful if they came over for a cup of tea to discuss your child's problems, if they were people you could talk to and get support from – but not if they were unknown or appeared only when someone needed to be arrested. Community perceptions of non-Indigenous police officers were similar: if police officers spoke with community members, if they got to know them, if trust were built, they could be real resources for local Indigenous people – otherwise, they were not.

The theme which continually emerged in this study was the need for opportunities for informal contact and face-to-face communication to build bridges between these two very different cultures. Interestingly, the research project itself helped to build these sorts of bridges, and so change some of the negative local attitudes to the police. During the project, the presence of Indigenous student trainees in visible customer-service positions at the front desk of the local police station indicated a closer link and relationship between the police service, as an institution, and the Indigenous community. As a result, Indigenous community members reported, informally, greater comfort in visiting the police station. Indigenous trainees, for their part, reported in their June 2003 evaluation meeting that they now had "…*more respect for the police*" and "…*a lot more empathy for them*" as a result of the project. One trainee noted that he went from being "…*a bit anti-police*" to the realization that "…*police are people too*." Another trainee, who had had negative experiences with police in the past, stated that: "…*the majority of the police in there are good….they're only doing their job*." Meanwhile, the police service reported a 50 per cent drop in complaints by Indigenous people, attributing this to the Indigenous trainees' front-desk presence.

When considering the issue of crime and violence prevention in disadvantaged communities, it is important to reflect upon the nature of the relationship between community members and powerful institutions such as the police service. Generally, police and disadvantaged community members are from very different cultures. These cultures are often divided by mistrust, as a result of negative past experiences, the vestiges of institutionalized racism and a lack of cross-cultural understanding. In the urban context, this is aggravated by the low likelihood that members of the police service and members of the Indigenous community will meet informally in non-confrontational contexts, in ways that can gradually build relation-

ships of trust.

As the police service and other powerful institutions make good-faith efforts to involve disadvantaged communities in crime-prevention initiatives, they must also make an effort to understand how these communities themselves perceive "crime", its causes and potential solutions. Relationship-building is key. In this case, local Indigenous community members clearly identified that social support, including informal social contact that crosses boundaries (between Indigenous/non-Indigenous communities, and between police and civilians), is for them an important part of the process of crime and violence prevention. Very simple initiatives to bridge social divides – such as the presence of Indigenous trainees at the police front desk – may have very important ripple effects, allaying underlying issues and situational factors that can lead to violence.