

Crime Prevention in Kugluktuk

Background

Kugluktuk is a small community of 1,250 inhabitants set between the Coppermine River and the shores of Coronation Gulf on the Arctic Ocean in the new territory of Nunavut. The Inuit of Kugluktuk recognize the importance of passing their customs onto younger generations, including drum dancing, carving soapstone and sewing traditional clothing. However, changes in some of the behavioural patterns of the community have had devastating effects. One of these changes is an increase in criminal activity, particularly amongst the youth.

In the past, citizens of Kugluktuk did not acknowledge crime and its effects as a community problem. Often, the perception of community members was that the individual was at fault – that the crime perpetrated was an individual

act. Due to the pervasive societal ‘punishment’ model for such acts, citizens had accepted the process of justice, including individual incarceration, as a means to deal with criminal activity. Within this context, healing as a community was not possible.

‘Change Begins With Us’

In 1997, a community action plan was developed entitled ‘Change Begins With Us.’ The plan identified specific problems in the community and recommended a framework for implementing solutions. Crime prevention was a main focus of the plan. The citizens of Kugluktuk were beginning to recognize that they must be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of community programs. The Kugluktuk Hamlet Council, a locally elected body of municipal representatives, was becoming more involved with the social programs in the community.

The wide range of activities identified in the community action plan demonstrated an increased sense of ownership and responsibility on the community’s part. There was a growing commitment to ensure that preventable problems

The Caledon Institute is collaborating with the National Crime Prevention Centre’s Community Mobilization Program to create the Crime Prevention series. The goal of this series is to document initiatives that build safe communities. The series seeks to enhance public awareness of and support for community-based partnerships on crime prevention through social development.

received appropriate attention prior to reaching unmanageable proportions. Crime amongst youth was being acknowledged as a serious and pervasive problem. The community perceived that youth are becoming involved in criminal activities at an earlier age and that criminal activities are of great consequence to both the community and the victim. The community was ready to focus its energy on the task of crime prevention and reduction, and on activities that would help identify the underlying causes of criminal behaviour.

Prevention of criminal behaviour, particularly among youth, is now being viewed as congruent with Inuit culture and most relevant to maintaining a positive cultural identity through the generations. With this new realization, the Inuit cultural sensitivities are dictating against removing the offender from his or her family and community. It is crucial that the offending individual and the community understand their responsibility to each other.

Community crime prevention

In order to implement the activities set out in the 'Change Begins With Us' plan, the Kugluktuk Hamlet Council turned to the Ottawa-based National Crime Prevention Centre. The Centre's Community Mobilization Program seeks to increase the development of community-based partnerships that deal with local crime prevention issues.

The Centre provided Kugluktuk with support for a crime prevention initiative that involves activities which will allow the community to: identify youth at risk at the preschool, junior and senior levels; develop a climate of awareness within the community about crime prevention and the consequences of crime; link youth to appro-

priate wellness-oriented activities; and offer workshops to educators, health care providers and community members about the importance of crime prevention. A resource map is also being developed to identify individuals, groups and agencies with the common goal of reducing criminal activities.

Sponsoring agency

The Kugluktuk Men's Group is the sponsoring agency which manages the community crime prevention program. The group is composed of more than 20 community members who came together in 1998 to provide opportunities for the community to participate in wellness activities. 'Talking circles' are held regularly for the individual support and learning of group members. The Men's Group operates literacy programs and computer skills workshops. A drop-in centre provides healthy alternatives for community members to socialize in a safe, drug-free and alcohol-free environment.

The Men's Group activities also bring youth and elders together in a traditional environment to allow for the transfer of knowledge and customs to the youth. The Group understands the need for crime prevention activities to help the community become healthier, safer and a better place to live.

Activities

Community development is the focus of all the activities of the crime prevention program. Recent program activities include monthly hunting trips for at-risk youth. Adolescents are paired with skilled hunters and accompanied on a field trip for the day. The youth are selected in consultation with high school teachers while the

The local high school is also participating in crime prevention activities. The school recognizes the importance of encouraging youth to volunteer and participate actively in the community. The education of the young people consists of a balanced approach with a particular emphasis upon heritage activities.

Conclusion

The significant community effort to mobilize the resources for this crime prevention project

is a testament to the community's caring for its youth. Project activities are providing opportunities for young people to choose alternatives to criminal behaviour, engage in wellness activities and learn appropriate ways to deal with stress and conflict.

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