Around the province

Reports from Youth Justice Committees Across Alberta

The successes and challenges faced by volunteer boards provide invaluable assistance to other committees across Alberta.

We invite Alberta youth justice committee members to drop us a line and let us know what's happening with their committees. We'll share committee experiences from across the province on this web site.

Make sure you include the following:

- Name of Committee
- Year Sanctioned
- Role Provided
- Challenges
- Success Stories
- What's New
Strathcona County
July 31, 2003

The Strathcona Youth Justice Committee (SYJC) is a non-profit volunteer organization comprised of 15 community members selected by Strathcona County council, authorized under section 18 of the Youth Criminal Justice Act to implement the Extrajudicial Sanctions Program (previously Alternative Measures under the Young Offenders Act).

The SYJC was one of the first non-aboriginal youth justice committee in Alberta. The committee meets with approximately 100-135 youth annually, since its inception in 1994. We benefit from strong partnerships, volunteer effort and community support.

Our members enthusiastically deliver the Extrajudical Sanctions Program, and work hard to encourage positive connections between youth and their community, increase public awareness of youth crime and foster partnerships with the Sherwood Park RCMP, Victim Services Unit, Correctional Services Division, Crown Prosecutor’s Office and Strathcona Family and Community Services.

The Youth Justice Criminal Act has elevated the profile of restorative justice initiatives by emphasizing rehabilitation and reintegration. The SYJC is hopeful that we can continue our role in helping young offenders understand the impact of their actions on the community and to motivate them against repeat offences.

We continue to work with existing community resources to address family issues, substance abuse and negative peer associations, (three major predictors of recidivism according to a recent Connecticut study) and strive to identify gaps in services and programming, such as teen social development and self esteem building.
CONNIE R. MORIN

Her commitment to youth crime prevention is inspiring and effective.

As a member of the Enoch Cree Nation, Connie Morin saw that youth in her community were in danger of getting into trouble and did something about it.

The grandmother of twelve is the chair of the Enoch Task Force, formed by the community to deal with crime on the reserve. At the same time the Task Force started taking small steps, Connie was also learning more about youth crime prevention through her job at the Yellowhead Tribal Community Corrections Society.

Armed with new insights through this training, she contributed more than 300 hours of volunteer time over the next two years to Task Force activities aimed at youth crime prevention. These involved many acts of kindness, such as raising money so that children from low-income families could watch a movie in a theatre. The Task Force also planned community dances and sponsored youth attendance at workshops.

Connie was also instrumental in developing the Task Force's current Crime Prevention Project, which focuses on helping youth become productive and pro-active in their community. Thanks to the Task Force's efforts, a noticeable difference has been observed in some of the youth who were most at risk of engaging in criminal activity.

Connie's commitment to youth crime prevention is inspiring and effective.

Congratulations Connie!
Edmonton
February 07, 2001

After a very lively response to a recruiting advertisement the Edmonton Youth Justice Committee recently provided an all day orientation session to 25 new volunteer panelists. Her Honor Judge Joanne Goss of the Provincial Court Family and Youth Division volunteered her time on a Saturday to pass on strategies she uses to find fit and appropriate sentences for Young Offenders.

Judge Goss confirmed to the volunteers the value of the work done by the committee to both the Young Offenders and the court.

Also on hand to assist with the orientation were Brian Holtby and Mark Cherrington of the Youth Criminal Defence Office. They offered their office's assistance to the volunteers where possible whether it was to assist in locating the young people or providing them bus tickets to get to the panel sessions. Mark's stories about very down and out youngsters eventually succeeding with the right kind of persistent help and guidance were particularly moving.

Henri Marsolais, George Miller and Margie Marvin, of the City of Edmonton Community Services, gave their insight into the Alternative Measures Program and how it relates to the Edmonton Youth Justice Committee model along with the benefit of their years of experience in interview technique and problem solving.

Dave Hill of the Crown Prosecutors Office and Alex Hasham of the Edmonton Police Service also outlined their agency's appreciation and involvement with the Edmonton Youth Justice Committee.

The Edmonton Youth Justice Committee has been handling between 150 - 200 cases per year since starting to take cases in August of 1996. The success rate for completing the imposed measures has been very high as has the satisfaction rate of all participants. At the volunteer appreciation dinner at the Alberta Justice Staff College in June, the Committee was grateful to receive a Cheque for $25,000.00 from the Minister of Justice and Attorney General Dave Hancock to help cover our administrative costs. Mr. Hancock also praised the Committee for its excellent work and involvement of the community in resolving youth crime conflict.
Mandate & Membership

The Gibbons/Bon Accord Youth Justice Committee was established by a ministerial order issued by the Honourable Brian Evans, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Province of Alberta on March 27, 1996.

In November of 1996 the original committee was sworn in. The committee presently consists of 12 members who are from the communities of Gibbons and Bon Accord and the surrounding areas. Committee members are asked to commit to a minimum two year term. The volunteers represent a wide variety of occupations and professions. The committee works well together because all members contribute openly and willingly to discussions. We are committed to helping young offenders and have the best interests of our communities at heart.

The Youth Justice Committee at Work

Files are referred to the committee by the courts, RCMP, Community Corrections and and/or the Crown Prosecutor.

Our fourth year has continued to be challenging, at times frustrating, eye opening and very rewarding. The number of members on the Gibbons/Bon Accord Youth Justice Committee has decreased from last year. Members are recruited on an ongoing basis. For the committee to be successful we must maintain our membership at a constant level in order to distribute the work load. Open communication with the RCMP and Crown Prosecutor is essential for the committee to be effective.

Alberta Justice provided us with a grant of $1,000 to support the work of the committee. These monies will be used for administrative supplies, volunteer appreciation and training as well as advertising.

We have come a long way and will continue to work hard to make this program a success and benefit to our communities. The more community organizations and businesses that are willing to participate and cooperate with our program the greater the benefits will be.

The Gibbons/Bon Accord Youth Justice Committee appreciates the continuing support of the RCMP, Alberta Justice, Alberta Solicitor General Correctional Services and the Towns of Gibbons and Bon Accord.

Special thanks are extended to:

- The previous RCMP liaison, Cst. John Caul, the current RCMP liaison Cst. Guy Perrault and Cst. Laurel Kading. Their support and guidance is appreciated.
Thanks also to Cindy Osborne and Carrie Wilson for the administrative support they provide.

- The staff of the St. Albert Community Corrections office, Doug Brady, Kim Sanderson and Roseanne Jakubec for their assistance. Our great working relationship helps make the committee more effective.
- Paulette Rodziewicz of the Young Offender Branch of Alberta Solicitor General for her guidance.
- The Royal Canadian Legion - Gibbons Branch #226 for providing us with their facility for our general meetings, as well as committee meetings.
- The Gibbons Seniors Twilight Club for providing us with their facility for meetings.
- The Town of Gibbons and Bon Accord for their assistance in providing administrative support.

Conclusion

During 2000 the Gibbons/Bon Accord Youth Justice Committee dealt with 17 cases. We continue to take a great deal of pride in dealing with each young offender as an individual. We strive to be creative in our consequences with the end result being that each youth is responsible for his/her actions and is accountable to the victim and the community.

The present chairperson is Jim Kirk, the vice chair is Michael Elmore, the Director is Wanda Roskewich, committee recording secretary is Natalka Strilesky and the treasurer is Bonnie Nimmo.

The committee looks forward to another challenging and productive year in 2001.

Bonnyville
January 18, 2001

The Bonnyville Youth Justice Committee is comprised of five Elders as well as representatives from Kehewin Cree Nation, Metis Nation of Alberta Zone II, the Town and MD of Bonnyville and the Bonnyville Canadian Native Friendship Centre. With a supporting letter from Judge Brian Fraser, the Bonnyville Justice Committee was sanctioned in 1994 and has now been in existence for approximately eight years. The RCMP, Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA) and Probation Services also support this initiative by attending the meetings and offering facts as well as background information on the clients. As a healing process rather than punishment, all parties involved, including the victim, are encouraged to attend. Traditional native dispute resolution and healing techniques are incorporated to help clients succeed. Referrals are made to the Bonnyville Justice Committee in three ways:

- The court system
- Directly from the Bonnyville RCMP
- Native Counselling Services of Alberta - Bonnyville
The clients are notified of their appearance before the committee by NCSA at their last court appearance, one week prior to their committee meeting by phone call from a member of the Bonnyville Justice Committee.

The day of the meeting, the RCMP are consulted to make the committee aware of the charge and relate all the facts concerning the particular offence. The offender will then be brought into the meeting alone to tell his/her side of the story. After the offender is given a chance to speak, the rest of the family is brought in to discuss the matter. Family concerns are also discussed at that time.

If the victim is present he/she will also be given time alone with the committee to explain their side of the story. The victim may or may not want to meet with the offender. If agreed, the offender should offer a sincere apology to the victim.

The recommendation procedure emphasizes keeping the offender in the community unless the offender needs treatment or secure custody. All alternatives are discussed from working with an Elder to community service hours and probation. The onus is put back onto the offender who has input into the recommendation so that he/she is not being set up to fail - this being a healing process, not a punishment.

If further information is required, contact Leo Gadwa, Chairperson at (780) 826-2913 or Dorothy Scanie, Bonnyville Canadian Native Friendship Centre at (780) 826-3374.
The Edmonton Native Youth Justice Committee has been providing disposition recommendations to youth court judges since March 1994. To date, it has been involved with approximately 100 cases. The committee is made up of Native elders and Aboriginal role models who are truly committed to working with troubled youth.

Monthly meetings and hearings are held at the Canadian Native Friendship Centre. Hearings are also held at Edmonton's Young Offender Centre when young offenders are remanded in custody.

The Edmonton Native Youth Justice Committee was formally designated in March 1997. Its mandate is to work with the justice system in dealing with offenders from Edmonton and surrounding area. It seeks to resolve problems through counselling and corrective action.

Typical meetings begin with the police report of the incident being read. Offenders and their parents are then asked to tell their side of the story. Victims, when willing, also take an active part in the meetings by explaining the crime's impact on their lives. When victims are involved, offenders have the opportunity to make a personal apology.

Dispositions are recommended after receiving input from young offenders, their parents, victims and committee members. Recommendations are based on healing rather than punishment. Primary objectives are rehabilitating the offender and restoring harmony to the community. This means that most of the time devoted to a particular case is spent counselling rather than lecturing.

Joan Collins, a court worker with Native Counselling Services of Alberta, plays a major role in the committee. In addition to accepting referrals from judges and lawyers, she also makes recommendations for cases to be referred to the youth justice committee. When referrals are made, she liaises between the committee, courts, Edmonton Police Service, probation officers and parents. She attends hearings and brings the committee's recommendations back to court. She also provides training and advice to committee members.

Constable Sharon Bourque, an Aboriginal police officer with Edmonton Police Service, assists the committee with criminal record checks and by taking minutes.

The Edmonton Native Youth Justice Committee has experienced many rewards for its work. In two cases, young offenders or their parents have called and asked for further intervention. The committee was also featured by a local filmmaker in the video Who's Watching Our Children?
The Community Justice Committee of Lethbridge is a group of volunteers sanctioned by the Solicitor General to act as a youth justice committee. Membership requires references, a background check and an oath of confidentiality. Training follows.

Committee members sit on panels of at least four. They work with youth 12 to 17-years-old who accept responsibility for their less serious offences (first or second) and who are referred by the Crown or the courts. Appropriate, fair and firm consequences are mutually agreed upon. A panel member then mentors the youth who, if he/she successfully completes the alternative measures agreement, does not receive a youth record and does receive insight into the necessity for better future choices.
West Central Region 9  
January 18, 2001

The West Central Region 9 Youth Justice Committee has been operating since February 1998, and currently includes 10 members. Our jurisdiction coincides with that of the Thorsby and Breton RCMP detachments and includes the areas of Thorsby, Warburg, Lindale, Breton, Winfield, Buck Lake and Alder Flats. We have good representation from each area except Buck Lake and Alder Flats. This we hope to remedy in the near future. Our plan is to offer another training session this year. As a result of two community awareness events, eight more people have expressed an interest in joining our youth justice committee.

We have completed four cases and are currently working on three new ones. Our four completed cases involved five male candidates. Four were charged with theft and one with assault. Every candidate was ordered to perform community service. Four were required to produce a written apology, three a verbal apology, one to write an essay, four to make restitution and one to seek family counselling. Two of our four cases were successfully completed. The remaining two have been returned to the court system.

Our first months in operation have been extremely interesting and educational. With each case comes a new set of issues.

Our questions for young offenders and their families inevitably raise questions for us as committee and community members. Our discussions often lead to much broader societal and ethical issues.

We have had excellent support and guidance throughout this process from our very busy district probation officer, Carl Pelton. He has been patient, cooperative and most willing to help us with our many questions and concerns.

We are positive that as we continue to learn and gain more experience, we will also gain greater self-confidence and self-reliance.

Yellowhead Tribal Community Corrections Society  
January 18, 2001

The Yellowhead Tribal Community Corrections Society has an agreement with Alberta Solicitor General which allows the five Yellowhead Tribal communities to receive correction services delivered by their own people. The staff provide support to the Alexis, Enoch and O'Chiese Youth Justice Committee.

The society has started a Youth Enhancement Program which offers support to young offenders through a variety of resources providing a venue for the youth to change their lives. Some activities undertaken by the youth enhancement support worker include:
• Providing young offenders community support and supervision.
• Establishing Elders justice committees to provide assistance to the offenders by offering support and advice in dealing with social, economic, emotional, or spiritual problems. This support and advice assisted the clients in completing their conditional orders.
• Providing transportation for the young offenders and their parents/guardians for court appearances.
• Assisting the youths in getting educational assessments, enrolling in educational programs and applying for treatment centres. As well, setting up counselling programs and after care follow-up assessments and assistance.
• Becoming an "AA" sponsor for clients in this program.
• Facilitating workshops within the First Nations communities with the support of child welfare, Native Alcohol & Drugs Program (NADAP), Health Services and the policing agencies.
• Securing placements for youth to complete community service hours, Fine Option Program and Alternative Measures Program. The youth enhancement support worker provided monitoring and follow-up on the offenders' progress in these programs.
• Preparing interim reviews for the court on the clients' progress.
• Providing predisposition reports on young offenders for the courts.