

THE COUNCIL AND THE PUBLIC

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Very often the operations of an organisation set up in the interests of the public is a mystery to the public. This is because the public does not always understand what the organisation is trying to accomplish, and even when they appreciate what it is attempting to do, quite often they doubt the appropriateness of its methods. The citizen rarely gets a complete picture of the whole agency, because he has probably dealt with only one or two of its representatives or maybe none at all. Yet, unless the public knows and understands the organisation's objectives their opinions will be based on emotions rather than on facts and they will not co-operate fully or at all in helping the organisation reach its objectives. If the organisation is to obtain help from the public - and it can achieve little without public support - it must explain itself.

Following the formation of the Queensland Branch of the Australian Crime Prevention Council on 30 January, 1976, the committee unanimously decided that its first move was to get the public interested in the objects and functions of this new branch and thoughts in keeping with the opening paragraph of this article were freely expressed in committee.

In order to get the public together to talk about a crime prevention programme it was decided to hold a "Crime and You Afternoon" on Sunday, 6 June, 1976. During the preliminary discussions many ideas were put forward by committee members as to speakers, panels, citizen groups, etc., who could participate with dedication and enthusiasm. Having noted the ideas put forward the committee then adjourned so that its members could give individual consideration and thought as to what had transpired, and meet again later with the objective of formulating a programme which could capture public interest and support.

Without dwelling any longer on the efforts which went into the preparation of our first programme, let us move to the "Crime and You Afternoon" which took place at the Kelvin Grove State High School Assembly Hall on Sunday, 6 June, 1976. It was attended by some 120 citizens comprising a good cross-section of the community.

It was previously well publicised that the prime purpose of the meeting was to provide interested citizens with an opportunity to express their views on what aspects of crime control the newly formed Queensland Branch of the A.C.P.C. should concentrate. It was obvious from the outset that the meeting had created considerable interest and many of those present indicated that they were looking forward to the afternoon's programme which would give them a better understanding of crime prevention as practised by the Council.

The afternoon's proceedings were opened by the Honourable Mr Justice M.B. Hoare, C.M.G., Acting Chairman, substituting for Chairman R W. Whitrod, who was unavoidably absent from the State on official duties. His Honour spoke briefly on the history of the A.C.P.C., the reason for the meeting that day and his confident expectation that public ideas and support for the Council would be forthcoming, and the functions of the State Branch with its committee, members and citizens working for a better regulated society.

The programme continued with an address by the Hon. W.E. Knox, M.L.A. who at that time was Minister for Justice and Attorney-General. The Minister said that some people assumed that the legislators held the key to crime prevention because they could pass a law to make unwanted behaviour or conduct a criminal offence. But, he went on to say, this was a false assumption because the most effective way in any democratic society to reduce crime is for the public to become involved in crime prevention and to care for the welfare of their fellow citizens. Public apathy and lack of concern for others not only makes it more difficult for the law enforcement officials but also leads to an increase in crime.

The next speaker was His Honour Judge A.B.C. Wilson, a vice-president of the Council at that time, whose subject was "The A.C.P.C. - What Is Your Role?". He said that it was important that a Branch arrange meetings and functions to ensure that those working within the criminal justice system and interested members of the public could have an opportunity to meet one another and exchange ideas.

It could only be through collaboration and co-operation that mutual respect could be developed. The system could operate more effectively when personnel within it understood the respective roles of those who have a part to play in the criminal justice system.

He highlighted the need for Branches to undertake specific projects related to the objects and functions of the Council and to seek to develop more community involvement in this important area. To say that there was a need for more community involvement or more public participation in the fields encompassed by the objects of the Council was to state the obvious. His Honour then said, "We would not be here this afternoon if it were otherwise."

He further stated that Queensland had a unique opportunity to show a lead and provide the incentive, the models, and the expertise required for the responsible implementation of practical programmes of this nature in this State. Public education was the corner-stone of any development in this area.

The final address, "You and Crime", was given by Mr. P.F. Johnson, M P., Federal Member for Brisbane, who opened with the quote, "Say not what your country can do for you but rather what you can do for it!" and followed this by saying that citizens should think about the implications of this statement so far as the problem of crime and delinquency in the community was concerned. There was no room for complacency to such a problem as the incidence of crime had reached a stage where we should be asking ourselves what are we able and willing to do about it. He then spoke of the necessity for greater co-operation between the official public services and the public in

the prevention of crime and delinquency, and expressed a number of ways by which this co-operation could be achieved. He followed this by emphasising the need for public involvement and gave a number of examples where such involvement would be a great help in crime prevention.

Citizens attending the afternoon were then divided into groups and given the opportunity to express their views on what aspects of crime control the newly formed Queensland Branch of the A.C.P.C. should concentrate. Later, the committee took these group findings into consideration in determining future work programmes and as a result the following seminars were organised.

"Crime Prone Families" held on 8.11.76; "Sentencing and Restitution" held on 6.4.77; and "Police Public Relations and Traffic Enforcement" held on 26.7.77.

In all of our programmes to date the support from T.V., press and radio in getting a message of our work to the public has been excellent and there is every reason to believe that this happy and important relationship will continue.

A further scheme designed to involve our members with the public and persons involved and interested in the criminal justice system got under way in March of this year and is now a bi-monthly event. Selected films in the fields of penology, law, law enforcement, sociology, adolescence and juvenile delinquency, drugs and drug addiction, child study (including child welfare), etc., are being screened at the Theatre, Lower Ground Floor, Commonwealth Government Centre, 295 Ann Street, Brisbane. There are four screenings on a Tuesday and a Thursday commencing at 10.00 a.m. and 2.45 p.m. on each of those days. The programme is of some 90 to 120 minutes duration and the audience is told that the major interests of the A.C.P.C. include all segments of the Criminal Justice System, such as Courts, Police, Prisons, Probation, Parole, After-care, with an emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation. It is also emphasised that its functions include the provision of opportunities for the exchange of information, not only amongst professional groups, but also with layworkers.

The films, it is hoped, will give the public some idea of the work in which the A.C.P.C. is concerned and at the same time members of the audience are asked to express their views on what aspects of crime control our Council should concentrate.

As I said at the beginning, "If the organisation is to obtain help from the public - and it can achieve little without public support - it must explain itself." This we are trying to do and our efforts to date indicate that some progress is being made.

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