



**Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Williams Lake Detachment
British Columbia**



THE PROBLEM

Auto Theft in Williams Lake, B.C.

As a result of having the highest auto theft per capita of any city in Western Canada, the RCMP went about identifying the problem with the community. This included auto dealers, the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, victims of auto theft, First Nation leaders and the police. We learned through our analysis that the problem had existed for over thirty years and was steadily increasing culminating in 314 thefts in 1995 for a population of 11,522. A complete and thorough analysis of previous thefts was conducted which assisted in determining who was involved, the methods used in stealing vehicles and the types of vehicles most likely to be targeted. We also learned that other problems existed as a result that needed to be addressed. After numerous meetings with the community, a Strategy was developed to address this growing problem. The Strategy incorporates both short and long term goals. The four components of the strategy include: Prevention; Root Social Causes; Alternate Justice Program; and Effective Law Enforcement. As a result of implementing this strategy vehicle thefts have decreased dramatically, the community is working more closely and effectively together and positive new partnerships with the police have been established. This is spilling out into other crime issues where the community is taking an active part in addressing crime.



**ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE
WILLIAMS LAKE DETACHMENT**

PROBLEM SOLVING PROJECT

AUTO THEFT

A. Scanning:

Williams Lake is a city in south central British Columbia with a population of 11,522 people and an area population of 32,400 people. The region's economy is dependent on the forestry industry as well as cattle ranching and fanning. The City of Williams Lake and surrounding area are policed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Williams Lake Detachment. The detachment has a complement of forty-one officers and nine civilian staff.

Auto theft has been a problem in Williams Lake for over thirty years. Most people are aware that the majority of stolen vehicles turn up near the Anaham Reserve west of Williams Lake and that many are completely destroyed by fire. For years the R.C.M.P. have responded to public pressure and have made some efforts at targeting this crime problem, but with few results.

In 1996 the detachment underwent considerable restructuring to provide more efficient police services to the public. A full time Community Policing Coordinator's position resulted. The role of this coordinator is to assist with the full implementation of Community-Based Policing within the detachment and community. Corporal Jacques Drisdelle, who was

stationed in another B.C. community was invited to move to Williams Lake and take on this new role in Williams Lake. He arrived in June of 1996.

The first task of the Coordinator was to meet with the people who were most affected by the problem. Local auto dealers had been victimized heavily and the consultation started there. As a result of this, meetings were called which included the auto dealers, representation from the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia and police. The analysis of the problem commenced at this level.

B. Analysis.

As a result of the consultation that occurred from these meetings, a comprehensive study of police and insurance files were conducted. Our first step was to get statistical reports from the Police Information Retrieval System. This not only gave file numbers, but broke down the thefts by date, hour and location. A comparison study could be done from this initial information. We then set about analyzing individual files for a controlled period of time. The purpose of this analysis was to determine the scope of the problem. The analysis consisted of determining the number of vehicles stolen each year and by month, the types of vehicles stolen and the method used to steal them. We wanted to know who was mainly involved - their age, gender and domicile. We interviewed victims of auto theft to learn how this had impacted them. We wanted to know what they could have done to protect themselves and what measures they were taking presently to prevent their vehicle from being stolen again. We also interviewed police officers actively involved in the investigation of auto theft.

From this analysis we learned that auto theft had indeed been a large problem over many years and extended back to at least 1970. We learned that trucks were the main target and that

thieves preferred four wheel drives. Although most makes and models of vehicles were targeted, we learned that thieves preferred Chevrolet, Jeep and Dodge pickup trucks.

10 Year Auto Theft Pattern

1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
198	130	167	137	164	150	163	202	268	314

1995 Stolen Auto Figures

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
26	22	30	22	20	22	24	35	35	32	28	16	314

1996 Stolen Auto Figures

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
11	12	10	19	12	13	15	22	26	20	24	33	217

We further learned that young First Nation males between the ages of 12 years and 18 years from the Reserves of Anaham and Stone were mainly responsible. Not all thefts could be attributed to this specific group as there were local Caucasian youths also involved in a minority of thefts. We further learned that there was no meaningful pattern to the thefts. Thefts were occurring every and any hour of the day and night. There was also no distinct pattern in the location of thefts, although there were a larger number of vehicles being stolen from around the downtown Bingo Hall. We did learn that there had been no theft where an anti-theft device had been employed.

This included the use of a steering wheel club. Our officers started talking to youths who they apprehended for auto theft about their method of operation. These youths admitted that if they became aware of an anti-theft device in a target vehicle that they would pass it up as the risk of being unsuccessful or caught was too great.

We learned that the vehicles of choice were easily started once the steering column was broken open and that this was as a result of a manufacturing flaw.

The financial costs to Insurance and individual victims was the obvious harm being done by this problem. In 1995 the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia in Williams Lake alone paid out \$1,060,748.00 and in 1996 that figure was \$918,725.00. This did not hold into account financial loss to individual vehicle owners as well as other insurance carriers costs paid out.

Compounding the problem of theft was the issue of hazardous high speed pursuits by police. We were able to see that thieves would often drive around looking for a police car and taunt them into a chase. Some of the chases extended as many as 60 miles and almost always culminated in off road situations. The dangers associated to police officers, other motorists on the highways and the auto thieves themselves was of great concern.

Our analysis told us that many of the stolen vehicles would eventually be found near the Anaham Reserve completely destroyed by fire. In most cases the stolen vehicles were found and most were apparently stolen for the enjoyment of a drive and eventual destruction. Very few vehicles were ever stolen for financial gain, although some did get stripped and the parts sold.

Further meetings occurred with First Nation Leaders, Chiefs & Elders from the Chilcotin Nation were invited to discuss this problem. We learned that many First Nation people felt oppressed by the white people and gave their silent support to the young First Nation males who

were involved in stealing vehicles from the white people. We learned that the Chief of the day from the Anaham Reserve gave his full support to the young men from his community to steal vehicles.

A public meeting was called on the issue in early December 1996. This meeting was very well attended by the public . We set out at this meeting to share with the community what we had learned about auto theft from our analysis. At this meeting we circulated a questionnaire and asked people to identify crime issues they felt were a problem in Williams Lake and to prioritize these in order of importance. Auto Theft was the overwhelming issue from 90% of the people who responded. We then circulated our questionnaire into the community and again most people identified auto theft as the number one problem. Out of this questionnaire came several suggestion on how to deal with the problem.

The information gained from the survey indicated that the public wanted:

- To be informed of what was being done to combat the problem.
- That the community had to take an active role with police in working to resolve this problem.
- That the Judicial System was not working and that we should explore alternatives, such as Family Group Conferencing.
- Push for stiffer court imposed penalties for auto thieves.
- Push for reforms to Canada's Young Offender's Act.

Several people identified themselves as wanting to get involved.

C. Response:

In February of 1997 these people were brought together for a brainstorming meeting. From this meeting, along with the mass of information gathered, a Strategy was developed.

This Strategy has four elements and these are:

- I Prevention of auto theft through education.
- II Addressing the root social causes.
- III Developing an Alternate Justice Program - Family Group Conferencing
- IV Effective and meaningful law enforcement.

This initial group was too large to actively work on the strategy as a whole, therefore the group was broken down into four levels, each level working on one of the elements of the Strategy.

Through the Scanning and Analysis a strong partnership developed between the Police Community Policing Coordinator and the Community Program's Manager for the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, (I.C.B.C.) Mr. David Dickson. They became the glue that would hold the four working groups together and ensure that the Strategy would be ongoing and workable.

While all of this was happening, the politics of the Anaham Reserve were in turmoil. An election for Chief and Councillors was held in January 1997 and the Chief of the day was removed due to election irregularities. A new election was ordered and the Chief was defeated. Adding to our frustrations was the fact that the Anaham Reserve was in another R.C.M.P. Detachment jurisdiction, the Alexis Creek Detachment. Through the efforts of Cpl. Jacques Drisdelle and David Dickson a meeting was scheduled with the new Chief Leslie Stump. The

meeting was held in mid-March 1997 in Williams Lake. At this meeting Chief Leslie Stump attended with his Band Councillors and their lawyer. The mood of the meeting was tense as Chief Stump accused the Police and I.C.B.C. of publicly labeling his people as car thieves at the December Public Meeting. Chief Stump was clearly upset and threatened law suits if these agencies continued to openly identify young men from the Anaham Reserve as responsible for auto theft in the area.

Cpl. Drisdelle explained the situation to Chief Stump and offered his unqualified apology to him for giving the impression of labeling people of the Anaham Reserve as auto thieves. He pointed out that at the meeting he had on two occasions clearly stated that the majority of people from Anaham Reserve did not approve of their young men stealing vehicles and that the majority of people were not thieves but honest, hard working people. He stressed that a minority of youths were holding the honest people hostage so to speak and that there was a need to work together to address this problem effectively. Cpl. Drisdelle offered to make his apology public at the next Public Meeting scheduled April 2, 1997. Chief Stump and his Council were invited to attend this meeting.

The four working groups set down to plan their individual strategy. April 1997 was declared Auto Prevention Month in Williams Lake and a number of events were planned.

Stage I - Prevention through Education:

The following was the action taken by the Prevention Group.

1. Organize a prayer month with the Williams Lake Churches to pray specifically for the reduction of crime in Williams Lake.

2. Local Auto Dealers to promote the sale of the Club to the people purchasing new and used vehicles.
3. Display table at the local mall on various anti-theft devices. Also provide information on the extent of the problem in Williams Lake and the prevention steps that can be taken by vehicle owners to prevent theft.
4. Set up a prevention display at the Forestry Forum on May 2nd which thousands of people would be attending. This would be a means of informing the public as to the extent of the problem, what is being done about, and prevention measures to avoid theft.
5. Set up a prevention display at the Williams Lake Car Show on May 24th which again thousands of people would be attending.
6. Shock method of advertising. Display a burned out truck shell that was recently stolen and destroyed. This was displayed in a high traffic area of the city and was displayed for the entire month.
7. Promote such anti-theft programs as Combat Auto Theft (C.A.T.) through the British Columbia Automobile Association. Have High School students patrol local parking lots and check vehicles for vulnerability to theft. Inform people of the C.A.T. Program and invite them to sign up. Provide tips on protection.
8. Put on a Public Meeting on Auto Theft for April 2nd.
9. City Proclamation that April 97 was "Stop Auto Theft Month."
10. Work with local AM/FM Radio Station and Newspaper to promote the HOT CAR PROGRAM through CRIME STOPPERS. Conduct a month long advertising campaign on the problem of auto theft in the city. These ads would include what people can do to

protect themselves, and the measures being taken by Police, I.C.B.C., and the community.

11. Research the "IN YOUR FACE PROGRAM" from the Edmonton City Police for the possibility of implementing same in Williams Lake.
12. Household mailing to every residence in and around Williams Lake. This would inform people of the public meeting, statistics on auto crime and prevention tips.
13. Complete an inventory of anti-theft devices available in Williams Lake and how to access these devices.

Stage II - Addressing the root social causes of auto theft:

Stage II of the Strategy started taking shape when Chief Leslie Stump agreed to attend the public meeting, but cautioned that he was attending with his full Council and Lawyer. He stated that they would video record the meeting. This was welcomed. At the public meeting the rules were clearly stated. The purpose of the meeting was to move ahead and deal with the problem. The purpose was not to lay fault but to constructively change the tide of bad attitudes and reduce auto theft. The public was being asked to review the measures being taken under the Strategy and comment on how it could be improved.

During the meeting Cpl. Jacques Drisdelle spoke of the hurt feelings felt by the people of Anaham as a result of the comments made that young men from that Reserve were responsible. He pointed out that there was no intent to cause this hurt. He apologized to Chief Stump and his people. All local media attended this meeting, including print, radio and television.

Afterwards, Chief Stump asked to speak. He stated that he was pleased with the positive attitude of the police and organizers of the meeting. He offered his apology for the young men from his community who were stealing vehicles in Williams Lake and he offered his support in working with Police and the community to find solutions to the problem. This single act has significantly turned the tide of auto theft in Williams Lake.

As a result of the positive outcome of the April 2nd public meeting, a series of meetings were held at Anaham Reserve, Stone Reserve, Community of Alexis Creek and Williams Lake between Williams Lake R.C.M.P. and Alexis Creek R.C.M.P., I.C.B.C., Native Leaders and the Auto Theft Prevention Group. A number of things were identified as being viable and workable. These included:

- Setting up a Citizens Patrol to work with Alexis Creek R.C.M.P. on the Anaham Reserve
- Better understanding of the first Nation Culture through training for police officers.
- Better understanding of the First Nation Culture through public gathering between First Nation and Caucasian.
- Development of an First Nation Profile for police and others.
- Support from the Community of Williams Lake for financial self-support initiatives for the Chilcotin Tribal Nation.
- Support for the Chilcotin Youth Enhancement Program for young people who are in trouble with the law and within their community.
- Foster a climate to create jobs for First Nation People.

The Williams Lake R.C.M.P. along with its partners are actively working on these issues with a number of these things being accomplished at this time.

Stage II - Addressing the root social causes of auto theft.

This working group has now completed their research on this program and have completed their working handbook. Meetings with all First Nation Communities have been completed to introduce the program. R.C.M.P. have also met with local Judges, Crown Counsel, the Bar Association, Probation Services, Service Clubs, schools and public groups to introduce the program. The Program seeks to divert first time offenders for various offences. In order to qualify, the offender must have admitted to the offence and be willing to participate voluntarily. During a Family Group Conference, the offender faces his victim. A facilitator gets the two sides talking with the purpose of reaching a resolution. The offender and victim together determine the sanctions that the offender will receive. Victim satisfaction in other programs that have been researched is very high and the hope is that we shall achieve the same successes.

The first conferences are scheduled for July 1997. A member of the Williams Lake R.C.M.P. underwent training in January 1997 as a facilitator and will be training additional facilitators. The broad community have overwhelmingly offered their support for this program. This program will only work for those first time offenders who are starting out in auto theft and will not work or be offered to those who have been involved in the past.

Stage IV - Effective and Meaningful Law Enforcement:

Through the restructuring of the Williams Lake Detachment, two officers are now dedicated to full time investigation of auto crime. Through their efforts, intelligence on those involved in auto theft is gathered. They identify those individuals who are actively involved.

They share the information with other officers and coordinate all enforcement on auto crime. This includes the posting of photos of the offenders in the detachment office and intelligence sheets on each. They coordinate the HOT CAR PROGRAM with local Radio, ensuring that timely news releases are done. A logging truck radio was purchased for the broadcasting of stolen vehicle descriptions to truck drivers who have offered their assistance as most stolen vehicles are taken west towards the Anaham Reserve. The Unit has targeted individual thieves and operated sting operations with bait vehicles. Through this concentrated effort many thieves were apprehended and successfully prosecuted.

A Community Court Watch made of up of community volunteers was organized. These volunteers monitor court proceedings and report their findings to the local media. Judges, Crown Prosecutors and Defense Counsel were all introduced to the Court Watch group and informed of its purpose. As a result, more meaningful sentences have recently been handed down for auto theft in Williams Lake.

It was our intention throughout this plan to have the community take ownership for the problem. The Police would coordinate the response, but the community had to buy into the solutions. Historically, the community had always waited for the police to respond to the problem and fix it. Our research showed that past police responses, which had mainly been short term and poorly organized enforcement campaigns had failed miserably. We learned most of this information through retired police officers from the Williams Lake Detachment living in our community.

A major obstacle we faced was the racist views towards First Nation that Caucasian people have. Some felt that an appropriate response to auto theft was vigilante action, harsher jail terms, cutting the First Nation people from the City. Some called for a border between the Chilcotin country to the west and Williams Lake where police could monitor the movement of First Nation People. We knew that in order to be successful we couldn't listen to such ideas but had to formulate new ideas for people to think about.

Added to our problem was the fact that many senior police officers were skeptical about the Strategy and the community partnerships being forged. They felt uncomfortable acting in conjunction with the public and sharing our information. They felt that a partnership response would weaken enforcement

Stage IV - Assessment:

We realized that to be successful at this Strategy that we had to set short and long term goals as far as seeing reduction in the number of vehicles stolen. Our analysis told us that there had never been a vehicle stolen with an anti-theft device in use and we had to inform the public of this. The short term goals would be realized through prevention and there was a need to educate people. We found that people were willing to get involved in something as tangible as this. Our information campaign started in April. We flooded the media with messages on prevention. We sent a brochure to every household in the area to advise people of the extent of the problem to inform them of ways they could protect themselves.

This resulted in an immediate response, that still continues today. People started reporting suspicious people regularly and the police started apprehending more thieves in the act as a result. People got involved because they were informed and could now see the results.

Local businesses started running out of anti-theft devices and had to increase their stock, in many cases reducing their prices along with active advertising. Even at this date local businesses are having a hard time keeping such items as steering wheel clubs in stock because of the high sales.

First Nation leaders from the Chilcotin Nation took an interest in the problem and started to speak out publicly against those responsible. This came at a personal cost as several leaders had their vehicle stolen and burned and received threats. There was a personal cost for these people to get involved with the police, and the thieves were delivering a strong message. This required a unified response from an already fragmented community and maintaining their interest was most difficult. Some of these people are still unsure of what they should do and have grown timid. Others are committed to making a stand and turning attitudes around. The positive side to this is that there is now a unified support from the Williams Lake community to help the people of the Chilcotin Nation achieve financial goals which were never before believed possible. The forest industry is working with the Chilcotin Nation to set up some joint ventures. There is political and financial support being lobbied for the construction of a Youth Enhancement Center to be run and operated by the Chilcotin People. The Provincial Government recently announced the allocation of \$80,000 towards a feasibility study for this project.

More importantly, tangible results started happening. Auto theft is down substantially since February 1997. The following is a break down of thefts for the first six months of 1997

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total
36	11	9	10	5	3	74

Should the recent trend continue, 1997 will surely be the most significant year for reducing auto theft in Williams Lake.

Evaluation is an ongoing process in this Strategy. The Prevention Working Group has taken on the role of evaluating the other phases of the Strategy. Each monthly meeting starts with a full report of the accomplishments, problems encountered and tasks to be accomplished. The group takes a critical look of what is being done and maps out the next steps to be taken to avoid problems and obtain maximum results.

The need to set up a Block Watch Program was identified through this evaluation process. As a result, five University level students were hired for the summer and have completely organized the Block Watch Program for Williams Lake. A computer with auto dialer capability is targeted for purchase sometime in the fall so that voice messages can be sent out to members of the Block Watch. These messages will consist of crime prevention, alerts on recent crime, warnings of fraud scams or suspect vehicles or persons to watch for. The results of auto theft prevention will also be sent out on this system. This will be one more way to effectively communicate with the public and keep involvement keen and current.

This Strategy is now focusing on the long term, especially in the area of addressing the root social causes. The work ahead will be difficult but rewarding and it is looked upon as an exciting challenge.



Questionnaire

AUTO THEFT

PLEASE TAKE A FEW MOMENTS TO REVIEW THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND PLEASE GIVE US YOUR VIEWS ON THE FOLLOWING MATTERS:

Q. DO YOU FEEL THAT THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH CRIME IN WILLIAMS LAKE?
Definitely: ___ Somewhat: ___ Not Really: ___

Q. WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION ARE THE CRIME PROBLEMS, IF ANY?
Theft: ___ Shoplifting ___ Family Violence: ___ Assaults: ___ Noisy Parties: ___
Auto Theft: ___ Drunk Driving: ___ Public Drunkenness: ___
OTHER: (please explain) _____

Q. IF YOU ANSWERED "YES" TO THE ABOVE, PLEASE LIST IN YOUR OPINION THOSE CRIMES IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE.
1: _____ 4: _____
2: _____ 5: _____
3: _____ 6: _____

Q. DOES THE COMMUNITY HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN ADDRESSING THESE PROBLEMS?
YES: _____ NO: _____

Q. IN YOUR OPINION, HOW CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED? _____

Q. ARE YOU WILLING TO BE INVOLVED: YES: ___ NO: ___

COMMENTS: _____

Q. HAVE YOU BEEN DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THE THEFT OF A VEHICLE IN THE PAST YEARS IN WILLIAMS LAKE?

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THIS PROBLEM?

Q. ARE YOU INTERESTED IN BECOMING INVOLVED IN THE FOLLOWING?
Auto Theft Working Group: ___ Citizens Patrol: ___ Court Watch: ___
Other: _____

Q. GENERAL COMMENTS: _____

(Optional) Name: _____ Telephone: _____

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION:

1. This problem solving initiative was undertaken at the Community Policing Coordinator's level and proposed to the Senior Management of the Detachment who gave their full support. From the onset the Community Policing Coordinator has spearheaded this initiative and has called upon various police members to assist in the process.
2. The Community Policing Coordinator has undergone Problem-Oriented Policing training through the Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. This training was done under the Police Management/Leadership course from that institution. This officer also took Community Problem Solving and Programs Management training through the Canadian Police College in October 1996. The entire staff of the Williams Lake Detachment underwent problem-oriented policing training in January of 1997 through training offered by "E" Division (British Columbia) Headquarters, Community Policing Section.
3. There are no additional incentives given to police officers who engage in problem solving. The officer involved in this problem solving took on this task for personal satisfaction.
4. The information learned and materials provided from the Community Policing Training through Dalhousie University and Community Problem Solving through the Canadian Police College have been used throughout this problem solving initiative.
5. The issues identified were: the need to get the community to buy into taking ownership for the problem and to work with police to find solutions; getting meaningful partnerships built and to foster good lines of communication. These have all been met.

6. Financial resources were provided for through community funds from the Community Policing Committee, Insurance Corporation of British Columbia and corporate donations. Volunteers have donated hundred of hours of their own time. The existing police budget has not been used to provide financial assistance towards this initiative. Expenses have been minimal and have consisted of paying for advertising, general mailing to every household and the rental of a community facility for public meetings. This has been cost shared with the partners involved.

7. Project Contact Person:

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