CASE PROGRAM 2007-86.2

New Zealand Police: training for ethnic responsiveness (B)

In September 2006, Pieri Munro, now a Superintendent, had just been appointed District Commander of the Wellington District. As he prepared to take on his major new role, Munro reflected on whether the lessons New Zealand Police had learnt from working with Māori would help them establish productive relationships with the country's rapidly growing multicultural population.

Since the tumultuous Bastion Point land protest of 1978, New Zealand Police had worked to develop a different relationship with Māori. In 2004, when 20,000 protesters marched the length of the New Zealand's North Island to protest that new legislation stripped Māori of their customary land rights, police worked with the protesters, rather than against them. The protest passed without violence, there were no arrests and no complaints were made against the police.

Munro regarded the success of the operation as proof that attitudes were changing: that police had forged links with Māori and begun to reflect the cultural values of all New Zealanders. Now the challenge was to develop strong links with the burgeoning population of Pacific peoples, Asians and people from other ethnic communities.

Measures of success with Māori and Pacific peoples

In 2005/2006, a survey found 72 percent of New Zealanders of European descent and 64 percent of Māori had "full" or "quite a lot" of satisfaction with the police. The figures had been gradually improving over the years: between 1997 and 1999, the percentage of Māori who had full or quite a lot of trust in the police increased from 36 percent to 48 percent.

This case was developed by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). It has been written by Linley Boniface under the supervision of Dr Richard Norman and with the editorial assistance of Janet Tyson, both of ANZSOG; it is a sequel to the case 2007-86.1 and has been prepared for teaching purposes only. The use of teaching materials is restricted to approved persons.

By 2006, Māori and Pacific peoples' crime statistics had dropped in line with overall crime statistics, but Māori and Pacific peoples continued to be disproportionately represented.

In terms of recruitment, in 1994 about nine percent of police staff identified themselves as Māori. By 2005, 11.1 percent identified as Māori, and 4 percent as Pacific peoples.[1] There were also more Māori at senior levels in the organisation: by 2006, for example, four of the 12 District Commanders (or Acting District Commanders) were Māori. In 2006, there were more Māori recruits in the police college than ever before.

In addition, Munro said Māori officers felt more able to express their sense of being Māori, and to use Māori values in their work.

Reflecting on the changes, Munro said:

> "If we look at crime statistics as a measure, our success doesn't jump off the page. If we look at satisfaction levels and the reduced number of complaints against the police by Māori, things are getting considerably better. In terms of being well connected with Māori, we have been absolutely successful. We're in a much better position to really address crime now."

Munro did not see his change of roles – from General Manager of the Māori Pacific Ethnic Services Unit to District Commander of the Wellington District – as a move away from the area of race relations. Instead, he saw it as a chance to put into practice all the policies he'd been working on at a strategic level for many years.

The New Zealand Police Strategic Plan to 2010, released shortly after Munro's new appointment was announced, had as one of the service's four values: "We are committed to being responsive to Māori as tangata whenua, recognising the Treaty of Waitangi as New Zealand's founding document. By working with Māori we will enhance safety and security". The Police Executive Management Committee accepted Munro's wording and rationale, which was intended to remove all mention of Treaty principles, Māori values, needs and aspirations, instead stressing the importance of working together with Māori.

Culture change

One example of the culture change across the New Zealand Police was its attitude to tangihanga – the Māori grieving process after a sudden death. Historically, after a sudden death – either a homicide or a road accident - detectives would quickly move to cordon off the scene. Often there were stand-offs between officers and Māori families, who wanted to stay with the body of the victim.

In a controversial case in April 2000, Steven Wallace was shot dead by police in the central North Island town of Waitara. The site was not blessed and some of Wallace's blood was washed away into public drains, which was contrary to Māori spiritual practices and caused some ill-feeling.

As far back as the 1970s, officers in some police districts had attempted to take Māori practices into account when dealing with sudden deaths in Māori families. Their

1 New Zealand Police Statement of Intent 2004/2005.

efforts had gradually become widely accepted around the country, with a number of police districts consulting with local iwi to ensure their own protocols were appropriate.

By 2006, the usual practice was for police to take the family to the scene of a sudden death, show them the body, and discuss why they needed to secure the scene to prevent evidence from contamination. Family members were permitted to bring a spiritual leader to bless the site before police work continued.

Since word of the policy spread, increasing numbers of non-Māori had asked for the sites of fatal road crashes to be blessed before being cleared away.

The challenges ahead

A research report on Asian communities[2] found that:

> "The vast majority of participants in this research had experienced some form of racism. Most common was verbal abuse and 'the finger', often by teenagers or children. Overt racism experienced included: damage to cars identifiable as 'Asian'; having stones or bottles thrown at them; and being laughed at because of poor pronunciation."

In a keynote address to the Australasian Police Multicultural Bureau in December 2005, New Zealand Race Relations Commissioner Joris de Bres said anecdotal evidence suggested incidents of property damage, racial abuse, threatening behaviour and assault were under-reported, although it was difficult to identify the level of reporting because no separate records were kept for racially motivated offences.

De Bres said a number of successful prosecutions for racial harassment sent out a clear signal that racial abuse and harassment were unacceptable and would be dealt with as crimes.

In De Bres's view, the challenges the police faced were to:

- Win and retain the confidence of ethnic communities, especially the growing number of young people.
- Demonstrate non-discriminatory behaviour.
- Be responsive and have the capacity to promptly address complaints of racial and religious harassment and abuse.
- Build strong relationships with ethnic communities, not just at times of crisis.
- Collect data that enabled trends in reporting, investigating and prosecuting hate crime to be monitored and reported back to ethnic communities.
- Dispel stereotypes about ethnic communities and raise awareness of racially motivated crime.

Future plan for ethnic services

From 2004 to 2006, there was a 25 percent drop in the apprehension rate of Asiatic peoples, and a nine percent drop in the apprehension rate of Indians. However, it was not clear whether the decrease was due to fewer crimes being committed or fewer crimes being reported.

2 Engaging Asian Communities in New Zealand, published by the Asian New Zealand Foundation in July 2005.

In its 2005/2006 Statement of Intent, New Zealand Police said more research was needed to understand the real extent of crime involving ethnic communities.

One complicating factor was that New Zealand had no specific hate speech legislation – although such legislation was being considered – and sentences for prosecutions under the Human Rights Act were relatively light. Instead, offenders were usually prosecuted under the Crimes Act or Summary Offences Act for using offensive behaviour or offensive language. A drawback of this approach was that it meant police did not have extensive data on the extent of racially motivated crimes.

In August 2006, New Zealand Police received a report it had commissioned from researchers at Waikato University on ethnic communities' perception of police. The results had not yet been made public at the time of writing.

In addition to other training packages on working with Māori, Pacific people and other ethnic communities, police had been working with New Zealand's Human Rights Commission to develop a comprehensive human rights training package. Training began in 2006, and was to be delivered to all staff within the next five years. Superintendent Olly Beckett, National Manager: Training and Professional Development, said the training would help to "underpin the moral accountability of the police", enabling operational staff to better balance the freedom of the individual and the maintenance of law and order.

Future training plans included courses on investigating hate crime.

By 2006, New Zealand Police's attempts to improve recruitment of people from other ethnic communities appeared to be paying off. In 2003, NZ police had five Asian police officers: three years later, it had 37.

Congolese in Palmerston North

An ethnic community safety project in the North Island city of Palmerston North illustrated attempts by individual police districts to forge good relationships with newcomers from other countries.

The project included inviting members of ethnic communities to tour the city's police station. In April 2006, 40 newly-arrived Congolese refugees were given a tour of the Palmerston North station, as well as a presentation about the role of the police in the community, and a display by a police dog puppy.

The adults were apprehensive to begin with, and some of the children were too scared to get out of the car when they arrived. Many of the refugees were frightened of the police dog, but took turns to pat it after the display was finished. The refugees also commented on how clean and spacious the cells were, and said they were surprised at how well criminals were treated in New Zealand.

Afterwards, police said they felt they had begun to gain the trust of the Congolese refugees. They hoped the refugees would feel able to approach the police if they were victims of crime, or if they witnessed a crime.[3]

The ethnic community safety project was an example of the significant cultural shift

3 Ten One (The New Zealand Police Magazine), issue number 285, 26 May, 2006, p4.

that had taken place within New Zealand Police since Munro became a police cadet in 1975. The service's confrontational attitude to different ethnic groups had, in Munro's view, been replaced by a commitment to train officers to establish good working relationships with the many different communities that made up New Zealand society.

Signs that the policy was working included rising satisfaction levels with the police, a growing number of Maori reaching senior levels in the organisation, increased recruitment of police cadets from ethnic communities, and the successful policing of events such as the foreshore and seabed hikoi.

The continuing challenge would be to build on the gains of the past 30 years to develop a police service able to meet the needs of the many ethnic communities that