30th May 2011

Executive Officer
Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee
Parliament House
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Re: Call for Submissions - Inquiry into Locally Based Approaches to Community Safety and Crime Prevention

The Communities That Care approach outlined in the submission that follows offers a feasible method for communities to access current prevention technologies that can assist their efforts to create healthy environments and prevent child and adolescent health and social problems. Victorian government support is sought to expand a national trial of the Communities That Care process and to enable the evaluation of its economic contribution to preventable health and social problems.

Many behaviours that form the basis of health and social problems such as harmful alcohol use, illicit drug use, violence and crime, increase in prevalence through the adolescent years and can be prevented through coordinated community actions. These behaviours can be of serious concern for individuals, families and the broader community. Many of these behaviours are associated with less visible problems that also exact health and social costs such as educational failure, suicidal behaviour, depression and sexual risk taking. Current data relevant to trends amongst children and young people suggest the potential to reduce the impact of these health and social problems through effective and well-coordinated community strategies.

Randomised and well-controlled evaluation trials in communities and schools reveal that a range of health and social problems that are experienced by children and young people can be reduced through local community mobilisation efforts. Problems that have been reduced in intervention trials include: crime and antisocial behaviour (Greenberg et al, 2005); alcohol and drug use (Hawkins et al, 2009); academic failure and school non-completion; risky and precocious sexual behaviour (Hawkins et al, 2008) and obesity (Swinburn et al, 2007). These are important problems that are amongst the highest contributors to preventable economic and societal costs.

Communities That Care Ltd is a not for profit training and consulting company formed through a collaboration between the Royal Children’s Hospital and the Rotary Club of Melbourne with the objective of implementing, evaluating and disseminating strategies that can increase the delivery of effective prevention services in Australian communities. The company vision is to promote the healthy development of children and young people through long term community planning to prevent health and social problems.
Communities That Care is a training and technical assistance resource that has been designed to enhance the healthy development of children and young people by building community capacity to plan and deliver effective developmental prevention services. The process was designed in the USA and initiated in Australia as a long term community planning process aimed at preventing a range of health and social problems including alcohol and drug abuse, violence and crime, school failure and community disengagement. The School of Psychology at Deakin University and the Centre for Adolescent Health (part of the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute) located at Melbourne’s Royal Children’s Hospital have been collaborating to provide research and technical support for this best-practice initiative while significant fund raising and administrative support has been provided through the Rotary Club of Melbourne.

The Communities That Care training and technical assistance process builds community capacity to plan and deliver effective child and adolescent health promotion and community prevention. The process assists local organisational development and planning by emphasising both community development and empowerment and the building of understanding and skills relevant to effective prevention strategies. Initial activities focus on community involvement by mobilising the support of key leaders and setting up a relevant prevention organisation or committee. Once communities achieve basic organisational “readiness”, the next phase seeks to identify the major risk and protective factors that are influencing local child and adolescent adjustment outcomes within the family, school, community, peers and at the individual level. Community profile information is systematically developed from youth surveys and other sources and used to establish local prevention and intervention priorities and health promotion targets. A plan is then established to select and implement evidence-based prevention programs that have been designed to address the selected priorities and targets. Finally monitoring and evaluation are implemented to assess the effectiveness of the local community plan. A series of training programs, assessment resources and consultations are provided to support communities. Through these steps the Communities That Care process assists communities to build local capacity to address the root-causes of child and adolescent problems.

From 2002 the Communities That Care process has been successfully implemented in four Australian communities: The Mornington Peninsula, Ballarat and Myrtleford in Victoria and Bunbury in Western Australia. Details of these communities are listed below. Evaluation findings confirm the process to have been delivered in line with recommendations (Kellock, 2007), with available pre-post surveys of large student samples showing community reductions in targeted problems including alcohol and drug use and sexual risk taking behaviour (Williams & Smith, 2007).

Four registered Communities That Care Coalitions currently operate in Australia.

Communities That Care Mornington Peninsula involves a strong partnership with local government. This group have completed their ambitious objective of implementing Communities That Care Local Area Groups in all six local areas of this large municipality. In 2008 the first resurvey report was published (Williams et al, 2008) providing evidence that the large trial of Communities That Care in the Mornington Peninsula Shire is showing indications of positive improvements in adolescent health behaviours and social environmental perceptions. The group are currently preparing their next phase of planning community improvements. http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au/Page/Page.asp?Page_Id=145 Contacts: Samantha Cochrane, Community Development Facilitator, Communities That Care / Mornington Peninsula.

Liz Tomazic,
Strengthening Generations Ballarat: With the completion of prevention planning reports and major activities for the Wendouree and Delacombe/Sebastopol communities (http://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/Community_and_Culture/Community_Development/Strengthening_Generations/index.aspx). The Strengthening Generations team have recently commissioned a student resurvey evaluation and are awaiting a report of results. Once results are to hand the next phase of planning community improvements will be initiated. Contact Jodie Downey - Project Officer.

Communities That Care Myrtleford: The most recently registered Communities That Care group. This group have formed a Key leader group and Community Board and have completed a community survey. Contact Lisa Neville - Health Promotion Worker, Alpine Community Health Centre. Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday - 8:30am – 5:00pm.

Investing in our Youth Bunbury, Western Australia was the first fully operational Communities That Care site in Australia. This community coalition has been led by the Investing in Our Youth organisation. Their website provides access to a variety of valuable information including details of the research and planning reports that are guiding activities in their community. http://www.investinginouryouth.com.au/ Resurvey work in Bunbury showed similar positive outcomes to those reported in the Mornington Peninsula.

Evidence supporting the Communities That Care process.

A number of systematic literature reviews in Australia have recommended adoption of the Communities That Care process as a community planning system that has the potential to encourage crime prevention (National Crime Prevention, 1999, p. 94, p. 101), alcohol and drug abuse prevention (Loxley et al, 2004, p. 135, p. 247) and mental health promotion (Keleher & Armstrong, 2005, p.55 - 56).

A large community randomised trial has been completed in the United States (Hawkins et al, 2008). Across the United States 24 communities were selected and youth characteristics studied for a number of years. Similar communities were then matched and one community in each pair randomised to receive the Communities That Care (CTC) process over 5-years. A cohort of over 4,000 students have been followed-up and resurveyed from age 10 to 13. The population of children exposed to the 12 CTC intervention communities were found to experience reductions in social developmental risk factors and elevations in protective factors. By age 12 their rates of externalising behaviours were reduced relative to children in the 12 control communities (Hawkins et al, 2008) by age 13 rates of early substance use were significantly lower (Hawkins et al, 2009).

A large effectiveness trial was reported by Greenberg and colleagues (2005) at Pennsylvania State University and evaluated the Pennsylvania experience implementing the CTC process in their state. This evaluation examined the extent of implementation of CTC in Pennsylvania counties and made comparisons with counties that did not participate in CTC. The CTC training and consulting process was found to be effective in encouraging and strengthening community
prevention coalitions over time and assisting them to develop evidence-based local prevention plans. The strength of local coalitions and the quality of their planning was found to lead over time to prevention activities being sustained beyond their initial seed-funding period. Through these mechanisms counties that implemented CTC were found to show reductions over time in official rates of youth delinquency. Greenberg (2005) concluded that CTC is currently the only effective system for building community prevention capacity and suggests that commonly used alternative strategies for community coalition building may not be sufficient to achieve community change.

**Australian evidence:** As described above CTC has been adapted and trialled in four Australian communities (Ballarat, Mornington Peninsula Shire and Myrtleford in Victoria and Bunbury in Western Australia) since 2002. Kellock (2007) completed a consultation with community stakeholders and concluded that the CTC process had been adapted and implemented successfully in the three Australian “pioneer” communities. Available Australian community resurvey results (Williams & Smith, 2007) are in line with the findings from the overseas evaluations in revealing population-wide improvements in youth reports of community social environments and reductions in problems such as alcohol and drug use and precocious sexual activity.

**Australian National Trial**

In 2008 the Australian Board responsible for CTC determined to seek support for a three state dissemination of CTC within a randomised trial design that aims to evaluate the economic benefits of effective community prevention. Communities that Care Ltd is working with research partners (Deakin University, the Centre for Adolescent Health, the University of Queensland and the University of Washington) to implement the national trial of the Communities that Care process. Victorian government support is sought to expand the national trial of the Communities That Care process to enable the evaluation of its economic contribution to prevenatable health and social problems.

**References**


Sincerely

John Toumbourou, PhD
Chief Executive Officer
Communities That Care Ltd.