



News Room – Inside the Winnipeg Police Service

A Culture in Need of Change

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May 6, 2015 - Last October our police service entered into a partnership with Hockey Winnipeg. It followed a minor hockey season that saw several violent incidents take place. Some resulted in criminal charges; others resulted in Hockey Winnipeg suspensions involving players or parents. To their credit, Hockey Winnipeg mandated that every parent of a child registered in hockey for the 2014-2015 season complete the "Respect in Sport Parent" program. This is an on-line educational tool designed to assist parents with their decision making at the rink and eliminate inappropriate behavior.

It was a natural fit for a police service that has adopted Crime Prevention Through Social Development (CPTSD). CPTSD involves long-term, integrated actions that deal with the root causes of crime. Its aim is to reduce risk factors that start people, particularly children and youth, on the road to crime, and to build protective factors that may mitigate those risks.

With all of this in mind, the summer of 2014 was spent drafting business rules and objectives to support the Respect in Sport initiative while delivering on the Service's CPTSD. Objectives included a commitment on the part of the service to assist the hockey associations in dealing with misconduct.



Simplistically stated the end goal is to interrupt the cycle of learned behavior that children are exposed to when people behave badly at the rink. The Service would send officers to minor hockey games throughout Winnipeg delivering public education materials addressing behavior and individuals that were not in compliance with the Respect in Sport initiative. Police support extends to Hockey Winnipeg's Rink Behaviour Policy which includes a "zero tolerance" of any forms of abuse or harassment during minor hockey events from any participant.

These efforts received a great deal of attention. The "Checking-In Program" as it was termed was unveiled at the 2014 Safety Expo sponsored by the Winnipeg Police. It was not by chance that this was the same weekend as the minor hockey season began and media outlets ran the unveiling as a national news story. Our office received inquiries from other police agencies keen on duplicating our efforts. Feedback from hockey moms and dads was very complimentary to the program.

Through the course of the season and into the playoffs, officers spent about 20 minutes at each of the 35 minor hockey games under the Checking-In umbrella. On some occasions officers were directed to particular games as a result of behaviors of people in attendance. Those concerns typically came in from area coaches or association representatives to Hockey Winnipeg and then over to the Winnipeg Police for consideration. These concerns and notifications are completely appropriate and fit well into our efforts with Hockey Winnipeg.

Then there were other moments.

In March playoffs began across all age divisions. In one recent series a heated game resulted in a post-game confrontation in the arena's parking lot. Individual players exchanged threats. As they separated and drove off, one group attempted to stop the other from leaving by backing toward the other. Some form of vehicle pursuit ensued over city streets where one group tried to run the other off the road. As one neared the other, a vehicle was spat upon. Eventually the groups separated without reports of damage or injury.

The Winnipeg Police were not contacted. What if this happened to your child at school, what would you do? What if it took place at your workplace? Would you have certain expectations of those running the event to work towards preventing another occurrence?

Information was later received by Hockey Winnipeg who shared it with the Winnipeg Police as part of the Checking-In program. To the credit of Hockey Winnipeg they recommended to both associations that the series should be terminated. That advice was eventually disregarded and the series proceeded as scheduled.

In an effort to prevent criminal behavior police officers met with both teams before the final game. The discussion was about the Respect in Sport Initiative and the consequences of criminal behavior. One of the teams had removed a couple of the involved players from their lineup for this final game. The other team made no such effort and after the game in the handshake line there was an apparent assault that generated an additional police response.

However not a single person has come forward to the police to serve as a witness in a police investigation. That includes the Association members who are responsible for your children that are involved in minor hockey.

The effect of failing to address issues of violence and misconduct has a training effect on those who are involved or surround the sport. It simply results in the offensive behavior becoming the new normal. It seemingly becomes acceptable and shame on those who have allowed this to take place.

Minor hockey has major issues on its immediate horizon. They include not only violence and misconduct, but issues surrounding concussions, use of body checking and the application of insurance in those circumstances.

To all of the member associations under the Hockey Winnipeg umbrella I issue you this challenge. For this coming season formulate and publish a Statement of Commitment detailing how your area association views and will deal with violence and misconduct in a meaningful way both inside and outside of the hockey rink.

To all of the adults who have kids playing in these associations I issue you this challenge. Hockey's needs are considerable. Fill the vacancies or compete in the elections that constitute your local associations.

You can drive the change in culture that needs to occur.

This is a call to action.

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