

## **SCHOOL CRIME STOPPERS**

By Constable Scott Mills

Toronto Police Service School Crime Stoppers Officer

The author would like to acknowledge the work of all the community volunteers, police coordinators and support staff, and members of the media who work tirelessly in Crime Stoppers programs worldwide to ensure community safety. A special thank you is extended to those involved past and present in the following organizations. It is their dedication that allowed me to gain the knowledge and information necessary to accurately write this training section on Crime Stoppers.

Crime Stoppers International [www.c-s-i.org](http://www.c-s-i.org)

Ontario Association of Crime Stoppers [www.ontariocrimestoppers.com](http://www.ontariocrimestoppers.com)

Toronto Crime Stoppers [www.222tips.com](http://www.222tips.com)

### **The Mission Statement/History of Crime Stoppers**

In Ontario, the Crime Stoppers programs fall under a provincial umbrella group known as OACS, the Ontario Association of Crime Stoppers. The OACS is a member of Crime Stoppers International, a global effort to implement and operate Crime Stoppers programs. The following valuable information was taken directly from the websites of these valuable organizations. Reference to these websites will offer you the most up to date information as the organizations continue to expand provincially, nationally and globally.

The mission statement of Crime Stoppers International is to develop Crime Stoppers as an effective crime-solving organization throughout the world, with the primary objective of the tri-partite organization, community, media and law enforcement working together to solve crime.

Crime Stoppers is a not-for profit community-based charitable program involving the co-operative efforts of the community, the media and the police in the fight against crime. Crime Stoppers encourages the public to call with information concerning crimes that have been committed, are being committed or are about to be committed. Crime Stoppers has become an invaluable investigative tool to Ontario Police Services.

Crime Stoppers is based on the simple principle that for every crime committed someone other than the criminal has information that might solve it. Crime Stoppers is the brainchild of a Canadian-born Albuquerque, New Mexico police detective, Greg MacAleese. MacAleese was assigned to investigate a 1976 robbery gone afoul that resulted in the senseless shooting of a young part-time employee of a gas station. Frustrated by the lack of a solid investigative lead in this case, MacAleese recognized there were two reasons the public did not communicate information concerning crime to authorities. These two prohibitions were a valid fear of reprisal and pervasive public apathy. This crime occurred at dusk, in a well traveled neighborhood in Albuquerque, leading MacAleese to believe that someone, other than the killers, must have knowledge concerning this homicide.

He reasoned that if he were to offer a cash reward, to overcome the apathy, while guaranteeing anonymity, to protect against reprisal, he might be able to solve this case. He contacted the local media, staged an on-site televised re-enactment of the crime and offered a cash reward from his own pocket for information that led to an arrest of the persons responsible. He set up a secure "tips" line and invited the public, after viewing the re-enactment, to call with information. He received a number of calls and the case was solved.

The Crime Stoppers triad was forged when MacAleese approached several members of the community to serve on a governing board of directors to administer the fledgling program and raise the necessary charitable funding. The concept of the community, the media and the police working together to solve crime spread rapidly to point where there are Crime Stoppers programs across the United States, Canada, Britain, South Africa, Guam and Australia. In Ontario, there are 39 Crime Stoppers programs, linked together by a national toll-free Crime Stoppers telephone number (1-800-222-8477 or TIPS), covering the entire geography of our Province. The impact of this crime fighting network in Ontario has been astounding! Since the original Ontario program commenced operation in 1983 to the end of 1999 Crime Stoppers tips have led to the arrest of 50,000 persons and the recovery of \$375 million in stolen property and seized illicit narcotics.

### **Student Crime Stoppers**

The number one goal of a school police officer should be to foster positive relationships with youth to prevent crime. Crime Stoppers can be used as a tool to get information to both prevent a crime, and assist to solve a crime.

Despite all our best efforts, inevitably an incident will occur where students in a school, with intimate knowledge of the details of a crime, are reluctant to come forward with information to assist the school authorities and/or police.

Crime prevention can only occur if pertinent information is forthcoming from the student community to the school authorities, police and/or parents and guardians in a timely manner. Ideally, trust between students and the school police officer would facilitate this information being reported directly from the students to the school police officer or school authorities, however in reality there can be several barriers that detract from this process.

It is incumbent upon the school police officer to build trust with the students, parents and school staff that promotes the reporting directly to the police or school authorities of concerns that could lead to preventing a crime. It is also wise to promote Crime Stoppers as a vehicle to anonymously get information to authorities that may prevent a violent incident like a school shooting or a pending assault, or in the aftermath of an incident, lead to solving it.

There are many reasons why a student may not report important information. Student Crime Stoppers programs, promoted effectively by school police officers to students, should first and foremost promote a positive relationship between students and authorities, but make it clear that by calling "222-TIPS" with any information, that it will remain anonymous, and can make a difference in preventing and solving crimes relating to schools.

The reasons for a student's reluctance to come forward with information are many, but can be summed up quickly with one popular phrase – "Stop Snitchin". The school police officer will find this popular culture one of the most challenging obstacles in their daily work.

After several school Crime Stoppers presentations and years of school investigations, dealing with thousands of youth, a suggestion for any school officer is to tell students that "Stop the Cryin'" is a more appropriate way to describe the need for information to solve crimes involving youth. The victims of serious crimes of assault and murder involving youth leave

behind a legacy of crying parents, sibling's relatives and friends who are all looking for closure by solving the cases. It would have been even better if those incidents that led to the violence were prevented by an anonymous call to Crime Stoppers.

Student Crime Stoppers is a very valuable tool for the school police officer. Crime Stoppers programs are community programs in partnership with local police and media that pay up to \$2000.00 in reward money for tips that assist to solve crimes. Crime Stoppers International publicly state that tips to Crime Stoppers assist in solving a major crime once every fourteen minutes worldwide. Most local Crime Stoppers programs involve a program geared towards youth. If your jurisdiction has another youth engagement program, it is imperative to include the anonymous reporting of information through Crime Stoppers along with this program.

The anonymity feature of calling Crime Stoppers in Canada is protected by the 1997 Supreme Court of Canada ruling R. v. Liepert. This makes the Crime Stoppers tip line the only true anonymous reporting system in the country. It can't be stressed enough that Crime Stoppers should also be promoted to students as a vehicle to prevent crimes from occurring in a school setting, in addition to assisting to solving crimes. Students need to understand that by calling Crime Stoppers, they are calling a community operated and funded program, and not the police. No matter what the circumstances, the identity of the caller by phone or person sending anonymous e-mail via the Tip Soft encrypted online tip form will not be ascertained by the police. Crime Stoppers programs do not subscribe to call display and the IP address identifiers of all online tips are stripped through an encrypted program called 'TipSoft' in use worldwide for Crime Stoppers programs. The designer of this program is a community member named Kevin Anderson in Texas, USA.

Crime Stoppers programs are operated by a local community board of directors and are mostly registered charities. The boards form close partnerships with the local police services, that provide seasoned and reliable officers responsible for coordinating the assignment of the tips to the appropriate investigators in a timely fashion, and facilitate the feedback and payment of rewards anonymously to the tipsters.

The callers are given a tip number, or asked to create a password online, that identifies them only by tip number when they call or e-mail to report their information. They are asked to anonymously call or e-mail back to the tip line in 6-8 weeks to determine the value of the information provided. The community Crime Stoppers boards meet monthly, and are provided information by the police coordinator of the value of a tip. The board determines the amount of the reward up to a limit of \$2,000.00. When the tipster calls or e-mails back for the results, they are told the value of the reward. The payment of the rewards vary in each program, but are similar to the system operating in Toronto where tipsters are given a bank transit number that allows them to attend any TD-Canada Trust bank branch in Toronto at any time, present the transit number to the teller, and collect the cash reward.

Approximately 750 tips per month are received in Toronto alone. The annual budget for Toronto is approximately \$100,000.00 - \$150,000.00. Crime Stoppers tips have assisted several major investigations over the years, and the programs are alive and well. In Toronto in April, 2007, a record number of tips for one month were called into Toronto Crime Stoppers since the program's inception in 1984.

An interesting fact in Toronto is that only 1/3 of the tipsters actually collect the reward money offered. This is an important fact to relay to students when making.

A school resource officer needs to know how to handle information received from Crime Stoppers programs. Mr. Robert Gill was a keynote speaker at the 2007 Ontario Association of Crime Stoppers Legal Issues conference in Gravenhurst, Ontario.

Mr. Gill is a British Columbia lawyer who was legal counsel involved in the 1997 Supreme Court of Canada case R. v. Liepert that resulted in the top court protecting the anonymity of a tipster calling Crime Stoppers. He stated that the anonymity of the tipster is the top priority of all Crime Stoppers programs.

It is essential that officers assigned tips treat this fact with the utmost of care relating to disclosure. Mr. Gill recommends that the Crime Stopper tip information be written into the investigating police officers' notebooks by the officers so that the chronology of events is documented.

Under no circumstances will this information be disclosed in the Crown evidence package. This means that when the notes of investigating officers are sent for disclosure, the anonymous tip information is removed at the source. Investigating officers must be very prudent with their disclosure procedure, and must properly and securely store their investigative notes and files.

Mr. Gill is to be acknowledged as the authority in Canada on legal issues surrounding Crime Stoppers. His dedication to community safety is commendable. Mr. Gill is accessible to answer questions directly from officers. His contact information is included here.

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