

Public safety/getting around safely

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1. Introduction

During this module, we will explore the issue of community safety, asking how safe you feel within your community, and what you could do to make your community a safer place to be. The group will look at examples of what other people are doing to improve the safety of their communities, both within Australia and overseas.

Discussion starter

- Are there views or opinions within the community, not represented in your group, that it would be beneficial to hear?
- Who would you like to invite to speak to your learning circle group?

2. Thinking about our community

Community means different things to different people. A community can be geographically based (like the place you live or identify with), it can form as a network of people with whom you associate (like a church, sporting club, or volunteer group), or it can be an idea of unity (such as ‘the Indigenous community’ or ‘the Australian community’).

Activity: ‘What I like about my community’

- Talk in pairs or as a whole group, taking equal time to respond to the question ‘What do I like about my community’?
- If you did this activity in pairs, each person could introduce their partner to the whole group, and summarise the answer they heard. Check with your partner if there’s anything you left out, or anything that they need to clarify.
- Someone scribe on paper/whiteboard. Draw two columns. In the left-hand column, list the ‘likes’. When everyone has reported, discuss your findings.
- For each item on the ‘likes’ list, ask: How did your community get that way? How does it stay that way? Write your ideas down in the right-hand column next to the relevant item. There might be lengthy discussion. If you can’t agree, write down some of the different ideas that have been coming up.

Discussion starter

- Did people mention any item more than once?
- Is there one ‘community’ where you live, or is it made up of a variety of

‘communities’?

3. Community safety

Perception of crime is still a problem in NSW, with a new Productivity Commission report showing the state’s citizens feel less safe than most of their counterparts.

Concern about crime is one of a number of performance ‘glitches’ uncovered by the commission in its annual report card on state services.

The 2003 Report on Government Services also highlights flaws in the key service-delivery areas of health, education and community services ensuring the document will be hotly debated in the final weeks of the NSW election campaign.

It has already become a political football, with NSW ministers contesting some of the findings and the Howard Government using it to attack federal Labor over its policies.

On crime, the report notes that while nationally 91.3 per cent of adults felt ‘safe’ or ‘very safe’ at home alone during the day, only Western Australia at 87.2 per cent had a rate lower than NSW.

NSW also came second last in a study of adults who felt ‘safe’ or ‘very safe’ in their homes after dark, with similar results for safety perceptions on public transport and while walking or jogging after dark.

Last year the Premier, Bob Carr, acknowledged his concern over the public’s perception of crime by making the reduction of community fear a key performance indicator in the contract of the Police Commissioner, Ken Moroney.

However, the report makes clear that statistical comparisons among states are not always fair. For example, the ACT and Northern Territory do not have suburban train networks, so perceptions of public transport there differ from the rest of the country.

‘An important objective of police services is to “reassure the public” by ensuring that the community feels safe (within themselves and regarding their property) in public and private,’ the report states.

‘Perceptions of safety are reported here, although these perceptions may not reflect reported crime for many reasons: for example, reported crime may understate actual crime, under-reporting may vary across jurisdictions and many factors (including media reporting) may affect public perceptions of crime levels and safety.’

NSW citizens led the country in their perception of the prevalence of some specific crimes. In NSW, 78.4 per cent of people thought illegal drugs to be a ‘major problem’ or ‘somewhat a problem’ in their area, compared with 73.9 per cent nationally and a low of 63.4 per cent in the Northern Territory.

NSW continued to have the highest number of officers at the level of constable and senior constable, had the highest proportion of female staff (32.3 per cent) and the biggest drop in complaints against its officers.

But the report refers to an unpublished survey of community attitudes towards policing which shows that NSW citizens still harbour concerns about their constabulary.

The state was less inclined to profess satisfaction with police performance. NSW was also behind other states in terms of perception of police honesty.

How about public honesty? Just over 60 per cent of NSW respondents in the same poll admitted driving more than 10 km/h over the speed limit 'sometimes' within the last 12 months.

The Sydney Morning Herald 7 February 2003

Our community 'works' more than it 'doesn't work'. That's because people, processes and resources make it work, every day. Some of these people and processes may be visible, and some may be woven into the fabric of the community in such a way that they are taken for granted. If we can build on these, we can develop and strengthen the forces of public safety already at work within our community.

Crime prevention can work as an active partnership between government bodies (such as local councils, police, schools) and individuals, groups and businesses within the community. Let's look at what is happening within your community.

Activity: Places I feel less safe

- In groups of three or four, or as a whole group, discuss two places you feel less safe in your community. They may include places you otherwise enjoy, at different times of day.
- Draw up a table with four columns, (or use the table provided in [Additional Resources](#) at the end of this module).
- Someone write each person's comments in the first column (see example below).
- When everyone has spoken, go through the list column by column. Try to identify *specific details* involved in the issue, in which people or organisations may be involved or interested, and any other comments.
- If the activity was done in small groups, have someone report back to the whole group.

Discussion starter

- Were there many similarities within your group? Differences? How do you explain the differences?
- Is there anything you or the group would like to take action on? How will you do this?
- Did this exercise lead you to feel differently about your community?

Activity: Photo display: our place

The group is invited to participate in a photo display for next time you meet. This is an exercise which helps people remember—and celebrate—what they like about their place. It's also a chance to think about places where they feel less safe.

- Divide into small groups. Arrange to meet before the next session to take the photos.
- Take four photos each to show what you like about your community, and then two photos each to show a place where you feel less safe. (Exercise care and sensitivity. For example, if there's a car park where you feel less safe at night, it's best to take the photograph during the day. Don't place yourself in danger.)

there was no gang violence reported. Cairns was 30th out of an available list of 42 areas in terms of its reported rate of juvenile offending.

Impact of the media?

Concerned by the media reports in the *Cairns Post*, the Australian Community Safety and Research Organisation (ACRO), decided to see what impact the newspaper stories were having. In their report, 'Missing the Mark' (1995) they found:

Although respondents felt crime in their suburb had generally not increased at an alarming rate and that crime in their suburb had not increased more than crime in the CBD (both accurate judgements) they also reported that they had a considerable fear of crime and that they were most concerned about youth crime. (p. 24)

Some people had said they thought there was a crime problem in their suburb. However, except for one victim of property crime, all other respondents said that there wasn't a problem in their own house or street, but that there was one 'over there'—pointing off in different directions. The authors of the report wrote:

One is left wondering where exactly the 'problem' exists. ... It is a reasonable conclusion that the recent media reporting of crime in these suburbs has indeed influenced residents' attitudes about crime and a resultant effect may be an increase in the fear of crime and an increase in the concern about youth crime. (p.25)

Quite possibly our own fear of crime is shaped by the way crime is represented in the media.

Activity: What's happening in your community?

In the previous section, you looked at individual and group perceptions of community safety. Here are some ways you could test these perceptions against what is really happening in your community.

- Are there facts/figures on crime in the local community that your group could access?
- Who could you invite to speak to the group about levels of crime within the community?
- If particular groups are targeted within your community (as either offenders or victims of crime), consider inviting members of these groups to speak to your group.
- Collect newspaper stories about crime in your area. Are the crimes reported objectively? Whose views are being represented in the stories and whose are missing?

Discussion starter

- How accurately does your sense of safety relate to what you know about the levels of crime within your community?
- How can we ensure that we do not develop an unrealistic perception of crime?
- What are some of the things you do or can do to help you feel safe?

4. An example of a safety audit: the Safe Women Liverpool Project

A safety audit is a way for local communities to inspect an area that is perceived to be unsafe and to identify safety problems within that area. In this study we will look at the Safe Women Liverpool Project Safety Audit study conducted in the mid 1990s.

Discussion starter

- How widespread do you think is women’s fear of being mugged, robbed or raped in public places? Is this an issue in your community?

What is a safety audit?

A safety audit is a way of inspecting a place that is perceived to be unsafe. It involves walking around an area and documenting—through notes, photos or video—any impressions and factors that influence whether an area feels safe or unsafe. It can look at:

- lighting
- landscaping
- buildings
- potential hiding places
- toilets
- public telephones
- automatic teller machines
- levels of maintenance (for example, graffiti-free)
- signage
- how the space is used
- access, and
- level of available assistance.

Who is involved in a safety audit?

A safety audit can be done on your own or as a group. Involving ‘stakeholders’ in the area helps everyone to understand the problems more fully, and encourages a range of solutions and many different viewpoints. Participants in the safety audit should be as diverse as your community—for example, shopkeepers, people with disabilities, police, individuals from differing ages and cultural backgrounds, gays and lesbians, users of public transport, car drivers, pedestrians, young people, parents with children or carrying shopping, people with literacy difficulties, public transport personnel and local council workers.

Liverpool Station Area Safety Audit

There were 25 participants in this community safety audit, 12 women, 13 men. The audit area was divided into four sub-areas, with about six people allocated to each area.

Organisations participating:

- Police:** Liverpool Police Patrol
South West Region Police
NSW Police—Strategy & Review
- Liverpool City Council:** Landscape Architect
Youth Development Officer
Councillor
- Health:** Liverpool Community Health
Drug & Alcohol Services
HIV

	CityRail Westway Bus Co. Metrolink Bus Co.
Housing:	Department of Housing
Community:	Safe Women—Liverpool Project Women’s Resource Centre Liverpool Women’s Health Centre Outer Liverpool Community Services Liverpool/Fairfield Transport Development Project
Businesses:	Railway Hotel Scott St Methadone Clinic
Media:	Good Weekend Magazine (The Sydney Morning Herald)
Other:	University of NSW—School Town Planning

A sample of issues noted in the audit:

- ‘Centre of park feels OK, edges feel ominous because of darkness.’
- ‘Tennis lights strong, friendly voices from the courts made this area feel desirable.’
- ‘The narrow cattle chute into the kids playground without the tennis court lights would make me uneasy, too many nooks, crannies and hidey holes.’
- Hiding spots between phones and toilets were noted.
- Out-of-date alcohol free zone signs.
- Graffiti noted.
- ‘Video shop on George St very bright, plenty of people coming and going, browsing inside. This feels safe to me.’
- ‘Alleyways are extremely dark and fear provoking.’
- Paving in need of repair.
- ‘Bike shop ... has bright lighting. Shop has security bars inside the window allowing for good vision into shop.’
- ‘The first takeaway food shop is now closing. The next one a short distance from the first is open until 5 am. They report that things in this area hot up around 2 am with fighting etc ... I feel very unsafe in this area.’
- ‘As I walk through this area it feels disjointed. Large open spaces, some lit, others not. Traffic and people appear to go where they please. Broken things around the area makes me want to hurry through. When things are not working I think no-one cares. There’s too many things to try and work out all at the same time.’

What sort of recommendations were made?

Many recommendations were made about such matters as lighting, positioning of phones, fencing and graffiti removal. One of the issues that came out was that no-one was clearly responsible for the area—there were a number of authorities who had an interest, but there was no coordination.

Some comments from the auditors

‘The future of community safety is bright if the Liverpool Safe Women project is any indication. It is a classic example of what can be achieved by the community working together to create a safer environment for all.’

Dave Darcy, NSW Police

‘Safety is a sense of freedom.’

Sandra Sunjic from Drug & Alcohol Services

‘A safe community can only come from the combined efforts of residents, business, police and council.’

Alison Megarrity, Liverpool City Councillor

‘I would like to see Liverpool as a city where everyone, regardless of sex, age or other defining characteristics, can walk the streets without fear and in safety, at any time of the day or night.’

Richard Carbury from the Scott St Methadone Clinic

‘The safety audit was a healthy thing to do. For those of us who drive it was good to get out of our cars and offices to see what the real people are experiencing and then trying to see things through someone else’s eyes, to try and really experience what fear and safety concerns are about.’

Mark McPherson, HIV Services

Activity: Holding your own safety audit

- Is there an area in your community that would benefit from a safety audit? A **Community Safety Audit Kit** has been developed by the Glenorchy City Council, Tasmania (details for obtaining the kit are listed in the [Additional Resources](#) section at the end of this module).

5. Can good environmental design prevent crime?

Activity: Imagining a difference

- Close your eyes for two minutes and in your imagination, go on a journey you regularly undertake—only this time, there will be many things on this journey which encourage you to feel safe and relaxed in your community. At the end of two minutes, open your eyes and share your experiences with the group.
- In your imagination, what was different? What did your imagined journey have more of? Less of?

The module *Setting the Scene* looked at crime prevention and some of the approaches to crime prevention. One of these approaches is crime prevention through environmental design. Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) is based on the idea that some crimes are committed because the environment creates opportunities for crime. CPTED seeks to change the design or other aspects of an environment, thereby reducing opportunities for crime—for example, people usually feel safer walking down well-lit streets.

One of the most important aspects of the environmental design approach is that it is centred on the community—that is, the needs and experiences of residents of the community must form the basis of any effective design.

Without the views of those who are most affected by fear of crime, an untrue picture of the problem will be obtained. Without the expertise of those who must use potential crime sites on a daily basis, the planning process is incomplete.

Working Guide for Planning and Designing Safer Urban Environments, 1992, p. 3.

In Australia, the editor of the report from a Queensland workshop on crime prevention through environmental design, stated that the most effective approach is one which

seeks to understand the complex dynamics in the community and which finds a balance between physical changes and social interventions.

Wendy Sarkissian, *Safe as Houses*, 1996.

An example from Toronto, Canada

In the early 1990s, people in the city of Toronto became concerned about the impact of the *fear* of crime on its citizens, especially women. Their experience was that that social housing projects, commercial establishments, and even neighbourhood parks were being used or enjoyed less because of the *fear* of increased crime. International studies suggested that this *fear* of crime could actually contribute to economic decline in downtown areas. This fear could be as destructive as the crime itself. Something needed to be done.

An approach was taken involving crime prevention through environmental design. The key was to trust people as experts in their own experience of getting about in their community—to trust their sense of where dangers lay. Researchers and planners found that often the design of places contributed greatly to people’s fear of crime.

This was not an approach that simply said that bad planning and design caused crime: it did not argue that ‘if you fix this or that then all crime would be solved’. But it did identify good practices and principles that made a location feel safer and friendlier.

Factors that enhanced safety and security in public spaces

The following table provides examples of the factors that were found to be important in the Toronto experience:

Awareness of the environment	
Lighting	‘Are you able to identify a face 15 metres away?’ ‘Do architects’ drawings ... take into account that the space will be used at night?’
Sightlines	‘Are sharp ‘blind’ corners avoided?’
Movement Predictors (predictable or unchangeable route or path that offers no choice to pedestrians, for example, pedestrian bridge)	Find alternatives, for example, safer pedestrian crossings instead of overpasses and underpasses. ‘Is lighting adequate and consistent, avoiding pools of shadow?’ Provide well-marked alternative well-lit and frequently travelled night route.
Entrapment Spots (spaces near movement predictors)	Can the entrapment spots be modified or eliminated?
Visibility by others	
Isolation: Ear and Eye	Important not to over-depend on video- cameras; aside from cost, will only help if there is a 24-hour attendant. Rely on informal surveillance (for example, people living close by with sightlines) and hardware such as well- signed telephones, emergency telephones or alarms.
Land Use Mix	One-use neighbourhoods (for example, industrial estate, dormitory suburbs) encourage crime because they are unused at particular times; by finding compatible land uses there is more community life

	and therefore more safety. But the development has to be in scale to fit in with the community, physically and socially.
Activity Generators	A street vendor can keep an eye on a through-route. So long as the use is complementary, the place is made secure by populating it.
Sense of Ownership/Maintenance	For example, is sexist, racist and homophobic graffiti promptly removed? Replace graffiti with murals.
The ability to place yourself in your surroundings	
Signage and Other Information	Exits, main routes, maps, recognisability, how close to safer places such as busy streets ...
Overall Design	Look for quality and beauty, legibility (obvious recognisability of a route or building), and unambiguous space (for example, often gaps between 'private' and 'public' space are left ambiguous, and become dead space).

Working Guide for Planning and Designing Safer Urban Environments, 1992.

Activity

- Spend 10 minutes as a group in a public place. Examine the area for the factors identified in the Toronto experience. Return and discuss how this area rates.

The Australian experience

Many local government bodies within Australia have taken an interest in the implications of good urban design in reducing crime.

The Leichhardt Municipality of Sydney doesn't have a particular crime problem, but through its Main Streets Program it is encouraging zonings which get people to use the streets, for example, for al fresco dining. In upgrading Glebe Point Road, large old poplars lining the streets are being replaced by native trees which have narrow trunks (so people can't hide behind them) and foliage above street lighting levels.

In 1998, then-Mayor Kris Cruden said: 'We are incorporating as much lighting as we can and being careful with the trees we plant so we don't create hiding places or interfere with sight-lines.' Early morning street-sweeping services have been re-introduced in and around main streets and restaurant strips to encourage civic pride. 'I think if people know an area is cared for they feel safer,' she says.

'What we are trying to do is encourage a community atmosphere. In the old days things happened on the streets. We are trying to bring that back with coffee shops and outdoor restaurants. Even though my daughter tells me the last thing Australia needs is another coffee shop when I look down Norton Street and Glebe Point Road (which are full of them) I don't see streets where people are afraid to be out at night'.

Plan it Safe: A guide for making public places safer for women, 1998, p. 22.

Reclaiming a public place

PUBLIC TRANSPORT SAFETY

City of Unley (SA), *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design project*

Educational materials aimed at developers, landscapers, residents, business owners, and owners of public space were developed as part of this project, available from

<http://www.unley.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=347>

Crime Reduction (UK), *Public transport toolkit*

<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/pt00.htm>

Department for Transport (UK) 1999, *Young people and crime on public transport*

Available at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/>

Department for Transport (UK) 2001, *Crime and disorder on public transport*

Available at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/>

New South Wales Attorney-General's Department 2000, *New South Wales Government policy statement and guidelines for the establishment and implementation of closed circuit television (CCTV) in public places*

http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/cpd.nsf/pages/cctv_index

Safer communities: strategic directions in urban planning (1998)

Papers from the conference organised by the Australian Institute of Criminology and Victorian Community Council Against Violence.

<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/urban/>

Sarkissian Associates Planners and ACT Planning and Land Management 2000, *ACT crime prevention and urban design resource manual*

http://www.actpla.act.gov.au/publications/crime_prevention/ResManual.pdf

South Australia Attorney-General's Department, Crime Prevention Unit, *Safety on public transport project*

http://www.cpu.sa.gov.au/sa_sopt.htm

Wilson, D and Sutton, A 2004, *Open street CCTV in Australia*

<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi2/tandi271.html>

Notes

1 For example see Marianne James and Adam Graycar, *Preventing Crime Against Older Australians*, Australian Institute of Criminology, 2000.

2 *Violence Prevention in Practice*, Australian Institute of Criminology Research and Public Policy Series, 1996.

3 *Fear of Crime: Volume 1*, Centre for Cultural Risk Research, Charles Sturt University, 1998.

4 For an overview of the project see <http://aic.gov.au/publications/rpp/03>. Other crime prevention and community safety projects are contained in the Tasmanian Crime Prevention and Community Safety Directory, available from the Department of Police and Public Safety, Tasmania, at <http://www.police.tas.gov.au>.

5 *Violence Prevention in Practice*, Australian Institute of Criminology Research and Public Policy Series, 1996.

6 *Fear of Crime: Volume 1*, Centre for Cultural Risk Research, Charles Sturt University, 1998, p.221.

7 From interview with ex-resident of Port Hedland.