

## **SUBMISSION**

### **Background**

The Caboolture South Public Safety project is a newly established crime prevention program based in Caboolture South, north of Brisbane. Funded by the Department of Housing and managed by the Queensland Police Service, the program has a Public Safety Co-ordinator based in the community.

A Steering Committee comprising local residents, Police, Chamber of Commerce, Department of Housing, Welfare (The Lighthouse), Caboolture Shire Council, among other representatives has been established.

Five key projects have been prioritised for the Caboolture South area:

- Safety Audit (identifying safety issues with high level of resident involvement, including issues relating to CPTED – Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, ie, lighting, landscaping, signage) – *Audit completed*
- Vehicle Theft Reduction & Prevention – *Commencing September*
- Break and Enter Reduction
- Community Education – *Ongoing media and other communication*
- Development of a Public Safety Strategic Plan for the area - *commenced*

### **Snapshot of the community**

Caboolture South is approximately one hour north of Brisbane. It is located within Caboolture Shire. The Shire offers a range of lifestyle options including affordable housing due to the areas still available for residential development. Landmarks from the D'Agulair Ranges and beaches on Bribie Island in addition to a metropolitan business centre and rural areas describes some of the features of this diverse south-east Queensland region. It has an annual growth rate twice the national average with a current population of approximately 115, 000.

As a new Project in Caboolture, and the first with a sole emphasis on crime prevention and public safety, the likelihood of longer term outcomes is good. Community support has been genuine with many locals, professional or other, recognising (early) the potential benefits an effective crime prevention program can have within the local community. At this stage the project is funded in the short-term with negotiations underway for future funding.

While the Project continues to gain momentum community expectation is high regarding outcomes, and to date, aims in each project are being achieved.

## ***RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC TERMS OF REFERENCE***

### ***Fear of crime***

Aged members of our community are particularly fearful of being a victim of crime. Their representation in the actual incidents of crime however, are not indicative of legitimate cause for their fear, yet it exists nonetheless.

Older people are generally more vulnerable physically and otherwise. This, accompanied with other factors, such as living alone and sometimes being isolated from the general community, does actually legitimize their fear.

Actual risk to aged people is minimal on comparison to other groups. For example, in Queensland males aged twenty-five to twenty-nine years were most likely to be victims of homicide and assault. Males were also more likely to be victims of Robbery than females. At every age group males were more likely to be victims of assault. Males were also more likely to commit offences of assault, and this is the case for every age group (Qld Police Service, *Annual Statistical Review*, 2000-2001).

Risk factors indicating a propensity to crime are clearly evident within Caboolture South,. Caboolture South is generally consistent with overall Queensland data in relation to a number of offence categories with some significant fluctuations at varying periods.

The incidence of assaults occurring within dwellings is a concern because of its impact upon individuals and families. Cycles of violence that continue within a family unit onto the next generation are immeasurable in terms of the cost to the community. Reports of assaults within dwellings are far greater than reported assaults within public places. Much attention is given to safety in public places, which is important. Less attention is given to crime occurring in the home though the impact of this crime is arguably more significant to general society.

Socially and financially disadvantaged communities tend to breed a complacency level by some members of its community in regard to crime. Negative stigmas associated with the area of Caboolture South are apparent. Some victims of crime actually "expect" that crime will occur, that their home will be broken into. Sadly many affected by domestic violence expect it, consider it normal and worse believe it is appropriate.

### ***The impact of being a victim of crime and fear of crime***

Being a victim of crime can have significant effects on the individual who was the direct victim of the crime, including economic, psychological, social effects and beyond. Further, community members not “directly” having experienced the assault, break & enter, or other crimes, are also victims. For example, the aged population who are particularly fearful of home invasion have had their fear contributed to by simply being aware of an incident having occurred.

Fear of crime is considerably contributed to by the media’s portrayal of crime related issues. Mainstream media tends to present information in a biased manner without due consideration to various aspects of an incident. Often, news reports are delivered in a manner that instills fear rather than informing and or providing useful safety information. The community is unable to make a balanced and informed judgment about many issues relating to crime because they are not privy to the complex aspects of criminal activity within the media.

Many victims, direct or indirect, become isolated within their communities. In Caboolture South there are many residents who would not leave their home to go for an evening stroll alone for fear of crime.

Regardless of the actual risk to community members, they are fearful and the intensity of their fear dictates the activity they will participate in within their own community.

Caboolture South does experience high numbers of Break & Enters, a high incidence of assaults and domestic violence related incidents and unlawful use of motor vehicles. Some of the key risk factors for these crimes are relatively easy to identify, including within the local context.

Responding to these crimes in a sustainable and significant way relies upon a number of factors. Key among these:

- Dedicated funding for appropriate terms
- Multi-strategy crime prevention focus
- Police commitment Management down
- Co-operation between government departments
- Community capacity-building
- Adequate resourcing and active commitment

## **Community Safety & Policing**

Caboolture South has an active police commitment to crime prevention initiatives. Within the Redcliffe policing district Caboolture is the first to undertake a public safety program, outside of the general police operations.

The capacity for a policing district crime prevention program is limited at present due to funding. The Redcliffe policing district however is negotiating to undertake a large-scale crime prevention program with the community.

Community expectation is high regarding the police preventing crime in addition to reactive policing. The in-house expertise and financial resourcing is very limited in this context. Police have undertaken a number of partnerships within the community to collaboratively address crime issues. This approach has formed some valuable relationships with other government and non-government organizations.

It is anticipated that the District wide crime prevention program currently being developed (and if implemented successfully) will have significant impact on crime figures and the community's capacity to feel safe.

Strategies that have an emphasis on local involvement, including local government, local residents, business sector and other key groups within the community tend to have a higher propensity of success. Tools and resources available within the local community and the ability to tap into form an integral part of operational issues. From accessing police crime mapping data and local networks of residents, the ability to access, utilize, and maintain such resources appropriately underpins public safety programs capacity to operate effectively.

## ***Strategies to support victims and reduce crime***

Strategic approaches implemented in a long-term intensified manner are seen as integral in impacting upon this and other local crime issues. The State Government, Department of Housing has commenced a Community Renewal program in Caboolture South, with this small-scale Public Safety Project a component. A number of community development and training initiatives are underway within the area with anecdotal evidence suggesting a number of positive changes within parts of the local community.

The Public Safety Project identified early, the need for long-term, strategic and intensive crime prevention efforts for a marked reduction in a number of offence categories. Resourcing of the current project limits its capacity to a small number of projects. Funding is being sought to adequately resource the Break & Enter Reduction project, of which the community has a high expectation will take place.

A number of residents identify more police and a higher visible presence as the key to reduced crime. Police operations are successful, however they are not sustainable.

An increase in resourced police responses would certainly impact upon crime reduction and the level of support victims and those at risk of becoming victims would receive. In terms of sustainability, crime prevention approaches that engage the local community, work closely with Police, local government, the business sector and other key stakeholders, are a more viable option.

Local government plays a key role with regard to future planning. Ensuring the local shire includes safety issues within all its planning processes is an integral strategy to prevent large scale developments (for example) proceeding prior to examination and assessment of potential safety issues. Planning policies that are inclusive of safety issues, with particular reference to Crime Prevention through Environmental Design and social planning have demonstrated opportunistic crime reduction and an increased sense of safety by residents.

Following a comprehensive analysis of safety issues within a community, the development of projects tailored to the local context is required for the next phase. Accessing databases containing evaluated reduction projects is one tool available to crime prevention practitioners, who are able to build upon lessons learned in other projects. A number of states have databases, though not extensive, in commission. A number of crime reduction strategies are also borrowed from experiences in the United Kingdom, United States and Canada. A national database that actively collects and houses crime prevention project synopses and evaluations, in addition to the large scale projects, would further contribute to the opportunity for tried and true as well as new approaches to be built upon.

Much of the necessary research has been undertaken in the field of crime prevention that predicts, by way of risk factors, the issues that contribute to crime. Where action is required there is still some reluctance to accordingly implement crime prevention programs on a long-term basis in some high crime locations. Radical approaches proposed to be trialed are also received with limited support although the anticipated outcomes are potentially significant in regard to the reduction of crime.

### ***Effectiveness of sentencing***

As a deterrent effect sentencing, particularly custodial sentences, do have a deterrent effect on crime. The effect however is limited, in that it does not deter all people from committing crime. Much research has been undertaken on the subject with reference to the causes of crime and the circumstances / risk factors

that are associated with people who commit crime and enter the criminal justice system.

Socially and financially disadvantaged areas such as Caboolture South are evident of much of the risk factors and without formal intervention at various levels sentencing would not be the key factor by any means for crime reduction. The threat of a custodial sentence to many perpetrators of domestic violence appears to have little or no deterrent effect.

Early intervention to break the cycle of violence is an avenue that requires much attention within this community. Local police have teamed up with the Domestic Violence Service in the development and implementation of a kids and Domestic Violence project. To date this project has addressed some of the key issues identified with police attendance at domestic violence incidents where children are present. Further programs in the early intervention stream are required to focus upon the level of domestic violence and domestic violence breaches within the area.

Most people do not commit crime, and many people within the general community do not commit crime because of their value systems. Early intervention can provide the opportunity to increase the number of people with value systems that reflect acceptable social behaviour.

Inherent difficulties exist with early intervention. These include the perception that "Governments" may seek to take over the parenting role of children through the various agencies that deal with children. The contradiction for the child between what may be instilled in locations outside the home to those that are instilled inside the home.

Whilst early intervention is an excellent long-term strategy, other avenues need to be explored to bring about a reduction in crime and an increase in the perception of public safety.

### ***Other issues***

Recidivist offenders, repeat victimization and reducing the opportunity to circulate stolen property and drugs throughout the community are issues that need to be addressed in conjunction with other strategies.

### ***Conclusion***

Communities and governments need to understand that crime prevention is not the exclusive domain of one organization or group or government department. No one entity can be held responsible for the crime rate or its reduction. It takes the combined effort of all to reduce crime.

Having said that, the best strategies and the most professional organizations will have little effect unless the community infuses those strategies with their energy and commitment.