

SAFETY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT – PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION: HOW TO FIND ALL THOSE INTERSECTIONS AND ACTUALLY DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

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Abstract

Policies to address safety are increasingly becoming an important aspect of what territorial local authorities (TLAs) in New Zealand need to consider when developing their Long-Term Council Community Plans to address their obligations under the Local Government Act 2002. Consequently, to provide a framework for their activities many TLAs have looked to the six criteria necessary to achieve the status of a Safe Community of the World Health Organisation (WHO) international network. Safe Communities is a WHO concept that recognises safety as a universal concern and a responsibility for all. Wellington City, the capital city of New Zealand, was one TLA that worked to address the six criteria and as a result was accredited as a WHO Safe Community, and part of the International Safe Community Network on 14 June 2006. This article provides a case study of the rationale and processes used by the Wellington City Council in its journey towards achieving Safe Community status, and the partnerships and collaborations that were part of this process. It demonstrates that to improve community safety it is necessary to develop policies that encourage successful partnerships and networks between individuals, organisations and other providers.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past those involved in policy development in injury prevention, crime prevention, alcohol misuse, road safety, water safety and violence prevention worked within their own silos with very little recognition of the links between them or consideration of how these issues could be addressed collaboratively (Israel et al. 1998, McLeroy et al. 2003, Nilson 2005). This changed considerably with the advent of the New Zealand Injury Prevention Strategy (Dyson 2003) and the Local Government Act 2002, which required TLAs to develop Long-Term Council Community Plans.²

Section 3 of the Local Government Act 2002 reflects a more modern style of legislative drafting by providing a clear purpose for the Act: to provide for democratic and effective local government that recognises the diversity of New Zealand communities. To this end, the Act:

- states the purpose of local government
- provides a framework and powers for local authorities to decide which activities they undertake and how they will undertake them
- promotes the accountability of local authorities to their communities
- provides for local authorities to play a broad role in promoting the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of their communities, taking a sustainable development approach.

The Act sets out to achieve this overall purpose by giving local authorities a new mission to play a broad role in promoting the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of their communities, taking a sustainable development approach.³

Community safety could be defined as something of a dynamic state in which all those issues that lead to harm or fear of harm, or crime are prevented or controlled (www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/documents/sr06-safety.pdf). This does seem to provide the opportunity for local government to be involved in community safety. As a part of a broad approach to community safety, public confidence in the safety of the city's streets and suburbs is a top priority for most cities and towns. In addition to initiatives designed to promote safety in the city, safety must also be enhanced through initiatives and programmes that act to support a city where people participate in their communities and activities. Safety is also enhanced when people feel proud of their community and have a strong sense of belonging; in other words, it involves more than just preventing crime and disorder (Rahim 2005). Councils have also recognised

² See www.wellington.govt.nz/plans/index.html.

³ See www.localcouncils.govt.nz/lqip.nsf/wpg_URL/About-Local-Government-Local-Government-Legislation-Local-Government-Act-2002?OpenDocument.

that to be an attractive destination for immigrants and visitors, and offer a high quality of life to residents, it is critical that a reputation of being a safe city is maintained or enhanced.

To address community safety there is a need to maintain a high level of preparedness for natural and other hazards, develop plans relating to road safety and safety design principles, and have in place a wide range of injury prevention strategies and responses to deal with alcohol-related harm. All of these have some relevance to TLAs, especially in light of the responsibility they have under the Local Government Act 2002 Section 3. This has seen TLAs, in developing their Long-Term Council Community Plans, adopt a leadership role but also reach out and work closely with their communities to achieve their goals. For many of these TLAs this has also meant taking an interest in the WHO Safe Communities model. Safe Communities is a WHO concept, which recognises safety as a universal concern and a responsibility for all (Nilson 2005).⁴

Internationally, the WHO Safe Community designation process has proven to be a sustainable way to prevent human suffering and reduce the social and economic costs of injury (Spinks et al. 2005). Injuries can take lives and ruin futures, and they are the leading cause of death for those aged 1 to 34 years in New Zealand. A report released on 28 April 2006 stated that the economic and social costs of workplace-related injuries and disease in New Zealand could total \$20.9 billion a year – up to four times higher than previous estimates. This report by the National Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee, found that only 2% of these costs were “compensated” by the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), the Ministry of Social Development and other such agencies. The report found that the vast majority of the costs are being borne by, and are affecting, employers, employees and society in general. The report challenged New Zealand to urgently address this “huge and unacceptable burden”.⁵

In general, being designated as a WHO Safe Community improves the quality of life for individuals, strengthens and supports community cohesion through increased participation in injury prevention and community safety initiatives, and provides a vehicle for the effective involvement of TLAs, businesses, organisations, schools, sport and recreation groups, families and individuals to improve their own safety and the safety of others. Experience has shown that in a successful community safety programme, there is only a short delay between the inception of prevention and control measures and decreases in injury rates. This rapid reward further encourages community participants to continue their efforts. When injury rates are shown to decrease, safety measures can generally gain broad public support and are effectively promoted by the mass media (Coggan et al. 2000, Klasssen et al. 2000, Rahim 2005).

4 See www.safe.communities.org.nz.

5 See www.nohsac.govt.nz/techreport4/index.php.

CASE STUDY – WELLINGTON CITY

Methods

Information for this case study was gathered from a variety of sources. All documents submitted for Wellington City's application for Safe Community status were scrutinised and analysed. Archival records relevant to this study were also sourced and analysed. An interview schedule was developed to explore key benefits and challenges for councils considering undertaking a commitment to attaining Safe Community status. Five key informant interviews were conducted by phone and transcribed, and a thematic analysis of the data from the interviews was undertaken.

Background

In the 1999 Wellington City Council Residents' Satisfaction Survey, only 30% of the residents felt safe in the central city at night. This followed the murder of a teenage boy in the city, sexual assaults and much negative media reporting. The Council chose to take action and placed safety on the agenda. As a part of the 2000/01 financial year Wellington City Council invested in a safety package set to operate over four years. Through the annual plan process, key issues were identified to be addressed through 31 initiatives. The key issues were:

- Dark spots due to poor lighting in the city encouraged crime and reduced feelings of safety and security.
- There was a lack of activities to involve young people once they were in the city.
- For young people to be able to contribute positively toward the community and function confidently within it, they needed to feel safe and secure. The on-street murder of a young person and high level of drunken and unruly behaviour of youths had highlighted the need for young people to be able to resist or avoid victimisation.
- Although there was a good network of public transport in the Wellington region and a limited late night bus service, this was not enough to ensure that people were able to get home safely at all times as many youths came from outlying suburbs and many activities they participated in continued after the usual bus time frames.
- Regardless of the prevention methods currently being used to control or prohibit access to drugs and alcohol, many young people still had relatively easy access to these in the city centre. Young people who misused alcohol and other drugs tended to be involved in anti-social behaviour and were often involved with the Police.
- Crime and fear of crime deterred visitors and citizens from the city centre.

- Creating a safe city would involve the community, agencies and Council working together. This would require strong leadership and active decision-making at senior levels and close collaboration with groups and agencies working with communities. In 2001 the Wellington Regional Leaders Forum was established to address these issues.

Wellington City Council, like any other TLA, wanted to develop policies that would ensure its residents and visitors had a high-quality lifestyle and a strong sense of being in a community that was safe, tolerant, cultured, smart and caring. It was also recognised that to develop policies that would ensure people felt safe in the community council staff would need to work collaboratively with other organisations to ensure the best delivery of services and programmes. This was seen to be a way of ensuring a sound social infrastructure and a high level of social cohesion of which safety was a part. It was also recognised that the council was well placed to provide access to services and resources and to provide greater leadership to promote a high level of social cohesion and participation. This was not about ownership, but about using the Council's collective knowledge and resources to make sure that its residents and visitors were safe.

Results

Over the next four years Wellington City Council developed policies to help people feel safe in the city. It used the annual plan process to implement initiatives to address the key issues. In 2000 Wellington introduced the City Safety Package, set to operate over four years, and provided funding of \$5million to support it. The aim of the Safety Plan was to:

- make the Wellington City community stronger and more effective
- reduce crime and anti-social behaviour
- create safer environments
- protect the public and build their confidence in Wellington city
- improve people's lives so that they would be less likely to commit offences or reoffend.

Some of the key responses included:

- The establishment of 15 (full-time equivalent) City Safety Officers (Walkwise) in the central city who operated 24/7 in the central city. They acted as ambassadors for the council aiming to prevent and deter crime and anti-social behaviour through visibility.

"The ambassadors are an incredible asset to Wellington's safety initiatives. You see them in their yellow jackets all over the city keeping an eye on what is going on."

- Partnerships with government, police, health and community agencies and the business sector (in particular the hospitality and security industries) through a variety of programmes. The partnership with the police was essential as they provided management and training for the Walkwise programme, established a Community Policing Base in the central city, developed CCTV (closed-circuit television) as a surveillance tool, enforced a liquor ban in the central city, and supported road safety and crime prevention through environmental design initiatives throughout the central city to develop safe environments and reduce violence in the public places of the city.

“The safety initiatives we [the Police] have initiated in partnership with the City Council have produced some great results especially in the central city.”

- Increased events for young people, and participation by young people in the planning, participation and delivery of council-led initiatives. The development of a late-night bus scheme and a Home Safe Taxi card scheme.

“It has made such a difference, my parents let me go to events in the city at night now.”

In 2004 the Council reviewed the City Safety Package and agreed to continue to work on the established initiatives. Because of the data showing the high personal, social and economic costs of injury (unintentional and intentional) on the Wellington City community, the Council also agreed that an additional component, injury prevention, should be added to the identified issues. During the two-year period 2000–2001, 108 people from Wellington City died as a result of an injury, and nine of these were young people (aged 0–19 years). During the four-year period 2000–2003, 4,960 people from Wellington City were hospitalised overnight for treatment of an injury, and 1,375 of these were young people (aged 0–19 years) (Safe Communities Foundation New Zealand 2006).

It was at this stage that Wellington City Council started to investigate the possibility of becoming an accredited Safe Community, part of the WHO Safe Communities Network. The WHO Safe Communities model creates an infrastructure in local communities for addressing injury prevention initiatives through building local partnerships. It is a programme that was initiated in Sweden by the WHO Collaborating Centre on Community Safety Promotion at the Karolinska Institute for Social Medicine.⁶

6 See www.phs.ki.se/csp.

The six criteria in the WHO Safe Communities model provided a framework in which to maintain existing initiatives and develop others to sustain community safety. The six criteria are:

1. formation of a cross-sectoral group based on partnership and collaborations, that is responsible for safety promotion in their community
2. long-term, sustainable, programmes covering both genders and all ages, environments, and situations to improve safety and address the injury burden
3. programmes that target high-risk groups and environments, and programmes that promote safety for vulnerable groups
4. programmes that document the frequency and causes of injuries – both unintentional (accidents) and intentional (violence and self-directed)
5. evaluation measures to assess programmes, processes and the effects of change
6. ongoing participation in national and international Safe Communities networks.⁷

This led to a realisation that to implement and maintain initiatives to address safety in Wellington City, a much closer collaboration between central and local government was essential. Wellington City – led by the Wellington City Council, but involving Police, Capital and Coast District Health Board and the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) – became focused on developing a sustainable community, where crime and the fear of crime and injury were reduced, and where early action was taken on an interagency basis to prevent and resolve anti-social behaviour and situations that put individuals and communities at risk. Although not a new idea, it was also recognised that community safety could not be achieved by the police and other agencies working alone, and that voluntary and community groups could make a vital contribution to community safety. Without some help in identifying the community safety priorities in the community, and without the community's involvement in tackling them, the goal of safe communities could not be achieved.

A steering group was formed to provide a framework for the community's activities relating to community safety informed by public feedback and recognised best practice. The group resolved to work towards an integrated whole-of-community, whole-of-council approach to community safety, embracing the concepts of early intervention, crime prevention, injury prevention, social justice and community capacity building. They worked together with key strategic partners from both the community and government and non-government sectors to develop a timely and accurate information base to identify the priority areas or issues for the community (such as crime areas, hot spots and injury issues) and to support a way forward by targeting the most serious forms and geographical concentrations of crime, disorder and injury in the community.

⁷ See www.phs.ki.se/csp/safecom/default.htm; www.safecommunities.org.nz.

In partnership and collaboration, organisations represented in the steering group worked together to:

- increase awareness of living safely throughout the year through the introduction of a wide range of education campaigns (see www.Wellington.govt.nz)
- help decrease the number of crimes, injuries and deaths through wide use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) as a part of all public space development and redevelopment, including environmental modifications such as improved lighting and the introduction of the Walkwise 24/7 team
- provide opportunities through the conduct of forums for exchange of information between community safety practitioners, researchers and policymakers from all sectors and disciplines with an interest in community safety issues
- facilitate intersectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration among policymakers, community safety practitioners, researchers and government departments by the annual auditing and review process and quarterly strategic partnership meetings
- advocate for and support the development, implementation and evaluation of community safety programmes and projects through the conduct of annual community safety surveys and the exchange and dissemination of police, crime and related health statistics
- promote the application of best practice to the development of safe communities programmes and projects through the adoption of an evidence-based approach to project development and implementation
- support the dissemination of information on effective community safety interventions through participation in relevant regional, national and international networks
- advocate for training, professional development and career paths for Wellington's Walkwise community safety practitioners
- make submissions to hearings and boards of review on legislative/regulatory changes affecting community safety.

"I was really impressed the way that we worked together in the steering group as in the past it had been so ad hoc and I don't really think we were achieving much."

Outlined above is an overview of the main initiatives introduced; a full list of initiatives introduced to support the Wellington International Safe Community Programme can be accessed via the Safe Community Foundation website.⁸

Recent analysis of the Council's Residents' Satisfaction Survey found that levels of perception of safety were increased. This increase was attributed to the development, management and training of Walkwise City Safety Officers, the development of the

8 See www.safecommunities.org.nz.

Community Policing Base in Cuba Street, the introduction of CPTED concepts, the liquor ban in the central city, and the Homeless Taskforce, which has dealt holistically with issues of homeless people living on the streets of Wellington. In the most recent survey, 72% of respondents reported feeling reasonably safe or very safe in the central city at night, an increase of 42 percentage points (Wellington City Council 2006). In addition, Police statistics showed a 30% reduction in traffic crashes, 60% reduction in reported burglaries and a 5.7% overall reduction in crime in the last 12 months in Wellington City.⁹ The Council agreed to spend a further \$15 million over 10 years to support safety initiatives, and a City Safety Business Unit – with an aim “to build public confidence in the safety of city streets and suburbs” – was established in late 2005 to support the Council’s focus on safety (Wellington City Council 2005).

The establishment of the City Safety Business Unit within Wellington City Council reflected the current priority for Wellington City Council that Wellington be seen as a safe city. Since being established, this team has continued with current activities (including the Walkwise contract), maintained a system of three public safety cameras in the central city, continued liaising with Police over resolution of public safety issues in the city (including the provision of a perspective on crime prevention in relation to Council events), and liquor licensing. It has worked with the Council’s City Housing team to improve safety within these tenancies.

The Unit has also worked extensively with the Road Safety team in Council and its community partners to further improve public transport, reduce the speed limit on selected roads, expand the Walking School Bus concept and support the design of environments to improve road safety. The Wellington City Safer Roads project involves the expenditure of an estimated \$20.45 million over the period 2003–2015 to reduce crashes on the city’s roads by one-third by 2010.

Working together with the ACC Injury Prevention Team, the City Safety Business Unit identified that Wellington City shops and licensed premises had one of the highest levels of injury in the city. Using that knowledge, “Shopsafe” was developed by ACC and delivered by Walkwise officers to a large number of inner city retailers. Shopsafe provides information and a checklist for retailers to ensure they are doing everything they can to minimise injuries. As at 2006, 50% of shops in the city had participated in this programme. The City Safety Business Unit and ACC have also worked with Wellington City Council’s Property Team to ensure that all contractors employed by the Council are certified “sitesafe”.

Additionally, Walkwise, Council and ACC, along with other agencies, provide “safe” visits for Year 8–9 students where they are given information on being safe in

⁹ See www.police.govt.nz/service/statistics.

Wellington City. Students meet at the Council's Emergency Management Office and walk through town and learn about road safety, visit the Fire Station and then go to Te Papa museum and learn about earthquakes and the correct procedures to adopt to minimise injuries and damage.

In recognition of these efforts, Wellington was accredited as a WHO Safe Community and part of the Safe Community Network on 14 June 2006, the 100th community and the only country capital to be accredited. The Council resolved to continue its leadership role in the steering committee and ongoing safety initiatives – the aim being to recognise the breadth and safety issues to be addressed; encompass environmental design, community development, education and enforcement; have the flexibility to respond to the varied needs of social, business and political life that make up Wellington's communities of interest; create opportunities for groups of citizens to collaborate in making Wellington safe; and enable programmes contributing to city safety to be identified, implemented and evaluated for their impact on achieving Wellington's vision to be a great place to live, work and play.¹⁰ In a letter of support for Wellington City's application for Safe Community status the chief executive of Local Government New Zealand stated:

Local Government New Zealand has on a number of occasions sought advice from Wellington City Council staff on issues concerned with community safety, including good practice workshops at our national conference. In our view it is one of the leading councils in this area and is looked to by other councils concerned with developing local community safety programmes. (www.safecommunities.org.nz)

Now that the Steering Group is in place to identify safety issues across the city, and groups established to develop and drive specific initiatives, it is envisaged that Wellington City will continue on a path that will:

- identify the priority areas or issues for the community, such as crime areas, high-risk roading areas and injury issues, based on a wide range of available data from a variety of sources
- work with key strategic partners from both the community and government and non-government agencies
- develop an information base that is timely and accurate that will support a way forward by targeting the most serious forms and geographical concentrations, of crime, disorder and injury in the community.

This is to ensure that Wellington City will continue to be a safe place to live, work, travel and play sport.

¹⁰ See www.safecommunities.org.nz.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This case study of Wellington City demonstrates that policies developed to ensure high levels of participation by organisations and individuals interested in safety promotion in the community are critical to achieving resilient and safe communities. Wellington City Council saw that to be successful at improving the safety of the city there was a need to work with others. The Council recognised that by developing policies that encouraged effective networking and collaboration between individuals, organisations and other providers, it could reduce the sense of “us” and “them”. The Council identified the links between injury prevention, crime prevention, alcohol misuse, road safety and violence prevention, and recognised the need to develop policies that would encourage a collaborative and cooperative approach. It then identified that the Safe Communities model created an infrastructure for addressing these issues by building partnerships between organisations and providing access to the experiences of like communities throughout the world.

Wellington City demonstrated that a council is well placed to support its residents and visitors to keep up their quality of life and access to services and resources. Ratepayers also expect council staff to develop policies to promote a high level of social cohesion and participation. It is from the example set by Wellington City that other councils can work collaboratively in their own communities to achieve International Safe Community status.

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