



## **The Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Plan**

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### **Introduction**

The problems associated with crime and safety in local communities have a major impact on the quality of people's lives. All over the world the public and private sectors are realising that the causes of crime or risk factors associated with offending behaviour are complex and that police departments alone cannot successfully deal with the twin issues of responding to crime and correcting the conditions which contribute to crime. It has thus become generally accepted that any successful crime prevention or community safety strategy is based on the principle of shared responsibility and that only a co-ordinated approach involving a wide range of groups and individuals will be able to cope with its challenges. With this in mind the recently released Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Plan aims to take a medium to long term approach to tackling the underlying causes of crime by focusing on both building and strengthening community as well as preventing community harm.

The suburbs of Redfern and Waterloo in inner city Sydney are located within five kilometres of the CBD and like many similarly located suburbs are undergoing a period of rapid gentrification due to increasing demand for inner city housing stock. As a consequence property values in Redfern in particular have increased rapidly in recent years reducing the affordability of housing in the suburb. The gap in socio-economic status between the high and low income groups is particularly evident in Redfern.

One of the most significant sites in the Redfern area is The Block. Since the 1940's Redfern and The Block in particular has been one of the bases for Aboriginal people in Sydney. It was one of the first pieces of land in urban Australia owned by Indigenous people when it was purchased for Aboriginal housing in 1973. Since then The Block has provided Indigenous people moving to Sydney with the opportunity to remain living in a community environment with extended family and is a place of social and cultural significance both to long term residents and people returning to and visiting the area.

Waterloo on the other hand supports one of the highest concentrations of public housing in Sydney with up to 80% of all dwellings owned by the N.S.W. Department of Housing. The area also comprises a significant industrial sector which has been one of the traditional employers for Waterloo residents.

### **Crime in Redfern and Waterloo**

The former South Sydney Council area which now forms part of the City of Sydney Local Government Area and which includes the suburbs of Redfern and Waterloo has consistently ranked in the top five Council areas over the last four years for the offences of motor vehicle theft, steal from motor vehicle, steal from person and robbery according to the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research

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(BOCSAR). Neighbouring Council areas also rank highly in this regard suggesting a regional connection to offences taking place in the area.

Redfern Police suggest that offenders committing break and enter and stealing offences are mainly young males aged 10-18 years. More serious offences such as armed robberies and violent break and enters as in many other areas are largely committed by males aged from 18-30 years. Evidence from Redfern Police suggests that most offenders have substance abuse problems, are from low socio-economic backgrounds, have suffered from neglect or family violence, have had limited education and come from families where there is a history of unemployment and imprisonment. Victims have most commonly been young women students transiting between Redfern Station and Sydney University.

It has been speculated that long standing tensions between some sections of the community and Redfern Police have also been highlighted by the recent incident which took place on Lawson Street Redfern in February 2004. While this incident received wide media coverage at the time it should be viewed in the context of a range of initiatives on the part of a range of agencies which are having a real impact in terms of improving the image of the two suburbs and the quality of life for people who live, work and visit the area.

### **The Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project**

In March 2002 the Premier Bob Carr announced the establishment of the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project as a first step in developing real and sustainable outcomes for the people of Redfern and Waterloo. A total of \$7 million dollars was dedicated to the Project over three years to develop and implement a number of practical initiatives to address key issues in the two suburbs. The Partnership Project moved quickly to support the development of a Community Safety Plan as one of the key initiatives of the Project with the then South Sydney Council taking the lead agency role.

### **The Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Taskforce**

The Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Taskforce was established in June 2002 with a view to co-ordinating an integrated planning approach to the development of a Community Safety plan for the area. The support of the Partnership Project enabled the Taskforce to comprise senior representation from a range of Government agencies including Premier's Department, Attorney General's, Housing, Health, Community Services, Education and Training and Probation and Parole as well as the Aboriginal Housing Company and members of the community. This is important in that often one of the challenges of working in Local Government in light of competing agendas and changing priorities is sustaining the strategic partnerships which underpin the success or otherwise of a medium to long-term community safety or crime prevention strategy.

The Taskforce acknowledged from the outset that there are no silver bullets or magic formulas when it comes to preventing crime in our communities and set about developing a plan with an emphasis on involving a range of groups and individuals

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working together on a range of initiatives with a focus on tackling the underlying causes of crime.

The Taskforce began by developing a shared vision for their understanding of the term Community Safety which came to read:

“Community Safety is about creating and maintaining a safe place in which to live, work and visit. This is achieved through a high level of community interaction, a well maintained environment and a strong sense of community responsibility for ongoing safety issues.”

With this in mind the Taskforce resolved that rather than focus on specific crimes, the aims of the Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Plan would be based on a sense of shared responsibility through:

- Community strengthening activities and
- The Prevention of community harm

### **Community Safety Audits**

In August 2002 a series of seven Community Safety Audits were conducted in the Redfern-Waterloo area. The aim of the safety audits was to involve a range of stakeholders in identifying issues in the physical environment which impact on people's feelings of safety. The audit process was also used to promote the fact that a comprehensive plan was being developed for the two suburbs and that this would involve an extensive consultation process. Safety audits are also useful in that research has shown that it is unlikely that communities will respond to partnership initiatives unless they experience tangible physical upgrades in their day to day living environments. The recommendations of the safety audits were subsequently implemented over the ensuing six months and a Useful Numbers Card produced to encourage members of the community to take responsibility for local concerns.

### **Community Consultation**

The Taskforce embarked on an extensive community consultation process as part of the planning process. Initial contact with a cross-section of the community revealed a fundamental distrust of the process. Members of the community disclosed that over many years they had been consulted about the issues they identified as priorities to a number of individuals and agencies. Many people divulged that they were never given any feedback as to what had happened to the information they had provided. Rarely did they ever see the person conducting the consultation again. This had led to feelings of scepticism and cynicism toward community consultation as many people believed they were not being listened to and as such the process was perceived as tokenistic. There also existed the belief that decisions had already been taken in relation to strategies which would form part of the plan.

The bulk of the community consultations consisted of surveying existing groups asking three open-ended survey questions about what they liked and disliked about the area and what would make it a better place. This method was taken so as respondents had the opportunity to broach specific issues they identified as affecting the community as opposed to pre-empting or raising issues in the actual question.

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Participants were also asked to explain what they felt the term “Community Safety” meant to them and whether or not they felt a sense of belonging in the area. In order to widen the number of people consulted participants were then encouraged to take a handful of surveys away with them to interview their neighbours and return these to their elected representative.

In light of the earlier negative sentiments expressed by the community toward the consultation process after each consultation session a summary report was forwarded to participants. Over the ensuing nine months this community consultation process continued as the strategies contained within the plan evolved. The process entailed returning to the groups who had been originally consulted and refreshing them with regard to the input they had provided. The groups were then informed on the input other groups had provided so as they could put their original input into some sort of perspective. The groups were then informed as to how this information had fed into the development of the strategies for action in the plan. This process remains ongoing, to not only continue to inform the community as to how the plan is being implemented and monitored, but also to continue to develop relationships integral to community ownership and participation.

The Taskforce also developed a map featuring animated icons of major community landmarks in order to conduct fear mapping exercises, to identify public spaces and places which people felt were well designed to feed into future planning processes, and to brand and promote what were then new Council boundaries for the old South Sydney Council.

### **Existing Research and Inter-related Plans**

The planning process also acknowledged that a great deal of research with respect to community safety issues in the then South Sydney Local Government Area which includes the suburbs of Redfern and Waterloo had already been carried out. This research includes Social Plans, Development Control Plans, interviews with specific groups in the community including Aboriginal people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women, older persons, young people, child and family service providers and the gay, lesbian and transgender communities.

The planning process recognised that the Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Plan is one of many strategic planning documents and initiatives currently underway in the two suburbs. Many of the problems or issues being addressed through these plans and initiatives relate directly to strengthening the two communities and by extension the safety of the area. In keeping with an integrated planning approach the plan contains strategies which overlap or complement other initiatives being implemented by the City including the Social Plan, Public Domain Plan, Community Facilities Plan, Affordable Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and Recreation Plan.

### **Priority Issues**

The information gleaned from the crime statistics, Redfern Police, community consultations, existing research and inter-related plans revealed that there are five major areas which form the key issues to be addressed in the plan namely:

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- **Community Strengthening Activities** – including ways of improving community consultation and the connections or interactions people share with one another at the neighbourhood level
- **Early Intervention Approaches to Community Safety** – such as issues concerning children and families
- **Community Safety and Young People** – specifically with regard to the 12-18 age group
- **Health Issues** – including drug and alcohol use and misuse and the prevention of community harm and
- **Planning and Environmental Issues** – looking at ways of planning for safer urban design including private dwellings and maximising the use of public spaces.

### **Community Strengthening Activities**

When members of the community were asked during the community consultations what would make the area a better place, common responses included more Police and tougher sentencing. While successive State Governments have in the past claimed that record Police numbers are graduating from the Goulbourn Academy the reality is that Police numbers have remained relatively stable. Employment trends in recent years suggest that “the job for life” mentality is a thing of the past and as such Police, as in many other occupations, will often move on to different careers throughout their working lives. Redfern Police Local Area Command have recently received a small number of additional staff in response to the incident on Lawson Street and while this initiative is welcome it is unlikely that their impact will alter the current situation given the complexities in relation to the underlying causes of crime to any significant extent.

The notion that more Police will create safer communities is simplistic because we do not have the population base to support significantly increased Police numbers, and secondly because the causes of crime are complex and as such any successful community safety strategy aimed at correcting the conditions that contribute to crime will depend on more than just Police authorities alone.

Similarly, much of the research on people who have experienced time in protective custody indicates that the longer a person is incarcerated the greater the likelihood that the person will re-offend. The reality is that regardless of how long a person spends in a correctional setting, sooner or later that person is released and becomes somebody’s next door neighbour. The question which was subsequently posed to members of the community who had responded with the tougher sentencing solution was “Would you rather live next door to someone who has been incarcerated for five years or eighteen months?”. Thus the issues of education around more police and tougher sentencing formed an important role in defining the intentions of the plan.

The first chapter of the plan explores the social environment in relation to community safety. A key factor in determining how safe people feel is the types of relationships that people share with one another at the neighbourhood level. In communities where people interact on a regular basis the impression is created that people look out for

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one another and hence feel safer. This will also make an outsider with criminal intentions that much more conspicuous in this kind of community.

The opposite occurs where people have few neighbourhood relationships, put bars on their windows and high walls around their properties and thereby cut themselves off from people in their immediate environment. This fortress mentality can create the impression that a place is more unsafe than it is in reality. Above all this issue emphasises one of the key factors underpinning the plan – that community safety is a shared responsibility, that each of us has a role to play in looking out for one another.

One of the key findings from the community consultations was that people felt there was a strong sense of community in the area and that most of the people in the area were friendly, unpretentious, diverse and genuine. A culture of people saying “hello” to one another is prevalent in the area and 90% of the 400 people thus far consulted have felt a strong sense of belonging to the area. This is important as a recent study found that:

“People who join things have a sense of belonging, of being a valued member of a group. Belonging engenders trust and trust engenders an optimistic outlook. It is this optimism that is directly predictive of good mental health. People who have hope for the future have a powerful shield against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”.<sup>1</sup>

People’s responses to the term “Community Safety” included:

- “An awareness in people of the ways in which they can work together to contribute to their own and each other’s safety and security”
- “Respect for each other to build community” and
- “Looking at issues as a community and addressing them as a community”.

Responses such as these were used to feed back to the community in ongoing community consultations again to reiterate the importance of social interactions, community connections and a strong sense of community ownership with respect to Community Safety.

Some of the key strategies in this section of the plan include:

- Constructing a new community facility adjacent to The Block
  - Establishing a Redfern-Waterloo Festival
  - Appointing a worker for DOH properties in Waterloo
  - Holding Open Air Cinema events in open spaces
  - Initiating smaller community strengthening activities with and between public and private housing blocks
  - Establishing a program of live music in local parks
  - Developing more innovative consultation tools and
  - Developing a resource kit to orient all new workers to the area.
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### **Early intervention approaches to Community Safety**

Consultations with the community and other research revealed an ongoing concern that there were specific families in the area in need of urgent and ongoing support. There is an increasing body of evidence that suggests that interventions early in life can have long term impacts on crime and other social problems. Overseas research has shown that for every dollar spent now a saving of up to \$4 will be saved later.<sup>2</sup>

Many programs were not originally designed to prevent crime but were established as a way of increasing the life chances of socio-economically disadvantaged people via better health, education and employment.

The effect of such initiatives may not be seen in the short term however it is vital that these issues be addressed now to alleviate the economic and social conditions that prompt the issues affecting children and families as an important investment in local crime prevention. Some of the strategies involved in this section of the plan include:

- Establishing a Child and Family Taskforce
- Developing a strategic plan for Child and Family Services
- Establishing an after-school and school holiday program
- Implementing the Indigenous Support Project

### **Community Safety and Young People**

Chapter five of the plan looks into issues affecting the 12-18 age group. Adolescence is a time of great change as young people are increasingly influenced by their peers, begin to participate in risk taking behaviour and begin to assert their own sense of identity. There are many misconceptions about young people and crime and while adolescence can be a crucial time for the emergence of anti-social behaviour, common perceptions of a “juvenile crime wave” are not borne out by reality.

The community consultation revealed that many people were concerned about young people congregating in groups in the area. Young men were afraid of other young men and were concerned about relations with the Police. The process involved educating members of the community around dispelling some of the myths a round crime and young people including:

- Most crime is committed by adults
  - Young people aged 15-24 are more likely to be victims of crime than any other group
  - In 1999 10% of all young people experienced a crime – 1% of elderly in the same year
  - 75% of young people offend once before desisting from further criminal activity
  - 15% of young people offend on one subsequent occasion before desisting from crime
  - violent crimes are in the minority even for those young people who become persistent offenders
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- offenders usually act alone or in pairs – there are few organised youth gangs
  - most juvenile crime is episodic, transitory, local, unplanned and not repeated.<sup>3</sup>
- Some specific strategies in relation to Community Safety and young people include:

- ongoing funding for the Lights Camera Action Project and Drivin' for Employment Project
- corporate sponsorship from NRMA Insurance for Police-Youth Mentor Project
- Council sponsorship of camps run by Aboriginal Men's Business and Support Group and plans to appoint part time staff
- Crime prevention programs in local schools
- Study into improved facilities for young people in Community Facilities Plan
- Exploring opportunities for Police –Youth worker training round common issues

#### **Health, Drug and Alcohol Issues**

Existing research, community consultations and discussions with Redfern Police and Area health services revealed the need for a number of strategies in the plan around addressing the problems linked to drug and alcohol use and misuse in the area. The Redfern-Waterloo area is no different to most other areas in this regard. The problems caused by intoxication, dealing and using in public places and unsafely discarded needles and syringes can all contribute to negative perceptions of community image. The key is to develop practical solutions to tackle the drug problem and to ease the suffering of individuals caught in the cycle of drug use.

Some specific strategies outlines in the plan in this regard include:

- Establishing a Drug and Alcohol Taskforce
- Establishment of a South Sydney Liquor Accord
- Developing an educational package and video for people held in protective custody around drug and alcohol education
- Roll out of needle bins across the area and development of needle hotline card
- Building information on minimising harm caused by illicit drug use into community events and festivals
- Expansion of the Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT) Program
- Piloting the Youth Drug Court Program in the area.

#### **Planning and Environmental Issues**

The final chapter of the Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Plan explores opportunities for developing strategies in relation to planning and the environment. Research and community consultation data revealed that people were concerned about the state of the environment and the role it can play in influencing people's perceptions of safety. An environment which is poorly maintained or inappropriately designed can make people feel more fearful. The key to safe urban design will

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essentially involve combining the social and the physical characteristics of an environment in striking a balance between surveillance, security, acoustic and visual privacy, building character and appearance and a clear delineation between public and private spaces.

In this regard the Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Plan has developed strategies which include:

- Updating Councils Development Control Plan to include Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles
- Ongoing training of Council staff in Safer By Design
- Development of an MOU between Police and Council for referral of development applications to consider community safety risks
- Develop a strategy for the removal of roller shutter doors from commercial premises
- Redfern Street upgrade

The City has also instigated a number of subsequent initiatives in response to specific crimes which form part of the Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Plan. These include the production of resources such as street signage, coasters and posters to protect valuables.

Council is also working in partnership with Redfern Police and NRMA Insurance involving a Crime Prevention van which travels throughout the community to specific locations in response to break and enter activity. The van provides advice on improving security for motor vehicles and in the home as well as information on local community activities. The same partnership are also implementing the Never Again Project in the area where security assessments are conducted on premises which have recently experienced a burglary. This project aims to protect such premises from repeat victimisation as research has shown that homes which have experienced a burglary are susceptible to repeat offences within three months of the original offence.

### **Conclusion**

The Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Taskforce continue to meet on a quarterly basis to monitor and implement the plan. An Action Plan has been drawn up and each agency responsible for each strategy is required to complete the matrix prior to each meeting to inform Taskforce members and the wider community on progress in relation to each initiative.

The Redfern-Waterloo Community Safety Plan emphasises that the key to creating safer neighbourhoods is to encourage social interaction and community connections where perceptions of fear are low, where community bonds are strong and where residents have a sense of ownership of their neighbourhoods. It is this central theme of shared responsibility which underpins the plan, that the best weapon we have in addressing crime in our communities is a planned and united community effort. It is acknowledged that this is the first plan of its kind for the area and while much of the challenge may lie ahead, it is hoped that a promising start has been made.

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