



# **Exploring reasons for dissatisfaction with safety in the City of Fremantle**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Understanding the discord between actual and perceived rates of crime ..... <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	
3. Exploring the main drivers of residents' dissatisfaction.....	8
4. Will greater police presence help or hinder residents' perceptions of safety? .....	113
5. Best practice.....	13
6. Key findings .....	13
7. Further reading.....	16

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The City of Fremantle's 2008 Community Perceptions Survey found that 35 per cent of residents were dissatisfied with safety and security in the city centre and 30 per cent of residents were dissatisfied with safety and security in their local area. Satisfaction levels in these areas have been declining over recent years. What is driving this dissatisfaction and what can the City of Fremantle do to address it?

This report explores the reasons for residents' dissatisfaction with safety and security within the City of Fremantle. The strategic purpose of this study is to gather some community views on safety and security issues to assist the City to consider appropriate strategies and action plans.

The study's six objectives are:

- To explore the main causes of dissatisfaction with safety and security;
- To find out whether residents' concerns are based on what they've read and/or heard from others or from personal experience;
- To identify when and where people feel most vulnerable;
- To identify how media communications about crime and anti-social behavior effect residents' feelings of safety;
- To understand what would make people feel safer; and
- To test reactions to various programs and solutions to improve safety such as CCTV, Safety House Program and Neighbourhood Watch.

To meet these research objectives, CATALYSE<sup>®</sup> conducted in-depth interviews with the following experts:

- Ms Celeste Lawson, Office of Crime Prevention
- Mr Brian Scully, State Coordinator, Neighbourhood Watch
- Research Associate Professor David Indermaur, Crime Research Centre, UWA
- Associate Professor Steve James, University of Melbourne

CATALYSE<sup>®</sup> also contacted the following key informants for information contained in this report:

- Maggie Gardiner, Community Safety Projects Officer, City of Rockingham
- Safety House Association of Western Australia
- Australian Institute of Criminology
- Australian Bureau of Statistics

To gain an initial snapshot of community views, CATALYSE<sup>®</sup> conducted a focus group with residents on Tuesday 11 June 2009. Participants were recruited from the database of residents who expressed a willingness to assist with further research for the City of Fremantle (developed as part of the City of Fremantle's 2008 Community Perceptions Survey). A random sample of respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with safety was invited to participate. Nine residents participated in the focus group and were offered a financial incentive for doing so. The participants had lived within the City of Fremantle for varying times, ranging from five to 50 years. Participants were asked a series of probing questions about crime and safety in their neighbourhood and within the central business district.

It is hoped that this preliminary research on safety and security issues is a valuable catalyst for further lines of inquiry within the City of Fremantle.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING THE DISCORD BETWEEN ACTUAL AND PERCEIVED RATES OF CRIME

### *Crime rates in Western Australia are decreasing...*

While measuring crime accurately is difficult, the available evidence confirms that the rate of crime in Western Australia is decreasing. *“Turning the Corner 2007: Recent crime trends in Western Australia”* finds that the total number of offences reported to WA Police has decreased markedly over the last seven years. While records for assault and sexual assault offences have increased, there have been significant gains in the reduction of burglaries, theft, robberies and motor vehicle theft. Some of the gains reported include:

- a 40 per cent reduction in the burglary rate between 2002 and 2006;
- a substantial decrease in theft since 2002, from 5,064 thefts per 100,000 persons to 4,031 thefts per 100,000 persons;
- a 60 per cent decrease in motor vehicle theft between 1998 and 2006 (after the introduction of the compulsory immobilizer scheme); and
- a 40 per cent decline in robberies between 1998 and 2006.

### *Crime rates are decreasing because...*

According to Associate Research Professor David Indermaur, property-related crime rates in Australia are declining for a variety of socio-economic reasons, including:

- changes in the economic reward structure that make burglary and property-related crimes less attractive;
- the introduction and uptake of insurance policy changes that reward upgrading home security measures, thereby reducing opportunistic crime;
- changes to the *Pawnbrokers Act* that make it harder to on-sell second-hand and/or stolen goods;
- changes in the price of second-hand goods such as video and DVD players, thereby reducing the financial gain for burglars;
- the increasing uptake and sophistication of tracking devices;
- the expansion of ‘cocooning’ and community policing initiatives that seek to reduce repeat burglaries;
- promotion of surveillance programs such as “Burglar Beware”, patrol services and CCTV;
- increase in sentences and punishments for prosecuted burglars; and
- a move toward a cashless society.

### *Yet most people greatly overestimate the risk of crime...*

Most Western Australians acknowledge that the State is a relatively safe and secure place to live. Despite this, many residents greatly overestimate the risk of becoming a victim of crime and believe that the levels of crime are increasing (Weatherburn and Indermaur, 2004). Criminology studies here and abroad highlight the widening disparity between the levels of actual and perceived crime rates (Weatherburn, 2004).

Celeste Lawson from the Office of Crime Prevention explained that fear of crime increases with age, probably due to concerns about a person’s physical capacity to defend themselves. However, the risk of being a victim of crime decreases with age.

The Office of Crime Prevention often uses assault rates as a way of illustrating the correlation between the fear/risk of crime and age. Assault rates decline with age. Australians aged 15-24 experience the highest rates of assault (32 per cent), while the lowest rate of assault is experienced by the elderly (2.6 per cent) (Trewin, 2006).

The discord between actual and perceived rates of crime was the topic of the Australian Institute of Criminology's 2007 survey of social attitudes. The survey found:

*A large majority of the public have inaccurate views about the occurrence of crime and the severity of sentencing. Consistent with previous Australian and international research, the Australian public perceives crime to be increasing when it isn't, overestimates the proportion of crime that involves violence and underestimates the proportion of charged persons who go on to be convicted and imprisoned (Roberts and Indermaur, 2007).*

### **Making decisions about safety and security initiatives at the local level is challenging...**

A significant challenge for local government authorities is responding to both real threats to safety and security and perceived threats (which may not accord with any real threat which adversely affects quality of life in the community). Decisions about which initiatives to support is further complicated at the local level by the lack of relevant and timely evaluation data. Few of the initiatives previewed in this study have undergone any rigorous program evaluation to determine their cost-effectiveness, capacity to reduce crime and/or impact on residents' perceptions of safety and security. This hampers the ability of local government authorities to make informed decisions about safety and security initiatives.

Preliminary research finds that local government authorities address actual and perceived threats to safety and security in a variety of ways, including:

- Creating a safety and security committee responsible for implementation and follow-up
- Added security patrols
- Holiday watch services
- Greater access to and co-ordination with Police
- Cooperative arrangements between policy, council, owners and licensees of publicly accessed facilities
- Management of drug issues (syringe disposal)
- Amendments to town planning regulations to encourage delineation between public and private property, and the use of public areas
- Added lighting and vegetation management in problem areas
- Improving access and transportation options in problem areas
- Added surveillance in problem areas
- Graffiti/vandalism response
- Identifying "unassigned public spaces" and developing more productive uses for them
- Published community safety leaflets and handbooks targeting particular interest groups
- Specific council telephone number for people to contact regarding safety issues (non-emergency)
- Websites with safety tips
- Information on Internet safety
- Road safety and crime information at local schools

### 3. EXPLORING THE MAIN DRIVERS OF RESIDENTS' DISSATISFACTION

Focus group participants were asked to reflect on their perceptions of safety and security within the City of Fremantle and then answer the following question:

On a scale of 1-10, I believe that the crime rate in the City of Fremantle is...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
		x xx	x	x x	x	x	x		
Very low									Very high
		x = male response			x = female response				

The responses showed a wide range of beliefs about the rate of crime in the City of Fremantle. Gender and age appear to be determining factors.

Given that the overall crime rate in WA is decreasing, what drives residents' dissatisfaction with safety and security within the City of Fremantle? Four main drivers emerged through the focus group discussion and expert interviews.

1. **Survey questions about safety and security may by their very nature elicit negative responses.** Some criminologists believe that when people express negative perceptions about safety and security in surveys, questionnaires or focus groups, they are likely to be expressing a political opinion. This opinion reflects a general complaint about the state of the world (as in "I want more order and protection of my world view"). This may explain in part residents' responses about safety and security issues. The functionality of the question too may explain why some residents indicated that they believe Fremantle's crime rate was in the upper range of the scale. According to criminologists, the word 'crime' conditions a fear response in many people and this may go some way to explaining poor reports of dissatisfaction.
2. **"It's the media, stupid!"** Not only is the media the primary source of information about crime for most residents, but communication specialists hold that the media is a powerful agenda-setter. Celeste Lawson from the Office of Crime Prevention explains that people learn about police and criminal activity in four key ways: through personal experience; family and friends; institutions; and the media. As most people have very little direct or indirect contact with police throughout their lives, the majority of information about police and criminal activity is sourced from the media. Jack Katz's seminal text "What makes crime news?" (1987) explores the media's insatiable appetite for reporting crime news. Crime reporting is highly newsworthy and media impact studies confirm that the media sets audience agendas on issues of safety and security – telling us not what to think, but what to think about and how to think about it.
3. **Females appear to have greater concerns about safety and security than males.** Gender appears to be a significant issue in understanding actual and perceived threats. This finding emerged in the focus group discussion about perceived crime rates: females (pink crosses) ranked crime higher in the City of Fremantle than their male counterparts (blue crosses). This concern about safety is amplified by the fact that there are more elderly females than males living

within the City of Fremantle. The 2006 Census data finds greater numbers of females than males in each of the 65-69, 70-74, 75-79, 80-84 and 85+ age brackets. Hence Fremantle's demography may also be a contributing factor in explaining why some residents are dissatisfied with safety and security issues. This is a significant finding because unlike the impact of the media which is difficult to counter at a local level, addressing the actual and perceived risks to older females is within the City of Fremantle's control.

4. *Anti-social behaviour in the City of Fremantle breeds uncertainty and concern about personal safety.* While violent crime is of greatest concern to focus group participants, it is the daily, residual presence of anti-social and nuisance behaviour that drives residents' dissatisfaction with safety and security in and around Fremantle. Focus group participants specifically mentioned the following types of activities as indicative of anti-social and nuisance behavior that drives dissatisfaction:

- Evidence of drug-taking (such as syringes) and drug dealing, attracting wrong/undesirable people into the neighbourhood;
- Hoons, specifically speeding cars, wheelies and the sounds of tyres screeching;
- Urinating and defecating in the streets, particularly at night;
- Loud screaming, offensive language and vulgarities from party-goers on their way home from night spots;
- Graffiti;
- The presence of broken bottles and glass which residents saw as evidence of antisocial behaviour, even if they didn't witness the behaviour themselves. As one focus group participant commented: "Broken glass is an annoying reminder that things aren't quite right".

#### 4. WILL GREATER POLICE PRESENCE HELP OR HINDER PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME?

The City of Fremantle is a major entertainment precinct and tourist hub. As stated in the Fremantle Community Safety and Crime Prevention Plan:

*Visitors to Fremantle are the lifeblood of Fremantle. For example annually there are almost 550,000 domestic day trip visitors to the City (average 2004 and 2005). Domestic visitors stayed 255,000 nights in Fremantle. 68% of international visitors to Western Australia travel to the city of for holiday/leisure purposes and international visitors stayed 450,200 nights in the City. One night club recorded almost 240,000 customers in a year. (2007:5)*

While transient populations add life and vibrancy into the City, they also bring uncertainty. It is this uncertainty that makes people withdraw from using public facilities, feel unsafe at home or in and around their neighbourhood. Notwithstanding the safety initiatives the City of Fremantle has already introduced, some focus group participants said that they feel that they live in a “fortress”. Based on this finding, a key issue which CATALYSE® sought to address was whether more visible policing would improve residents’ perceptions of safety and security within Fremantle.

A preliminary answer to this question was sought by asking residents in the focus group about their attitudes to visible policing and by seeking research on the effectiveness of programs such as Neighbourhood Watch. The results were mixed. A quantitative questionnaire would provide further information about how many people in the community hold these views.

##### *Will great police presence make people feel safer?*

Focus group participants were mixed in their opinions about the effects of visible policing. Some residents felt more assured by late night patrols, police on horseback and police presence within the entertainment precinct. Even if there is no research to demonstrate the effectiveness of such initiatives, some people felt reassured by physical police presence and visible policing initiatives (like CCTV in the central business district). For this group, a highly visible police presence deterred crime and made them feel safer. Associate Professor Steve James from the University of Melbourne referred to this as “reassurance policing”.

Yet others felt that police presence heightened safety concerns and signaled greater uncertainty (as in, if police presence is required then perhaps this is an unsafe area). Steve James referred to American criminology studies that find that police availability is not the key issue in determining perceptions, but **how well** police treat you when they respond to an incident. Hence, saturation policing is less important than developing public trust in police.

A quantitative survey would be required to gain a statistically reliable view of the relationship between community perceptions of safety and visible policing measures.

##### *Does Neighbourhood Watch make people feel safer?*

Another way CATALYSE® sought to address the efficacy of visible policing was to look at research into the effectiveness of programs such as Neighbourhood Watch. While evaluation data is limited, it seems

that a highly recognised community initiative such as Neighbourhood Watch may have only limited impact on residents' perceptions of safety and security.

Neighbourhood Watch has had an active presence within the City of Fremantle for the past 20 to 25 years. Not all of the Suburb Manager or Area Coordinator positions within the City of Fremantle are currently filled which can make the program look dormant. However State Coordinator Brian Scully suggests that Neighbourhood Watch is becoming more of a philosophy than a program. Hence:

*“Neighbourhood Watch’s formal structure and hierarchy is hard to maintain. We’re now moving away from the formal structure in newer suburbs, in areas with young families and in those new housing estates that have their own security. Neighbourhood Watch is not so much about a ‘program’ per se, but more a philosophy about what it is to live in a community” (Brian Scully interview, 2009).*

An independent public perception survey in April 2008 found that Neighbourhood Watch has a high level awareness within the WA community and a legacy of strong promotional support. The key findings of the survey were:

- 97 per cent of respondents had heard of Neighbourhood Watch. These levels of unprompted and prompted awareness were commendably strong.
- 45 per cent of respondents who had heard of Neighbourhood Watch were able to correctly describe what it did.
- 85 per cent of those who were aware of Neighbourhood Watch felt that it builds a safer community, with 45 per cent strongly agreeing;
- 72 per cent felt that the program reduces crime in the community, with 31 per cent strongly agreeing that it does.

Survey respondents felt that Neighbourhood Watch had been quite effective at building safer communities, and has had some impact on reducing crime in the community. However, it has not had a strong impact on perceptions of personal safety. In addition, criminological literature finds that the introduction of some crime prevention strategies such as Neighbourhood Watch has resulted in a heightened fear of crime in some communities (Chan, 1995).

## 5. BEST PRACTICE

CATALYSE® canvassed a range of solutions to reducing crime and improving residents' perceptions of safety and security within the City of Fremantle. The Office of Crime Prevention suggested two simple things that all residents can do to reduce crime in their neighbourhood. These are:

1. Be vigilant about locking windows and doors; and
2. Know your neighbour.

This advice is a consequence of the high number (around 38%) of successful burglaries that are a result of a burglar entering a property through an unlocked door or window (*Turning the Corner*, 2007).

Focus group participants had a number of additional suggestions specific to the City of Fremantle, including:

- Improving the state of the roads and footpaths, especially on route to Fremantle's nightspots
- Enforcing existing laws, especially relating to street-drinking. As one participant said: "*I just don't see enough happening to stop unlawful behaviour*".
- Introduction of more speedos, speed traps, traffic calming and traffic management
- Greater management of hotspots and haunts
- Greater lighting, especially in poorly lit carparks such as the Fremantle Club
- Less tolerance for drug houses
- "Move-on" notices as a way of managing anti-social behavior
- Encouraging family-friendly activities within the entertainment precinct
- More preventative programs and initiatives (ranging from volunteering opportunities to skate parks)
- Stimulate more cafes and niche wine bars to remove the concentration of "*big beer barns*"
- Combat the culture of binge drinking
- Removing stolen/damaged cars (participants mentioned a burnt out van near the harbor that had been left idle for over a week)
- Banning beer bottles in favour of beer cans to reduce broken glass (Most people conceded that party-goers were not taking alcohol out of the pubs in glass, but drinking beer in bottles on the way to the nightspots that was the issue).

Focus group participants reported a huge disparity in their opinions about safety and security within Fremantle between day and night. Come 5pm, the focus group participants talked about Fremantle as a ghost town saying: "*There is nothing going on in Fremantle past 5pm. If people felt safer, they would be out and about*". Focus group participants mentioned that they were most concerned about safety and security on Wednesday to Sunday nights, and felt that antisocial behavior increased on weekends, public holidays and in Summer. When asked what would encourage families to come back into Fremantle at night time, focus group participants mentioned:

- Food, wine, art and cultural festivals
- Music
- Concerts
- Outdoor movies
- Speakers' corners
- Night buskers
- Activities at the Art Centre or art galleries

The Office of Crime Prevention will soon release an online search tool that will allow local government authorities to search for targeted best practice initiatives in crime prevention. Until this is released, canvassing other local government authorities may be the best way of identifying which initiatives are being trialed and with what effect. Based on this review, the stand-out initiative that would go some way to meeting the needs of older females within the City of Fremantle is the Seniors Security Subsidy Scheme – currently operating in the Cities of Rockingham and Cockburn, and the Town of Victoria Park.

The City of Rockingham introduced a Seniors Security Subsidy Scheme in July 2008. The program was designed to help seniors improve the level of security within their homes, reduce the risk of seniors becoming a victim of crime by offering affordable solutions and by raising safety awareness within the community. The City of Rockingham contributes up to \$100 towards the cost of purchase and installation of a number of security items including sensor lights, security door and window screens, window and door deadlocks, home intruder alarms, smoke detectors and property marking kits. To date, 179 seniors within the City of Rockingham have used the subsidy scheme. The application process has been simplified to minimise paperwork. The subsidy refund is paid directly to the senior rather than the security retailer. The program is aimed at seniors who are in receipt of a Pensioners Concession or Seniors Card. Currently 7,810 households within the City fall into this category.

The program was recently evaluated by Maggie Gardiner, Community Safety Projects Officer, City of Rockingham. Apart from the month of July 2008, the crime statistics demonstrate a significant downward trend in the number of burglaries committed within the City, compared with the same period last year. A total of 531 burglaries were committed between July and December 2007 compared with 442 between July and December 2008. This represents an overall reduction in burglaries of around 17 per cent.

The total budget for the program in Rockingham in 2008-09 was \$40,000. The Seniors Security Subsidy Scheme compliments and links into existing successful programs run by the City – the Safety for Seniors Program, Neighbourhood Watch, the Burglary Reduction Cocooning Initiative, the Community Security Service and Rangers Services who patrol burglary hotspot areas. These combined initiatives as well as effective policing methods and detection, has seen a significant reduction in the number of residential burglaries within the City compared to the same period last year. Due to the success, popularity, and impact on burglary figures within the City, the Council has agreed to continue to support the scheme in the next financial year. There will be an increase in some of the subsidies and additional security items introduced.

The City of Rockingham also operates a Safety for Seniors Program which has been running for many years and received a Western Australian Crime Prevention Award in 2008. This scheme has 583 members. Seniors joining the program receive a free membership pack filled with useful information about personal safety and home security and receive a free personal panic alarm. Seniors also have the option of joining a free phone link service (with monthly safety follow-up calls).

As part of this project, CATALYSE<sup>®</sup> also carried out online research to find other examples of best practice community safety initiatives. This search found the following:

**City of Melville, WA**

Established a community safety and security service: the primary role of the service is to observe, report and monitor anti-social behaviour and any issues of safety and security within the community.

### **City of Stirling, WA**

The Security Service (Patrol Service) attends to a wide range of matters including: reporting incidences of graffiti to private and public property; reporting damage and vandalism; deterring anti-social behaviour; locating lost and stolen property; providing community safety advice; and monitoring and reporting suspicious activity. The City also provides a holiday watch service for private residences and a community safety toolbox. The toolbox includes a fridge magnet with important phone numbers, a map of the City of Stirling showing the locations of its police stations, plus some self-assessment sheets relating to the safety and security of property.

### **City of Sydney, NSW**

Safe City Program: Some of the safety and security initiatives include:

- (a) the development of licensing accords between Police and licensed venues to address under-age drinking and anti-social behaviour in and around licensed venues;
- (b) responses to address illicit drug use include the development of a comprehensive Syringe Management Strategy;
- (c) community strengthening activities and the prevention of community harm including recognising the specific needs and developing appropriate responses to key community groups.

### **Town of Maroochy, Qld**

Design Code for Community Safety and Security (in relation to Planning Codes) – to address both people's perceived sense of safety and actual potential for crime. Design issues include:

- (a) providing opportunities for casual surveillance,
- (b) clearly defining boundaries between public and private space,
- (c) encouraging a mix of complementary land uses that can extend the duration and intensity of activity in public areas,
- (d) ensuring lighting and landscaping allow for adequate surveillance, and
- (e) using robust materials in situations where vandalism has occurred or is possible.

### **Devonport City Council, TAS**

The Devonport Community Safety Liaison Group use the following strategies:

- (a) Early Intervention/Development - this strategy is based around the provision of support at critical times in social, physical and mental development to prevent later offending.
- (b) Community Development - is based around a combination of programs aimed at building up communities to be able to address their own social problems.
- (c) Situational/Environmental - includes the improvement of the physical environment in which people live and reduce the opportunity of crime through effective urban design, planning and management of areas with community safety and crime prevention in mind.

### **Newcastle City Council, NSW**

Recent actions to increase public safety include:

- (a) The development of three Crime Prevention Plans for specific problem areas
- (b) Development of the Late Night Transport Strategy and implementation of NightLink
- (c) Establishment of the Nightcare Program
- (d) The PCYC Mobile Activity Van, a joint venture with Lake Macquarie City Council, PCYC and NSW Police which purchased a custom built mobile activity van which can be used in crime hot spots

## **East Gambier, SA**

With the help of a \$4,865 Community Help grant from general insurer, SGIC, a grassroots initiative in the East Gambier area is making inroads into security and safety in the area. The SGIC grant has been used by the East Gambier Resident Action Group to fund various safety and security projects specifically tailored to addressing the concerns of local residents, such as installing peep holes in homes of at risk residents and conducting road safety awareness programs in the local school.

## **6. KEY FINDINGS**

- Despite the fact that crime rates in Western Australia are reported to be decreasing, most residents overestimate the risk of becoming a victim of crime.
- The media has a significant impact on residents' perceptions of safety and security.
- Within the City of Fremantle, anti-social and nuisance behaviour breeds uncertainty and appears to be a key driver of dissatisfaction with safety and security.
- Increasing police presence may not make residents feel safer. Some residents feel more reassured by visible policing, while for others an increase in police presence signals uncertainty and danger. The key issue is developing and maintaining public trust in police. How can the City of Fremantle assist with communicating this message?
- While residents support a range of safety and security initiatives, it is difficult to recommend one strategy over another. There is a shortage of studies that demonstrate the impact, outcomes and effectiveness of safety and security initiatives.
- Regardless of how the City of Fremantle allocates its budget, it is advisable that an evaluation component be built in to programs so that impact, outcomes and cost-effectiveness can be assessed to support future decision-making.
- Domestic context means everything. Many criminologists warn against the use of generic "tool-kit" models because it assumes that a crime prevention program that works in one locality will automatically work in another. Tools need to be customised or targeted to meet the needs of specific areas.
- Councils aim to tackle safety and security concerns directly by changing the environment or providing safety services and information. There is little evidence of Councils using positive PR or branding to counter the abundance of crime news reported in the media. Since perceptions appear worse than reality, might the City of Fremantle benefit from a communications or branding campaign to re-shape community perceptions?

## 7. FURTHER READING

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