

© in compilation Australian Institute of Criminology 1996  
© in text Karena Shannon

The contents of this file are copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968* (Cwlth), no part of this file may in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, microcopying, photocopying, recording or otherwise), be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted without prior written permission. Inquiries should be addressed to the publisher, the Australian Institute of Criminology, GPO Box 2944, Canberra ACT 2601.

## **Crime and Older People, ISBN 0 642 22739 X**

### **Creating Safer Communities with the Elderly**

Miss Karena Shannon  
Coordinator  
Christchurch Safer Community Council  
New Zealand

Gladys M. Goodall  
APWC/Age Concern Representative CSCC Delegate.

#### **Background to the Christchurch Safer Community Council (CSCC)**

Having completed a two-year Safer Communities Pilot Program in December 1992, it would seem timely to make some comments about the development of this concept in Christchurch. When we began in 1990 we were agreed that while crime/the effects of crime/fear of crime touched all of us, we were still in the mind set that Police and Justice Departments had the major responsibility for addressing this problem. We had (unconsciously in the main) handed over responsibility for individual and community safety. For the purposes of this paper we will use the term community to mean a body of people living in one place.

The Safer Community approach is founded on the belief that when communities begin to own the problems of crime they will be motivated to find solutions or ways of minimising the effects of crime. The primary role of the Safer Community Council (SCC) is to develop an effective partnership between Central/Local government and Community

groups, whose focus is to identify areas of need, plan local strategies and in turn coordinate and target resources to address these. The Safer Community concept has a much broader base than crime prevention.

The full Christchurch Safer Community Council was in place by December 1990 and there has been a fairly stable representation over the 2-year Pilot Programme. With limited time and resources Christchurch agreed to focus on Women, Elderly and Youth in Christchurch South - population approximately 50 000. The CSCC incorporated the concerns of all three of these groups into its planning process.

In order to establish a representative Safer Community Council we sought nominations from the community for our focus groups/area. We defined Elderly as 60+ while acknowledging this was an arbitrary measure.

The CSCC accepts the fact that fear of crime amongst the elderly is disproportionate to their level of victimisation. One of the major challenges facing all of us who work in this area is to reduce this unrealistic fear of crime.

*As the Department of Justice (1986) said;*

*"Fear of crime may...be paralysing individuals and communities almost as much as violent crime itself, causing them to become isolated or fragmented and resulting in inner city streets being progressively deserted by all but the criminal element.*

*One way of addressing the widespread fear of crime, of course, is to reduce the volume of crime itself. However, as we have seen, fear is not directly related to the incidence of victimisation, and there are compelling grounds for arguing that fear reduction ought to be an independent objective of social policy. (Robinson, Young & Haslett 1989).*

The CSCC supports the premise that "Communities, by definition are safe" and we are developing strategies to nurture this sense of community. The essence of community is concern with common interests and the CSCC is working to promote safe and healthy communities. We aim to enhance feelings of individual and community safety by increasing a sense of belonging and well-being.

Having identified the elderly as a focus group, the CSCC sought the assistance of Age Concern (Canterbury), in the nomination of a representative for our Council. 85-year-old Gladys Goodall's contributions and commitment in this area have proved her to be a wise choice. Mrs Goodall began by surveying all Senior Citizens Groups operating in the focus area. A report, summarising their safety concerns was subsequently tabled (*see* Appendix 1). Much to the surprise of the younger CSCC members the issues raised did not relate so much to crime and violence as to everyday problems on their local streets for example, street lighting, footpath repair, pedestrian crossing locations, dogs and inconsiderate use of cycles and skateboards.

Older people frequently spend more time in their communities than younger people and they are often very aware of what's happening. Since people walking on the streets informally police them, the challenge to SCCs is to ensure the maximum usage of these neighbourhood streets by the elderly.

The learning for the CSCC in this process of consultation was that these everyday problems (at worst an annoyance to most younger community members), can prove to be an enormous threat to many elderly people. Falling or being knocked over has far worse consequences for an older person for example, broken legs or hips very often result in a permanent loss of independence, mobility and subsequent quality of life. The findings of a later Safety Audit undertaken by the CSCC supported Mrs Goodall's report.

The CSCC can play an important role in advocating on behalf of the Elderly in matters that are the business of the local authority. We have a general brief to be concerned about safety issues for the elderly. Mrs Goodall has demonstrated how important it is to have the contributions from the elderly themselves. Too often they are forgotten when we assume we know what is best for them.

One of the CSCC's roles in helping to resolve the issues raised was that of advocate with appropriate partner organisations and groups e.g. schools, City Council Road Safety Committee etc. Our task was to support and coordinate the response. We also recognised the ongoing need to raise awareness of these issues in the wider community. To this end we were successful in getting funding through a Community Organisation Grant Scheme which we used to develop a video resource focusing on elderly safety issues. It is designed as a discussion starter for the elderly in the first instance but also for a wide range of community groups. Through this discussion we hope the elderly will be encouraged to support one another in speaking up about these concerns to the appropriate authorities. We believe that empowerment of the elderly is all about them being self-determining, having a voice, and being able to feel that they can feed into the planning processes of the local authority thereby influencing the decisions that enhance their own safety.

## **Conclusion**

The CSCC rejects the notion that we can assume that if the elderly are out of sight they are out of mind. Our programme is predicated in the idea that it is important to operate on a policy of inclusion - to make the elderly more visible as part of the community, and more self-determining where that is possible.

Creating Safer Communities with the Elderly presents a far greater and ultimately more rewarding challenge than simply focusing on Crime and Older People. The CSCC's goal

is to raise awareness not only of the issues but of positive responses thereby empowering a section of the community that are frequently perceived as victims.

While the danger is to ignore the often mundane everyday issues, these concerns are very real for the elderly. When overlooked or trivialised, feelings of fear, powerlessness and isolation increase. This is the beginning of victimisation of the elderly.

### **References**

Peggy G. Koopman-Boyden 1988, "Perspectives on the Elderly in New Zealand" - Papers in Vol. IV (Social Perspectives) Report of the Royal Commission on Social Policy, April.

Robinson, Young and Haslett 1989, "Surveying Crime" - Study Series 5, Institute of Criminology, Victoria University, Wellington, 1989.

### **Acknowledgment:**

Colin Hicks  
Manager, Crime Prevention Administration Unit  
Dept of Justice, Wellington.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Canterbury Aged People's Welfare Council (Inc) Age Concern**

### **Christchurch Safer Community Council, Project No. 1, June 1991**

#### **Elderly**

Seven Senior Citizens Clubs were addressed to ascertain whether our elderly citizens in the Sydenham Electorate have any concerns which the CSCC could address, correct or improve during our 2-year term of office.

The clubs had the following comments to make:

1. St Mary's Senior Citizens Club, Halswell
  - a. The Halswell five-road junction needs a round-about or traffic lights.
  - b. There is difficulty getting over Sparks Road to the Post Office.
  - c. There are problems with large trucks coming at speed from the Halswell Quarries.
  - d. The elderly have difficulty getting to the Library on the corner of Sparks and Halswell Roads. At night tree branches blot out the light, making the approach to the library dangerous after dark.
  - e. Skateboarders make a visit to the Post Office hazardous for slow, infirm residents.
  - f. Children are abusive, use filthy language and threaten the elderly, especially outside the video parlour.
  - g. Dogs foul pensioner flats gardens, in fact one man deliberately took his dog right onto a pensioner's garden to urinate and defaecate. He said he paid for the pensioner to live there and it was his right to use the garden at will.

2. Opawa Senior Citizens Club.

- a. There was considerable alarm about the closing of Ensors Road crossing. This is the main route from St Martins to New Brighton and Linwood, and closure would cut off access by pensioners to their families.
- b. The elderly would like better lighting in the subway under the motorway.
- c. Other complaints include dogs fouling two streets, letter boxes and fences being pushed over and insufficient facilities for letter posting.

3. West Spreydon Senior Citizens Club.

- a. Roberta Drive: Trees reduce the light available. The street is in poor repair.
- b. Rose Street: Trees hang over footpaths, reduce light and obstruct pedestrians.
- c. The footpaths are unsafe in the vicinity of Spreydon, Manning and Hillmorten schools. Students arriving at the three schools in the morning and leaving in the afternoon make the footpaths unsafe.
- d. At Dundee Place pensioner flats, the children use their private footpaths nearly knocking them over making it unsafe in their allotted area. Children use abusive language and generally threaten infirm residents. Skateboards are a big problem, especially when towing another child. Recently, one overbalanced and fell under an incoming car. Dog pollution is a problem.

4. Sydenham Friendship Club.

- a. There were many complaints that a phase of twenty seconds is too short for infirm people to cross from the Caltex Station to the old Sydenham Post Office.
- b. Cyclists use the footpaths as of right, to and from schools and leave their bicycles lying on the street, a big hazard for those with impaired sight.
- c. A pedestrian crossing is needed from Waltham Arms Hotel to Durham Street.

5. St Martins Friendship Club.
  - a. There were complaints of dogs fouling gardens and footpaths.
  - b. Cyclists on footpaths create hazards for elderly people.
  - c. Complaints from residents about a pensioner living in Cresselly Place having five cats which upsets other residents.
  
6. Christchurch Sunshine Club.
  - a. More complaints about dogs fouling footpaths, children riding bicycles on footpaths and skateboards on footpaths.
  - b. In Simeon Street roots present a hazard to pedestrians, in fact all of Spreydon has poor footpaths. Gutters are not cleaned and complaints made to the City Council are ignored.
  - c. Pensioner cottages at 5 Andrews Crescent do not have outside porch lights which causes fear at night for residents.
  - d. On Lincoln Road there is a need for a pedestrian crossing for the residents of 40 pensioner flats wanting to catch a bus.
  - e. There were complaints about shopping trolleys and bicycles blocking footpaths at Frankleigh and Barrington Street. Children and adults are being abusive to the elderly and skateboards bar pedestrians in many areas, especially near Pioneer Stadium.
  
7. Beckenham Friendship Club.
  - a. There were complaints about dogs roving in and out of properties, fouling gardens and footpaths. Outside 10 Sandwich Road, a dog owner deliberately brings his dog to foul the footpath every day, obviously to upset the resident who protested about this practice. He could use the riverbank but refuses.

- b. There are other complaints about bicycles ridden by children on the streets as well as skateboards and advertising material being hazardous to the blind and partially sighted.
- c. Skateboards on the overhead bridge off Moorhouse Avenue have overbalanced and fallen under cars. They need to be stopped for their own safety.

8. Summary.

- 1. There is verbal abuse of the elderly by children and sometimes by adults.
- 2. Skateboards were a danger to pedestrians of all ages.
- 3. Bicycles are being ridden on streets and left lying anywhere unsafe.
- 4. Dogs foul properties, streets and parks.
- 5. Overhanging branches on streets interfere with street lighting.
- 6. Street maintenance is not up to standard in some areas.
- 7. More pedestrian crossings are needed in high traffic density areas.

**Updated Report on the Elderly  
Gladys Goodall  
CSCC Elderly Representative  
May 1992.**

**Background**

A survey was carried out of Senior Citizens clubs in the Sydenham Electorate during May 1991 addressing safety issues as they related to the elderly in South Christchurch. This report was tabled at the 4 July 1991 meeting of the Christchurch Safer Community Council (CSCC).

**Results**

I attended a meeting at Beckenham Service Centre to confer with Nick Chapman (Centre Manager) and Brent Ferigo (Community Activities Officer, Beckenham Service Centre) to address questions of street maintenance, lighting, problem trees, cycle and skateboard use on the streets.

A meeting was set up by Karena Shannon (Coordinator, CSCC) inviting representatives from the two High Schools and the two Intermediate Schools in the area, Susan Cambridge (Road Safety Council Coordinator) and Brent Ferigo.

This was followed up by meetings on 2 October and 6 November 1991, and 26 February 1992, to address the problems of skateboards and cycle safety management.

Susan Cambridge has excellent rapport with schools on cycle safety promotion and with City Council Engineers who have now designed a new type of cycle stand which will take both narrow and wide cycle wheels. This will encourage cyclists to use stands and assist freedom of movement on the streets for the elderly.

Jan McLauchlan, our CSCC Community Support Group Coordinator, has approached the owners of 4 Dairies which were identified as the main shop corners where cycles on

footpaths are a problem. These shopkeepers have been cooperative in discussions about the use of cycle stands. They are prepared to give spot prizes, provided by CSCC, for good efforts by children in using stands.

*Reference to each club visited*

1. Halswell - St Mary's Senior Citizens club.

A roundabout is programmed to go ahead in 1992/93. An island has been cut out in the meantime to curb fast traffic. Traffic Officers were advised of complaints about speeding trucks - these were found to be a low number.

Security lighting has been installed at the library car park and trees have been cut back at the front to improve lighting.

A residents group has been formed to combat abuse of the elderly by youths and school children. Dog control - the City Council has limited resources to handle this and residents have been advised to use Neighbourhood Watch.

2. Opawa Senior Citizens Club.

(Reference, Harold Thomas, Technical Officer).

Ensors Road crossing - a subway has been built with good lighting. Residents are asked to report missing lights.

3. West Spreydon Senior Citizens Club.

(Reference, Chris Kerr, Roading Department Programme Officer).

a) Roberta Drive - survey is complete, work is underway.

b) Rose Street - being upgraded at the present time.

c) Unsafe footpaths - Spreydon, Manning and Hillmorton Schools. Teachers stand at the school gates during the arrival and departure times of pupils. They do not supervise outside the grounds. Elderly people should avoid use of the streets at these times.

(Reference, Ken Murray, local MOT Officer 13.08.91).

Ken liaises with schools in a supervisory role on school pupils behaviour during arrival and departure times at school.

d) Dundee Place - fencing of cottages is being considered.

4. Sydenham Friendship Club.

a) Brougham St. crossing - Traffic Officers checked this out and found it to be satisfactory. They met with pensioners from the cottages at Sydenham Park and explained what the signal times meant. The residents now understand their usage. The information is to be corrected.

5. St Martins Friendship Club.

c) Five cats in a pensioner cottage - the Welfare has the situation in hand, eviction is possible.

6. Christchurch South Sunshine Club.

b) Simeon Street - Sam Hardwick, Tree Operation Officer, requires the address where tree roots are a problem and what the problem is with the trees before action can be taken. Generally only the worst bits will be done. Marie Watson will advise.

c) Re 5 Andrews Crescent, there is a motion on file that a car park be installed which will improve security for residents.

d) Lincoln Road - a pedestrian crossing has been requested for 40 pensioner flats, a pedestrian refuge may also be considered, to allow easy access to the bus stop. Shopkeepers have objected to the loss of a car park. Mike Thomson, Roading Officer,

surveyed it and found very few people used it. The request was declined because of the heavy traffic hazard.

e) Cycle parks are being worked on.

7. Beckenham Friendship Club.

a) Complaints about dogs - suggest residents write to Mayor or City Manager.

b) Sandwich advertising boards - Council has action under way.

Skateboards.

Together Brent Ferigo and I interviewed 32 pensioners in their cottages at Sydenham Park, on 24 April 1992, to ascertain whether a skateboard bowl was acceptable if placed near the new Tennis Pavilion. Although 75 per cent were agreeable, an interested party later secured many signatures for a petition of protest against the proposal. \$25 000 is available for this project which is now being considered for Waltham/Waltham School grounds.

The Spreydon/Heathcote Community Board have resolved to upgrade Hoon Hay Park facilities. \$15 000 is available now and more will be available for the south-east area in the 1992-93 budget.

Hagley/Ferrymead Board have resolved to put the Skateboard bowl in Waltham Park. These facilities will reduce the skateboard problem on footpaths for pedestrians.

*Safety Video*

The CSCC has been successful in obtaining \$5 000 from a COGS grant to make a video focusing on issues of Safety for the Elderly. CTV have agreed to carry out the technical work and a small planning sub-committee will be formed including the CSCC Coordinator, Mike Kyne (Christchurch Police), Community Support Group Coordinator and myself to consult re the content and distribution. It is possible that we may sell this

product nationally at a later date. I have tentatively discussed this project with Sally Timms from the Aged Peoples Welfare Council (APWC), who is supportive of this initiative.

I am concerned about the lack of work being done in the area of dog pollution. The dog population, particularly the larger breeds, is growing at an alarming rate. I consider this problem is beyond the resources of Neighbourhood Support Groups and recommend that a coordinated effort will produce the most effective results.

I must emphasise that the progress achieved in the areas discussed has been made possible by the consistent assistance received from Sally Timms (APWC), Brent Ferigo and the CSCC Coordinators.