

# “We’re not Batman” – Roles and Expectations of Local Government Community Safety Officers in New South Wales

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- › Dr Murray Lee and Associate Professor Thomas Crofts (Sydney Institute of Criminology) collaborators in this exploratory study
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- › There is now a well established body of research and practice highlighting the shift to, and capacities of, local government as a critical agent in the delivery of crime prevention (Hastings and Melchers, 1990; Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994; Crawford 1997; Qld Criminal Justice Commission 1999; Shaw 2001; Sutton and Cherney 2002; Council of Europe, 2002; UNODC 2004; Cherney 2004a; Cherney 2004b; Leonard et al, 2005; Homel 2005; Anderson and Homel 2005; Cherney 2006; Cherney and Sutton 2007; UN Habitat 2007; Sutton et al 2008; Homel 2009; Shaw 2009; UNODC 2010).
  
- › Multiple explanations for this trend:
  - ‘Local solutions to local problems’
  - Government to governance
  - Principles of subsidiarity
  - Counter ‘penal populism’
  
- › Despite CSOs assuming a central role in these activities, very little has been written about their work (especially in NSW)

› Two key data sources:

1. Focus group with 13 NSW Local Government CSOs in November 2011

- Convenience or purposive sample – invitations extended through the NSW Local Government Community Safety and Crime Prevention Network and held directly after a Network meeting to facilitate attendance
- Focus group questions:
  - What do CSOs do?
  - What makes the role effective?
  - How do CSOs measure effectiveness and outcomes of their work?
  - What could be done to improve the effectiveness and outcomes of CSO work?
- A focus group interview was chosen to provide opportunities for CSOs to share their insights and to build on answers provided by their colleagues during the focus group. As noted by Hall, focus groups provide “rich textual data containing information from interaction among participants ... Often such interaction produces new ideas or novel ways of thinking about the issue that would not have arisen from the conduct of interviews” (2008: 203).

2. Review of 10 CSO job descriptions

## Key Findings – Tenure and Experience

- › Of the 13 focus group participants, 7 were females and 6 were males
- › All 13 focus group participants had post-secondary school qualifications (11 had bachelor or masters degrees)
- › 11 had permanent tenure
- › 4 had duties other than community safety / crime prevention
- › Experience or time in the role varied significantly with the average being 3 years and 4 months (range: 3 months to 13 years)

- 16 different job titles (\*indicates repeated more than once)
  - a) Coordinator Social Planning and Social Policy
  - b) Senior Project Coordinator, Safe City
  - c) Community Crime Prevention Officer
  - d) Community Safety Field Officer
  - e) Community Safety and Crime Prevention Officer\*
  - f) Youth and Community Safety Officer
  - g) Community Safety and Projects Officer
  - h) Youth Programs and Community Safety Officer
  - i) Community Safety and Public Education Officer
  - j) Community Safety Coordinator\*
  - k) Community Safety and Development Officer
  - l) Community Safety Officer\*
  - m) Community Development Officer – Community Safety and Crime Prevention
  - n) Youth Crime Prevention Project Officer
  - o) Crime Prevention Officer
  - p) Community Development Worker – Community Safety

Cherney (2004a) noted that crime prevention/community safety practitioners in his research in Victoria preferred the use of the term 'community safety' to describe their work and were 'reluctant to categorise their work as simply or primarily to do with crime prevention' (2004a: 117). A similar tendency appears from this list of job titles, with 'community safety' more frequently used than 'crime prevention'.

- Reside within different Council units:
  - a) Public Domain and Amenity
  - b) Recreation, Customer and Community Services
  - c) Corporate Services / Community Services
  - d) Community Services
  - e) Community Development and Services Unit\*
  - f) Community Development\*
  - g) Community Services
- \* Indicates repeated more than once
- › “... what’s interesting when you listen around the room is a lot of **what people do around the room depends on where they sit in the organisation as in what area**. A lot of the people in this room are sitting within the sort of community services, and they tend to be more project orientated. I don’t touch any of that sort of stuff in my role, I don’t have anything to do with the youth programs which is all ... done by a community capacity building team. So I tend to be more involved in very specific stuff”.

## Key Findings - Responsibilities

- › Develop a crime prevention plan and then manage the projects that arise out of the plan
- › Oversee crime prevention projects
- › Project management, planning and policy roles
- › Manage grant projects (in some cases this means managing funding given from council to external agencies)
- › Coordinate domestic violence projects
- › Management of sex services and associated intelligence
- › Work on projects funded by state and federal Attorney-Generals departments
- › Early intervention – alternative school program for at-risk young people aged between 10 and 15 years
- › Inter-agency committee responsibilities:
  - Liaison between council and police
  - Attend Crime Prevention Partnerships
  - Convene safety/crime prevention committees/partnerships
  - Participate in Beats Working Party
  - Provide secretariat support to safety/crime prevention committee/partnership
- › Provide public education
- › Community development and engagement
- › Review development applications (DAs) for crime risks
- › Contribute to major urban re-development projects – crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) focus
- › Graffiti management plan
- › CCTV and conduct lighting audits
- › Building security for council premises
- › Liquor accords
- › Manage alcohol free zones and alcohol prohibited areas
- › Social Impact Assessments (associated with licensed venues)
- › Assume responsibilities for crime prevention features of major events in the area
- › Be the council representative at major community events
- › Respond to complaints by residents and elected officials



- › Bailey (2003) noted in her analysis of CSOs in England and Wales, that “it is quite clear that the role expectation of a CSOs can encompass just about anything” and that the “role is one that has huge expectations, immense demands and no clear boundaries of where responsibilities begin or end” (2003: 32). One of the focus group participants made a similar observation in relation to the CSO role in NSW:

“I get a perception from particularly talking to the community that they seem to think that we’re Batman. They ring us up instead of the police, and I always tell them if there is a problem the first port of call is the police. We’re not Batman”.

## Key Findings – Enhancing Effectiveness

- › Greater need for human service agencies (generally State government organisations) to contribute to crime prevention:
  - “... I’d like to see more support from the human services agency and perhaps Education or DoCS or someone like that. I think we also need a partnership model that we all develop ourselves and are accountable to so that we actually at a project inception agree on how we can be accountable to each other up front. These models exist overseas and we ourselves have to get better at documenting it and publishing our own experience”.
- › The establishment of the NSW Local Government Community Safety and Crime Prevention Network was acknowledged as providing an important role and aiding professional development:
  - “One of the things that I would say this Network has the capacity to do, to make our roles more effective is to I guess encourage more of this sort of ... less formal meeting, not so much using the meeting as an opportunity to get a speaker in and to go through the minutes, but this opportunity to touch base with each other, to share with each other, to find out what’s going on ... to be able to say I’ve been told I have to do a CCTV project and I’ve got no idea where to start, what’s the first thing to do? What should I do? So that’s one side of it is an ability for us to learn from each other”.

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# Thank You

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