



The Safer Communities Approach

The Safer Communities Approach

What is a Safe Community?

The defining feature of a safe community is the ability of all of its citizens - regardless of gender, race, age, income, sexuality, language or ability - to participate fully and freely in all of its environments. This requires that citizens both feel, and are, safe and that they have meaningful opportunities to participate in local decision-making processes.

Safety has many different meanings for different people, depending on who we are and what our personal, economic and social circumstances are.

Communities from around British Columbia have offered many examples, including:

- A safe community is one where we feel safe
- A safe community is one where we feel safe out in public, both day and night
- In a safe community, women, children, seniors and other vulnerable people would finally be safe from violence and abuse from the people they know as well as from strangers
- A safe community is a vibrant and diverse community
- A safe community is accessible
- A safe community has good services and infrastructure
- A safe community has adequate housing for all
- In a safe community our work places are free from violence and harassment
- A safe community is one where everyone is valued and there is no discrimination
- In a safe community, all resources – human, physical and social – would be freed up for more productive uses

How can we achieve our goals for safer communities?

- Crime and victimization are the visible results of problems. The challenge is to address the *root issues*, and increase or support the factors that offset the causes of violence.
- This means working to reduce risks for offending AND address the vulnerability of individuals and neighbourhoods.
- This approach recognizes the critical importance of prevention, and the need to address factors of economic, political, and social inequality that lie at the root of crime, victimization and fear.

THE SAFER COMMUNITIES APPROACH

The Safer Communities Approach

The safer communities approach enables us to effectively address the complex nature of personal security issues through integrating a range of physical, social **and** institutional measures.

This approach recognizes that:

- ☐ the community is the focal point of effective crime prevention;
- ☐ the community needs to identify and respond to both short and long term needs;
- ☐ efforts should bring together individuals from a range of sectors to tackle crime;
- ☐ strategies for preventing crime should be supported by the whole community; and
- ☐ inclusion of gender is necessary for a full analysis of crime, fear and victimization.

This approach :

- Is based on an understanding of both the *physical* and *social* obstacles to safety
- Requires a combination of immediate community-based prevention measures AND broad-based long term preventative strategies
- Includes BOTH planning and community development improvements
- Requires ongoing consideration of community safety and social development in decision-making processes.

Working for Safer Communities

It is essential that the work for building safer communities is carried out at the local level, and be guided by a collaborative community-based process. Local governments are uniquely placed to provide the leadership necessary for a sustainable, integrated community safety strategy that addresses women's personal security issues.

Indeed, all across Canada, local governments are increasingly recognizing that community safety is a fundamental quality of life issue - a safe community is a livable community, a healthy community, and an economically viable community.

Building and maintaining safer communities for women is a process that requires:

- ⇒ solid leadership and a partnership effort involving the whole community;
- ⇒ meaningful community involvement that highlights the perspective of those most vulnerable to violence;
- ⇒ a comprehensive process of inquiring about needs and issues;
- ⇒ safety audits of community environments; and
- ⇒ an integrated strategy with supporting processes and mechanisms for implementing solutions.

A strong partnership between local government and the community is key to the development of an integrated community safety strategy that addresses women's safety concerns.

Local government is in an ideal position to provide leadership and structure in this area.

Municipalities are the closest level of government to the citizen, so they are in the best position to work with local groups to establish effective community-based programs.

Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2000