

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Lake Macquarie City Council

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Mr Edmond Atalla MP
Chair, Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie St, SYDNEY 2000

Submitted via portal

Subject: Submission – Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

Lake Macquarie City Council (Council) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the parliamentary inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities. Council staff have prepared this submission, which includes insights from research undertaken into community safety issues in one locality in our city.

Lake Macquarie is one of the largest regional councils in NSW by population, with 220,000 residents. The city comprises more than 90 suburbs, towns and economic centres encircling one of Australia's largest saltwater lakes.

In 2017, the Department of Communities and Justice commenced re-alignment of community-based programs under the Targeted Early Intervention reforms, which effectively reduced the provision of broad-based, front facing, soft entry programs for young people to narrow the focus on 'child protection'. This change has had a significant impact on the capacity of youth sector organisations to engage with young people to prevent disconnection with education and community.

Over the same period in Lake Macquarie, NSW Police reduced relevant staff levels from six community and youth focused officers (two school liaison officers, three youth officers based in two local PCYCs and one youth liaison officer) to two positions – continuing the youth liaison officer role and one youth officer based across the area for PCYCs. The reduction of community-based policing in the area has severely affected the capacity of local police to engage with young people to prevent their involvement in anti-social behaviour and crime.

These two significant changes have contributed to a reduction in support for young people to explore social interaction and relationships in positive and supervised/ unstructured social environments. Young people have increasingly been left to find their own way without the support of qualified youth workers and other professionals.

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Subsequently, there has been a significant increase in rates of involvement of young people in anti-social behaviour and crime in the Lake Macquarie area when compared to NSW:

- Over a four-year period from January 2020 to December 2023, the involvement of juveniles in break and enter offences increased by 385 per cent (from eight incidents to 32).
- The increase for the same period for the juvenile involvement in theft of vehicles increased by 750 per cent (from seven incidents to 53) .
- Over the past three years, the rate of juvenile involvement in theft from retail stores has increased by 175 per cent (from 43 incidents to 76).
- For the same period, the incidence of intimidation, stalking and harassment has increased by approximately 10 per cent (from 63 incidents to 70).¹

Another concerning development was the announcement by Department of Communities and Justice in early 2024 to cease endorsement and resourcing of Local Government Crime Prevention Strategies. This decision adversely affects the ability and capacity of local government to be involved in the identification and reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour. It has removed a vital opportunity for local government to assist the State Government with the identification and provision of evidence-based programs to address areas of crime in local communities. Local government organisations have close links to community at the grassroots level, which provides councils with a unique opportunity to work with communities to improve social cohesion, particularly in communities where the involvement of children and young people in anti-social behaviour and crime has increased in recent years as indicated by research and confirmed by BOCSAR data.

In 2022, Lake Macquarie City Council worked with the University of Newcastle (UoN) to conduct research into the causes of anti-social behaviour and crime in Charlestown, which is the city's largest shopping and recreation precinct. The collaboration resulted in a substantial report about the nature and causes of anti-social behaviour and crime, *Reducing anti-social behaviour at Charlestown Square 2022*. Charlestown Square is the region's major shopping and retail precinct. Council identified a range of behaviours occurring in the precinct including nuisance behaviour, consorting, vandalism, theft, physical violence, and drug taking and dealing. The report addresses the nature and extent of anti-social behaviour in the area, investigates the key causes and drivers and makes recommendations about short and long term actions that could be taken to effect positive change.

¹ (<https://crimetool.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/bocsar/> viewed on 27 May 2024).

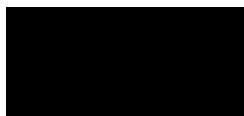
A key finding of the report is that boredom is a major driver of anti-social behaviour among young people and this, coupled with the rise in the use of social media to gain peer gratification, is creating a new level of risk to the management of shopping centres and public recreational precincts. While the research focused on the situation in Charlestown, the types of behaviour identified in the report are increasingly common to other areas as well. The increase in malicious damage to both public and private infrastructure in town centres and high-profile locations during and since 2019 has been significant and notable. As an example, repair of malicious damage to public infrastructure (public toilets, recreation facilities, children's playgrounds) has cost over \$100,000 in the past three years. Local shopping centres have reported a significant increase in malicious damage to similar infrastructure within their centres over the past three to four years.

The UoN report found the most effective approach to addressing the rise in anti-social behaviour among young people was to adopt a 'holistic, community based' approach that 'involves young people directly' (UoN 2022, p7). It recommends a combination of initiatives targeting positive engagement with and sustained involvement of young people.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback to this inquiry. A copy of the UoN research report is included with this submission.

Should you require further information about matters raised in this submission, please contact Manager Community Partnerships Andrew Bryant on [REDACTED] or via email on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,



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Reducing anti-social behaviour at Charlestown Square

Final Report

Prepared for Lake Macquarie City Council



June 2022

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. OVERVIEW

Charlestown Square, within the Charlestown precinct located in the north-east of Lake Macquarie, is the region's major shopping and retail precinct. The Shopping Centre itself is operated by the GTP group and comprises retail, personal services (i.e., gym, nail salon, hairdresser), and food and beverage outlets. Several public and community services border the centre including a sports ground, skate park, community centre, youth services and a junior soccer club.

Lake Macquarie City Council (LMCC) has identified a range of behaviours occurring in the precinct including nuisance behaviour, consorting, vandalism, theft, physical violence, and drug taking and dealing. Young people are considered the main perpetrators of this behaviour. Anti-social behaviour within the Charlestown area impacts various stakeholders within the precinct with spill over effects beyond the immediate vicinity.

As part of Council's efforts to reduce the long-standing issue of anti-social behaviour at Charlestown Square and the surrounding recreational precinct, LMCC commissioned the University of Newcastle to conduct a project that seeks to identify and understand:

1. The nature and extent of anti-social behaviour occurring at Charlestown Square and the surrounding recreational precinct, including the participants, location, timing and frequency of such behaviour
2. The key causes and drivers of the behaviour
3. Priority issues to be addressed, and strategies both immediate and long term that need to be employed to effect positive change.

1.2. KEY FINDINGS

This report makes several key findings including:

- Boredom is a key driver of anti-social behaviour
- The rise of social media in contributing to antisocial behaviour and the desire for peer gratification
- Charlestown Square is conveniently located, easily accessible, inexpensive and central meeting place for young people
- The layout of Charlestown Square, its range of youth-targeted stores, and proximity to public transport, Skate Park and Oval makes the precinct an attractive social hub for young people
- The greatest incidence of anti-social behaviour occurs in the South Piazza, both at the upper area, (which includes restaurants, entertainment venues and facilities and a children's playground and entertainment level), and the lower street level. More antisocial behaviour occurs at the lower street level of the Southern Piazza where young people congregate, but anti-social behaviour occurring in the upper area is still significant.
- There are security limitations throughout the precinct, with GTP security guards not having jurisdiction outside of the perimeter of the Centre (i.e. excluding the skate park and oval areas).
- There are inconsistencies with CCTV monitoring across the precinct. CCTV in the skate park and oval are owned by council and are not monitored on a regular basis.

1.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes a suggested recommendations to address anti-social behaviour at Charlestown Square, and the extended recreational precinct around the centre:

1. Undertake a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment and implement findings
2. Activation of the South Piazza area
3. Establish a Senior Management group (GTP and LMCC) to encourage shared issues and commitment to problem solving
4. Maintain employment of appropriate youth liaison, community organisations and social welfare resources and agencies to facilitate effective, consistent and collaborative engagement with young people
5. Undertake community consultation to understand the perception of shopping centre safety across Lake Macquarie & Newcastle
6. Undertake a review of the effectiveness of current security and policing practices to determine gaps/problem areas and determine when and where anti-social behaviour is visible/hidden and take measures to address the gaps and problem areas. Formation of a reference group of Councils/shopping centres in the region to share common problems, solutions and learnings
7. Clearly define and separate the roles of Security Guards and Youth Liaison Officers
8. Retain additional police patrols (Thursday late night shopping)
9. Encourage stores experiencing issues to take greater responsibility in addressing problems (e.g., Rebel Sports)
10. Work with Youth Liaison Officers and schools to reduce the attractiveness of improper social media use amongst young people
11. Review existing crime prevention strategies and implement additional measures where required
12. Implement rigorous, independent evaluation and reporting of implemented strategies
13. Implement CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) in future renovations/refurbishments at Charlestown Square
14. Introduce structural changes (designing out crime strategies) to the design of Charlestown Square and surrounding recreational precinct to reduce opportunities for anti-social behaviour that emerge within the environment.

2. Introduction

2.1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Charlestown Square, within the Charlestown precinct located in the north-east of Lake Macquarie, is the region's major shopping and retail precinct. The Shopping Centre itself is operated by the GTP group and comprises retail, personal services (i.e., gym, nail salon, hairdresser), and food and beverage outlets. Several public and community services border the centre including a sports ground, skate park, community centre, youth services and a junior soccer club.

Lake Macquarie City Council (LMCC) has identified a range of behaviours occurring in the precinct

including nuisance behaviour, consorting, vandalism, theft, physical violence, and drug taking and dealing. Young people are considered the main perpetrators of this behaviour. Anti-social behaviour within the Charlestown area impacts various stakeholders within the precinct with spill over effects beyond the immediate vicinity.

A stakeholder group, established in 2014, has been working to address the long-standing issue of anti-social behaviour at the Charlestown precinct, with particular focus afforded to Charlestown Square. The group comprises LMCC, NSW Police, Shopping Centre Management, local business, community service organisations, and Transport for NSW. A range of approaches to address the issue have been trialled and have achieved positive outcomes, however the stakeholder group is seeking new and innovative solutions to achieve a sustained reduction in anti-social behaviour.

2.2. THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

Anti-social behaviour, defined in this report as ‘any behaviour that disturbs, annoys or interferes with a person’s ability to go about their lawful business’,¹ has been identified as a problem within the Charlestown precinct, specifically within Charlestown Square, for disrupting business practices and tainting the family friendly nature of the shopping centre. Young people are the main perpetrators of anti-social behaviours and so a variety of immediate, intermediate and long-term recommendations have been offered as potential solutions for achieving a sustained reduction in anti-social behaviour.

As part of Lake Macquarie City Council’s efforts to reduce the long-standing issue of anti-social behaviour at Charlestown Square, Council commissioned the University of Newcastle to conduct a project that seeks to identify and understand:

- The nature and extent of anti-social behaviour occurring at Charlestown Square, including the participants, location, timing and frequency of such behaviour
- The key causes and drivers of the behaviour
- Priority issues to be addressed, and strategies both immediate and long term that need to be employed to effect positive change..

The purpose of this report, and research, is to provide a unique and unencumbered perspective on the observed issue of anti-social behaviour amongst young people within the Charlestown Square shopping precinct and neighbouring areas. Anti-social behaviour is documented as a problem facing stakeholders, namely GPT Group, ACS, Local NSW Police, retail store owners, The Place Community Centre, shoppers and community members, to which this report identified priority issues to be addressed and suggests range of immediate, intermediate, and longer-term recommendations for establishing solutions which re-engage in a model of sustainable place making.

This report identifies potential solutions that are:

- informed by an understanding of what is driving the behaviour
- specific to the Charlestown Square and surrounding recreational precinct context, built on lessons from elsewhere
- sustainable, and
- achievable within available resources.

¹ WA Police. 2009. Anti-social behaviour reduction strategy. p2.

2.3. DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic profiles for Charlestown and the surrounding suburbs are detailed below.

Charlestown Square is situated within the Lake Macquarie LGA, home to 197,371 residents. The median age of Lake Macquarie is 42 years, with 24,151 10–19-year-olds, and 10,893 20–24-year-olds residing in the LGA. The unemployed population of 6,295 gives Lake Macquarie an unemployment rate comparable to the rest of New South Wales. The Charlestown area, viewed as a state electoral division, itself accounts for a significant portion of Lake Macquarie's population, with 72,039 people calling the area immediately surrounding Charlestown Square home. Of these, a total of 12,991 or 18.1% are aged 10–24.² The Suburb of Charlestown has a population of 12,912, with 5.9% (387 people) of this population unemployed. Of Charlestown's population within its suburb boundaries, 2,121 people are between the ages of 10–24.³

Gateshead, a suburb adjacent to the south of Charlestown has a population of 3,145, where 651 people are between the ages of 10–24. 136, or 11.2% of the local population is unemployed, which is nearly double the national average.⁴

Windale is situated south of Charlestown, within the Lake Macquarie LGA. The suburb is home to 3,358 people, of which 661 are aged 10–24. 174 people residing in Windale have been recorded as been unemployed, accounting for 18.9% of the local population, a much higher percentage than the national average of 6.3% unemployment.⁵

Mount Hutton, which is situated southwest of Charlestown, has a population of 3,529. 571 people are between the ages of 10–24, and the suburb has an unemployment rate of 5.7%, representing 90 people, which is lower than the national unemployment rate.⁶

Kotara, to the north of Charlestown, is comparable as it holds a shopping centre of a similar scale to Charlestown Square. 3,939 people reside in Kotara, with 723 people between the ages of 10–24. 5.1%, or 103 people, were recorded as been unemployed within Kotara.⁷

The towns of Maitland and Branxton have been identified as places where some of the young people who frequent Charlestown, reside. Maitland has a population of 78,015, with 2,842 people recorded as unemployed. 14,954 people were between the ages of 10–24.⁸ In Branxton, out of a population of 1,991, 397 were between the ages of 10–24, and a recorded 53 people were unemployed, lower than the national average at 5.3%.⁹

The areas surrounding Charlestown Square are characterised by a high population of young people, generally higher than average unemployment rates, and lower in socio-economic status.

The Charlestown Square precinct is a central hub for Lake Macquarie and, with one of the most popular bus interchanges in the Newcastle Transport area it is a convenient, easily accessible, inexpensive and central meeting place for young people.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census QuickStats:

https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SED10018?opendocument

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census QuickStats; [https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/SSC10885#:~:text=In%20the%202016%20Census%2C%20there,up%202.3%25%20of%20the%20population.&text=The%20median%20age%20of%20people,\(NSW\)%20was%2038%20years](https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/SSC10885#:~:text=In%20the%202016%20Census%2C%20there,up%202.3%25%20of%20the%20population.&text=The%20median%20age%20of%20people,(NSW)%20was%2038%20years).

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census QuickStats; <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/SSC11594#:~:text=In%20the%202016%20Census%2C%20there,up%209.7%25%20of%20the%20population.&text=The%20median%20age%20of%20people%20in%20Gateshead%20was%2035%20years>.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census QuickStats; <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/SSC14315>

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census QuickStats; <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/SSC12766>

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census QuickStats; <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/SSC12200>

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census QuickStats; <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/UCL111002>

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census QuickStats; <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2016/SSC10549>

2.4. METHODOLOGY

The specific causes and drivers of the current anti-social behaviour at Charlestown Square and the surrounding recreational precinct are difficult to pin down neatly. Literature suggests, however, that risk factors for young people can include personal characteristics (impulsiveness, risk-taking, drug and alcohol use), family traits (conflict, lack of supervision), school (bullying, low academic achievement), peers (mixing with the 'wrong crowd', peer rejection), and community (exposure to crime, lack of support services). Mixed in with these risk factors has been the emergence of social media as a driver of anti-social behaviour for the notoriety it offers young people. Often fights, thefts and other acts considered anti-social are committed by young people, which are filmed and uploaded digitally to gain attention and support within virtual spaces.

To build a foundation for research, and to understand the situation at Charlestown Square and the surrounding recreational precinct with better clarity, the following methodology was applied:

- A review of data, literature and approaches relating to local community attitudes towards safety, risk factors and drivers for anti-social behaviours amongst young people in public spaces, and lessons learned from interventions implemented locally and elsewhere
- Semi-structured interviews with 6 key stakeholders to understand the extent and nature of antisocial behaviour at Charlestown Square and the surrounding recreational precinct, and strategies that have been developed to target such behaviour
- Direct observations to understand and assess the nature and extent of anti-social behaviour occurring at Charlestown Square and the surrounding recreational precinct (who is participating in the behaviour, where, when, and how often it occurs) and identify patterns in behaviour of young people that frequent the area.

3. Key Findings

3.1. LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

A view consistent amongst anti-social behaviour literature is that there is no single definition of anti-social behaviour. The term anti-social behaviour incorporates a wide range of behaviours from minor, offensive or harmful acts, to more serious criminal activity. A popular definition of anti-social behaviour is 'any behaviour that disturbs, annoys or interferes with a person's ability to go about their lawful business',¹⁰ which in the context of Charlestown Square includes behaviour which prevent people from shopping or feeling safe while doing so. Anti-social behaviour covers both illegal activities, and activities that while legal are regarded as socially disruptive and a nuisance.

Anti-social behaviour is a problem in many communities in Australia and overseas, and there is evidence of a growing public perception that crime and anti-social behaviour, particularly among young people, is becoming worse.¹¹ Young people (or youth) are defined as individuals aged between 12 and 25.¹²

Anti-social behaviour is an emotive issue, and is concerning for government, non-government organisations, businesses, communities, families and individuals for several reasons:¹³

¹⁰ WA Police. 2009. Anti-social behaviour reduction strategy. p2.

¹¹ Roberts L & Indermaur D. 2009. What Australians think about crime and justice: results from the 2007 survey of social attitudes. Research and public policy series no. 101. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

¹² Morris L, Sallybanks J, & Willis K. 2003. Sport, Physical Activity and Antisocial Behaviour in Youth. Public Policy Series no 49. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

¹³ McAtamney A & Morgan A. 2009. Key issues in antisocial behaviour. Research in practice no. 5. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

- Anti-social behaviour can have a negative impact on community perceptions of safety, and people's quality of life through damaging public confidence and increasing fear of crime, which, can in turn disempower local communities and contribute to rising crime and urban decay¹⁴
- Anti-social behaviour threatens the establishment and maintenance of a safe and secure community, which is an important prerequisite for community wellbeing and cohesion as well as sound economic growth through continuing business activity and investment
- Individuals who engage in anti-social behaviour risk becoming excluded from important support mechanisms such as school, their families and service providers. They also risk encounters with the criminal justice system
- Involvement in anti-social behaviour can persist throughout adolescence into adulthood, becoming a more significant social issue with long term negative consequences for the individual, their family and the wider community.¹⁵

In terms of the situation at Charlestown Square, not having a single conclusive definition of anti-social behaviour is a challenge for all stakeholders in their attempts to narrow in their focus on who specifically is engaging in anti-social behaviours, and what behaviours are relatively common. Generally, young people have been observed as the instigators of anti-social behaviours, with smoking/vaping, using offensive language, running/skating in inappropriate areas, and unintentionally hindering the safety of self or others been the most common behaviours observed in field work. The anti-social behaviours that young people at Charlestown Square exhibit are a threat to the centre's efforts to maintain perceptions of the locale as safe and inviting for all to enjoy. Anti-social behaviour threatens the centre's bottom-line of prosperous business activity and growth and reflects a wider issue of the socio-economic limitations in the education, moral development and few outlets to develop maturity available to a significant proportion of young people in the area.

Previously there has been collaboration between key stakeholders in developing crime prevention strategies which covers reducing anti-social behaviour amongst young people. Partnerships between the likes of NSW Police, LMCC, GTP Group, the Eastlakes Youth Centre and the Lake Macquarie Youth Advisory Council, and young people themselves have previously been established, where collective decisions have been made to resolve instances of anti-social behaviour within the Charlestown Square shopping precinct¹⁶. Maintaining these partnerships is essential to ensure anti-social behaviour continues to be addressed amongst young people.

A key piece of literature is the 'Charlestown Recreation and Land Plan', adopted in late September 2015 by LMCC. This plan outlines many beneficial youth strategies which can be renewed or improved upon to increase the levels of social behaviour amongst young people within Charlestown Square and the wider LGA. Strategies, which can be improved upon, included:

- Developing open spaces for young people to hang (these spaces should be monitored by security and youth liaison staff)
- Recognising that young people have a right to socialise in recreational places (building rapport and mutual respect with young people)

¹⁴ Millie A. 2008. Anti-Social Behaviour in British Cities. Geography Compass, 2: p 1684.

¹⁵ Committee on Children and Young People Inquiry into children, young people and the built environment: issues paper 3: Related Developments in NSW, nd.

¹⁶ Lake Macquarie City Council (2015), 'Lake Macquarie Crime Prevention Strategy 2015-2018'. https://ehq-production-australia.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/f68ef63090ea6238ba88f17b5bed8299abe1477f/documents/attachments/000/024/803/original/Lake_Macquarie_Crime_Prevention_Strategy_2015-2018_Published_Version_20_July_2015.pdf?X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAIBJCUK4D4O4WUUA%2F20220512%2Fap-southeast-2%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20220512T043910Z&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Signature=69e922142f484aa49e3a4f39b1f9f7ef88c4e2ab18af8bdcb64d9650b9bd165c

- Dedicated Youth Centre on the old school site – Charlestown (Further funding needed, should be secular in nature to ensure equity of support for all young people)
- Develop Charlestown Skate Park (Increased security/youth liaison officer presence to drive out crime and allow all young people to use the area)
- Improve cycleways and pedestrian access, improve linkages between locations
- Improve recreational opportunities, more passive recreational spaces (More activities besides the cinema, Timezone to prevent ‘wandering’)
- Encourage the provision of non-sport recreational opportunities for young people.¹⁷

Whilst there is no magic bullet for solving the issues associated with antisocial behaviour at Charlestown Square, the literature suggests that a best practice approach to youth-related issues is one which is ‘holistic, community-based and involves young people directly in the process.’¹⁸ A combination of initiatives is going to be most effective in ensuring young people are appropriately catered for and as such, it is recommended that an array of approaches is considered for adoption.

The main goal in tackling the issues of youth related anti-social behaviour should be to work towards improving relationships between young people and stakeholders,¹⁹ setting the groundwork upon which youth focused engagement and education initiatives can be implemented. Charlestown Square is a key social environment for young people in the Lake Macquarie area. The skate park and other attractions nearby, and the nature of many of the businesses in the area attract youth to the location. Young people should be encouraged to utilise the space in manners which are overtly social, and do not adversely impact the family friendly atmosphere of Charlestown Square as a place of business.

Training security guards and educating centre management staff to be more in tune with the needs of young people, can help to reduce instances of anti-social behaviour.

Young people should feel connected to the area, fostering a respect for place. Spaces for young people could include areas of Charlestown Square where youth-oriented stores are grouped together.²⁰ These areas should cater to different groups of young people, diversifying the specific groups of young people who use a space to avoid undesirable cliques dominating the social environment. This can help with reducing public perceptions of youth partaking in gang like activity.²¹ It is important that not all youth are targeted. The majority of young people do not actually engage in anti-social behaviour and responses should not unduly interfere with the affairs of all young people.

Engaging directly with young people and consulting them on their social needs can foster the development of spaces which are orientated towards their needs, creating a ‘sense of partnership, communication and respect that is essential for prosperous work.’²² Engaging directly with young people, listening carefully and involving them in the development of rules and

¹⁷ Lake Macquarie City Council (2015), ‘Charlestown Recreation and Land Plan’, *LMCC Charlestown Recreation and Land Plan*. <file:///C:/Users/Imay5/Downloads/Recreation-Land-Plan-Charlestown-Adopted-28-September-2015-FINAL-Changes-Accepted-from-D07517113.pdf>

¹⁸ White R, 1998. *Public spaces for young people: A guide to creative projects and positive strategies*. Canberra. p. 1.

¹⁹ Usein O, Clancey G, 2007. *Considering youth issues in shopping centre development applications*. Youth Action & Policy Association (YAPA), Surry Hills. p.4.

²⁰ Usein O, Clancey G, 2007. *Considering youth issues in shopping centre development applications*. Youth Action & Policy Association (YAPA), Surry Hills. p. 10.

²¹ White R, 1998. *Public spaces for young people: A guide to creative projects and positive strategies*. Canberra. p. 5.

²² Usein O, Clancey G, 2007. *Considering youth issues in shopping centre development applications*. Youth Action & Policy Association (YAPA), Surry Hills. p.6.

codes of conduct²³ can effectively reduce instances of anti-social behaviour. This can be done by engaging young people who frequent Charlestown Square, or externally integrated into neighbouring 'feeder' schools, by developing new and maintaining existing formal links with youth services, youth committees, or youth councils.

3.2. STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 key stakeholders to better understand the extent and nature of antisocial behaviour at Charlestown Square and the surrounding recreational precinct, and to gain an understanding of strategies that have been developed to target such behaviour. Interviews were conducted with key staff from the GTP Group, Access Group Solutions (security company), Lake Macquarie City Council, Eastlakes Youth Centre, and the NSW Police Lake Macquarie District Command. Several key themes were identified from these discussions.

1. Boredom as a driver for anti-social behaviour:

- One third of interviewees considered boredom to be a key driver of anti-social behaviour amongst young people at Charlestown Square.
- High levels of boredom in youth is a primary reason for young people congregating at shopping centres together.
- There is a need for Charlestown Square to counter boredom by providing activities for young people.

2. Desire for gratification from peers with self-encouraged anti-social behaviours (and the influence of social media):

- Young people have a desire to be 'cool', and anti-social behaviour can have this effect
- Anti-social behaviour is self-encouraged by young people and peers, as evidenced by the impact that car 'hooning' can have on young people at the Centre
- Young people are encouraged by their peers to make fun of others
- Conflicts and arguments are seen as entertainment and can bring huge groups of young people together. Fights are often filmed and cheered on by large groups of young people.
- Creating drama for social media to create notoriety: *'Social media drives anti-social behaviour by prompting young people to record it to gain 'street credibility'*
- *'Social media influence is insidious and making young people act out, this is the root cause of a lot of new problems.'*

3. Ease of access to Charlestown for young people:

- The Charlestown Square precinct is a central hub for Lake Macquarie and is one of the most popular bus interchanges in the Newcastle Transport area, making it a central meeting place and easily accessible for young people: *'All roads lead to Charlestown'*
- A majority of young people arrive at Charlestown Square by bus
- Charlestown is a convenient meeting place for young people due to accessibility and transport availability.

4. Charlestown Square is designed to be a central social hub, which attract young people to the area:

- *'Charlestown Square is the 'light' of Charlestown and is a central meeting point'.*

²³ White R, 1998. *Public spaces for young people: A guide to creative projects and positive strategies*. Canberra. p. 10.

- Young people see Charlestown Square as both a safe place to hang out, but also as a place to fight and misbehave
- Design of the Southern Piazza drives anti-social behaviour as it attracts young people to hang out there
- Charlestown Square is a meeting place for at risk youth.
- Young people view Charlestown Square as a place where they have the freedom to do what they want outside of their school and home lives.

5. Current security limitations:

- A disrespect for authority and the law is common amongst anti-social behaviour offenders
- '*Charlestown Square is an island.*' Security services and patrols do not extend beyond GTP property
- Banning is an ineffective strategy as it is difficult to enforce and there is no way to prevent re-entry. Many of the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour at Charlestown Square view banning almost as a badge of honour'
- There are inconsistencies with CCTV across the precinct. CCTV in the skate park and oval are owned by council and are not monitored on a regular basis
- Young people can receive mixed messages from liaison officers and security.

3.3. OBSERVATION SUMMARY

Several direct observations were conducted at Charlestown Square by University of Newcastle staff to understand and assess the nature and extent of anti-social behaviour occurring at Charlestown Square (who is participating in the behaviour, where, when, and how often it occurs) and to identify patterns in behaviour of young people that frequent the area. The observations were conducted on Thursday 5 May 2022, between 6.30pm and 9.30pm and Saturday 14 May 2022, between 11.00am and 4.00pm. The areas observed include the South Piazza (outside centre corner of Pearson & Frederick Street); The Food Court and area outside Rebel Sport on Level 2; and the Northern Piazza bus stop (The Corner).

For each period of observation two University employees worked under the direction, and with the support of the Charlestown Square security team to conduct several 30-minute periods of observation. These observations were conducted at Charlestown Square's Southern Piazza, food court, and northern piazza at alternating times on Thursday night (5th May 2022). On Saturday (14th May 2022) observations alternated between the food court, the central interior space adjacent to Rebel Sports, the Southern Piazza and the Northern Piazza, following the same 30-minute time intervals. In line with University of Newcastle ethical guidelines, observers did not engage with persons under the age of 18. From conducting observational field work several instances of anti-social behaviour were witnessed, which allowed for determinations of when and where the issue was most prevalent.

1. Thursday evening observations:

For the Thursday night observations mild (legal) instances of anti-social behaviour were most prominent, with the majority of 'offences' occurring within the Southern Piazza. On the night, between 6:30pm and 7.00pm, young people were observed to be running, using offensive language, smoking, vaping, jaywalking, and hooning about in cars, in response to which other young people yelled and cheered. A man over (assumed over the age of 18) was observed in possession of alcohol and was seen littering. From 8.00pm - 8:30pm instances of anti-social behaviour were limited to vaping and 'mucking about/play fighting' amongst friends. The youth centre at this time had opened reducing the numbers of young people in the area; it was much quieter than the earlier session. From 9.00pm - 9:30pm at the Southern Piazza it was even

quieter. Some hooning and yahooing by youth in cars was observed, and some wolf whistling. There was a heated interaction between a group of male youths (under the age of 18) and police. The young person's spat in the vicinity of police and as a result they were firmly asked to leave multiple times by police, resulting in an argument. In the end the boys were moved on after additional security arrived.

The environment of the Southern Piazza was interpreted as been a driver of anti-social behaviour as its design provides opportunities for young people to congregate. The area was dimly lit and largely out of view of other shoppers and to some extent security. The grassed area on the corner of Pearson and Frederick Street is an identified problem area, where on the Thursday night young people were gathered in small groups of 3-5, or a few medium groups of 6-10, however most were harmlessly socialising. An instance where police had to move a group on and ask them to not make an issue out of it was observed (between 6:30-7pm), this exchange was heated. Groups were observed to largely consisted of a singular heritage, and young people were appropriately dressed.

Instances of observed anti-social behaviour at the food court between 7.00pm - 7:30pm was limited to young people whistling loudly and jumping up on an indoor sign, as well as unintentionally blocking a thoroughfare. From 8:30 - 9.00pm running indoors, using offensive language and littering were observed from young people, with one instance where staff had to ask a group of male youths to pick up the rubbish they had left behind. This interaction was non-confrontational. Generally, more social than anti-social behaviour was observed in the food court. The area was well lit and very busy to the point where the number of young people within the area was too difficult to record.

At the Northern Piazza, also known as 'The Corner', observation of anti-social behaviour was very limited. The space was public and well lit, with only a handful of young people in the area. Instead, the area was dominated by families and mature restaurant goers. Security cameras were observed throughout the area, with most of the individual shops having in-store cameras. Observed anti-social behaviour included one young person riding a scooter in an inappropriate area, and some drivers yahooing in their cars. Young people were primarily waiting to get on public transport at the bus terminal. There were no altercations with security/police.

It was noted by security staff and police that the number of young people at Charlestown Square and the few instances of anti-social behaviour evidenced on the evening was not typical of a 'normal' Thursday night, and that it was a particularly quiet evening, which was possibly due to the rainfall experienced that day and into the early evening.

2. Saturday Observations:

Data collected during the Saturday observations was limited due to the few instances of observed anti-social behaviour occurring. Observations were first conducted at the central space outside Rebel Sports (Level 2) within Charlestown Square; here a large number of young people were observed of all age ranges, who were mostly shopping by themselves or in couples. During both observation periods (11:00am - 11:30am, and 1:30pm - 2:00pm), no anti-social behaviour was recorded, and there were no interactions with centre security. In the Food Court, observed between 11:30am - 12:00pm and 2:00pm - 2:30pm, there were more young people present than could be effectively counted, yet anti-social behaviour recorded was limited to one instance of littering, and one couple considered inappropriately dressed by not wearing shoes. The area outside Rebel Sport and the Food Court were both well lit, monitored by security and busy.

The Southern Piazza was the location where the most anti-social behaviour was observed on Saturday, consistent with the Thursday observation. In the area, between 12:00pm - 12:30pm, three small groups of 3-5 young people, and three medium groups of 6-10 were observed, of mixed ages and sex; however the area overall was quiet. Observed anti-social behaviours included running in an inappropriate area, displaying aggressive behaviour by pushing and

shoving one another, jaywalking and dangerously crossing in front of cars, loud engine revving and yahoing, and one young person threw a water bottle. Between 2:30pm - 3:00pm at the Southern Piazza the area was again quiet, with a mix of singles, couples, and small and medium groups of young people observed, of mixed ages and sex. One underage young person was seen smoking/vaping, and offensive language was used once. Young people were mostly in transit, either moving through the area or harmlessly socialising and chatting. There were no interactions between young people and security observed during these times.

The Northern Piazza was observed between 12:30pm - 1:00pm and 2:50pm - 3:15pm. During the first observation period the area was dominated by young couples, socialising, courting and having lunch. One instance of jaywalking was observed. In the second observation period there were mostly couples in the area, with one prominent medium group of 6-10 young people. This group exhibited anti-social behaviour by pulling up plants out of gardens, throwing things at each other, jumping over each other, all of which was filmed by fellow young people.

3. Summary

Anti-social behaviour is present within Charlestown Square and can be observed as common among select young people throughout the Charlestown precinct. Within Charlestown Square the problem is concentrated within the Southern Piazza, on both the lower-level corner of Pearson and Frederick Streets, and the upper restaurant and entertainment area. From observations, there are no distinct age ranges nor sex makeup of young people that frequently display anti-social behaviour as perpetrators were diverse, however it did occur most commonly when young people were gathered into groups of three or more. The environment in which anti-social behaviour occurred was also significant, as dimly lit, poorly monitored areas displayed the most instances of the behaviour.

3.4. KEY FINDINGS

A review of youth centres within and nearby Charlestown Square found that the many have religious affiliations or are run by religious organisations/churches. This may be a deterrent to young people who are irreligious or a turned away by the prospect of religious affiliation.

In previous refurbishment and redevelopment undertakings at Charlestown Square, such as the 2011 refurbishment of the centre, a Shopping Centre Crime Risk Assessment was conducted by an urban and community planning consultancy, Social Impact Strategies. This work addressed local street crime, alcohol related violence and drug related activities²⁴, finding from community and stakeholder interviews found that young people are the predominant instigators of anti-social behaviour. Young people were reported to have committed vandalism and graffiti, publicly drinking alcohol, and displaying behaviours which can be perceived as intimidating. A key driver of these behaviours was identified as boredom amongst young people and a lack of things to do. Prominently, the risk assessment outlines that anti-social behaviour is only displayed by a visible minority of young people, with the majority been well-behaved.

From the data collected from both the interviews and field observations, anti-social behaviour at Charlestown Square most commonly occurs within the Southern Piazza, which can be dimly lit in areas, is in close proximity to the Skate Park and oval and is directly connected to a major bus terminal.

The anti-social behaviours observed were commonly smoking/vaping, using offensive language, running/skating in inappropriate areas, and unintentionally hindering the safety of self or others. Fights and physical violence have also been identified by interviewees as a prominent concern, with mentions of social media as a driver of physical violence and recklessness, as was observed within the Northern Piazza during Saturday observations. Anti-social behaviour occurs largely

²⁴ Social Impact Strategies (2022), What We Do, Accessed 12th May 2022. <http://socialimpactstrategies.com.au/what-we-do>

when young people are gathered in small to medium sized groups, yet the age range, sex or cultural/linguistic make up of these groups varied.

Table 1 below outlines a summary of the strategies used to address antisocial behaviour in young people. A number of these strategies have been implemented at Charlestown Square, indicated in the successful and unsuccessful columns of table 2. Strategies that have been noted to have success in the literature are outlined in column 3. These have not been implemented or tested at Charlestown Square.

Table 1: Strategies for dealing with antisocial behaviour.

Successful	Unsuccessful	Untested
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioural Codes – printed out and distributed to youth (need to be up to date and relevant to current day youth) • Police presence during Thursday late night shopping • Roving outreach • Moving on groups of 3-4 young people (need to be careful not to target young people indiscriminately) • Youth/community Liaison Officer's are effective for building rapport with young people • Youth Centres facilitating engagement with young people and give them something to do • Having security host activities for young people (build rapport) • Employing at risk youth • Engagement programs in public spaces • Leaving lights in oval/skate park turned on overnight • Monthly community group meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banning • Court system (overly lenient towards youth, which is not necessarily a negative thing) • Playing classical music as a deterrent to loitering (customer complaints) • Rewards Program (movie/Timezone tickets) • Blitz/periodic crackdowns on anti-social behaviour (too irregular to be effective) • Surveying young people on what they would like to see improve at the Centre (unreasonable answers) • Militant security approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New behavioural codes • Put an end to Thursday night shopping completely • Specialised security training (de-escalation strategies) • Separating roles of security and liaison to prevent conflicts of interest with staff objectives. • Extending security/police presence beyond CS property boundary (Skate Park) • Banning young people and only letting them return after having a meeting with centre management • Space activation of the unoccupied areas of Charlestown Square • Investing in improving security cameras for the skate park • Develop a 'vision' of youth behaviour for young people to aspire to • Establishing support for banned youth • Conducting talks at schools • Stocking a pantry to deter theft of essential goods (providing them in a safe manner instead) • Include additional personnel in monthly community group meetings to minimise risks associated with group turnover and continuity • Continued de-escalation training to account for staff turnover

4. Recommendations

A number of recommendations to address anti-social behaviour at Charlestown Square and surrounding recreational precinct are detailed below for consideration:

Immediate Recommendations:

1. Undertake a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment and implement findings: Commitment to implement CPTED

GPT Group to conduct a centre-wide CPTED assessment, with a focus on both the upper and lower levels of the Southern Piazza, and implement recommended findings as a mechanism for crime prevention and minimisation by reducing criminal opportunity and fostering positive social interaction among the users of a space using urban and architectural design.

2. Activation of space in the South Piazza:

The greatest incidence of anti-social behaviour occurs in both the upper and lower levels of the South Piazza. Altering the design and purpose of the space should be considered to diversify or invite a greater proportion of people to utilise the area; especially at night when

many of the Piazza's shops and restaurants are closed. The South Piazza is currently dominated by young people. Activation of the space to benefit older customers and families may limit opportunities for young people to behave anti-socially and prevent them from dominating the space. Potential strategies could include pop-up community events.

3. Establish a Senior Management group (GTP and LMCC) to encourage shared issues and commitment to problem solving:

Engage with GTP Group senior management (regional/state) and LMCC senior management to discuss the issue shared by both organisations and shared commitment and approach to addressing the issues at Charlestown Square.

4. Maintain employment of appropriate youth liaison, community organisations and social welfare resources and agencies to facilitate effective, consistent and collaborative engagement with young people:

GTP group to review the role of the Youth Liaison Officer in line with best practice, and employ community organisations and social welfare resources and agencies to facilitate effective, consistent and collaborative engagement with young people to build relationships, identify those needing help, understand the source of problems, provide the right kind of support and work back into families to provide the required support.

Intermediate Recommendations:

1. Undertake community consultation to understand the perception of shopping centre safety across Lake Macquarie & Newcastle:

GTP Group to commission and conduct a survey to understand community concerns and sentiments relating to safety and anti-social behaviour at Charlestown Square to assist in the identification of key problem areas and understand actions the community would like to see in addressing the issues.

2. Review current crime prevention strategies:

Undertake a review of the effectiveness of current security and policing practices to determine gaps/problem areas and determine when and where anti-social behaviour is visible/hidden and take measures to address the gaps and problem areas.

3. Formation of a reference group of Councils/shopping centres in the region:

Form a reference group of local councils and shopping centres with the purpose of knowledge sharing and collaboration to identify similar problems and share strategies employed by other Centres in the Hunter region to gain understandings of the effectiveness of reduction strategies (for example, Glendale Shopping Centre, Lake Macquarie Fair, Central Coast, Kotara, Green Hills, and Erina Fair).

4. Clearly define and separate the roles of Security Guards and Youth Liaison Officers:

Security and Youth Liaison Officers in many instances undertake elements of each other's jobs, which is challenging for developing rapport and consistency with young people. Employment of a Youth Liaison Officer at Charlestown Square is an effective strategy; however the nature of this role is conflicted. This role is expected to build rapport with youth, as well as acting in a disciplinary role, which is conflicting for the role's objective of building rapport with young people. The purpose of each role should be clearly defined, and

consideration should be given to the appropriateness of the rapport versus discipline element of the Youth Liaison Officer role.

5. Retain additional police patrols (Thursday late night shopping):

The additional police presence (funded by GTP) during late night shopping hours is an effective contributor to reducing instances of anti-social behaviour and maintaining public perception of Charlestown Square as a safe space and should be retained.

6. Engage with stores experiencing issues to take greater responsibility in addressing problems (e.g., Rebel Sports):

GTP to engage with stores directly to encourage them to take greater responsibility in addressing problems at the Centre. For example, retail theft prevention strategies such as hiring a private security guard (as done by Rebel Sport and JB Hi-Fi), affixing ink/dye tags or other security mechanisms to merchandise, and education of all staff in safety and emergency protocols.

Longer term recommendations:

1. Work with Lake Macquarie Police Youth Liaison and School Liaison Officers and schools to reduce the attractiveness of improper social media use amongst young people:

Work in collaboration with local Lake Macquarie and neighbouring LGA schools, youth centres and Police Youth Liaison and School Liaison Officers to develop a campaign to reduce instances of young people engaging in anti-social behaviours for the purposes of filming it and uploading it online. Engage Lake Macquarie Police School Liaison Officer to educate young people within a school environment.

2. Review existing crime prevention strategies:

Undertake a review of existing crime prevention strategies, and activate additional measures where required, (for example, the installation of additional security cameras, increasing security/police presence, elimination of non-visible and hidden areas, and establishing and clearly displaying codes of conduct within Charlestown Square.)

3. Implement rigorous evaluation strategies and reporting of implemented strategies:

Evaluate the effectiveness of anti-social behaviour prevention strategies as they are implemented to gain an understanding of the success (or otherwise) and impact of implemented strategies.

4. Implement CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) for future renovations/refurbishments:

Undertake CPTED assessments in future Centre renovations and refurbishments to reduce and prevent crime through urban and architectural design.

5. Designing out crime strategies:

Introduce structural changes to the design of Charlestown Square to reduce opportunities for anti-social behaviour that emerge within the environment. This could include increasing the coverage of CCTV, eliminating non-visible areas, leaving lights in the Southern Piazza on 24/7, and encouraging a diversification of who uses spaces.