

**Submission
No 160**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Gunnedah Community Roundtable

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**GUNNEDAH COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE SUBMISSION FOR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMMITTEE ON LAW AND SAFETY INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND
RURAL COMMUNITIES**

The Gunnedah Community Roundtable is a multidisciplinary interagency with a membership of around 200 representatives from 85 organisations working in aged care, homelessness, health, education, disability, employment, mental health and child protection. Our participant organisations are the frontline services for people impacted by crime, and for those perpetrating crime. As such, we feel the views of the organisations represented by the Gunnedah Community roundtable can make a positive contribution to the proposed responses to the current challenges to community safety faced by rural and regional communities.

A disproportionate amount of property crime is perpetrated by young people. The child protection element in this cannot be ignored. It is unreasonable to view a young person as a criminal without considering the context in which the crime is committed. Locally, there is strong anecdotal evidence highlighting the connection between perpetration of crime and children who have early experiences of being the subject of child protection reports, identified as being at risk of serious harm, or living in an out of home care situations. This observation is supported by the findings of Report to the Criminology Research Advisory Council '*Children in out-of-home care and the criminal justice system: A mixed-method study*' which found evidence of how histories of trauma and situational factors relating to the care environment interact to criminalise care-experienced children. The Gunnedah Community Roundtable supports the following actions to respond to the increased risk of criminalised behaviour among children who have an experience of neglect or abuse.

- Increased financial support for families following successful completion of a Restoration Plan
- Financial support for foster carers to maintain care of a child until the child is 21
- Increased funding for foster children and children identified as being the subject of a child protection report to access paediatricians and associated specialists
- Improved access to diversionary programs
- Increased funding for targeted early intervention services to improve the wellbeing of children, young people and families at a population level.
- Increased collaboration between police, community corrections and community services

- Consult directly with vulnerable young people to develop appropriate strategies
- Increased funding to community service organisations to enable responsive and flexible service provision

Crime often occurs in recurrent places or in a recurrent pattern. Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a crime prevention strategy that focuses on the planning, design and structure of cities and neighbourhoods. It reduces opportunities for crime by using design and place management principles that reduce the likelihood of essential crime ingredients (law, offender, victim or target, opportunity) from intersecting in time and space. CPTED aims to create the reality (or perception) that the costs of committing crime are greater than the likely benefits. This is achieved by creating environmental and social conditions that:

- Maximise risk to offenders (increasing the likelihood of detection, challenge and apprehension);
- Maximise the effort required to commit crime (increasing the time, energy and resources required to commit crime);
- Minimise the actual and perceived benefits of crime (removing, minimising or concealing crime attractors and rewards); and
- Minimise excuse making opportunities (removing conditions that encourage/facilitate rationalisation of inappropriate behaviour).

CPTED employs four key strategies. These are territorial re-enforcement, surveillance, access control and space/activity management. All CPTED strategies aim to create the perception or reality of capable guardianship.

Community ownership of public space sends positive signals to the community. Places that feel owned and cared for are likely to be used, enjoyed and revisited. People who have guardianship or ownership of areas are more likely to provide effective supervision and to intervene in crime than passing strangers and criminals rarely commit crime in areas where the risk of detection and challenge are high. Effective guardians are often ordinary people who are spatially 'connected' to a place and feel an association with, or responsibility for it.

Territorial Re-enforcement uses actual and symbolic boundary markers, spatial legibility and environmental cues to 'connect' people with space, to encourage communal responsibility for public areas and facilities, and to communicate to people where they should/not be and what activities are appropriate (Safer By Design, NSW Police).

The Gunnedah Community Roundtable supports the following actions to reduce environmental factors of crime:

- Funding for local government to undertake CPTED auditing and develop and deliver appropriate strategies

- Funding for local government and community groups to “activate” community spaces
- Promote community engagement in design of community assets
- Encourage design of community spaces to simultaneously meet needs of multiple cohorts

Communities like Gunnedah are often overlooked for provision of services and allocation of funds. Organisations based in Tamworth, Newcastle and other regional centres receive funding to provide outreach services to communities such as Gunnedah, but too often we experience unreliable, inconsistent and inadequate outreach services. The Australian Institute of Criminology report *‘What Works in Reducing Young People’s Involvement in Crime?’* identifies an intensive case management approach that targets the needs of the young person holistically to be the most effective approach, if implemented through a professional model be implemented where agencies and government departments work together to provide a complete support service. Opportunities for collaboration, colocation and codesign between responsible organisations is significantly diminished if a funded organisation does not have a physical presence in the community it is servicing.

The Gunnedah Community Roundtable strongly supports diverse, adequately funded and sustainable organisations as a key component in reducing crime and increasing community safety. We support the following actions to promote a functional and effective service ecosystem:

- Provision of place-based comprehensive programs to all rural and regional communities
- Direct funding for local services to local organisation
- Requirements to demonstrate collaboration with locally based organisations in tender and grant submissions and acquittals

The information gathered from stakeholders and through community consultation demonstrates that without appropriate resourcing delivered at a local level and a commitment to improve and maintain infrastructure, that these issues will continue to intensify. There is a desire from all stakeholders who participated in this submission that they are eager to work together, and with all levels of government, to deliver early intervention programs, develop local skills and knowledge, and implement meaningful change and improvement for youth crime and community safety in Gunnedah and similar communities. This cannot occur if smaller regional towns like Gunnedah are continued to be treated as satellites of major regional centres.