

Research Director  
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane  
4000

**Crime Inquiry 2014  
Submission 005**

02/07/2014

Dear Executive Officer

With reference your letter dated 28<sup>th</sup> May 2014 inviting responses concerning strategies to prevent and reduce criminal activity in Queensland it is with pleasure that I forward the following response on behalf of our Safer Toowoomba Regional Partnership members.

Safer Toowoomba Regional Partnership Inc. (STRP) is an interagency, community – based group working to promote safety in Toowoomba City through needs-based crime prevention and injury prevention programs. Under the STRP Constitution the chair is appointed by the mayor of the Regional Council and the Superintendent of Police is the deputy. Membership includes the Local State member, State Government representatives (Education, Queensland Police Service, Dept. of Communities – Youth Justice, Corrective Services), Neighbourhood Watch, Business, Media, Toowoomba Regional Council an Indigenous person, Service groups such as the Toowoomba Youth Service and the Police Citizens Youth Club.

Since the groups inception (approx. 15 years) STRP has raised in excess of one and half million dollars through grants and sponsorships to conduct a diverse range of very successful community activities.

Outlined below are examples of some of the current activities:

**The Heights Community Centre:** This centre has been in operation for approx. five years and has offered a range of services and activities for the Wilsonton Heights Community. Over the years funding to ensure the success of the centre has been provided by the Commonwealth Government, the Toowoomba Regional Council and currently through a grant from the Department of communities for \$231,000.00 over 3 years. The Department of Communities provides a house and activity shed to assist in providing this service.

**Graffiti Busters:** Graffiti Busters is a partnership involving STRP, the State Government, Toowoomba Regional Council, Queensland Police Service, Central Business Task Group, Department of Communities and a group of volunteers with the major objective of ridding the city of illegal graffiti. To assist in achieving this objective STP was successful in obtaining a \$10,000.00 grant for a tandem wheeled trailer fitted with a water tank and pressure cleaner. This equipment assists our Youth Justice and Corrective people in removing an ever increasing amount of illegal

graffiti appearing in our city. Recently the State Government provided a grant through the Toowoomba Regional Council. This has allowed STRP to appoint a coordinator which provides further opportunities in adopting a more proactive approach in establishing a program for street art and an educational program for school age children.

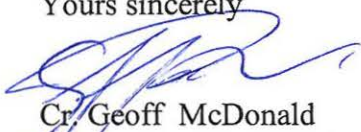
**Radio Programs:** STP has an arrangement with radio 4WK to develop and conduct a radio program on a monthly basis. The purpose of the program is to outline some of the social challenges we face and then provide information on the support structures in place to address these challenges.

**Currently Seeking Designation as a National Safe Community:**

STRP is currently working with the University of Southern Queensland in seeking National Designation as a Safe Community. The proposed foundation plan attached outlines the demographics of our region, challenges we currently face in our community and the strategies which we will adopt in meeting these challenges.

Safer Toowoomba Regional Partnership Inc. members are committed and passionate in working with our many partners in making our region a safe and peaceful place for each of us to live work and play.

Yours sincerely



Cr. Geoff McDonald  
Chair Safer Toowoomba Regional Partnerships Inc.

**FOUNDATION PLAN TO THE AUSTRALIAN SAFE COMMUNITIES  
FOUNDATION TO OBTAIN AUSTRALIAN SAFE COMMUNITY  
DESIGNATION**

**WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS A SAFER  
COMMUNITY**



## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 WHY THE TOOWOOMBA REGION WANTS TO BECOME AN AUSTRALIAN SAFE COMMUNITY**

Many communities face increasingly difficult challenges in addressing community safety issues. Communities seek to prevent local manifestations of global influences that are beyond the control of individuals, families, and even governments. This demands new ways of thinking and responding to combat increasing complex problems and global impacts.

The Toowoomba Region shares the view of the many Australian other communities across the globe that the Safe Community Network offers an unparalleled framework in the area of safety promotion

The experience and successes in Australia and overseas show that a coordinated and focused community safety framework directly influences and improves quality of life outcomes, increasing a community's well-being.

The Australian Safe Community framework is built on partnerships within communities and fosters 'grass roots' community collaboration. This emphasis contributes towards fostering a culture of shared commitment and ownership of safety enhancement.

Outcomes identified in the Australia Community Network were reviewed as part of the Toowoomba region's examination of its viability and it was concluded that in most instances the program contributes to and builds the community's capacity in maximising the investment of resources and effort at a whole of community level.

As a result of the outcomes of the University of Southern Queensland survey (copy attached) and workshop together with the experience of members of Safer Toowoomba Regional Partnership Incorporated and the Safe Communities task group our community issues were prioritised.

After prioritising these issues and considering our current resources our approach in seeking designation will focus on crime prevention.

## **2.0 Community Profile**

The Toowoomba Region is uniquely located in the south-east corner of Queensland and offers nearly 155,000 residents the best of both city and country lifestyles. Established around an agricultural sector that takes advantage of incredibly fertile farming land, the region's economy has grown and diversified to the point that Toowoomba is now the second largest inland city in Australia and the service centre for south-west Queensland.

Toowoomba is rapidly beyond its Garden City reputation to becoming the hub of one of Australia's most attractive regions. The temperate climate, beautiful gardens and serene countryside remain but phenomenal opportunities are attracting an influx of new businesses and residents keen to be part of the success of the region. The Surat Basin, one of Australia's richest accessible resource reserves, is just hours west of Toowoomba and will see almost \$200 billion invested in projects that will create around 16,000 jobs.

Our region is working hard to ensure that economic growth compliments the quality of life that has long been a feature of the Toowoomba region.

### **3.0 Demographics**

#### **Key Points-Extract from Demographic Profile: Toowoomba**

- The estimated resident population of Toowoomba Region in 2011 was 151,188 people representing a total increase of 8904 since 2006.
- The number of young people (0-14 years) increased from 31,251 in 2006 to 32,496 in 2011.
- The number of older people (65 years and over) increased from 19,761 in 2006 to 23,464 in 2011.
- The number of working age people (15 – 64) increased from 91,272 in 2006 to 95,228 in 2011.
- Indigenous
- The top five languages spoken at home (other than English) in Toowoomba Region were Arabic – 688, Mandarin -580, Filipino – Tagalog -511, Afrikaans – 389, German – 300, Dinka – 297, Cantonese – 224, Italian – 211, French – 182, Dutch – 163.
- Approximately 35,464 (or 23.45% of the population ) were attending an educational institution in 2011.
- In Toowoomba low income earners (earning less than \$200 a week ) accounted for 7.5% of all people aged 15 years and over.

- In 2011 total labour force was 72,259 with 3446- - unemployed , 2036 – 2.8% looking for full- time work and 1410 – 2.0% looking for part-time work.
- Couple families with children increased from 16,272 in 2006 to 16,613 in 2011. Couple families without children increased from 14696 in 2006 to 16,073 in 2011. One parent families increased from 5418 in 2006 to 6010 in 2011. Lone persons in homes increased from 12,170 in 2006 to 14,106 in 2011.

#### 4.0 Crime Data

Regional statistics obtained from the Queensland Police Service together with the outcomes from the Toowoomba Community Study undertaken by Professor Michael Cuthill from the University of Southern Queensland will influence the strategic direction undertaken by both the Safe Communities task group and Safer Toowoomba Regional Partnership Inc.in building a safer and more peaceful community.

Crime Statistics for the Calendar Year 2013 are as follows:  
Toowoomba - 10397, Highfields – 575, Oakey – 437, Yarraman – 216, Crowsnest – 125, Pittsworth – 120, Clifton – 75, Cecil Plains – 44, Goombungee – 41, Cooyar – 22, Millmerran – 15.  
Total for the region- 12067.

These offences include:

Homicide, Assault, Robbery, Other Offences Against the Person, Unlawful entry, Arson, Other property damage, Unlawful use of motor vehicle, Other theft, Fraud, Handling stolen goods, Drug offences, Liquor ( excluding drunkenness), Weapons act offense, Good order offences, Traffic and related offences, Other.

#### Crime Statistics for the Years 2010 to 2014

Financial Year	Total	Assaults	Drug Offences
2010/11	12094	643	1334
2011/12	21760	620	1679
2012/13	12253	635	1472
2013/14	12195	558	2123

#### Towards a Strategic Community Safety Agenda for Toowoomba

In his paper Towards a Strategic Community Safety agenda for Toowoomba Professor Michael Cuthill found there were different perceptions in defining community safety, perhaps somewhat

reflecting the diverse operational focus of those interviewed. The most direct answer was “actual protection from threat”, a basic human requirement which relates to quality of life and community well – being. However, other less obvious aspects of safety were also presented, for example that it was a “feeling” – you either felt safe or you didn’t. A sense of belonging and connections were also suggested as important components of safety.

Professor Cuthill through his interviews with diverse agencies with different agendas and experiences provided a breadth of description on a diverse range of community safety issues relevant within the Toowoomba community. The following 11 issues were identified during interviews. Professor Cuthill pointed out that the list is not presented as a comprehensive list, rather as a work in progress which currently outlines those issues identified during interviews.

1 Locational considerations, 2. Domestic Violence, 3. Cultural and Linguistically Diverse populations,  
4. Homelessness, 5. Bullying, 6. Home security, 7. Mental Health, 8. Youth at risk, 9. High risk behaviours, 10. Illegal drug use, 11. Road Safety.

Interviewed participants stated the need for a more strategic approach to community safety in Toowoomba. This strategic approach to community safety in Toowoomba would support coherent interventions, moving from siloed approaches to integrated design and implementation. It would look to tackle root causes of insecurity, looking at acts of violence within a broader political, economic, geographic, social and cultural context. Local people would be an integral part of community responses, and be included in decision making process including planning and targeting of resources. A focus on development of social capital and community resilience would help build community trust, networks, capacity and collaboration. These are seen as critical in supporting and embedding a culture of community safety.

The clearest and most important message, in building a culture of community safety, is that violence of any kind is not acceptable in any situation and this is the direction the Toowoomba Says No to Violence Group is promoting.

**Important Safety Issues Identified by Potential Partners**

Safety Issue	Details	Examples of Potential Partners
<b>Locational Considerations</b>	<b>Violence in and around</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lower socio economic areas</li> <li>• around late night entertainment areas</li> <li>• the general community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of Community Task group representative of the community.</li> <li>• Late night traders and the hotel and hospitality traders.</li> <li>• Toowoomba Says No To Violence.</li> <li>• Toowoomba Youth Service.</li> </ul>
<b>Public Areas</b>	<b>Lighting in public areas such as the CBD parks and gardens.</b> <b>Accessibility to public areas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toowoomba Regional Council</li> <li>• Queensland Police Service</li> <li>• Representatives from business and the general community.</li> </ul>
<b>Illegal Drug Use</b>	<b>Alcohol over dosing, drug side effects and people who are homeless and in crisis are often found around the city.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifeline</li> <li>• Toowoomba Club House</li> <li>• Drug Arm</li> <li>• Toowoomba Youth Service</li> <li>• Queensland Police</li> <li>• Salvation Army</li> <li>• Fresh Hope</li> </ul>
<b>Domestic Violence</b>	<b>One in three women are effected by domestic violence. Still seems largely hidden from community . Little hard data to</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships Australia</li> <li>• Fresh Hope</li> <li>• TSNV</li> <li>• Queensland Police</li> </ul>

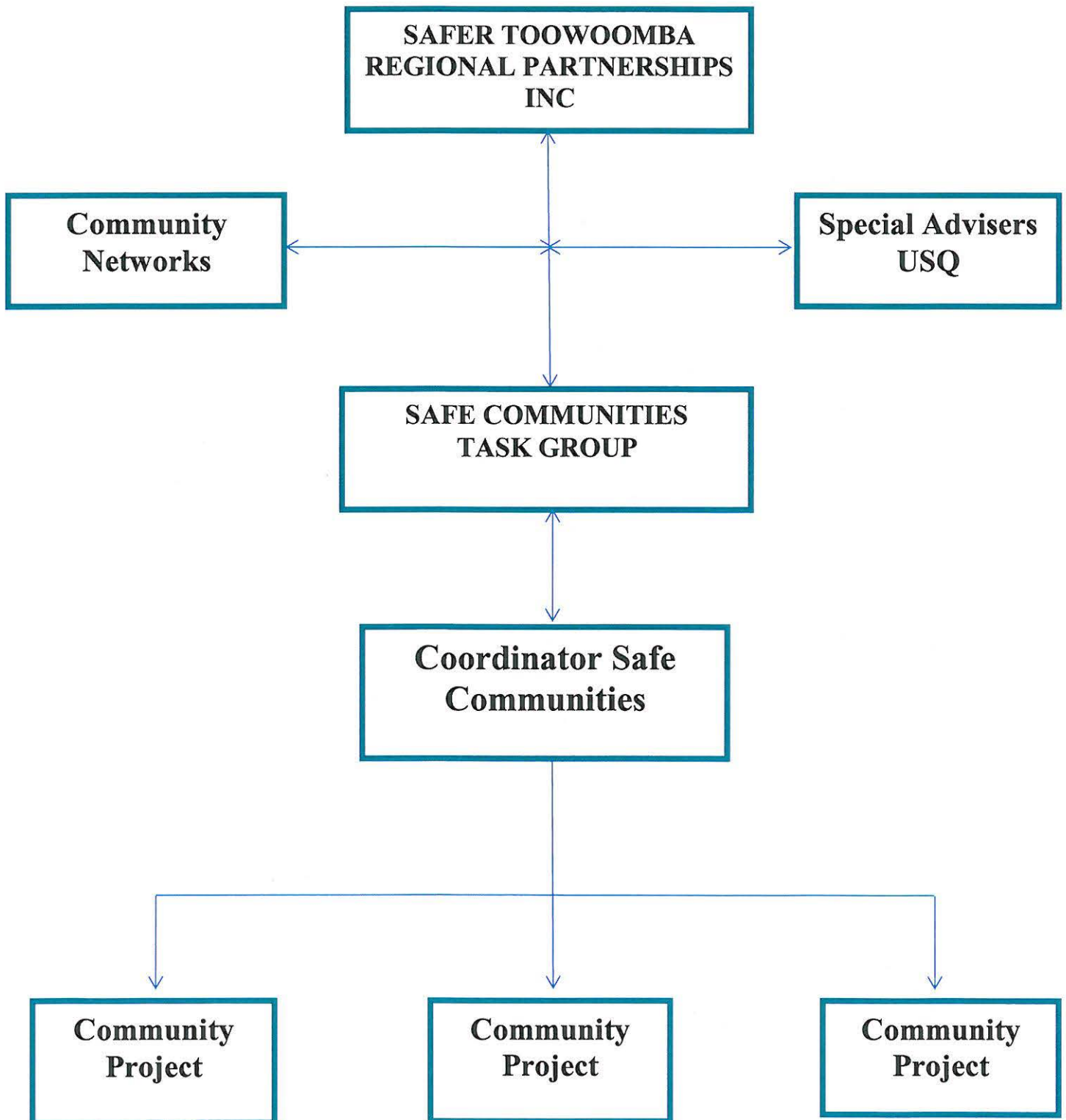


	<p>determine to the magnitude of the problem. Worst occurrences are seen when there is a combination of one or more factors such as financial stress, alcohol, holidays and hot weather.</p>	
Home Security	<p>Home invasions are becoming more prevalent. Particular concern for older residents who might feel more vulnerable Changing demographics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Queensland Police</li> <li>• Service Groups Eg. Rotary</li> <li>• General community</li> </ul>
Cultural and Linguistically Diverse ( CaLD) populations	<p>Community safety relating to CaLD populations with regard to cultural norms that might not be acceptable to the community especially relating to: gender, intergenerational (cultural) clashes Potential for youth gangs Need to focus on nurturing cross-cultural dialogue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pureland Learning College</li> <li>• Toowoomba Regional Council</li> <li>• Queensland Police</li> <li>• Religious groups</li> <li>• TSNV</li> </ul>
Homelessness	<p>Safety for homeless people relating both to risk of violence on the street, and also with regards to their physical and mental health. The scale of the problem in Toowoomba, as with elsewhere in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TYS</li> <li>• Lifeline</li> <li>• Salvation Army</li> <li>• Queensland Police</li> </ul>

	<b>Australia is not well articulated.</b>	
<b>Bullying</b>	Ongoing issue primarily within School and workplaces Cyber bullying is increasing Scale of this issue is not well understood but increasing media reports across Australia suggest all forms of bullying are a growing issue of concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TSNV</li> <li>• Pureland Learning College</li> <li>• Dept. of Communities – Youth Justice</li> <li>• Dept. of Education</li> <li>• Religious Organisations</li> </ul>
<b>Youth at Risk</b>	Perceived contributions to this “risk” are the family situation, mental health problems, and a behavioural and/ or learning disability A common (but not exclusive) factor seen to underpin “risk” is low socio-economic background.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TYS</li> <li>• Pureland Learning College</li> <li>• Queensland Police</li> <li>• Dept. of Communities – Youth Justice</li> <li>• Dept. of Education</li> <li>• Sporting organisations</li> <li>• Religious Groups</li> </ul>
<b>Mental Health</b>	Specific contributing factors include increasing financial stress, the fast pace of life, relationship breakdowns, natural crises (flood, fire and drought) and disempowered and disengaged citizens ( particularly young people).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toowoomba Club House</li> <li>• Relationships Australia</li> <li>• Lifeline</li> <li>• Fresh Hope</li> </ul>

**GOVERNANCE**

**Organisational Structure**



**Timeframes to Complete the Establishment Process**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Appoint a Coordinator (leader)</b>	<b>Safe Communities Task Group-(SCTG) Volunteer already in place</b>	<b>Part time coordinator will be appointed when funding becomes available.</b>
<b>Establish reference group – steering committee</b>	<b>Safer Toowoomba Regional Partnership (STRP)</b>	<b>Already in place – may require additional representation.</b>
<b>Identify partners and sponsors</b>	<b>SCTG, Coordinator</b>	<b>July 2014</b>
<b>Seek funding opportunities to ensure the success of the project</b>	<b>Coordinator, SCTG, STRP</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>
<b>Obtain and process data to assist with priority setting</b>	<b>USQ, Coordinator, SCTG, STRP</b>	<b>Completed by the University of Southern Queensland USQ.</b>
<b>Arrange Incorporation and Constitution</b>	<b>STRP the legal entity is already incorporated.</b>	<b>Already in place.</b>
<b>Meeting of the reference group</b>	<b>Coordinator</b>	<b>Already in place.</b>
<b>Submission of the Foundation Plan to Australian Safe Communities Foundation</b>	<b>Coordinator, SCTG, STRP, USQ.</b>	<b>August 2014</b>
<b>Letter from Mayor seeking support from groups and organisations.</b>	<b>Coordinator, SCTG, STRP</b>	<b>August 2014</b>

**Proposed Work Plan 12 to 18 Months**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
<b>Determine priorities</b>	<b>USQ, SCTG, STRP, Coordinator</b>	<b>Determined, Ongoing</b>
<b>Identify Sources of Grant Funding</b>	<b>USQ, SCTG, STRP, Coordinator</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>
<b>Establishment of Community Consultation Process</b>	<b>USQ, SCTG, STRP, Coordinator</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>

Establish the Identity and Image of Toowoomba Region Safe Communities	SCTG, STRP, Coordinator	Ongoing
Preparation of three year strategic and work plan with targets and identification of resources	SCTG, STRP, Coordinator	Ongoing

### Indicative Budget

#### Income

Item	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Partners/Sponsors	\$5000.00	\$5000.00	\$5000.00
Donations	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$500.00
Other Income			
Other Sources of Funding -Grants	\$34500.00	\$34500.00	\$34500.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$40000.00</b>	<b>\$40000.00</b>	<b>\$40000.00</b>

#### Expenditure

Item	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Office Rent	Toowoomba Regional Council	Toowoomba Regional Council	Toowoomba Regional Council
Salaries	\$30000.00	\$30000.00	\$30000.00
Administration	\$5000.00	\$5000.00	\$5000.00
Conducting Community Surveys, Promotion of the Concept, Designation Fees	\$4000.00	\$4000.00	\$4000.00
Contingencies	\$1000.00	\$1000.00	\$1000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$40000.00</b>	<b>\$40000.00</b>	<b>\$40000.00</b>

## *Towards a strategic community safety agenda for Toowoomba*

Prof Michael Cuthill  
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### **Context for study:**

The Toowoomba Regional Council area has a population of approximately 160,000 people. It is situated about 150k west of Brisbane, the Queensland state capital. Historically, this slow paced, regional town depended primarily on a strong agricultural base. More recently, CSG and coal extraction in south western Queensland has contributed to a resources boom, with flow on benefits to Toowoomba. Steady growth is expected to continue over at least the next 20 years (ref?).

The change process, as Toowoomba evolves from its historically conservative past towards a rapidly growing regional capital, will bring with it community impacts. It is expected that population growth will put extra strain on services and infrastructure, the 'slow' regional lifestyle will be threatened, house prices will likely rise and new ideas introduced by incoming residents will test conservative values. These changes will undoubtedly present challenges to both government and community.

This situation requires good information through which the change process can be equitably and sustainably managed. A solid evidence base, which encompasses a diverse range of public, private and community sector perspectives, is required. The key outcome here, while embracing the growth potential, is to protect those things the community values, and make sure the city has those things it needs.

Data that 'describes' the Toowoomba community is currently available in many forms (e.g. the census and in agency reports), however this largely statistical description does not equate to 'understanding' the community. Diverse voices within the community setting must be included as part of the development process. In order to strengthen this existing evidence base the *Toowoomba Community Study*, a collaborative multi-agency research project, will gather up to date data from key informants and community members, to identify current community perspectives of life in community. Ownership and understanding of the change process must lie within the broader community.

The community perspectives gathered through this research will, in turn, be both informed by and referenced against existing data to provide a balanced description of 'Life in community'. This study argues that diverse community perspectives of life in community are a key, but oftentimes neglected requirement for informing dialogue about just and sustainable regional development.

The *Toowoomba Community Study* will provide a valid and reliable evidence base for public, private and community sector agencies planning and decision making. Such information might be used in diverse applications including funding proposals, infrastructure prioritisation, project development, advocacy, responding to service gaps, policy development and planning.

The *Toowoomba Community Study* is being implemented through a series of seven sub-projects which provide different lens to view and explore community perspectives of life in community. In addition to the Community Safety reported in this paper, the other six sub-projects include, 1) Health and Well-being, 2) Education and Learning, 3) Work and Workforce, 4) Leisure, Sport and Recreation; 5) Diversity and Social Inclusion, and 6) Human Scale Development. Each sub-project provides a different 'lens' for exploring community perceptions of life in community.

This community safety research has been designed in collaboration with the Safer Toowoomba Regional Partnerships (STRP). This informal partnership comprises 18 member organisations who represent a diverse range of community safety issues and initiatives. The STRP looks to build capacity in which all sectors of the community working together in a coordinated and collaborative way, forming partnerships to promote safer behaviour choices and practices, manage risk, increase the overall safety of the community, and reduce their fears of harm. The aim of the STRP committee is to:

1. Identify and respond to community safety gaps;
2. Support safer community existing initiatives where possible;
3. Provide a strategic overview of community safety in Toowoomba region; and
4. Act as an advocate for community safety initiatives, resources and issues.

The intention of this research is threefold, it informs 1) community futures scenario mapping in Toowoomba; 2) preparation of a National Safe Cities accreditation proposal for Toowoomba, and 3) supports a review and reflection process of STRP operations and directions. In looking to provide some parameters for research, a definition of community safety was sought. A focus on 'freedom from violence or threat' (= a safe community) has been used as a broad referral point to guide this exploration of community safety in Toowoomba.

#### **Research design:**

Upon completion, five data collection processes will have been implemented:

1. Semi-structured interviews with key informants;
2. Participation/observation at STRP committee meetings;
3. Collation and review of relevant local, national and international reports and academic papers relating to the topic; and
4. A community profile which includes Toowoomba Community Safety reporting; and
5. A review workshop/s with a STRP working group and/or interviewees.

Eleven semi-structured 'key informant' interviews were conducted as the initial stage for data collection and provide the main basis for reporting in this paper. All participants were identified by the STRP executive. Selection criteria required interviewees to have a good broad understanding of community safety in Toowoomba. A diverse range of sectors and agencies were involved. In responding to a set of six guiding questions interviewees were prompted to weave their own narrative. Interviews lasted between 40-60 minutes, and were audio recorded. The research has USQ ethics approval.

In addition to interviews, a start has been made on collating existing agency data, but much work is still required to understand the current nature of community safety reporting. This situation is confounded by the scattered nature of data across multiple agencies reporting on different community safety areas, data which is of variable quality, and data collected at different geographical scales and encompassing different levels of detail.

A comprehensive literature is also required to inform next steps and/or actions arising from this study. This would enable the STRP to respond by building on existing examples and experiences from other cities. However, progressing work around both collation and analysis of current data sets and the literature review is dependent on securing funding.

### **Results:**

#### *Perceptions of community safety in Toowoomba*

There were different perceptions in defining community safety, perhaps somewhat reflecting the diverse operational focus of those interviewed. The most direct answer was 'actual protection from threat', a basic human requirement which relates to quality of life and community well-being. However, other less obvious aspects of safety were also presented, for example, that it was a 'feeling' – you either felt safe or you didn't. A sense of belonging and connections were also suggested as important components of safety.

When asked 'How safe is Toowoomba?' responses ranged from 'fairly safe' to 'very safe'. Overall, it was suggested that, all things taken into account, Toowoomba is a fairly safe community. One interviewee suggested that we 'should value and celebrate' this situation, as not every city can make a similar claim. However, in tempering that celebration two warnings were sounded:

- 1. This perception means little if you are a victim; many people continue to suffer violence in the Toowoomba community, and they must continue to be supported.*
- 2. The current situation can quickly change. Rapid growth has the potential to impact on community safety in Toowoomba. A proactive approach is required.*

Interviewing people from diverse agencies who have different agendas and experiences has provided a breadth of description on a diverse range of community safety issues relevant within the Toowoomba community.



### *An initial typology of community safety issues in Toowoomba*

The following 11 issues were identified during interviews. These issues start to paint a locality specific picture of community safety issues in Toowoomba. This is not presented as a comprehensive list, rather as a work in progress which currently outlines those issues identified during interviews.

#### 1. Locational considerations

Some specific geographical areas in Toowoomba were identified as having a history and/or reputation for safety issues. These are Wilsonton, Grand Central and the CBD. In particular, Friday and Saturday nights in the CBD were readily identified with alcohol fuelled violence. Seniors appear to have a perception that the CBD is not safe at night.

#### 2. Domestic violence

There are concerns that despite increasing attention to domestic violence that it is still an issue that is largely hidden from the community. The worst occurrences are seen when there is a combination of one or more factors such as financial stress, alcohol, holidays and hot weather.

#### 3. Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) populations

Community safety, relating to CaLD populations, was discussed first, with regard to cultural norms that might not be acceptable in Australia especially relating to gender and intergenerational (cultural) clashes and second, in terms of the 'potential' for youth gangs. There was also a warning to be aware of racial and/or religious tension that has been experienced in other regions. An explicit focus on nurturing cross-cultural dialogue was suggested.

#### 4. Homelessness

Concern was expressed as to safety for homeless people. This relates both to risk of violence on the street, and also with regards to their physical and mental health. The scale of the problem in Toowoomba, as with elsewhere in Australia, is not well articulated.

#### 5. Bullying

Bullying was identified as an ongoing issue primarily within school and workplace contexts. In particular, it was suggested the prevalence of cyber bullying is increasing. Again, the scale of this issue is not well understood but increasing media reports across Australia suggest all forms of bullying are a growing issue of concern.

#### 6. Home security

One interviewee suggested that home invasions are becoming more common. This issue appears to be a particular concern for older residents, who perhaps feel more vulnerable. Feelings of insecurity for older residents were also highlighted under other issues.

## 7. Mental health

Mental health issues appear to be a common topic of discussion across the Toowoomba community. Specific contributing factors include, increasing financial stress, the fast pace of life, relationship breakdowns, natural crises, (flood, fire & drought), and disempowered and disengaged citizens (particularly young people). It is not clear if there is an increasing incidence of mental health issues or whether this has just become a more open topic of discussion in recent years, and hence more visible.

## 8. Youth at Risk

Perhaps linked to the visibility of mental health is an increasing focus on 'Youth at Risk'. Perceived contributors to this 'risk' are the family situation, mental health problems, and a behavioural and/or learning disability. A common (but not exclusive) factor seen to underpin 'risk' for young people is low socio-economic background. One interviewee suggested that YAR might comprise ~5% of the total population, but we do not actually know the scale of the problem, hence service delivery resourcing is currently seen as a best guess response.

## 9. High risk behaviours

Some/many young adults (~15-30 years) appear to be increasingly willing to engage in high risk behaviours. This might be attributed to emerging social norms within younger populations. Alcohol appears to play a major contributing role in this behaviour. Social media may have f

## 10. Illegal drug use

There were varying responses to drug use with some interviewees saying there is little problem in this area, while others argued that it is widespread across region, quite significant, and not well recognised.

## 11. Road safety

Road safety has been discussed as a key area of concern with a sharp increase in fatal road accidents in 2014.

As the UNDP (2009:1) argue, "... the drivers of violence and insecurity are various and complex". As such, each of the 11 issues listed in this initial Toowoomba typology is likely to have some degree of overlap and relationship to each of the others. Presentation of the typology is intended to provide some initial understanding of the multiple and interconnected factors that contribute to or influence community safety in Toowoomba.

### Perceptions of community safety

There is little understanding if current community perceptions of their safety match the reality. For example, it is useful to consider if the following statements, taken from interviews, reflect the current Toowoomba reality?

*Our roads are less safe than 30 years ago.*

*It is not safe to visit the CBD on a Saturday night.  
There are more home invasions now than ten years ago.  
Mental health issues are getting worse in Toowoomba.  
There is more violent crime now than 20 years ago.  
It is not safe to allow our children to ride to school.*

Interviewees, who made these comments, are well informed professionals working in various aspects of community safety, and yet even their responses indicate differing or perhaps unfounded perceptions of community safety in Toowoomba. People's perceptions of community safety play an important role in directing resources and responses. Unfounded perceptions will undoubtedly contribute to feelings of insecurity and hence impact on quality of life and a potential 'white-anting' of community cohesion and well-being; in essence, a self-fulfilling situation. This suggests that it is perhaps becoming increasingly necessary for agencies to consider how they manage for both the reality, and in responding to perceptions of community safety.

Suggested contributing factors, seen to potentially underpin these contrary perceptions, include:

- ✚ ... lack of good quality data;
- ✚ ... accessibility to reliable reporting/information;
- ✚ ... overstretched services;
- ✚ ... the fast pace of change in community; and
- ✚ ... a focus on treating symptoms rather addressing causes.

#### *Opportunities for building a culture of community safety*

Interview participants stated the need for a more strategic approach to community safety in Toowoomba. This is a view more broadly endorsed by the UNDP (2009:1) who argue that, "The complex challenges emerging from the changing nature of violence can no longer be met with separate sectoral interventions alone ..." Clearly there is argument for a more strategic, collaborative approach that involves whole of community responses. Such an approach would support development of a culture of community safety, across multiple settings and across diverse sectors, and look to become embedded in the norms and social practices of the community.

A strategic approach to community safety in Toowoomba would support coherent interventions, moving from siloed approaches to integrated design and implementation. It would look to tackle root causes of insecurity, looking at acts of violence within a broader political, economic, geographic, social and cultural context. Local people would be an integral part of community responses, and be included in decision making process including planning and targeting of resources. A focus on development of social capital and community resilience would help build community trust, networks, capacity and collaboration. These are seen as critical in supporting and embedding a culture of community safety. Interviewees also identified place specific initial requirements to be addressing concurrent to a move towards developing this strategic approach.

The clearest and most important message, in building a culture of community safety, is that **violence of any kind is not acceptable in any situation**. In implementing that message it was argued that each individual holds first and foremost responsibility for ensuring their own safety. This is largely a matter of common sense. This concept of individual responsibility must also be extended to a sense of responsibility for each other. In addition to this lead message, a suite of (3-5) 'common' messages need to be developed. These would form the basis of all community safety communications, for all agencies. Such messages would form the spearhead of a concerted whole of community approach to enhance understanding of community safety. Effective delivery mechanisms need to be identified.

Community connections were seen to be a critical requirement for building a culture of community safety. Some suggestions included a neighbourhood focus, support for community and organisational networks, use of digital technologies, and supporting (intergenerational) family links. An extensive literature around social capital has explored community connections in diverse contexts. While there is no magic wand that can build social capital, there is much practical advice and examples to support such outcomes.

Education and lifelong learning, prevention and early intervention are key leverage points for enhancing community safety (repeat 10 times!). Such programs are known to lessen risk and increase resilience. QCOSS (year) argue that the cost effectiveness of investing in these programs is now irrefutable; Keeping people out of the crises system is a good investment. However, this approach is not adequately resourced in Toowoomba with interviewees suggesting that much more investment is required. Note! Resourcing for such activity should not be achieved through decreased support for service delivery which is already stretched trying to cater to existing demand. Education and lifelong learning, prevention and early intervention programs should be seen to run parallel to and in support of current service responses.

The uncertainty arising from short term funding programs (6 months – 2 years) has been an ongoing focus of discussion in the Australian community sector. Short term funding for programs builds community expectations and enthusiasm, then the funding runs out. It was suggested that it might be better having fewer programs that connect well across multiple agencies and can operate over longer timeframes. This would require a move towards integrated service delivery, collaborative governance, and enhanced network development. As noted by one interviewee, there is a need to move past 'scared turf' and work together as a community. Unfortunately, collaboration in a competitive environment is challenging.

Learning outcomes for school students have also been an issue of concern. Low school attainment levels can have a profound impact on safety outcomes during a lifetime. Two school related topics were signalled during interviews.

First, schools are generally a first choice for 'community' education programs. However, the schools agenda is already politicised and crowded, and national curriculum requirements perhaps limit the opportunity for schools to respond to local community safety contexts. It is unlikely that a singular schools focus for community safety education will be an effective response. There is a need to look towards other processes which facilitate education opportunities around community safety for young people. One successful example relates to mentoring programs where older people work with young people through structured programs. Through these programs, understanding of social norms and acceptable behaviours can be shared through ongoing opportunities for dialogue. Other successful approaches implemented elsewhere should be reviewed for relevance to Toowoomba. A stronger parents and families focus, which links community services, volunteering, faith groups, and sports and recreation activities, with the school acting as centres of community, has also shown some early promise in addressing this challenge (SIP review refs).

#### Identifying what we don't know

Equally important to developing strategic responses to community safety in Toowoomba is identification of what we don't know. Some questions have already been flagged in previous sections of this paper; these and additional questions (identified by this author) would benefit from broader stakeholder discussions, as part of an ongoing process towards building a deeper understanding of how community safety in Toowoomba might be enhanced. A comprehensive literature review and analysis of secondary data held by agencies is also required to support development of informed responses.

1. What are the social and financial costs of not feeling safe in community?
2. What are the economic benefits of keeping young people safe?
3. What is the argument for investing in community safety?
4. What per capita funding does Toowoomba receive for different aspects of community safety in comparison to other similar regions?
5. What are the (diverse ?) social norms in relation to community safety (variables, e.g. culture, age, education level, gender)? How will projected population growth impact on those norms? How can acceptable norms (or key community safety messages) be communicated to community?
6. What are our current education and lifelong learning, and prevention and early intervention approaches to community safety, and how successful are they? What other approaches have been used successfully elsewhere?
7. How well do Toowoomba community safety agencies communicate, engage and partner with each other? What could be done better? What models provide direction to support agencies working together effectively?
8. Interviewees have mainly focused on Toowoomba City, what is the situation in the outlying communities that are part of TRC?
9. Why are the factors contributing to community safety issues (e.g. increased anger, frustration, powerlessness, busy life, less respect, anonymity, changing social norms etc.). How can we proactively respond to these?

10. Does knowing your neighbours increase neighbourhood and home safety?  
How can neighbourly social interaction be encouraged and supported?
11. What do we understand regards the short, medium and longer term impacts of emphasis on violence through movies, media and games?
12. How do we support the recovery period for loss and grief after major safety events (e.g. floods, violence, road accidents, deaths)?
13. How do we build community resilience to help people deal with the rapid change process?
14. How do we ensure that there is appropriate parental engagement in and support for young people during their learning journey?
15. How do we build a sense of ownership among younger people so they see themselves as part of the community?
16. Is it possible to develop a system whereby community safety information, from diverse agencies can be effectively and efficiently collated, analysed and made accessible?

### Implications for STRP

The STRP has been running, more or less in its current form, for ~20 years. The group has an impressive record of achievement. Some of the major initiatives the STRP has supported over this period include:

- ✚ Peace builders, school based program. Quite expensive to run, but still embedded in some school cultures despite no funding since ???;
- ✚ The City safe program;
- ✚ City safety audits - still current?
- ✚ Graffiti stop
- ✚ Toowoomba says no to violence sub-group including White Ribbon campaign;
- ✚ Grand central youth initiative,
- ✚ Flexischool,
- ✚ Wilsonton (Highfields??) community centre (plus flow-on projects) - broad cultural mix

The STRP has exhibited strength in working together with a shared vision of supporting community safety in Toowoomba. The group has adopted a strong relationship based approach, bringing together diverse agencies operating across a wide range of community safety issues. This approach has generated an innovative 'can do' attitude. However, the scale, complexity and resources required to respond to community safety needs, in a rapidly growing city, are challenging the group and its long standing approach.

Interview responses strongly support a more strategic approach to community safety in Toowoomba. If the STRP is to continue being an effective agent for community safety some key considerations will need to be discussed. These include:

- ✚ What is the STRP vision and key roles (e.g. advocacy/lobbying, education, securing funding, representing a community voice, forums/education, cross-agency network, support for current initiatives etc.)

- ✦ What structure, governance and resourcing is required for STRP to effectively achieve its vision?
- ✦ How can STRP access and use existing community safety information?
- ✦ How can STRP best respond to community needs through coordinated evidence based responses?
- ✦ How can STRP gain strong and broad political support?