

# OPSO Final Report to the TASK FORCE ON CRIME AGAINST SENIORS

## Introduction

*To empower older people by giving them ownership of solutions to crime prevention within their communities and to educate them in protective procedures both in and outside the home*

Older People Speak Out (OPSO) applied for and received a grant from the Community Benefits Fund to carry out a pilot project on crime prevention strategies in Queensland. The objectives of this project were to;

- investigate the causes of Fear of Crime amongst older people at selected centres in Queensland,
- educate older people in strategies for personal safety at home and away from home,
- seek solutions from participants, and
- foster community-building, intergenerational activities in an environment which enabled older people to pass on their life skills, thereby enhancing the self-confidence of all participants, reducing fear of crime amongst older people and possibly reducing the incidence of crime in each community.

## Procedure

Notification of approval of the Grant was received early in July, 2005. Speakouts were then conducted in a number of centres around the State. In addition to representatives of seniors' groups and carer organizations, members of the seniors' community, Queensland Police, local media, service clubs and youth groups were invited to each venue. Particular attention was paid initially to participation by Year 12 students and timing of the visits was determined by school holidays. In view of the significance older participants attached to their relations with youth as a factor in their fear of crime, attendance of School age children should be mandatory at future Speakouts on this topic. Towns selected gave a valid spread for research purposes for this pilot project. The initial programme was:

Friday 26 Aug	Ferny Grove
Wednesday 31 Aug	Bribie Island
Monday 5 Sep	Innisfail
Tuesday 6 Sep	Atherton
Wednesday 7 Sep	Mareeba
Thursday 8 Sep	Ingham
Tuesday 27 Sep	Gold Coast – Elanora
Tuesday 4 Oct	Childers
Wednesday 5 Oct	Rockhampton

Participants were invited to share a morning tea with the OPSO team at each venue, following which the content of the booklet 'Confident, Safe and Secure living in Queensland' was explained in conjunction with a power point presentation produced by Queensland Police. Over 450 copies of the booklet have been distributed to participants so far. The presentation focussed on two main issues: Fear of Crime and Elder Abuse and the strategies that participants could put in place to help alleviate their concerns.

During the discussion that followed each presentation, participants were encouraged to voice both their concerns and possible solutions that could be implemented. Each group was then invited to nominate a local project that might reduce fear of crime amongst older people. In all but one community, participants nominated youth groups in the street as a major cause of fear and elected to develop an intergenerational project to lessen this fear by bringing about some degree of intergenerational understanding. A return visit was planned to each centre to follow up on progress but these could not be scheduled until early in 2006, which necessitated gaining an extension to the project from the Community Benefits Fund.

For a variety of reasons, notably involvement of Year 12 students and the end of the school year and the effects of Cyclone Larry on the northern centres during term 1 of 2006, some of the momentum generated by the Speakouts was lost. Some progress was made in Mareeba, Rockhampton, Ferny Grove and Palm Beach. Recognising the importance of intergenerational activities in rebuilding the community and the need for guidance to all age groups in setting these up, OPSO put together a booklet entitled 'Generations a Go Go'. Because of the State-wide representation at the 60 and Better Annual Conference in Rockhampton, we chose to launch the kit there in May so that it could immediately be delivered across the State. Copies of the booklet were distributed to other northern centres the week before and will be further distributed as Speakouts and follow up visits are scheduled.

The Media has been most supportive of this project which has attracted coverage in the local press and radio. The ABC reported fully on the launch in Rockhampton.

In **Mareeba**, the fear of crime expressed by participants was so palpable that OPSO decided to write to the Mayor suggesting that a special Forum be held to find solutions. This proposal was accepted and OPSO conducted a very successful Forum entitled 'A Community Response to a Community Challenge' on behalf of Council on November 11. Attendance was outstanding and drew all sections of the community together in looking at the problem and suggesting solutions. Many initiatives were raised and have since been put into effect. The Mayor has been advised of all outcomes from this Forum.

## Older Peoples' Concerns

It was a feature of all Speakouts that participants did **not** feel as safe now as in previous decades. This was despite statistics indicating that older people are the safest age group in the community. However, the effects of violence against older people are more pronounced and unlike younger people in work, they do not have the opportunity to recoup financial loss.

Some common themes were:

- **Changes in society:**
  - More people – including itinerant workers in some centres.
  - Reduction in community spirit – people don't talk over their backyard fences anymore.
  - Both parents working, often long hours, and an increase in single-parent families - some don't take responsibility for their children's actions
  - Some young people lack respect for other people and property – possibly aggravated by a lack of self-respect
  
- **Relations with youth:**
  - Only about 3 – 5% were seen as a major problem, although they can also influence others.

The availability of drugs and alcohol – many participants voiced a view that licensees failed to police the availability of alcohol to those underage and those already intoxicated.

In some towns there was a perception that there should be a review of Centrelink's administration of youth allowances.

Teenage parties were sometimes out of control due to gatecrashers and underage drinking condoned by parents.

There was a perception that when younger people were charged, the courts were too lenient.

Most centres agreed the situation was aggravated by the lack of suitable local job opportunities.

There was a lack of activities for young people or venues where they could 'hang out', e.g. cinemas and dance halls had closed, junior sports clubs were licensed therefore excluding the under aged etc. Like older people, the younger generation was often overlooked in the provision of resources. This was not a problem in Childers where the Council was described as very active and the community much closer than other places.

In at least two centres, older people remarked that they would not report offensive behaviour to the police because of fear of retaliation.

Some people suggested that national service might help develop self-discipline in some young people.

- **The environment**

Street lighting, apart from the main street, was described as poor in most centres.

Added to the lack of light at night, many pavements were uneven – both problem areas had been drawn to the attention of the relevant councils but lack of resources was given as the reason for lack of action

Apart from Rockhampton and the Gold Coast, there were no Safe Houses. Enquiries suggested that although this programme was supported by the community, it had largely lapsed due to the paperwork involved.

There was a dearth of public transport in any but the main cities. This is a major problem of concern to both youth and the elderly, many of whom could not drive.

- **The effect of the Media**

It was pointed out that television and radio in particular and newspapers came from regional centres like Cairns and/or Brisbane, where the crime scene was very different from surrounding towns. This could cause unnecessary fear.

Some thought there was too much violence on TV, and this could increase fear of crime.

Some said crime reports, particularly against older people were sensationalised.

- **Parenting**

Parenting today drew much comment from both young and old at our Speakouts. Single parent families and the lack of a father figure were mentioned frequently as contributing to ill-discipline, as was the failure of some parents to control their children. Participants agreed that youth happily has a lot more freedom than in the past and modern society has emphasized the rights of the individual and educated the young to question intelligently. The younger people who attended our Speakouts were prime examples of responsible and well-adjusted youth, prepared to put a point of view and well worth listening to. However, participants indicated that more emphasis needs to be placed by both parents and the education system on young people's responsibilities to other individuals and society in general, and on the rights and responsibilities of parents. It was agreed that there is a need to introduce both parenting training and projects that encourage the

development of responsibility and self respect in the young, so that they do not develop anti-social behaviour in the future. There was a very interesting suggestion from Mareeba that eligibility for the Baby Bonus be tied to parents completing a positive parenting course.

- **Mareeba**

Factors unique to Mareeba that emerged following the September Speakout and Forum were the need for Aboriginal Elders to be involved in the sentencing of Aboriginal offenders, special education programmes for 'at risk' youth, and the effects of the Queensland Government Alcohol Management Plans. In September Queensland Police representatives raised the problems caused by the movement of Aboriginal people from areas where Alcohol Management Plans restricted alcohol availability to centres such as Mareeba where there were no such restrictions. Comment was sought from the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy for the information of participants at the November Forum, but it was interesting at that Forum that the Queensland Police denied that there was any such problem. Later information suggests that while the Queensland Police are still in denial, sadly the reality proves otherwise and that this more than any other factor is contributing to the high level of street offences and inappropriate behaviour in and around Mareeba CBD. The reasons for the failure of the Queensland Police to acknowledge this community concern need to be investigated.

## Outcomes

All concerns raised at our Speakouts need to be addressed. Some factors are within the capacity of the local community to rectify through their local authorities, while the Task Force is requested to raise the remainder with the appropriate authorities. As a consequence of our involvement in this project, OPSO contributed to the Review of Murri Courts undertaken towards the end of 2005. While the conclusions of this review are eagerly awaited, OPSO advocated establishment of Murri Courts in any community with a significant Aboriginal population.

Our presentation at Palm Beach on the Southern Gold Coast in September was one of the main factors in putting together the Palm Beach Police Community Consultative Committee following the January 2006 youth riots. Made up of all generations, including OPSO, its task is to initiate and co-ordinate short and long-term projects to provide activities and centres for southern Gold Coast. We are co-ordinating our intergenerational projects set up after our Speakout with this Committee.

Education is one of the keys to alleviating fear of crime amongst older people. To that end, OPSO will continue to conduct Speakouts, to distribute the booklets "Confident, Safe and Secure Living in Queensland" and 'Generations a Go Go', and to discuss concerns raised by participants. We will also continue to follow-up the matters raised so far.

Education is also the key to ensuring that all senior Queensland Police Officers recognise the concept of Fear of Crime and are prepared to react accordingly. OPSO will continue to introduce Recruits to this concept during our presentations at the Police Academy.

In the meantime, we have been heartened by the response in a number of centres visited last year and will continue to monitor their progress. As a consequence of the May 2006 round of visits, we are confident of additional projects in Ingham, Atherton, Mareeba, Rockhampton and Childers, and the resultant list includes:

Mareeba. Following the Remembrance Day 2005 Forum, the community has responded through the Truancy and Graffiti Group (TAG), and as the momentum grows, co-ordination has emerged as a major consideration:

- The Pulse Café is now open an extra night a week (20-40 youths per night) using older people as volunteer supervisors.
- In co-operation with Education Qld, courses for youth at risk commenced at schools, the first at Mareeba primary School at the start of the school year. Volunteers work with at risk youth (who previously never attended school) after lunch each day to undertake interesting and educational activities on the proviso that they attend school in the mornings.
- Funded by TAG, a local hair dresser is running her third hair care program for at risk girls, a ten week course which involves their attendance at school as a prerequisite.
- TAG organized a BBQ in the park on 8th April inviting business owners and community members that have previously been targeted by youths to come along and meet the kids. Once a personal relationship is struck between youths and townspeople they stop offending against those persons. Members of the Cairns Taipans and Mareeba AFL also participated. Wayward parents, families and kids were deliberately targeted.
- School-leaving-aged youth have been linked up with NETO employment agency so that they can access government funded literacy and numeracy courses to improve their ability to obtain local employment.
- A local car dealership has offered to conduct a second engine/motorcycle-rebuilding workshop designed to give at risk youth experience in working in the mechanical industry. A local firm has donated a motorcycle for the project and the plan is to have it restored and raffled off in the community to support another project
- Local businesses have been asked to employ at risk youth as work experience students to form relationships and show the youths how devastating stealing and damage is to business owners.
- Seventh Day Adventists are relocating camp buildings to Chillagoe (when they find suitable land) to set up a youth camp.
- Mareeba State High School has been linked with the President of the local branch of the Australian Pensioners and Superannuants League for a Skills Exchange programme.
- A Junior Neighbourhood Watch programme and a cultural reinforcement scheme involving at risk Aboriginal youth and a local tracker are being planned.
- The Mayor agreed to include information on activities in the Council section of the 'Advertiser' newspaper, and the Chamber of Commerce representative also agreed to include information in the Chamber's regular newssheets.
- Some restrictions on the sale of cask wines are in the process of implementation.
- Benefits in combating the high rates of domestic violence on the Tablelands were also seen in an expansion of the concept of 'Generations a Go Go'.

A recent report from the Community Justice Group showed that in the three months to mid April 2006 there were no new cases involving youth. This was directly attributed to activity since the Remembrance Day Forum.

Rockhampton. A skills exchange programme has been set up involving the local 60's and Better organization and students from the Rockhampton State High School. This project is still very much in the pilot stage, with lessons to be learned on both sides before any expansion to other older peoples' groups and the many other schools in the city. Rockhampton State High School is very enthusiastic but an obvious hold up is school holidays for the students. The school has also decided that the first 4 weeks of a term are best for interaction. Activities to date include:

- Skills exchange – SMS – started 29 March but into recess during the Easter school holidays. Up to 25 people attending.
- Computer group – again up to 25 people, started after Easter and will resume the first week in May.
- Two start cartooning in May with a drawing class by late May
- Five Gentleman still very interested in making Movies from video recordings
- Four to start working with school farm in the May term
- The whole group doing SMS Computer to be involved with students teaching them how to Old Time Dance.

In mid May, in conjunction with the official launch, local schools were visited, given copies of 'Generations a Go Go' and agreed to build on existing contacts with seniors' groups as follows:

- North Rockhampton Heights College – with Primary and Secondary pupils, were enthusiastic about further developing relations with a Vietnamese Veterans Association.
- Glenmore State Primary School intends to 'adopt' a local Retirement Centre with possible future developments as the children graduate to Glenmore State High School. There is a high proportion of Aboriginal youth in this school and the Principal saw merit in involving Aboriginal Elders in cultural activities.
- Glenmore State High School intends to introduce a Chaplains Lunch Club with seniors' attending. The Chaplain is also accredited to the Primary School, which will enable projects to continue as the student's progress through their formal education.

It was interesting that there is a high rate of youth suicide in Rockhampton and the schools approached saw benefits in expanded projects along the lines of 'Generations a Go' for both youth and seniors.

Palm Beach. The first attempt to break the ice between older people and year 12's from Palm Beach – Currumbin State High School following our September Speakout was a barefoot bowls morning at Tugun Bowls Club on 25 May.

Ferny Grove. Piccabeen Community Centre has applied for funding for Senior's Week activities 2006 to include the setting up of a skills exchange programme.

Ingham. The State High School Principal was most supportive of a skills exchange programme involving upper school students and seniors and a Forum has been planned for June 22 in the School Library to further develop this project and to see what skills are available in the local community that would be of interest to all participants.

Atherton. As well as reinstating an 'Adopt a Grannie' project between the State High School and Carinya Nursing Home, the Atherton Shire Council Youth Worker agreed to help co-ordinate a skills exchange programme involving the High School through the Chaplain, the State Primary School – the Principal was most enthusiastic, and local Senior's groups. The Chamber of Commerce and Service Clubs are also involved.

Childers. Both State Primary and High Schools have community programmes, but at present there is little social contact between students and seniors. Members of the Junior Council present at the

meeting agreed to build on existing projects. For example, the Junior Council is assisting in the building of accommodation at a Nursing Home for people visiting their relatives. Opportunities were seen to bring both young and old together in discussion on interior decoration of the building and design of the gardens on site, leading to other skills exchange programmes in the future.

Bribie Island. The need for ‘a place for youth to hang out’ was identified at our August Speakout. OPSO has now been invited to work with one of the retirement villages on intergenerational projects. Staff from Caboolture QUT are planning with OPSO to link our intergenerational work with their teacher-training programme in that area.

Innisfail. There is a close-knit community of seniors’ organizations in Innisfail whose members support each other. They said Innisfail was becoming a retirement town and reported no significant fear of crime among seniors. As the town was badly hit by Cyclone Larry, we were unable to follow up our dialogue with the community except in an on-going, socially supportive way.

## **Resources**

When speaking to Neighbourhood Centre Staff in a number of North Queensland centres, we were made aware of a variety of programmes and funding sources targeting similar but sometimes not all the same groups. Staff had difficulty keeping abreast of all the possible permutations and combinations. As there are many different Government Departments which fund programmes and activities, there is need for a whole of government review to ensure that taxpayer’s money is being made available equitably and conveniently so that the community can properly benefit.

## **Conclusions**

Without doubt in terms of what has been accomplished in respect of outcomes for future development and the community benefit and common good, this project has been successful way beyond our expectations. It has set a sound basis for the method of developing community-building intergenerational projects in keeping with Department of Communities policy and the findings of the Task Force on Crime against Seniors on which OPSO was represented. The Crime and Misconduct Commission researched fear of Crime in Queensland extensively on behalf of the Task Force and our action research during this project substantiated much of that theoretical research. In consequence OPSO is amongst the leaders in this field in Queensland.

Innovative strategies have been set in place to act as models for future development, and a how-to-do-it kit of activities, titled ‘Generations A Go-Go’, was launched recently in Rockhampton. There is still work to be done on this kit and it can be continually added to as the programme spreads to more and more towns. It is also on the OPSO web page from where it can easily be downloaded. This booklet is also a leader in its field.

Members of the Task Force from Crime and Misconduct have said that this project put into practice what their research showed. This is especially illustrated in Mareeba where the greatest need was for collaboration between generations, and where OPSO consequently had the opportunity to do the most in-depth work. Results have been encouraging in all three areas: in linking together young and old, in reducing crime and in setting up a broad range of community-driven projects. To achieve this goal as they planned their intergenerational activities, the seniors needed information on how to set up these activities and an on-going mechanism to share with groups everywhere their successful techniques. The outcomes listed in this report, especially those mentioned by the Community

Justice Group, indicate that the project's methodology is valid. It is significant that OPSO is now being invited to appear for older victims in Youth Justice Conferencing.

The booklet 'Confident Safe and Secure Living in Queensland' and accompanying Queensland Police power point presentation were well received in all towns and participants reported that the information in the booklet was of great value and easily understood. The Task Force found that generally there is a huge demand for this booklet and for presentations.

Speakouts in each town touched a community nerve, as many older people have concerns about their safety. Participants were keen to voice possible solutions and to undertake local projects. The educative process, backed up by intergenerational, community-building activities is most important in the future around the State and OPSO will continue to make this project one of its top priorities.

At public meeting, Seniors identified a need to work with youth in schools in an effort to bring about inter- generational understanding. Their scope included school leavers, too as possibly being at risk. In each town, the projects have received good publicity and have now captured media attention, indicated by the number of Statewide media requests OPSO has received for stories on the projects as they develop. These stories are being followed up and will be publicised at a forthcoming southern Queensland launch.

Some of the conclusions reached by members of the OPSO team as they toured the region are:

- The target market for the youth segment of any intergenerational project extends to the Primary level and above.
- Most communities have people who care and people who work hard for their cause. They need co-ordination to maximise opportunities.
- Statistics relevant to community activities – good or bad, are only released under duress.
- The Queensland Government's alcohol restrictions in Aboriginal communities have a domino effect on crime in other areas.
- Alcohol abuse is the major cause of problems in regional Queensland.
- Regional Queensland centres need input from people with different skills who can expand the overall knowledge base.
- Most schools have contact with older people which can be the basis for social interaction and the catalyst for community-building, intergenerational activities.

This project has been most important to recognizing the concept of Fear of Crime amongst seniors, a concept which is still not fully accepted, even by some senior Queensland Police. As well as listing many of the causes of that Fear, this project has also highlighted many strategies to alleviate Fear of Crime, including the establishment of intergenerational, community-building activities. It was vital to its successful conclusion that the extension be granted so that full advantage could be taken of the preliminary work. Throughout the project, in the documents and emails setting up the Speakouts, at those Speakouts, in media interviews, in Reports and in the booklet 'Generations a Go Go', the crucial importance of the Community Benefits Fund in funding this project has been made abundantly clear. This project, and all the important effects flowing to support the older people in our community, who have a lifetime of skills, experience and influence to pass on to the younger generation, could not have taken place without the support of the Community Benefits Fund.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Task Force;

Note that the success of this pilot project as detailed in the report has been way beyond our expectations.

Note the concerns raised by older people at our Speakouts. While OPSO will continue to monitor progress in rectifying those concerns, many require addressing at Departmental level, including;

- Education of ‘at risk’ youth.
- Education of all Queensland Police Officers in the concept of Fear of Crime.
- Recognition of the domino effect of the Queensland Government Alcohol Management Plans on crime in neighbouring communities.
- Development of Positive Parenting courses and the linking of eligibility for the Baby Bonus to completion of such a course.
- Recognition of the contribution of alcohol (and drug) abuse to crime in many centres and the development of appropriate counter measures.
- Enforcement of Licensees responsibilities, particularly in rural areas.
- Review of the administration of Youth allowances by Centrelink, particularly in rural areas.
- Addressing the perception of ‘soft sentencing’ held by many in the community.
- Providing resources for suitable venues for youth to ‘hang out’ in Queensland communities.
- Developing Public Transport in rural centres.
- Investigating restoration of the Safe House programme.
- Review of all Departmental community development programmes for overlap, shortfalls and ease of access.
- Encouraging Local Government Authorities to rectify the environmental factors listed in the report.

Promote the establishment of community-building, intergenerational projects throughout the State through the appropriate State Government Departments, using this Report and the kit ‘Generations a Go Go’ as guides.

Note that OPSO will continue to educate older people in personal strategies to alleviate fear of crime, record their concerns and take action as appropriate.

Note that as a direct consequence of this project, community-building, intergenerational projects have already been established in some Queensland communities, and that OPSO will continue this process.

Note the very encouraging reports from Mareeba as a direct consequence of this project and monitor the progress of the PBCCC.

Note that as a part of this project, OPSO has put together a booklet ‘Generations a Go Go’ containing guidance on the establishment of intergenerational, community-building projects, the first time such a comprehensive document has been published in this country.

Note that as well as contributing to the establishment of community-building, intergenerational projects to reduce the fear of crime amongst seniors, use of the kit ‘Generations a Go Go’ may also contribute to alleviation of domestic violence and youth suicide.

Note that OPSO will make the continuing of this project one of its top priorities.

