



Taking Stock:

*communities and governments working together for
community safety and well-being*

Focus Group Summary

*This report is drawn from the full research report that was written by
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Introduction

In 2005, the Taking Stock project was launched to “take stock, and with community and government partners, put in place a plan to work together for community safety and well-being by addressing the root causes of crime.” The goal is to move towards a comprehensive community approach to crime prevention through social development in Prince Edward Island.

The focus group report is a piece of work that is one component of a larger project. The goal is to organize and host a series of six focus groups with communities of interest across Prince Edward Island. The focus groups brought participants together to ask their opinion of crime prevention and community safety from the perspective of their community of interest. The research findings will provide a basis for discussion and contribution to the provincial Comprehensive Framework and Action Plan.

Background

In 1995, a report entitled “*Strategies for Safer Communities in Prince Edward Island*” was released. One part of the research that informed the Strategy was a series of focus groups. To attempt to line up with the communities of interest from 1995, focus groups were set up with the following communities: seniors, newcomers, gay men, francophone and acadienne people, Aboriginal youth and women. A total of 41 people participated in the six groups. All the information gathered from the focus groups was collated and analyzed for common themes. The focus groups were not designed to be exhaustive.

There are numerous limitations to this research. One is that for the six focus groups, there were several co-facilitators based on language and skill with the audience. A second limitation was in the translation. And, a third limitation was in timing.



Taking Stock is supported by the PEI Office of the Attorney General
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Building On The “Strategy For Safer Communities” (1995)

In 1995, the “*Strategy for Safer Communities in Prince Edward Island*” was released by Community and Correctional Services and the Community Safety and Crime Prevention Advisory Committee. For this research, nearly 400 Islanders were consulted by survey or focus group including:

- Nearly 200 seniors interviewed about their safety concerns through the *Seniors Housing Survey*
- Nearly 100 students in grades 7 to 9 answered a questionnaire, and
- Over 80 people participated in the focus groups.

The research in 1994-1995 led to the Strategy and from that, a vision statement of safer communities was developed:

“Visions of safer communities in Prince Edward Island are similar for people from Souris to Tignish. The qualities of a safer community are the same for men, women, disabled, youth, gay or immigrants. A safe community is one where people know their neighbors, respect themselves and each other, where everyone is valued and included in decisions and activities of the community. There is an absence of alcohol and drug abuse, violence and fear.”

This vision became the foundation of work that lead from the Strategy in 1994-1995 to the document *Working Together for Community Safety, a Prince Edward Island Approach for Safer Communities*, released in 2004 by the Office of the Attorney General.

Synopsis of a Literature Review

For this report to have a longitudinal flavour, it is important to capture a short synopsis of government and community interventions since the 1995 Strategy before examining the comments made by focus group participants. There seem to be more examples of changes in community safety when there are more organizations working together, in partnership, for change. This increases the ground-swell, and government and community both put more focus in these areas. For each community of interest that was part of these focus groups, a quick review of federal, provincial and community initiatives linked to crime prevention and community safety or the root causes of crime were described.



Focus Group Findings

To understand the perspective of six communities of interest in relation to community safety, a set of three questions were asked: what makes a community safe; when don't you feel safe; and, what are the root causes of crime? The comments reflect common themes across the groups as well as point out any differences by community.

What makes a community safe?

For this question, most focus group participants named a short listed of concepts that answered the question for them. This question didn't seem to elicit as much open discussion as the questions that followed it. However, all groups talked about the following:

- Looking out for each other and a sense of belonging
- Leaving your house or car unlocked
- Being connected to your history and heritage
- The presence of police and other services as a deterrent to crime
- Community inclusion, diversity in language, religion and culture
- Lack of family violence and resources to support families
- Absence of drug and alcohol abuse
- Prosperity and having resources



When you don't feel safe?

This question led to much discussion yet there was considerable agreement across the groups as to when they did not feel safe in their communities. Common themes included:

- Lack of personal safety to walk alone at night, driving at night in rural areas and harassing phone call
- All forms of family violence
- Youth hanging around in groups in intimidating and the need for safe schools
- Alcohol and street or prescription drugs abuse
- A lack of police presence in our community
- *Youth Criminal Justice Act* not being used as it was originally intended
- Architectural security and a lack of lighting, home security, and
- Places of employment that aren't inclusive or consider the personal safety of their staff.





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The Root Causes of Crime

In discussing the root causes of crime, most groups mentioned the same issues, in the same order of importance. Their answers included the following:

- Drugs and alcohol
- Poverty and lack of good paying jobs
- Youth and parental responsibility
- Stranger and family violence
- Lack of inclusion
- Literacy and education/consolidated schools
- Architecture including signage, lighting and parking garages



Summary

To summarize, it can be noted that repetition of themes across the questions. Concepts that participants described as factors that make their communities safe, were then reiterated as issues for community safety from other perspectives. They all continued to come back around in the discussion on the root causes of crime. There were very few discussions that were particular to just one group. Almost everything mentioned by any one group, was reflected in another group, although sometimes they used different words or language to express their issues.

Even though this report does reflect back to the 1995 Strategy and lists a synopsis of changes and interventions particular to the focus group communities of interest, it is not a true longitudinal study. There would be great benefits to setting up a proper research study that could take into account the research findings from the other Taking Stock research.

To see the full research document, or the French version, go to the website address: <http://www.cliapei.ca>

Support for the project is from the PEI Office of the Attorney General and the National Crime Prevention Centre, Public Safety Canada.

