



# Taking Stock:

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

## Research on Community Strengths Towards Safety and Well-being

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

The goal of the Taking Stock project is to move towards making Prince Edward Island a safer place by addressing the root causes of crime through social change. The Taking Stock project has three research pieces and this report looks at Community Strengths towards Safety and Well-being.

### Focus on Communities

The four communities in this study are Lennox Island, Tyne Valley, Montague and Hillsborough Park. For each we set up focus groups and talked with local experts and residents. These communities have all taken steps to build on their strengths and to bring people together to work on social change including programs for community safety. As well, all of them face continuing challenges in working to make their communities safer places.

The research literature points out some things that add to community strength, especially for projects in which people need to work together. These are:

- Local meaning and connection
- Local ownership and commitment
- Clear vision for the community and ways to reach the goals
- Trust in the system and in each other
- All interested groups are asked for their ideas
- Approaches are broad-based, link with other programs and include many people and different interests
- Skills and good organization so the community is better able to take on projects
- Strong leadership and coordination
- Good communications, and
- Relationships within communities - and beyond.



Taking Stock is supported by the PEI Office of the Attorney General  
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The above list reflects the things that add to the 'domains of well-being' as explained by Dr. Doug May of Memorial University, a leader in Newfoundland and Labrador's 'Community Accounts' project. Well-being comes from good social relationships, health, culture, equal treatment of people, feeling safe, human capital, working conditions and income, as well as consumption (use of services and products) and having enough time to rest and enjoy life. (See website at <http://www.communityaccounts.ca>)

### Communication in Communities

People have a number of ways of getting information about crime and its victims. Many use the tried and true ways of 'by word of mouth' or newspapers.

Others are now using newer electronic means such as police scanners, radio, TV and the internet. Each community has its own 'culture' as to how news is spread about crime and its victims, and it can vary with age group. For example, some seniors in Montague use the Internet to forward information to other seniors, the RCMP and the Town Council. In Tyne Valley, MacNeil's Store is the main place to share information.



### Community Strengths

Most people see their communities as safe places. Some in Lennox Island and Hillsborough Park believe that well-being has been improved because of the commitment to their youth and listening to their needs. Personal safety is important to people in all communities. A sense of belonging, of knowing others and of being among friends adds to feelings of well-being. Access to enough resources like money, programs for social change and community safety, and having good contacts with others are were said to be important.

The main strengths of these four communities are the people themselves and their commitment to making their communities good places to live. Many spoke of community pride and the wish to have safe and active places for their families. While some strengths are seen as 'tangible' or concrete, such as the presence of facilities and sports fields, others can be said to be more 'intangible'. These include social change activities, pride in community and heritage, knowing one's neighbours, helping each other, good communication, and having people who go the extra mile.



Strong leaders, support for families and programs for youth are also seen as strengths in a community. All of these are seen as major assets that add to personal and community well-being.

### Community Challenges

Substance abuse and parenting challenges are barriers to well-being in the four communities. Other barriers are family violence, sexual abuse, family poverty and a shortage of resources in the community to help families and teens. Health issues such as obesity, smoking and alcohol use were given as concerns in one community, but likely occur in all as they are generally problems in North America Canada and the United States. Some other barriers could be distance to school, the community's reputation from within and without, the lack of places to play and meet, and, surprisingly, the close-knit nature of the community. The last one is a strength as well, but it is a barrier when it means that people are afraid for their own safety if they report a crime. Any of these barriers can lead to people feeling alone and feeling bad about their lives. These all work against safety and community well-being.

### What people need to work together to increase community safety include:

- Good leaders
- Training and development of skills
- Programs and hangouts for youth
- Good communication
- Money and other resources
- Good connections with others
- A sense that all are included and opinions respected
- Coordination of activities
- Education and awareness
- The ability to celebrate the 'good news'
- A culture of sharing, and
- Supportive people.



**Barriers to working together include** the lack of these things, as well as feeling alone and being poor. Some things that help overcome the barriers so that people can work together are a culture of sharing, people becoming active and taking the lead, and people being asked for their ideas and to take part in projects.





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Some things that help to overcome the barriers so that people can work together are:

- A culture of sharing in the community
- People becoming active and taking the lead
- People being asked for their ideas and to take part in projects



The importance of people working together was shown by the late Dr. Margaret Meade when she said:

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”*

People said they thought they generally knew about crime that happens in their community. In smaller or close-knit communities there seemed to be a greater awareness of what is going on (and it is likely that this relates to everything, not just the crimes). Awareness of and concern about crime is lower among people whose situation lets them feel safe. As one woman put it “I never did (think about crime) before I was a victim, but now I do”. Residents often gave the causes of crime as youth and substance abuse.

### Summary

The information we got from people in the four communities was close to that found in the research literature. At the end of the day, it shows that people know a lot about the strengths in their communities and what it will take to work together to increase their own safety and well-being. In short, change requires a few people to become leaders, get the others going and to find ways to reach their goal.

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

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