Neighbourhood Safety

A Handbook of Policy and Practice

John Cartwright
and
Clifford Shearing

Contents

1. Introduction

"Die bendes maak dit baie moeilik om hier te leef. Ek het hier grootgeword. Toe ek 'n kind was, het die skole ons besig gehou met goed soos sport en houtwerk, maar my kinders ken dit nie. Hulle kan nie na skool bly nie, dis te gevaarlik met die bendes in die strate …. [Die politieke partye] moet ophou om wonderlike beloftes te maak wat ons weet hulle nie kan nakom nie. Hulle moet kyk na die kleiner dinge wat saak maak, soos die gemors in ons strate."

"The gangs make it very difficult to live here. I grew up here. When I was a child, the schools kept us busy with things like sport and woodwork, but my children know nothing of that. They can't stay on after school, it's too dangerous with the gangs in the streets … [The political parties] must stop making wonderful promises that we know they can't keep. They must look at the small things that matter, like the mess in our streets."

Resident of Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, in *Rapport*, 20 January 2019.

Policing (effective, visible, professional and publicly accountable) is an essential element in creating and maintaining safety and a sense of safety in any given neighbourhood.

But safety is more than the absence of harm (just as peace is more than the absence of war), and law enforcement, however effective, is not able to deal with potentially disruptive socio-economic issues at neighbourhood level (such as absent fathers, dependency on alcohol, heroin or other drugs, teenage pregnancy, school dropouts, etc.).

In order to build and maintain real and lasting safety, therefore, law enforcement must be complemented, on equal terms, by an approach to neighbourhood policing and safety-building that is *locally focused*, *problem-solving* and *future-oriented.* This may be referred to as 'placemaking for public safety'.

In this context we think of a 'neighbourhood' as an informally demarcated area that can realistically be covered on foot or bicycle and forms a reasonably consistent whole with respect to its typical problems of safety and liveability. It may take many different forms, such as, for example, a small village, a high-rise apartment building or several blocks of houses, shops, sports fields and other amenities.

2. Principles and priorities

There are a few simple and practical principles guiding this approach to creating safety:

1. Focus on the future, not the past.
- Focus on making the future better, instead of trying to 'fix' the past.
- The question to ask is ***not***
  'Who is to blame?'
  but rather
  'What made it possible for this to happen?'
  and
  'What can be done to see to it that this is less likely to happen again?'

2. Focus on opportunities.

- How can we make a harm less likely to happen again?
- What opportunities are there to encourage positive attitudes and engage in constructive action?

3. Think issue-based partnership ('whole-of-society').

- **Identify**, **mobilise** and **integrate** whatever range of knowledge, capacity and resources is necessary for dealing effectively with any given issue.

4. Different problems and opportunities require different solutions.

- Creating and managing safe and livable communities and public spaces requires a flexible and comprehensive 'toolbox'.
- *Budgets to promote 'security' need to be flexible*, so that they can be used to support those people, programmes or projects that actively contribute to safety – not only the obviously relevant state agencies.

Placemaking is therefore a way of
- looking at a place,
- thinking freshly about it, and
- taking effective action in it,

in order to make it a safer and better place to be.

What do we mean by a safer and better place to be? We mean a place where people can live, work, play and grow – altogether, a *liveable* place.

Safety - and the sense of being safe - can be created.

Every 'place' (our street, the planet ...) has its own features and characteristics, its own opportunities for good things or bad things to happen.

In other words, there is always a 'pathway' that has led to a harm.

If we can identify that pathway, we can then devise a way of interrupting it so that the potential harm is less likely to happen. And even more than that, an opportunity for harm (a vacant lot used for dumping) may be turned into an opportunity for improving safety (making a simple park for recreation).

At the end of a placemaking workshop for a new Neighbourhood Watch in a country town, the members were asked if they could think of a simple action they could carry out at once that would make a difference. A young man and his friends announced that they were going to do a survey of all the streetlights in their neighbourhood and would send a list of the missing or 'out' lights to the relevant municipal department and would follow up to see that they were fixed.

3. Tested practices in creating safety

Using the foundation of the design principles for placemaking that we have articulated above, we propose several forms of practice that, if implemented consistently, will lead to less violence and disorder and greater peace, safety and stability in any given neighbourhood.

What all these forms of practice have in common is that they help to create spaces and opportunities for people to think freshly about what they are capable of and develop innovative and effective plans of action.

Placemaking for neighbourhood safety may be carried out by any person with the right attitude, without the need for any official rank or designation (by Neighbourhood Watches or Peace Committees, for instance).

Nevertheless, there are real advantages in many situations for the placemaker to carry official authority and statutory powers. We therefore begin by considering the opportunities available specifically to law-enforcement officers.

i.   Neighbourhood Safety Officers [1]

"Dis die klein jakkalsies wat die wingerd vernietig." [2]

- Neighbourhood Safety officers are deployed to designated neighbourhoods for extended periods of service.
- They are law-enforcement officers who have the attitude and the experience to think innovatively and develop practical plans of action in cooperation with all persons, agencies and organisations who share the vision of a safe, peaceful and prosperous neighbourhood.
- They are the interested and engaged daily 'face' of policing in the community they serve.

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[1] This is the term used in Cape Town. In Amsterdam, officers carrying out this function are called 'wykagente' (area officers), while in Toronto they are 'Neighbourhood Officers'.
[2] 'It's the little foxes that destroy the vineyard'

a) NSO Objectives

- To help create conditions which discourage disorder and encourage constructive future-oriented thinking.
- To promote safety and a good quality of life (*leefbaarheid*) in their assigned neighbourhood.

b) How does an NSO help to create safety?

- By knowing and being known in their neighbourhood.
- By identifying opportunities for reducing risk and increasing local wellbeing.
- By creating a network of agencies, Individuals and organisations who have insight into the neighbourhood and become their partners in creating - step by thoughtful step - safety and a good quality of life.

c) What makes a successful NSO?

- An NSO
- is observant, proactive and uses his/her initiative
- is comfortable with cultural/social/economic diversity
- communicates easily with a range of people and organisations
- is a good listener, but is ready to act when required
- sets an example of integrity, reliability and fairness
- has experience of law enforcement-based policing and is ready to use his/her powers when necessary.

d) Conditions for the successful deployment of NSOs

- All managers in the line of command of NSOs must thoroughly understand and support the principles of this form of integrated neighbourhood policing.
- The special qualities of initiative and 'self-starting' required of NSOs should be emphasised in their recruitment and realistically reflected in their conditions of service.
- For accountability and for record-keeping, their mode of reporting must reflect, support and reinforce their functions.

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A school may be regarded as a kind of neighbourhood with special needs, and we have found it effective to deploy officers who fit all the criteria for NSOs as officers with specific responsibilities for schools. [3]

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[3] As, for example, in many jurisdictions in the United States and Canada.

ii.   School Resource Officers

Prevention is better than cure (and cheaper)

Schools are in many respects 'the centre of the community'. Everyone in a neighbourhood has either been at school, has family at school or lives near a school. What happens in the school affects the community, and vice versa. Social issues from the neighbourhood are brought into the schools (sometimes literally, in the form of intrusions by gangsters), and the state of the school (flourishing, depressed, or anywhere in between) sends ripples back into the community.

School Resource Officers (SROs) are law enforcement officers who are deployed specifically to schools. They are much more than 'security guards' – like NSOs, they are problem solvers and facilitators, while still having the authority of trained law enforcement officers.

a)   SRO Objective
To create and maintain an environment in and around designated schools that is conducive to teaching, learning, and personal and social development.

b)   Key roles and responsibilities
- In cooperation with the principal, staff, pupils and parents, to contribute actively to the creation of a safe and inspiring environment in and around the school.
- To identify opportunities for improving safety, and to make plans to take advantage of these opportunities.
- To identify risks of unsafety and harms, and to devise strategies and plans to mitigate or eliminate them.
- To develop and make regular use of a network of partners (individuals, organisations or agencies) who may be of assistance in achieving the above objectives.
- To build trust in their integrity and competence as law-enforcement officers.

A few SROs in an area decided to offer training in drilling (or 'marching') to volunteer pupils in three schools. After three months they held a mini-festival to show off their new skills. A 13-year-old team member, when asked what this activity meant to her, said, "I'm learning discipline. I talk to people differently now".

The discipline she speaks of is not of an oppressive kind, but an internalised structure which provides creative form and direction to her thoughts and behaviour.

So, the external order that the presence of SROs helps to bring about in a school is a potential framework for growth and personal liberation in an environment in which such opportunities are limited.

c)   Guidelines for implementation

Get to know

- *the place*: the school buildings and grounds, the immediate surrounds of the school, and the routes pupils follow to get to school and back;
- *the people*: inside the school, from the principal to the cleaners; outside the school, the parents and neighbours. They all have knowledge and insights that will be useful in creating safety;
- *the issues*: some will be obvious; some the SRO will become aware of through their continuing interaction with members of the school community;
- *the potential partners*: as in the case with NSOs, some things SROs can deal with effectively by themselves, but many problems and opportunities require specific partners, whether in policing, in social development (truancy, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, etc.), in NGOs or in the community.

iii.　　Focus Tables

Official policing or law enforcement, even through the facilitative approach of NSOs and SROs, is not enough in itself to deal with the socio-psychological issues that are crucial elements in community instability and unsafety, and a Focus Table provides a practical issue-based bridge between policing and social development professionals.

a)　　Objective
To contribute to the safety and quality of life in a neighbourhood by dealing professionally and effectively with individual cases of trauma and distress.

b)　　How does a Focus Table operate?
A Focus Table regularly brings together professionals working in the community to focus on individual cases involving social and psychological issues and to make recommendations on appropriate follow-up actions, including referrals.

A Table therefore includes social workers with a variety of professional specialties and responsibilities (for example, early childhood education, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, family dynamics and domestic violence, etc.), representatives of locally based NSOs, Social Crime Prevention officers if locally available (community education, programmes on alcohol and other drugs, etc.) and SROs.

The Focus Table model not only provides a forum for finding appropriate ways of dealing with difficult individual cases, but is also a convenient and unique means of sharing information and requesting or proposing actions across very different sectors working in a specific community (particularly from social workers to police, and vice versa).

This regular but informal sharing strengthens institutional capacity as well as benefitting individual community members.

The Focus Table does not run its own programmes but aims to facilitate the best possible use of existing programmes, resources and skills. It may however make recommendations for improvements or innovations if it becomes apparent that there are clear needs and opportunities to be addressed.

c)   Essential elements of an effectively functioning Focus Table
- awareness of the common goal: increased safety, social cohesion and quality of life within a designated area
- regularly scheduled meetings
- the regular presence of locally based practitioners with relevant professional shills
- clear definition of the roles of participants
- respect for the variety of skills and perspectives present
- clear and informed direction from the Chair
- an agreed standard format for reporting on specific cases
- confidentiality: no names of individual cases come to the FT – access to the forms is on a need-to-know basis, monitored by the Chair
- a person tasked with archiving the Case Reports for summary reporting purposes
- sufficiently detailed minutes of meetings to ensure follow-up and accountability.

iv.   Neighbourhood Safety Teams

One hand washing the other

NSOs, SROs and Focus Tables all derive their special activities from the core placemaking principles laid out above (pages 1-2). Each one of them has its own way of identifying, mobilising and integrating different kinds of knowledges and resources in order to promote safety and a good quality of life in a neighbourhood.

These programmes can be effective if implemented separately (where, for example, you may have NSOs in a neighbourhood but no SROs, and vice versa).

However, experience shows that if all three mutually reinforcing functions are deliberately and strategically implemented in the same neighbourhood, as distinct and respected elements in an inclusive team, their effectiveness is greatly enhanced.

This should not be surprising – a well-functioning Neighbourhood Safety Team (NFT) is after all merely exemplifying the third principle: 'Think issue-based partnership.

In addition, of course, they will have access to the support of their colleagues in regular operational policing and any special policing units that may be locally available, as well as to the local authorities responsible for such services as roads, cleansing, electricity and so forth.

Conditions for an effectively functioning Neighbourhood Safety Team
- Senior management agreement on terms of internal and external cooperation.
- Clear consensus on the overall objectives of the combined work.
- Each partner respects the specific and complementary skills/capacity of all the others and makes space for them to be put to work.
- Responsibility for operational planning and implementation is shared.

v.   Neighbourhood Watches

Neighbourhood Watches are a popular means of mobilising local knowledge in order to improve safety in their neighbourhood. They are autonomous civil society organisations whose members voluntarily give of their time, working within the law.

Neighbourhood Watches are often referred to as 'the eyes and ears of the police' in the community, and usually have a close association with state police agencies. They carry out neighbourhood patrols on foot, by bicycle or in vehicles, by day and often by night. Well-resourced communities may invest in radios, cameras and control rooms linking their activities with private security companies and police agencies.

Whatever the level of technical support available to a Neighbourhood Watch, their establishment and operations in effect recognise that neighbourhood safety cannot be brought about by state law-enforcement agencies alone, and that – if they operate within the law that applies to all civilians – their patrolling activities may contribute to improving neighbourhood safety and reducing the opportunities for crime.

Nevertheless, not every local resident who wishes to help create a safe neighbourhood is interested in – or even fitted to – taking part in recognised patrols. The crucial element that Neighbourhood Watch members bring to improving local safety is their local knowledge, and we need to think more broadly about how that knowledge can best be use in a preventive and future-oriented manner. 'Placemaking' may include formal patrolling, but is not limited to it.

So, if not only patrolling, what?

So far, we have been presenting sets of practices (based on the same set of foundational principles) that may be implemented either through state bodies (NSOs, SROs, Focus Tables) or in close association with them (Neighbourhood Watch), but anybody can be a placemaker for public safety. All it takes is

- Knowledge of your neighbourhood (physical layout, demography, culture and amenities, etc.).
- An observant eye for signs of potential harm (the 'broken window' awareness) and potential for improvement.
- Knowledge of whom to ask for assistance if needed (police, social services, municipal services, etc.).
- Respect for the law and proper process.
- A willingness to think beyond what is usually taken for granted.

Here is a suggested Code of Good Practice for civil society placemakers, including Neighbourhood Watch:

- **Our aim is to help make our neighbourhood a safe place to live, work and play.**
- **We respect all other organisations, agencies and individuals that share this aim, and we undertake to work in cooperation with them.**
- **We work and behave within the law.**
- **We are transparent and accountable with respect to any funding we may receive in relation to our work as placemakers.**
- **We do not use this work as a platform for party-political or sectarian interests.**

vi.   Peace Committees

In the 1980s, in response to the concern of indigenous cultural minorities ('First Nations') in New Zealand, the United States and Canada that a disproportionate number of their young men (and some young women) were falling foul of the dominant criminal justice system, there was a move to redirect or divert suitable cases out of the court system. What was proposed was a deliberative process intended to repair the harm done and avert the additional harm brought about by punishment and incarceration.

This diversion – one possible embodiment of the approach known as 'restorative justice' - took the form of gatherings commonly known as 'family group conferences'. In this format, victim and offender were brought together in a mediated process, with the outcome of the process (usually some form of restitution or community service) being referred to the state authority for approval and implementation.

As South Africa undertook the ongoing process of reinventing itself after the oppression and disruption of *apartheid*, it became clear that even a national police agency that had changed its definition from a 'Force' to a 'Service' was not able to move essentially from 'fighting crime' to 'creating safety', and that other more creative measures were needed.

In responding to this need, both the family group conference model and indigenous African dispute-resolution traditions provided some food for thought, but the model that emerged from testing and consultation (the 'Peace Committee' model) is radically different from both:

- Peace Committees are autonomous civil society organisations based on local knowledge and experience and do not have any formal or statutory link with state agencies or structures.
- Their objective in each case is a pragmatic one: to make the future better for the parties involved in the dispute (and thus for the neighbourhood). Reconciliation between the parties is a welcome bonus rather than a crucial objective.
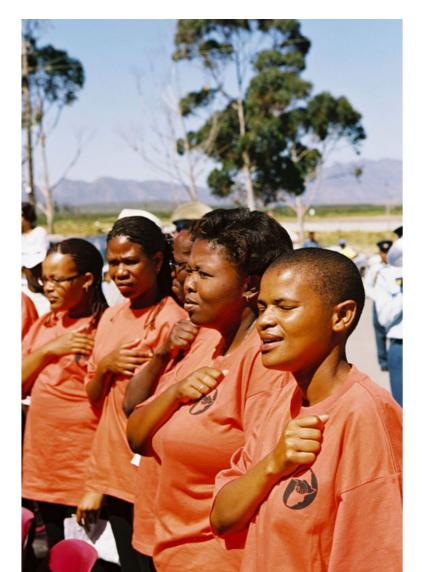
A middle-aged couple came to a Peace Committee gathering together with their son and his girlfriend. They all lived together in a very cramped one-bedroom house, and the two women were constantly at odds, even coming to blows.

After long discussion it became apparent to everyone present (including, crucially, the disputants) that no reconciliation between the women was likely and that the trouble would continue and probably get worse if they were living in the same house. The action plan agreed on by all was that they would ask the assistance of the local civic association committee that recommended the allotting of plots for building shacks.

This was done, the young couple moved, and the Peace Committee later reported that the relationship between the women, if not cordial, was no longer obstructing or undermining their daily lives.

The Peace Committee model is designed to enable people to manage their own lives. Although its aims are general (that is, the whole of people's lives) it approaches general things in very specific and concrete ways by giving priority to disputes. The model sees most disputes as problems that are usually small in themselves, but which, if they are not dealt with, can often escalate until they become disastrous.

Peace Committees operate according to a Code of Good Practice. When a complaint is brought to a Peace Committee, an agreed set of procedures is followed.

a) How Peace Committees work

A "Peace-making gathering" is arranged, usually within days after the occurrence of the problem. The purpose of this gathering is to bring together the disputants and any other people who may be able to help understand and resolve the dispute. In this process, the role of the Peace Committee members is entirely to facilitate, not to engage in blaming or judging, and not to propose any solution.

The Gathering is guided through several stages, with all those present being encouraged to take part: first, statements and discussion on what happened and its consequences; then an attempt to identify the root cause(s) of the problem, and finally discussion to produce an appropriate action plan agreed by all, to try and ensure that the problem does not recur. The focus of the gathering therefore starts with the past problem and moves towards making a better and more secure future.

Here is a more detailed account of the process:

- People in communities establish groups of people, who call themselves a Peace Committee. The purpose here is to create an ongoing structure that people in the community, governments and others can relate to.
- This Peace Committee announces itself within the community as a group who will facilitate the resolution of disputes. When this happens the Peace Committee tells the community about their values. They do this by stating and making available a Code of Good Practice that says, "Here are our values; here is what we are committed to". In South Africa a key feature of this Code is that "we do not use force to solve problems". The purpose of the Code is to ensure that people know the key values of the Peace Committee so that people know what to expect.
- Why would people choose to bring a dispute to the Peace Committee? People usually do this because they do not want the guiltiness and punishment that the criminal justice system promotes, but also do not wish to take the vigilante route (which is relatively common in poor communities in the larger South African cities).
- Once a dispute has been brought to the Peace Committee, the Peace Committee assigns three or more people to facilitate a dispute resolution.
- Once the Peace Committee understands what has been going on, it organises a gathering that includes the disputants and other people who they think will be able to contribute to solving the problem. We call these Peacemaking Gatherings. Who is asked to attend is very important, as the people that come bring with them knowledge and resources that they can use to help solve problems. Having the right people from the community, they ensure that solutions will be community solutions and that the decisions taken will respect peoples' values and the way they live.

A young woman came to a Peace Gathering, saying that her partner had beaten her. She brought her partner and her sister with her. After she had told her story, the young man apologised profusely, promising that he would never do it again.

The Peace Committee facilitator asked her if she was satisfied with this commitment, and she replied that she was. At this point her sister intervened, stating that he had beaten her sister before and had then promised never to do it again, and that his simple word could therefore not be relied on.

The young man was very embarrassed and conceded the truth of this. After further discussion, it was agreed by all the parties that a member of the Peace Committee would visit the young couple at least once every month to have a friendly conversation with them and would report back to the Peace Committee each time.

This is a striking example of finding a thoughtful future-oriented solution by having the right 'partner' present (mobilising the most useful resource) – in this case, the complainant's sister.

- Gatherings usually take place in the house of a Peace Committee member or in a room at a community centre. Either way, the environment is informal and non-threatening
- At a gathering, after reading the Code of Good Practice, the first thing the facilitators do is to hear from the disputants (separately) what the dispute is all about. The purpose here is not to decide who is right and who is wrong but to try and identify the causes of the problem and to find out who is likely to be able to help in solving it. No one is labelled as a victim or an offender. Rather they are people who have a dispute.
- At a gathering the focus always moves toward the future. The question asked is what can be done to reduce the likelihood of this and similar problems happening again. This does not mean, of course, that they do not talk about the past; but they do so in order to find out what can be done to make tomorrow better.
- When a plan of action to improve matters is reached, it is written down and everyone signs to show his or her commitment to it. If specific things must be done the plan will list them and it will say who is responsible for doing these things. The purpose is to make sure that everyone knows what has been decided, so that they can make sure that what is decided does happen.
- At the end of the gathering it may be that the disputants apologise to each other, if they do, they may shake hands or hug each other. But this is not seen as essential. It is useful if it contributes to people being able to move forward to a better tomorrow. But sometimes people decide that this is not going to be either necessary or helpful. When this happens there may be no apology.
- What always does happen at the close of a gathering is that the people present do something that symbolises their commitment to what has been decided. This might be a dance, or a song, or a prayer or a holding of hands or a combination of things like that.
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Problems and disputes brought to Peace-making Gatherings for facilitation have included unpaid loans and child maintenance, insults and fighting, theft and domestic violence. In all these matters, the gathering together of appropriate local people in a facilitative environment is the

key to the resolution of the dispute and the agreement on workable and effective plans of future-oriented action.

b)   Peace Committee Code

We help to create a safe and secure environment in our community
We respect the South African Constitution[4]
We work within the law
We do not use force or violence
We do not take sides in disputes
We work in the community as a co-operative team, not as individuals
We follow procedures which are open for the community to see
We do not gossip about our work or about other people
We are committed in what we do
Our aim is to heal, not to hurt

4. Conclusion

Considering the principles and practices articulated in this brief handbook, we may rephrase our priorities as follows:

- safety begins in neighbourhoods, the places where we live, play and often work;
- true safety is experienced in the enhanced quality of daily life;
- neighbourhoods are the building blocks of a broader community, and have a ripple effect beyond themselves;
- neighbourhood safety is not the exclusive domain of any single agency or organisation;
- the chief characteristics of effective placemakers for public safety (whether 'ordinary' citizens or public servants) are alertness and respect.

If you would like assistance from John Cartwright in applying these principles to particular contexts and circumstances, please contact Elaine Atkins at Elaine.Atkins@uct.ac.za

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[4] Or equivalent in other jurisdictions.

19