

## Why you need a community crime prevention strategy

Crime is a serious problem in this country. Solutions that work and are cost-effective must be found. Crime prevention is just this sort of solution. A community crime prevention strategy is a framework for the crime prevention activities that will make your area safer.

### Crime prevention works

Your area needs a crime prevention strategy because it is the best way to reduce crime. It works. In countries where crime prevention has been practised for many years, certain projects have succeeded in bringing down crime levels and in lessening the chances of young people turning to crime. Consider these examples.

The Quantum Opportunities Program (QOP) in five cities in the USA reduced delinquency by 71% by providing disadvantaged, at-risk youths with incentives to complete school. An evaluation showed that programme members were more likely to finish high school, to register for tertiary education, and were less likely to be arrested than other young people in similar communities. In the Netherlands, projects to prevent young people from turning to crime also managed to reduce delinquency by 71%.

Many crime prevention programmes reduce the levels of crime. Two examples show decreases in domestic violence and crime related to alcohol and drug use. A programme to reduce domestic violence in Scotland focused on educating men convicted of domestic violence. An evaluation found that female partners of men in the programme reported a 56% decrease in domestic violence. In the USA, a two-year assessment of substance-abuse prevention programmes by the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs showed a 63% reduction in any illegal activity by programme participants.

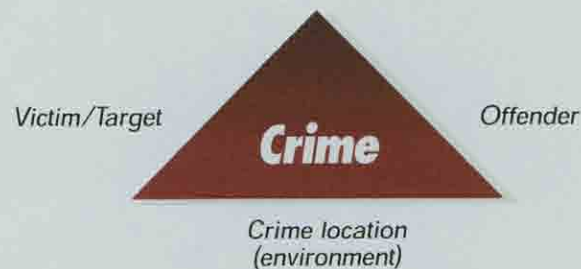
Property crimes like burglary can also be reduced through the crime prevention approach. In Kirkholt, England, a programme to reduce repeat burglary in a low-income housing estate showed a 58% reduction in burglaries in the first year (from 526 to 223). Over three years, this had improved by 75%. In the Netherlands the Safe Housing Label programme, initiated by the police in Rotterdam, Leiden and The Hague, showed a 70% reduction in burglaries among those households who participated.

Crime prevention programmes are not all equally successful, and one that works in your community may not work as well in another area. However, there is sufficient evidence to show that crime prevention does work. You can benefit from this experience and you should adapt examples of successful projects to make your community safer.

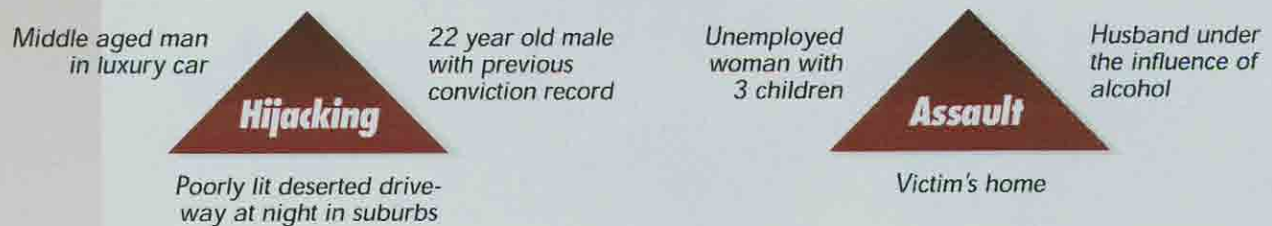
## What causes crime?

Crime prevention works because it is based on a sound understanding of what causes crime. It is only by thinking through the causes of a problem that you will be able to prevent it.

Crime is not caused by any one event but rather results from a combination of many factors. Whether or not a crime is committed usually depends on three sets of characteristics: those of the offender, those of the potential victim, and those of the 'environment' where a crime is likely to be committed. The environment includes the physical location, the people, and activities in an area that might deter or encourage the offender in his or her actions. The examples below show how these basic elements can be applied to well-known crime situations. Just as a specific crime depends on the interaction and presence of these three elements, preventing crime also concerns the three components.



**Figure 1:**  
*The basic elements of a crime*



**Figure 1(a):**  
*Hijacking example*

**Figure 1(b):**  
*Domestic violence example*

## Crime prevention has become a buzzword - but what does it mean?

Crime prevention means different things to different people. For the police, crime prevention has to do with roadblocks, visible policing and search-and-seizure operations. For a social worker, it might mean setting up projects to re-integrate a young offender back into society after being arrested for a petty crime. These are very different activities, but they all contribute towards preventing crime.

In effect, crime prevention is about stopping crime from happening rather than waiting to respond once offences have been committed. For example, much policing activity

involves responding to crime: when the police are called to a crime scene they respond by investigating the case, arresting suspects, and seeking a conviction in court.

Many people believe that it is only through action by the police and the courts that crime in our communities will be reduced. This is usually seen as the 'tough, no-nonsense' approach resulting in punishment to deter offenders from committing crime again. But it is equally important to stop people from committing crime in the first place. Prevention, often seen as the 'soft' approach, saves the government vast amounts of money. It also lessens the impact of crime on victims, as well as the destructive effects of imprisonment, particularly on young offenders and petty offenders. It improves the quality of life in communities which, in the long term, helps create a safer environment. More importantly, preventing crime means aiming at the heart of the problem - rather than responding to its symptoms.

## Crime prevention is not a 'soft' option!

Making your community safer will mean combining the efforts of those who enforce the law with the efforts of those who prevent people getting on the wrong side of the law. Given the factors that lead to crimes being committed (shown in Figure 1), it is clear that simply arresting an offender will deal with only one part of the 'crime triangle'.

You should therefore think of crime prevention as an approach that combines several strategies.

### A definition of crime prevention

Crime prevention involves responding to a few priority problems, using targeted multi-agency programmes. These programmes aim to address the causes of and opportunities for particular crime problems. They should also enforce laws, ensure that order is maintained in the day to day activities of the community and reduce public fear of crime.

## Why can't we expect the police alone to reduce crime?

Because crime is caused by a range of factors, it will be impossible for any one agency (like the police) to make a major difference on its own.

Consider the two examples in Figure 1 again:

- **In the hijacking case** (Figure 1(a)), the police could patrol the area and arrest the suspects if they are notified of the incident. But they cannot provide better street lighting, make the vehicle owner take precautions, or provide the offender with alternative employment opportunities.

- **In the domestic violence case** (Figure 1(b)), the police can do very little to prevent the assault since it happens in the privacy of a home and results from complex social problems. Even arresting the offender in this case will be difficult, because most victims do not report the incident to the police. Policing alone is seldom the best solution to violent crimes of this nature.

These two cases show that preventing crime requires the involvement of many very different role-players. Setting up partnerships between a range of organisations is the key to reducing crime in your community. Partnerships should pool the resources and skills of all relevant role-players for a specific crime prevention project. Together they can identify the most serious crimes in your area, plan how to reduce them and ensure appropriate and ongoing management of the projects.

### Example of a crime prevention partnership

The following role-players could be part of a local **crime-prevention partnership** to address the problem of **hijacking**:

- **Law enforcement agencies** (police and prosecution agencies): Visible police patrols on highways, at major intersections and in suburbs; special courts for prosecuting suspects.
- **Municipalities**: Designing buildings and roads to reduce the opportunities for hijacking and informing people of risk factors and hijacking locations.
- **Community**: Neighbourhood-watch groups that provide information; support victims and deter attacks by patrolling the area.
- **Business**: Supplying cars and radios for police patrols; project management; and applying media liaison and publicity skills to advertise the project.
- **NGOs**: Counselling victims of car hijackings and giving support in court preparation.

### How the causes of crime are linked to the solutions

Solutions to crime must be based on the factors that cause crime, as shown in Figure 1 above:

- **Victims**: Crime prevention projects could consider what makes victims vulnerable, or attractive targets for offenders.
- **Offenders**: Crime prevention projects could focus on what makes offenders willing and able to commit the crime.
- **The environment**: Crime prevention projects should reduce the opportunities for crime in crime-prone places.

Because activities in these three categories are quite different and involve different agencies and government departments, crime prevention is generally understood in terms of three approaches:

- Law enforcement.
- Situational prevention (see glossary).
- Social prevention.

Programmes might start out using one approach and later incorporate other approaches. Examples of projects to solve various crime problems under these three approaches are shown below.

These **approaches** are not distinct and are rarely used alone. In most cases elements of all three are used together to impact on a single problem: for example, **car guard** programmes to reduce car theft provide visible policing (law enforcement), the 'eyes on the street' which act as a deterrent (situational prevention), and jobs for the previously unemployed (social prevention).



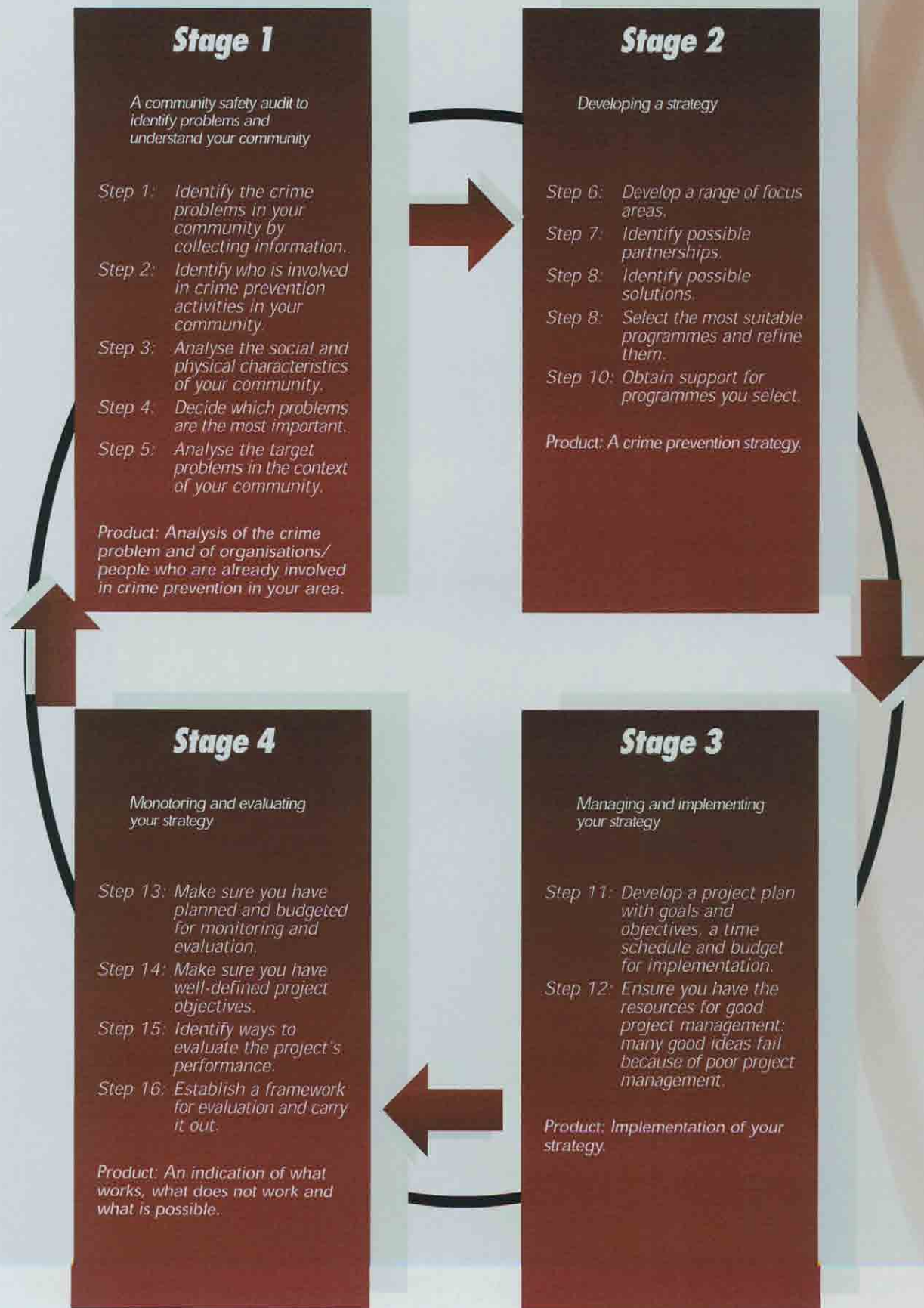
**Figure 2:**  
*Three approaches to crime prevention and some examples of possible projects*

## Planning your community crime prevention strategy

The key to successful crime prevention is planning. This means that you will have to

- approach your community's problems logically and systematically;
- develop focus areas and programmes to address the needs you identify; and
- evaluate these programmes to ensure that they are effective.

The planning model (Figure 3) shows the phases in designing and implementing a strategy. The rest of the manual will guide you through each of the steps to help you reduce crime in your area. Remember that funding, both for the strategy itself or projects within it, as well as for the planning of the strategy, is a necessary and ongoing activity.



**Figure 3:**  
The process of planning and designing your community crime prevention strategy