



Meeting needs, making changes, improving outcomes

Developing Safer Communities: CDI's Community Safety Initiative

Policy Brief

This policy brief outlines ways in which we can promote collaborative responses to address local safety issues, improve neighbour relations and promote a safe and healthy environment for children and families. The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), one of the three Prevention and Early Intervention Programme organisations, implemented a Community Safety Initiative (CSI) in Tallaght West. This has been independently evaluated and the findings and key implications for policy-makers and practitioners in community safety are presented here.



Key Points

- Community safety initiatives are broad-based responses to local safety needs. They take a partnership approach based on community development principles and aim to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in local communities;
- CDI implemented a Community Safety Initiative (CSI). This included establishing, supporting, and coordinating an interagency-community partnership to plan and manage the CSI; carrying out community engagement and safety-related activities in small neighbourhoods (approximately 100 households) and across Tallaght West; and addressing issues in a newly built estate. In addition, it involved implementing a Restorative Practice Programme and developing and testing a CSI Manual;
- An independent evaluation of the CSI found that it is important to ensure that the CSI has adequate local input and broad representation from the locality, and that community members are sufficiently supported to engage with the initiative;
- Positive child and family outcomes were heavily influenced by the quality of the service provision, supports to parents and staff, organisational supports, and onsite delivery;
- The core stakeholders necessary to the successful implementation of a locally based CSI include residents, managers and front-line staff from the local authority, Gardaí, youth services and local community-based organisations. Buy-in to the work of the CSI may also be required from other services (such as education and health services) depending on local conditions. Involvement by managers in the planning and design of a CSI will facilitate the required focus and collaboration by front-line staff in identified localities, where a sustained short-term effort to confront safety issues will reap positive results for communities.

Background and Context

The evaluation of the Childhood Development Initiative (CSI) by Reddy *et al* (2013) defines community safety initiatives as broad-based responses to localised anti-social behaviour and crime. The general aim is to employ long-term partnership strategies that supplement familiar State-led policing strategies with more holistic, localised and comprehensive responses in order to reduce anti-social activity, crime and the fear of victimisation (Gilling, 2005; Ekblom and Pease, 1995; Harris, 2006). The 'community safety' concept, therefore, commonly involves establishing area-based partnerships between key actors in the areas of criminal justice, local and community development, as well as local residents and young people (Flint and Nixon, 2006).

Local community safety initiatives are in line with the current Programme for Government (2011–2016), which commits the Government to a fundamental reorganisation of local governance structures to allow for much greater participation by local people in decision-making, including local responses to crime. In addition, local authorities are required by the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 to develop anti-social behaviour strategies that coordinate services and adopt a preventive approach.

The Children Act 2001 includes provisions relating to the prevention of criminal behaviour among young people, diversion of young people from the criminal justice system and rehabilitation. The Garda Síochána Act 2005 provides for the introduction of Joint Policing Committees and Local Policing Fora, which offer a mechanism for the community, Gardaí, local authority, Oireachtas members and other key stakeholders to come together regularly to address safety issues. Community safety initiatives can also support the objectives of the Department of Justice and Equality's Strategy Statement 2011–2014, which includes a commitment to supporting community policing models and partnerships as a response to anti-social behaviour and low-level crime.



CDI's Community Safety Initiative

In 2007, CDI began work on developing and implementing a Community Safety Initiative (CSI), with a comprehensive consultation process with local stakeholders (CDI, 2008). An interagency-community partnership was established to plan and manage the work of the CSI and over the next three years, a range of activities aimed at engaging the community in the CSI and at improving and maintaining safety in local neighbourhoods were undertaken.

Community engagement activities included local field-workers undertaking door-to-door surveys that identified key issues which informed activities; local festivals; sports tournaments and street clean-ups (all organised on a joint agency-resident basis); children's good behaviour awards; and joint resident-agency training activities (e.g. Life Coaching Courses, Restorative Practice Training). The work included the development of a CSI Manual, which gathered evidence of best practice in relation to community safety and sets out a framework of actions to implement a CSI.

The CSI also developed a focus on urban planning and development as a key contributor to building safer communities. This initiative, called the *Safe and Healthy Place*, worked to address issues in a new housing estate in Tallaght West. CDI and South Dublin Children's Services Committee agreed this initiative and an interagency-community partnership was established to conduct a needs assessment in the new estate (CDI, 2010) and to devise and implement an action plan for developing facilities and services there.

The overall aims of the CSI are:

- to improve safety and promote pro-social behaviour across Tallaght West;
- to improve community awareness and participation in local activities and services;
- to encourage wide community engagement in maintaining a safe environment.

Evaluation of CDI's Community Safety Initiative

The Child and Family Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway, conducted an evaluation of the CSI (Reddy *et al*, 2013). Key findings include:

- Pooling of resources and the sharing of information and experience were identified as benefits accruing from partnership-working on CSI structures.
- Collaboration under the *Safe and Healthy Place* initiative was identified by a majority of participating service providers as giving structure and focus to service provision in a new estate and as having helped to broaden the capacity of local service providers to support local children and families.
- It is difficult to deliver on demonstrable outcomes relating to community-wide safety and pro-social behaviour. Many factors impact on this, including the perceived connections between the safety initiative and established structures, buy-in at managerial and organisational level, and the identification of local 'champions'.
- It is important that there is sufficient time in advance of implementation to develop a comprehensive best practice document, one that is internationally and nationally informed and contains relevant contextual policy and legislative information. Such a 'framework of action' may serve as a practical guide to stakeholders in clarifying purpose, outcomes and actions.





Recommendations

In implementing its CSI, a major learning point for CDI has been that for the vast majority of residents in Tallaght West, achieving community safety means tackling anti-social behaviour and addressing environmental issues at a very local neighbourhood level. Reducing crime remains the remit of the Gardaí and community engagement with crime reduction is already provided for through both Estate Management Clinics, which the Council and Gardaí jointly provide, and through participation by residents in Local Policing Fora.

In work that took place outside the timeframe for the overall evaluation (2011–2013), it was found that an interagency focus on local neighbourhoods (approximately 100 houses) identified as having particular safety problems could bring major improvements in the quality of life for residents within a short timeframe (12 – 18 months). (An evaluation of this work will be published in late 2013.).

CDI recommends:

Based on the learning from the evaluation of the CSI and CDI's subsequent work in Tallaght West, particularly through a partnership with South Dublin County Council and its RAPID Team, CDI recommends:

1. Given the centrality of community development approaches, that all those engaged in front-line delivery with disadvantaged communities receive a basic introduction to these principles as a minimum;
2. That a community engagement module be developed for delivery to both managers and front-line staff on an interagency and cross-disciplinary basis for those organisations whose work requires engagement with residents, particularly in areas of disadvantage. This would include local authorities, Gardaí, probation and youth services;
3. That key training and supports be provided to appropriate structures to ensure fidelity of intervention delivery and so ensure the potential for positive outcomes;
4. That community members be sufficiently supported to engage with community safety initiatives and, where possible, capacity-building strategies be delivered jointly to residents and service providers;
5. Given that stakeholder engagement is most effective when it involves both formal and informal strategies, that a mechanism for developing and sharing these approaches be developed in order to harness and maximise effective practice;
6. That all Government Departments continue to commit to using evidence to inform planning and service delivery, and give serious consideration to the implications of this evaluation for professional training, service planning and service integration.

Further information:

For further details on the CDI CSI evaluation report, please see:

Reddy, J., Kearns, N. and Canavan, J. (2013), *Evaluation of the Community Safety Initiative of the Childhood Development Initiative*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).

For further information on CDI's Community Safety Initiative, please visit: <http://www.twcdi.ie/our-programmes/community-safety-initiative>

References:

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The Childhood Development Initiative,
St Mark's Youth and Family Centre,
Cookstown Lane,
Fettercairn,
Dublin 24.

Phone: 01 4940030

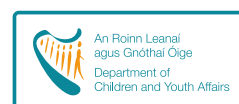
Fax: 01 4627329

Email: info@twcdi.ie

Web: www.twcdi.ie

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