



## BRIEF: Informed Community Engagement

# Strategic Priority: Safe City

## Definition

Contributing to inclusivity, diversity and accessibility in our community and participating in initiatives focused on a range of long-term, systemic safety solutions that respond to current and future residents.

## Research Shows...

Fostering policing is an important, but not singular, component of community safety, as achieving community safety requires community effort. Of equal significance are community-driven initiatives that help individuals struggling with addiction and mental health issues as well as those in need of supportive housing.<sup>1</sup> Safety is complex and is rooted in both the occurrence of crime and also perceptions of relative safety and unsafety.<sup>2</sup> While we tend to think of safety in terms of physical well-being and security, a more comprehensive definition suggests that “notions of safety and belonging have social, structural, physical, psychological and historical dimensions—all of which should be equally considered.”<sup>3</sup>

## Key Facts and Considerations

- » Most of the 911 calls dispatched to the [Owen Sound Police Service in 2023](#) were for non-Criminal Code incidents.
- » Between 2022 and 2023, [Owen Sound's overall Crime Severity Index](#), which includes all Criminal Code violations and assigns greater weight to more severe crimes, increased by 18%.
- » Owen Sound Police Service's [2022 Community Survey](#) found a slight increase in respondents who believe crime has increased in the community.
- » The Downtown River District scored the lowest in the Owen Sound Police Service's 2022 Community Survey on feelings of safety both at night and during the day.
- » The [Mental Health Crisis Response Team](#), a partnership between Owen Sound Police and Canadian Mental Health Association Grey Bruce, ensures individuals experiencing mental health or addiction issues receive the most timely and effective care possible. It has resulted in a 36% decrease in the number of individuals apprehended under the Mental Health Act compared to 2022.

1 Toronto Neighbourhood Centres. (2021). *Rethinking community safety: A step forward for Toronto*. <https://ccla.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Rethinking-Community-Safety-A-Step-Forward-For-Toronto-Full-Report-12.pdf>  
2 Zhang, F., Fan, Z., Kang, Y., Hu, Y., & Ratti, C. (2021, March). "Perception bias": Deciphering a mismatch between urban crime and perception of safety. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 207. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2020.104003>  
3 Pitter, J. (2023, September). *Little Jamaica cultural district plan*. City of Toronto. <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/9487-city-planning-little-jamaica-cultural-district-plan-final-report.pdf>

- » The Owen Sound Police [Community-Oriented Response Unit](#) proactively addresses community issues and concerns through partnering with local agencies, reducing police calls for service and ensuring more appropriate assistance for those in need. They are also a member of Grey Bruce Community Safety and Wellbeing Planning (CSWBP).
- » In early 2024, the Owen Sound Police Service initiated a partnership with Carleton University's Police Research Lab to study individuals' access to community services following police interactions.

## Precedents from Other Communities

The following precedents may be aligned with current initiatives in Owen Sound and may be reviewed to assess local approaches and/or serve as inspiration for possible future initiatives.

- » The City of Orillia's [Couchiching Community Safety and Well-Being Plan](#), aimed at enhancing community engagement and fostering trust, has resulted in community stakeholders feeling safer, experiencing a stronger sense of belonging, and becoming more aware of various forms of violence and the resources available to support victims.
- » The County of Simcoe's [South Georgian Bay and Springwater Community Safety and Well-Being Plan](#) addresses mental health, addictions, housing and access to services, resulting in greater success among community members in securing and retaining housing and fewer barriers to accessing services.
- » Northumberland County's [Community Safety and Well-Being Plan](#) allows community stakeholders to collectively develop and implement strategies to address the root causes of crime and complex social issues, prioritizing local initiatives and investments for social development and crime prevention.
- » The [Calgary Police Youth Foundation](#), alongside the City of Calgary, delivers early intervention community programming for at-risk youth.
- » Residents of the Centretown neighbourhood in Ottawa, following the city's creation of the [Alternate Neighbourhood Crisis Response](#) line, can call 211 in the event of a non-medical emergency, such as a substance use or mental health crisis.

Note: This brief is not intended to be complete or exhaustive. It is an informative community engagement preparatory tool. Special thanks to the students of URB432H in the Department of Urban Studies. Instructor: Daniel Fusca