

Homelands Partnership

Senior Sergeant KENNEDY, Queensland Police Service

Names of all partners involved in the project.

Queensland Police Service, Queensland Department of Communities, Centre link, Queensland Health, Queensland Correctives Services (Lotus Glen facility Mareeba – Townsville correctional facilities men and woman, Capricornia facility Rockhampton) , Queensland Justice Department, Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Policy, Cairns City Council, Sky trans, Aboriginal and Islander Rehabilitation Scheme (AIRS), Life Line, Oz Care, Hedleys' Liquor Group, Coles Myer Liquor Group, Beer Wine and Spirits Group, local hoteliers,

Address of lead organization or individual responsible for the project.

Senior Sergeant Owen KENNEDY, Cairns City Beat C/- 5 Sheridan Street, Cairns City,

Contact person/s for the project (include phone and fax numbers).

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Date of commencement of project.

01 July 2004

Summary description of project

The aim of the police led Homelands Project is to address the historical problem of homelessness in Cairns and the issues related including public drunkenness, anti-social behaviours, criminal acts, low feelings of safety by the public of Cairns, poor perception by the people of Cairns that police and government being unable to address associated crime issues in the CBD. The Homelands Project addresses the issues through a whole of government approach in partnership with business and the people of Cairns.

It must be remembered that this partnership was developed in view of a unique position that Cairns is in. Cairns is within the Far Northern Police Region which has **90% of the indigenous communities for the state within its boundaries**. The Region has a population of approximately 230, 000 persons of which 13.2% (30360) identify as indigenous. The Region has 27% of the States indigenous persons. (Source: DATSIP)

Cairns is the hub of tourism for Far North Queensland, with it being the life blood of the region valued in excess of **\$2billion** dollars annually from 3 million visitors.

The historic and chronic issue of public drunkenness in Cairns was until recently seen as a risk to the viability of tourism in Cairns. Cairns was being questioned as a safe destination and police were seen as unable to protect it.

Historically large numbers of indigenous homeless were arrested and held in the Cairns watch house with research indicating that over **1150 per year** (on a ten year average) were incarcerated by being arrested and charged with public drunkenness. A historical eleven year high being in 2000 with **2057** persons. These same persons in addition were committing endless numbers of anti-social behaviour offences, assaults on tourists and other offences which created the image that the CBD was simply not a safe place to be.

The Homelands Partnership as a multi agency partnership with police as the primary lead agency; sought to address law and order issues through integrated approaches and strategies. The Scope of the Homelands Partnership is to assist the homeless who have been identified as predominantly indigenous persons from cape communities and other indigenous communities throughout Queensland.

The Homelands Partnership worked towards assisting homeless persons within the township of Cairns. The identified homeless were predominantly indigenous persons who became displaced from their surrounding communities after arriving in Cairns for various reasons including medical treatment or released from jail and then found they no longer had means, or motivation to return home. These persons ended up in a chronic cycle of homelessness, alcohol abuse and repeat offending resulting in continual incarceration in either the Cairns Police Watch house or Lotus Glen Jail.

The partnership also identified that this group also had large amounts of outstanding fines from Magistrates Courts and on the spot fines, providing a heavy burden of knowing the issuing of warrants was a matter of time resulting in further periods of imprisonment. The partnership was able to develop a strategy whereby individuals were able to identify their outstanding fines and pay them of in instalments through periodic payments from their centre link pensions. It must be remembered that issues such as out standing fines was identified as a key issue in '*The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*' Extract: "*The*

imprisonment for non-payment of fines represents a remarkably substantial but little recognized category of offenders in prison.”

In early 2004 police found that they were unable to consult with the homeless to determine their needs and reasons for becoming homeless in Cairns. Police found that as early as 6am most mornings the homeless were heavily intoxicated and committing offences which continued through the day making it impossible for any government or social agency to speak with them, thus clients were not able to break the cycle of alcohol abuse. It was also found that the chosen alcohol consumed was cheap wine casks.

Consultation was conducted with local liquor stores including large conglomerates as to the issues and it was agreed that they would enter into a Voluntary Management Plan (VMP) as of 01/07/2004 to not sell wine casks each day before 4pm. This plan had an immediate affect in so far as allowing the various agencies to consult with the homeless during a previously non existent sober period to discuss their various personal issues.

These issues included:-

- Numerous outstanding fines which they believed were to cause their imprisonment
- Being placed on inappropriate pensions or payment schemes resulting in termination of payments resulting in offences of stealing, begging alms, creating a public nuisance and alike in areas of the Cairns CBD heavily populated by tourists
- Being stuck in Cairns after release from hospital or jail or for various reasons and not having the ability to book flights and to return home
- Not being able to verbalize their desire for housing, rehabilitation or to return home
- Chronic medical or mental health issues including conditions left untreated for extended periods. The mental health issues leading to offending and incarceration.

The VMP provide a never before window of sobered opportunity to allow personal consultation with the homeless to identify specific issues with a view to solving same be it providing the ability to return to their home communities, housing, placement into rehabilitation, the ability to pay of their outstanding fines through installments via their centre link payments or to be placed on more appropriate pensions or payment schemes.

There are now fourteen bottle shops participating in the VMP.

Through out the process ongoing issues were identified requiring consultation across a broad number of government agencies including the courts, corrective services and community justice groups to develop appropriate responses. By way of example police are now working with the local jail closer then ever to **educate recidivist offenders to reduce offending** and whilst in prison identifying personal issues to once again fall back on this multi agency approach to respond and break the cycle of alcohol abuse, offending behaviors and ongoing incarceration. Jail management has identified a reduction in recidivist itinerant offenders entering the local jail.

The project has demonstrated that it is appropriately targeted by the fact the outcomes since 2004 have so clearly showed a great impact on police resources and law enforcement within the Cairns CBD as well as an improved life style for this client group and that of the local general population. The project not only was required to be appropriately targeted but conducted in a culturally sensitive manner. Once the chronic vale of public drunkenness

was lowered and the daily high levels of intoxication removed, the various agencies including police (police liaison officers) were able to consult with the individuals to determine their needs and reasons for being homeless and thereby caught in the cycle of alcohol abuse and offending.

It was important to tackle the issue at street-level, to break the cycle and bring about long-term change in anti social offending and criminal acts

Since Homelands was introduced in July 2004, **28 people** have been housed in temporary accommodation, **18 people** have entered alcohol rehabilitation and **149 itinerants** have voluntarily returned home to their communities. **282 people** have also been assisted in pay off outstanding fines by assisting them in structuring an automatic payment from their fortnightly pension. (24 February 2006)

The partnership clearly shows sustainability by the statistics provided for 2003, 2004 and early 2006. Not only has it provided a profound reduction in offending but a dramatic increase in the public's perceptions of safety and the police services ability to provide a safe community. The project and thereby police service has done so for a period of time.

The sustainability of the project is also increased due to the fact that the project was developed and operated from existing resources requiring no increase in expenditure by state or federal governments. The success of the project has encouraged the Queensland state government to expand it to Townsville and Mt Isa where similar historical issues exist.

The project is able to demonstrate in a profound way the impact of this project not only with the Homeless but also the community of Cairns. **Homelessness** numbers in Cairns has **reduced by 60%** over 2004 and 2005.

During 2004 and 2005 the number of the indigenous homeless being charged and held in the Cairns Watch house for offence of **public drunkenness has dropped by 85%** against the ten year average and the trend has continued into 2006. Further to this there was a **48% reduction in 2004** and **93% in 2005** when **compared to 2003** for drunken diversions by police to places of safety required for this client group (**3925 in 2003, 2041 in 2004, 269 in 2005 and 14 in 2006 as @ 31/07/06**) due to the dramatic decrease in the numbers of drunk itinerants on the streets of the Cairns CBD.

A corresponding trend to support the reduction in the harmful affects of alcohol abuse upon the homeless is the steady decline in the numbers of homeless through the local diversionary centre (**up to 46%**) which is the alternative place of safety for this client group when drunk.

Calls for service by police and other services including contracted local government security has dropped significantly during 2004/2005 which is clearly indicated in calls for service comparative graphs on page 10 of the attachment. Calls for service to events attached to this group namely drunken incidents, assaults and disturbances were greatly reduced and thereby increasing the safety of the Cairns CBD and the \$2 billion dollar tourism industry which is so vital to this region.

This has freed immense police resources in the Cairns CBD to enable police to refocus and concentrate on other offender groups (e.g. drug offenders, property offenders, offences

against the person) by Cairns City Beat police. The arrest rate of the Cairns City Beat Police increased by **107%** (source: City Beat Statistics) **in 2004** to 2003 and **142% in 2005** to 2003. In the first seven months of **2006** the arrest rate is already **57%** higher than the same period in 2005 and **156%** higher when compared to the same period in 2003. It has also freed police resources to concentrate on other serious issues such as working towards reducing the road toll resulting in a 34% increase in the detection of drink drivers in 2004 compared to 2003 and 63% increase in 2005 compared to 2003.

What is the annual cost of the project?

There is no additional cost to the project other than the costs of existing services which were already in place and not effectively used.

Target group or groups:

The project aims to assist a number of and digress type of target groups. It assists the homeless indigenous (approximately 150) in Cairns, but in doing so it has also assisted the population of Cairns (230, 000 persons) to be and feel safe. Further more it has ensured the safety of millions of visitors (nationally and internationally) to Cairns, thereby assisting the ongoing viability of the lucrative tourism industry.

Has this project reduced or prevented violence or other types of crime in your local community? If so, how do you know?

The project has both reduced and prevented crime in the community of Cairns through a coordinated collaboration of existing government and private resources. The partnership tackled core issues at a street based level and the success of the project is evident through various sources including a statistical reduction in the number of indigenous homeless in police custody in Cairns for public drunkenness and ant social behaviors, a dramatic reduction in police calls for service for the same client group, a steady decline in the same client numbers through the local alcohol diversionary centers and night shelters and ongoing positive media feedback of increased safety in the city as well as ongoing positive feedback received from government officials, business members and industry representatives.

The success of the project in kerbing such offending has generated much interest from police commissioners and government ministers in South Australia and Northern Territory requiring briefing to both parties.

How do you measure the success of the project? Please provide qualitative and quantitative measures.

The success of the project in a quantitative sense is measured through the dramatic reduction in homeless numbers resulting in statistical reduction in arrest numbers, calls for service for police and contracted city security and the reduction in client numbers on other government agencies which provide diversionary centre and night shelter facilities. Conversely also a success of the project is new found ability of police resources to target other offending

groups and other issues such as reducing the road toll. Prior to this partnership it would be safe to say that the city beat police spent 80-90 % of their time and resources dealing with a single offending group (homeless) with no resolution in site. In fact, the Cairns Chamber of Commerce states that this issue is recorded as being an unsolved one since the 1890's.

The success of the project in a qualitative sense is measured through a number of ways. Firstly, the local media who prior to this partnership was not only hostile towards police but towards government in what they perceived as an inability to tackle a historical issue which affected the safety of businesses and their viability including the local tourism industry, residents safety and the overall reputation of Cairns as a safe destination. Local radio media in particular now are very strong advocates of the project due to its success.

Other qualitative measures include comments by local business operators, politicians and members of public as to the turn around of the issue. Cairns City Council quarterly client surveys show clear increase in the public's perception of being safe whilst visiting the Cairns CBD. By way of example:

I have witnessed in the last twelve months how this strategic partnership has Achieved what was believed by many to be unachievable. (Dr Lesley Clark MP, Member for Barron River, 21.7.05)

It is a great initiative and it sums up all that police are doing to make Cairns, in particular, a safer place. We all know that the problems of homelessness are complicated. Ms SPENCE Minister for Police and Corrective Services, [Hansard]

“Council is fully supportive of the Homelands Partnership program. Council believes that the Homelands Program has assisted greatly in improving both actual public safety in the Cairns CBD, and the public perceptions of safety in this area.” (Malcolm Robertson, Cairns City Council, Inner Facilities Manager, 20/7/2005).

It is with great pleasure that I provide a reference on behalf of the Queensland Safe Communities Support Centre (QSCSC) for the Homelands Project. The QSCSC supports the implementation of the WHO Safe Communities programs in Queensland, in order to make Queensland a safer place to live, work, travel and play, one community at a time. The project has the potential to make a significant impact in Queensland and internationally. This program is an example of one person's passionate dedication to addressing a complex social issue, developing partnerships which encourage buy in and sustainability, measuring the process and impact of the intervention and sharing the information so as not to reinvent the wheel and offer the opportunity for constant improvement. Effective collection and use of data has enabled the project to be based on sound evidence and provide a baseline from which the intervention can be evaluated. This model is a significant contribution to the strength of the project and its widespread application as a proforma for other communities to adopt. Dawn Spinks Manager, QSCSC, Co-Vice Chair Australian Safe Communities Foundation (ASCF)

Identify what aspects of the project could be adapted elsewhere.

The main aspect of the projects ability for adoption elsewhere is that the stakeholders involved are available for similar utilisation in all states and territories even though they may go under a different name or identity. The ability exists for the same stake holders to form a collaborative approach to tackle not only this type of crime prevention strategy but others of a similar types by tackling the core issues at a street based level. Already the model of this project is being examined by South Australia and the Northern Territory for further application.

What outcomes of the project are likely to be enduring?

All outcomes of reduction are set to endure as once displaced individuals who had no means or motivation to change their life style and offending behaviors are now doing so on a regular basis. It is further evident by recent comments by centre link management who state that long term change is further evident by individuals returning to their communities moving of centre link dependency and either involving themselves to community development employment programs or actual full time employment. The reductions previously out lined have been over a period of years (2004-2006) already displaying the projects ability to endure.

Is the project considered to be special or innovative?

The project is special in so far as it is a collaborative approach involving many in the private and public sectors, non profit organizations and representative from indigenous communities to respond to an issue once thought as impossible to resolve. It helps persons at risk at both ends of the spectrum in so far as the homeless who through the cycle of alcohol abuse are those with increased health and mental health affects as well as increased rates of imprisonment. It also helps those who were at risk of being offended against or drastically impacted by this same group namely the residents of Cairns, local businesses and the \$2billion national and international tourism industry.

Has the project raised community awareness of the issue?

Community awareness has been raised through various media releases as to its success and positive impact on Cairns. Stories have varied from print media (Cairns Post) to television (News Stories) and radio talk about (John MACKENZIE talk back show). Awareness was also raised through the project being awarded

2006 Prime Ministers National Drug & Alcohol Award – Excellence in Policing
2005 QPS Gold Medal Award (Lantern) for Problem Orientated Policing Projects.
Highly Commended in 2005 Queensland Premiers Awards for Excellence.