



Addressing safety in urban neighbourhoods

What does international
evidence and experience
suggest for Auckland's Victoria
Quarter?

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Civic Insights 

Summary

Background

In 2023, Auckland Council developed a long-term investment programme for Victoria Quarter (an inner-urban neighbourhood west of the City Centre, bound by Fanshawe Street, Hobson Street, Union Street and Victoria Park). In response to residents' concerns about safety in Victoria Quarter, a safety assessment was included in the investment programme.

Council subsequently proposed a four-phase safety assessment, with the first phase including “a literature review on best practice models for safety [that] will provide rationale for further investment into Victoria Quarter”.

The Report addresses this goal by summarising insights from academic and practitioner literature on safety in urban neighbourhoods.

It asks:

- How is urban neighbourhood safety best understood and addressed? (Section 2)
- What approaches exist for improving urban neighbourhood safety? (Section 3)
- What does current international knowledge, detailed in the Report, suggest about ways to improve safety in Victoria Quarter? (Section 4).

What is urban neighbourhood safety?

Addressing urban neighbourhood safety depends on an accurate understanding of its nature. Synthesising research and practitioner literature, the Report finds that urban neighbourhood safety is:

1. multi-dimensional: incorporating environmental and social (including psychological, community, and economic) dimensions that together shape residents' perceptions and experiences of neighbourhood safety.
2. actual (objective) and perceived (subjective): data collected by police and other agencies provide a robust picture of actual safety; however, perceived safety tends to be less understood, despite its influence over how people relate to one another and their neighbourhoods.
3. contextual: attending to the specificity of neighbourhoods' physical and social dynamics is key to understanding and, in turn, improving urban neighbourhood safety.

What approaches exist for improving urban neighbourhood safety?

Approaches for improving urban neighbourhood safety tend to fall into two categories, focusing on either environmental improvement or community development.

While no single approach is appropriate by itself and without adaptation to local context, each offers suggestions for addressing safety in urban neighbourhoods.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and Health Promotion Through Environmental Design (HPTED) are two of the most prominent approaches to improving urban neighbourhood safety through changes to the built environment. Asset-based Community Development (ABCD), Community Safety Assessment (CSA), and Trauma-focused Community Development (TFCD) are three common approaches for addressing urban neighbourhood safety through community engagement and change.

The Report details key features/principles of these approaches and highlights factors believed to enable or constrain their success.

Considerations for Victoria Quarter

Based on academic and practitioner literature, the Report suggests that investment to improve safety in Victoria Quarter should consider:

1. taking opportunities to proceed with improvements to the built environment, with appropriate input from community members.
2. working with community members to identify their particular safety concerns and prioritise their suggested responses.
3. understanding a range of community members' perspectives on safety in Victoria Quarter.
4. using low-cost measures and existing data collection efforts to assess changes in perceived safety.

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1. Neighbourhood safety in Victoria Quarter

Approach

Auckland Council's Request for Proposals (RfP, 15 March 2024) details a four-phase Safety Assessment for Victoria Quarter. Sometimes known as the 'West Stitch', Victoria Quarter is an inner-urban neighbourhood west of the City Centre, bound by Fanshawe Street, Hobson Street, Union Street and Victoria Park.

The RfP calls for the provision of "robust evidence for an ongoing investment and urban improvement programme for one of New Zealand's densest inner city residential neighbourhoods."

Work to develop an investment programme for the Victoria Quarter precinct was completed in November 2023 by Council's Development Programme Office. It identified a number of short-term initiatives to be developed, including a Safety Assessment.

Phase 1 of the Safety Assessment, involving 'internal collaboration and synthesis', calls for "a literature review on best practice models for safety [that] will provide rationale for further investment into Victoria Quarter".

The RfP notes:

"There are many ways to assess safety and there are many benefits resulting from improving safety in an urban area. Safety approaches [require] a multi-disciplinary approach and can [include] environmental, social, economic and public health sustainability. Safety interventions, at a neighbourhood level, are not the same for all areas, and have to be assessed and determined by the context of the area (history, geography, topography, built environment etc), people and resources available for investment."

Contributing to Phase 1 of the Victoria Quarter Safety Assessment, this report summarises insights from academic and practitioner literature on safety in urban neighbourhoods.

In the Report, 'urban neighbourhood' can be considered synonymous with 'inner-urban', 'central' or 'non-suburban' neighbourhood.

In particular, the Report discusses:

- How urban neighbourhood safety is best understood and, in turn, addressed (Section 2)

- What approaches exist for improving urban neighbourhood safety (Section 3)
- What current international knowledge, detailed in the Report, suggests about ways to improve safety in Victoria Quarter (Section 4).

Context

Maintaining and improving safety is a feature of Auckland-wide and Local Board-level plans, as well as plans specific to the city centre, and an investment programme for Victoria Quarter. This section summarises how the issue of safety features in plans and programmes for the city centre and Victoria Quarter.

City Centre Masterplan (2020)

The Masterplan includes improvements to the built environment of Victoria Quarter as part of “Transformational move 2: The east and west stitch”.

The Masterplan notes: “The western edge of the city centre is the most densely populated residential area in New Zealand. Despite this, parts of the area are underused and undervalued - the quality of the public realm is often poor.”

As the Report will later discuss, the quality of the built environment has an influence on actual and perceived safety.

City Centre Action Plan (2023)

Safety is a major theme in the Action Plan, including as part of ‘Focus area #1: Improving the experience of the city centre’, which includes the following commitment: “Getting the basics right: We will put extra emphasis on initiatives that contribute to a clean, safe and well-functioning city centre”.

City Centre Safety Plan (2024)

The Plan notes that actual and perceived safety in the city centre can be seen as distinct from similar issues in non-central locations:

“Auckland’s city centre is more vulnerable to higher crime rates than other city suburbs, with factors such as population density, demographics, nightlife, and economic activity all contributing to increased safety concerns.”

The Plan emphasises the need for ‘long-term solutions’ and recommends approaches that “actively [involve] residents, community groups, and marginalised populations [to help] bring people together, [reduce] fear of crime, and [encourage] people to take part in community activities.”

To fulfil the Plan’s ‘Community engagement, development and outreach’ goal, it seeks to “**support the aspirations and ability of communities** to take action on issues that matter to them in relation to safety and community wellbeing”.

The Plan sees safety improvements as occurring through three protective ‘realms’:

Protection through urban and spatial design Includes city planning with built-in safety feature principles. Helping to create urban spaces that are easy to navigate, with clear lines of sight; controlled access points and parking; ample lighting, and a well-connected infrastructure. This also highlights the visibility of Te Ao Māori and mana whenua within urban design.	Protection through the management of the quarter / neighbourhood Includes cooperation between: mana whenua and matawaka entities; housing providers (public and private); businesses and business associations; social and wellbeing agencies; youth / rangatahi organisations; police; council; educational institutions, economic development agencies.	Protection through social connectedness Includes community and neighbourhood development; improving understanding and application of Te Tiriti principals; building greater awareness of mana whenua connection to this land; opportunities for positive interaction between our diverse ethnic communities; building and promotion of shared values and mutual trust between residents and visitors.; active community and interest group networks.
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Victoria Quarter Investment Programme Business Case (2023)

The Programme Business Case (PBC) sets out a cohesive investment plan that responds to the current and future issues and opportunities over a 30-year time horizon.

One of the “regenerative statements” underpinning the PBC is:

“A safe, healthy and prosperous place: **Victoria Quarter will be a safe and healthy place for diverse communities.** As a vibrant and desirable residential neighbourhood, it will also be attractive to a wide range of thriving businesses, including innovative and creative industries.”

When discussing *The Perceptions of Living in Auckland’s City Centre: 2022 Survey of Residents*, the PBC notes:

“54% of residents within the Quarter feel safe within their own area during the day and only 13% feel safe after dark. **Comparatively to other inner-city residents, the Victoria Quarter community feel the most unsafe in their own area. This demonstrates a critical need to address these concerns and create a more inclusive Quarter at all times.** 59% of residents indicate that they are highly impacted by aggressive, unpredictable, or confused behaviour and 47% indicate that they are highly impacted by theft or break-ins.”

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In summary, there are concerns with the perception and actuality of safety relating to Auckland in general, those more specific to the city centre, and those relating to Victoria Quarter at the neighbourhood level.

The Report responds to this context by looking to international evidence and experience about ways to understand and address safety in urban neighbourhoods like Victoria Quarter.

2. What is urban neighbourhood safety?

Urban neighbourhood safety is multi-dimensional

Urban neighbourhoods are complex ecosystems where many interrelated factors influence safety. Research and practitioner literature suggests that **understanding the multi-dimensional nature of urban neighbourhood safety is essential for developing effective responses**. Environmental and social (including psychological, community, and economic) dimensions collectively shape residents' perceptions and experiences of neighbourhood safety.

Environmental dimensions

Hazards

Environmental hazards such as elevated noise, air pollution and road traffic affect public safety. Exposure to pollutants can lead to chronic respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, and increased mortality rates¹, while the risk of traffic-related injury and mortality increases, generally, with traffic speed².

Uneven footpaths, inadequate lighting, and poorly maintained public spaces can pose direct risks to residents' safety. Studies have shown that neighbourhoods with poor sidewalk quality are linked to lower physical activity and increased risk of injuries³.

Design

The design of urban environments plays a crucial role in determining the safety of neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods with clear sightlines and adequate lighting can deter criminal activity by increasing potential offenders' likelihood of being observed⁴. For instance, well-lit streets and open spaces are associated with lower crime rates and increased feelings of safety among residents⁵.

Neighbourhoods with strong territoriality—a visible sense of ownership and responsibility among neighbourhood residents—exhibit lower crime rates, as residents are likelier to engage in protective behaviours and report suspicious activities⁶. This can be achieved through physical markers, such as fences, signage, and landscaping delineating private and public spaces⁷. More active control measures such as gates, barriers, and controlled access can reduce opportunities for crime⁸.

Order

Signs of neighbourhood neglect and decay can contribute to perceived and actual crime⁹. Well-maintained environments, characterised by clean streets, functional public amenities, and active community spaces, are associated with higher levels of perceived safety¹⁰. Conversely, poorly maintained environments can lead to feelings of neglect and insecurity, further perpetuating the cycle of fear and disengagement¹¹.

Psychological dimensions

Distress

People living in neighbourhoods perceived as unsafe often experience heightened levels of fear and anxiety, which can lead to significant psychological distress¹².

However, studies have shown that fear of crime does not always correlate with actual crime rates¹³. Personal experiences, media portrayals, and community narratives influence perceptions of safety¹⁴. Environmental cues also shape perceptions of safety. Poor lighting, abandoned buildings, and visible signs of disorder can heighten feelings of vulnerability and fear¹⁵.

Individual & community impacts

The psychological impacts of fear and anxiety can be profound, affecting not only individual well-being but also community dynamics. People who perceive their neighbourhoods as unsafe often report poorer physical health and higher levels of stress¹⁶. The lack of social cohesion in neighbourhoods perceived as unsafe can hinder community engagement and support, further impacting residents' mental health¹⁷.

Uneven vulnerability

Specific populations are more vulnerable to the psychological impacts of fear and anxiety in urban neighbourhoods. Research indicates that older adults, women, and people with disabilities often experience a heightened fear of crime and its associated psychological effects¹⁸.

Community dimensions

Connections

Strong community ties within neighbourhoods are associated with lower levels of fear and increased feelings of safety. For example, residents who know their neighbours are more likely to feel secure in their environment¹⁹. Neighbourhoods with a high sense of collective responsibility can empower residents to act against crime and disorder, enhancing their understanding of security²⁰.

Isolation

Conversely, social isolation can exacerbate feelings of vulnerability and fear. Individuals who perceive themselves as disconnected from their community are more likely to report feelings of insecurity²¹.

Exclusion

Discrimination and exclusion are significant social factors undermining feelings of safety and belonging in urban neighbourhoods. Feelings of unsafety are heightened among minority groups due to experiences of racial profiling and discrimination²². This can lead to a cycle of fear, where individuals avoid certain areas or activities, further isolating themselves from their community. Economic inequality can also contribute to feelings of exclusion and insecurity²³.

Economic dimensions

Desperation

Neighbourhoods characterised by high levels of poverty and unemployment often experience higher crime rates²⁴, as people may resort to illegal activities to meet their basic needs²⁵.

Disorganisation

Economic instability can also lead to social disorganisation, which diminishes community cohesion and increases feelings of unsafety. The absence of strong social networks can hinder residents' ability to respond to crime and disorder, leading to a heightened sense of vulnerability²⁶.

Disinvestment

Neighbourhoods with limited economic opportunities often lack high-quality public amenities and services, such as well-maintained public spaces, adequate lighting, and community policing initiatives²⁷, which are associated with diminished levels of perceived safety.

Urban neighbourhood safety is actual and perceived

Understanding and improving urban neighbourhood safety requires attending to actual (objective) and perceived (subjective) safety. Despite the potential under-reporting of crime, existing data collection by police and other agencies of the criminal justice system provides a robust picture of actual safety in different locations and at different scales, including the neighbourhood scale.

By contrast, the nature of perceived safety in a particular neighbourhood is less easily understood. Still, **residents' perceptions of their safety greatly influence how they relate to other residents and their neighbourhoods**. Research and practitioner literature points to five key factors shaping perceived safety: visible disorder, social and community connections, the quality of the physical environment, patterns of neighbourhood use, and the uneven distribution of vulnerability across the resident population.

Visible disorder

Research consistently indicates that **perceptions of disorder significantly influence feelings of safety**. Visible signs of disorder, such as vandalism and litter, can lead to increased fear of crime, **even in areas with low crime rates**²⁸. This phenomenon underscores perceived disorder's importance as a predictor of safety concerns, often overshadowing objective crime statistics.

Studies have shown that **people with higher levels of awareness regarding crime and disorder report lower feelings of safety**²⁹. This suggests that crime awareness can significantly influence perceived safety even if it does not directly correlate with crime rates.

Community connections

Strong community ties and collective efficacy—the shared belief in a community's ability to maintain social order—are associated with lower levels of fear and increased feelings of safety³⁰. **When residents feel connected to their neighbours and believe they can rely on one another, their perceptions of safety improve**, even in the presence of crime.

Conversely, social isolation can exacerbate feelings of vulnerability and fear. **People who perceive themselves as disconnected from their community are more likely to report feelings of insecurity**. This highlights the importance of fostering social connections and community engagement to enhance perceived safety.

Quality of the physical environment

The quality of the physical environment is another critical factor influencing perceptions of safety. **Well-maintained public spaces, adequate lighting, and greenery have been shown to enhance feelings of safety** among residents³¹. Conversely, poorly maintained environments characterised by physical incivilities can increase fear of crime and insecurity³².

Research indicates that the design of urban spaces can impact residents' perceptions of safety. For example, environments that promote natural surveillance—where residents can easily observe their surroundings—are associated with increased feelings of safety³³. This

highlights the **importance of urban planning and design in creating safe environments** that foster positive perceptions of safety.

Patterns of neighbourhood use

People who frequently engage with their neighbourhoods—through walking, socialising, or participating in community events—tend to report higher levels of perceived safety³⁴. In contrast, **those who limit their interactions due to safety concerns may reinforce feelings of isolation and fear, creating a cycle of disengagement.**

The timing of neighbourhood use can also affect perceptions of safety. People may feel safer during the day when more people are around than at nighttime when **the absence of others can heighten feelings of vulnerability**³⁵.

Uneven distribution of vulnerability

Certain demographic groups, such as **women, older people, and individuals with disabilities, often report higher levels of fear and insecurity**³⁶. This heightened vulnerability (perceived and/or actual) can be attributed to various factors, including social norms, physical limitations, and past experiences with crime.

Research indicates that **these groups may perceive their neighbourhoods as more threatening, leading to increased anxiety and withdrawal** from public spaces³⁷. Addressing vulnerable populations' specific needs and concerns is essential for creating inclusive strategies that enhance perceived safety for all residents.

Urban neighbourhood safety is contextual

The multi-dimensional nature of urban neighbourhood safety and the complexities of actual and perceived safety means that context is critical. **While experiences and initiatives elsewhere are instructive, neither the diagnosis nor solution for one neighbourhood will be entirely adequate for another.**

Distinctive combinations of built form, natural features, land use, and activity patterns significantly shape perceptions of safety at the neighbourhood scale. In addition, the demographic makeup of a neighbourhood, including age, income, and the presence of residents, workers, or visitors, influences safety perceptions. Differences in perceptions of safety are further shaped by personal experiences and social identities.

After surveying research and practitioner literature, **attending to the specificity of neighbourhoods' physical and social dynamics is key** to understanding and, in turn, improving urban neighbourhood safety.

3. What approaches exist for improving urban neighbourhood safety?

Cities worldwide have employed various strategies to reduce crime, improve health outcomes, and foster social cohesion. From these experiences, it is apparent that enhancing safety in urban neighbourhoods requires a **multi-faceted approach that addresses environmental improvement and community development**. This section explores available approaches, providing an overview of their key features and the factors associated with their successful use, according to academic and practitioner literature.

On the environmental side, the section discusses Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and Health Promotion Through Environmental Design (HPTED). On the social side, it discusses Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), Community Safety Assessment (CSA) and Trauma-Focused Community Development (TFCD). Together, these approaches offer different ways to understand and act upon the environmental and social aspects of improving safety and quality of life in urban neighbourhoods. **While no single approach is appropriate by itself and without adaptation to local context, each of them offers suggestions for addressing safety in urban neighbourhoods.**

Environmental improvement

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a philosophy that emphasises the strategic design and effective use of the built environment to reduce the incidence and fear of crime while improving the overall quality of life. The core premise of CPTED is that well-designed environments can influence human behaviour, thereby deterring potential criminal activity.

Typical features/principles

The main principles of CPTED³⁸ include:

Natural surveillance: designing spaces to maximise visibility. By ensuring areas are well-lit and that sightlines are clear, people can observe activities that deter potential offenders. The idea is that when people can see and be seen, the likelihood of crime decreases.

Access control: managing access to spaces to limit opportunities for crime. This can be achieved through physical barriers, such as gates or fences, and design features that guide movement and restrict access to certain areas. Effective access control helps to create a sense of ownership and responsibility among users.

Territorial reinforcement: creating a sense of ownership and community within a space. By clearly defining public and private areas, residents are encouraged to take responsibility for their environment, which can deter criminal activity. This can be achieved through landscaping, signage, and the design of physical boundaries.

Maintenance: well-maintained environments signal that a community is active and engaged, which can deter crime. This principle aligns with the "Broken Windows Theory," which suggests that visible signs of neglect can encourage further crime. Regular upkeep of public spaces, such as cleaning and repairing, is essential for maintaining safety.

Activity support: designing spaces that promote desired activities and social interactions. The likelihood of crime can be reduced by fostering community engagement and ensuring that spaces are used for intended purposes. This can include designing areas for social gatherings, recreational activities, and other community events.

Mixed uses: the strategic placement of different land uses to enhance safety. By situating residential areas near commercial spaces or community facilities, the presence of people can deter criminal activity.

These principles work together to create environments less conducive to crime and promote a sense of safety and community among residents. Applying CPTED principles has become a common component of urban planning and design. It has the most developed academic literature compared with the approaches discussed in this section.

Considerations for successful application

The effectiveness of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) has been a subject of extensive research and debate. While CPTED has demonstrated efficacy in reducing crime and fear of crime in various contexts, its success is influenced by factors such as community engagement, the specific design of interventions, and the broader social context. Ongoing adaptation of CPTED principles is essential to enhance its applicability and effectiveness in diverse settings.

Mixed evidence: Despite the positive outcomes of CPTED, some research has reported mixed results. Critics argue that the application of CPTED can be inflexible and context-

dependent³⁹. While certain CPTED measures, such as surveillance and access control, have been shown to be effective, others may not yield significant results⁴⁰.

Need for community engagement: The success of CPTED is often linked to community involvement and engagement. When residents actively participate in designing and managing their environments, it can enhance the effectiveness of CPTED strategies⁴¹.

Only part of the solution: CPTED is most effective when integrated into broader crime prevention strategies that include social, environmental, and community development initiatives. It should not be viewed as a standalone solution but rather as part of a multifaceted approach to crime prevention⁴².

Evaluation challenges: Evaluating the effectiveness of CPTED can be challenging due to the complexity of crime dynamics and the various factors influencing crime rates. The lack of standardised instruments for measuring CPTED's impact on crime and fear of crime has been noted as a limitation in existing research⁴³.

Health Promotion Through Environmental Design

Health Promotion Through Environmental Design (HPTED) is a framework that emphasises integrating health promotion principles into the planning and design of built environments. It draws on lessons from Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and focuses on creating environments that support and enhance human health and well-being.

Typical features/principles

The key principles of HPTED⁴⁴ include:

Design in collaboration: the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders, including health professionals, urban planners, community members, and political decision-makers. Effective collaboration ensures that the built environment is designed to support the health and well-being of all users, moving beyond mere consultation to active partnership in the planning process.

Design in response to context: the effectiveness of health-promoting designs depends on their adaptability to local contexts. This entails understanding a community's unique social, cultural, and environmental characteristics to tailor health interventions appropriately.

Design for physical activity: creating environments that encourage regular physical activity. This can be achieved by providing open spaces, recreational facilities, and infrastructure that supports active transportation, such as walking and cycling.

Design for social cohesion and equity: fostering social connections and ensuring equitable access to health-promoting resources. This principle highlights the role of the built

environment in facilitating social interactions and promoting inclusivity within communities.

Design for access to healthy food: ensuring access to affordable and nutritious food. This principle emphasises measures to support local food production and improve access to healthy food options, thereby addressing dietary-related health issues.

Design for a healthy biophysical environment: emphasising the interconnection between human health and the health of the biophysical environment. HPTED promotes sustainable practices that enhance air, water, and soil quality, contributing to overall public health.

Design for safety and security: encouraging safe environments to support community engagement and physical activity. This principle involves implementing design strategies that enhance safety, such as natural surveillance and well-defined public spaces.

Design for healthy and affordable housing: recognising the impact of housing on health, this principle emphasises support for diverse and affordable housing options that promote well-being and access to essential services.

Considerations for successful application

While HPTED offers a promising framework for promoting health through environmental design, its effectiveness is contingent upon overcoming various implementation challenges, enhancing stakeholder awareness, and developing robust evaluation methods.

Practical challenges: The practical implementation of HPTED principles can be challenging. Factors such as political resistance, lack of funding, and competing priorities in urban planning can hinder the adoption of health-promoting designs⁴⁵.

Skills gaps: Effective application of HPTED requires a deep understanding of the relationship between the built environment and health. This necessitates ongoing professional development and training for planners and health professionals, which may not always be feasible⁴⁶.

Lack of stakeholder awareness: There may be a lack of awareness or understanding of HPTED among key stakeholders, including policymakers and community members. This can result in insufficient advocacy for health-promoting designs in planning processes⁴⁷.

Evaluation challenges: Assessing the impact of HPTED interventions on health outcomes can be complex. There is often a lack of standardised metrics, as with CPTED, to evaluate the effectiveness of health-promoting designs, making it difficult to demonstrate their value⁴⁸.

Risk of oversimplification: While HPTED aims to address multiple determinants of health, there is a risk of oversimplifying the complex interactions between the built environment

and health. This can lead to inadequate solutions that do not fully address the underlying social determinants of health⁴⁹.

Community development

Asset-based Community Development

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a community development approach that focuses on identifying and mobilising a community's existing strengths and resources, rather than concentrating on its needs and deficiencies. It encourages communities to leverage their own assets—such as the skills of residents, local associations, and institutional resources—to drive community development processes and create positive change.

Typical features/principles

ABCD is characterised by several key features⁵⁰ that distinguish it from traditional needs-based approaches to community development:

Focus on community assets: ABCD prioritises the identification and mobilisation of existing community assets, which can include individual skills, local associations, and institutional resources. This approach encourages communities to recognise their strengths rather than focusing solely on their needs.

Community empowerment: ABCD aims to empower community members by transforming them from "consumers" of services into "producers" of programs and solutions. This shift fosters a sense of ownership and agency among community members, enabling them to take charge of their development.

Collaborative approach: The ABCD model emphasises collaboration among community members, local organisations, and external stakeholders. It promotes co-production, where community members actively define problems and develop solutions.

Relational dynamics: ABCD recognises the importance of social relationships and networks within the community. It leverages these connections to enhance community cohesion and facilitate collective action.

Holistic perspective: ABCD takes a holistic view of community development, considering not only economic factors but also social, cultural, and environmental aspects. This comprehensive approach helps to create sustainable and inclusive community initiatives.

Participatory evaluation: ABCD encourages evaluation methods that involve community members in assessing the effectiveness of initiatives. This approach helps ensure that evaluations are relevant and reflect the community's experiences and perspectives.

Addressing power dynamics: Recent discussions around augmenting the ABCD model highlight the need to address community power imbalances. This includes recognising and empowering marginalised groups and ensuring all voices are heard in the development process.

Sustainability and resilience: ABCD promotes the development of sustainable community initiatives that can adapt to changing circumstances. By focusing on local assets and capacities, communities can build resilience against external challenges.

In summary, the features of ABCD revolve around leveraging community strengths, fostering empowerment, and promoting collaborative and inclusive practices. This approach not only aims to improve the immediate conditions of communities but also seeks to create lasting change by building capacity and resilience.

Considerations for successful application

Asset-Based Community Development offers a promising and adaptable framework for fostering community-driven initiatives and enhancing local capacities. It has been applied to different geographical and socio-economic contexts, and in various sectors, including health, education, and economic development. This **flexibility allows for tailored interventions that meet the specific needs of communities**.

Implementation of ABCD should also take heed of factors that could hamper its success⁵¹:

Tokenism: One of the most significant criticisms of ABCD is the risk of tokenism. In some cases, ABCD initiatives may be co-opted by external actors or organisations, leading to tokenistic engagement rather than genuine community empowerment. This can undermine the core principles of ABCD and result in disillusionment among community members.

Exacerbating inequalities: ABCD may exacerbate existing inequalities by favouring already cohesive and influential communities. Those with fewer resources or less social capital may struggle to engage effectively in ABCD initiatives, widening the gap between different community groups.

Reliance on existing cohesion: The effectiveness of ABCD often relies on the pre-existence of strong community networks and cohesion. The approach may struggle to gain traction or produce meaningful outcomes in communities lacking these elements.

Evaluation challenges: Evaluating the effectiveness of ABCD poses significant challenges, as traditional evaluation methods may not adequately capture the relational and developmental nature of community-based interventions. There is a need for innovative research strategies that align with the principles of ABCD.

Community Safety Assessment

Community Safety Assessment (CSA) is a generic term widely used by practitioners that describes a systematic process to identify and analyse safety concerns, risks, and resources within a community. It does not have an underlying philosophy concerning the causes and solutions to safety and well-being, like CPTED, HPTED, ABCD and TFCD. Rather, it is a **process that involves collecting quantitative and qualitative data to understand the unique circumstances and challenges that affect community safety**. CSA emphasises the importance of understanding local realities and engaging community voices in the assessment process, creating evidence-based safety plans that are tailored to the specific needs of a community.

Typical features/principles

CSAs typically exhibit⁵² the following features:

Data collection: the systematic collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, including crime statistics, surveys, interviews, and observational studies, to understand the safety landscape of the community. Emphasis is placed on developing a comprehensive understanding of local realities.

Community engagement: working with community members to gather insights and foster participation. This can involve workshops, focus groups, and public meetings where residents can voice their concerns and contribute to the assessment process. Involving community members increases the likelihood of their engagement in solutions.

Safety profile development: A community safety profile is often created to summarise the assessment findings. This profile includes information about the community's demographics, environment, safety concerns, and available resources. It serves as a baseline for measuring progress and understanding the specific challenges faced by the community.

Recommendations for action: Based on the findings, the assessment typically concludes with recommendations for strategies and actions to improve community safety. This may include policy changes, community programs, or infrastructure improvements.

Ongoing evaluation: Community safety assessments are not one-time events; they require ongoing evaluation to monitor progress and adapt strategies as needed. This iterative process ensures that the community safety plan remains relevant and effective over time.

Focus on vulnerable populations: Assessments often pay particular attention to vulnerable groups within the community, such as women, children, the elderly, and marginalised populations. Understanding their specific needs and concerns is essential for creating inclusive safety strategies.

Considerations for successful application

While useful for understanding and improving safety within communities, CSAs can face limitations that affect their effectiveness and outcomes:

Representation: The selection of participants for interviews or surveys can introduce bias. For example, marginalised groups may be underrepresented due to mistrust of authorities or reluctance to participate, which can skew findings.

Ethical sensitivities: Engaging with community members about sensitive issues can raise ethical concerns regarding confidentiality and potential harm. Participants may be wary of negative consequences of participating or stigma, particularly in discussions about crime and safety.

Perception–reality gap: There can be a significant gap between perceived and actual safety, influenced by factors such as media portrayal and community narratives. This discrepancy can lead to misinformed strategies that do not address the root causes of safety concerns.

Need for active participation: Effective assessments require active participation from community members, which can be challenging. There may be apathy or scepticism towards safety initiatives, particularly if past efforts have not yielded visible improvements.

Keeping up with change: Communities are not static; they evolve over time due to demographic changes, economic shifts, and social dynamics. Assessments may quickly become outdated if they do not account for these changes, leading to ineffective or irrelevant safety strategies.

Trauma-focused Community Development

Trauma-focused (or trauma-informed) Community Development (TFCD) refers to an approach that **integrates an understanding of the impact of trauma at both individual and community levels into community building and development processes**. It recognises that trauma can affect the health and well-being of community members and that addressing these impacts can foster resilience and promote positive community outcomes.

Typical features/principles

Key principles of TFCD⁵³ include:

Safety: Ensuring that community environments are physically and psychologically safe for all members.

Trustworthiness and transparency: Building trust through open communication and clear expectations regarding community initiatives.

Peer support: Encouraging mutual support among community members to foster a sense of belonging and shared experience.

Collaboration and mutuality: Promoting partnerships among community stakeholders to leverage collective strengths and resources.

Empowerment: Ensuring community members have a say in the development processes and their voices are heard and valued.

Cultural competency: Being sensitive to and respectful of community members' diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences.

Considerations for successful application

Academic and practitioner literature suggests the following should be considered in maximising the effectiveness of TFCD⁵⁴:

Resource constraints: Many community-based organisations may be stretched thin, lacking the necessary resources to implement trauma-informed practices effectively. This can lead to insufficient support for community engagement and development efforts

Historical distrust: Communities that have experienced historical disinvestment and negative interactions with institutions may distrust external entities. This scepticism can result in low engagement levels and reluctance to participate in community development initiatives.

Complexity of trauma: The ongoing nature of trauma can create barriers to effective community building and may require continuous adaptation of strategies.

Lack of shared understanding: There may be a lack of shared language and understanding among community members and stakeholders regarding trauma and its impacts. This can hinder collaborative efforts and the development of effective strategies to address community trauma.

Cultural competency challenges: Implementing trauma-informed approaches requires sensitivity to cultural, historical, and gender issues. Failure to adequately address these factors can lead to ineffective interventions and may perpetuate existing inequities within the community.

Sustainability issues: Trauma-informed initiatives often rely on external funding, which can be unstable. Without sustainable funding models, communities may struggle to maintain trauma-informed practices over the long term.

4. Considerations for Victoria Quarter

Based on academic and practitioner literature synthesised above, the Report suggests that investment to improve safety in Victoria Quarter should consider:

1. Taking opportunities to proceed with improvements to the built environment of Victoria Quarter, with appropriate input from community members.

Existing literature demonstrates how high-quality built environments, designed with personal safety and well-being in mind, can improve actual and perceived safety.

Council plans and the Victoria Quarter investment programme (2023) note that the Victoria Quarter precinct currently has relatively poor-quality streetscapes. Large-scale improvements to Hobson and Nelson streets have been mooted in the City Centre Masterplan, and planning is underway for improvements to the Nelson Street slipway in consultation with local stakeholders. Smaller-scale initiatives should also be considered, as existing literature broadly supports initiatives of various scales—large and small—as having the potential to improve neighbourhood safety.

2. Working with community members to identify their particular safety concerns and prioritise their suggested responses.

Consultation and collaboration with community members is a major theme in existing literature for several reasons.

First, perceptions of urban neighbourhood safety are critically important. Perceptions play a big role in shaping individual and community-level behaviours. Negative perceptions of safety, to a certain extent, create their reality. Understanding community members' perceptions of safety—how, why, and where they feel unsafe—is important for developing contextually sensitive responses.

Second, understanding community views and solutions is important because safety is not just an issue of improving the built environment. Social factors (psychology, community relations, economic factors) are often a major element of safety concerns. Engaging with community members to understand the social dimensions of their safety concerns will assist in avoiding a 'physically determinist' approach to urban neighbourhood safety.

Third, engaging with community members and facilitating their engagement with one another can be useful for building trust, identifying community strengths, and

fostering a sense of community that can be beneficial in its own right and for improving collective efficacy.

3. Understanding a range of community members' perspectives on safety in Victoria Quarter.

Existing research and practice shows that a singular community view about safety is unlikely. Residents and other local stakeholders will tend to have varied views about their neighbourhood's safety and appropriate responses to it.

There is a risk of prioritising the input of particular stakeholders over others, which shapes how safety is understood and addressed. Marginalised or disadvantaged groups, evidence shows, may not be well represented or feel empowered to make their views known.

For this reason, efforts to work with community members to identify their safety concerns and prioritise their responses should make intentional efforts to access and engage with a diverse range of community members. This could be done through collaboration with a reference group composed of community members with a range of perspectives.

4. Using low-cost measures and existing data collection efforts to assess changes in perceived safety.

Data on actual safety is routinely collected by agencies within the justice system. However, understanding perceived safety in a particular neighbourhood tends to be more difficult and potentially costly if bespoke data collection is required. Debates over existing approaches to improving safety also highlight methodological challenges. For these reasons, the Report suggests that Council consider ways to incorporate low-cost measures and draw on existing data collection efforts to assess the apparent impacts of efforts to improve perceptions of safety in Victoria Quarter. While such measures are unlikely to offer statistically robust insights, one ought 'not let the perfect be the enemy of the good': output measures, consultation or engagement feedback, and using existing data sets (such as future iterations of the city centre resident survey or key performance indicators) together will offer instructive insights into general trends in resident sentiment.

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