

Manitoba's only Safe Community: Brandon & Area

By Wendy French, Regional Coordinator, Safe Communities Foundation

“I believe that the whole idea of a Safe Community is not to reinvent programs, but to support what is already going on in the community,” says **Sharon Young**, co-chair of Brandon & Area Safe Community Coalition. Sharon has been one of the driving forces in getting local agencies, the City of Brandon, the RMs of Elton, Whitehead and Cornwallis, and local industry to form a coalition and apply to become the first, and so far the only, designated Safe Community in Manitoba.

The Brandon & Area Safe Community Coalition (BASCC) evolved from the Westman Injury Prevention Education Network (WIPEN) that formed in 1998 to address injuries in a collaborative manner. After two members attended a Safe Communities national conference, they thought that the model might be a good fit for Brandon. In 2002, the City of Brandon's City Manager and Mayor endorsed the concept and hosted an event with the support of the Manitoba Safety Council. The Safe Communities concept was brought to light by Safe Communities founder, **Paul Kells** to top management and community leaders from industry, the public sector, business, local agencies and the Regional Health Authority. “There was an amazing show of support from community leaders,” says Sharon, “That was key for us moving forward.”

The next step involved a large community meeting with community stakeholders and a special guest from the Rainy River Valley Safety Coalition. “Co-chair **Doug Langtry** provided us with practical, grass-roots information about his region's start and progress in sustaining a Safe Community. With several years of experience with the Safe Communities model, Doug was a credible advocate for involving the whole community in an injury prevention strategy,” says Sharon. “We needed to see a clear picture of what Safe Communities looked like in action and to start thinking about what that might look like in our situation. Doug gave us a practical framework to do that.”

A subsequent presentation was made to the Chamber of Commerce. “It is so important to include all sectors at the ground level,” advises Sharon. “We brought people

together as a group; people who wanted to see outcomes and wanted to be actively involved in making things happen.” A leadership/steering committee was formed and a business plan was developed. After submitting the plan to the Safe Communities Foundation, Brandon & Area received designation as Canada's 38th Safe Community in November 2003.

“Fortunately, the focus on preventing injury in the province continues to evolve both at a policy level and in the numbers of programs that are available,” says Sharon.



“For example, SAFE Work and Safe Schools now exist and safety promotion and injury prevention are being integrated across many sectors, and not just to those who were in the business of safety. Many organizations now realize that we all are affected by injury and we can save personal and financial costs when we reduce injury. We are attempting to do our part to shift the culture by educating and changing attitudes.”

Brandon & Area identified a need for collecting solid data on injuries and recognized the challenges in getting the ‘true injury picture’ of the community before planning, coordinating, and evaluation could begin. Getting the partners together made a difference in tackling the lack of consistency that often exists. For example, the Playground Injury Prevention Committee saw that schools, daycares and the recreation department reported playground injuries differently and to different sources, but an overall picture of playground injury in the region was not available from any one source. When

partners met to discuss data collection and started sharing what they were doing, they recognized that one standard form would make it easier for everyone in having the ‘whole’ picture for playground injury in the community and for collecting baseline data. After learning to ‘speak a common language,’ the partners began to send the data to a central repository where trends could be tracked over time.

The coalition continues to work on consolidating data and finding consistent ways of reporting so that the area has a clear picture of how people are getting hurt. “Quality information is essential for planning programs and interventions that will meet the specific needs of the region, and for determining if the policy and programs that we develop are making a difference,” states Sharon. “We also did an extensive scan of the safety and injury prevention programs that already exist in the community and often it means connecting what is there. We have no intentions of reinventing the wheel.”

All regional health authorities must include injury prevention as part of their performance deliverables to Manitoba Health. BASCC has used the umbrella concept of Safe Communities to form the basis of their injury plan. The Coalition's priorities include senior fall prevention, playground injury prevention, young worker injury, and motor vehicle injury. The work of the Suicide Prevention Implementation Network (SPIN) has also been incorporated into the overall community injury prevention plan. Solid research and data form the basis of all activities and decisions.

Sharon Young says that part of the success of Brandon & Area is being sensitive to the needs of the committee members and respectful of their time. “These are good people with a real passion for making a difference by reducing injuries,” she says, “The overall goal is to work together, to achieve some real results and to be sustainable over the long haul”.

If you have any questions about the experiences of Brandon & Area Safe Community Coalition, contact Sharon Young at (204) 571-8398 or youngsb@brandonrha.mb.ca