

Is your community the next Safe Community?

By Wendy French, Regional Coordinator, Safe Communities Foundation



Could Canada become the safest country in the world for people to live, learn, work, and play? The Canadian Safe Communities Foundation (SCF) thinks so. This not-for-profit group is dedicated to making Canada a safe place to live, one community at a time. The SCF helps community groups get organized, focused and enthusiastic about reducing injuries and deaths locally. When a community becomes a designated ‘Safe Community,’ it focuses on needs at the grassroots level, and also joins a national movement with momentum, strength and support. In our country, there are currently 46 Safe Communities covering an estimated 21% of Canadians. Humboldt, Saskatchewan became Canada’s newest Safe Community in November. Brandon and the surrounding area is the first and, so far, the only designated Safe Community in Manitoba.

THE INJURY PROBLEM

Injuries have been referred to as the “hidden epidemic.” Most people do not realize that injuries are the leading cause of death in Manitobans aged 1 – 44 years of age. The report, *Injuries in Manitoba: A 10-year Review (Manitoba Health, 2004)*, shows that from 1992 to 2000, 5702 Manitobans died from injuries and between 1992-2001, a further 120,611 were hospitalized for injuries. The cost to our province is an estimated \$819 million each year, according to *The Economic Burden of Unintentional Injury in Manitoba (Smartrisk, 2004)*.

MOST INJURIES ARE NOT ‘ACCIDENTS’

Injuries are predictable and, therefore, preventable. Every year, injuries occur under similar circumstances as those occurring in previous years. Unless something changes, people will continue to be injured in much the same ways as in the past. The good news is that because research tells us how, where, why and when people are getting injured, we can work together to prevent future injuries.

SAFETY IS EVERYONE’S RESPONSIBILITY.

Everyone has a right to live in a safe environment and a responsibility to create a culture of safety. Communities want to address the issues that are specifically affecting their community, municipality or town. This is where the Safe Communities Foundation can help. It promotes community-based injury prevention where individuals and agencies work together in partnership to promote safety, manage risk and increase the overall well-being of its members. A key to success is an active local coalition, association, committee or network with a diverse range of members (such as health care, police, schools, day cares, local business) that work to address local concerns about injuries, collisions and crime. A national team of regional representatives assists local communities throughout the designation process and provides on-going support. **Wendy French** is the Regional Coordinator for Manitoba.

Community coalitions are well positioned to make real changes that are uniquely suited to their area. The coalition can identify gaps and duplication of effort; resources expertise and ideas are shared. Funding opportunities may be optimized, as ‘funders’ often want to see evidence that agencies are working in partnerships. A dedicated coalition often has a strong sense of mission, cohesiveness, motivation and permanence.

Benefits of joining the Safe Communities Network

COMMUNITY BUILDING

There are many benefits to becoming a designated Safe Community. Communities that went through the designation process reported that the community has a higher profile and receives more attention from the media, that the Safe Communities brand has given their efforts more credibility, and that the community at large has an increased awareness of safety issues and behaviours.

THE NATIONAL NETWORK

The Safe Communities Foundation has much to offer. It can help your community expand outreach and maximize funding opportunities. The Foundation shares information, resources, tools/templates, and best practices; and provides learning and networking opportunities through a listserv, teleworkshops, publications, the website, and an annual conference. The Safe Communities Foundation also grants seed money to help community coalitions get established. Other benefits include recognition, on-going support, partnership opportunities, as well as a connection to the international Safe Communities network. As well, SCF is an affiliate support centre to the World Health Organization’s Collaborating Centre for Safe Communities.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), every dollar spent on Safe Communities saves society \$40.

SAFE COMMUNITIES’ SUCCESSES:

- Last year, traffic enforcement increased by 18%, and Motor Vehicle Collisions (MVC) were reduced by 7% in Brockville, Ontario - a Safe Community that hasn’t had a fatal MVC in six years.
- A bike helmet program in Perth, ON saw an increase from 20% to 95% usage rate.
- In Hamilton, more than 10,000 youth participated in ‘Cyclemania’ and bikes and blades programs – and more than \$28,000 in certificates have been redeemed for new bike helmets.
- Wolfville, NS had a 12.5% increase in the correct use of child car seats.
- In Kingston, the injury rate among young people aged 15-24 dropped by 9% from 1998 to 2000 (Source: Kingston Regional Injury Surveillance Program).
- In 22 Brampton, ON schools, more than 16,500 children learned hands-on about fire safety and injury prevention through the 2003 Risk Watch program.

The first pre- and post- Safe Community Designation Study was conducted by the Safe Community Coalition of Brockville & District Attitudinal Survey in 1996 with follow up in 2002. A five-year comparison survey revealed that:

- 97% of Brockville residents feel 'somewhat or very safe' living in Brockville.
- 32% of residents claim they are more safety conscious than they were one year prior.
- 40% of residents are aware of the Safe Community Coalition; of those aware, 71% feel that the Coalition was doing a very good/good job to improve the level of safety in the Brockville area

Communities are invited to join in making Canada the safest country in the world. For more information about the Foundation and how to become a designated Safe Community, contact:

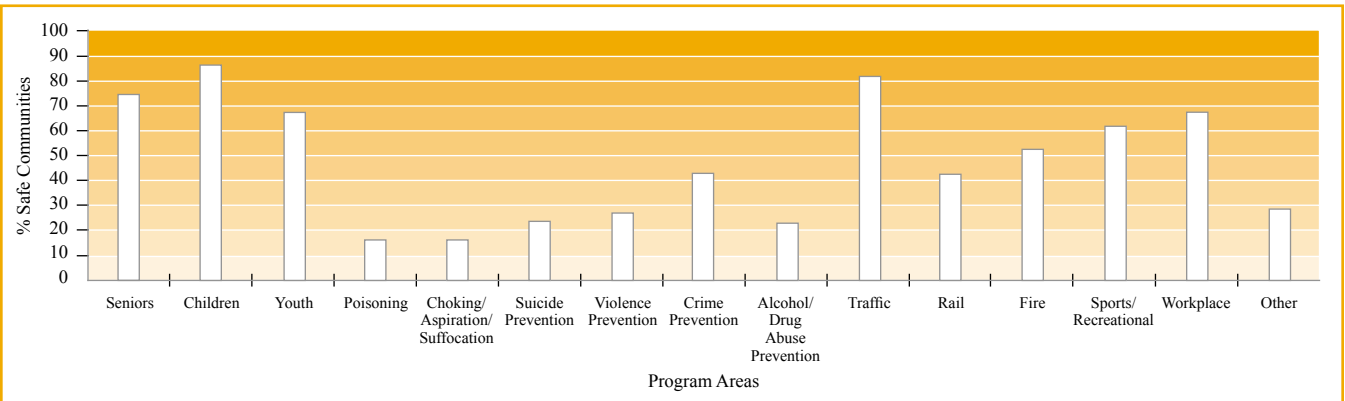
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