
Partnership for Personal Safety: Preventing Violent Crime in and around Licensed Premises

An exemplary project of the South Australian Crime
Prevention Strategy

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During 1992-1993, the Crime Prevention Unit undertook a project, Partnership for Personal Safety: Preventing Violent Crime in and around Licensed Premises, as an exemplary project of the South Australian Crime Prevention Strategy. The project officer was Chris Matthews, who worked with the Crime Prevention Unit on secondment for 12 months. The pilot projects undertaken and the material arising from them were the result of his work with the licensees and managers of the hotels and clubs, and I am indebted to them for their work.

Background to the South Australian Crime Prevention Strategy

The aim of the South Australian Crime Prevention Strategy is to prevent and reduce crime and improve community safety. The Crime Prevention Unit, in the Attorney-General's Department, has four programs for implementing the Crime Prevention Strategy:

- Local Crime Prevention Committees;
- Coalition Against Crime and its Working Groups;
- Aboriginal Programs;
- Exemplary Projects.

The Partnership for Personal Safety project is an exemplary project under the Crime Prevention Strategy. Like other exemplary projects it arose from the work in other areas of the Strategy. Many Local Crime Prevention Committees have given priority to crime prevention needs arising from hotels and other licensed premises; this is increasingly so with committees in country areas of the State. The Coalition Against Crime Working Group on Alcohol, Drugs and Crime also identified the need to reduce crime related to hotels and nightclubs as a priority in reducing alcohol-related crime. A review of interstate work and an assessment of the limited information available on the level of crime and violence in and around hotels and clubs¹ supports the concerns of these two arms of the strategy, and the project has been one of the major exemplary projects undertaken to date.

Background to the Partnership for Personal Safety Project

Violence and other crimes in and around licensed premises such as hotels and clubs make significant contribution to the level of

¹. The term "club" refers to nightclubs, discos and dance clubs, not to sporting clubs which were not included in this project.

assaults reported to police. They also contribute to fear of crime in the community. This is periodically highlighted by media reporting of specific incidents. Immediately prior to the Crime Prevention Unit beginning the project, incidents which received widespread media coverage included violence allegedly involving sporting professionals at a hotel in Glenelg (a beach front suburb), the abduction and rape of a woman outside a licensed venue in Salisbury (northern metropolitan suburb), and the sexual assault and murder of a woman after she left a licensed premises in the inner city.

Drink driving offences are commonly cited in discussions about hotel and club related crime. Theft or vandalism of cars in car parks are crimes identified by both patrons and managers of hotels.

Less commonly acknowledged are ongoing incidents of violence within licensed premises, between patrons but also sometimes involving security or crowd control staff. Also receiving little attention are incidents of harassment of both staff and customers, petty theft and minor assaults, and sexual assaults occurring within premises. Both interstate work and our preliminary discussions with police and the industry indicate that there is a feeling among both licensees and victims that victims contribute to offences against them because they are using alcohol. This may limit the likelihood of victims reporting offences occurring within licensed premises. There appears to be a significant level of incidents occurring in licensed premises which are not reported to police.

As well as the actual level of incidents, the experience of offences or other behaviour such as harassment creates a feeling of lack of safety in a premises. Once again, work in other States and industry representatives suggest that people do not continue to use a premises in which they feel unsafe. Public awareness of crime and danger associated with hotels and clubs does two things—it deters some people from using the venues, and it attracts others who enjoy an atmosphere which includes apprehension and possible danger. Particularly when accompanied by an economic recession, the result is fewer people using hotels and clubs, and less diversity among those who do use them. Media coverage of the events mentioned was of acute concern to licensees and to industry bodies when the project began as it was viewed as unfairly scaring people away

from venues which licensees considered "safe" rather than simply warning people about "unsafe" venues.

The Structure of the Project

The aim of the project was to develop means of reducing violent and other crimes, and to improve the safety of hotels and clubs, through identifying and piloting strategies for use by licensees and managers in their own premises.

The issues to be addressed by the project were:

- means of assessing environmental features of premises and surrounds, including car parks (such as, safety audit, informal surveillance) which can reduce or prevent crime and contribute to safety;
- management practices, including crowd control, private security, and server responsibility and awareness, which can contribute to crime prevention and safety.

The project piloted strategies with licensees and managers in two places: in a suburban hotel containing a number of bar and entertainment venues (McMahon's Dance Club in Salisbury, a northern suburb) and in an inner city location with a large number of licensed premises—Hindley Street in the city centre. It was intended to capture both the situation of a hotel used by local residents, and premises which aim to attract a wider custom. It was also hoped to learn something by comparing crime prevention strategies suited to a relatively isolated premises with those suited to premises in close competition with each other.

The Crime Prevention Unit developed the brief for the project by working with the Intra-City Cooperative Action Group (local crime prevention committee for the inner Adelaide area), Task Group on Drugs and Alcohol and the Coalition Against Crime Working Group on Alcohol, Drugs & Crime. During the project, a reference group reviewed progress and considered its direction. Members were:

- the Crime Prevention Unit;

- the Intra-City Cooperative Action Group, whose representative also represented the Drug and Alcohol Services Council;
- the policing arm of the Liquor Licensing Commission;
- the Hotel and Hospitality Industry Association Training Foundation; and
- a licensee not participating in the pilots.

The Coalition Against Crime Working Group on Alcohol, Drugs and Crime maintained an interest in the project and provided a problem solving forum. It will provide a key means of maintaining a focus on violence and crime in hotels and clubs now that the initial project is completed.

The decision to focus the project on what licensees can do rather than on other crime prevention and community safety issues, such as how local residents can be and feel safer, how police can alter their practice, or how the industry can be regulated differently, reflects the role of exemplary projects within the Crime Prevention Strategy. Part of the strategic approach is about encouraging a broader responsibility for crime prevention than reliance on the criminal justice system. Hotels provide an ideal opportunity to move from a view in which an offence occurring on the premises requires a response by police, or a regulating body, to a consideration of the extent to which practice and the behaviour in a business can contribute to the incidence or lack of incidence of violence. It also provided an opportunity to explore how crime prevention and safety can make a positive contribution to the business itself. The project was outcome oriented: what could the participants do to prevent crime and improve safety, rather than the primary focus being what we can find out about crime in their premises.

The Crime Prevention Unit saw benefit in basing the Project Officer for the project outside of the unit, acknowledging concerns among licensees about interference from a government agency in their businesses. The Drug and Alcohol Services Council agreed to supervise the project officer. The officer had expertise suited to working with licensees as well as strategy development and implementation skills and training skills.

Without this particular combination the pilot projects would have been less successful.

McMahon's Dance Club

The pilot project at Salisbury involved only one licensee, who was keen to participate. The venue included a number of bar and entertainment areas including a dance club and an entertainment venue offering piano and singing. The piano bar was poorly used and a few months into the pilot the manager closed the venue, opening it several months later with a different use. This limited our ability to assess the impact of the pilot on the licensee's turnover.

The pilot started with an audit of the physical safety of the bar and entertainment areas, and the car park and surrounds of the hotel. There was also a survey of staff and customer perceptions of safety and quality of service developed with the manager and extended from one to three nights following the enthusiastic patron response.

From their experiences in the pilot project, management at McMahon's developed a "Patron Service Undertaking" covering:

- security and service standards;
- entertainment standards;
- legal and community standards.

By the end of the project, management had implemented a range of measures which included:

- informing staff that the provisions of the Liquor Licensing Act and the Commercial and Private Agents Act are to be observed;
- developing an induction manual for staff;
- providing written instructions for staff dealing with incidents of assault, harassment or conflict;
- putting in place a written register of such incidents;

- no longer allowing large groups (for example, bus tours) to use the venue unless previously booked and arrangements have been made to cater for the group;
- no longer booking any promotions or entertainment which promote violence, harassment or aggression, and informing promotion companies of this policy;
- providing "chill out" areas for patrons (away from loud music and alcohol);
- reviewing staff numbers during night trading and bringing in extra casual staff as required;
- ensuring that non-alcoholic drink; including coffee, and food is available to patrons;
- increasing the lighting at entrances;
- providing emergency phone numbers at well placed phone sites within the premises;
- reviewing the location of security staff, and providing them with emergency phone numbers and a means of readily identifying the site in which they are stationed;
- providing clear instructions to crowd control staff about their role in preventing incidents and how to defuse conflict;
- providing signs at all entrances covering age requirements, proof of identification, standards of behaviour and dress, and details of the service plan;
- providing instructions to door staff on consistency in applying entry requirements;
- providing dog security teams on peak nights;
- liaising with the State Transit Police (public transport security personnel), police, council and local agencies about young people using the car park area;

- enhancing communication between hotel staff and security staff on specific incidents; and
- providing regular training and problem solving sessions with staff.

The project officer determined that a total of 24 changes covering work practices and physical features had been made to the premises as a direct result of the pilot, resulting in changed attitudes in both staff and patrons, flowing from management. The licensee was also considering measures such as regular meetings with local business and residents to deal with any concerns they may have as they arise.

Hindley Street Pilot

The Hindley Street pilot took much longer to establish. The first challenge was the number of licensees in the area. There are around 40 licensed premises in an area which covers two sides of a street about a quarter of a mile long. It includes hotel trading licences, restaurants, "general facility" licences which allow 24-hour trading aimed at the tourist market and nightclub or entertainment venues ranging from quality to sordid. There was significant turnover of licensees with a proportion of premises closing and reopening or changing hands regularly. There is one licensee holding a significant number of the licences in the area, and also owning some of the properties for which other businesses have licences. These characteristics create particular competition between premises which may contribute to management practices encouraging high levels of intoxication or rapid intoxication (for example, extreme discounting, targeting of underage drinkers, gimmick drinks). The area is unique in Adelaide.

There was considerable discussion during the development of the project brief, and among the reference group members, about using Hindley Street as a pilot site. In its favour was the opportunity it offered to work with a diversity of venues and managers, and to work in a precinct. It was the focus of city centre entertainments particularly all-night trading. It attracts considerable media, community and political attention periodically because it has a reputation for sex, violence, harassment, disorder and socially frowned-upon pastimes.

Hindley Street also provides a concentration of offences reported to police in the central business district. A police station had been located in the area in response to the concentration of incidents.

Police and traders estimate that up to 10 000 people use the street on a busy night. To improve safety and reduce violence and crime in Hindley Street venues would be to significantly contribute to crime prevention.

Licensees were contacted by visiting the venues and meeting with the staff and managers. Initial reception was sceptical. There was also considerable feeling that crime and violence were the responsibility of the police and the government—through law and penalties. Powers to remove and ban individuals from premises and to remove people from the street were the focus of initial interest from managers. There was also a feeling of powerlessness to do anything themselves about safety in the face of recessionary economic pressures and fierce competition.

An important means of establishing our credibility with these licensees was for the project officer to be on the street and in their premises when they were there, that is at night. Having a drink with them after the main rush (round midnight) proved a useful way of discussing their concerns and our interests.

Another means of establishing our credibility was for the local police and the Liquor Licensing Commissioner to speak on our behalf, supporting concepts of crime prevention and of licensee responsibility for safety. Because of the nature of the street, local police patrols are on foot and are familiar with both day and night time traders, and with regular users of the street.

All the licensees are in contact with the Liquor Licensing Commissioner and have a respect, if grudging, for the requirements of the Liquor Licensing Act.

The downside of using police and the Liquor Licensing Commission as allies was that it reinforced the initial response from licensees that crime prevention is about police and law, and all they had to do was whatever they were told by those two agencies, and we would go away and leave them alone.

Once dialogue was established it emerged that there was common interest in an audit of the physical safety of twelve premises in the street. Ten people worked in pairs from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. on a Saturday night/Sunday morning to assess the

layout and standard of premises, and the impact of the physical surroundings on staff and patron behaviour. We also took the opportunity to look at the layout and work practices of local car parks, which included high rise car parks. Results were provided to the individual licensees and discussed with them.

Following the safety audit there was a pause in the pilot and then the managers and licensees took over. A group met without the project officer but after several weeks re-established contact and put forward a proposal. Ten of the managers wished to operate to a jointly agreed standard of management practice with the aim of reducing violence and crime.

This was the first time in which any of the night time traders or licensees in Hindley Street had agreed to meet or to work together. In the fiercely competitive atmosphere of the street, it represented a real breakthrough in attitude—in business practice and in crime prevention and safety.

The agreement to include some measure of control on discounting practices was particularly heartening. There had been and continues to be a lot of discounting in the street to attract custom from neighbouring premises. These ten premises are only a quarter of the licensed premises, and do not include the major licensee in the street, but they believe that they have more to gain by offering a high standard of service and safety than by offering cheap drinks.

The printing of the customer service pledge in a form which can be displayed to customers was sponsored by the Hotel and Hospitality Industry Association, providing a closer link between the industry body and the licensees in the street, as well as reinforcing the commitment of the industry to crime prevention.

The participating managers will meet to monitor adherence to the pledge. They have agreed that this group will include members from the police and other agencies in the area. The Crime Prevention Unit will invite the inner city area local crime prevention committee, the Intra-City Cooperative Action Group, to participate in the monitoring process. The licensees have also agreed that the group will have the right to ask that the pledge poster be returned to the group if practices in a premises are considered to be breaching the standards of the pledge.

A number of licensees have suggested that the standards of the pledge should be included in the conditions of their licences.

The concern of the group is, however, that other licensees in the street should also be subject to the conditions if they are to be formalised.

The customer service pledge was launched at one of the participating premises in April, with the support of the Crime Prevention Unit, the Hotel and Hospitality Industry Association and the Police.

In addition to the pledge, a handful of licensees in the street have undertaken renovations which have improved the safety of their premises, and a number have improved lighting.

Some licensees worked through the survey process undertaken in the McMahan's Dance Club pilot with the project officer as well as responding to the safety audit information.

What We Have Learnt

What particular lessons have we learnt from the project? The first point is that it takes a long time for participants in projects like these to develop an understanding and commitment. For example, in the Hindley Street pilot, licensees started from a position of "get more police, it's their problem" and "tell me what I have to do to meet the requirements of the law and that's all I'm doing" to "if we do something we will gain—and we are part of the process which contributes to crime prevention and safety".

Strong partnerships with key players (in this case, local police, liquor licensing authorities, the industry body and key players in the industry) and key licensees in Hindley Street provided both the initial contact and credibility, and the ongoing means of bringing the licensees and managers along with the project.

We also found that, once the participants were interested, they were more innovative than anticipated, and eager to take control themselves. We learnt that waiting and listening and working on their suggestions rather than on preconceived ideas is better than trying to steer a particular course. We have tools to offer, for example, safety audits, staff and patron surveys, incident recording procedures, information about reported offence levels and about measures tried elsewhere but we

cannot say that any particular measure will make a particular premises safer. Licensees find that out best for themselves.

An example of this is the business plan focus which grew out of licensees and managers in both pilots taking control. Their interest was an increase in turnover by attracting people who otherwise would not use the venue, or prevention of loss of custom through incidents witnessed or experienced. The joint approach to crime prevention and safety was brought about by reviewing and improving the quality of service provided to patrons.

Establishing structures to maintain the momentum, both during the project and once the intended period of contact ends, is useful. Structures which can continue commitment and involvement are possibly more useful than staffing, which can reinforce reliance on someone else to do the thinking and to take responsibility for preventing crime and improving safety.

There are also some observations about the impact of introducing concepts of crime prevention and safety to the participants. The project officer and the Crime Prevention Unit had a marked impact on behaviour just by making contact with licensees and managers and by being on the pilot sites, for example, the project officer noted that the behaviour of door and other security staff was less aggressive than he had observed on nights when contact was less formal. The police noted that it was an unusually quiet night for incidents including assaults. One premises has an infamous attraction known as "the cage"—a barred structure in which a scantily clad woman dances. On the night of the safety audit the cage had been moved away from the front window and the dancer was wearing extra clothes.

Has the project had an impact on the level of incidents? Statistics on the frequency of incidents prior to the project were not known. However, by acknowledging the problem of crime and safety in hotels and clubs, we are also encouraging the reporting of incidents: crime prevention strategies in hotels should lead to more patrons wanting to report offences and more managers recording and reporting incidents. By being there we may have increased the level of reported offences. If we have been successful, we should also have increased the perception of safe use of these premises.

There has been a huge level of interest from the community in the project. Local Crime Prevention Committees want a means of working with their local hotels and clubs. There is clearly much concern at the local level about the role of hotels and clubs in crime prevention and safety, and this concern is not only about property crimes such as vandalism or graffiti, but includes concern about the safety of young people using hotels and clubs, concern about the safety of women using licensed premises, health concerns about the volume of alcohol encouraged by promotions, concerns about road safety and about the risk of patrons being victims of assault. There is also concern at the community level about attitudes towards the use of alcohol and in particular, the acceptance of violence as appropriate or excusable behaviour when alcohol is used, particularly in hotels.

Attitudes to Violent Behaviour and the Use of Alcohol

This is a major concern which the project did not address. When licensees have attempted to make the premises safer, including demanding a high standard of behaviour, they are still faced with a demand from a section of the community which wants to fight and drink. Neither regulation nor action on the part of licensees can change attitudes in the general community, and that demand will mean that some businesses respond, and there is commercial pressure for others to lower their standards. The Coalition Against Crime Working Group on Alcohol, Drugs and Crime considers this community acceptance, and even expectation, that alcohol causes and excuses violent behaviour to be a priority area for its work (*see* Atkinson 1992). The Working Group is currently determining how best it can link to local and national crime prevention and public health measures to address this cultural contributor to violence.

Ongoing Work from the Project

The strategies which licensees and managers tried and found useful have been written into a training manual, *Safe Profit*.

The manual outlines a business planning process for establishing what will provide safe, quality service and a safe environment for staff, and enables managers to set priorities to achieve a safer premises while maintaining or increasing custom.

Safe Profit will now be trialled for 12 months in hotels and clubs across the State. The Crime Prevention Unit has been granted funding from the National Drug Strategy Crime Prevention Fund to test the usefulness of the manual to managers of licensed premises and the impact of the crime prevention strategies it contains on preventing and reducing crime and violence in their premises. This trial will include premises in country areas of South Australia, and premises attracting particular groups of patrons.

The Crime Prevention Unit is continuing to negotiate with the Hotel and Hospitality Industry Association for the industry body to provide a training package for crime prevention and safety in licensed premises for use with *Safe Profit*.

A number of the Local Crime Prevention Committees are using *Safe Profit* and similar processes to those used in the pilot studies to work with licensees in their local communities. The Coalition Against Crime Working Group on Alcohol, Drugs and Crime will be a key structure for maintaining momentum in this area and in transferring what was learnt from the project to a wider arena.

References

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