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Implementing safer school leavers' celebrations

End of school events, such as Schoolies Week, can attract large groups of unsupervised young people and are often accompanied by an increase in antisocial behaviour in an area (OCP 2007). When individuals, particularly young people, congregate, it is often a concern for members of the community and the prevention of group violence can pose policing and management challenges (White 2006). Strategies to reduce group misbehaviour for organised events include:

- focus on community safety rather than law enforcement
- emphasise safe fun
- incorporate explicit rules and behaviour boundaries
- be crime prevention focused (White 2006).

A holistic prevention approach is advocated, incorporating facets of environmental design, situational prevention and social prevention (White 2006). An evaluated example of this approach is the 'management by event' framework endorsed by the state government for the 'Leavers' celebration in Dunsborough, a town in southwest Western Australia. The framework is a coordinated response that includes:

- a focus on rights and responsibilities
- improved safety through robust policing and harm minimisation
- active support to regional communities to manage visiting school leavers
- better coordination between government and non-government agencies
- research into improved ways to manage large groups of young people (OCP 2007).

The framework incorporates a mixture of universal, selected and targeted interventions. These include diversionary activities, identification wristbands, transport, and support services. Recognised with an Australian 2007 Crime and Violence Prevention Award, the success of the framework was highlighted by comparing key data from 2006 with 2005. An evaluation showed:

- an 81 percent reduction in arrests
- a 45 percent reduction in property damage and cleanup costs
- a 40 percent reduction in ambulance call outs
- a 56 percent reduction in move on notices
- strengthened partnerships between government and community
- improved perception of Leavers by the community and the media
- the town centre free of crowds (OCP 2007).

For more information on the 2007 Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Award winners see <http://www.aic.gov.au/acvpa/>, and for more information on Schoolies Week visit <http://www.aic.gov.au/research/jjustice/schoolies.html>.

References

Office of Crime Prevention 2007. Leavers 2006 in Busselton-Dunsborough: evaluation report. www.crimeprevention.wa.gov.au

White R 2006. Swarming and the social dynamics of group violence. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* no. 326. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi2/tandi326.html>