

17 March 2011

One in two young people feel 'unsafe' in public places.

Safety is top of mind with results from an innovative arts and environmental health project by the Injury Control Council of WA (ICCWA) revealing one in two feel 'unsafe in public' throughout Western Australia. The Our Space, Safe Place project engaged a diverse range of young people aged from 12-25, through a series of art and photography workshops and an online survey to find out what they think of safety in public spaces that are important to them.

Unsafe versus safe places

The survey included questions on a variety of public spaces including: parks, shopping centres, entertainment and night venues including licensed premises, recreational facilities, roads, public transport vehicles and terminals, schools and workplaces. CEO Deborah Costello explains, "With more than 500 young people responding to the survey, the results provide valuable information and unique insights into their perspectives of safety that local councils and government bodies can use in their planning and development."

Perth's Top 5 Unsafe Places

Perth's Top 5 Most Safe Places

<i>Unsafe</i>		<i>Safe</i>	
1	Pubs/Bars/Nightclubs	1	Hospitals & Schools
2	Taxi Ranks	2	Workplaces
3	Skate Parks	3	Cafes/Restaurants/Fast food outlets
4	Public transport stops/stations	4	Sporting Clubs
5	Public toilets	5	Shopping centres/Youth Centres

(1 is ranked as the 'most unsafe')

Unsafe people and scenarios – key takeout is alcohol in public

The most unsafe public scenarios for young people involved intoxicated people and the availability of alcohol in public places with comments such as, "I feel unsafe when I feel drugs alcohol or unsocial behaviour are involved" and "If people are drinking they can be unpredictable and things can change very quickly, so I don't trust them as much and hence feel less safe".

Ms Costello believes this is an important message for local governments to consider when planning public events, "The statistics on alcohol and violence confirm the fears of many young people. We strongly recommend to councils the need for alcohol free areas at public events and consideration of the proximity of licensed venues to youth orientated public spaces for urban planning in general."

Age, race, gender have no correlation on feeling unsafe

The survey results show that young people have a great tolerance for diversity and believe themselves to be more tolerant than other generations. A strong current of respect for all types of people being welcomed in public was conveyed through the qualitative results. Suggestions on how to increase feelings of safety for the general community included, "Promote multicultural messages, encourage diversity by asking more input from young people of all cultures" and "Federal legislation to protect us from discrimination on any grounds, including gender and sexual expression".

Strategies for unsafe places

Although the majority feel 'unsafe' young people still actively use public spaces due to necessity. Qualitative survey responses show a range of strategies to manage safety with young people demonstrating resilience and confidence overall. Key strategies included being with groups of friends in public, or if alone staying close to people that look 'trustworthy' such as family groups and using a mobile to 'call or pretend to call a friend/family member'.

Ms Costello CEO says, "Older people may think that young people have little idea about safety. The results show that today's youth are in fact very safety consciousness and have a practical range of strategies to live their life in public spaces and places. They don't want to live their lives in fear."

Attitude plays a big part with many comments such as 'thinking positively' and 'acting confidently'. Interestingly there was a strong split between young people using active outgoing behaviours such as 'smiling, looking people in the eye', to those believing more introverted strategies and minimising their interaction offered the safer path such as 'minding my own business and not talking to anybody', 'wearing sunglasses – not looking anyone in the eye' and 'listening to my own music'.

Comprehensive results from the Our Safe, Safe Place survey will be forwarded to a number of local governments, councils and community organisations for implementation in their future urban planning.

ICCWA wishes to thank the young people involved in the project as well as the schools and different youth agencies, support groups and the professional artists and photographers who helped make the project a success.

Our Space, Safe Place was proudly supported by Lotterywest, the Department for Communities' Office for Youth and Healthway.

For further information please contact ICCWA on 9420 7212 or visit www.iccwa.org.au



Government of Western Australia
Department for Communities



Ends.

(**Media contact:** Deborah Costello - CEO, ICCWA (08) 9420 7212/0408 900 448 or email dcostello@iccwa.org.au.)

Photo opportunity: Project participants at ICCWA head office with CEO Deborah Costello. Sample of "feature images" from the exhibition.