DON'T GO THERE:

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY SAFETY AND POLICING

A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT WITH

VICTORIA POLICE, REGION 2 (WESTGATE)

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We hope we have done justice to the voices, views and values of both young people and members of Victoria Police heard throughout the course of our research around community safety, policing and the building blocks for a safe and healthy future.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CALDB	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background
CMY(I)	Centre for Multicultural Youth (formerly known as Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues)
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DHS	Department of Human Services
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship (formerly the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs)
DIMA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (now known as Department of Immigration and Citizenship)
DPCD	Department of Planning and Community Development
LGA	Local Government Area
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Scientists
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VU	Victoria University

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Project aims

This study aimed to find out what young people aged 15-19 in the Brimbank area think about community safety and about the ways in which police and young people interact on these issues. Using a mixed-method study design that collected data through a survey and focus groups, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- *What helps young people to feel safe?*
- *What leads to young people feeling unsafe or at risk when they are in public spaces?*
- *What do young people see as the triggers and causes of increased violence and conflict amongst groups of young people?*
- *What do young people think about police in their local area and how can relationships between young people and police be improved?*
- *How can police and young people work together in improving community safety in the Brimbank area?*

This project surveyed 500 young people drawn from the general population in Brimbank and engaged a further 44 young people from Sudanese and Pacific Islander backgrounds through focus group discussions, as well as 14 young people drawn from the general population in a focus group looking specifically at strategies for improved youth-police consultation mechanisms on community safety. The evidence base provided through the *Don't Go There* study has emerged through detailed and rigorous elicitation and analysis of the perceptions, views and voices of young people themselves. The findings of the research report are essentially 'data-up' findings that have been generated through a series of questions and themes that, while they are informed by a range of concerns and interests for Victoria Police as the key stakeholder in the project, have been independently pursued in the research design and have allowed young people to speak freely and in detail about what most concerns *them* in relation to the main issues canvassed in the study.

While the findings presented below are specific to what young people who live in the Brimbank region have said in response to the research questions and themes, the methodology used in this survey, as detailed in Chapter 7 of the report, is fully transferable and can be used to elicit the views and perspectives of young people anywhere in the state to gather similarly rich locale- or regionally-based data.

1.2 Key findings from the survey

Defining safety

Young people defined 'safety' as the absence of anxiety when walking around the street or neighbourhood; not feeling that they were in danger, and not needing to be vigilant about security.

Perceptions of safety in Brimbank

Of the sample of 500 young people, 50% of the participants reported feeling safe or extremely safe in their local neighbourhood. A further 25% reported feeling somewhat safe, while 12% said they felt unsafe in their local neighbourhood. Just over one-third (36%) of young people reported being worried about being attacked in public. The main public places young people said were unsafe for them were: train and bus stations; on public transport; walking down the street, and in local parks. Young people overwhelmingly reported train and bus stations as more unsafe than other areas.

School was reported as a safe place by the majority of young people (90%), with only 4% saying they felt school was an unsafe place. Young people made it clear that the main way in which places are made unsafe is through the behaviour of others, including aggressive, intrusive, and violent behaviour. Drug and alcohol use, drug dealing, gang activity and fighting were given as common reasons for the presence of such behaviours.

Young people in groups in public spaces

'Hanging out' with friends was the primary reason for young people gathering in groups in public. More than three-quarters (78%) reported hanging out in public places, generally in the afternoon after school. They meet in groups in public places for social reasons and as a safety strategy. Meeting socially in groups allows young people to spend time together, to be involved in planned activities, and to have access to friends. The other main reason for meeting in groups in public was to feel safe.

Gangs

Three-quarters of these young people thought there were gangs in their local area. They were clear in their description of the difference between groups and gangs. Antisocial and violent behaviour were reported as the key markers distinguishing a 'gang' from a 'group'. One-third of all participants reported having had encounters with gangs in their local areas and young men were twice as likely to report gang encounters as young women. 50% reported some fear of gangs in their local area, while 20% reported being very scared of gangs. They thought the main reasons young people joined gangs were to belong; for self defence; for criminal activity; for power and reputation, and based on having the same ethnic background.

Violent crime

This group of young people perceived the main reasons for committing violent crime were: for power and image; because of individual problems; to be part of a group, and because of social problems in the wider community. One-fifth reported having been a victim of violent crime in public, with almost twice as many reports of being a victim from young men compared to young women. Young men were more likely to report assault than young women. Young women, however, were more likely to report offences described in crime statistics as 'behaviour in public' (for example, offences related to drunkenness, indecent/offensive behaviour or language), whereas young men did not report these kinds of offences.

Weapons carriage

50% of young people reported that they knew other young people who carried weapons regularly. Various kinds of poles and bats, knives and guns were reported as the main weapons that young people knew of others carrying. Young people thought that the main reasons for carrying weapons were to feel safe, for self-defence, and for protection. However, of the 25% of young people who reported that they had carried a weapon at some time and commented further on this, knives were the most frequently cited. Young men were more likely to say they had carried a weapon than young women. Young people who reported being victims of crime were more likely to report carrying a weapon than the sample in general. However, this group accounted for only 40% of all those reporting carrying a weapon at some time.

Why conflict occurs between young people in public

Acting tough and looking for a fight; differences of opinion; relationship issues, and racism were the main reasons given for the causes of arguments between young people. They thought conflict turned violent through when young people were concerned with acting tough; not wanting to back down; being cool or seeking reputation, and using physical aggression to resolve conflict.

How young people can stay safe and reduce conflict in public

Young people in the survey reported that following public safety tips such as going out in groups was the best way to keep safe from violence. Not getting involved with bad company, not getting involved in fights and avoiding places where violent people or groups hang out were also reported as ways of staying safe.

Suggestions for reducing conflict amongst young people included: education on and encouragement of self-control and respecting others; choosing friends wisely; greater police or adult supervision; stronger consequences for aggressive behaviour, and more prevention measures, such as counselling and controlling drugs and alcohol.

When they have a problem, young people said those best able to help them were their mother, relatives, school counsellors, and their father. However, when the issue is conflict, they nominated young people themselves as being best able to deal with this, followed by police and youth workers.

Young people and relationships with police

Half of the participants reported they trusted or completely trusted the police, while a quarter weren't sure and a quarter reported a lack of trust. Over half (58%) reported that they felt safer when they saw police on the streets. Just under half said they believed young people in their area held negative views of police. In responding to how police could develop a good relationship with local youth, young people emphasized increased communication, friendliness and approachability, and a polite and respectful attitude. Several key perceptions about the primary roles of police emerged from the survey data, in which young people's responses suggested that they see police variously as service providers; enforcers of order and control; intimidators; listeners, helpers and problem solvers; educators and advisors; and irrelevant to helping young people feel safe.

About one-fifth said they would call the police if they needed to. When asked, just over half gave examples for what might stop them calling the police if their own or someone else's safety were in danger. The most commonly reported reasons they would not call police were: fear of violent reprisals, negative consequences, or escalation of the situation. The belief that the police won't respond in time to the call, will be ineffective in handling the situation, will not be interested in the problem, or won't take their call seriously was also reported. Young people said they would feel more comfortable calling the police if the police were friendlier, if the police were more respectful, if they could be more confident that they would be assisted, and if the call could be more private or anonymous.

In responding to how police could make them feel safer, young people suggested that police have greater visibility, better response time, use their power of enforcement, have a more respectful attitude towards young people, and listen to what young people have to say.

Improving community safety

Young people's suggestions for improving community safety included more police on the streets; greater reporting of crime to police by young people; more environmental security measures such as cameras and guards, and police and community members working collaboratively. Interesting ideas on education for encouraging understanding and respect between young people themselves and between young people and the police and on how to keep safe in public were suggested.

1.3 Key findings from focus groups with Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people

Perceptions of community safety and risks to safety for these two groups of young people in the 15-19 year old age group in Brimbank share some things in common with the representative sample survey findings, but also reflect some differences that are specific to young people from Pacific Islander and Sudanese backgrounds. While some broad comparisons about CALDB or 'ethnic minority' youth may at times be drawn in relation to young people in the mainstream community that can help inform aspects of strategic policy development, fine-grained knowledge from within specific communities can yield stronger insights when thinking about how best to design and implement culturally specific and locally tailored solutions to issues around community safety and improved relationships between young people and police. Different CALDB communities may have varying experiences and perspectives about how they understand, manage and relate to perceptions around safety and well-being in the community and the role of police in helping them feel and be safe. While such differences can at times pose operational, strategic and policy challenges for community policing initiatives, they also offer opportunities to gain better in-depth understanding of the nature and background of specific issues and how to respond most effectively to them.

Racism

Racism and its negative impact on feeling safe in the community is a key concern for both groups, but tends to be experienced more *acutely* by Sudanese young people based on racial visibility and their status as refugees/new arrivals, and more *chronically* by Pacific Islander young people based on history, culture and experience in Australia.

Perceptions of safety in the local area

Young Pacific Islanders reported feeling a chronic sense of threat and lack of safety, particularly for young men, both during the day and at night in Brimbank, whereas Sudanese young people said they feel safer during the day than at night. In comparison to survey respondents, 90% of whom felt school was a safe place, young Sudanese men identified in and around school as a place where they felt less safe.

Young people in groups in public places

Public gathering in both small and larger groups is perceived by young people in both communities as a critical part of socialisation and cultural reaffirmation and bonding, and young Pacific Islanders and Sudanese want its positive benefits to be supported through appropriate measures while limiting its negative impacts. Being in groups is also seen as a key safety strategy for young people in both communities in relation to feeling and being safe in their local area.

Relationships with and attitudes toward the police

Both Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people in these focus groups expressed lack trust and confidence in the responsiveness and understanding of police when their safety is threatened or at risk. This lack of trust and confidence is based on perceptions of racism, cultural stereotyping, failure to take young people seriously, and awareness of limited police resources in responding to call-outs and reported incidents.

The perception of the police by both groups of young people is that police simultaneously enhance the safety of young people by their *presence* in the local area – but can also place the safety of young people at risk by their *behaviour* in the local area, specifically toward young people in these two communities. Young Pacific Islander and Sudanese people said they want to know police better and be known better by them to improve their sense of community safety. They also want to see increased numbers of police from their own cultural/ethnic backgrounds serving in their local area.

Strategies for staying safe in the community

Pacific Islander young people in the focus groups appeared to be more confident and assertive about life in Brimbank than young Sudanese people, but paradoxically the sense of discomfort with other cultures and ethnicities in the local area that some young Pacific islanders expressed in the focus groups also makes them more vulnerable to issues around community safety. Sudanese young people tend to adopt risk-management strategies to negotiate issues of community safety and the police (e.g. travelling in groups, avoiding certain places or groups of people), whereas Pacific Islander young people tend to adopt relationship-management strategies (e.g. relying on friends and family for protection and back-up) for the same issues.

Gangs

While the threat or presence of violence from perceived 'gangs' is perceived as an issue of significant and ongoing concern by young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders in Brimbank, the focus group findings suggest that the most common form of 'gang' activity in this local area perceived by young Sudanese and Pacific Islander people is the existence of fluid and porous localised groups we call 'alliances', rather than larger scale, well-organised youth collectives. These alliances were reported to be cross-ethnic and based on shared location and social interests, rather than comprised of single ethnicities based on shared cultural and/or criminal interests. However, more detailed and in-depth research is required to understand better the way in which alliances and semi-structured 'gangs' of young people are operating in the Brimbank region.

Young people in both these communities also perceive that they are often unfairly labelled by police, media and others in the community as being in 'gangs' when they are instead gathering in groups for social, recreational or safety reasons. Paradoxically, although young people in these groups said they did not want to be stereotyped as 'gang members' by police and others on the basis of what they wear, young people themselves in these groups identified certain kinds of clothing and body decoration as signifying either 'gang' membership or affiliation with an alliance of the kind described above. School uniforms were also reported as a perceived risk to safety by some young people as they moved between suburbs in their local area.

Cultural issues and community safety

Both Pacific Islander and Sudanese young people said cultural obligations and family relationships play an important role in relation to community safety. Within the focus groups there was an emphasis on increased vulnerabilities for both Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people based on the obligation to protect other family members, e.g. the sexual coercion of girls to prevent the bashing of relatives, or becoming involved in physical conflict because someone within a young person's extended kinship network has been attacked or threatened.

Causes of conflict for young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders

Conflict triggers identified by young people in both these communities are similar to those for young people in general, as is the greater likelihood of physical conflict between young men, but physical assaults between women were also reported in the focus groups. However, racial and ethnic abuse and taunting is a significant additional conflict trigger for both communities. Fear of social exclusion and its impact on reduced community safety encourages higher risk behaviours around safety in both communities. Gathering in groups increases perceptions of safety for young people in both communities, but young Pacific Islander and Sudanese people also think this creates problems as a result in their relationships with the police and the general community.

Weapons carriage

Perceptions of routine weapons carriage by others, and a corresponding hike in perceived lack of safety, are normative for this age group in these communities in Brimbank, particularly based on reported observations of weapons carriage by other ethnic or cultural groups of young people in the area.

Improving community safety

Young people in both communities are interested in strengthening the social fabric of their local neighbourhoods and public spaces through developing increased cultural awareness, tolerance, respect, mutual education and joint activities between police, young people and the general community. These are seen as key elements of increased community safety by young Pacific Islander and Sudanese people themselves.

1.4 'Listen and learn': a consultative model for youth-police community safety partnerships

A key component of this study has involved the development of the 'Listen and Learn' model for community safety partnerships. The findings outlined above, combined with the general population focus group exploring improved police-youth relationships and community safety consultation, have provided evidence-based data that usefully inform an effective partnership model for ongoing youth-police consultation. The staged model of 'Listen and Learn' has five parts. The first four stages set up a structured recurring dialogue between young people and the police. Stages 1 and 2 focus on the need to *identify*, *explore* and *prioritise* community safety issues for young people and the police; Stage 3 *develops* programs and strategies to address these priorities; and Stage 4 *reviews and evaluates* their outcomes for both young people and the police at the local community level before the cycle starts again. Stage 5 involves *ongoing informal dialogue and exchange* between young people and the police throughout the consultation cycle, including the use of web-based platforms to maximise outreach to young people who use ICTs as part of their everyday lives, as well as to encourage contact with those young people who may be disengaged from school or other community-based settings.

Underpinned by the evidence produced through this study, 'Listen and Learn' is a model that:

- Assumes that a majority of young people and police have a positive and shared interest in and commitment to promoting enhanced community safety in their local area.
- Emphasises, encourages and resources the front-line role of operational police in becoming more knowledgeable about and connected to young people at the community level.
- Promotes mutual respect, tolerance, trust and genuine understanding of each other's views between young people and police.
- Helps develop confidence building for young people when dealing with police as a key objective of the consultation and engagement process.
- Facilitates individualised contact and relationship-building between young people and police, particularly operational police, as a complement to larger-scale relationship building exercises between groups or communities and the police.
- Invests in educating young people about police powers and actions, and police about young people's experience and needs regarding community safety and relationships with the police.
- Recognises that ongoing consultation with young people in the community needs to respond to the needs of young people from different backgrounds and stages of residence in Australia.
- Balances the role of police in the community as service providers, advisers and educators with their role as law enforcers.

- Is sustainable, collectively owned by both young people and police, has consistent and clear goals but can also adapt to changing needs and circumstances through regular evaluation, review and improvement.

1.5 Future strategic directions

A number of the strategic directions and suggested actions arising from the *Don't Go There* study are addressed in the ongoing youth-police consultation model discussed in Chapter 9 of the report. These include strategies for responding to young people's concerns about improving their relationship with police through establishing better ongoing communication and consultation pathways; reciprocal education for young people and police about rights and responsibilities, cultural considerations, and the impact of attitudinal and behavioural messages in encounters between young people and the police. They also include strategies for dealing with better understandings of the causes, triggers and alternatives for dealing with conflict between young people, particularly around youth violence as part of a broader social process.

The consultation model, which incorporates both the survey and focus group methodology and further stages of ongoing dialogue and consultation, is an important outcome of the project and offers a structure for continued information and data gathering, dialogue and exchange, and prioritising and implementation of responses around young people, safety and policing in the community. Beyond this, however, a number of key issues have been raised by young people throughout the study that require further strategic thinking and approaches. Accordingly, the suggested actions below are intended to complement the consultation model by drawing together key areas of concern and suggestions for addressing these based on the data that have emerged throughout the course of the research program.

Young people's perceptions of safety in Brimbank

The data strongly support specific and urgent attention being given to improving both the perception and reality of community safety in the Sunshine Transport Hub area, as well as at other suburban train stations including St Albans and Watergardens. This is a complex problem that requires a coordinated approach amongst key stakeholders, including the local council, police, youth workers, transport operators, state government representatives and young people themselves. Ways of addressing this could include:

1. A purpose-specific taskforce could be set up within Brimbank, including police and youth representatives from the local community, to develop a 'Safer Sunshine Transport' plan that addresses the concerns and feedback provided by young people through the project.

2. Victoria Police could respond to the perception that a more visible and frequent police presence at Sunshine Transport Hub would improve community safety and enhance young people's sense of access to police through resourcing increased foot and vehicle patrols in the area between 3 pm and 5 pm during the week and on Friday and Saturday evenings. This could be run for a trial period that would then assess what difference, if any, this makes to perceptions of community safety for young people who use Sunshine Transport Hub on a regular basis.

3. Young people's desire to have greater access to and better relationships with local police could be addressed by establishing an ongoing 'shopfront' presence for local police at the Hub, similar to the Footscray Market shopfront for Footscray Multicultural and Youth Resource Officers in that suburb, or else by establishing a mobile 'police station' run out of a bus or van that is rotated through the Sunshine Transport Hub on at least a weekly basis, ideally in the after-school period between 3 – 5 pm on weekdays. This is an outreach program

that would seek to transform the existing perception of Sunshine Transport Hub as a negative and dangerous community space into a more positive social space that encourages young people to feel the police are actively engaging with their presence and their concerns. It could also provide an opportunity for some of the educational and communication exchanges that young people have said they want to have with police to occur through displays and community awareness campaigns being run from either an ongoing or mobile police 'mini station' at the Transport Hub.

4. Victoria Police could consider responding to the suggestion from the general population focus group on how police can best engage young people in ongoing consultation by setting up, in cooperation with other relevant community stakeholders, a recreational event that draws young people to the Sunshine Transport Hub on a regular basis to engage socially with operational police, for example through music, dance or other community activities.

5. In partnership with schools and relevant community organisations and agencies, Victoria Police could focus specifically on intercultural community policing strategies and activities that help promote intercultural learning and understanding amongst the culturally and linguistically diverse community of Brimbank, with special attention devoted to creating socially positive bridges and bonds between young people from different backgrounds to help reduce anxiety and misunderstanding about people from different cultural backgrounds and countries.

Young people in groups in public

Young people in groups need to feel they are legitimate users of public spaces when they are behaving appropriately, and to feel confident that police have appropriate working knowledge and understanding of the difference between a 'group' and a 'gang'. This could be strengthened through the following strategy:

1. Victoria Police could further develop the capacity of operational police to understand and respond appropriately to social groups of young people gathering in public as distinct from local street gangs or youth alliances that gather specifically for the purpose of antisocial and/or criminal activity. Some of this capacity building for operational police could involve developmental training that brings young people and police together to identify and set boundaries around what police need to do in discharging their duties and what young people can reasonably expect to do or not do when they are spending time in public in groups.

   This is particularly important in the case of operational police and CALDB youth, where the potential for misunderstanding and miscommunication about public gathering and the use of public space is pronounced. Improved cultural understanding for operational police about why larger group sizes – traditionally equated with 'gangs' in the literature (e.g. White 1999) – do not equate with gangs but are characteristic of social gathering in public for both male and female Sudanese-background and Pacific Islander young people suggests the importance of making such developmental training cross-cultural in focus.

Gangs in Brimbank

1. Consideration should be given to acknowledging the widespread perception amongst young people themselves that gangs exist in the Brimbank area. Continuing a strategy of downplaying the existence and operation of local youth gangs, while understandable in the context of both the data and the literature that suggests that local street 'gangs' often come into existence through self-naming as such, also risks alienating young people who may perceive that the police are denying or minimising something young people themselves take for granted about their local environment.

2. A more useful strategy might be to employ a continuum model, in which lower-level street gang activity is acknowledged but also put in its place relative to more highly organised, sophisticated and criminally active gang formations. This would also be helpful in allowing for the development of strategies to enhance protective factors that minimise the risk of young people becoming involved in local street gangs, and raising community awareness about the realities and consequences of engaging in gang-related activities and group identity.

3. Careful consideration could be given to the terminology used to describe local youth collectives to avoid the tensions, conflicts and misunderstandings that can arise when the label 'gang' is used. Describing local youth collectives that display some antisocial or delinquent behaviours as 'crews', 'alliances' or 'street groups' rather than 'gangs' may help shift the emphasis away from the challenges of defining 'gangs', helping to focus instead on the broader social processes that lead to youth violence and conflict in the community.

4. A public awareness campaign about ways for young men and young women to feel strong, confident and empowered without becoming involved in local street gangs is also a strategy that should be considered, drawing on a number of recent and current approaches in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom that are addressing similar issues (see Listen and Learn model in Chapter 9 below). Such a campaign could usefully draw on the developing literature on socially resilient communities that emphasises building social cohesion and tolerance as a key element in enabling people to resist social pressures that foster discontent, conflict and violence.

Understanding conflict

The reasons that conflict occurs and escalates for young people, like many of the issues canvassed in this study, are complex and multi-factorial. However, a clear finding in the research is that masculinity, particularly around image, reputation and peer status, is critical in conflict escalation, especially in group settings. Accordingly:

1. A public multi-media campaign titled 'How cool is that?' showing graphic representations of the consequences of violent conflict – loss of life, disfigurement, arrest and imprisonment, the loss of support from friends and family, etc. – could be a powerful counterweight to the current cultural pull towards violence as a means of negotiating masculinity, identity and empowerment for young men in particular.

2. Beyond such a campaign, it is recommended that community stakeholders – including schools, police, social service providers and local councils – work together to develop specific conflict resolution and conflict de-escalation resources and toolkits for young people to strengthen alternative conflict resolution skills for youth in Brimbank. Young people who feel that there may be no alternative to 'backing down' other than to fight or become violent need education and support about why this is a myth. Such a toolkit would need to be designed to be CALDB sensitive and to learn from alternative and traditional dispute resolution approaches already in place within CALDB communities whose effectiveness may be threatened by cross-cultural disputes where parties in conflict do not understand each other's codes and triggers. Specific information about what is understood as provocative or threatening across different cultural groups could be workshopped and better understood as part of this process.

3. Racism and discrimination between young people on the basis of ethnicity and cultural background has been identified as a significant trigger for escalating conflict and violence amongst CALDB young people in the study, and particularly for Sudanese young people. The link between racism, discrimination and violent responses to these experiences needs to be understood as part of a broader community safety and crime prevention strategy in which young people from all backgrounds understand that they are also responsible for escalating conflict

when they express racist or ethnically derogatory or inflammatory sentiments to their peers, even if they do not themselves become physically violent. This is part of a broader education and awareness campaign that is addressed in the 'Listen and Learn' ongoing youth-police consultation model.

Weapons carriage and violent crime

Periodic weapons amnesties have shown limited effectiveness in reducing the incidence of weapons carriage for the same reasons identified in earlier studies, which were that young people most often carry weapons to feel safer when in public or in areas they felt to be dangerous in their local area. A new strategy is needed to address this persistent problem. School and other educational campaigns recommended by earlier research do not appear to have resulted in a noticeable shift in attitude amongst young people that dislodges the link between carrying weapons and feeling 'safer' or more able to defend themselves in public spaces. Potential strategies for dealing with these issues here include the following:

1. The data show that trolley poles were a clear weapon of convenience and choice for young people in Brimbank. Victoria Police could work with manufacturers of shopping trolleys and the proprietors of shopping malls, particularly Highpoint but also Sunshine Plaza, Watergardens and other local consumer hubs, to make trolley poles less easily accessible.

2. Knives are easily transported, easily concealed and easily used by young people. The persistence of knife carriage and use requires a full-scale public media campaign that, like road safety, binge-drinking and other campaigns aimed at youth, graphically illustrates the consequences of carrying knives. To be most effective, the campaign needs to dislodge the myth that weapons carriage makes young people safer and focus instead on the ways in which weapons carriage in fact places them at greater risk for their safety. At the heart of such a campaign would be the effort to change the culture and thinking around weapons carriage for young people and to transform the role of weapons in the social relations that young people have with each other and with public spaces in their immediate and broader environments.

3. Such a campaign could usefully focus on three key areas:

    - How easily a weapon such as a knife can be turned against the carrier by a stronger, more agile and/or more experienced offender.
    - Better educating potential victims of knife and other weapons-related crimes on how to engage in evasive or avoidant strategies that minimise their risk of being victimised through weapons carriage. A public awareness strategy empowering potential victims, as well as those targeting potential or existing weapons offenders amongst young people, may produce a shift in thinking about weapons carriage and its impacts that has been elusive to date for this social group.
    - Making weapons carriage into a 'shame job' through negative peer reactions to young people who carry weapons may also produce a shift in attitude, behaviour, and the underlying social relations that currently inform the issue of weapons carriage and youth.

Reducing conflict

1. Victoria Police could further strengthen its work with schools and with CALDB community leaders and groups to develop clear and realistic expectations and guidelines focusing on conflict prevention rather than conflict intervention. This is an example of an area that could be one of the priorities for a pilot program in the 'Listen and Learn' consultation model.

2. It would be highly advantageous to incorporate specific CALDB approaches to conflict reduction into operational police awareness and training to assist in minimising conflict involving CALDB youth that may arise on the basis of cultural misunderstanding and/or competing values and approaches.

3. There is also a clear place for education around self control, respect for others, communication and conflict resolution skills. This could include strategies for emotional regulation and how best to diffuse conflict, with a particular focus on strategies for young people to minimise the risk of verbal arguments becoming violent or large-scale confrontations.

Young people and relationships with the police

1. Victoria Police could develop a set of specific strategies, designed in conjunction with Youth Resource Officers and Young Police Commissioners (see 'Listen and Learn' model) that allow operational police to better understand youth-specific listening and engagement skills, and that emphasise a protocol of *mutual listening and respect* between young people and police that cuts both ways.

2. The issue raised by young people around their reluctance to contact police for fear of reprisals by peers could be addressed through the establishment of a local 'Youth Safety Hotline' or similar mechanism that provides young people with an easy to remember free-call number on which they can report crime or provide information relating to community safety concerns where they believe their own or someone else's safety is at risk. Since young people also reported a lack of confidence about dealing with police when they do make contact, with many young people saying they felt too intimidated to ring police even when they needed them, such a hotline could be staffed by personnel who have expertise in dealing with young and inexperienced callers who require support or can provide important information to police about criminal activity in their local area.

3. An educational campaign could be developed that helps young people understand when to call 000, when to ring their local police station, and when to contact a portfolio-specific officer such as a Multicultural Liaison Officer, Youth Resource Officer or Emerging Communities Liaison Officer. There is both confusion and resistance amongst participants about how to contact police and what to expect when they do.

4. Young people need to be provided with clear, accessible and easy to understand information by Victoria Police about how to lodge a complaint against a police officer(s) if they feel their treatment by police warrants this. This is a particular issue for CALDB young people in the study, who have reported instances of asking for police details in order to lodge a complaint and either not receiving these details, being abused when they ask for this information, or being unclear about how to pursue a complaint when they do receive identifying information from a police officer. This is also based on a recommendation that was made in 1999 by the Jesuit Social Services Ethnic Youth and Police Project in the City of Yarra, but does not appear to have been taken up specifically in the current Victoria Police ESD Community Service Charter.

5. Victoria Police can show they have heard and made a positive investment in young people's concerns and contributions to issues around community safety and policing through disseminating information and updates about strategies and programs arising from the *Don't Go There* project. This could be achieved through school bulletins, local newspapers, community forums, and other means of ongoing consultation about the issues raised and how Victoria Police in Brimbank are working in partnership with young people in addressing these issues.

Gender-specific issues for young women around community safety

1. A culturally appropriate multi-media information and awareness campaign could be run by police in partnership with culturally appropriate community organisations specifically for young CALDB women in specific communities about who to call and how best and most safely and comfortably to report incidents of sexual assault, coercion and victimisation, including information about victim support and advisory services available through Victoria Police and other community-based agencies.

2. Further culturally sensitive and appropriate research needs to be undertaken to gain further knowledge and understanding of the specific issues around sexual assault and coercion for young CALDB women in particular communities, since this is an under-researched dimension of community safety with implications for both other CALDB communities and the general community.

3. The issue of why some young women in specific CALDB communities bypass Brimbank police in favour of contacting police in other nearby localities when reporting sexual offences can be explored and addressed through appropriate operational education and training in responding to young CALDB female callers making contact in relation to sexually based crime.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 *Don't Go There* project overview

The research and findings underpinning this report are based on a two-year collaborative research project between Victoria Police and Victoria University called *Don't Go There: Young People's Perspectives on Community Safety and Youth Policing*. The project represents a significant input towards the emphasis placed by Victoria Police on youth policing and community safety, and the priority of developing coordinated approaches toward youth offending, victimisation and the need for early intervention, diversion and crime prevention strategies.

Don't Go There has focussed on finding out what young people in the Brimbank area in Melbourne's West – distinctive for both its highly diverse ethnic population and low scores for perceptions of community safety among Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Victoria – think about the ways in which the police and young people interact on issues of community safety. Research has centred on young people in Brimbank between the ages of 15 – 19 who have been asked about things that make them feel safe, unsafe or at risk when they are in public spaces; what they see as the triggers and causes of increased violence and conflict amongst young people; their attitudes toward and relationships with local police; and how the police and young people can work together to improve community safety in the Brimbank area. While Brimbank is a focal point for this research, the study has examined perceptions and strategies that are relevant to other Victorian culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALDB) populations and to Victorian communities in general.

Don't Go There has been youth-centred, community-based, locally bounded and diversity-sensitive in orientation. The voices of young people are a central element of the research, acknowledging the importance of youth participation in evaluation and consultation relating to policy development and practice. Using an approach that combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the overall project design had four main components:

- An animated interactive web-based survey of young men and women in Brimbank;
- A series of purposive focus groups involving participants drawn from two specific CALDB communities (Sudanese and Pacific Islander) within the Brimbank LGA;
- A review and analysis of relevant media reporting on young people, policing and community safety throughout the life of the research project; and
- A literature review of relevant theoretical and empirical work in the area of youth studies, community safety, risk theory, youth-police relationships, youth gangs and related areas that have informed the project's aims and findings.

2.2 Project deliverables

The study has met the following objectives as key deliverables for the project:

1) The development of a transferable youth engagement tool for Victoria Police to employ across the state in conducting region-specific community surveys of young people in relation to community safety and crimes against the person.

2) The production of a robust and targeted evidence base regarding young people's knowledge and understandings of policing, crime and community safety, including young people from CALDB backgrounds.

This evidence base is intended to provide a better understanding of youth perceptions of police and the drivers of those perceptions surrounding issues of:

- neighbourhood and community safety
- the job of police and role within the community
- level of trust in police

The evidence base is also intended to support and inform the development of specific youth crime prevention and safety initiatives and programs through drawing on young people's experiences and knowledge of local youth activities in the region, including criminal and anti-social behaviour, gang activity, weapons carriage and any perceived links between violent crime and ethnicity, including identification of the areas where youth feel most at risk of becoming a victim of crime. There is a specific subsidiary focus on selected CALDB youth perceptions and issues in the context of Victoria's diverse ethnic and cultural mix, both in Brimbank and elsewhere in Victoria.

4) Future strategic directions for the consideration of Victoria Police relating to the design and implementation of strategies for the enhancement of youth policing and community safety based on the project findings.

5) A best-practice model for on-going youth-police consultation that can be used by Victoria Police beyond the life of the research project to promote dialogue, communication, mutual problem-solving and proactive partnerships between young people and Victoria Police around issues of community safety, crime reduction and well-being for young people in a given locality, including a specific focus on ideas from young people about how to reduce drug use, crime, gang activity, weapons carriage and other related forms of violence amongst youth. The findings from *Don't Go There* have served as the basis for developing a five-stage model titled 'Listen and Learn: A consultative model for youth-police community safety partnerships'. This consultation model and its relationship to project data and findings are described in Chapter 9 below.

2.3 Significance and rationale

The Victoria University-Victoria Police *Don't Go There* project has been designed to assist in developing an evidence base to underpin Victoria Police's operational imperatives with regard to youth and community safety. As such, the study has addressed several of the current strategic priorities identified by Victoria Police. These include:

***Partnerships*:** The project has developed and extended a productive research partnership between Victoria Police and Victoria University, with a specific focus on serving the needs of the Western region of Melbourne. The synergy between research-based and operational perspectives has the capacity to generate important insights and knowledge around youth and community policing issues that will be used to better enable Victoria Police to meet its objectives. It will also enhance the capacity of Victoria Police to sustain ongoing community consultation mechanisms and partnerships around youth and community safety concerns.

***Program development*:** The research data and outcomes generated by this project will enhance the capacity of Victoria Police to develop and allocate resources for targeted proactive programs based on innovative and tailored approaches to the development of safe and secure communities, with specific regard to young people.

***Bridging barriers*:** The focus on and data arising from CALDB youth in the Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities as a specific component of the research project will enhance the capacity of Victoria Police to better understand and implement policies, approaches and consultation mechanisms that are relevant to local and emerging CALDB communities and that recognise and build on the potential for shared community capacity-building with such groups.

***Customer satisfaction*:** The inclusion of young people's perspectives on community safety and policing, together with those of other relevant community stakeholders, will ensure that Victoria Police is better able to respond to the concerns and perspectives of all stakeholders at the local community level, including youth.

Improved perceptions of safety: The evidence base produced by this project will support better understanding of how young people perceive and define 'safety' in their communities, and will provide a basis for program development that targets specific areas for action and improvement in support of creating safer local communities.

2.4 Background to the research

In 2007, as a part of its focus on youth policing and community safety, Victoria Police identified a priority focus on the development of coordinated approaches toward youth offending, victimisation and the need for early intervention, diversion and crime prevention strategies. This was evident in the 'Community strengthening priorities 2006/07' section of the *Victoria Police Business Plan 2006/07*.

At that time, many of the initiatives and policies developed in local regions around youth issues had been supported by anecdotal evidence without the benefit of either systematic research or ongoing mechanisms for community consultation with youth around these issues. However, the evidence-led aspect of contemporary policing acknowledges that approaches relying on 'ideologically driven assumptions about human nature' do not have an empirical relationship with reducing or preventing crime (Sherman et al., 1998; Farrington and Welsh, 2005; Homel, 2005; Waters, 2007). Consequently, in order to maximise the success of new initiatives in the area of youth and community policing strategies focused on young people, it was recognised that a robust evidence base was required to support the development of such strategies and the allocation of police resources. This evidence base would need to be informed by relevant research principles and methods, and managed by appropriately qualified research personnel. Victoria University, working collaboratively in partnership with Victoria Police, was uniquely well-positioned to undertake such a research project.

Victoria University brings extensive experience in community-engaged research and long-standing relationships with both the general and CALDB local communities (including the Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities) in the Western Melbourne region. More specifically, the two Chief Investigators, Associate Professor Michele Grossman and Associate Professor Jenny Sharples, both have strong research track records in these areas.

Associate Professors Grossman and Sharples have worked collaboratively throughout the project with representatives from Victoria Police, including the lead partner, Inspector Scott Mahony, Brimbank; Inspector Steve Soden, Youth Affairs; and Ms Leanne Sargent, Manager of Policy and Research. The project has also benefited from the support and guidance of a Project Reference Group comprising representatives from local council, youth and community organisations and relevant CALDB community members (see Acknowledgements for a list of Reference Group members).

Finally, fundamental to the research has been the extensive input of young people, with 558 young people between 15-19 participating in the study through the survey and focus groups. Their participation has been critical to the outcomes of this project and acknowledges the 'growing commitment to including young people's voice in research, evaluation and consultation' and an understanding that this demographic group are 'becoming central to the development of local, regional and national policies and strategies' (Halsey et al., 2006).

Researchers sought to find out what young people in this age group in the Brimbank[1] area think about community safety and about the ways in which police and young people interact on these issues. Young people were asked to tell researchers about those things that helped them feel safe; what led to their feeling unsafe or at risk when they are in public spaces; what they saw as the triggers and causes of increased violence and conflict amongst young people; about their attitudes toward and relationships with police; and how the police and young people could work together in improving community safety in the Brimbank area. It is anticipated that the development of strategies for enhanced community safety for the 15-19 age group may have a flow-on effect for the upper age range of the youth cohort (20 - 25 years of age), as well as to the general community.

As indicated above, representatives from two CALDB communities – Sudanese and Pacific Islander – were chosen to participate in focus groups as part of the *Don't Go There* project. This was due to a number of specific factors. Anecdotal reports from police, young people and community representatives suggested that young people in these communities in the Brimbank region were more frequently involved in issues relating to public gathering, youth-on-youth assault, aggravated assault, traffic offences and weapons carriage than other CALDB and non-CALDB youth. The current study sought to explore this perception and to provide an evidence base around these issues.

The perceptions of Sudanese young people concerning police and the criminal justice system have until recently been relatively undocumented, although several reports have begun to investigate these issues.[2] The majority of Sudanese young people, aged 15-19, are new or recent arrivals to Australia, settling in Melbourne since 2001. This means that there is limited empirical research to date on interactions between Sudanese young people and police or the criminal justice system. Pacific Islander young people are part of longer-term well established communities in Melbourne, but while slightly more research is available documenting their perceptions relating to policing and community safety (e.g. Guerra et al., 1999), their views and experiences remain comparatively under-researched as well.

Both communities have been the subject of intensive media reporting in relation to 'youth gangs' and 'ethnic gangs' in recent years, but there has been little empirically-based evidence supporting these claims. This makes the perceptions of young people in these two communities particularly worthy of further investigation and study.

Project aims

As indicated above, the primary aim of this collaborative project was to provide a robust evidence base to inform the development of strategies, policies and programs that address community need, including the following key objectives:

- A better understanding of youth perceptions of police and the drivers of those perceptions regarding neighbourhood and community safety;
- An evidence base for the design of specific youth crime prevention and safety initiatives and programs drawing on young people's experiences and knowledge of local youth activities, including identification of the areas where young people feel most at risk of becoming a victim of crime;

[1] Brimbank includes the following suburbs: Albanvale, Albion, Ardeer, Brooklyn (Pt), Cairnlea, Calder Park, Deer Park, Delahey, Derrimut, Hillside (Pt), Kealba, Keilor, Keilor Downs, Keilor East (Pt), Keilor Lodge, Keilor North, Keilor Park, Kings Park, St Albans, Sunshine, Sunshine North, Sunshine West, Sydenham, Taylors Lakes, Tullamarine (Pt).

[2] See for example Smith and Reside (2010) *'Boys, you wanna give me some action?' Interventions into Policing of Racialised Communities in Melbourne,* Victorian Legal Services Board; Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2005) *Rights of Passage: A Dialogue with Young Australians about Human Rights*, Sydney.

- Ideas from young people about what triggers violence amongst youth, and strategies for reducing crimes against the person in public places;
- The design and implementation of strategies for the enhancement of youth policing and community safety based on project findings;
- A sustainable best-practice mechanism for ongoing youth consultation between Victoria Police and young people in the community on crime and safety issues, beyond the life of this research project. This consultation model will promote dialogue, communication, mutual problem-solving and pro-active partnerships between young people and police around issues of community safety, crime reduction and well-being for young people.

2.5 Focus on the Brimbank area

The Brimbank area of Melbourne's Western region was chosen as a focal point for research in which to examine perceptions and strategies that would be relevant to both Victoria's CALDB populations and the community in general. From the outset of this collaborative research project, the Brimbank region represented an exciting strategic opportunity to survey in detail young people's perceptions of community safety and to pilot the development of youth policing and neighbourhood safety strategies.

2.5.1 The demographic and cultural context

Young people aged 15-19 in Brimbank

The 2006 census data show that young people between the ages of 15-19 comprise 7.6% of the total population in the Brimbank LGA, with 12,889 young people aged 15 – 19 living in as part of an overall population of 168,216 people who cited Brimbank as their 'usual place of residence' (ABS, 2006).

Of that number, 6,225, or 50%, were attending secondary education. Another 20%, or 2,437 young people, were attending TAFE, University or another Education and Training facility. About a third (32%) of young people in Brimbank were not studying but were employed in either part- or full-time work (4,001). A further 1,027, or 8% of young people were not employed, of those, half (514) were also not studying. The remaining 776 (6%) of young people residing in Brimbank LGA at the time of the 2006 Census did not answer this question (ABS, 2006). Enrolment records indicate that 4,802 young people were enrolled in Years 10, 11 and 12 at Brimbank LGA secondary schools. Assuming that all the students in these schools were residents of Brimbank LGA, this would represent 38% of young people aged 15 – 19 in Brimbank LGA (DEECD, 2007).

A distinctive feature of the Brimbank region is its strikingly diverse multi-ethnic population, with just over half of Brimbank residents born outside Australia. Of the region's total population, 82,915 listed their country of birth in the 2006 Census as 'Australia', leaving 50.7% (85,301) of the Brimbank population born elsewhere (ABS, 2006). The figures for CALDB residents were even higher when languages other than English spoken at home were taken into account. Since 2001, Brimbank has accepted increasing numbers of new migrants entering the country on protection visas. Many of these migrants have come from African countries, including Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia. The various African groups arriving in Australia are ethnically and religiously diverse, and a large majority have come to Australia as refugees.

Sudanese communities in Brimbank

The Sudanese community in Brimbank is the largest African-background group of residents. According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Settlement Database, Brimbank is home to approximately 28% of Victoria's Sudanese population (DIAC, 2009). Since 2003, the City of Brimbank has received the second-largest

intake of young people (aged 12 – 25) on Humanitarian Entrance Visas in Victoria (CMYI, 2008). Sudanese young people aged 13 – 25 comprised the largest single intake group (25%) of all humanitarian entrants to the state in 2006/2007, dropping to being the fourth largest intake group (6%) in the state over 2007-2008 (CMYI, 2008). However, young people of Sudanese origin in Brimbank continue to comprise the single largest cohort of refugees within the 10-19 age group (ABS Community Profile Series, 2006).

Sudanese refugees face a variety of issues when arriving in Australia, including language barriers, adjusting to Australian values and lifestyle, and addressing trauma-related issues from their experiences in Sudan and in refugee camps. Families may find it hard to access appropriate services in existing systems such as education and health care institutions, and may be under significant financial strain due to the costs of travel and difficulties with finding appropriate work. Young people are likely to have had significantly disrupted schooling, and may find that the course content as well as the structure of Western educational styles and the limitations of language are all barriers to school participation and achievement (CMYI, 2003).

Communities are frequently confronted with problems associated with the gap between parents and children, with children more readily adopting Australian values and lifestyle while parents may struggle to find a place. Consultation with newly arrived migrant men in the Brimbank area identified that men are frequently unable to find work due to their qualifications not being recognised, and are therefore unable to act as providers for their families (Deng and Andreou, 2006). Men also perceive that women are better able to interact with Australian social and legal institutions, leaving them feeling excluded from family decision-making processes. They spoke of fears that the young people would lose their cultural identity and abandon cultural beliefs and practices (Deng and Andreou, 2006). Refugees may experience the fragmentation of their family, reducing their social support and kinship ties. Young people may have lost their immediate family and be placed in the care of more distant relatives. They may also experience some role alterations, as their parents or relatives may depend on them for translation and information gathering (Beattie and Ward, 1997).

A 2006 study commissioned by DIMA on the settlement experiences of newly arrived humanitarian entrants shows that significant intergenerational tensions exist between refugee youth and their parents or families (Ben-Moshe et al., 2006). The relevance of this issue to the proposed study relates to the incidence of public gathering and both formal and informal gang membership by young people who may find it difficult to spend time at home because of issues involving overcrowding, family violence, or other intergenerational and cultural issues.

As noted above, Sudanese families from refugee backgrounds began arriving in Australia in significant numbers in 2001. Consequently, young Sudanese-background people have not lived in Australia long enough to build a persuasive profile or history of interactions with the police or justice system. However, anecdotal reports from police, young people, youth workers and community representatives in Brimbank have suggested more frequent levels and types of interaction between young people from these communities and the police around issues relating to public gathering, youth-on-youth assault, traffic offences and weapons carriage.

Pacific Islander communities in Brimbank

Brimbank also has well established Pacific Islander communities, especially around St Albans and West Sunshine, accounting for 1.41% (approximately 2,385) of the total Brimbank population (ABS 2006). By 'Pacific Islanders', we mean people who identify as members of the Polynesian and Melanesian communities that have settled in Australia, including Cook Islanders, Fijians, Maori, Niueans, Samoans, Solomon Islanders and Tongans. The largest Pacific Islander community in the Brimbank area is Maori (some of whom may be listed in the census data under 'New Zealanders'), followed by Fijians, Samoans, Tongans and Cook Islanders (ABS 2006).

Most migrants from the Pacific Islands come from a culture that is oriented towards family and community. Kuk (1997) noted that many Pacific Islanders in the US find it difficult to adjust to the more individual achievement-oriented education system. Young people are also raised to 'respect authority', and therefore tend to behave submissively and struggle to assert themselves, often leading to disengagement and early exiting from the education system (Kuk, 1997). Subsequent research noted that while enrolment of Pacific Islanders in the education system was increasing in the US by the late 1990s, they were still disproportionately small compared to the numbers of Pacific Islander children in the country. In addition, the number of Pacific Islanders continuing beyond post-compulsory schooling years was declining, and they were underrepresented in all levels of higher education (Macpherson, 2001).

Comparatively little has been written about the experiences and culture of Pacific Islanders in Australia until relatively recently (see Chapter 6 below). However, certain issues and challenges have been identified in regards to this group. A New South Wales parliamentary motion raised a number of these issues, including the overrepresentation of Pacific Islander youth in the juvenile justice system, and the pressures on parents to work long hours to earn money for themselves and family overseas. It was also noted that many of the young people were attracted to 'gangs' or groups because they mimicked the sense of connectedness and interdependence that is highly valued in Islander cultures, but often found such gangs to be a pathway into criminal or antisocial behaviour (Stewart et al., 2003). In 2004, a New South Wales program was established to support young Pacific Islanders in late primary and early high school years, noting that family and community-oriented cultural practices such as having older children care for younger ones had a negative impact on school participation and achievement (Moyes, 2004).

Shared features of community experience for young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders in Brimbank

There are a number of common features across the Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities in Brimbank, particularly amongst young people. These include shared social, community and educational spaces in the Brimbank region; shared aspects of socio-economic disadvantage relative to mainstream communities; strong, valued and sustained extended family and peer networks; strong cultural and social systems of eldership and respect for elders; strong and well defined senses of cultural identity; orally based cultures with varying levels of literacy for diverse reasons; and dislocation from both intimate and extended family who remain in the country of origin or residence overseas.

As White et al. (1999) have noted of Pacific Islander communities, both the Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities tend to be:

- Highly visible racially and/or ethnically in comparison to the general Australian population;
- More likely to congregate in public spaces for the purpose of socialising or general leisure; and
- Inclined to use and create social spaces in which friends or peers take the place of the role of extended family if this is not available within Australia.

Both communities thus provide the capacity for significant benchmarking of Victoria Police's interest and success in developing proactive strategies that help them better understand the specific cultural attitudes and experiences of CALDB communities in order to build culturally aware and responsive relationships with young people from diverse backgrounds and communities across the region and the state.

2.5.2 Crime and perceptions of community safety in Brimbank

Definitions of safety that incorporate a person's feelings of health and well-being relating to their experiences and levels of participation are central to the City of Brimbank's approach to community safety planning (*Integrated Community Safety Plan: 2004-2009*). Community safety is defined as:

> A state of being, as well as a state of mind. It's a component of a person's health and wellbeing, in that a person can't feel completely well if their safety is threatened, and feeling unsafe can affect a person's long term health. It's based on perceptions of surroundings as much as experiences within those surroundings. Safety is felt when a person can live without fear of intentional or unintentional injury. It is influenced by the appearance and attractiveness of local areas, by the presence of crime or threatening behaviours, by the standard of maintenance and upkeep of a local area, and by the information a person gathers from sources such as media, word of mouth reports and personal experiences (2004: 5).

The Brimbank Council initially implemented a community safety plan in 2000, and reviewed and updated it in 2004 for the 2004-2009 period. Community Safety planning in Brimbank addresses both criminal and non-criminal factors that impact on safety and well-being, as derived through local safety survey data (*Integrated Community Safety Plan: 2004-2009*: 14-15).This survey has revealed that in comparison to Melbourne metropolitan residents, Brimbank residents felt less safe in their local community. There was a perception amongst many residents that crime was increasing in their area, and that they were less safe than they had been five years ago. Safety concerns that continually arose from the data (Brimbank City Council, 2004) related to:

- Speeding and reckless driving
- Congregating young people in parks and shopping centres/precincts
- The deterioration or neglect of public spaces (need for improved litter and graffiti control and streetscape and local park maintenance).
- Lack of security on public transport and around transport interchanges
- Car thefts and car break-ins in streets and car parks
- Perceptions of public safety in specific areas (evidence of drugs, crime, violence and anti-social behaviours)

The Community Safety Plan developed in response to these issues targeted three key aspects of safety: crime prevention, community confidence and road safety. Crime prevention strategies focused on reducing drug related offences, reducing violence, reducing robberies and burglaries, and improving possible crime 'hot spots' in the community. The community confidence dimension sought to engage the community in active participation and neighbourhood building strategies, and in local problem-solving around safety concerns. Road safety strategies focussed on reducing the risk of road accidents for drivers, bicycle riders and pedestrians (Brimbank City Council, 2004).

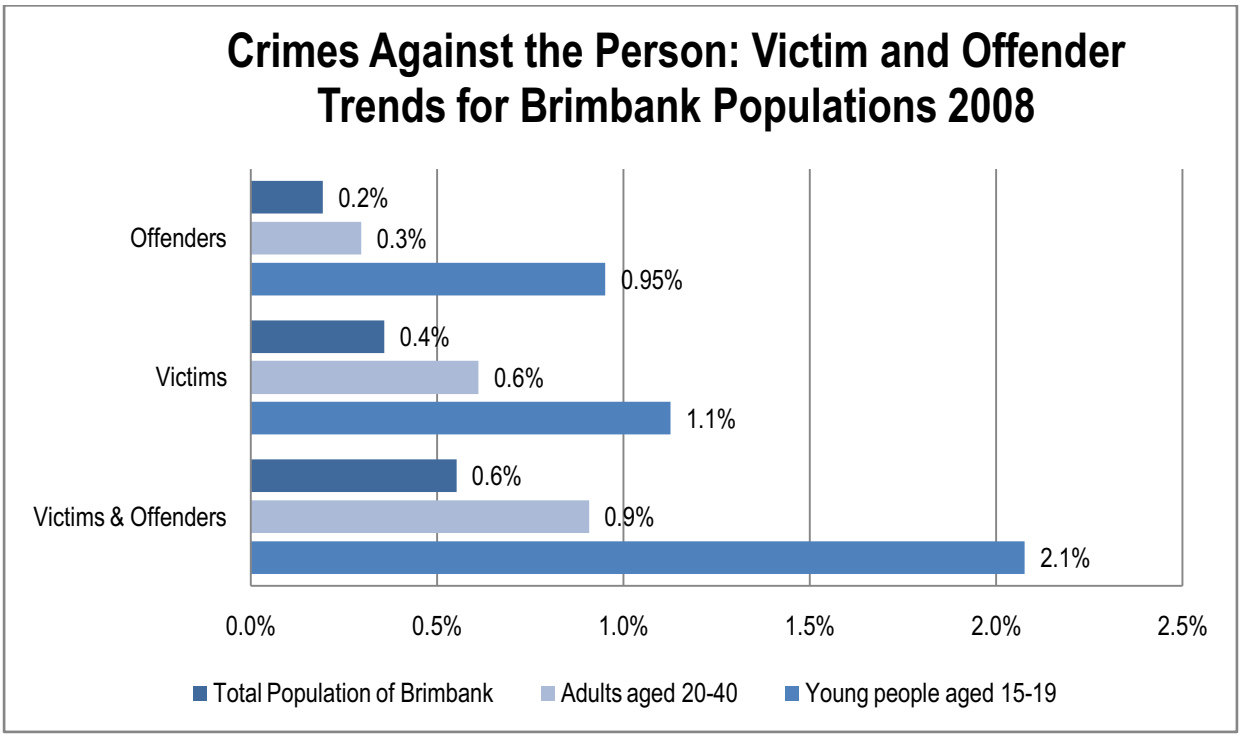
However, according to the 2006 report published by the former Department of Victorian Communities (DVC)[3] examining each individual LGA in Victoria, the Brimbank area (Region 2, Division 1) in Melbourne's inner West had lower scores for perceptions of community safety (42%) compared to the rest of the North Western Metropolitan region (52.6%) and the Melbourne Metropolitan area (60.3%) (Strategic Policy and Research Division, DVC, 2006).

Data from the 2006 National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing reinforced these findings. It was found that less than 40% of residents in Region 2 (the Western region of Victoria, which includes Brimbank) felt 'safe or very safe' taking public transport at night, while just over half (55%) of residents felt 'safe or very safe' walking in their neighbourhood at night.

[3] Many of the functions of the former Department of Victorian Communities (DVC) are now the responsibility of the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD).

Victoria Police crime statistics reported for the period of 2007-2008 indicated that the Brimbank LGA showed some variations in crime rates in contrast to the Victorian state averages. In particular, robbery, burglary, theft from and of a motor car, shop theft, and drug-related offences were higher than state averages, while rape, property damage, assaults, harassment and bicycle theft were below state averages. However in comparison to 2007-2008 crime statistics for Brimbank, there was an overall drop in crime rates of 3% in 2008-2009. Significant drops in motor vehicle theft (33%) and crimes against property (10%) were recorded in 2008-2009 for the Brimbank Police Service Area. The figures also showed an 8% increase in the number of robberies (248) and a marginal increase in the number of assaults (1,064) (*Brimbank Leader,* August 2009). Crime statistics for the Brimbank LGA also reveal that in the area of crimes against the person in public places, the figures for both offenders and victims of such crimes are at least 25% higher in the 15-19 year old age group in comparison to the 20-40 year old age group (Victoria Police, 2009), despite young people between 15-19 comprising roughly 7.6% of the total Brimbank population (ABS 2006).

Figure 1: The percentage of offenders and victims in Brimbank in the 15-19 year age group compared to the 20-40 year age group and total Brimbank population.[4]



Understanding the specific Brimbank context is obviously fundamental to the *Don't Go There* project, but so too are the broader government, policy and research contexts. Accordingly, the following review of the literature in Chapter 3 explores government policy setting, concepts of community safety, perceptions of youth violence and gangs and police models and responses to these issues.

[4] Source: Victoria Police data supplied January 2009.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Whole of government approach to crime prevention

At a public administrative and operational level, Australia has experienced a shift away from 'command and control' modes of crime prevention, towards a 'whole of government' approach (Homel, 2005; see also Crawford, 2006, 'networked governance'; Appleton and Burnett, 2004, 'joined-up government'). This approach promotes the coordination of stakeholders across all levels of government to engage communities in planning and decision-making to reduce crime and increase safety. It is a shift that acknowledges that causes of crime are complex and connected to environmental and social determinants specific to local communities. In response, the objectives of a 'whole of government' model of crime prevention emphasises the need for partnership arrangements, integrated community planning, innovative models of community consultation and a rethink of service delivery to address community needs (Homel, 2005; Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria, 2008). This also refocuses the role of police who were previously identified as entirely responsible for maintaining community safety and social order in communities. Under a whole of government approach, the job of policing now rests with a series of public, private and voluntary agencies (Yarwood, 2007) encouraging a 'third-way' approach to crime reduction (Giddens, 1998; Crawford, 2003; Lupton, 1999; Hughes et al., 2001; Johnston, 2000). Policing thus moves further away from traditional reactive and 'people blaming' approaches and towards evidence-led crime prevention and community-centred policing.

As indicated earlier, the evidence-led aspect of contemporary policing acknowledges that ideologically informed policing has produced practices that tend to be ineffective, inefficient and unaccountable to the public, whilst also being disproportionately focused on 'getting tough on crime' regardless of whether this reduces crime in actual terms. Evidence-led policing addresses this failure by rationalising crime prevention approaches through data gathering and analysis, new technologies and scientific evaluation methods. This development shifts crime prevention away from moral arguments about crime and punishment toward being able to demonstrate 'what works' to reduce crime (Sherman et al., 1996; Farrington and Welsh, 2005). Evidence-led crime prevention, also referred to as intelligence-led policing (Ratcliffe, 2003), has been emphasised by Victoria Police through its strategic framework, *The Way Ahead: Strategic Plan 2003-2008.*

As outlined in the *Way Ahead*, Victoria Police has designed a model to standardise approaches organised around problem-oriented or intelligence-led policing (Victoria Police, 2003). Particular emphasis is placed on early intervention and prevention through the key delivery areas of tasking and coordination, standard intelligence products and problem solving analysis. This model reflects an increasing reliance on 'proactive' surveillance technologies and data analysis to identify populations and areas of 'risk' in the operational environment. This approach shifts police priorities away from reactionary forms of law enforcement, and instead emphasises proactive practices of data collection, records management, co-operation and data sharing between specialist agencies. It also puts a greater focus on the use of computer technologies to rationalise expenditure and achieve police performance targets (Waters, 2007: 639). Specifically, these technologies enable police to map crime 'hot-spots' using more efficient and sophisticated methods (Monmonier, 2006; Yarwood, 2007).

Critics of intelligence-led policing have seen this approach as a means of reinforcing traditional police methods of 'people-blaming' in a more sophisticated way by using technology and intelligence to target 'troublemakers.' De Lint claims that intelligence-led policing is driven by the need to redistribute risks in order to reduce the costs of crime control (2003: 383-4). Under this paradigm, concerns about rehabilitating criminal offenders are replaced with a focus on increasing capacities for covert surveillance to reduce crime. As De Lint (2003) and Yarwood (2007) acknowledge, intelligence-led policing is most often criticised for using techniques that aggressively patrol specific social groups, reinforcing social exclusion (Herbert, 2006; Skogan and Hartnett, 1997).

The move towards evidence-led policing corresponds with the emergence of the risk factor prevention paradigm in the developmental sciences (Catalano and Hawkins, 1996). In this paradigm, risks are scientifically identified and used to explain future 'pathways' into crime (see Homel and Lincoln, 2001). For police, this provides an evidence base to justify increased surveillance of young people. The theories supporting these practices emphasise crime prevention and community safety, but opponents of the risk paradigm accuse it of ignoring structural disadvantage (for example, immigrant youth and settlement issues, socio-economic issues) and of misunderstanding 'risk' as a fact rather than a construction informed by moral judgements regarding norms of behaviour. It is this misguided rationality, critics argue, that excludes and harms young people (White and Cunneen, 2006; Kelly, 2003).

Substantial critiques have also been applied to risk assessment instruments and their so called 'objectivity', particularly in evaluating risk factors in populations where complex cultural factors may apply (e.g. young, ethnic populations). As Peter Kelly (2003: 465-9) notes:

> Risk discourses are dangerous in the sense that (they) promise that the risks, the uncertainties and the contingencies of human behaviours, dispositions and interactions in complex settings can be objectively, scientifically or critically identified… At-risk discourses and techniques also promise potentially endless justifications for the surveillance of populations of youth.

Kelly questions both the validity of the 'science' of risk and also the social alienation effects of programs structured around monitoring and assessment of youth, highlighting how this mode of surveillance may in fact contribute to at-risk pathologies by reinforcing the targeted group's alienation. John Muncie (2005) agrees, claiming that risk profiling and risk prevention techniques 'go against the grain' of social justice and human rights based approaches, often reproducing the very problems they are supposed to be tackling. Muncie concludes that the shift toward the 'new' youth justice has produced a 'complex amalgam' of contradictory approaches including retribution, responsibility, rights, restoration and rehabilitation, which simultaneously exhibit both strong exclusionary and inclusionary tendencies (Muncie and Hughes, 2002).

More positively, the 'whole of government' shift and receptivity to notions of neighbourhood effects has seen Australia's governing agencies at both national and state levels adopt 'urban renewal' or 'neighbourhood renewal' schemes to address issues of crime and disadvantage in high-crime communities (see Homel, 2005: 363). Neighbourhood renewal programs address 'neighbourhood effects' but embed their aims within a social justice framework, so that political and economic resources are directed toward local needs in disadvantaged communities. These policies primarily address crime and social disorder through broad based social interventions in combination with physical/spatial interventions (Judd and Samuels, 2005).

The 'neighbourhood renewal' scheme that comprises the *Growing Victoria Together* plan (2001, updated 2005) identifies six priority areas of government investment that covers both social and physical improvements to neighbourhoods of disadvantage. These are:

- enhancing pride and participation in the community
- enhancing housing and the physical environment
- enhancing employment, training and job opportunities,
- improving personal safety and reducing crime
- promoting health and well-being
- improving access to transport and other key services

3.2 Government policy and community safety

Evidence-led policing and a whole of government approach are crucial aspects of community safety in Victoria, supported by some key strategic state and federal policy frameworks, including *The National Crime Prevention Program* (Canberra, 1997), *The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, 2004-2009* (FaHCSIA, Canberra), *A Fairer Victoria: Strong People, Strong Communities* (Victoria, 2008) and *Safer Streets and Homes: A Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy for Victoria, 2002-2005* (Victoria, 2002).

These policy frameworks emphasise themes of community consultation and participation, 'third-way' policing, and risk assessment and surveillance to prevent crime and reduce fear of crime. The 'science' of risk prevention informs the place-centred focus of 'community safety' programs by identifying that risk factors leading to increased crime and social disorder most often cross the boundaries of race, gender and socio-economic determinants and are more directly related to place (Baker, 1999). This finding reorders the role of police, shifting them away from policing specific crimes and criminal offenders to profiling area and population level factors (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997).

Situational crime prevention is a theory that underscores this place-centred approach, focusing on the opportunity for crime to occur in certain physical/environmental settings. Situational crime prevention views crime as a rational response given the right environment, and makes recommendations that alter the physical environment to prevent crime occurring (Tonry and Farrington, 1995; Hope, 2001; *Safer Streets and Homes,* 2002*).* In Victoria, situational crime prevention techniques are incorporated into a whole of government approach that also develops social programs to build stronger networks of institutional support and to strengthen communities to increase feelings of safety (*Safer Streets and Homes*, 2002; *A Fairer Victoria*, 2008).

'Safety' in Victoria's community safety planning is not solely determined by absence of crime risk, however. Instead, community safety programs identify non-criminal factors like poor physical and social infrastructure, social disorder and weak community ties as being major factors that contribute to fear of crime in communities. Subsequently, community safety is about addressing those risk factors, in partnership with communities, to increase feelings of safety.

The public health model of 'community safety and well-being' also identifies that feeling safe does not simply relate to low crime risk, but has a direct correlation with the social relationships that individuals form in the communities in which they live. Feelings of social connection and inclusion underscore feelings of safety and well-being (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2007; Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2005; Morsillo and Prilleltensky, 2007; Department for Victorian Communities, 2007; *Integrated Community Safety Plan: 2004-2009*). Values of community capacity building, social justice, social inclusion and community consultation are promoted in the public health model (Labonte et al., 2002; Lerner and Benson, 2003; Eckersley et al., 2004). This approach tends toward the social welfare end of the 'community safety' scale, but it also demonstrates a strong relationship with 'evidence-led' and 'actuarial' approaches.[5]

In the Victorian crime prevention framework (*Safer Streets and Homes,* 2002) both of these approaches are crucial, with the psychological, social and economic costs of crime to the community underscoring a renewed focus on cost-benefit analysis of existing programs, community education, victim-centred approaches to crime

[5] Actuarial justice refers to shifts in the criminal justice system away from philosophies of welfare and associated definitions of justice 'in favour of improving internal system coherence through evidence-led policy, standardised risk assessments, technologies of actuarial justice and the implementation of managerial performance targets' (Muncie, 2004: 40). As such, criminal justice services, from crime detection through to punishment and rehabilitation, are now more focused on producing efficient and cost-effective practices to reduce crime.

reduction, identification of crime 'hot spots' and increased investment in social/physical infrastructure and local planning and decision–making capacities.

3.3 At-risk and vulnerable youth

In addition to the focus on local governance and situational crime prevention, *Safer Streets and Homes* has a strong focus on addressing youth violence through family violence prevention programs and programs addressing youth 'at risk'. Programs are focused on primary prevention, including 'targeted education, the identification of points at which family violence may onset in a relationship and development of responses aimed at early intervention to reduce the potential for escalating and ongoing violence'(2002: 15).

Programs to reduce youth violence share this focus on 'strengthening families' and 'strengthening communities'. They provide better institutional support to manage 'educational pathways' and to address issues of 'youth disconnection' that may lead to later problems including drug abuse, mental health problems, homelessness and youth offending. *Safer Streets and Homes* specifically identifies young people from CALDB communities, refugee backgrounds, indigenous young people, and children in or leaving state care and protection services as having heightened vulnerability to risk and requiring more assistance from governing agencies (2002: 17).

Community safety policies and directives are embedded in a broader legislative and policy framework for youth, which comprises the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act* (2005), the *Children Youth and Families Act*, and *Future Directions: an Action Agenda for Young People* (2006). At the policy level these frameworks drive a range of services aimed at improving outcomes for young people. Policy priorities include increasing community participation, improving education outcomes, increasing the flow of information and improving young people's health, safety and well-being. *Future Directions* seeks to articulate a vision of the future in which 'all young Victorians have a strong sense of belonging, are motivated to create and share in opportunities, and are valued for their contributions and influence in their communities' (*Future Directions*, 2006). However, the release of the *Vulnerable Youth Framework* discussion paper in 2008 (Department of Human Services) suggests that not every young Victorian has the same opportunity to achieve these goals, and some may require more concentrated support and direction. 'Vulnerable young people' is a term used in this framework to define 'young people who, through a combination of their circumstances and adolescent risk-taking behaviour, are at risk of not realising their potential to achieve positive life outcomes' (DHS, 2008: 1).

The *Vulnerable Youth Framework* has been developed to address the needs of vulnerable young people aged 10-25 years, who may experience high levels of risk owing to issues of adolescent transition, developmental problems, economic disadvantage, homelessness, family breakdown, drugs and alcohol abuse, mental health problems and a range of other social, environmental and health issues. The *Framework* addresses these 'risks' with a strong focus on prevention and early identification. Prevention strategies recommended in the discussion paper are: health promotion strategies, alcohol and other drug harm minimisation, school engagement strategies, sporting and other recreational activities, parental skills programs and community safety planning.

However, there has been ongoing critique of the 'community safety' paradigm in British criminological discourse, where it is analysed as one fraction of broader youth justice reforms aimed at increasing social control through a focus on risk assessment and risk management. The claim made by critics is that these techniques often lead to the over-policing of vulnerable groups, raising legitimate questions of whether community safety programs are genuinely directed at developing strong, inclusive communities that can partner with police to address crime and safety issues, or whether they serve as a means for police to communicate their own agenda to communities (Wright and Hill, 2003; Muncie, 2005; Yarwood, 2007; Lyons, 1999; Kelly, 2000; Stephens and Squires, 2004).

For example, Wright and Hill (2003) argue that the concept of 'community' as a feel-good term can be used to conceal social control effects (for example, disciplining young 'troublemakers,') whilst having the appearance of promoting social inclusion. The authors specifically point to the paradox of community safety discourses which talk about consultation and social inclusion, but which deny a voice to the most vulnerable members of the community because of their legal status:

> The rhetoric of community safety has been developed to promote inclusion and active citizenship. Yet inclusion in the community is predicated upon being perceived as a law-abiding citizen. Therefore, paradoxically, the young people who are perceived to be 'the problem' are in reality not part of the participative solution (Wright and Hill, 2003: 28).

Kelly (2000) agrees, pointing to the convergence of 'community safety' and youth 'at risk' discourses, a move which constructs youth, and particularly ethnic minority youth, as delinquent, deviant and disadvantaged; and from whom the community must be protected. The justification for this relates to young people being identified as having limited capacities for rational self-government, which makes them 'dangerous' to the broader law-abiding community. This 'construction' marks young people for increased surveillance and control under the community safety model. In this instance the predictive armoury of 'risk' assessment and management has a negative effect, impinging on young people's rights to freedom and privacy, whilst at the same time denying them their rights to equal protection under the law.

Stephens and Squires make a pointed comment about community safety practices in the UK, where the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) have been strongly criticised (Stephens and Squires, 2004). The authors note that it is no accident that the new laws are driven by moralising social policy aimed at 'responsibilising' young people and curbing youthful ambivalence. For example, the authors quote David Blunkett, the then British Home Secretary, in a speech couched in the moral and legalistic discourse of broader neoliberal frameworks of government aimed at making citizenship a privilege that must be earned:

> We need to accept that our rights as citizens come with responsibilities - we need to move from selfishness to selflessness; from disrespect to respect; from fear to confidence (Home Office, 2003: 2, cited in Stephens and Squires, 2004).

The moralistic tone used by Blunkett underscores the community safety agenda in the UK which critics regard as a veiled attempt to abdicate state responsibility for crime control by 'responsibilising' individuals, families and communities to become self-governing risk-managers. As the authors note, this transfers focus away from problems that are 'structural' in nature and channels more responsibility (and blame) to the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of the community.

A more localised criticism of Victoria's community safety framework has been articulated by Carolyn Whitzman as a part the 'Gender, Local Governance and Violence Prevention in Victoria' project (GLOVE, 2007). Whitzman's criticism relates to the lack of clarity, direction and vision in Victoria's 'whole of government' approach to community safety. She argues that the community safety framework is over-determined by improving police performance targets and decreasing police-reported rates of violence and fear of violence. As a result, she suggests, when tighter reporting and public awareness campaigns on intimate-partner and family violence increased reporting on these 'previously hidden' crimes, it registered as an escalation in violent crime statistics. The response of the state government, according to Whitzman, was to withdraw support for programs addressing family violence, and to revert to an easier-to-manage focus on property crime and 'at risk' youth.

Whitzman's main criticism, however, refers to what she calls the 'gender mainstreaming' of community safety discourse (Whitzman, 2007: 3). Whitzman explains that community safety approaches are subject to a 'silo affect' whereby 'community violence' and 'violence against women' are separated and receive different treatment from police and governing agencies. She asserts that 'family violence in the private sphere is treated as a separate phenomenon from community and collective violence, in the public sphere, despite overwhelming evidence that the two are closely related in terms of causes and impacts' (Whitzman, 2007: 3; see also Krug et al., 2002; Shaw, 2002). Whitzman argues that the failure to give family violence its due as a public health issue reinforces gender stereotypes of what constitutes 'real' crime.

3.4 The context for violence

There has been a global push to recognise violence as a universal health problem and to invest in violence prevention strategies at an international level (Butchart et al., *Preventing Violence: a Guide to Implementing the Recommendations of the World Report on Violence and Health*, 2004). A key finding from the World Health Organisation report on violence was that most perpetrators of interpersonal violence were aged between 15 and 44 years old. The prevalence of adolescent interpersonal violence was specifically noted and identified as a pressing global health issue, with high rates of violence across the developed and developing world cancelling out many health gains achieved through infant and child health programs (2004: 8).

The international focus on violence prevention has contributed to the current 'reframing' of violence as a public health issue rather than a criminal justice issue. This shift specifically identifies youth violence as a symptom of underlying social factors including poverty, poor education, inadequate parenting, family dysfunction and drug and alcohol addiction (Butchart et al., 2004). The public health paradigm incorporates three levels of intervention to address issues of youth violence. These are: primary (preventing violence before it occurs); secondary (reducing risk factors associated with youth violence); and tertiary (reducing the negative flow-on effects from violence).

As documented in a special edition of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* on 'Community Mobilisation for the Prevention of Youth Violence' (March 2008), 'community mobilisation' has also been adopted as a key component of the shift towards a public health model of violence prevention. Community mobilisation describes a process where health professionals engage young people and community members within existing community structures to identify local psychosocial and socio-cultural factors that contribute to youth violence, and to develop strategies that address these needs at a grassroots level. Many of the communities targeted by such interventions are marked by economic disadvantage and a 'disconnect' between young people and social institutions. Therefore, strategies which rebuild these connections and strengthen the social safety net are understood to be crucial to solving the problem of violence in communities (Kim-Ju et al., 2008).

A vital aspect of building communities and strengthening social infrastructure has been to create safe public spaces for young people. The underlying principle here is that a strengthened sense of self emerges from positive interaction with the local environment and the community (Malone, 1999). In particular, self expression through engagement in community decision-making and problem-solving is understood to provide an outlet that may otherwise be replaced with violence as a means of communicating anger, frustration, and fear (Hyde et al., 2003).

In the Australian context, gang violence and youth violence more broadly has been a growing focus for community level interventions and public health campaigns over recent years. This is in response to alarming figures that show violent assaults have increased an average of 6% each year between 1995 and 2005, three times the annual growth of the Australian population over the same period. Official crime statistics also demonstrate that persons aged 15 to 19 years are three times more likely to be processed by police for criminal

conduct than any other group. Of this group, rates for assault increased by 14% from 1995/1996 to 2005/2006; 15-19 year olds are also more likely to be victims of violent assault than any other age group.[6] The Australian Bureau of Statistics has estimated that violent crime now costs the government $2.5 billion each year (Mayhew, 2003).

Australian youth violence prevention strategies are predominantly shifting towards the public health paradigm, with an increased focus on early intervention around the risk factors of violence in public places, school violence, violence in the family and drug and alcohol consumption.

3.4.1 Violence and public places

Crane (1999) noted that many private shopping centres had come to incorporate previously 'public' functions such as transport hubs, post offices and libraries. One of the outcomes of this privatisation has been an increased level of conflict and problems for certain sectors of the community, including young people and the homeless, in accessing public spaces. Corporate interests and business owners may seek to exclude or control access to spaces for these groups in favour of those they see as legitimate customers. These controls on access are often 'policed' by privately hired security officers, who may use tactics such as targeting particular 'types' of people to question or search (Crane, 1999).

Young people often perceive that they are targeted by police when accessing public and community spaces such as suburban shopping centres, beaches, and cinemas (Delaney et al., 2002). One review found that young people reported being harassed or moved on by police for behaviour such as 'being rowdy' or 'lacking respect'. The authors argued that police intervention in young people's lives was also driven by political forces, with governments funding police beats to crack down on 'anti-social' behaviour by youth as a way of being seen to be tough on crime (Delaney et al., 2002).

It is also argued that adults' perceptions of young people in public spaces are often fuelled by media reports that label young people as 'troublemakers' (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2005). Legal actions that have been taken to control young people's use of public space include 'move-on' powers, knife search powers and non-association orders, while other steps such as curfews have been infrequently introduced but often debated (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2005; Delaney et al., 2002). Such laws may also target particularly vulnerable groups such as homeless or indigenous young people, as well as those of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It was noted by one observer that young migrants may attract more attention from police than non-migrant peers because of their physical appearance and language differences (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2005).

Beyond legal interventions, it is noted that urban planning has developed other ways to discourage young people from gathering in public spaces. These include designing out areas of congregation such as public seating, and using landscaping to reduce space for 'loitering'. The use of closed circuit surveillance cameras has also tended to target young people, particularly non-white young males (Crane and Dee, 2001).

White (2001) notes that young people's access to public space is limited not only by public stereotypes and deliberate policing, but by risks such as greater traffic density, fears of assault or abduction without parental supervision, and by heavier school schedules and the availability of free home-based leisure options such as television or computer games. However, in spite of efforts to regulate or dissuade young people from accessing public spaces, young people still frequently choose to gather together outside of their homes. It is argued that young people are seeking ways to make public spaces safer for them and their peers, to participate in the development of public spaces, and to be treated with greater respect by adults and legal authority figures. One

[6] *Australian Crime: Facts and Figures*, Australian Institute of Criminology, 2007.

relevant and successful example of how this challenge has been addressed in the local Brimbank area is the 'Street Surfer Bus' community outreach program developed in 2004 with support from the Victorian state government, which mobilises police, youth workers and volunteers who travel throughout the Sunshine locality on Friday nights to talk informally and non-confrontationally with young people in public spaces frequented by youth in the community about their experience, needs and concerns. The Street Surfer Bus program is positively regarded by young people in the area, even when their general attitude toward police and community safety is fairly negative *(Don't Go There*, 2010).

In addressing the 'problem' of young people and public space, a more consultative approach to planning and development has often been advocated. For example, Crane (1999) outlined a process in Brisbane that involved young people having input into public space planning projects. The process began with interviews with young people accessing major shopping centres, and a series of group-specific and mixed focus groups that discussed policies and strategies to deal with major issues affecting the centres. A number of key themes emerged from these discussions, including young people's rights to access public and community spaces, the need to include young people in design and policy decisions, the tension between various goals for users of public space, and the need to engage a broad range of stakeholders when undergoing planning and consultation (Crane, 1999).

White (2001) put forward a model of youth participation in public space design that encompassed the environment, amenities, means of access and activities. Environmental factors relevant to young people included both the physical environment (for example identifying attractive sites and avoiding unsafe places), and the social environment (the attitudes of owners and security guards, and the presence of other groups who might encourage or limit the young person's access). The regulatory environment, including the training and professionalism of security guards, the nature of policies developed to deal with situations of concern, and the visibility and inclusion of minority groups, was also considered (White, 2001).

A government-based project was developed in 1999 linking crime prevention strategies with increasing access for young people to public spaces (White et al., *Hanging out: negotiating young people's use of public space*, National Crime Prevention Strategy, 1999). This project argued that young people would benefit from access to a range of services, including shops, entertainment venues, social service providers, and improved transport. The project also advocated the involvement of youth consultants in planning and design projects, and the use of youth policy to inform planning decisions. In addition, it was recommended that local councils develop information toolkits concerning young people and public spaces, that police and private security personnel receive training in more youth-friendly ways of interacting, and that problem behaviours in public spaces should be dealt with where possible using a conciliatory rather than a confrontational approach (*Hanging out*, 1999). These recommendations relied on both police and planners at state level, and municipal councils and both public and private sector venues (such as parks, transport hubs, shopping centres and cinema chains) at the local level, to fund and implement particular kinds of training and youth-friendly approaches to the use of public space by young people.

While it is beyond the scope of the present study to track comprehensively the outcomes at local and regional levels of *Hanging Out* and its recommendations, one example of a pilot project that drew on this research was implemented in Hobart and surrounds in Tasmania. The 'Common Ground' project was introduced to help manage fear of crime in Hobart and the surrounding area. A joint initiative of the Councils for National Crime Prevention and Tasmanian Crime Prevention, it drew together multiple stakeholders across young people, police, community groups, municipal councils and local businesses and traders' groups to develop strategies for the positive and safe shared use of public safe and a more positive image of young people. An outcome of the pilot was the development of the 'Streetsmart Kit' which was the focus of a major project in 2003-2004 conducted by YNOT (Youth Network of Tasmania) (http://www.ynot.org.au).

3.4.2 Youth 'gangs' and 'groups'

The definitional challenges of coming to a widely agreed consensus about what a 'gang' is, how it differs from other social collectives, and how we might generalise about or understand the specific phenomenon of 'youth gangs' across differing ethnic, cultural, local and national contexts, are notoriously difficult and at times seemingly intractable (Esbensen et al., 2001; Sullivan, 2005; White, 2006, 2008; Klein and Maxson, 2006). Yet while the distinctions between 'groups' and 'gangs' that young people in our study explored with us may provide only muddy or blurred distinctions between these phenomena as experienced by young people themselves at a practical, theoretical or conceptual level, they are nevertheless 'meaningful distinctions', and thus 'social facts', for many people and communities who perceive the existence of local gangs as part of their day to day lived experience (Sullivan, 2005). Such 'social facts' require the attention and investigation of social scientists and scholars from a range of disciplines, despite their failure to fit into any neat conceptual or operational categories of analysis (Sullivan, 2005: 173).

As recent research and scholarship in the field of gang studies and youth violence has suggested, much contemporary thinking is now more inclined to look at the ways in which youth gangs (not all of which are violent) and youth violence (not all of which takes place through gang structures) each require the investigation and study of the *social processes* at work in such formations, rather than focusing on the 'youth gang' as a 'reified group' that becomes the main focal point of study, thereby drawing researchers and policy makers away from a more critical focus on the underpinning problem of youth violence more broadly (Sullivan, 2005: 180; 170). We agree it is important to focus on youth violence and gangs as social process rather than solely on 'gangs' as a concrete and limiting object of study, but we are also mindful through our own study that the existence of local gangs (in Brimbank as elsewhere) are 'social facts' for young people themselves, as both the focus group and survey results make clear. In this regard, Maxson and Klein's (1989) three criteria for distinguishing a 'street gang' from other kinds of gangs offers some useful ways of talking about the kinds of groups that often define young people's understanding of local 'gangs' in the Australian urban context, including young people in the *Don't Go There* project. These criteria focus on a) whether a youth group is recognised as a 'gang' by the local community; b) whether the group recognises or promotes itself as a distinctive alliance of young people; and c) whether the group is involved in 'enough illegal activities to get a consistent negative response from law enforcement and neighbourhood residents' (White 2007: 10). In a related vein, work that attempts to locate young people and youth formations using a continuum model may be found in James C. Howell's *Preventing & Reducing Juvenile Delinquency: A Comprehensive Framework* (2003). According to Howell, "the most important point to keep in mind in any attempt to define youth gangs is that such groups are an integral feature of the experiences of young persons during adolescence. One way of viewing gangs is along an age-graded continuum of social and criminal groups that is anchored at one end by childhood play groups and at the other end by adult criminal organizations. The following groups (and more) are represented along this continuum:

- **Childhood play groups:** harmless groups of children that exist in every neighborhood
- **Troublesome youth groups:** youths who hang out together in shopping malls and other places and may be involved in minor forms of delinquency
- **Youth subculture groups:** groups with special interests such as "Goths," "straight edgers," and "anarchists" (Goths are not known for criminal involvement, but some members of other youth subcultures have histories of criminal activity; Arciaga, 2001)
- **Delinquent groups:** small clusters of friends who band together to commit delinquent acts such as burglaries
- **Taggers:** graffiti vandals (Taggers are often called gang members, but they typically do nothing more than engage in graffiti contests.)

- **School-based youth gangs:** groups of adolescents that may function as gangs only at school and may not be involved in delinquent activity, although most members are involved in such activity
- **Street-based youth gangs:** semi structured groups of adolescents and young adults who engage in delinquent and criminal behavior
- **Adult criminal organizations:** groups of adults that engage in criminal activity primarily for economic reasons"

In his (2002) activity-based typology of gang-related behaviour spanning the categories of 'criminal', 'conflict', 'retreat' and 'street culture', White defines 'street culture'-based groups as those which display as their

> ...main characteristic [the] adoption of specific gang-related cultural forms and public presentation of gang-like attributes. The emphasis is on street gang culture, incorporating certain types of music, ways of dressing, hand signals, body ornaments including tattoos, distinctive ways of speaking, graffiti and so on. It may be 'real' activity in the sense of reflecting actual group dynamics and formations. It may also simply be a kind of mimicry, based upon media stereotypes and youth cultural fads. (cited in White and Mason, 2006: 57)

In subsequent work, White (2007) notes Miller's (1992: 21) US-based definition of youth gangs as 'a self-formed association of peers, united by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership and internal organisation, who act collectively or as individuals to achieve specific purposes, including the conduct of illegal activity and control of a particular territory, facility or enterprise.' White sees this as a helpful description because it distinguishes between 'youth gangs' and other more sophisticated, criminally driven and/or adult formations such as bikie and prison gangs or supremacist and other hate-based groups (White 2007: 10). In a similar effort to encourage more nuanced analysis and theorising of 'youth gangs' and criminal activity groupings, Sullivan (2005: 175) develops three heuristic 'analytic categories of association' – 'action sets', 'cliques' and 'named gangs' – to help him think through social processes as structured by type, duration and intensity of association between young people who may be identified, or self-identify, as belonging to 'gangs'. Sullivan defines a 'clique' as:

> An aggregation of individuals with some form of diffuse and enduring bonds of solidarity, at least for the near term. They engage in a variety of activities together on some kind of regular basis. They need not have a name or leader or share ritual symbols of group membership.

Much of the research on how young people form social collectives such as cliques for the purpose of creating, maintaining and enacting bonds of solidarity can overlap with research that focuses on the use of public space by groups of young people. The experience of being spatially and socially excluded often results in youth constructions of space that 'contest' institutionalised exclusion. The street is an important site to enact this resistance according to Matthews, Limb and Taylor (2000), owing to its symbolism as a space 'betwixt cultures, neither entirely owned by young people nor fixed as adult domains' (2000: 77). This makes the street a space of struggle for young people to whom it represents 'place, ownership and independence outside the parental home' (Nayak, 2003: 310). Much of this research has overlapped with considerations of youth gangs as a socio-cultural phenomenon, as Nayak's work makes clear. Nayak grounds these views in a body of literature on youth subcultures stretching back to Stuart Hall (1977), where the development of youth 'street gangs' was initially perceived as a compensation for socio-economic exclusion, achieved through the assertion of territorial power over local streets and neighbourhoods. Rob White continues this theme in his extensive research on youth gangs, framing youth gang formation as a tactic of resistance to institutionalised forms of exclusion. White acknowledges, however, that there has been insufficient empirical research into the causes and dynamics of youth gangs in Australia, and, as a consequence, the 'youth gang' debate has been over-determined by 'moral

panics' about ethnic minority youth in the popular media (White, 2007; White and Wyn, 2004; Noble, Poynting et al., 2004; White et al., 1999; Collins et al.; 2002).

According to White, ethnic minorities are often targeted for their visibility and their congregation in large numbers in public spaces. There is also a very strong 'masculine' identification to these 'gang' formations and identities (White and Mason, 2006). Themes that have surfaced to explain the 'masculine' and 'conflict-oriented' basis of gang formation are: social connection, identity and collective protection. Two Australian studies in particular identify these causes. First, a previous Melbourne study engaging with 'ethnic youth gangs' (White et al., 1999), which interviewed 120 young people from six ethnic communities (Lebanese, Pacific Islander, Somalian, Vietnamese, Turkish and Latin American) specifically targeted to reflect the dominant ethnic group in their particular region of the city found that 'gang' membership revolved around forms of street culture (music, sport, styles of dress); ethnic identity (involving language, religion and culture); and the need for social belonging (friendship, support, protection). The second study was undertaken in the South-Western suburbs of Sydney and related to alleged Lebanese gangs (Collins et al., 2002). This research found that social exclusion was central to gang formation and emanated from defending against racism and being excluded from 'mainstream' society.

One interesting theme emerging from both studies was an acknowledgement of the way forms of masculinity which emphasise aggressive physicality and working-class values tend to overlap in gang culture, producing embodied cultures where 'being tough' and engaging in physical tests of strength affirms identity. This research suggests that economic disadvantage and marginalisation makes 'the body' a 'key site' for inscriptions of identity and belonging (see also Connell, 1995; 2000). As Collins and White note, this often manifests as self-destructive violence or violence directed towards others when other avenues for identity-making are not available.

The influence of institutional racism is also omnipresent and operates, according to White and Collins, through youth policing and through institutions like citizenship. For example, both studies point out that in everyday language, 'Australian' is a category differentiated from 'Asians', 'Turks', 'Lebanese', and so on, regardless of the citizenship status of the individual. On this basis, 'Aussies' are white Anglos while the rest must be distinguished from this dominant ethnonational category (Collins et al., 2002). This operation performs the exclusion of certain ethnic groups from true 'belonging' in Australia (see Ghassan Hage, 1998). According to Collins, the subsequent assertion of 'ethnic' identity is a performance of self-respect in the face of such exclusive and marginalising behaviours (see Collins et al., 2002). This often translates into forms of group membership that demand loyalty and being tough to deflect racist exclusionism. It also sometimes takes the form of contempt for 'Aussies' and other rival ethnicities.

Both reports acknowledge the perception of the existence of ethnic youth gangs in Australian cities, with Collins's report (2002) indicating that two in every three people surveyed thought that there were Asian, Lebanese or Pacific Islander gangs in their local government area. Yet both reports indicate that the reasons for gang formation were most often social, and that violence was more often inwardly focused (related to fighting between rival gangs) and opportunistic as opposed to criminally organised. As White explains, this is an important distinction, as much of the debate in Australia about youth gangs draws on discourses of 'colour gangs' in the US, which are typified by organised criminal behaviour (Miller, 1975; Huff, 1996; Klein, Maxson and Miller, 1995).

In identifying Australian 'gang activity' White avoids these comparisons, drawing his definition instead from Australian researchers Aumair and Warren (1994). Aumair and Warren identify Australian youth gangs according to five key identifiers: 1) mainly male membership; 2) gathering in public space; 3) demonstrating 'outward displays of collective identity' through dress code; 4) organised mainly for social rather than criminal reasons; and 5) violence is 'inwardly' focused and covers drug abuse or fighting between members and rival gangs.

The authors also draw on Canadian benchmarks in differentiating gangs from other youth formations (Gordon and Foley, 1998).[7] This research makes the point that street gangs tend to appear and disappear in waves owing to a number of factors including police scrutiny, maturation of members, spawning of new branches from an existing formation and peer-group pressure. Based on these definitions and his own findings, White concludes that rather than being anti-social, most 'gang-related' activity in Australia involves 'hanging out' in a way that makes crime a secondary motivation, with membership being primarily forged for the social reasons of peer support, identity and friendship.

Despite the ambiguities relating to the term 'gang' discussed by White et al. (1999) and others as mentioned above, both reports did find that violence was a common feature of 'gang' formation. For example, in Melbourne, street fights among ethnic minority youth were found to be common across the sample group (White et al., 1999). Collins puts this into a broader social context by arguing that gang membership, and particularly gang violence, is a form of 'mutual protection' against racism and social exclusion (Collins et al., 2002). Collins et al. found that ethnic group bonds became strengthened by street-level racism, and that gang membership was often motivated by the desire for collective protection against discriminatory social forces (Collins, 2002). Collins identified police-youth relations as being a part of this dynamic, with the report identifying young people's experiences of harassment by police based on their racial or ethnic appearance as a contributing factor (White et al., 1999: 35; Collins, 2002: vi). Two out of every three young people surveyed in Collins' report believed that police picked on groups of young people, and specifically young people from Asian, Middle-Eastern, Lebanese and Pacific Islander backgrounds. Broadly speaking, the report identifies a racial character to police harassment of young people, with ethnic minority youth being targeted unfairly by police and dealt with using coercive police techniques rather than harm minimisation techniques (See also White and Wyn, 2008; VEOHRC, *Rights of Passage*, 2008).

In later research, White argues that US style gang violence is now emerging as a factor in Australia (White and Mason, 2006; see also Adamson, 1998), a claim supported by recent reported incidents of gang violence in schools in Sydney's South-West (Lawrence, 2008; Patty, 2008) and the existence of websites identifying LA-style gang membership in Sydney, Melbourne and other Australian capital cities (Mitchell, 2008; Day, 2008; Falconer, 2007). An article in the *Herald Sun* reported a comment by the Assistant Commissioner that young African refugees in Melbourne connected with US culture because they could 'identify with the black American gangs' (Kerbaj, 2008). But White and Collins's research points to some crucial differences between Australian and US style gangs, in terms of the level of criminal organisation demonstrated. For example, Collins et al. (2000; 2004) show that young Australian men joined gangs in order to get respect and improve their status. White agrees, arguing that it is more useful to analyse group violence as an issue related to 'social identity and the frictions associated with group interactions based on ethnicity' rather than concentrating on a much hyped brand of youth violence whose existence in Australia does not replicate its American counterpart, but is subject to local complexities, actors and cultures. White's research also suggests that gang-related activities (drug use, violence, street culture) are not exclusive to gangs and that many non-gang youth engage in the same activities (White and Mason, 2006).

At times, young migrants in Australia have been stereotyped in the media as forming 'ethnic youth gangs' (White et al., 1999). In July 2008, for example, an article in *The Age* reported on a leaked internal Connex report that claimed that the main perpetrators of violent crime on train lines are Asian, African and Polynesian youth, with 'ethnic gangs congregating at train stations' (Sexton, 2008). However, when young people of different ethnic backgrounds were consulted about the existence of gangs, it was found that the term 'gang' was poorly defined,

[7] This theory informs White's later research on youth group dynamics and the concept of 'swarming' that provides an alternative explanation to the escalation of small group conflict into large group violence, enhanced by the use of SMS technologies that facilitate rapid gathering and 'flash mobs' in particular settings (White, 2006.)

and that gang membership was often confused with participation in friendship or social groups. It was also found that many young people had experienced ethnically associated street or school fights, and that racism, social status, and feelings of being disrespected were closely tied to this. Young people noted that unemployment was frequently a problem, and that there was a perceived lack of social services and recreational venues accessible to them (White et al., 1999).

The primary differences between gangs and non-gang formations, according to White, are determined by the nature of violence that gang members engage in and social organisation. Firstly, gang formation is typified by large groups of over 15 people, usually with exclusively male membership and including older members, whereas non-gang groups tend to be smaller in size and more uniform in age. In terms of where they 'hang out', gangs predominantly occupy local neighbourhood streets that have territorial boundaries recognisable to gang members and rival gangs. Non-gang members, however, predominantly occupy private homes and public shopping malls.

The reasons for joining non-gang youth groups were found to be motivated by friendship, whereas gang membership was found to be motivated more by status, protection, drugs and getting away with illegal behaviour (White and Mason, 2006: 59-60). Gang fights were also more likely to involve several people, to be sustained and to be targeted against an 'established' enemy (2006: 63). The reasons for fighting also differed, with violence between non-gang members being primarily motivated by personal grievances, whereas for gang members fights related to group issues such as protection of territory and revenge (2006: 63). Additionally, White's findings indicate that gang fights are 'both inter and intra racial' and that many fights are incited by racism (White, 2000: 3). A particularly worrying finding emerging from White's research is that gang members are nearly six times more likely to use weapons in fights than non-gang members (2006: 64).

As these examples show, youth gangs in Australia can be both 'socially constructive' and 'socially destructive' forms, depending on the political, social and community context they emerge from. In a socially constructive way, youth gangs provide a structure of 'belonging' and 'shared cultural identity' that is particularly important to young people who are negotiating their entry into the adult world away from the security of the family home. In a socially destructive way, the spread of violence and insecurity robs other young adolescents and other members of the community of their right to be free from violence and intimidation and may impact on the willingness of young people in particular to build legitimate forms of social connection in their local neighbourhood.

These issues are important ones for policy-makers and communities, particularly given the insight that international research has provided us with regard to the 'perversion' of youth gang cultures in circumstances of social disadvantage and government inaction (Rodgers, 2005; Eggleston, 2000).

3.4.3 Violence in schools

In 2006, the National Safe School Framework (NSSF, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2003) was introduced in Australia to encourage schools to implement anti-bullying programs (see also McGrath and Noble, 2005). As figures published by the National Centre Against Bullying (NCAB) show, 1 in 6 Australian children between the ages of 8-17 are bullied at least once a week (Chadwick, 2007), with bullied children being three times more likely to develop depressive symptoms. In addition, school bullies are at a higher risk of going on to become serious violent offenders. In an October 2008 article, the *Herald Sun* reported on a Victorian Department of Education document that detailed over twelve-hundred allegations of assault involving state school students and staff over a two year period, as well as over two-hundred cases of sexual assault (Collier, 2008).

A large body of American (Juvonen and Graham, 2004; Boney-McCoy and Finkelhor, 1995; Nansel et al., 2001, 2003) and Australian (Cross et al., 2009; McGrath and Noble, 2005; Rigby, 1996; 1999) research suggests that adolescents are becoming increasingly concerned for their own personal safety in schools, with threats to personal safety reflected in the substantial incidence of both 'overt' and 'covert' bullying in both Australian and American schools (Nansel et al., 2003, Cross et al., 2009). American survey data shows that between 40% and 80% of school aged young people report being victimised by bullying, while the Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS), based on a large sample of more than 20,000 Australian school students between 8-14 years of age, estimates that around one in four Year 9 students (27%) report general bullying, with slightly higher prevalence in Year 5 (32%) and Year 8 (29%). The scale ranges from minor incidents of verbal abuse and intimidation to more serious forms of victimisation including violent assault, property damage and theft (Boney-McCoy and Finkelhor, 1995; Nansel et al., 2001). According to some researchers, ethnicity is a relevant variable in studies of peer harassment, as victimisation is most likely to occur where a power imbalance is detected by the bully. Ethnicity can signal such a power imbalance by enhancing us/them or in-group/out-group disparities (Juvonen and Graham, 2004).

Weapons carriage on school grounds has also emerged as a conspicuous public health concern in the United States over recent years, following several fatal school shootings occurring in the US from the mid-1990s to 2000s (Furlong and Morrison, 2000; Kingery, Coggshall and Alford, 1999; Smith et al., 1999; Bronner, 1999). The spectre of this kind of violence has emerged in Australia with machetes being used in a recent attack on a school in Sydney's South West (Lawrence, 2008; Patty, 2008). As the problem of weapons carriage has emerged only relatively recently in Australia, explanations for this practice are largely based on American research, although Australian studies such as Bondy et al. (2005) on young people and knife carriage in Victoria have begun to draw on local data and theory-building in attempting to describe causes and other factors influencing the rise in weapons carriage amongst young people in Australian settings. According to the American literature, the reasons for weapons carriage and use in school settings concentrate on the relationship between weapons carriage, delinquency, gang membership and criminal activities such as drug dealing (Kingery et al., 1999; Lizotte and Sheppard, 2001; Simon et al., 1999). These theories highlight that weapons are an aspect of a social environment that normalises violence and the use of weapons, in which young people see and use weapons as a form of social currency in negotiating status and reputation amongst their peers. It also includes the socio-educational environment in a number of local and state school systems in the US, where efforts to make schools safer through introducing weapons-detection technologies in schools have been critiqued for normalising violence amongst youth as an expected and unavoidable facet of life in public educational settings (McCord et al., 2000: 11).

3.4.4 Violence and alcohol

The introduction of social responsibility programs and legislation targeted at youth binge-drinking at an Australian national level (Department of Health and Ageing, 2008) demonstrates the way in which youth violence prevention in Australia is currently being processed through a public health frame aimed at minimising harm and 'responsibilising' young people. Binge-drinking has become a particularly charged issue in recent times with the release of a report on youth binge drinking from the Australian National Council on Drugs (Frye et al., 2008) which showed that, in any given week, approximately 1 in 10 12-17 year olds were binge-drinking to harmful levels. The report also linked the escalation in dangerous levels of drug and alcohol abuse among young people to the normalisation of alcohol and drug use in the family environment. And yet, despite this finding, police and media attention has focused on public as opposed to private forms of binge-drinking, which lead to escalated incidents of violence in public places (Houston, Johnston and Austin, 2008). An article in *The Age*, for example, reported on the introduction of a 2 a.m. entry curfew and 'undercover operatives' working in Melbourne's bars and clubs, aimed at 'combating binge-drinking and alcohol fuelled violence' and targeting those selling alcohol to minors (Burgess, 2008).

Evidence of a causal link between alcohol and violence has been emphasised in empirical research but there are also significant arguments that problematise this link. In *Alcohol, Young Persons and Violence* (2001), Homel and Lincoln identify Australia's 'wet' drinking culture as a significant risk to the health and safety of young Australians. Evidence shows that more than half of violent offences take place in environments such as pubs and clubs, a finding that is supported in other research into the risk of alcohol on community (Toumbourou et al., 2004). Both reports recommend a combination of regulatory approaches (i.e. reducing liquor licenses and late night trading, higher taxes on alcoholic drinks favoured by young people) in combination with public health interventions targeted at reducing social and developmental risk factors that lead to binge drinking, such as supporting children in families with drug-using and alcoholic parents (Toumbourou et al., 2004: xiv). Yet Homel and Lincoln's (2001) research also shows that there is not a simple causal relationship between alcohol and violence, but that background factors (cultural, situational and individual) can heighten the predisposition to and risk of violence.

As Kelly points out, the raft of risk management techniques that have been introduced into youth policing and regulation has not delivered an inclusive social insurance policy for all young people. In fact the 'youth at risk' category expresses simultaneous inclusionary and exclusionary forces, where protection and insurance is provided for some, whilst others are subjected to constant surveillance and intrusions. From this perspective, Kelly argues that young people today are increasingly dealt with through forms of 'institutionalised mistrust' that only serves to compound social risk and skew perceptions of police and other authority figures who represent the 'frontline' of community safety. Worryingly, the category of 'dangerous youth' or 'anti-social' youth are also increasingly being 'constructed along gender, racial, [and] class…lines' with 'young, black males attract(ing) more surveillance in certain spaces because the "numbers" suggest that they pose the most danger' (Kelly, 2003: 175).

3.5 Community policing

The police presence in a community, and relationships between police and citizens, can have a significant impact on feelings of safety in a community. Community policing is a framework that has developed to encourage closer relationships between police and community members, and to generate organisational strategies for partnerships between police and residents to address issues of crime and social and physical incivilities (Reiss, 2006). Other terminology and models that have emerged from this greater focus on police/community interactions include proactive policing, problem-oriented policing, and reassurance policing (Fielding, 2005).

In a critique of community policing, Fielding (2005) notes a number of commonalities in a variety of community policing projects, including the presence of police on long-term beat assignments, the sharing of crime control with public organisations such as Neighbourhood Watch, and development of communication avenues such as consultation committees. However, it is also noted that the concept of community policing can be difficult to define, and that it potentially rests on a faulty assumption of a 'community' as a unitary entity holding a common value system. Fielding (2005) notes that geographic communities, particularly in urban areas, are prone to de-emphasise commonalities and to emphasise differences; consequently, community policing approaches tend to resonate best with certain sectors of the community, such as homeowners, business interests and the elderly.

Another critique of community policing focuses specifically on the lack of engagement of young people in many community-based initiatives (Forman, 2004). It was noted that citizen participation meetings tended to have a higher representation of white, higher-income homeowners, particularly from single-family and married-couple residences. For example, even when specifically targeting lower-SES and racial minority groups, a large scale

community policing project in Chicago was noted to have particular difficulties in engaging young people, with the majority of those attending meetings being middle aged or older.

It was also noted that young people were more likely than older adults to be treated by police as threats to public order, and to have negative interactions with police. Forman (2004) notes that police and public safety rhetoric often uses language about 'loitering youths' and 'youthful troublemakers' that places young people in opposition to law-abiding citizens. Another discussion of community safety and crime prevention in British housing estates found that public discourse often contained mixed messages about young people; on one hand arguing for increased amenities and youth-friendly public spaces, and on the other hand identifying 'young people' in general as a significant threat to safety and as the target for monitoring/policing interventions such as closed circuit video monitoring (Hill and Wright, 2003).

White (2002) notes that patterns of youth offending tends to suggest that while actual offending behaviour is spread across different sectors of the community, certain demographics were more likely to be the targets of policing interventions. In particular, young males of low socio-economic status and/or minority backgrounds had higher levels of involvement with the justice system than other demographic groups (White, Tienda and Wilson, 2002). White (2002) also highlighted that the offending behaviour of young people tends to be conspicuous because it relates to their use of public space, and tends to be visible due to the involvement of groups of young people, and due to the fact that crimes are committed in public venues such as local shopping centres where offenders may be recognised by neighbours. Finally, White (2002) highlights that young people are frequently also victims of other young people's attacks, particularly if they are from a group perceived to be weak or marginalised (for example, gay and lesbian young people, ethnic minorities, young women).

In spite of these critiques, a number of aspects of community policing have been demonstrated to have merit, particularly in their impact on people's perceptions of safety. One study conducted across twelve cities found a significant negative correlation between fear of crime and the perceptions of community policing within the community (Roh and Oliver, 2005). The same study showed, however, that the relationship between fear of crime and community policing was mediated by other variables, including the perceptions of neighbourhood physical and social disorder, and feelings of dissatisfaction with the neighbourhood (Roh and Oliver, 2005).

A literature review conducted by Zhao et al. (2002) looked at research into three styles of policing: targeted patrols, proactive/aggressive arrest policies, and integrated and comprehensive community policing. The majority of the twenty-six studies reviewed found that an increase in police presence (regardless of the style of policing) resulted in a reduction in fear of crime in the areas assessed, while one study found an increase in fear of crime. However, less than half of the studies reviewed found evidence of an increase in satisfaction with police resulting from increased police presence (Zhao, Schneider, and Thurman, 2002).

Skogan (2006) used survey methods to investigate the impact of police encounters on public perceptions of police. The study indicated that positive encounters with police did not increase the level of positive appraisal, but negative encounters significantly decreased positive assessments. This effect was consistent for both community initiated and police-initiated contacts, and suggested a strong negativity bias in police appraisals. Thus, the presence of police and positive police contacts may not necessarily result in higher community appraisals of the service (Skogan, 2006).

While police presence is crucial to reducing crime risk and fear of crime at the community level, public confidence in police reflects a much more complex array of values and experiences. Skogan's research, for example, indicates that negative encounters between police and community members are four to fourteen times more likely to make a lasting impression than positive experiences (Skogan, 2006). Within the broader context of

measuring perceptions of police as a key indicator of police performance, this finding demonstrates that minimising negative encounters has a tangible benefit to police.

One significant factor that has pushed community policing to the forefront in recent years, both in Australia and internationally, is the experience of increased levels of multiculturalism, and subsequently, increased police interaction with culturally diverse communities. Historically, this interaction has been marred by hostilities and accusations of police discrimination. The literature suggests that harsh law enforcement styles of policing have been a major contributor to tensions, with heavy-handed police tactics becoming a 'conflict-analyst' (*Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies*, United Nations, 2006). Community policing addresses these issues by encouraging police to be proactive in understanding social and cultural differences and to improve communication and partnership between police and minority communities (Yarwood, 2007). This model also generates innovations in conflict resolution. Mediation techniques are employed to defuse conflict and minimise the risk of conflict resolution through violent means, which is a risk factor for damaged trust relations and continued hostilities (*Recommendations on Policing in Multi-Ethnic Societies*, 2006).

As Skogan argues, the demographical factors of age and race, more than any other, have a substantial impact on levels of trust and public confidence in police. This reflects historical relations of discrimination and harsh treatment directed towards young people and ethnic minorities by police (Schafer et al., 2003; Brown and Benedict, 2002; Reisig and Correia, 1997; Kelly, 2000; 2003; Stephen and Squires, 2004; Waters, 2007). In particular, American research uncovers evidence that African-Americans and racial minorities are more likely to be stopped by police for no perceived legitimate reason and are also more likely to be threatened with sanction. The perception people have of police in many of these communities therefore reflects low levels of trust (Skogan, 2006). These practices have not been restricted to America, however, with similar research being undertaken in Australia into relations between police and indigenous young people (Cunneen and White, 1995; White and Alder, 1994), and police and ethnic minority youth (Collins et al., 2000; 2002; White et al., 1999; see also *Rights of Passage*, 2008). These studies have uncovered similar discriminatory practices that impact on levels of trust in police.

Community policing is an operational mode that underscores the aims of the community safety paradigm, being designed to strengthen trust and foster good relations with the communities that police serve (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997; Brogden and Nijhar, 2005). This cultural shift acknowledges that the 'legitimacy' of police work rests on having the support of the public. Historically speaking, however, rather than being driven by a top-down policy agenda, the move from professional policing to community policing emerged as a more bottom-up response to race-related riots and unrest in a number of Western societies in the 1960s and 1970s. Tensions arose in these circumstances owing to community perceptions that ethnic and racial minorities were receiving differential and discriminatory treatment by police (Weatheritt, 1986; Skogan and Hartnett, 1997). Community policing was thus initially designed to respond to and ease racial and ethnic tensions, enabling police to prevent a breakdown in social control.

In Chicago, a city with a history of riots, police corruption and antagonism between ethnic minorities and police, community policing was adopted as a 'proactive' strategy to build better relationships with ethnic communities, to reduce hostilities and improve perceptions of police. In their review of Chicago-style community policing, Skogan and Hartnett (1997) identify some key features. These are: the decentralisation of police departments to enhance better communication between police and public, and shifting from a reactive, 'law enforcement' model to 'problem-oriented policing'. The remaining principles are organised around community participation, where police develop partnerships with community members, businesses and so on, to effectively make the community itself a 'co-producer of safety.'

The experience of community policing in Australia has seen the development of formal and informal mechanisms to bridge the gap between police and community members. Three models currently discussed in the literature are: the holistic framework, which sees community policing as a part of a broad structural and organisational reform of police services 'and is reflected in the corporate culture of police' (Beyer, 1993: 4). A second model relegates community policing to specialist units and roles, i.e. multicultural liaison officers, and does not impact on or change mainstream policing operations. In the final model, community projects and initiatives are mobilised on an ad-hoc basis to encourage 'non-confrontational' interaction between police and community members (Beyer, 1993).

Well known examples of formal and sustained community policing programs are *Safety House*, *Neighbourhood Watch* and *Crime Stoppers* (Beyer, 1993: 1; see also Bayley, 1999; Rosenbaum et al., 1998). These programs all adhere to community policing principles of mobilising community crime-fighting partnerships and improving the flow of information between police and the public. The bulk of community policing work in Australia, however, is informal and relates to more localised programs and initiatives, but the authors do note that Victoria and several other states have recently worked toward restructuring their whole organisation around the concept of community policing.[8]

Community policing, like community safety, has had some detractors because of its focus on increasing police contact with community members. In his evaluation of community policing in the UK, Gordon (1984) expressed concern that community policing, 'under the guise of offering advice and assistance' may be used as a means of performing surveillance on target populations (Beyer, 1993). This has the potential to further alienate vulnerable community members and increase relations of mistrust. Another problem Gordon identifies is the way processes of community consultation can be manipulated by police to produce 'engineered consent' for preferred police priorities (see Gordon, 1984). As Gordon writes, this kind of 'community policing' was used to generate community support for 'military-style' police tactics following the Brixton riots in the UK, despite such measures contradicting the principles of community policing and being considered by many experts in the field to be a conflict-catalyst (Gordon, 1984).

This raises the most obvious questions concerning community policing and community safety practices, which centre around whose needs are being addressed – those of police and regulatory agencies, or 'communities'? And how do we ensure that police interaction with the community does not impinge on people's human rights? The combination of greater 'access' to communities and greater discretionary power has the potential to be abused, a point which has been acknowledged by community legal services in Australia (Hopkins, 2006; see also *Rights of Passage: the Experiences of Australian-Sudanese Young People*, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2008).

Community policing can sometimes have a negative impact on police officers themselves by exposing well-intentioned police officers to situations where they lack the appropriate skills and knowledge to effectively engage with community problems (Wilson, 1990). As Wilson has argued, community policing requires police officers to deal with situations relating to the disturbance of public order. In multi-ethnic communities this requires them to have vast knowledge and specialist skills to negotiate and resolve disputes, but Wilson claims that there is no evidence in police training of a focus on 'interpersonal and social skills' that are necessary for effective community policing (1990: 2). Although this has changed to some extent over the last two decades as police organisations around the world have responded to the challenges of multiculturalism, ethnic-minority citizens and

[8] See *The Way Ahead: Strategic Plan 2003-2008* which describes Victoria Police's objective to 'create police as leaders in the community' through 'increased support for Local Safety Committees and Police Community Consultative Committees, increased opportunities for professional development and recruitment of under-represented groups so that our workforce is as diverse as our community' (2003: 13)

communities are still frequently reported to be unhappy or concerned about how police interact with them in community contexts (Davis, 2000; Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2002; Sollund, 2006; West Midlands Police Authority, 2009).

Segrave and Ratcliffe (2004) point out that community policing has become a 'popular catch-phrase' in modern policing, and almost every police department wants to be seen to be participating, but that there is sometimes a distinctive lack of training, support and monitoring structures accompanying the strategy (see also Cameron and Laycock, 2002; Moore, 1992; Thurman et al., 2001). The authors support this claim with reference to several evaluations of community policing programs in Australia (Saul, 1997; Criminal Justice Commission, 1995), which note that the general attitude toward community policing across the whole police organisation is that it is 'soft' and not 'real' police work. This view has made it difficult for community policing to be 'incorporated into an overall policing practice and philosophy … grounded firmly at the operational level of policing' (Beyer, 1993: 1). In general, such debates and perspectives demonstrate the complexities in aligning and implementing community policing and community safety strategies in Australia.

3.6 Ethnicity, youth and police relations

While neighbourhood factors and previous encounters may play a significant role in attitudes towards policing, other demographic factors have also been shown to play a role in shaping individuals' perceptions. Two of these factors, as implicit in the discussions above, are the respondent's age and race.

US and UK research on race, ethnicity and youth-police relations

There are complex and inconsistent findings in research conducted in the US and UK contexts regarding the impact of race in relation to youth-police relations and the issue of how influential perceptions of race and perceived racial attributes are in the way in which young people and the police approach and understand each other.

In the US, Cheurprakobkit (2000) considered the experiences of police contact amongst white, black and Hispanic subjects in the United States. It was found that Hispanic subjects generally held favourable views of police, equivalent to those held by white respondents. However, in line with a trend towards African-Americans holding less favourable attitudes towards police than white Americans, black respondents in Cheurprakobit's study held less favourable views. Views were often influenced by the nature of contact with police, with more positive contacts leading to more positive attitudes. In this study, younger respondents tended to express less favourable attitudes than older respondents (Cheurprakobkit, 2000).

Huebner et al. (2004) investigated the impact of demographic, neighbourhood and contact variables on perceptions of police in the US, by conducting telephone surveys with more than 1100 participants. This study found that African-American and white respondents reported high levels of satisfaction with policing (79% and 85% respectively). The study also indicated that African-American women, older people and homeowners were more likely to be satisfied with community policing models. The study suggested that a diverse range of factors, including neighbourhood context, contacts and demographic variables, impacted on African-American attitudes to policing, while a more limited range of variables shaped white attitudes (Huebner, Schafer, and Bynum, 2004).

Weitzer and Tuch (2005) conducted a survey to investigate black, Hispanic and white perceptions of racial bias in policing. They hypothesised that black and Hispanic participants would have a greater perception of racial bias and discrimination, as they would be more likely to see police as allies of the white majority. This hypothesis was supported, with significant numbers of black and Hispanic respondents and very few white respondents indicating that black people were treated worse than white people by police; that black neighbourhoods received poorer services; that police prejudice is evident; and that they themselves had been treated unfairly by police.

The study found that attitudes were impacted by personal and vicarious experience, and by media reports of police discrimination (Weitzer and Tuch, 2005).

There is emerging research also regarding the attitudes held by juveniles towards police. One study found that teenagers in general had poor opinions of police performance when compared to adult data, and that African-American teenagers had more negative opinions that white Americans (Hurst, Frank, and Browning, 2000). For example, 23% of white respondents and 15% of black respondents indicated that police did a good job of stopping crime, while 47% of whites and 26.5% of blacks responded that police did a good job in general. However, the study also found that while young black Americans rated their attitudes towards police as less favourable, their actual encounters with police were rated similarly to white respondents (Hurst et al., 2000).

Another study conducted in urban and regional high schools in the United States also found that young people rated police performance more negatively than equivalent adult studies (Taylor, Turner, Esbensen, and Winfree, 2001). They also found that white attitudes were consistently more positive than black attitudes, with Hispanics reporting attitudes somewhere between the two other racial groups and Asian respondents reporting similar attitudes to whites. The study also found that most favourable attitudes were reported from relatively rural sites with a majority of white respondents, while the most unfavourable attitudes were reported in urban, black majority settings, suggesting that race and location were somewhat confounded (Taylor et al., 2001).

Howell et al. (2004) stress that the 'role' and 'legitimacy' of police in relation to 'black' America have been problematised by historical accounts of discrimination. They also stress that these relations of 'mistrust' have been reinforced in a post civil-rights era by new practices of racial profiling and neighbourhood policing which aggressively target black neighbourhoods (2004: 46). This is supported by a large body of literature identifying that African-Americans continue to be more likely than whites to have 'experienced involuntary, uncivil, or adversarial contact with police; to be stopped, questioned, and/or searched without cause or due process; and to experience verbal or physical abuse personally' (Howell et al., 2004: 46, see also Browning et al., 1994; Flanagan and Vaughn, 1996; Weitzer and Tuch, 2005; Schafer et al., 2003). In addition, African-Americans are also more likely to express a higher level of dissatisfaction with police service and response times, 'which is universally regarded to be an important measure of the efficiency of police service' (Howell et al., 2004: 48).

Howell et al. complicate this straightforward analysis, however, by referring to the higher rates of crime that exist in many 'black' neighbourhoods, 'which creates a dilemma for police in terms of what should be the proper balance between maintaining public order and civility, and aggressively fighting crime' (2004: 47). This problem is pronounced in the new era of community safety and community policing, where the focus on fostering good relations between police and community members must be balanced against the imperative of reducing crime and anti-social behaviour to satisfy the 'broader community'. Piper and Piper identify this paradox (1999) as one which reinforces a 'self-perpetuating quality in the perceptions of police and ethnic minorities, where 'each organises their everyday relations on the basis of negative stereotypes' (518). For police, resolving the conflict of fostering good relations with ethnic minority people versus policing anti-social behaviour, often leads to gridlocked negotiations and, in some instances, withdrawal of proactive police services in these communities. And yet, this is also identified by African-American communities as further evidence of police neglect and discrimination.

In his research of police/ethnic minority youth relations in the UK, Mark Moore (1991: 19) acknowledges this paradox, observing that:

> The police could make two responses that would be racist and perceived as such. One is to ignore the problem because neither victims nor offenders are judged worth saving. The other is to use broad fears in the wider community as an occasion for cracking down.

In both instances, police are seen to be providing differential treatment to ethnic minority or 'black' communities, either through under-policing or over-policing. These outcomes impact on levels of trust, well-being and safety amongst residents and threaten to undermine the legitimacy of police services in 'securing the support of the public' they serve (Schafer et al., 2003: 441).

In Scotland, *Narrowing the Gap: Police visibility and public reassurance - managing public expectation and demand* (2002) reviews community responses to policing and the influence of police visibility based on research data gathered across eight Scottish police force areas. This project sought to:

- Identify the nature and impact of concerns that underlie public demand for greater reassurance through police visibility and accessibility;
- Identify the nature and extent of gaps that may exist between perceptions, expectations and policing provision in relation to these concerns; and
- Gather information to aid identification of targeted solutions to public concerns and demands.

The findings of this report indicated that 'police officers were considered neither common nor accessible in young people's lives and although they accepted a need for police, young people did not view them positively'. With respect to minorities, however, there were 'very few differences in the views expressed from those of the general public, including the desire for greater visibility and engagement. The only exception to this related to the perceptions of crime directly attributable to the minority status of the victim' (*Narrowing the Gap*, 2002).

Australian research on race, ethnicity and youth-police relations

In the Australian context, a research project conducted in 2000 in the southern regions of Melbourne focussed on ethnic communities' perceptions of crime and safety (Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2000). The report identified that young migrants were more likely to report feeling safe and less likely to be worried about crime than older migrants. Women also reported feeling less safe than men, while many migrants identified difference of appearance (either through traditional dress or skin colour) as contributing to differential treatment by police and other members of the community. It was found that both younger and older migrants reported that they would not contact police if a crime was committed, but for different reasons. Older people would not contact the police due to their difficulties with English, while younger people reported that they would not contact due to negative past experiences with police and concerns about racially targeted discrimination. It was noted that young women were more likely to engage with police seeking assistance or support, while young men were more likely to experience contact due to compliance issues such as traffic or criminal offences. However, these differences in contact did not result in differences in attitudes towards police (Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2000).

Many accounts from the UK and Australia have made note of how provisions under the new 'community safety' paradigm have justified measures to 'crack down' on anti-social behaviour. The problem is that some of these behaviours are not perceived by young people to be anti-social and may, in fact, have positive value for young people in terms of their individual development, and feelings of belonging (Malone, 1999; White et al., 1999). Some practices also have distinct and important cultural meanings for many ethnic groups, making measures to 'crack down' appear racialised and exclusionary (White et al., 1999; Collins et al., 2000; 2004).

An example of this can be found in Rob White's research on young people's use of public space (White, 2004). As previously noted, moral panics about young people congregating in public space has seen the introduction of increased police powers to target young people exhibiting anti-social or problematic behaviour. These powers extend to the use of name-checks, move-on powers, stop and search powers, and the power to take fingerprints and bodily samples from alleged young offenders (2004: 2). The introduction of these powers has invited criticism from academics and policymakers for its emphasis on police discretion in determining what defines anti-

social behaviour; a situation which opens up vulnerable groups (i.e. young people and ethnic minority youth) to discriminatory police practices (Walsh and Taylor, 2007).

This claim is supported by research into ethnic youth gangs (White et al., 1999) which found that almost half the sample population identified having negative experiences with police, including: being stopped and searched by police (55%), being physically assaulted (34%), being falsely accused/arrested (15%) and being subjected to racism (11%). White goes on to say that the experience of 'overpolicing' of ethnic minority youth in Australia leads to a 'self-perpetuating cycle of violence' where young people, instead of requesting help from police, opt for forms of armed gang protection against racist attacks, a practice which only serves to justify more police intervention.

The Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (2002), in its policy paper on refugee young people in Australia, makes special mention of how 'moral panics' about ethnic youth gangs has fuelled public suspicion of refugees and increased calls for police to use coercive strategies to deal with refugee young people. The report refers to White et al.'s findings (1999) that groups of refugee young people are a specific target of surveillance and police intervention (2002:10). A follow up report by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI, 2006) also highlights concerns about refugee young people's experiences of harassment and racism from police. This foreshadows recent allegations of police discrimination against Sudanese young people, made to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission by the Southern Ethnic Advisory Council following the death of Dandenong teenager Liep Gony in 2007 (*Rights of Passage*, 2008) and similar reports of human rights abuses against Somalian, Sudanese and Afghani young people in the Flemington area of Melbourne (Hopkins, 2006).

The most commonly reported complaints are: young people being stopped and/or questioned/searched in public; police 'moving on' young people without a legitimate reason; racist comments being made by police to young people; police refusing to provide their identifying details when requested; and police refusing to respect a young person's right to silence. But more concerning reports of serious harassment have also been alleged involving 'unwarranted use of force, explicit racist comments, and other practices that are potentially in contravention of Victoria's *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*; the police code of conduct; and in some instances potentially also constitute a criminal offence' (*Rights of Passage*, 2008: 3). As these reports warn, negatively oriented differential policing of refugee young people and other young people of ethnic minority status creates relations of resentment, mistrust and alienation, which only serves to compound the potential problem of ethnically-based youth gangs.

3.7 Youth and police liaison projects in Australia

The project brief for *Don't Go There* did not include a comprehensive survey or audit of either Victorian or interstate and national youth-police liaison initiatives undertaken over the last few years to improve community safety, youth-police relationships and crime prevention in relation to young people. However, we note here a number of initiatives and projects designed to address improved liaison between young people and police in Victoria. For example, Victoria Police and the Victorian government have recently responded to the problem of alcohol-fuelled violence in the central business district (CBD) by forming a 'Safe Streets Taskforce' 'with transit police patrolling all major transport hubs in a bid to identify troublemakers from early on in the evening' (Victoria Police, July 2008). Further to this, the Victorian State Government and Victoria Police are currently trialling 2am 'lockout' laws for patrons of licensed venues in the CBD (Burgess, 2008).

Various other projects have been undertaken by Victoria Police in partnership with local communities since 2005 to improve young people's perceptions of community safety, and to build stronger relationships between youth and migrant communities and law enforcement. These include:

- 'Constable Awareness Days' to educate constables about ethnic and youth issues;
- Police sponsored sporting events;
- Drug abuse resistance education programs delivered by police in school settings;
- Police-youth recreation and cross-cultural awareness programs, e.g. '3019: Under the Radar' in Braybrook;
- Youth working groups and consultation committees; and
- Youth group activities and camps conducted through Police Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC).

Projects aiming to prevent crime such as increasing patrols in known trouble spots, community meetings with target ethnic groups, and projects investigating use of public space have also been implemented over a longer period of time, such as:

- Neighbourhood Watch programs introduced to areas of high ethnic youth residency, such as high-rise public housing;
- Skills development and physical activity programs for migrant and ethnic young people leaving the education system; and
- Media promotion of positive youth-police partnership projects (Australian Police Multicultural Advisory Bureau, 1999).

One such project run a decade ago resonates in particular with the current research focus for *Don't Go There*. In 1999 a project entitled 'City of Yarra - Improving Police/Ethnic Youth Relations' was conducted in Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy under the auspices of Jesuit Social Services. The project was developed in response to specific community concerns about the relationship between young people of ethnic origin and police within the area, particularly members of the Vietnamese and East Timorese communities living in public housing estates. The project aimed to improve relationships and to develop a better model of dispute resolution (Jesuit Social Services, 2000).

The project identified a number of issues impacting on relationships between police and ethnic young people. These issues included:

- A need for cross-cultural training for police;
- Stereotyping of ethnic youth by police;
- Young people failing to report incidents involving police;
- Lack of knowledge about rights in relation to police involvement;
- Need for better communication and liaison between police and young people in the community.

At the time of the report, many of the positive police-youth projects in the area had been identified as being short-term and recreationally focussed. It was noted that many young people had concerns about police harassment, and did not use existing mechanisms if they had a complaint about police treatment. They were also reluctant to access services that were perceived to have a link to policing, and there were few opportunities for the police to communicate directly with young people in a positive way. The report also suggested that the police felt young people had no fear of the law, and perceived youth and community focussed issues as being either an extra burden in an already heavy workload, or as 'not real police work' (Jesuit Social Services, 2000).

Focus groups conducted in the context of this project found that young people were reluctant to participate, due to the perceived involvement of police. It was also found that it was particularly difficult to engage young school-

leavers in the groups. Individuals who participated identified both positive and negative associations with police. Positive encounters included police involvement in schools, while negatives included contacts with police in public venues, where young people felt they might be perceived to be doing something wrong just because police were speaking to them (Jesuit Social Services, 2000).

Recommendations made at the end of the project included that:

- A police and ethnic youth liaison officer position be established;
- The project advisory group continue as a police and ethnic youth committee;
- More cross-cultural training be conducted in the region, particularly focusing on youth cross-cultural issues; and
- Changes be made to make complaints and dispute resolution procedures through the Ombudsman's Office and the Police Ethical Standards Department more accessible to young people.

A decade on, some of the police-related recommendations have been actioned, for example through the recent appointment by Victoria Police of Emerging Community Resource Officers beginning in 2009, which supplements the existing capacities of Multicultural and Community Resource Officers not only in the City of Yarra but across the state. However, the most recent (2008) Community Service Charter of the Victoria Police Ethical Standards Department, while it embraces cultural diversity in the service charter and provides for interpreting and translating services as needed, does not address the issue of greater accessibility for young people either in general or specifically from CALD backgrounds in relation to complaining about or seeking clarification or dispute resolution regarding police conduct.

4 METHOD

This study aimed to find out what young people in the Brimbank area in the 15 – 19 age cohort think about community safety and about the ways in which police and young people interact on these issues. Using a mixed-method study design that collected data through a survey and focus groups, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What helps young people to feel safe?
- What leads to young people feeling unsafe or at risk when they are in public spaces?
- What do young people see as the triggers and causes of increased violence and conflict amongst groups of young people?
- What do young people think about police in their local area and how can relationships between young people and police be improved?
- How can police and young people work together in improving community safety in the Brimbank area?

The research was supported by Human Research Ethics approval from the Ethics Committees of Victoria University, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The ethical conduct of the research project has been consistent with established ethical principles in community-based research (see Appendix).

4.1 Survey design

The survey was designed to be an engaging, interactive tool that could be modified and used as an element of a youth-police consultation strategy by Victoria Police. The survey instrument is available on http://dontgotheresurvey.com/download.php and can be downloaded and viewed by entering 'test' when asked to submit a token once the program has been downloaded. A CD version of the survey instrument has also been made available to Victoria Police.

Special attention was given to designing a survey that would maximise engagement by young people of both genders from diverse community and cultural backgrounds. The survey instrument designed for this study was computer-based, online, interactive, and used animation and multimedia, including a voice-over audio option. A series of youth-focused survey instruments were reviewed as part of the development of the overall survey design[9] and this showed that young people prefer computer-based questionnaires to traditional paper-based tools. A computer-based online survey also has a number of advantages: data can be more efficiently stored; completion does not involve handwriting; an increased feeling of confidentiality may result in higher validity of response to sensitive issues; and the presentation can be customised to include interactivity and animation.

The survey used contemporary, graffiti-style characters and background designed to visually reward and encourage participants to stay focused throughout the process. The 'graffiti style' artwork also aimed to be broadly ethnically and culturally representative. Various elements of the background were also animated, such

[9] Collingwood Youth Survey Report, 2006; Adolescent Health and Well-Being/Communities That Care Youth Survey, 1999; Mission Australia online survey of Australia's young people, 2002 and 2007; Mt Druitt Pacific Communities Needs Analysis, 2003; Promoting Prevention, Extending Entitlement, Swansea, Wales, 2004; Through Children's Eyes school-based survey, Newcastle, UK, 2003; Gangs, Crime and Community Safety Survey, Western Sydney, 2004 (combined adults and youth); Thuringowa Youth Survey, Australian Community Safety and Research Organisation, 1998, and the YouthSCAN survey. The 2004 Swansea-based survey conducted by Haines et al. in particular was directly relevant to some of our concerns around young people, engagement and literacy levels in survey design and specifically informed our own survey model for the project.

as birds, trees, cars, and body gestures. The survey included a voice option where questions and instructions could be heard as spoken by an animated character while simultaneously reading questions and instructions on-screen. Questions and instructions were read onto audio by age-appropriate professional actors and fully integrated with the survey's on-screen content and prompts. Each character had a spoken dialogue used to introduce each section of the survey. This special feature of the survey was designed to improve comprehension and engagement for participants, enhancing the capacity of young people with varying literacy levels to feel comfortable with both navigating the survey and responding to each item in the questionnaire.

The survey was divided into six sections, one for each theme. Each section was preceded by an introductory character animation of approximately thirty seconds which could be skipped if desired. The introduction gave instructions on answering the survey and explained its purpose. Answers in every section were not compulsory, and questions could be skipped.

Figure 2: Survey Characters

Figure 3: Survey Question

Questions for the survey were developed to address the project aims and were informed by the literature review. The questions were developed in collaboration with Victoria Police. The draft survey questions included a consultation phase with relevant community stakeholders including selected school principals, CALDB community members, Victoria Police with responsibility for youth affairs, community youth workers, and others. The questions were then piloted with young people.

The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The type of questions used included Likert scale responses, where participants were asked to select an answer on a scale of 1 to 7; closed choice questions, where participants could choose one answer from a set of possible answers; and open ended questions, where participants could provide written text answers to a question. The survey took approximately 35 – 40 minutes to complete and asked 55 questions covering six main thematic clusters (see Table 1).

The organisation and flow of these thematic clusters was designed to ensure that participants began the survey by responding to questions dealing with information and issues that were familiar, factual and non-threatening. The questions then moved through topics and issues that at times engaged young people in thinking about controversial or difficult issues. They concluded with a set of questions that allowed young people to consider positive and constructive approaches to dealing with some of the problems and concerns they might have identified in earlier segments of the questionnaire.

Table 1: The six main areas of content for the survey

The 6 main areas of content for survey questions	
1. About you	15 demographic questions: age, gender, country of birth, cultural background, years lived in Australia, suburb and years lived in suburb, living arrangements, income, employment, type of residence, languages, and public transport use. No identifying information
2. Community safety	7 questions: what feeling safe means, and how safe participants feel in particular places in their neighbourhood.
3. Young people in groups	10 questions: about young people in groups or gangs.
4. Young people and violent crime	10 questions: on respondents' opinions, experience and fears about violence; opinions on conflicts and conflict resolution, and weapons use.
5. Young people, police and community safety	9 questions: on seeking help, trust and attitudes toward police.
6. Working together to improve community safety	4 questions: on working with police and what could be done to improve community safety.

4.1.1 Procedure

For survey participation, young people were recruited primarily through local schools in the Brimbank area, as well as through local university and TAFE campuses and community organisations. Recruitment through secondary schools in the Western region provided access to approximately 4,802 young people enrolled in years 10 to 12. A response rate of 10% per school would provide 480 responses. The sample size for the survey was designed to be 500.

Recruitment of young people to participate in the survey began in September of 2008 and continued until May 2009. Schools in the area were approached through a letter to the principal. School principals were then contacted by phone and those willing to participate were sent further information (plain language statement, consent forms, letter to parents). Principals were asked to provide the researchers with information on classes that may be approached for participation. Teachers of those classes were then contacted and one member of the research team attended classes to inform students about the proposal, and to hand out consent forms and plain language statements to be taken home and discussed with parents. Students who were willing to participate needed to return parental consent forms to the school and these were collected by the researchers. One or two

members of the research team would then attend the school to administer the survey to students who had returned their parental consent forms. Headphones were supplied to all participants to minimise sound disruption to others taking the survey in group settings such as classrooms, libraries or school computer labs. The survey was not open to the general public; the specificity of the sample was protected by giving participants a token (a random number) which was required to be able to start completing the survey. Tokens expired after a specified time and became invalid after expiration. To begin the survey, participants entered the URL http://art.tafe.vu.edu.au/survey into a web browser and then gained access by entering their specific token.

To provide motivation and incentive for young people to participate in the survey, students were informed that they would enter a prize draw for an iPod Touch, which was chosen owing to its appeal for young people. Following the completion of the survey, participants had the opportunity to enter into the raffle. In the latter stages of recruitment, students also received a single movie ticket as an added incentive to participate in the surveys and to assist in meeting the sample target of 500. The following table provides a summary of the data collection.

Table 2: Data collection breakdown summary: November 2008-May 2009

Participants by school/organisation	Numbers allocation (approx)	Age spread (approx)	Gender mix
	November 08		
State secondary college (a)	30	15-17	roughly 50/50
State secondary college (b)	60	15-18	mixed
VU Libraries	13	17-19	mixed
Catholic secondary college (a)	35	15-17	All females
	Feb-March 09		
VU TAFE (Liberal Arts)	23	16-19	mixed
VU Higher Ed first-year lectures	8	18-19	mixed
Community Youth Hub (Sunshine)	20	16-19	mixed
State secondary college (c)	50	15-17	mixed
Catholic secondary college (a)	70	16-18	All females
	Apr-May 09		
VU TAFE (trade apprentices)	37	16-19	All males
Community Centre (St Albans)	13	15-18	mixed
Community Youth Hub (Sunshine)	10	15-19	mixed
State secondary college (d)	131	15-18	mixed
Total participants	500		

4.2 Focus group design

The focus group questions were developed collaboratively between Victoria Police and Victoria University. Input on draft focus group questions was sought from relevant stakeholders, including target CALDB community members and young people from the selected target groups.

The focus group discussion was designed around a range of themes; questions were sufficiently unstructured to facilitate participants' voices and to gather information that may not have been previously anticipated while also being structured enough to keep participants' discussion related to the topics of the research questions. This issue is particularly important in research work with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Hughes and DuMont, 1993). The ordering of themes and questions was designed to build confidence and comfort with the process as the focus themes developed, so that when difficult or potentially confrontational issues and topics were discussed, participants had already experienced some trust and confidence within the group process. The focus groups began with non-challenging questions that were related to young people's

perceptions of their own personal experience (spending time together in groups in their local area), then moved on to more challenging issues around perceptions of safety in public and gang activity in the region, peaking with discussion around conflict, violence and crimes against the person in public places. Questions concluded with a more positive and future-oriented focus on how relationships with the police could be improved based on young people's perceptions of current relationships with police in the locality, and on how young people and police might work together to improve community safety more generally. Using this structure, the focus groups used 17 questions across seven key themes in discussion (See Appendices for questions).The themes covered were:

- Young people in groups
- Perceptions of lack of safety in the community
- Groups or gangs?
- Young people and conflict/violence
- Young people and crimes against the person in public places
- Relationships between young people, the police and community safety
- Working together to improve community safety

The focus group methodology was sensitive to gender differences amongst young people, and ran both mixed-gender and gender-specific groups to assist in identifying and analysing any significant gender-based differences in response to the study's focus on young people, community safety, youth and violent crime, and improving community safety and relationships between young people and the police.

In keeping with best-practice research methods for research conducted with young people (Gibson 2007), and CALDB communities (Huer and Saenz, 2003), community-based research assistants were employed on the project to guide the recruitment and assist with the conduct and facilitation of the focus groups, including translation and interpretation in participants' first or primary languages as required. Four community research assistants were employed, one of each gender from each of the two relevant communities. This enabled us to successfully recruit young people within these sometimes hard-to-access communities and to run single-gender and mixed-gender focus groups in both community samples in a fashion that was sensitive to the cultural needs of both communities. Where needed, interpretation and translation for both questions and responses was provided during the focus groups by the relevant community-based research facilitators.

4.2.1 Procedure

A total of 58 young people were recruited for participation in the *Don't Go There* focus groups: 44 from the two CALDB communities of Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people, and 14 from the general population15–19 year old cohort in Brimbank for a purpose-specific focus group on youth-police consultation mechanisms.

Recruitment of participants for the focus groups took place through mobilising existing local networks and organisational contacts (schools, AMES, community groups) in the target communities combined with chain-referral sampling. This method is useful for a research focus that seeks to tap into a smaller or limited subset of the general population who may be less visible or otherwise difficult to identify or contact (Brown, 2003; Streeton, Cooke and Campbell, 2004; Grupetta, 2005). The community research assistants were provided with an information sheet that explained the project aims and which outlined the format of the focus group. They then canvassed the local community through church gatherings, sports clubs and existing networks, inviting youth participation by verbally explaining the survey and providing a copy of the plain language information sheet for participants.

From March to October 2008, 44 young people between the ages of 15 and19 participated in five scheduled focus groups of 7-10 each, purposively selected for residence in the Brimbank LGA, age range, gender, and membership of either the Sudanese or Pacific Islander communities. The groups were run as follows:

1. All-male Sudanese focus group
2. Mixed gender Sudanese focus group
3. All-female Sudanese focus group
4. All-male Pacific Islander focus group
5. Mixed gender Pacific Islander focus group

A sixth group of all-female Pacific Islanders was planned but despite extensive networking and outreach through our community liaison support workers and other community-based contacts, we were unable to recruit the necessary numbers from amongst Pacific Islander young women for the all-female group. This was primarily because we could not guarantee the required condition of residency and/or school attendance in Brimbank for this final group of participants. However, we gained a further three Pacific Islander young women as part of the general population group of participants in the sixth focus group on ongoing consultation mechanisms for police and young people in the community, bringing the total number of Pacific Islander female participants across all focus groups to eight.

The sixth focus group of 14 young people in the same age group but drawn from general community backgrounds was held in June 2009. The general population focus group included 8 male and 6 female participants. All were Brimbank residents and were recruited through Visy Cares Youth Hub in Sunshine. Because this was a general population focus group, no culturally targeted recruitment was undertaken. However, the range of cultural diversity within Brimbank was well represented by a variety of young people from Asian, Anglo-Australian, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander and African backgrounds.

Below is a breakdown of all focus group participants by cultural background and gender.

Table 3: Focus group participants by cultural background and gender

Cultural group and gender	Number of participants
Sudanese males	14
Pacific Islander males	13
Sudanese females	12
Pacific Islander females	5
Mixed gender general community	14[1]
Total	**58**

[1]8 males and 6 females - African, Anglo-Australian, Middle Eastern, and Pacific Islander background young people, including 3 Pacific Islander females

A senior researcher and 1-2 community research assistants from the Sudanese and/or Pacific Islander communities facilitated each focus group. Each focus group ran for approximately 1½ -2 hours. They were set up in locations that were easily accessible to participants by public transport (Victoria University's St Albans campus, local churches and at the St Albans Library) and held on weekends and Friday afternoons to maximise participation. In some instances, cab charges were used to transport participants to the focus group venue. At the beginning of the focus groups, participants were reassured about confidentiality and their informed consent to participate was obtained. As the focus groups were recorded, consent was also obtained for this to occur and participants were assured that only the chief investigators and project officer would have access to the tapes.

5 REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE SURVEY FINDINGS

This chapter provides an analysis of the survey data, reflecting the areas investigated through the survey: Demographics; Perceptions of community safety; Young people in groups; Young people and violent crime; Young people and police; and Working together to improve community safety.

5.1 Participant demographics

The demographics of the participant group represent Brimbank's high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and the locality's cultural and linguistic diversity. In summary, two thirds of the participants live with both parents, and another quarter live with mother only; most attend school or other educational institutions; two thirds have at least one parent working full-time as the main breadwinner; two thirds live in a house or flat that is either owned or mortgaged; and almost half (43%) had lived in their current suburb for less than 5 years.

The participants' diversity reflects Brimbank's demographics as a destination suburb for overseas-born and recently arrived Australian residents from a wide variety of countries, circumstances and cultural backgrounds. Over two thirds of the young people surveyed identified their primary cultural identity as 'non-Australian' or 'Australian plus another identity'; half spoke a language other than English at home; just over a quarter were born in another country; and 12% had lived in Australia for 5 years or less.

5.1.1 Age and gender

A total of 501 young people in the age range 15-19 participated in the survey. Overall, there were slightly more young women than young men; 46% were male and 54% were female. Most were aged 15 to 18 years because the survey was largely run through schools in the region. The male to female distribution across age was reasonably even, except at age 15, where there were more female than male participants (see Figure below). Most respondents were studying (97%) and most were at school (82%), as shown in the table below.

Figure 4: The percentage of male and female survey participants within each age group

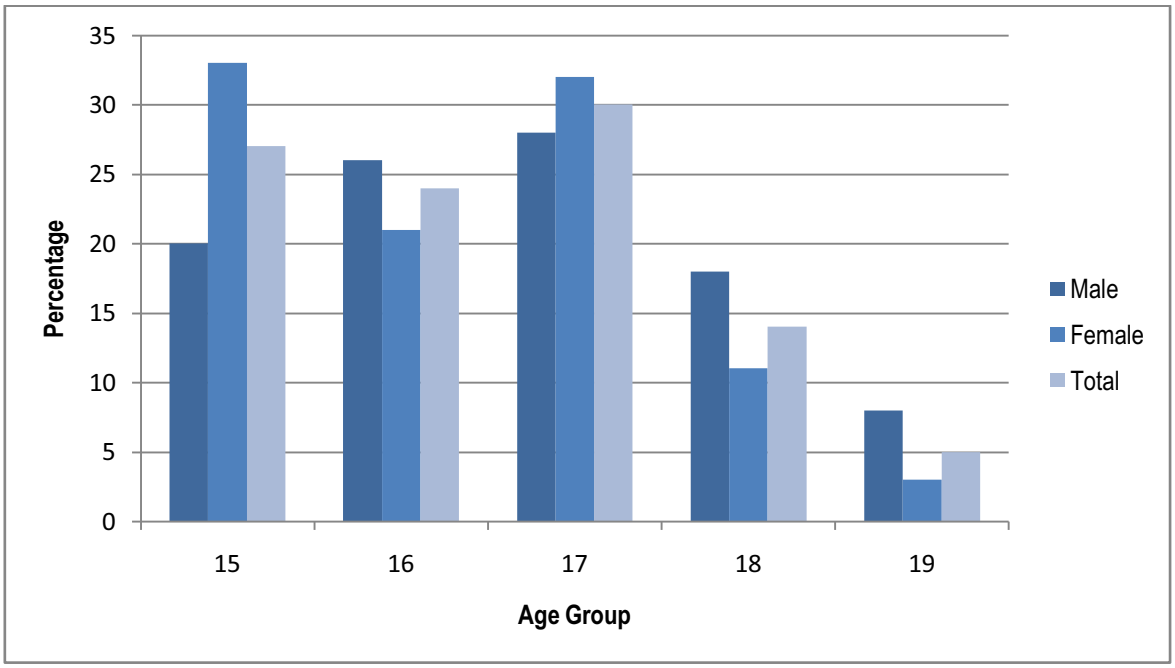


Table 4: Educational level

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL (%)	
High school (Year 10)	35
High school (Year 11)	17
High school (Year 12)	30
TAFE course	7
Apprenticeship	4
University course	4
Not Studying	3
Total	**100**

5.1.2 Culture and language

Almost three-quarters of respondents were born in Australia (73%). The next most common country of birth was Sudan (6%). Those born outside Australia came from a diverse range of countries; there were 44 reported countries of birth other than Australia (for a list of countries see Appendices). Of those born in another country close to half (44%) had been living in Australia for 5 years or less.

However, country of birth alone does not adequately describe the diversity of the participants. Although just over a quarter were born in another country (27%), over two thirds (70%) recorded their cultural identity as 'Australian and another cultural identity', or 'a cultural identity other than Australian'. Over half of the participants (52%) stated that they spoke a language other than English at home; 41 languages 'other than English' were spoken at home. For example, while only 2% were born in Vietnam, 8% reported speaking Vietnamese at home and chose Vietnamese as their cultural identity. These results are displayed in the following tables.

Table 5: Country of birth by continent

COUNTRIES OF BIRTH BY CONTINENT (%)	
Australia and NZ	76
Africa	9
Asia	9
Europe	4
Pacific Islands	1
Other	1
Total	**100**

Table 6: Length of residence in Australia for participants born overseas

IF YOU WERE BORN IN ANOTHER COUNTRY, HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED IN AUSTRALIA? (%)	
0-2	19
3-5	25
6-10	33
More than 10 years	23
Total	**100**

Table 7: Cultural identity

CULTURAL IDENTITY (%)	
Australian only[1]	30
Australian plus	14
Other identity only	56
Total	**100**

[1]The category of 'Australia only' includes participants who identified themselves as Australians, Australian Aboriginals, (6) and/or Torres Strait Islanders (1), and not from other cultures; 'Australian plus' includes participants who identified themselves as Australians and of another culture e.g. Australian and Vietnamese; 'Non-Australian only' includes participants who did not identify themselves as Australians but only of another cultural identity.

The table below shows a more detailed breakdown of cultural background for those who reported Australian plus another cultural identity or another cultural identity only. While 73% were born in Australia, 30% report Australian as their sole cultural identity.

Table 8: Cultural background

CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS[1] (%)	
Australia only	30
Pacific Islands	5
African	9
European	30
Asian	20
Other	6
Total	**100**

[1]'Pacific Islands' includes cultural backgrounds such as Fijian, Maori, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islander; 'African' includes backgrounds from African regions such as Sudan, Congo, South African and others; 'European' includes cultural backgrounds from European regions, such as Italy, Macedonia, Turkey, and others; 'Asian' includes backgrounds from Asian regions, such as China, Vietnam, Philippines, and others.

The table below shows the languages spoken at home, showing just over half spoke English and another language at home.

Table 9: Languages spoken at home

WHAT LANGUAGES ARE SPOKEN AT HOME? (%)	
English Only	48
English Plus	52
Total	**100**

Table 10 shows the range of languages spoken at home. Vietnamese (8%) was identified as the most spoken language other than English at home. 'Multiple Languages' is a summary category representing participants who stated that more than one other language was spoken.

Table 10: Languages other than English spoken at home

LANGUAGES OTHER THEN ENGLISH SPOKEN AT HOME (%)			
Acholi	0.2	Maori	0.2
Afghan	0.2	Polish	0.2
Albanian	0.6	Portuguese	0.2
Arabic	3.2	Punjabi	0.8
Assyrian	0.2	Romanian	0.2
Bosnian	0.6	Russian	0.4
Cantonese	0.2	Samoan	1.6
Croatian	1.0	Serbian	0.8
Dinka	1.2	Sinhalese	0.4
Greek	2.0	Slovenian	0.2
Hakka	0.6	Somalian	0.2
Hindi	0.4	Spanish	2.6
Hungarian	0.2	Tagalog	2.8
Indian	0.2	Tamil	0.4
Italian	0.8	Thai	0.2
Korean	0.2	Timorese	0.4
Laotian	0.2	Tongan	1.2
Lebanese	0.4	Turkish	2.8
Macedonian	3.4	Urdu	0.6
Maltese	2.0	Vietnamese	8.2
Mandarin	0.8	Multiple Languages	5.6

5.1.3 Socio-economic background

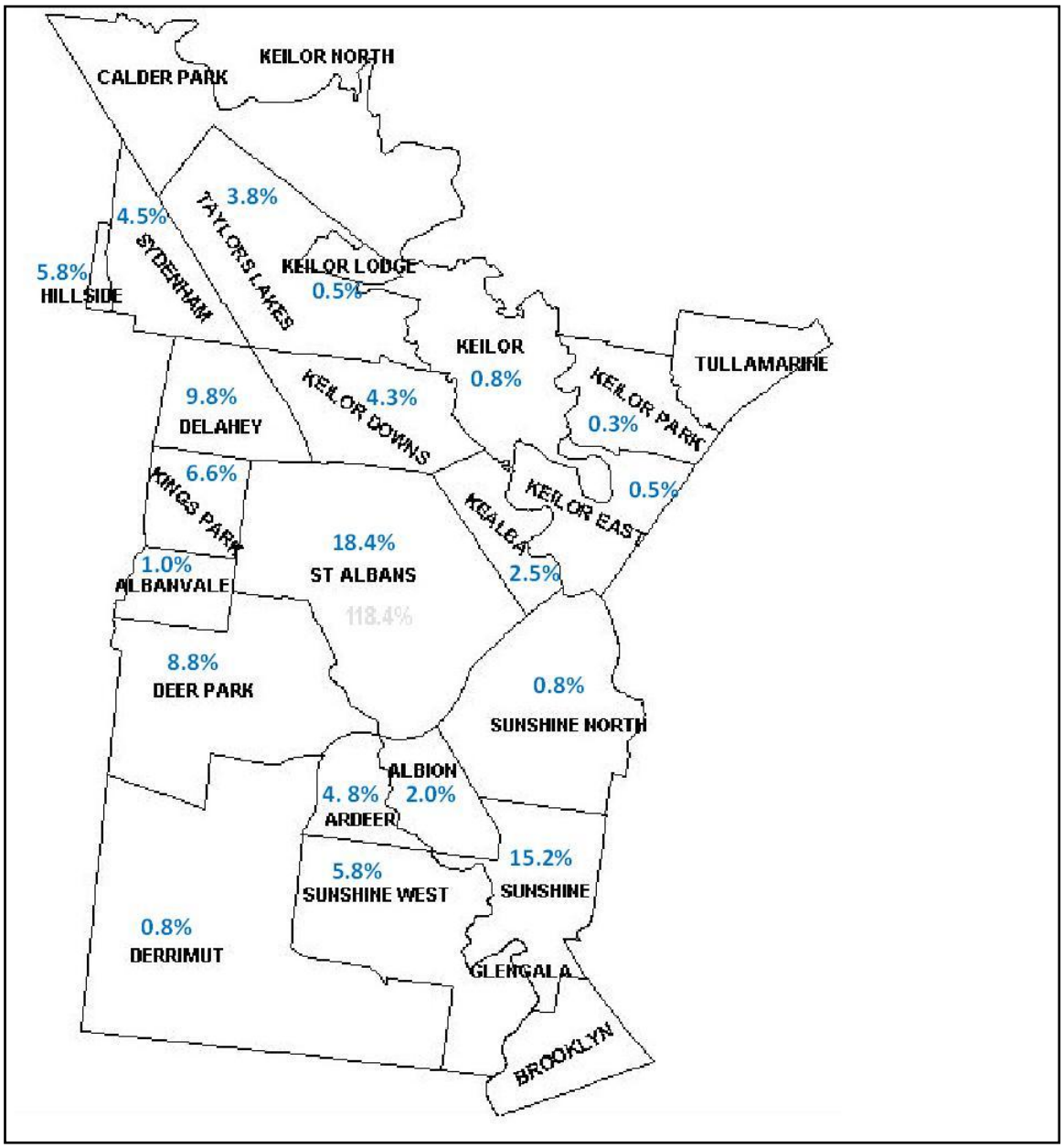
Socio-economic background (SEB) was explored through questions relating to suburb of residence, length of residence in that suburb, who participants lived with, employment status of the main income earner, and type of residence. All participants lived in or went to school in the Brimbank LGA. Most respondents were from St Albans followed by Sunshine, Delahey and Deer Park (see Figure 5 below). Just over half had lived in their current suburb of residence for over 5 years, while 43% had lived in their current suburb for less than 5 years.

Most respondents lived with both parents (66%), followed by those living with their mother only (24%). Most lived in an owned or mortgaged house or flat, followed by a rented house or flat, and a small number (7%) lived in public housing. Most respondents indicated that they lived with both their mother and father in an owned or mortgaged house or flat (64%). Those living with one parent only were more likely to be living in a rented house or flat (44%) than those living with both parents (17%). Only 29 participants (6%) did not live with either parent.

For the majority of participants, the main household income earner worked full-time (65%). 'Unemployed/receiving government benefits' was the second most common response at 14%, followed by working part time at 10%.

Participants were asked how they travelled to school, work or university; about half travelled by car and half by public transport or walking.

Figure 5: Percentage breakdown of participants by Brimbank suburb



Source: *Revised from Department of Human Services, State Government of Victoria: North and West Metropolitan Region.*[10]

[10] Retrieved from http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/operations/regional/north-west/regional-information/demographic-information/northandwestregion3

Table 11: Participants' family living arrangements

FAMILY LIVING ARRANGEMENTS (%)	
I live with my mother and father	66
I live with my mother	24
I live with my father	4
I live with my relatives	3
I live with my friends	1
I live with my husband/wife/partner	1
I live on my own	1
Total	**100**

Table 12: Type of housing

TYPE OF HOUSING (%)	
Owned/mortgaged house or flat	64
Rented house or flat	26
Public housing	7
Temporary Residence	1
Homeless	1
Unsure	1
Total	**100**

Table 13: Main type of household income

MAIN INCOME EARNER IN THE HOUSEHOLD (%)	
Working full-time	65
Working part-time	10
Casual/seasonal work	5
Unemployed/receiving government benefits	14
Don't know	6
Total	**100**

Table 14: Form of transport taken to school/work/university

FORM OF TRANSPORT TAKEN TO SCHOOL/WORK/UNIVERSITY[1] (%)	
Car	47
Bus	20
Walk	16
Train and Bus	8
Train	6
Bicycle	3
Total	**100**

[1]Due to survey error, a number of respondents skipped this question, N=202

5.2 Community safety

Section Two of the survey consisted of multiple choice and free text questions on what feeling safe meant to participants, and how safe or unsafe they felt in particular places in their neighbourhood, or in particular situations.

5.2.1 Definitions of safety

Feeling safe is the feeling you have within the neighbourhood, a [sense of] well being, of being able to walk freely without feeling insecure [or] afraid of what lurks around the corner.

One of the aims of this research was to investigate young people's own definitions of safety. The survey asked, *What does safety or feeling safe mean to you?* Thematic analysis of the responses (see Table 15 below) found that feeling safe meant an absence of anxiety walking around the street or neighbourhood. There was also an emphasis on not feeling in danger and the absence of heightened vigilance – 'looking over your shoulder', 'being watched', being aware of or fearful of strangers, of being approached without consent.

Table 15: Definitions of safety - themes

COMMON THEMES IN RESPONDENTS' DEFINITIONS OF SAFETY	
	Frequency
Feeling free from fear or anxiety	88
Feeling safe when walking down the street/around the neighbourhood	50
Feeling 'comfortable' in the local environment and with those around you	50
Not being or feeling 'in danger'	38
Feeling 'protected'	23
Being with or around family	21
Feeling 'secure'	21
Not being the victim of violence (e.g. shot, stabbed, hurt, bashed, attacked)	14

What emerges from these responses is that 'safety' and 'feeling safe' is most closely associated by young people with the freedom from fear, worry or anxiety at any time of the day or night, and the presence of family and/or friends. This definition fits well with Brimbank Council's definition of Community Safety as being 'based on perceptions of surroundings as much as experiences within those surroundings. Safety is felt when a person can live without fear of intentional or unintentional injury.'

5.2.2 Perceptions of safety in the neighbourhood

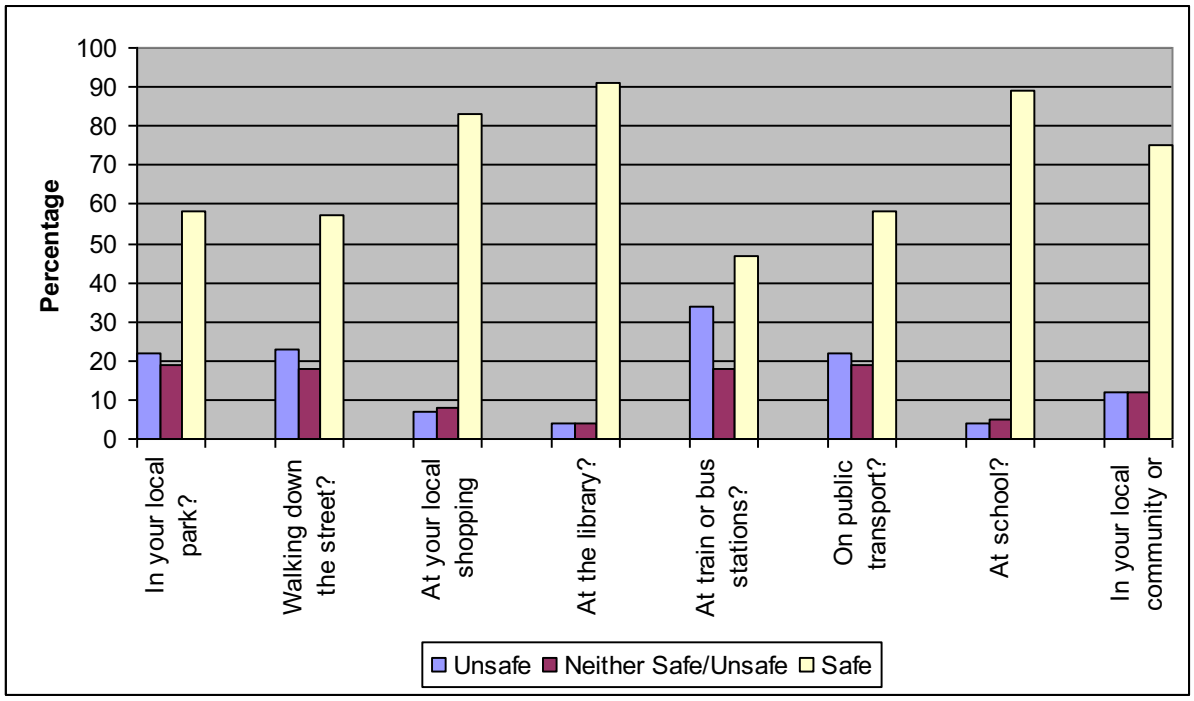
Young people were asked about local areas in which they felt safe or unsafe. Three quarters of the young people (75%) reported feeling safe in their local neighbourhood in general: 50% felt safe to extremely safe and 25% felt somewhat safe. Some said neither safe nor unsafe, and 12% reported feeling unsafe (see Table 16 below). This result is lower than findings of previous Victorian surveys where around 80% of young people reported feeling safe or having high levels of satisfaction with their safety (Department of Victorian Communities, 2005; DEECD and DPCP, 2008).

Table 16: Perception of safety in the local neighbourhood

HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY OR NEIGHBOURHOOD IN GENERAL? (%)	
Extremely safe	14
Safe	36
Somewhat safe	25
Neither safe/unsafe	13
Somewhat unsafe	6
Unsafe	4
Extremely unsafe	2
Total	**100**

School, the library and local shopping centres were the safest places (shown in Figure 6 below). School was reported as a safe environment by the vast majority (90%). This is in line with a similar recent Victorian survey showing 92% of young people reporting school as safe (DEECD and DPCP, 2008). In this sample a higher rating of safety was given by overseas-born students (94%), which is in contrast to other reports of lower levels of perceived safety at school for CALD students (DEECD and DPCP, 2008).

Figure 6: How safe or unsafe young people feel in areas of the neighbourhood during the day[1]



[1]Respondents were given a response choice on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 'extremely safe' to 'extremely unsafe' as in Table 16. The 'safe' category in this Figure is the sum of the first three responses 'extremely safe', 'safe' and 'somewhat safe'; the 'unsafe' category is the sum of the last three; 'extremely unsafe', 'unsafe' and 'somewhat unsafe'. The percentages are reported in figures in Table 21 and the complete data is in the Appendix.

As discussed above, three quarters (75%) reported feeling safe in the local neighbourhood. However, only 57-58% reported feeling safe walking down the street, being in the local park or being on public transport. Young

people in this survey reported much lower levels of safety walking down the street than in previous surveys. A 2007 survey of perception of safety from the general population (Department for Victorian Communities, Community Indicators Victoria, 2007) shows 90% felt safe or very safe walking alone in Brimbank during the day (the Victorian State average was 96%). Similarly, 96% of young people reported feeling safe or very safe walking alone in their local area during the day (DEECD and DPCP, 2008); this can be compared to 58% of young people in this survey feeling safe walking down the street in Brimbank (32% safe or extremely safe and 26% somewhat safe).

However, by far the strongest message emerging from these data is the lack of safety while waiting for public transport. Waiting at the train or bus station was the most unsafe place identified by participants, where about half (47%) felt some level of safety while a third (34%) felt a level of being unsafe. Waiting for public transport was reported as less safe than travelling on public transport.

In addition to choosing from the options of places given above, participants were asked to identify areas in which they felt unsafe. It is important to note that about one third of survey respondents said that they did not have any places in their local area where they felt unsafe. Of those who did feel unsafe, participants again overwhelmingly reported feeling unsafe while waiting for trains and buses at local stations or transport hubs, particularly in Sunshine and St Albans. Below are some of these young people's comments:

> *The places that I feel unsafe are bus stations and train stations especially.*
>
> *Waiting at train stations, there should be security because there [are] a lot of creepy people.*
>
> *Especially the public transport area, Sunshine Station. There are always constant fights and robbery. It's the insecurity of being alone, especially at night time.*
>
> *Taking public transport down at my area is extremely unsafe. Going to take public transport has been one of my worst fears, perpetrators are lurking everywhere giving disgusting gestures, swearing and drinking.*
>
> *I feel unsafe at my local bus shelter. I also feel unsafe when I am walking to the shopping centre alone.*
>
> *The train station, not only on the platform but around it also.*
>
> *Mainly at bus stops, train stations and on public transport. Around these areas makes me feel extremely unsafe and intimidated*.

Train stations were also nominated as unsafe areas in a 2004 safety survey of the Brimbank general population (Brimbank Council, 2004). In the current survey, additional places nominate as unsafe included parks, streets, and alleyways. Participants also emphasized feeling less safe at night or in unlit or poorly lit areas.

Time of day was explored separately in the survey and most places were reported as more unsafe at night. However, about one quarter were reported as equally unsafe during the day – unsafe all the time.

Table 17: Perception of safety in local areas and time of day

ARE THESE PLACES MORE UNSAFE AT NIGHT, DURING THE DAY OR ALL THE TIME? (%)	
Day	4
Night	69
All the time	27
Total	**100**

Participants were asked what it was about the places they nominated that made them feel unsafe. Other than the perception that darkness made an area unsafe, the responses all related to the types of people in the area and their behaviour; violent behaviour, aggressive and intrusive behaviour, and the perceived presence of substance abuse. This includes behaviours such as being stared at, being asked for things (e.g. money, time, directions), attempted theft, fights, swearing, rudeness, screaming or feeling 'disrespected'. Overall, young people emphatically identified behaviours they considered to be threatening, confronting, 'aggro', dangerous, suspicious or uncomfortable as contributing to their perception of lack of safety in relation to specific places in their local area. A significant number of these behaviours are in turn linked to particular social groups, such as the perceived presence of gangs, gang activity, drug use and users, drunkenness and 'stranger danger'. The responses could be summed up by this participant's comment:

> *I feel pretty safe most places; it is more the feeling of unsafe people that make places seem or feel unsafe for me*.

The appearance of places was also raised and is an interesting focus that could be explored further. While not related to policing per se, the appearance of places may have some influence on perceptions of the greater need for police in areas that are consistently dirty, poorly maintained, of low quality infrastructure or otherwise neglected. Crime prevention design has been developed as an architectural and planning specialty aimed at using design to reduce crime and increase perception of safety in local neighbourhoods (Colquhoun, 2004). The neglected appearance of some local places may lead to an increase in the perception of them as places where crime may occur, in line with Victorian community safety frameworks emphasising poor physical and social infrastructure as factors that contribute to fear of crime in communities (*Safer Streets and Homes*, 2002).

Table 18: Perceptions of what makes places unsafe

PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT MAKES PLACES UNSAFE	
	Frequency
Drug use, users, dealing	44
Gangs and gang related activity	32
The type of people (scary people, people who are there)	26
Violence (with or without weapons)	19
Drunkenness and alcohol consumption	19
Strangers	16
Crowds or large groups of people	14
Cars driving too fast	6
No or not enough police around	4

Notably, there was virtually no focus on linking place, lack of safety and ethnicity; only 4 young people mentioned ethnicity.

A further analysis of the data was undertaken to investigate whether perception of safety on public transport was related to public transport use. Young people who travel to school by car reported a higher level of feeling unsafe being on public transport and at train and bus stations compared to those who reported using public transport to get to school or walking.

Table 19: Perception of safety on public transport and usual mode of travel to school

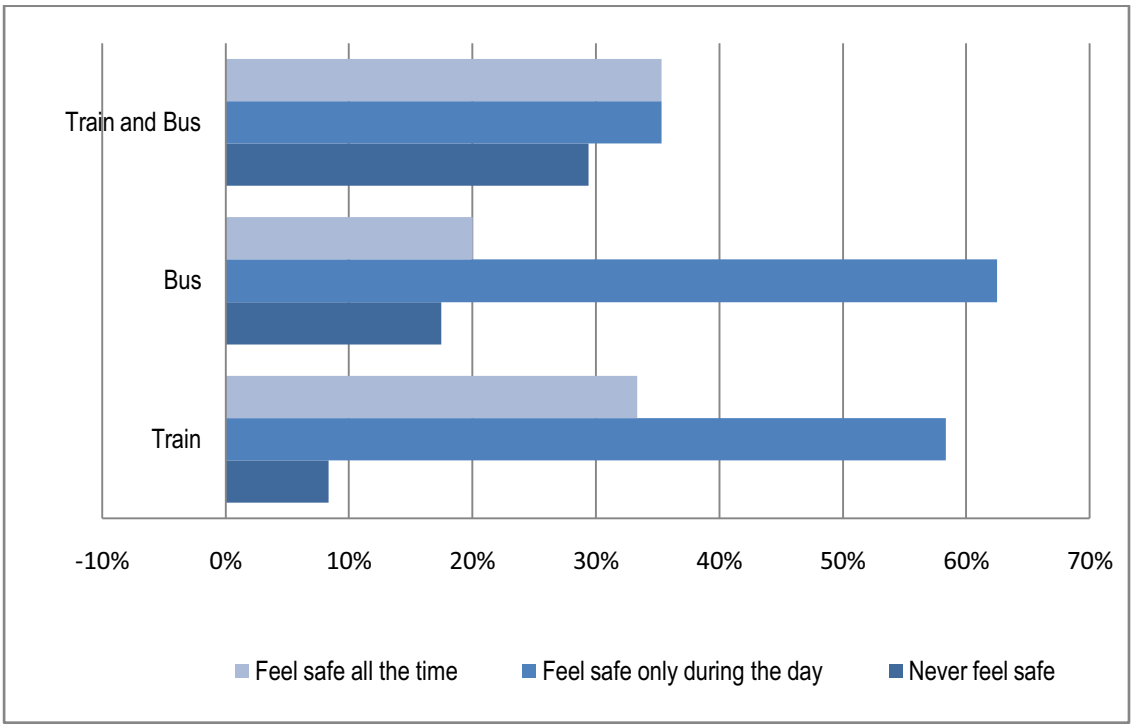
PERCEPTION OF SAFETY ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT	USUAL MODE OF TRAVEL TO SCHOOL (%)			
	Walk	Public transport (bus and train)	Car	Total
Safe	30	33	25	29
Somewhat safe	28	29	27	28
Neither safe/unsafe	10	19	19	17
Somewhat unsafe	16	15	16	15
Unsafe	16	4	13	10
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 20: Perception of safety at train and bus stations

PERCEPTION OF SAFETY AT TRAIN/BUS STATIONS	USUAL MODE OF TRAVEL TO SCHOOL (%)			
	Walk	Public transport (bus and train)	Car	Total
Safe	28	20	13	18
Somewhat safe	16	32	26	27
Neither safe/unsafe	16	16	19	17
Somewhat unsafe	9	15	15	14
Unsafe	31	17	27	24
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Further analysis showed that perception of safety also depended on the type of public transport options used (see Figure 7 below). Young people who used both train and bus were more likely to report never feeling safe (29%) than those on the train only (8% never feel safe) or bus only (18% never feel safe).

Figure 7: Type of transport taken and perception of safety on public transport



5.2.3 Safety perception and gender

There were gender differences in perceived safety. Overall, young men reported feeling safe in public places more than young women. This gender difference in reports of safety has also been found in previous safety surveys of young people in Australia (DEECD and DPCP, 2008). In this study, young men overall reported a higher level of safety on public transport, on train and bus stations and at the park than young women. This is interesting given that statistics on crimes against person show that young men in this age group are at a higher risk of being a victim of crime in a public place than young women. This difference is even more marked if the sub-categories of safe are taken into account. Young men were more likely than young women to report being extremely safe, and young women were more likely to report being somewhat safe rather than extremely safe. It is likely that this difference partly reflects constructions of masculinity. Young women reported a higher level of safety than young men in safer places such as: school, the library, and the local shopping centre (see Tables 21-23 below).

Table 21: Gender differences in reported levels of safety in areas of the public space

HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL	GENDER (%)		
	Male	Female	Total
In the neighbourhood in general?			
Safe	74	77	76
Neither safe/unsafe	12	12	12
Unsafe	14	11	12
At school?			
Safe	88	93	90
Neither safe/unsafe	6	4	5
Unsafe	6	3	5

On public transport?			
Safe	67	52	58
Neither safe/unsafe	19	20	20
Unsafe	15	28	22
At train or bus stations?			
Safe	55	41	47
Neither safe/unsafe	19	18	19
Unsafe	26	41	34
At the library?			
Safe	89	94	92
Neither safe/unsafe	2	5	4
Unsafe	9	1	4
At your local shopping centre?			
Safe	82	85	84
Neither safe/unsafe	7	10	8
Unsafe	11	5	7
Walking down the street?			
Safe	61	56	58
Neither safe/unsafe	16	20	18
Unsafe	23	24	24
In your local park?			
Safe	65	54	59
Neither safe/unsafe	16	21	19
Unsafe	19	25	22

Table 22: Gender differences within the category of 'safe' - in the neighbourhood

PERCEPTION OF SAFETY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Extremely safe	28	12	19
Safe	46	50	48
Somewhat safe	27	38	33
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 23: Gender differences within the category of 'safe' - on train or bus stations

PERCEPTION OF SAFETY AT TRAIN OR BUS STATIONS	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Extremely safe	12	2	7
Safe	41	22	32
Somewhat safe	47	76	61
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

5.3 Young people in groups in public places

Section Three of the survey consisted of ten questions about young people in groups or gangs. As earlier studies have indicated, 'hanging out' with friends overwhelmingly defines the primary reason for young people gathering in groups in public. As the table below shows, 76% of young people reported hanging out in public fairly often or sometimes in a group in a public place; only 8% said they did not do this at all. Gender differences were small,

with boys slightly more likely to report hanging out fairly often. Most hang out in the afternoon with males in the sample slightly more likely than females to hang out after 6pm.

Table 24: Gender differences in reported 'hanging out' in groups in public places

DO YOU REGULARLY HANG OUT IN GROUPS IN PUBLIC PLACES?	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Yes fairly often	37	31	34
Sometimes	40	43	42
Not often	15	18	16
Not at all	8	8	8
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

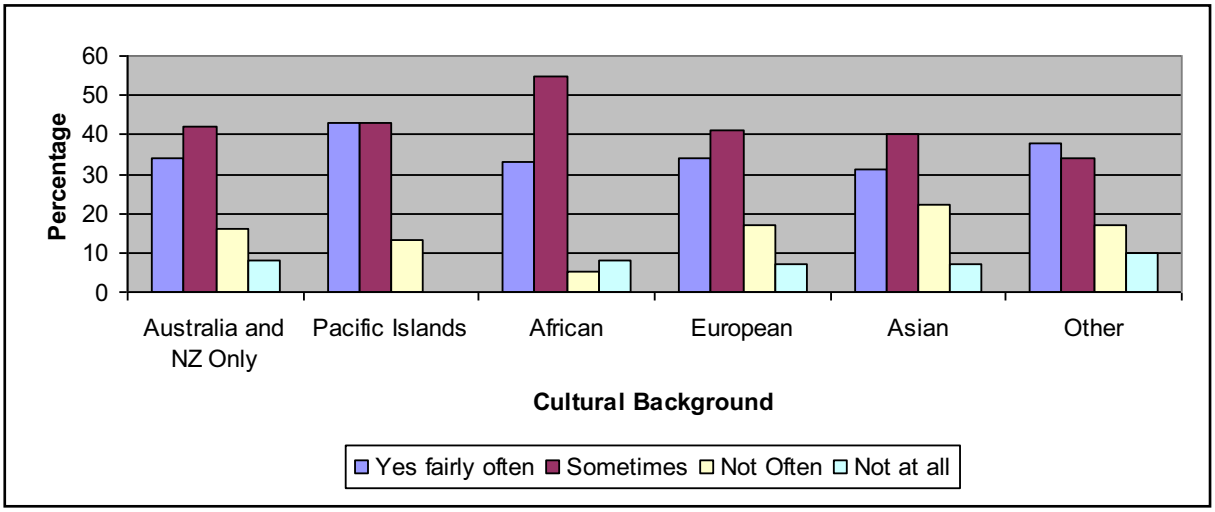
Table 25: Most likely time of day for 'hanging out' in groups in public places[1]

WHEN ARE YOU MOST LIKELY TO DO THIS?[1]	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Morning	4	6	5
Afternoon	57	76	68
6-10pm	25	15	20
After 10pm	14	3	7
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

[1]Note: Those who chose 'Not at all' for Question 23 - 'Do you regularly hang out in groups in public places?' - have been omitted (N= 39).

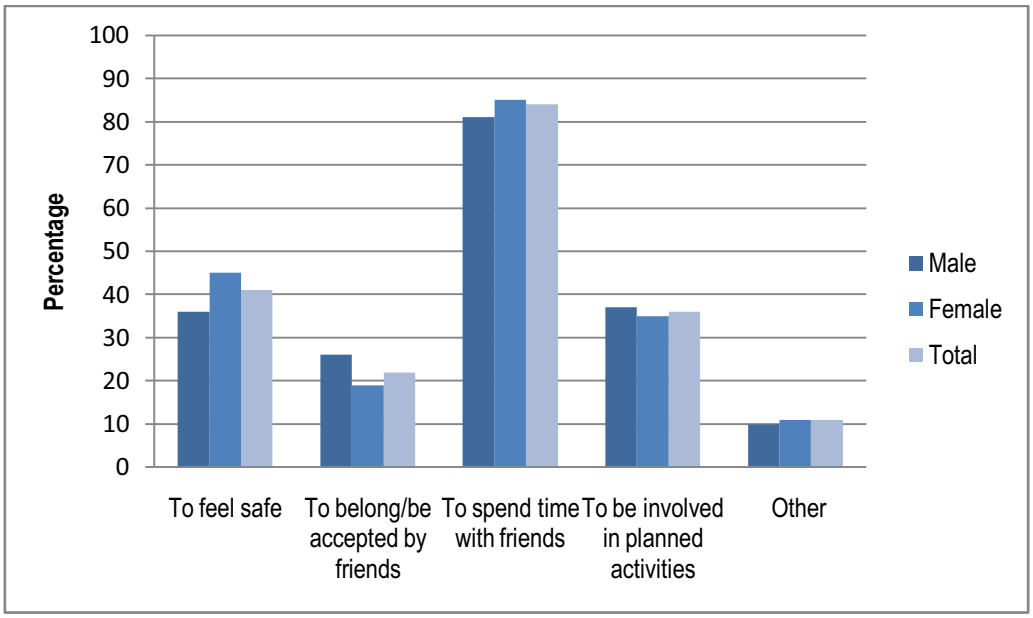
An analysis of 'hanging out' in public places by cultural background revealed that young people who described their cultural background within the category of 'African' were more likely than other groups to hang out 'sometimes'. However, the Pacific Islanders were the group most likely to hang out in public 'fairly often'. It should be noted that Pacific Islanders made up only 5% of the sample when compared to other groups, such as Australia and New Zealand, which made up 34% of the total sample.

Figure 8: Gathering in public places and cultural background



Participants were asked about their reasons for hanging out and could choose more than one reason. The most popular response was 'to spend time with friends', followed by 'to feel safe', 'to be involved in planned activities' and 'to belong/be accepted by friends'.

Figure 7: Main reasons for wanting to hang out in groups in public places[1]



[1]Note: Participants could tick more than one response. Percentages are % of participants within the same gender that chose the same reasons (e.g. 36% of males chose to hang out to feel safe, which means that 64% of the males did not choose that option).

An analysis of reasons for wanting to hang out in groups in public places by cultural background, as illustrated in Figure 9 below, showed that young people who described their cultural background as 'Asian' were more likely to say they hang out in public to spend time with friends and to engage in planned activities than other groups. Pacific Islander young people were the least likely to choose 'to belong and be accepted by friends' as a reason for hanging out in groups in public, and African-background young people were the most likely to choose 'to feel safe' as a reason for hanging out in groups. Other reasons given for hanging out were: socialisation and fun with peers ('kicking back', 'hanging out'); 'looking cool', and accessibility to friends.

Figure 9: Main reasons for wanting to hang out in groups in public places and cultural background

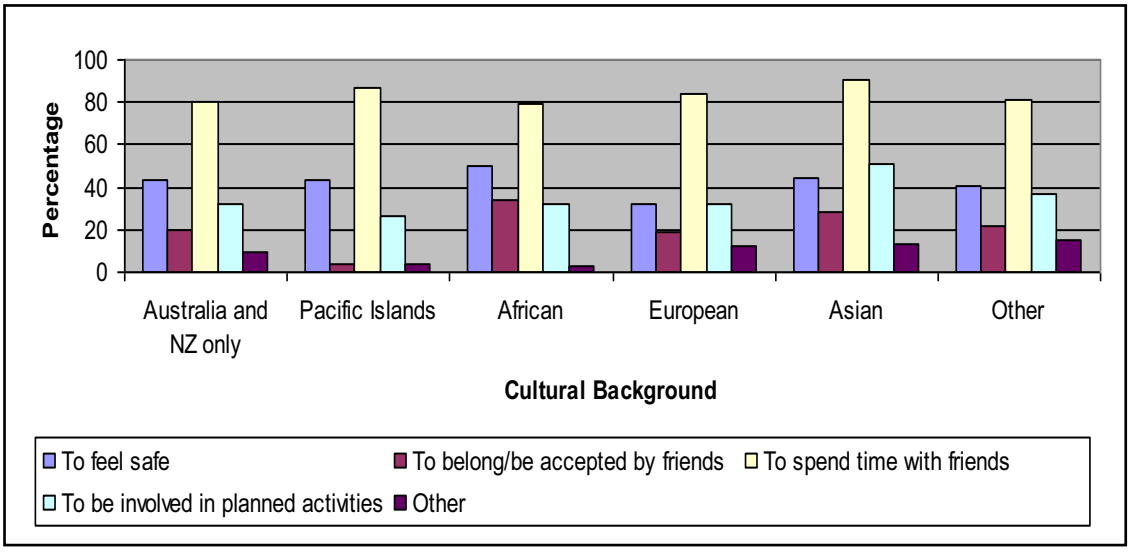


Table 26: Places where young people report they hang out in public

PLACES WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE REPORT THEY HANG OUT IN PUBLIC	
	Frequency
Shopping centre/mall	183
Local parks and Skate parks	86
City	82
Movies/Cinemas	42
Local Shops	31
Station (Sunshine and Footscray in particular)	27

Shopping centres and local shops account for 212 responses, or slightly under half the sample, and probably represent very close to half the sample when the 'city' responses (some of which refer to shopping) are factored in. Shopping centres have been reported as the most popular place for young people to socialise in a previous Australian study (White and Mason, 2006). 'Hanging out' and being part of public spaces and public life are also important factors in this context.

Local parks are the next most common area for public hanging out for those surveyed. The references to parks are by and large non-specific with respect to location or neighbourhood – the few that are mentioned include Santana Park, Footscray Park and St Albans Park.

5.3.1 Perceptions of gangs in Brimbank

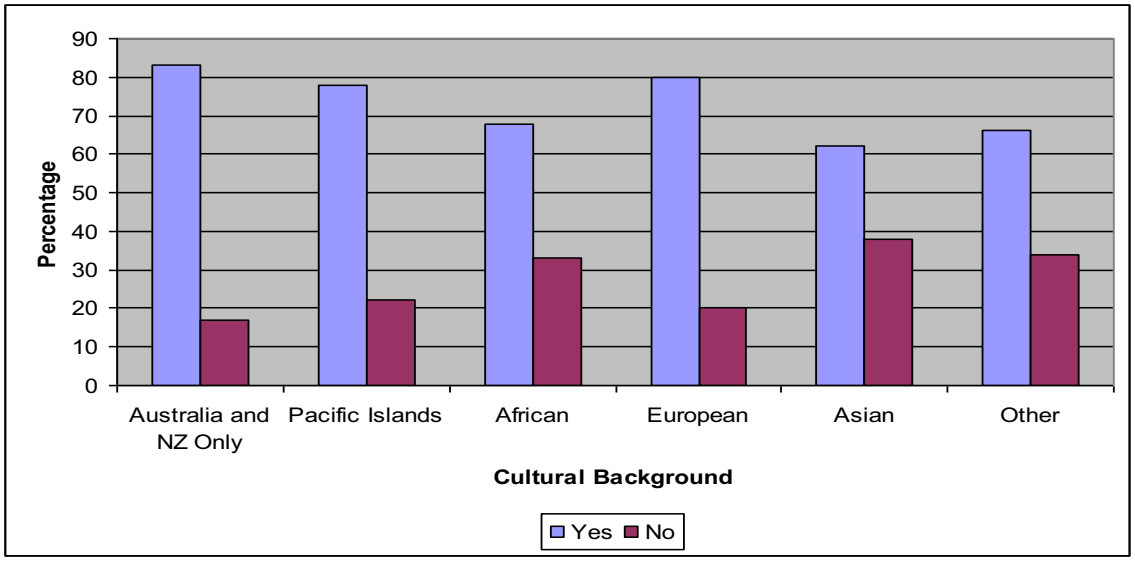
Three quarters of the young people in the survey believe there are 'gangs' in their local area and there was no gender difference in this response. While this study is not about organized crime, these findings can be compared to Collins et al.'s (2004) work in Sydney where two thirds of the adults surveyed thought there were organized crime gangs in their local area; there was no gender difference in reporting of perceptions of organized crime and there was no age difference in this perception, with two thirds of the young people reporting the same view.

Table 27: Perceptions of gang activity in the local area

DO YOU THINK THERE ARE 'GANGS' IN YOUR LOCAL AREA?	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Yes	76	74	75
No	24	26	25
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

The figure below shows the relationship between cultural background and the perception of gangs in respondents' local areas. Young people who identified their cultural background as 'Australian' or 'New Zealand' (excluding those who identified as Pacific Islanders) were most likely to perceive that there were gangs in their local area, followed by 'Europeans' and 'Pacific Islanders'.

Figure 10: Percentage of participants who think there are gangs in their local area and their cultural backgrounds



Half of the participants reported fear of gangs; one fifth were very scared and a further one third felt 'a little bit scared'. 14% of respondents also indicated that they were 'not scared at all' (see Table 28 below).

Table 28: Fear of gangs

ARE YOU SCARED OF GANGS?	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Very	16	22	19
A little bit scared	21	38	30
Not sure	18	18	18
Not very scared	25	13	19
Not scared at all	20	9	14
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

5.3.2 Encounters with gangs

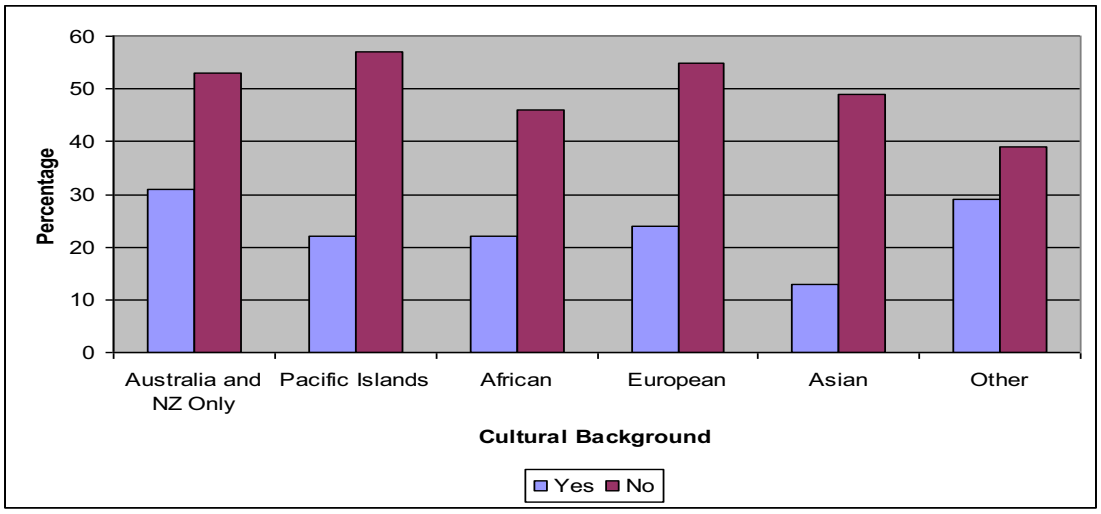
Participants were asked if they had had any encounters with gangs, and one third answered 'yes' to this question. Young men were more likely to report encounters with gangs than young women.

Table 29: Young people's reports of encounters with gangs

HAVE YOU HAD ANY ENCOUNTERS WITH GANGS?	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Yes	41	24	32
No	59	76	68
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

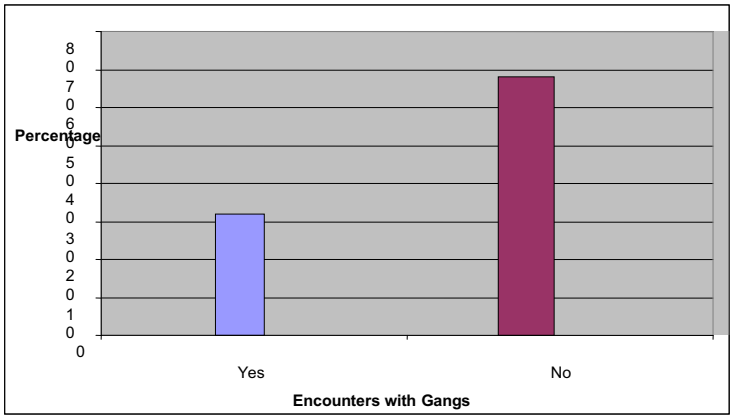
The analysis of encounters with gangs showed no real differences across cultural backgrounds (see Figure 11 below). Those from Australian and NZ cultural backgrounds were most likely to report encounters with gangs compared to other cultural backgrounds.

Figure 11: Reports of encounters with gangs and participants' cultural background



The participants who responded 'yes' when asked if they believed there were gangs in their local area were also analysed as to whether they had had any encounters with gangs. Most (68%) of those who did think there were gangs in their local area had not had any encounters with gangs.

Figure 12: Perception of presence of gangs and report of encounters with gangs



Of the those who said 'yes' to having encounters with 'gangs', 101 responses included further comment or description. Some of these responses were negative, some positive and some ambivalent, reflecting a spectrum of both types and frequencies of encounters between young people and 'gangs' in the survey data.

Specifically, in relation to the issue of how encounters with gangs relate to perceptions of community safety and feeling safe for young people, not all encounters with 'gangs' reported in the survey by young people are necessarily either positive or negative, but may be strategic, pragmatic or involve historical relationships where young people's views of these encounters have changed over time. This is well illustrated by the differing stories about gang encounters told by some young women in the survey, which reveal negative encounters but also demonstrate how some young people strategically manage their relationships with 'gangs' to increase their own sense of personal safety and security.

Several young women in the survey report encounters with young males perceived to be gang members that have a clear negative impact on their sense of personal and community safety, as the following representative comments illustrate:

> *I was walking home and a group of gang members stopped me and decided to touch me inappropriately and call me sexual names until I slipped away with an unknown adult who pretended they knew me*.

> *Name calling - sluts, whores, the usual ….felt like a piece of meat*.

Such responses, while limited in number in the qualitative survey data, are significant because they correspond to similar focus group data from Sudanese young women around sexual menace and coercion by perceived gang members. Some Sudanese young women reported feeling compelled to enter into sexual relationships with gang members in order to protect a male relative (e.g. younger brother), or to avoid being beaten up or further harassed themselves (see Chapter 6 below).

In contrast, however, another young woman's narrative in the survey data also suggests that some young women can use their affiliation or friendship with local gangs or crews to settle scores or to enhance their own feelings of being safe and protected:

> *I was hanging out with a friend and she started to make trouble with this girl and the girl followed us home and she called up the gang and the girl got bashed but I was lucky because I knew one of the girls in the gang. So I got let off*.

Unsurprisingly, where personal friendships/relationships with perceived 'gang' members exist, this involves a reduced perception of threat or lack of safety in relation to local gangs: '*Well, some of them are kinda cool, they were friends of friends and they seemed harmless.'* Where past friendships with local gangs or gang members do influence positive perceptions of safety and wellbeing, they can also be fluid and mobile for young people, reflecting changing perceptions over time: '*Yes, this happened 3 years ago but it was just my old mates that thought they were in Bloods. They've grown up and matured now, thank God.'* '*Yes. I was friends with them but they do too much stupid stuff.'*

Some of the detailed encounters described by young people in the survey offered specific information around where locally identified gangs hang out. In line with earlier responses to questions about gangs and groups, they focus on the kinds of behaviours young people see as aligned with local gangs and gang activity, as the micro-narratives below suggest:

> *KPC [Kings Park Crew] and the St Albans Boys plus YSNK (Young St Albans and Kingsville] have been at the St Albans Festival where their rivals, the Sunshine Boys have come and trouble has broken loose, where there are young children who witness the fights and even weapons produced*.

> *I was with my older brother and his friends who are in [their] mid-20s when we walked past the Sunshine Boyz at Highpoint because they are known to hang out there. And my brother's friends are bigger and older and more in numbers and the Sunshine Boys just said, Ooo, scary. [They were] joking around but really they knew they had to say something to protect their reputation, when at the same time they didn't want to*.

> *I was at the pizza shop with a few mates waiting for pizza and my boyfriend to finish work there. And there was a gang of people there drinking and yelling, one guy said to me, 'Hold my fukn smoke, bitch'.*

> *I just walked off and* the guy pulled out a knife and put it to my throat. Another time I was walking to my cuzn's house and a gang came up to me and started to throw glass bottles at us…

The final word goes to a respondent who identified as a 'gang' member at one time but took a pragmatic approach to her involvement with local gangs: *'I bounced out because it was getting in the way with my studying.'* This comment suggests something of the way in which these young people are negotiating social relationships but also balancing and revising priorities around present needs (social acceptance) and future plans (study and careers). This comment points to the need for further research in the Australian context that focuses specifically on how young people move into but also *out of* affiliation and involvement with local street gangs.

5.3.3 Differences between groups and gangs

'Gangs give you the glare, groups give you the smile'

It is important to understand what young people in the Brimbank region perceive the key differences to be between 'groups' and 'gangs' when thinking further about the wide-spread perception of gangs within the Brimbank locality. Groups were seen in general by young people in the survey *as 'people displaying a non-hostile disposition, laughing, talking and having fun'.* The perception of what constitutes a group was common across most responses, groups of young people were defined as being 'relaxed', 'chilling', 'friendly to others', 'hanging out', 'having fun', 'minding their own business', 'smiling', 'not staying too long in one place'. As respondents noted,

> *I can tell the difference between a gang and a group of people hanging out because usually a gang will be all tough and loud and don't really care if they get into trouble, whereas a group of people hanging out are more there to have fun and not cause any trouble.*

> *A group of people hanging out is when they are harmless to the community and they keep to themselves and cause no disruption. A gang starts to make the community feel awkward and uncomfortable and maybe even feeling unsafe. Gangs can also be violent and cause harm to others around them.*

In thinking about what distinguishes a 'group' from a 'gang', most young people felt that the main differences between a 'group' and a 'gang' revolved around behavioural elements, appearance, and intentionality. Many young people associated 'gangs' with what one respondent called '*attitudes, reputation and big mouths'*.

Anti-social and criminal behaviour were seen by young people in the survey as the key markers identifying the difference between a 'group' and a 'gang', a perception echoed in the literature on youth gangs, anti-social behaviour and violence. While earlier research suggests that youth gangs engage in both 'conventional and anti-social behaviour' with each other (Thornbury, 2001 cited in Vigil, 2003), 'it is the anti-social behaviour...that attracts the attention of authorities as well as the general public' (Vigil 2003: 226) and accordingly governs the perceptions of what constitutes a 'gang' as opposed to a 'group'.

For respondents to the survey, violent behaviour, fights and bashings were the most commonly identified feature of what distinguishes a 'group' from a 'gang', with 19% of young people identifying this as the major difference between 'groups' and 'gangs'.

Table 30: Markers of "gang' versus 'group'

MARKERS OF 'GANG' VERSUS 'GROUP'	
Violent and antisocial behaviour	violence, bashing and fights making others feel unsafe, harming or endangering others or self generalised doing of 'bad things' – behaviour, language' engaging in vandalism, including graffiti, or other criminal damage bullying, abusive or intimidating behaviour and language weapons carriage drug use and/or trafficking
Appearance	'Looking rough', 'dangerous', 'shifty', 'shady' 'Trying to lay low and look cool' Wearing clothes, body decoration or accessories associated with transnational 'gangsta' culture: 'hoodies, baggy pants, big tops, tatts, bandanas, colours'
Intentionality	Territorial purposes - To appear 'cocky', like they 'own the place' Status-seeking purposes - To assert their perceived social status and reputation – '*They think they're top shit*' Attention-seeking purposes - To make sure they are noticed through disturbances, general nuisance behavior

More generally, the kinds of behaviour associated with 'gang' identity and activity included generalised nuisance behaviour in public: being loud or rowdy, yelling out to/at others in public; being disruptive of the local environment, 'in your face', 'looking for trouble', prepared for a fight; being intimidating, invasive of others' space, and staring and 'eyeballing'.

The perception of 'eyeballing and staring' as features of 'gang' behavior and practice is significant because this corresponds to findings in the Pacific Islander focus groups that 'eyeballing' and the perception of inappropriate staring is seen as a trigger for conflict escalation for youth within the Pacific Islander community (see Chapter 6 below).

Despite being unhappy about the ways in which young people themselves are often stereotyped by police on the basis of appearance or fashion sense, 'gangs' were nevertheless frequently associated by young people in the survey with particular kinds of appearance, such as looking cool or dangerous or wearing particular items.

The combined elements of behaviour and appearance described above are interpreted by young people in the survey to connote particular motives or intentions for young people perceived to be in 'gangs' rather than 'groups', based on how respondents in the survey read peer behaviour, body language and dress or body decoration. Young people are perceived by survey respondents to be in 'gangs' rather than 'groups' for the purposes of territory, status or attention.

However, 'gangs' were simultaneously seen by some respondents as *lacking* a specific reason for being together. Whereas 'groups' of young people were generally seen as purposeful (e.g. coming together for a

specific recreational activity or to simply enjoy each other's company ('hanging out'); 'gangs' were seen in one of two ways: either as lacking in purpose (hanging or loitering without a plan or destination), or else coming together primarily in order to intimidate, harass, start a fight or to back each other up.

Out of 478 young people who offered qualitative responses to this question, only two respondents mentioned ethnicity. However, this is at odds with the quantitative survey data, in which 54% of young people said that shared ethnic background was one reason why young people joined gangs (see Table 32).The discrepancy here may be explained by the 'forced question' in the drop-down selections for the question 'Why do young people join gangs?' which provided 'shared ethnic background' as an option.

Only a small minority of young people (10) defined the difference between 'gangs' and 'groups' primarily in terms of weapons carriage. Definitions of 'gangs' were linked by some respondents to group size, e.g. '8', '8+', '10 or more', '14-30', or '50'. '*More than 5'* was offered several times as a threshold number for constituting a 'gang'. A few young people also associated groups transforming into gangs based on the time of day (e.g. *'after 9 pm'; 'after school');* or by location (e.g. *'at station'; 'especially at the transport train and bus station or game arcade areas').* There were also occasional associations with age (e.g. *'after the age of 10', 'after the age of 15', 'after 15 or 16'*), suggesting that at least some young people link 'gang' membership or predisposition with processes of socialisation and rites of passage (White, 2000). While the age threshold identified here is slightly older than that identified in US research, which suggests that the 'modal age of gang joining' is 13-15 years of age (Maxson, Whitlock and Klein, 1998: 71), the process of joining a gang or engaging in gang-related activity is nevertheless linked to adolescent development both within the literature and by some young people in the survey.

5.3.4 From 'groups' to 'gangs'

In addition to the focus on the behavioural, appearance-based and intentionality-based factors perceived to distinguish 'groups' from 'gangs', there is some emphasis in the qualitative data on the perception that 'groups' of young people transform into 'gangs' through the practice of self-naming – that is, group members 'become' a 'gang' when they begin recognising themselves as such and come to be seen in this way by others (Maxson and Klein, 1989; Spergel, 1995; Klein, 1995). This suggests that a number of these young people understand the dynamic of 'gangs' versus 'groups' to occur through the process of self-identification by group members in order to be noticed, to wield power, to bond, to include some and exclude others. Consider the following pair of statements – one emphasising friendship, safety, security; the other intimidation, fear and threat towards others:

> *I think a group of people become a gang when they all feel safe with one another and aim to look out for each other in any situation*.

> *I think a group of young people become a gang when they are seen to be frightening or threatening to other people and also when they themselves choose to classify themselves as that and make a public idea that they are a gang.*

These statements suggest that perceptions around the differences between 'groups' and 'gangs' can be strongly influenced by whether a young person identifies with the social politics of belonging in which such formations are embedded.

The major themes emerging from responses as to why young people in the survey thought that groups of young people transformed into 'gangs' may be categorised as follows:

To belong or feel socially accepted	To be loyal to peers	To feel better about oneself, including feeling safer or more secure
To intimidate, harass and bully	To look 'cool' and feel superior	To manage experiences and/or feelings of isolation, alienation or exclusion

Young people's perceptions of why some people join gangs are discussed in Section 5.3.5 below in response to the question, *'Why do you think people join gangs?'*

The main differences between 'groups' and 'gangs' that emerged from the data were the linking of 'groups' with friendly, relaxed, non-confrontational and non-intrusive behaviour in public for the purpose of hanging out, having fun and generally enjoying the company of peers. By contrast, 'gangs' were identified with violence, physical and verbal intimidation, criminal activity and generally threatening or abusive behaviour towards others, as well as with general disruptive behaviour and rowdiness in public. The association between gangs and violence is strong: 19% of young people in the sample referred to violent or physically harmful behaviour in their definitions of what distinguishes a 'gang' from a 'group', and 44%, a significant proportion of the sample, see gangs as defined by physically aggressive, violent and anti-social behavior more generally. This contrasts with 3% of respondents citing only verbal intimidation and abusiveness as primary characteristics of perceived gang-like behaviour.

While young people in the survey were strongly inclined to see specific kinds of behaviour as defining the difference between 'groups' and 'gangs', this is complemented by an emphasis on the size of the group in question – the larger the group, the more likely it is to be seen as a 'gang', aligning with White's (2000) findings on the significance of group size in defining what constitutes a gang.

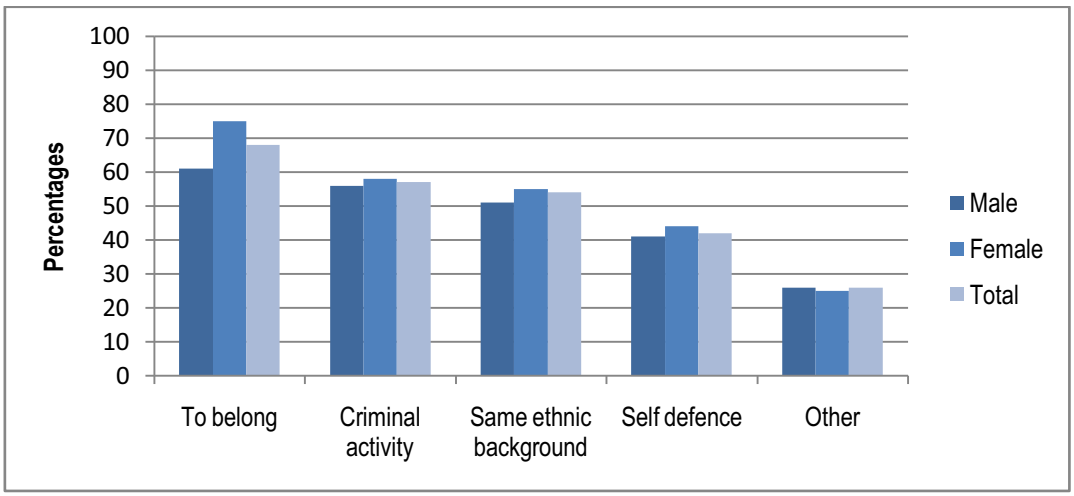
There is consistent analysis from young people here about why groups morph into gangs, or aspire to self-identify as gangs. Most of these reasons focus on increasing a sense of social inclusion, safety, belonging and power, and decreasing a sense of social isolation, insecurity, powerlessness or being unwanted. Key themes include the desire to belong, to feel safe, to seek approval or respect, to be noticed, to feel 'better' or more superior to others, to exclude others (in order to feel like an 'insider'), to feel and behave powerfully, and to minimise feelings of alienation or being rejected.

The data also show that it is critically important to many of these young people to feel 'backed up', protected by a larger group of peers who will 'stand up' for them. Alignment with a self-identified 'gang' can create and promote this sense of belonging and being protected. Young people in this category tend to have either mixed feelings or somewhat positive feelings towards 'gangs' in their local area. Alternatively, for those who do not identify with this form of belonging, gangs are seen as groups that exist primarily in order to make others feel unsafe or intimidated through violence or generalised criminal activity, both major and minor. Accordingly, young people in this category tend to have largely negative feelings toward 'gangs' in their local area.

5.3.5 Perceived reasons for young people joining gangs

The figure below shows the percentages of young people within the same gender who chose reasons why people joined gangs (e.g. 61% of males thought people joined gangs for a sense of belonging, which means that 39% of the males did not choose that option). Note that respondents could choose more than one option.

Figure 13: Perceptions of why young people join gangs



A total of 373 young people offered 'further comments' after completing the quantitative drop down boxes in this section. Most of these comments were quite brief. The three main themes emerging from those comments were: self-defence and feeling safe; to belong; and power and reputation. A number of responses also centered on young people wanting to be, or look, 'cool' as the primary reason for young people joining gangs.

Table 31: Other reasons given for why young people join gangs

OTHER REASONS GIVEN FOR WHY YOUNG PEOPLE JOIN GANGS	
Self-defence and feeling safe	*They are unsafe so they try hide behind other people.* *To feel like a big person joining a 'gang'.* *To feel tough because they know they're weak.* *To feel safe and to hang out with people they are comfortable around.*
To belong	*To be around other people because of their stories in life…or because they have known each other for quite a long time.* *When they are lonely and want to be a part of something.* *Friends get sucked into it, so therefore they get sucked in.*
Power and reputation	*I think they enjoy feeling powerful, it's like a sense of security. Some people do it for protection just for backup when it comes to a fight whereas some people just do it to try and act tough, scare people, and try to have power over others.* *Reputation. Respect. … Some start off by wanting to show off. In the end they have to hold that rep so you do more. Peer pressure.* *People join gangs to look and act tough. They feel that if in a gang their behaviour would be free and if in trouble, as a gang they have backup.*

In relation to the central themes of this study, a number of further comments focused on young people joining gangs to feel safe, protected or 'tough' when they are in reality feeling unsafe, vulnerable or insecure.

Overlapping with these responses are themes of friendship, support, loyalty, feeling understood and/or belonging. Some respondents also felt that the influence of family and friends was a primary factor in whether young people joined gangs:

> *Most of them…have grown up watching friends and family doing the same things which they think are alright, they really don't care and think it's a cool and fun thing to be in.*

A few comments emphasised the sense of power that being in a gang can bring. However, others emphasised the constant pressure to keep up a 'reputation' once a young person uses gang membership to bolster social status, which in turn can lead to ever more risky and anti-social forms of behaviour. Still others identified the motivation to join gangs as a way of being free of consequences for their actions:

> *I believe people join gangs to feel as if they can do whatever they desire without any consequences involved … People in the gangs will think whenever they need their friends' help they will have their backs.*

Despite a little more than half (54%) of young people in the survey who thought that ethnic background was relevant to why young people join gangs, only two of the comments in the qualitative data related to ethnicity, either implied or directly.

Finally, some respondents saw the desire to join gangs as connected a form of sanctuary from or solution to problems linked with home, family or other emotional and social difficulties. The focus on gangs as providing an alternative 'home' or 'family' for young people who have troubled home lives is well supported in the literature (Maxson, Whitlock and Klein, 1998.) Comments included:

> *To try to get away from a bad situation or problems that [are] causing them to feel in that way so they might decide to join a gang*.

> *Parents give a lack of commitment to bring up their kids in [the] right manner, so they go to a gang they can call home and their other family*.

Overall, the more thoughtful and extended comments in this section of the survey illuminate the 68% of young people who identify a range of social, emotional and relationship-based reasons that young people may join gangs, beyond the desire to 'look cool' or to combat boredom or lack of direction. In addition, they emphasise the important perception of 42% of respondents that joining gangs is one route to feeling safer or more secure if a young person feels at risk of being vulnerable or unprotected in the community, particularly in relation to peers. Finally, they are candid about the desire for power and perceived 'superiority', or feeling better than others, that underlines the motives for joining gangs for some young people, although this does not appear as statistically significant in the quantitative data analysis. The qualitative responses did not focus or elaborate on criminal activity as a reason for joining gangs, despite 57% of young people saying this was an important motive for joining gangs in the quantitative section of the survey, and they did not focus on shared ethnic background, despite 54% of participants choosing this as a reason why young people join gangs (see Figure 13 above).

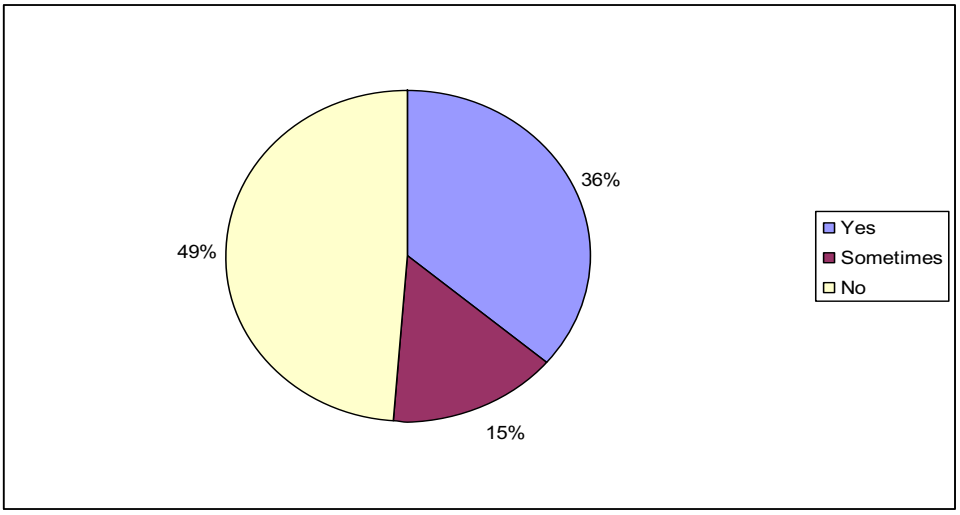
5.4 Young people and violent crime

Section Four of the survey asked about respondents' opinions, experience and fears about violence; opinions on conflicts and conflict resolution, and weapons use.

5.4.1 Worry about violence in public places

Participants were asked: *Do you worry about getting attacked or beaten up when you're out in public?* Almost all responses to this question were fairly brief, with all respondents qualifying their responses as either 'Yes', 'No' or 'Sometimes'. Half of the sample did not worry about violence in public and half did or did sometimes (see Figure below). Young women were more likely than young men to provide a 'Yes' response, with 60% of young women saying 'Yes' or 'Sometimes', compared to 40% of young men.

Figure 14: Do you worry about getting attacked or beaten up when you're out in public?



Of those who did worry or worried sometimes, six themes emerged (see Table 32 below). A third of these respondents replied that they were afraid 'in certain public places'. Responses fitting this theme were either general or specifically named public places. The public places that were most likely to make respondents worry about being attacked or beaten up were: Footscray, Sunshine, St Albans, the local milkbar, trains, train or bus stations and unfamiliar places.

The next most common theme was: 'I'm worried that gangs or groups may hurt me'. Some respondents were worried about gang attacks as they had heard or believed that gangs could target people in public for no apparent reason. Some had heard from media or peers about attacks that had happened in their area: *'Yes, because I have heard of people giving 'gangs' a wrong look and they get beaten up for it'.* Others were worried about being out-numbered by groups in public and being targeted.

The third most common themes were 'when alone' and, in equal number, 'I am wary and ready just in case'. The responses fitting both of these themes were general and alluded to a generalised feeling or perception of fear whenever in public with no specific explanation for reasons why. Some of the responses fitting the theme 'when alone' specified that they were most likely to feel fear of being attacked in public if they were alone at night.

Some participants said they were not worried, since friends would back them up or defend them, that they could defend themselves, or they would be with friends or family. Some said they were not worried as they kept out of that kind of thing, or that they hadn't done anything wrong. Some girls reported comments such as '*No, because I'm a girl, that happens to boys*'. These themes can be found in the table below.

Table 32: Reasons given for worrying about getting attacked in public

REASONS GIVEN FOR WORRYING ABOUT BEING ATTACKED IN A PUBLIC PLACE	
	Frequency
In certain public places	30
I'm worried that gangs or groups may hurt me	19
When alone	12
At night in certain places	11
Because I have seen or known it to happen or experienced it	10
I am wary and ready just in case	9
	91
REASONS GIVEN FOR NOT WORRYING ABOUT BEING ATTACKED IN A PUBLIC PLACE	
	Frequency
I'm usually with friends or family and they will back me up	18
I try not to get involved in that sort of thing/ I haven't done anything wrong	18
I'm a girl that happens to boys	6
I know how to take care of myself	5
No one can do that to me	4
	51

The responses that commonly aligned with 'I'm usually with friends or family and they will back me up' explained that as respondents were rarely alone in public, they did not fear being attacked or beaten as being in a group would deter any attackers. Some respondents added that even if they were attacked, they felt confident that their group would help them.

The other main theme for 'No' responses was: 'I try not to get involved in that sort of thing/I haven't done anything wrong'. Most responses fitting this theme showed that many respondents believed they would not be attacked because they were not the sort of people to get involved in 'that sort of thing' (e.g. fights or criminal activity). These respondents commonly stated that they did nothing wrong most of the time so they believed they were unlikely to be attacked or beaten up. This theme shows an underlying belief that only those who are doing the wrong thing, including getting involved in fights or in the wrong situations, are going to be attacked in public. Some comments included:

> *Not really, I mean if it happens it happens it's a part of life...You just have to be smart and always think what you're doing and you should be alright*.

> *No, I don't worry about getting attacked or beaten up when I'm out in public because I don't ever do anything wrong*.

5.4.2 Victims of crime in public

A total of 90 respondents indicated that they had been a victim of crime in a public place before, which represented 19% of the total sample. More males than females reported this experience, and the reports are more frequent as the age of the participants increases.

Table 33: Gender and experience of being a victim of crime in public

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN A VICTIM OF VIOLENT CRIME IN A PUBLIC PLACE?	GENDER (%)		
	Male	Female	Total
Yes	24	14	19
No	76	86	81
	100	100	100

Table 34: Age and experience being a victim of crime in public

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN A VICTIM OF VIOLENT CRIME IN A PUBLIC PLACE?	AGE (%)					
	15	16	17	18	19	Total
Yes	12	14	18	27	50	19
No	88	86	82	73	50	81
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

The 90 respondents who reported being victims of crime were analysed by gender and age. In three age groups young men reported experience of being a victim of crime more than young women. In contrast, 15 year old young women were more likely than young men of the same age to report this. These findings are illustrated in the table below.

Table 35: All victims of crime by gender and age

	AGE (%)					
	15	16	17	18	19	Total
Male	37	75	48	68	77	59
Female	63	25	52	32	23	41
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Respondents who identified as being victims of crime were then asked to describe what had happened to them, without naming any person involved. About three quarters of those who reported being a victim of crime (65 of the 90) answered this section and described the crime. Of those who described the crime, half reported incidents of assault towards themselves and one third reported witnessing crime. Other types of crime described by respondents (illustrated in Table 36 below) included: anti-social behaviour in public such as drunkenness, indecent or offensive behaviour or language (11%); harassment or other ongoing unwanted behaviour towards the victim (5%); and robbery (3%).

The types of crimes described differed according to gender. Twice as many male victims of crime reported that they had experienced assault compared to female victims. On the other hand, a quarter of the young women reported abusive behaviour in public while young men did not report this crime.

Table 36: Types of crimes experienced as a victim of crime, by gender

TYPES OF CRIMES EXPERIENCED TAKEN FROM THE CRIME STATISTICS 2007/2008 REPORT	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Assault[2]	63	30	48
Witness of victim of crime[5]	31	37	34
Behaviour in Public[4]	0	23	11
Harassment[3]	6	3	4
Robbery[1]	0	7	3
	100	**100**	**100**

[1]Robbery includes offences of armed robbery and robbery/assault with intent to rob.
[2]Assault includes indictable and summary assault offences such as intentionally/recklessly cause injury, make threats to kill, reckless conduct endangering life/serious injury, unlawful assault, assault with weapon/instrument, and discharge missile/stone to injure/danger.
[3]Harassment includes offences of stalking and use phone/postal service/listening devices to menace/harass/offend.
[4]Behaviour in public includes offences related to drunkenness, indecent/offensive behaviour, verbal abuse.
[5]Witness of a victim of crime includes the participants not being the direct victim, but being the direct witness of the crime.

Of those respondents who described incidents of assault, half were over 17 years of age. The greater proportion of respondents describing incidents of assault also named Sunshine as their suburb of residence (24%). Public locations were not always given by respondents, however, when they were identified, they ranged from stations, shopping centres to the street. The descriptions of assaults were of either involvement in fights or getting 'jumped' or assaulted by another group of people they did not know. Only two respondents explicitly described being assaulted by only one other person.

> *I was attacked three times in one night by a group of girls I had never met they jumped me on a 'Bus' which is run in Sunshine. One of the girls' mothers was running the program and didn't help to stop it*. (Female victim of crime)

Fights were typically not described in great detail, nor were many particular public locations identified. Sometimes respondents stated that fights were initiated by violence from the other party. A minority of respondents described incidents in which they had initiated an assault, usually on another individual that had made derogatory remarks or threats. Two descriptions of fights were explicitly identified as gang on gang violence. In all these cases, the respondents seemed to know the attacker/s. A typical comment made by respondents regarding fights was: *'A misunderstanding between old friends that got out of control and turned into a fight.'*

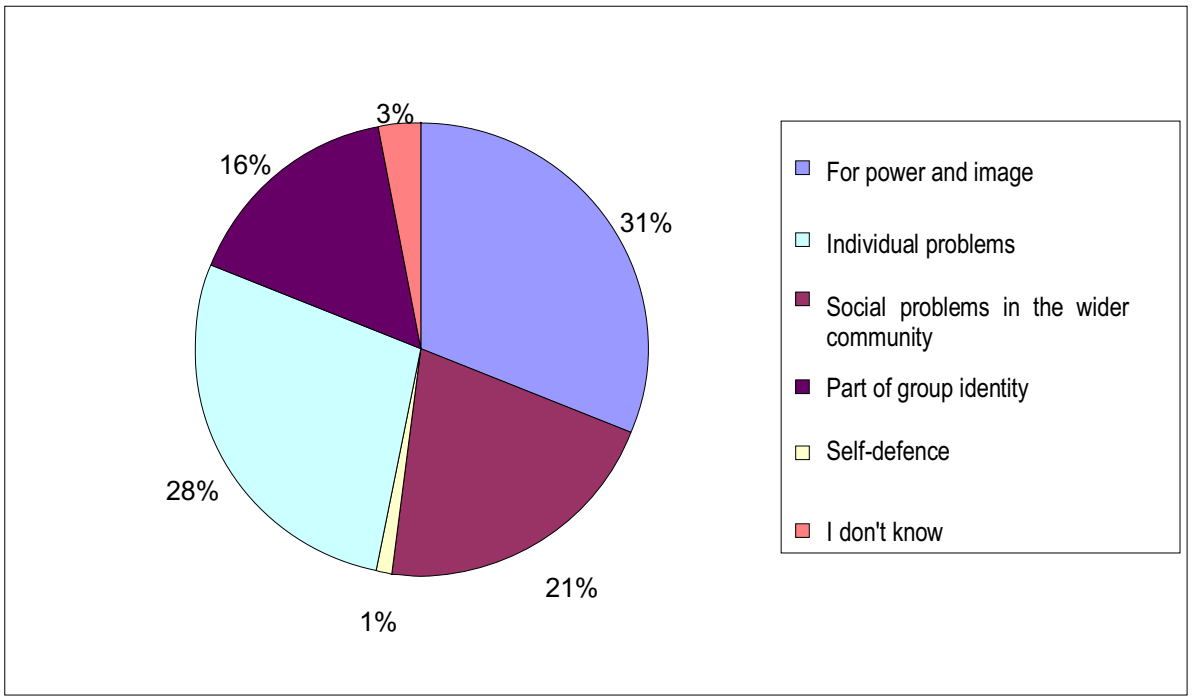
Being a witness of crime was the next most common description to being a victim of crime in a public place, with one third identifying themselves as witnesses of crime rather than being direct recipients of violent behaviour or crime. Most of these respondents were witnesses to assaults typically described as having occurred to friends or partner. There was an equal amount of male and female respondents who identified themselves as witnesses of crime. Consistent with the findings on assault, 17-year-olds formed the highest proportion of respondents who had witnessed a crime in the past.

> *Yes, I was out at [the] Melbourne Show, someone called me a slut, and the other someone knocked them out and stomped on their head… there is just a lot of times I've witnessed people being hurt and threatened*. (Female victim of crime)

5.4.3 Perceptions of the reasons young people commit violent crime

Participants were asked their views on why they thought young people commit violent crime. They generally gave more than one reason. Six main themes emerged (see Figure 15 below):

Figure 15: Perceptions of the reasons that young people commit violent crime



There was some gender difference in these responses. Young women gave more responses than young men. The responses from young women more often related to being part of a group, including comments on peer pressure, or that violence was due to individual problems that a young person may be experiencing or had experienced such as family problems or expression of feelings like anger: '*To get away from home, or maybe family problems leads them to do violent activities.'* This may be due to young women in this age range placing a greater importance on interpersonal relationships within a group as well as being more aware of feelings and their outcomes. By comparison, the greater number of responses from young men relate to experiencing power and having a positive image with peers: *'To get peoples' money or to make themselves feel better or look good in front of their friends'.*

The responses of survey participants who had reported experience as a victim of violent crime in a public place were compared to the overall sample. Victims of violent crime were most likely to give reasons relating to power and image for why young people commit violent crime, which included responses such as 'trying to be cool' and to feel powerful' (see Table 37 below). Those who reported experience of violent crime as a victim were more likely to cite wider social problems in the community than the whole sample. The response themes by this group are presented in the table below.

Table 37: Reasons given by young victims of violent crime for why young people might commit violent crime

VICTIM OF VIOLENT CRIME IN A PUBLIC PLACE BY REASONS FOR COMMITTING VIOLENT CRIME (%)		
	Victims	**Total Sample**
For power and image	31	31
Individual problems	29	28
Social problems in the wider community	21	16
Part of group identity	16	21
Self-defence/ threatened	2	1
I don't know	1	3
	100	**100**

5.4.4 Understanding conflict

Participants were asked: *What do you think causes arguments between young people hanging out in public places?* and *What do you think makes arguments and other conflicts between young people turn violent?* and they often gave multiple answers to these questions. The most common themes that emerged from this question are shown in the tables below.

Table 38: Perceived causes of arguments between young people hanging out in public places

WHAT DO YOU THINK CAUSES ARGUMENTS BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE HANGING OUT IN PUBLIC PLACES? (%)	
Acting and talking tough (looking for a fight)	18
Differences of opinion or misunderstandings	13
Relationship or friendship issues	12
Discrimination and racism	10
Gang or group rivalry	7
Being cool/power struggles	9
Taking drugs or alcohol	5
Gossiping and bullying	5
Previous fights or arguments	3
Disputes over drugs and money	3
Immaturity/stupidity	3
Boredom/no reason	2
Peer pressure	1
I don't know	4
Other	5
Total	**100**

Table 39: Perceptions of what makes arguments and other conflicts between young people turn violent

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES ARGUMENTS AND OTHER CONFLICTS BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE TURN VIOLENT? (%)	
Acting and talking tough	23
Escalating disagreements where neither side will 'back down'	11
Showing physical aggression e.g. pushing/weapons	9
Being cool or proving a reputation	8
Out of control anger/feelings	8
To resolve arguments/bullying once and for all	8
Peer pressure from gang or group	6
Taking drugs or alcohol	5
Personal problems/ differences	4
Racism and discrimination	4
Relationships or friendships issues	3
Immaturity/stupidity	2
I don't know	6
Other	3
Total	**100**

Acting and talking smart was also a main reason for gang fights in White et al.'s (1999) earlier work on gangs in Melbourne.

5.4.5 Weapons

Half of the participants reported knowing of young people who carry weapons regularly. Young men reported more knowledge of weapons carriage than young women (See Table 41 below). The age differences were not great; however, 15 year olds were less likely to know of others carrying weapons than older age groups.

Table 40: Reported knowledge of weapons carriage and participants' age

DO YOU KNOW MANY YOUNG PEOPLE WHO CARRY WEAPONS REGULARLY?	AGE (%)					
	15	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**Total**
Yes, a lot	20	20	20	13	15	19
Yes, some people	21	38	34	33	54	32
Not sure	25	16	24	20	12	21
Unlikely	10	10	8	7	4	9
No, no one I know	24	16	14	27	15	19
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 41: Reported knowledge of weapons carriage and gender

DO YOU KNOW MANY YOUNG PEOPLE WHO CARRY WEAPONS REGULARLY?	GENDER (%)		
	Male	Female	Total
Yes, a lot	28	11	19
Yes, some people	33	32	32
Not sure	17	24	21
Unlikely	9	9	9
No, no one I know	13	24	19
	100	**100**	**100**

Respondents were then asked what kind of weapons they knew people carried. 232 participants gave descriptions of weapons. Most described more than one type of weapon, as shown in the list below (Table 42). Poles, trolley poles, bats, baseball bats, guns, knuckle busters, machetes and various knives were the most commonly reported. The higher prevalence of all poles and bars (38%) compared to all knives including machetes (21%) in Table 42 may relate to the opportunistic access to and use of poles, especially trolley poles, by young people – they are easily to hand in a variety of circumstances and may be spontaneously acquired in particular violent or threat scenarios. Conversely, the prevalence of knives in Table 43 below, when read in conjunction with the reasons given for why young people carry weapons in Table 44, may indicate that they are weapons of choice for planned strategies of self-defence: small, easy to conceal, easy to transport and easy to use.

Table 42: Types of weapons reported

WHAT KINDS OF WEAPONS DO THE PEOPLE YOU KNOW CARRY? (%)	
Poles, including trolley poles	19.5
Bats/baseball bats/club	14
Guns/gats	12
Knuckle busters	11
Machetes	7
Pocket knife	7
Stanley knife/butterfly knife	3
Sword	2
Butter knives/scissors	1
Butchers/carving knife	1
Taser/tazer	2
Wood/timber sticks	3
Chains	2
Bottles	1.5
Crow bars	1.5
Metal rulers	1
Screwdrivers	1
Metal corkscrew/ metal pipes	0.5
Other	10
Total	**100**

Further categorisation of the types of weapons was undertaken based on categories displayed in the Victoria Police Weapon Identification Web as reflected in the table below.

Table 43: Types of weapons young people are perceived to carry

WHAT KINDS OF WEAPONS DO THE PEOPLE YOU KNOW CARRY? (%)	
Weapons of Convenience (Home)[1]	32
Weapons of Convenience (Public)[2]	34
Batons and Clubs	5
Electrical	3
Knives and Daggers	90
Projectiles[3]	21
Sprays	3
Martial Arts	1
Armour[4]	17

[1] Could be found at home, such as tennis rackets, screwdrivers, hammers

[2] Could be found in public areas, such as trolley poles, pieces of wood

[3] Designed to shoot or propel a smaller item, such as guns, slingshots, crossbows

[4] Weapon to increase the force or impact of a punch or blow, such as knuckle dusters or lead gloves

The overwhelming response from young people to the question, *Why do you think young people carry weapons?* was that they associate weapons carriage with feeling safe, protected or for self-defence. The main themes are summarized in the table below.

Table 44: Perceptions of why young people carry weapons

REASONS GIVEN FOR WHY YOUNG PEOPLE CARRY WEAPONS - MAIN THEMES		
Protection, self-defence, feeling of safety	70%	*Out of fear of being attacked by multiple people, mostly a self-defence reason.* *People carry weapons because they think that weapons will protect them from a person that is being violent towards them and help keep them safe and also threaten the person that is being violent and back off.* *Because they know that the area is unsafe so they have to do everything they can to protect themselves. It's not like there are any police around to watch out for any violence.*
To be or appear cool or tough	16%	*To think that they are cool, to show it off.*
To cause hurt or harm to others, start or have the advantage in fights	13%	*Because they want to use it sometime ... to go to a fight and hit someone, to hurt a certain person.*
Membership in gang	6%	

A number of young people in the survey offered multiple overlapping reasons for why their peers may carry weapons. These responses tended to reflect a perceived need for weapons for both self-defence and aggression toward others:

> *I think that young people carry weapons to feel safe, to think that they are cool, to show it off, to commit crimes and to harm people*.

> *I think [young people] carry weapons to portray a sense of power over others. And also for self-defense against people who they may feel threatened by. But the main concept is to cause trouble, look tough and make people fear them if they make it known to others*.

The 70% of young people whose responses to this question focused on weapons carriage for reasons of safety/self-defence/protection, combined with a high response rate to this question (482/500), suggests that weapons carriage for this age range of young people in Brimbank is seen primarily as a means of managing or enhancing safety in the community for themselves.

The small number (6%) of respondents who associated weapons carriage with gang membership means that the majority of young people in the survey do not specifically associate weapons carriage with gang activity or gang membership. Instead, most young people in this community see weapons carriage as a generalized response to feeling unsafe or at risk of being attacked or menaced. For some young people in the survey, feeling unsafe in this way can be a chronic state of affairs: *'To feel safe in a sick world.'*

These general-population responses also align with the responses of the Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people in the focus groups (Chapter 6). For these CALDB groups, perceptions of routine weapons carriage by others and corresponding low levels of safety were normative. As one young Pacific Islander male respondent commented during a focus group discussion:

> *We see it pretty much every day…sometimes people are walking down the street holding machetes or poles…You can fit them down the trackies and all that, yeah*.

About a quarter of survey participants said they had carried a weapon at some time, with young men more than twice as likely to have carried weapons than young women (see Table 45 below), and 17 year old respondents were most likely to report having ever carried a weapon compared to other age groups. Most of these respondents elaborated on why they have carried weapons and under what circumstances (see Table 48 below).

Table 45: Reasons for carrying weapons and gender

HAVE YOU EVER CARRIED A WEAPON FOR ANY REASON?	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Yes	35	14	23
No	65	86	77
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 46: Reasons for carrying weapons and age

HAVE YOU EVER CARRIED A WEAPON FOR ANY REASON?	AGE (%)					
	15	16	17	18	19	Total
Yes	21	24	27	19	23	23
No	79	76	73	81	77	77
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

All 114 respondents who had ever carried a weapon were separately analysed by gender and age. Overall, as with the whole sample, males were more likely than females to have carried weapons for all age groups. The only age group where this was not so markedly the case was at 17, where young women were most likely to have carried a weapon (see Table 47 below). It should be noted that there were only six respondents in total forming the 19 year age group for those who carried a weapon.

Table 47: Age and gender of respondents who have ever carried a weapon

	AGE (%)					
	15	16	17	18	19	Total
Male	61	85	52	77	100	67
Female	39	15	48	23	0	33
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

In considering the responses to this question, one should keep in mind the perceived risk for many young people of disclosing illegal activity such as weapons carriage, even during a confidential survey. Reasons given for carrying a weapon break down into four general themes as shown below.

Table 48: Reasons for weapons carriage

REASONS FOR WEAPONS CARRIAGE	
For the purpose of feeling safe in general, in the absence of any specific threat	*Just in case anything bad happens to me.* *Because it makes me feel so much safer.* *Coz you can never be too careful.* *For my own piece of mind and to feel safe that I could defend myself in a violent argument.*
As a response to a specific threat from others or based on a previous violent incident in which the weapons carrier was the victim	*After I [had] been followed home on 3 different occasions and being hit at a train station by a male 3 times in the face.* *Because someone swore to kill me when they saw me next.* *Because this guy was after me.* *When I first left a gang, I felt threatened so I carried around a*

	Stanley knife. Not that I would've used it but it was just in case. *I was threatened if I ever came back to a park to play basketball I would be bashed by 5 people so I took something to scare them all away.*
As part of an organized fight (e.g. with another group of young people) or for other offensive purposes, such as revenge or attack	*It was in my brother's car because we went to sort an argument with somebody and it wasn't supposed to be a fight, so I stayed in the car with a baseball bat just in case Because they beat my brother.* *To get revenge.* *To go fight another gang that also had weapons.* *To bash some people in KP [Kings Park].* *Since year 7 someone was annoying me so I got annoyed and I was going to threaten him in year 11 with a machete at school.* *Because we were getting into a fight and they were bringing weapons.* *Because they beat my brother.*
Under specific circumstances linked to time of day, place, or being on own	*Protection catching trains at night, walking streets at night to get home from parties, etc.* *When walking my dog, just in case someone tries to hurt me because I'm alone.* *Because my friend and I were walking to another friend's place at a very early hour of the morning.* *Because I knew the area I was going to was unsafe, and it made me feel safe.* *Cause I walked home at night from the gym, so my guy mate said I should carry something in case.*

Overall, these responses suggest that the primary circumstance under which young people in the survey carry weapons is based on perceptions that weapons reduce their risk of being victims of violence and make them safer in general. They feel less vulnerable in dangerous or risky locations and/or at night when carrying a weapon, and when faced with a perceived specific threat they feel weapons carriage may help them cope more effectively with that threat. Only 7 respondents identified aggression or revenge attacks as the primary circumstances explaining their own weapons carriage.

The table below shows the findings for whether participants had been a victim of crime and whether they had ever carried a weapon for any reason. Participants who reported being victims of crime were more likely to carry a weapon than those who had not.

Table 49: Weapons carriage by victims of crime

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN A VICTIM OF VIOLENT CRIME IN A PUBLIC PLACE BEFORE?	HAVE YOU EVER CARRIED A WEAPON FOR ANY REASON? (%)		
	Yes	No	Total
Yes	40	12	19
No	60	88	81
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

5.5 Reducing conflict

5.5.1 Staying safe

Participants were asked: *How do you think people can keep themselves safe from violence?* and they gave multiple answers. Four main themes emerged: being aware of and following public safety tips such as going out in groups; not getting involved with bad company or gangs; not starting or get involved in fights; and avoiding places where violent people or groups hang out. These themes indicate that respondents believed in prevention as the key to keeping safe from violence. Other respondents suggested strategies for dealing with a potentially violent situation as it happened, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 50: Keeping safe from violence

HOW DO YOU THINK PEOPLE CAN KEEP THEMSELVES SAFE FROM VIOLENCE? (%)	
By being aware of and following public safety tips, e.g. go out in groups	27
Don't get involved with bad company or gangs	15
Don't start or get involved in fights	15
Avoid places where violent people or groups hang out	13
Be prepared for the possibility of being attacked	8
When in a dangerous situation keep to yourself and think before acting	7
Defend yourself or call for help	4
Having more community initiatives that will occupy young people	2
Having parental/adult supervision and listening to them	2
Improving laws and having more police	1
Not sure	3
Other	3
Total	**100**

Common responses for following public safety tips included: avoid going out at night or late; be aware of surroundings; staying in busy or visible areas; getting lifts or avoiding public transport; and staying away from strangers or suspicious people. As one young woman commented: *'Limit outdoor and public activity - if outdoor activity is necessary, travel in groups and not as individuals.'*

Underlying this theme was a general awareness that violence in public is more likely to happen in particular circumstances; if precautions are taken then young people could feel safe from violence. However, responses also indicated that a general level of fear and distrust about being in public is part of daily living for many of these respondents. Generally speaking, respondents were also identifying violence in public as perpetrated by strangers rather than anyone that could be known to them. This may be because these respondents have not

experienced, or are not aware of, violence occurring from those known to them. It may also be that these respondents do not feel threatened by their peers or may perceive any aggression from those known to them as more manageable compared to that of strangers.

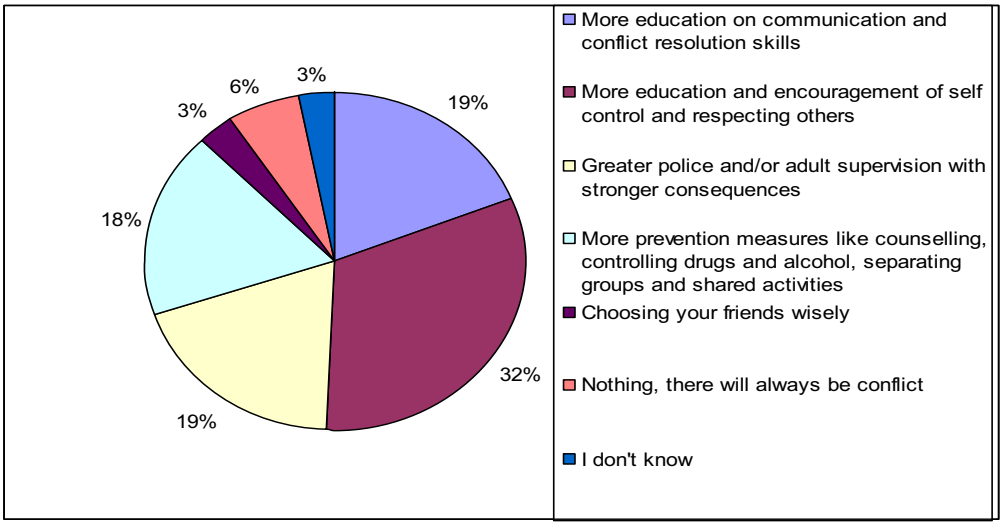
The next highest proportion of respondents gave responses fitting with the theme, 'Don't get involved with bad company or gangs'. Again the responses to this theme were generally about preventing violence, which respondents here identified as originating from particularly bad influences and peer group pressure. This included getting involved with gangs, defined by these respondents as groups of people who had a reputation for getting up to no good or committing petty types of crime. In general, the responses to this theme suggested that violence in public is more likely to come from groups of young people and that young people are likely to know or identify those among their peer group who might try and start violence in public. One young man commented: *'Just stay away from it and get proper friends, the people you kick back with is who you end up being.'*

Following on from the earlier theme, the third highest proportion of responses fitted the theme, 'Don't start or get involved in fights'. Fights were identified by most of these respondents as the main source of violence that young people were likely to encounter in public. Some respondents also gave general descriptors, such as not getting involved in 'trouble'. Again, underlying this theme was the idea that violence was most likely to happen between groups of young people or as coming from a group of young people in public. Respondents for this theme were also indicating that fights tended to happen between groups of young people or individuals that were known to each other. One young man stated: *'Ignore all fights and walk away from someone that wants to fight.'*

5.5.2 Strategies that could help reduce conflict

Participants were asked: *What do you think might help reduce conflict between groups of young people?* and were able to give more than one answer (see Figure 16 below). Four main themes emerged: more education and encouragement of self-control and respectful behaviour towards others; more education about communication and conflict resolution skills; greater police and/or adult supervision with stronger consequences; and more prevention measures such as counselling, controlling drugs and alcohol, separating groups and shared activities.

Figure 16: Respondents' suggestions for reducing conflict between young people



Young people suggested that schools and the community at large should address a general lack of respect for others existing between groups of young people in public spaces. This included respecting others' differences as well as avoiding potential conflict in public. Some respondents suggested walking away and remaining calm as one way to avoid conflict in public and that this should be encouraged for young people. This theme can be

interpreted as young people's awareness that conflict between groups can be about competitive views regarding neighbourhoods or public spaces. An extension of that view is that there are limited public spaces and resources in Brimbank for young people, in any case respondents for this theme suggested that public spaces should be shared. The implication of this is that by encouraging greater respect for others, particularly others not in young people's friendship groups, competition for public spaces and resources may be minimised as a source of conflict between groups of young people:

> *If people were able to just get by, and be able to live with one another, to get through to their minds that they are all the same and there is no difference between them*.

A connecting theme was that there should be greater education about communication and conflict resolution skills for young people. Again the responses for this theme suggest that young people identify the source of conflict between some groups of young people as a general pattern of disrespectful behaviour. Underlying this behaviour, as suggested by certain responses to this theme, is an attitude that exists for some young people where conflict resolution can only occur through force and intimidation rather than communication, negotiation and compromise:

> *Teaching them how should they deal with conflicts without going into physical fights*.

The third theme suggested greater police and/or adult supervision with stronger consequences for violent behaviour. Respondents for this theme suggested that disrespectful behaviour should be addressed by having more police in public and having police deal with the conflicts or any potential conflicts between groups of young people. Parents and other adults such as security personnel were also suggested by respondents as people that could resolve public conflicts or at least provide supervision to prevent public conflicts from occurring. Respondents also suggested that if public conflicts did occur then the consequences should be swift and serious, including jail time. Some respondents added that this would make public spaces safe for everyone. As one young person put it:

> *More police presence around with stricter consequences [for] fights*.

In contrast, another fairly prominent theme in young people's responses related to having more prevention measures, with a high proportion of these respondents suggesting having more shared activities and places to hang out for groups of young people. The idea promoted by these respondents was that having a greater amount of public space and shared activities in these spaces would help to reduce the competition for resources and public spaces. These young people were identifying limited resources and public spaces as the main source of conflict between groups of young people. Respondents suggested that with such measures there would be other beneficial flow on effects including getting to know other groups of young people which could in turn reduce any negative views of other young people. In general, responses to this theme were identifying more utilitarian preventative measures that addressed limitations to particular resources and/or public space. Usually these measures extended beyond groups of young people in public and addressed aspects of young people's culture more broadly, for instance promoting harm minimisation strategies to alcohol and drugs for all young people. In general, this view is reflected by comments such as the following:

> *More activities for young people that they are interested in so they can work together and understand each other*.

5.5.3 Helping young people with conflict

Participants were asked: *Who do you think is best able to deal with conflict between young people?* One quarter nominated police, one quarter nominated young people themselves, and other young people nominated youth worker, friends, mother, father and relatives.

Table 51: Perceptions of who is best able to deal with conflict between young people

WHO DO YOU THINK IS BEST ABLE TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE? (%)	
Young people themselves	25.5
Police	25
Youth worker	15
Friends	10
Relatives/family friend	9
Mother	4.5
Father	2.5
School counsellor	3
Religious/community leaders	3
Other	2.5
Total	**100**

For those who nominated young people themselves are best able to deal with conflict within their peer group, emphasis was placed on young people needing to 'learn from experience' or 'learn from their mistakes'; doubt that young people will respond positively or listen to anyone outside their peer group; mistrust of adults; belief that they are not well understood except by other young people; and general belief that conflict is best resolved amongst the people who have initiated it. There was some emphasis on the need for young people to be better equipped to know how to resolve conflict when it arises; on strategies, knowledge, and tools with which to manage conflict as it happens, and to prevent it from escalating.

Those young people who nominated the police as having the best ability to deal with conflict between young people ascribe this to the coercive powers of police; their ability to arrest, control, detain or to 'scare' young people into behaving better, and/or not progressing or escalating conflict because of the perceived negative consequences when police become involved. However, some young people also saw a clear educative role for police working cooperatively with schools and community organizations to better inform young people about the consequences of conflict that causes harm to others.

Issues of trust, safety, confidentiality and 'knowing young people' were the prevalent factors for young people who selected 'youth workers' as best able to help resolve conflict among young people.

In contrast, when responding to who they would go to for help with a problem, most participants nominated mother, relatives or school counsellor (see Table 52 below).

Table 52: people to whom young people may turn for help with a problem

IF YOU NEED HELP WITH A PROBLEM, WHO DO YOU GO TO? (FIRST OPTION)	GENDER (%)		
	Male	Female	Total
Mother	33	43	39
Relatives/family friend	25	22	23
School counsellor	16	16	16
Father	9	7	8
Someone else	6	4	5
Friends	4	2	3
Police	2	2	2
Telephone help line	3	3	3
Teacher	2	1	1
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

5.6 Young people and police

To investigate the relationship between young people and police, participants were asked how much they trust police, why they think police might stop to speak to young people in public, and what they think young people in their local neighbourhood think about police.

About half of the respondents reported trust or complete trust in the police; one quarter were unsure, and another quarter reported a lack of trust (see Table 53 below). These findings of 25% distrust in police are high in comparison to Australian figures showing 15% of young people distrust the police (ABS General Social Survey, 2006). However, although the rates were different, the gender differences in this study were in line with this ABS survey; young men were more likely to distrust the police than young women.

Table 53: Degree of trust in police and gender

IN GENERAL, HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST POLICE?	GENDER (%)		
	Male	Female	Total
Completely trust	14	16	15
Trust	26	38	32
Not sure	24	31	28
Don't trust	19	11	15
Completely don't trust	17	4	10
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 54: Degree of trust in police and age

IN GENERAL, HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST POLICE?	AGE (%)					
	15	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**Total**
Completely trust	20	12	15	12	8	15
Trust	34	37	29	30	27	32
Not sure	26	31	27	34	23	28
Don't trust	10	13	19	11	27	15
Completely don't trust	10	7	10	13	15	10
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

The question of why police might stop to speak to young people in public was investigated. There was no single dominating category in responses to this question. The responses can best be characterized as occupying a continuum of negative to positive. There was a slight predisposition toward the perception that police stop young people on the basis of generalized suspicion of young people because they are young and for no other reason; this was sometimes linked to young people in groups but that link was made by a minority of respondents. The single most significant response focused on the theme of young people looking or acting 'suspicious' or 'shifty' as the primary reason why police would stop and speak to them in public, which accounted for 11% of the reasons offered.

However, there were also a range of comments that suggested that at least some young people believe the police stop and speak to young people in public because of reasonable concerns or fears that criminal or anti-social behaviour had taken place (or was likely to take place), and that groups of young people are seen by police as a resource for community-based intelligence on crime and illegal activity because they were in a position to shed light on or provide information about such events.

As a continuum, the main reasons why young people in this survey perceive that police stop to speak to them in public are clustered from most negative to most positive are shown in Table 55 below.

The most negative comments centered on the perception that police stop young people in public because the police themselves are bored and find it diverting to stop young people; because they are interested in hassling young people or 'cheeking' them without good reason; because they are stopping young people on the basis of racial appearance, and because the police are interested in asserting their own power and authority by targeting young people.

The most positive comments centered on perceptions that the police stop and speak to young people in public because they are concerned to promote or increase community safety; to protect young people themselves from harm; to use young people as an intelligence-based resource to promote community safety; and to advise young people or listen to their problems.

Table 55: The themes for reasons why police would stop young people

THEMES: REASONS FOR STOPPING YOUNG PEOPLE	
Police want to hassle or cheek young people	*Because they pick on young people and they like getting them in trouble.* *Because they're mean/Because they can/Because they're racist* *They won't just have a conversation with a young person.* *Because they feel powerful and like knowing they are in control.*
Police are bored or want to entertain themselves	*Because they have nothing better to do.* *For fun.*
Police are suspicious in general of young people with no foundation	*Sometimes just to get [a young person's] details for no reason.*
Police assume young people will make trouble whether or not this is true/has happened	*Because they think young people are gonna bash someone or start trouble.*
Police don't trust young people	*Because they think we are up to something or don't trust us.*
Police are suspicious of specific young people or groups of young people with some foundation	*Because they might feel that there is something wrong, they're up to something, they're carrying something on them and they're acting shifty, or just to find something or someone and they're asking the young people if they have any ideas about it.*
Police are gathering intelligence	*Because if there is a problem the young person could know some evidence.* *See what's happening in the area and ask them questions to help with an investigation.*
Police care about young people and are looking out for them	*Communication and to find what they are doing and how they are doing.* *I think because police want to know do young people feel safe in the local area.*
Police are trying to keep the community safe	*Because they see them doing something wrong or look to be a threat to other youths in the area.* *To make sure that they are not under the influences of alcohol and/or drugs, so that problems are avoided.* *Just to find information and help with the safety of young people, due to the increased amount of…youth conflict.*
To give young people advice	*I think police would stop to speak to young people in public to see if they are OK and if there is any trouble going around. Also, to make sure that they are keeping themselves safe from any harm.* *Maybe to tell them what is good and not to get into the fights, to help them out.*

To listen to young people's problems or to improve relationships	*I think it's because young people are more likely to get into trouble and because [the police] don't want that, they stop to chat to them to avoid that. Also the fact that they are making an effort to make young people see that they are there for support, help and guidance and they are not scary and think they own them or are better than them.* *Police might stop to speak to young people in public because they're just concerned about what's happening and how you feel*.

There were 117 responses to the question: *What do young people in your local neighbourhood think about police?* Of these, 33% reported positive views of police held by young people in their local area, who see the police as helpful and there to enhance community safety, while 67% reported somewhat negative to strongly or extremely negative views of police held by young people in their local area who are either very hostile to police, are frightened by or mistrust police, or are critical of aspects of the role and performance of police in the community.

Two thirds of these responses report somewhat negative to extremely negative perceptions of police by young people in Brimbank. It should be kept in mind that this two thirds represents 78 young people out of a sample of 500. It is also important to keep in mind that the survey question asks young people to report what they perceive to be the perceptions of police held by young people in Brimbank in general, which is not necessarily their own opinion of police. In fact, a number of responses here distinguish carefully between what the respondent thinks other young people think and what the respondent herself/himself thinks of police. These distinctions and qualifiers tend to be made when the respondent wishes to dissociate herself/himself from the negative perceptions of others.

Representative comments from those who reported that young people in Brimbank hold strongly or extremely negative perceptions of police tended to use the word 'hate' and were often based on perceptions that include seeing the police in traditional anti-authoritarian terms, expressed through offensive but well-known epithets such as 'pigs', 'rats', 'dogs' and 'scum'; as one respondent put it: *'"Pigs", "rats", "dogs" - nothing respectful, that's for sure.'*

While some of these highly negative perceptions offer little insight beyond the general anti-authoritarian tenor of their language, a few of the responses above hint at negative views of police based on perceptions that some police are not 'good' because they are seen as unethical (e.g. *'corrupt'*), taking advantage of their position *(*e.g. *'get away with everything*') or unprofessional (e.g. *'rude'*) based direct or reported encounters with young people or on perceptions held within the community in general. However, some insights were also offered by young people on how to interpret some of the highly negative views of police held by young people in Brimbank. As one respondent astutely noted, '*They don't care for police much at all, they call them pigs, etc., but when it comes down to the crunch they are scared of them.'*

The suggestion here is that for at least some young people what lies behind the appearance of strong hostility toward or dislike of police is instead inspired by fear and anxiety, feelings which young people (especially young men) are likely to camouflage amongst their peers. In turn, this links back to the themes that emerged in Question 48, where some young people identified the main role of police in the community as 'intimidators' and 'enforcers'. Two respondents specifically linked young people's negative views of police to a particular suburb: *'They don't care about the community, especially Sunshine.'*

Table 56: Young people's perceptions of what young people think of police

THEMES: WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE THINK OF POLICE	
The police are there to be helpful and are a positive presence in the community in general	*They try to sort out problems in the community.*
The police are there to make people feel safer and/or to make the community a safer place in general	*They think of them as people striving to keep our communities safe.* *They think that they can help if you have problems and make you safe.* *They think that they're great. Because they keep the place safe.* *Think they are people that keep everything in line.*
Strong or extremely negative views of police	*Most people hate them 'n' call them pigs 'n' shit like that.* *Hate them, well, the bad ones.* *They are involved in drugs and the criminal stuff.* *They believe police are people who abuse their authority.* *They hate them because a few of them were very rude.*
Not being around enough in the community	*They are never there when people need them.* *They don't do enough to help the community.*
Discriminatory or racist	*They think police don't treat everyone the same and that's why you see people do what they want. If police treat[ed] everybody the same they will be no problem.*
Ineffective in preventing or redressing crime	*They think that there isn't much that police do when someone tells them a crime that has happened.* *They think police can't stop them.*
Not arriving on time or when needed	*They come too slow, they take their time.* *They are not a lot of help...They don't come when they're called, they come an hour later.*
Trying to stop young people having a good time	*I think young people in my local neighbourhood think that the police are only aiming to get people into trouble and ruin their so-called 'fun'.* *Most don't like it when they go to break up a party.*
Not really caring about young people and their problems or concerns	*They don't like police that much because they don't really do much for the younger generation. They have a negative outlook on us which is a shame because we all are different.*

Behaving badly or unprofessionally	*People I know think that [the police] do things wrong themselves. Which they do, I have seen them. And people think they charge people just because they can. And they are also rude. Some of them, anyway.* *They don't really like them and think they are lazy.*

5.6.1 Calling the police

In everyday operations police have anecdotally reported their attendance at situations involving young people where the police have not been called soon enough. To investigate this issue, participants were asked: *What might stop you calling police if you thought your safety or the safety of someone else was at risk?* and *What would make you feel more comfortable calling police?* More than half (55%) offered reasons for not ringing the police when their own safety or that of others was at risk. However, 20% of young people said nothing would prevent them from calling police if they felt their own or others' safety was at risk.

Table 57: What young people say would stop them from calling police when safety was jeopardized

THE MOST COMMON REASONS GIVEN BY YOUNG PEOPLE (56% OF SAMPLE) WHY THEY WOULD NOT RING POLICE WHEN THEIR OWN OR SOMEONE ELSE'S SAFETY WAS JEOPARDIZED		
Fear of direct and violent reprisals from others as a result of ringing police	21%	*Because someone might realise that you were the one who called police and then get you into trouble or [get] very angry at you.* *Because the bullies would get mad, and want to get me more.* *Being hurt afterwards for telling the police.* *By being scared someone will find out and threaten me.* *Blackmail and threaten you. Death threats.* *Someone trying to hurt me or someone I care about.* *If someone threatened to hurt me if I called the police, after all they can't look after you 24 hours a day.*
Fear other negative consequences such as arrest, getting self or friend into trouble, attracting police attention or escalating a situation	16%	*If calling the police meant that my safety or someone else's would get worse.* *They might think that I caused the trouble.* *They might turn the situation on you and make you responsible.* *Scared they might tell someone I don't want to know.* *Might get done too.* *Might go to jail, or get in trouble.* *I would worry that the police take it too far.* *The risk that if the police come it will anger the person more and cause more trouble than needed.* *The issue being blown out of proportion.*

The belief that the police won't respond in time to the call, will be ineffective in handling the situation, will not be interested in the problem/young person or won't take their call seriously	7%	*Because by the time they got there, the situation will more than likely be over.* *I will take the matter into my own hands because the police never come early.* *They can't do much, they don't usually help and usually when I call they say they can't do anything.* *They probably would ignore me [because] I'm African.* *They don't respond to our phone calls. We are their last priority.*
Fear or mistrust of police	3%	*Scared of what might happen or what the police might do.* *I've heard that some police are corrupt which makes me think not to trust anyone [in] my life but my family and friends.* *Fear, police can be intimidating.*
Resistance to dobbing or snitching	4%	*Because you would get hurt even more for being a snitch.* *People won't like me because they'll say I'm a dog because I told.* *[I wouldn't call] if they were my friends.*
Feel better able to handle a situation on own or with friends and family	2%	*If my mates could help me first I wouldn't even bother with the police.* *If I had relatives with me or had control.*

The fear of direct reprisals is the major and most powerful response given by those who are reluctant to call police when safety is an issue. This points to an embedded culture in which ringing the police is seen as a form of betrayal or aggression that can invite further repercussions for the caller. This group of responses suggests that ringing the police is itself seen as an 'unsafe' course of action for a significant number (21%) of young people in the survey that can further compromise their sense of security and wellbeing. Loyalty to or pressure from peers was also an issue for some respondents, with ten young people (2%) commenting they would not ring police because of friends – either the desire not to get friends in trouble, friends talking them down from ringing police, or the belief that friends would provide alternative means of safety.

Participants were asked: *What would make you feel more comfortable calling police?* The most common responses from young people on this issue centred on their feelings about how the police dealt with them when they rang, and on how much confidence they had in whether the police would arrive in time to help and be effective when they did get to the scene. The themes from these responses can be seen in Table 58 below.

A small number of young people (4%) said they were already comfortable calling the police if they felt they needed to: *'If I genuinely felt I was in danger, I would not hesitate to call the police.' 'If there was a problem, I feel comfortable thinking that I could call the police if I needed to.'* Another small group of young people (7%) saw this as an issue of judgement and discretion, saying they would feel comfortable ringing police if the seriousness of the situation warranted contacting police: *'If there has been a robbery or a murder, etc.' 'If I needed to call them I would.' 'When the violence increases and you feel threatened.'* A further 3% said nothing would make them feel more comfortable ringing the police under any circumstances. Comments included: '*Nothing, they're completely ignorant to your issues and never sort things out quickly enough or efficiently.' 'Nothing, I would rather call my boys.' I don't think I'd ever feel comfortable calling the police.'*

Table 58: What young people say would make them feel more comfortable calling police

WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE CALLING POLICE?		
If police were friendlier and/or more respectful to the caller	10%	*Their way of speaking could be less formal.* *If they were more direct, helped more and understood more.* *If they took you more seriously.* *That they believe you.* *When they listen to what you're saying instead of asking heaps of questions.* *If the police treated us a little better […] we would feel a lot better about calling the police.* *If I think police can help me, they are friendly, they can let me trust them.*
If the caller had increased confidence that the police would help and be effective in assisting when contacted	10%	*If their presence might actually make a difference in the situation and help the victim.* *Knowing they would do something and not just discard [the issue] or come when they see fit.* *Knowing what the consequences would be and knowing that the police are going do a job that's fair.*
If anonymity and confidentiality/privacy could be assured	10%	*If calling secretly instead of [in] public.* *If it was able to be more anonymous and not need to be afraid of people finding out it was you.* *Knowing they would keep what I say confidential.*
If the caller was confident police would arrive in time to assist	9%	*If they actually came when you called them.* *Knowing they will be there as soon as possible.* *If they could actually be there when you need them not 30 minutes later.*
If the caller felt reassured that they were safe when ringing the police, either in relation to their peers or to police themselves	6%	*If I knew I wasn't going to be hurt by anyone.* *If I had protection.* *Knowing that they can handle someone that may want to hurt me.*
If the caller had support for lack of self-confidence	2%	*If I knew how to talk.* *If I knew them better it would be easier to say things.* *Speaking to someone young who will understand.* *When I have someone with me when I'm calling; to speak to a person of the same gender.* *Having someone supporting me to do it [i.e., make the call].*

Easier access	2%	*Nothing, it feels uncomfortable calling 000 because we have to talk to a damn machine.* *Easy number.* *If there was another number, not just 000, coz that's all for emergencies and stuff.*

Young people said they would feel more comfortable ringing police if they had easier, quicker telephone access to police. Related to this is the importance of good police listening skills on the other end of the line. In summarizing the responses to this question, the major inhibitors to young people feeling comfortable when calling police involve young people's perceptions that:

- police could be friendlier, less formal, demonstrate improved ability to listen and reassure
- police won't come on time or at all when called
- police are not always helpful or effective at scene when they do arrive
- confidentiality and/or anonymity is critical to feeling comfortable when contacting police
- feeling safe and not at risk as a result of calling police is also important
- some young people lack self-confidence when dealing with police over the phone

5.6.2 Help from police to feel safe

Participants were asked: *How can police help you to feel safe?* Six key themes emerged in relation to how the police can make young people feel safer: greater police visibility and better response times; use of authority to enforce the law and impose order and control in public; improving behaviour and attitude of police toward young people; listening and support by police for young people; police and young people educating each other; and inability of police to help young people feel safe. In each of these themes, the perceived primary role of police emerges from the data, so that young people in the survey defined police variously as:

- service providers
- enforcers and agents of order and control
- intimidators
- listeners, helpers and problem solvers
- educators and advisers
- irrelevant to helping young people feel safe

Each of these sheds light on how young people view their own safety and the role that police can play – with some modifications in strategy and practice – in enhancing a sense of safety in the community for young people.

The main themes on how police can help young people feel safe are shown in the table below.

Table 59: How police can help young people feel safe: main themes

HOW POLICE CAN HELP YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL SAFE: MAIN THEMES	
Greater police visibility	*People don't cause trouble when they see a police car on patrol because they don't want to get caught.*
Better response time to calls	*[They could help me feel safe] by actually responding to phone calls. There have been a few incidents where I would call them and they didn't come to see if everything was OK. This is because I am a teen and they don't see us as a priority.* *They can't, really [help me feel safe]. Sunshine is a dodgy area, and if you call the police for a dispute, and you call a pizza from 3 suburbs away, guaranteed the pizza will get there first.*
Using their power of enforcement	*Because they are armed and know what to do, so there is a safe feeling when they are around.* *Because they know how to deal with situations; generally people are scared of police so people will be scared off.* *They enforce the law, which makes me feel safe.* *[By] act[ing] on violent gangs in the community.* *By controlling the violence.*
Through their attitude and behaviour	*By treating me safely and listen[ing] to me or to what I have to say.* *By continuing their work and being kind people who emit a safe vibe.* *By not being biased about anything.*
Listening to problems, being there	*By being there for me when something's wrong, but they're never there.* *By knowing they are there to help.* *If you tell them your problems that they can help you sort it out.* *Look after us and make sure that they have our backs.*
Education and advice	*Give you guidelines to follow to stay safe.* *By giving out advice.* *'Be more involved in the community and talk to young people in schools at an early age and continue until Year 8; [come to school] fetes and fundraisers.* *Asking more questions about the community and what they could do.*
Police cannot help me feel safe	*They don't make me feel safe, they're liars.* *They can't do anything about young people and gangs so they can't help you feel safe.* *They don't, they are useless… they don't know how to deal with things.* *They can't, police make everybody feel uneasy about what they are doing whether it be innocent or not.* *They can't and they will never make any young person feel safe.*

Increased police visibility was the most frequent response and reflects a common perception of police as service providers. This group of responses reflects the perception that higher visibility and greater presence of police in a local area is the factor most likely to increase people's sense of safety in their everyday lives. This is supported by some of the literature on police visibility and perceptions of community safety. For example, *Narrowing the Gap* (2002; see Chapter 3 above), a large Scottish study based on 30 focus groups and more than 1000 survey participants, found that:

- 89% thought that a visible police presence would make people feel safer;
- 83% thought it would prevent crime; and
- 81% of people believed a visible police presence would deal with the root causes of crime and disorder.

Respondents in the qualitative component of the Scottish study identified 'lack of police on the beat and slow police response times - a perception that the police are not there when required' as a main feature of perceived 'ineffective interventions' by police that contributed to public anxiety and feeling unsafe in local areas. The same study noted, however, that 'greater police visibility was not important to young people and whilst the most common response to improving visibility [from young people] was to have more officers', this was balanced by counter-concerns around harassment and negative encounters with police. Overall, this UK study found that young people placed more emphasis on building positive relationships with police than on police presence dissociated from other factors such as trust and positive community interactions.

The tables below show how often young people reported seeing the police in their local areas and the degree of safety they felt when they saw police on the streets.

Table 60: Perception of police presence in the area

HOW OFTEN DO YOU SEE POLICE ON THE STREETS IN YOUR LOCAL AREA?	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Often	19	13	16
Sometimes	35	39	37
Not very often	46	48	47
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 61: Perception of safety and police presence

DO YOU FEEL SAFER WHEN YOU SEE POLICE ON THE STREETS?	GENDER (%)		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Much safer	23	20	21
Safer	34	40	37
Neither safe/unsafe	26	31	28
Less safe	7	6	7
A lot less safe	10	3	7
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

The results of these questions on frequency of seeing police and feelings of safety show seeing police can reflect both positive and negative messages. For example, of the people who see police often, 32% feel neither

safe/unsafe, while 23% feel a lot less safe and 28% feel much safer. Of the respondents who see police only sometimes, a high proportion feel safe (44%) when they see police while another 33% feel neither safe/unsafe. On the other hand, of the respondents who do not see police very often, a high proportion (58%) feel safer (37%) to much safer (21%) when they do see police on the streets.

Young people were also frustrated by what they perceive as slow response rates or a failure to respond when they feel they need police to assist them. Their comments indicate both this frustration and also the sense that they don't matter to police as much as others in the community.

In the second theme, respondents focused on how police can make young people feel safer in the community through their role as enforcers – using their authority to arrest, charge, and control in order to manage violence, conflict and anti-social behaviour. As one participant put it, some young people see police as *'the boss of the law'* and feel this is their primary role in enhancing community safety for young people.

The third theme focussed on police helping young people safer through improving police attitudes, behaviour or demeanour toward young people. This group saw police primarily, though not exclusively, as intimidators who can instil unease and anxiety amongst individual or groups of young people in order to control their behaviour and/or to demonstrate their enhanced power and authority relative to that of young people. This correlates strongly with findings from the Sudanese and Pacific Islander focus groups in Chapter 6 below, where much emphasis was placed on this perception by study participants who identified stereotyping and racism, not being listened to or responded to, and not feeling respected by police as inhibitors to better relationships with the police. Like the respondents in the survey, the focus group participants wanted police to avoid stereotyping or pre-judging them, to listen to young people more effectively, and to show respect and understanding when they encountered young people in the community.

A number of the survey responses indicated the level of intimidation young people feel around the police, which in turn can make them feel less safe even when the police are trying to help. Nevertheless, young people who responded this way also stressed their desire to talk to police them and have the police *'listen to my problems'*. They want to connect with police in positive rather than negative ways, to understand police better as well as feel better understood by them.

Closely linked to this is the fourth theme: the police can help make young people feel safe by listening to them and 'being there' for them when they need the police or are having problems. These respondents saw police primarily as listeners, helpers and problem solvers, a community resource they would like to access and trust but did not always feel they could do so.

3% of young people responding to this question saw the role of police in helping them feel safe as linked to the ability of police to be educators and advisers. These respondents placed emphasis on the educative role of the police in helping young people feel safer by better understanding their rights and responsibilities and by advising them about how to handle various situations. In turn, they also stressed the desire for police to learn more about young people from young people themselves so that educating each other becomes a reciprocal process.

However, 7% of young people who responded to this question felt police couldn't help them feel safer under any circumstances. For this group of respondents, the role of police in helping young people feel safe was largely irrelevant. Their negative feelings about police and safety tended to centre on lack of trust in police; a belief that police aren't 'there' for young people; a sense that the police are overwhelmed and can't solve problems like gang violence; and a perceived inability on the part of police to care about or understand the problems and experience of young people.

While these responses have been clustered to emphasise both the diversity of views and the key themes governing young people's perspectives on how the police can help them feel more safe, it should be noted that many of these categories overlapped for individual respondents; a number of responses to this question referred to multiple things that police can do to enhance young people's sense of safety in the community, and some young people saw the police as a combination of, for example, 'enforcer' and 'educator' or 'intimidator' and 'service provider'.

5.6.3 Improving police relations with young people

Participants were asked: *What is the best way for police to develop a good relationship with young people in your local neighbourhood?* About 50% emphasized *police communication with* and *behaviour and attitude toward young people* as the most significant elements in developing good relationships between young people and the police in their local area.

The largest single group of responses was the 20% of young people who said they saw improved communication strategies and pathways between police and young people as the most important element in developing better relationships at the local level. 15% of young people believed that police being friendlier toward and more approachable by young people was the best way to strengthen the relationship between young people and the police. Another 15% felt that improvements in police attitudes and behaviour toward young people – particularly in relation to police being more polite and less disrespectful when dealing with people in this age group – were key elements in creating better relationships. 8% of young people stressed a more caring, understanding and supportive attitude by police toward young people as crucial to creating better relationships at the local level.

Beyond young people's central focus on communication and attitudinal issues in their perception of how police can best improve their relationships with young people in the local area, a number of other key elements emerged across these responses. 10% saw educational activities as the best way to improve the relationship between young people and the police in their area. They defined 'educational activities' very broadly, including both formal and informal school visits and programs, community educational activities, learning more about what the police do, and having the opportunity to teach police something about young people. Some of the suggestions and comments around educational activities and engagement between young people and the police included. 7% saw social activities and local community involvement between police and young people as the best way to forge good relationships in the local community, many of which fall under the banner of pro-active community policing. These comments also align well with those of CALDB young people in the focus groups below (Chapter 6), who emphasise the importance of having strong community-based relationships with individual police officers such as the connections between individual police and local youth promoted by the Surfer Bus initiative in Brimbank.

Table 62: Strategies suggested by young people to assist the police to develop good relationships with young people in the local neighbourhood

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY FOR POLICE TO DEVELOP A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD?	
Improved communication between police and young people	*The best way for police to develop a good relationship with young people is to talk to them.* *To let young people know that the police are not being unfair, just trying to make the streets a safer place for the community.* *By having serious talks with young people about issues and concerns.*

	Talk to us normally and nice, not with an attitude that makes us think they're suss. *To have a meeting night where we get to voice our issues and worries.* *If they stop picking on us and have a normal convo with us and show us they're here to help, not to make our lives harder.* *Young people feel very scared when they see police, the officers could just say hello to make them feel like there is nothing wrong.*
Police being friendlier toward and more approachable by young people	*Providing support in a comfortable manner where young people can be able to open up and speak freely.* *By not getting all tensed up when police or kids see each other.* *Come down to [young people's] level.* *Encourage instead of trying to scare [young people] into things.* *Not only having an authoritative demeanour but also one that makes people feel like [police] are friendly and approachable.*
Police being more polite and less disrespectful	*If they didn't talk to us so bad.* *Less aggressive towards the young people.* *Not be so argumentative with teenagers when they get into trouble.* *Not to pinpoint people for their culture.* *Reducing stereotyping and prejudices.*
Police being more caring, understanding and supportive toward young people	*See things from our point of view.* *Try to understand what [young people's] real issues are.* *To tell [young people] that they are on their side and are there to help.* *To listen to [young people's] ideas.*
Educational activities	*Maybe taking on young students and things to show them the ropes, get them involved in their work a little bit and maybe even start groups who can speak to [young people], help them and provide support groups for struggling kids.* *Approach [young people] in schools and talk about their job to stop stereotypical ideas about [the police].* *By making [police] aware of the problems that we face and to make us aware that [police] are on our side by making programs with our schools and communities.* *Have days for people to come in and ask questions and meet with their local police.* *Having them attend our school and making us comfortable with them.* *Local gatherings and talks with police officers in and out of school.* *Maybe get us to do another survey like this.* *Get feedback for [young people's] perspective on certain issues relating to their age group.* *Through a youth forum where youth can converse with police and bring up their safety fears and work on a way to resolve these.*

Social activities and local community involvement	*Mix and doing [things] together, like cooking, dancing, story-telling, acting, learning other cultures and religion, etc.* *Get involved in social activities that young people are involved in.* *To have a local community fun place where all the police are there [for young people] to be friends with and ask questions.* *By being involved in what they do, getting to know the local kids by perhaps going to local places, sports clubs, schools and hanging out with the kids.* *Create a day where they are in the community to talk to youth and to reassure [them] they are safe.* *Gain [young people's] trust by going into their schools and youth centres and be friendly with them.*

In the responses here, the desire of young people to relate to the police as listeners, helpers and problem solvers; educators and advisers; and service providers emerges most strongly in their emphasis on seeing improved communication strategies between young people and the police; a friendlier and more approachable police force in the local community; better attitudes toward and treatment of young people by the police, and a clear focus on reciprocal educational and community activities in which the police and young people come together to learn from each other for the purpose of better mutual understanding.

5.7 Improving community safety

In answering the question: *If you could do three things to make your local neighbourhood a safer place, what would they be*? respondents were able to suggest three things that would make their neighbourhood a safer place. The top response for all suggestions nominated by respondents was 'more police and reports of crime to police', which made up a quarter of responses. Other top suggestions given for making a respondent's neighbourhood a safer place across all suggestions included: more environmental security measures; police and community members working collaboratively; and encouraging understanding and respect.

Table 63: Suggestions by young people about making their neighbourhood a safer place

SUGGESTIONS BY YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT MAKING THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD A SAFER PLACE (%)	
More police and reports of crime to police	25
More environmental security measures	13
Police and community members working collaboratively	12
Encouraging understanding and respect	9
Keeping safe in public campaign	8
Get rid of gangs and 'bad' people	8
More allocated public spaces to hang out and shared activities	6
More laws and/or consequences for public offences	5
Look after public spaces and schools	3
Help troubled young people	3
Protect yourself	2
Other	6
Total	**100**

Note: Some respondents gave more than the allocated three suggestions.

The top suggestion given by respondents across all suggestions was having more police and reports of crime to police: *'Call the police if anything happens*'; '*Have more police near public transport'.* Some responses for this theme suggested particular public areas where there should be a greater police presence. The main places nominated by respondents included: public transport, train stations and street patrols. Other responses for this theme pertained to young people reporting crime to police when it occurred. This finding suggests that there are a proportion of young people in Brimbank who do perceive the role of police as protectors of their community and shows an element of trust for the police and their role. It also suggests that this proportion of young people are aware that a limitation on police presence in the community can be due to low numbers of police officers and resourcing. This finding implies that they would like that to be addressed for Brimbank.

Having greater environmental security measures was the second most suggested response theme across all suggestions made. Environmental security measures pertained to the physical presence of security objects or personnel found in most public spaces that some respondents explained improved their feelings of safety. The most common suggested security measure was having more security cameras in their neighbourhood, particularly at or near train stations: *'More cameras around certain areas'; 'Have security people watching the train stations*'. Other suggested security measures included security guards patrolling public buildings and areas, more street lighting and more public phones. This theme suggests that there are a proportion of young people who understand that police cannot be everywhere at once and that securing the environment offers an alternative to a constant police presence. It also suggests that these respondents are using public spaces in Brimbank regularly enough that they are knowledgeable of the practicalities that need improvement for them to feel safer while out in their neighbourhood.

Police and/or community members working collaboratively was the third most common theme in the suggestions given by respondents for improving safety in neighbourhoods: '*Get a group together involving the police to actually work together and make our community safer'; 'Talk to neighbours and make plans to be safe*.*'*

Responses for this theme centred on having community consultations such as, community meetings or school visits, that could occur between community members in a neighbourhood as well as the community and the police. This included youth specific consultations as well as the community at large. Running community initiatives such as Neighbourhood Watch was one common response for this theme. Other respondents suggested that there should be more community initiatives where they could get to know neighbours and others living in their neighbourhood.

It appears from the responses to this theme that a proportion of young people in Brimbank see improvements to neighbourhood safety not only as the responsibility of police, but of themselves and everyone living in their neighbourhood. It also suggests that there are a proportion of young people that are willing to be a part of the solution and to work with police and others in their neighbourhood to improve safety.

5.8 Summary of the survey findings

Perceptions of safety

Half of the participants reported feeling safe in their local neighbourhood; one quarter reported feeling somewhat safe and 12% reported feeling unsafe. Train and bus stations were overwhelmingly reported as the most unsafe places with one third reporting this as unsafe. Walking down the street, in local parks, and on public transport, were rated as unsafe by one quarter. There was a gender difference in perception of safety with young women more likely to report being somewhat safe or unsafe than young men who were more likely to report feeling extremely safe.

Hanging out in groups

Hanging out with friends was the primary reason for young people gathering in groups in public. More than three quarters reported hanging out in public places, generally in the afternoon. They reported hanging out in groups in public to spend time with friends, to be involved in planned activities, to have access to friends and as a safety strategy.

Gangs

Three quarters thought there were gangs in their local area. They were clear in how they saw the difference between groups and gangs. Antisocial and violent behaviour were reported as the key markers distinguishing a 'gang' from a 'group'. One third of all participants reported having had encounters with gangs in their local areas and young men were twice as likely to report gang encounters as young women. Half reported some fear of gangs in their local area. They thought the main reasons young people joined gangs to belong, for criminal activity, due to having the same ethnic background and for self-defence.

Violent crime

Young people reported that the reasons for young people committing violent crime were: for power and image; because of individual problems, to be part of group identity, and due to social problems in the wider community. Those who reported having been a victim of violent crime were more likely to think that social problems in the wider community were the cause. Just over a third reported being worried about being attacked in public, particularly in certain places. One fifth (19%) reported having been a victim of violent crime in public with almost twice as many reports from young men as compared to young women. Young men were more likely to report assault than young women and young women more likely to report offences related to drunkenness, offensive behaviour and abusive language than young men.

Understanding conflict

Acting tough and looking for a fight or being cool were the main reasons given for the causes of arguments between young people, followed by differences of opinion. Young people thought conflict turned violent through acting tough, lack of back down, being cool and showing aggression.

Weapons carriage

Half the participants reported knowing young people who carry weapons regularly. Poles, trolley poles, bats, baseball bats, guns, machetes and various knives were reported as the main weapons of choice. Young people thought that the main reasons for carrying weapons were to feel safe, for self-defence and for protection. One quarter reported that they had carried a weapon at some time. Victims of violent crime were more likely to carry weapons than others.

Staying safe

Young people reported that following public safety tips such as going out in groups was the best way to keep safe from violence. Not getting involved with bad company, not getting involved in fights and avoiding places where violent people or groups hang out were also reported as ways of staying safe.

Reducing conflict

Young people reported suggestions for reducing conflict as being: more education and encouragement of self control and respecting others; choosing friends wisely; greater police or adult supervision with stronger consequences; more prevention measures such as counselling and controlling drugs and alcohol. A quarter of young people thought that young people themselves were best able to deal with conflict between young people, followed by police and youth workers. In contrast mothers, relatives and school counsellors were reported as who they would go to for a problem.

Young people and police

Half of the participants reported they trusted or completely trusted the police, while a quarter reported a lack of trust. About one fifth said they would call the police if they needed to. When asked, just over half gave examples for what might stop them calling the police if their own or someone else's safety were in danger; fear of violent reprisals, negative consequences, or escalation of the situation were the most common responses. The belief that the police won't respond in time to the call, will be ineffective in handling the situation, will not be interested in the problem, or won't take their call seriously were also reported. Young people said they would feel more comfortable calling the police if the police were friendlier, if the police were more respectful, if they could be more confident that they would be assisted, and if the call could be more private or anonymous.

In responding to how police could make them feel safer young people suggested that police have greater visibility, better response time, use their power of enforcement, have a more respectful attitude towards them, and listen to young people.

Improving community safety

Young people's suggestions for improving community safety included: more police, greater reporting of crime to police by young people, more environmental security measures such as cameras and guards, police and community members working collaboratively, encouraging understanding and respect, a keeping safe in public campaign, getting rid of gangs and 'bad' people, more allocated public spaces to hang out, and shared activities for groups of young people.

6 SUDANESE AND PACIFIC ISLANDER YOUNG PEOPLE: FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The purpose of the focus groups run with young people drawn from the Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities within the overall research design was to draw out in-depth insights into community-specific perceptions in order to identify discourses and issues around community safety, young people and policing that may or not be shared with the representative sample as a whole.

Although as young people from CALD backgrounds, both Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people may share some experiences and perspectives in common with other CALD-background youth relative to those of young people from mainstream communities, a critical element in our study is the exploration of differences and commonalities *between* young people from these two CALD cohorts around issues of safety and policing in the community, as well as broader consideration of how the findings for both communities relate to those for the representative sample generated through the survey.

While broad comparisons about CALDB or 'ethnic minority' youth may be drawn in relation to the mainstream and are useful at some levels of policy and strategic development, it is the fine-grained knowledge generated from within specific communities that can yield the most insights when considering how to design, implement and evaluate culturally specific and locally tailored solutions to issues around community safety and improving the relationship between young people and police at the local level. It is also a timely reminder that different CALDB communities may have varying perspectives in terms of how they understand, manage and relate to perceptions around safety and well-being in the community. While such differences may pose operational, strategic and policy challenges for community policing initiatives, they are ultimately opportunities to gain a more in-depth understanding of the nature and background of specific issues, and the targeted strategies and mechanisms needed to respond effectively to those issues.

Between March – October 2008, 47 young people drawn from the Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities in Brimbank participated in 5 scheduled focus groups of 7-10 participants each. All participants were Brimbank residents, drawn from a diverse range of suburbs across the Brimbank LGA. These groups were selected for reasons outlined in Chapter 2, including the desire to investigate the evidence base for anecdotal reports that both communities were over-represented in issues of concern to police, including public gathering, youth-on-youth assault, aggravated assault, traffic offences and weapons carriage.

Before presenting and analysing the findings from the focus groups, the next section provides some general background information and context for the Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities.

6.1 Background information on the Sudanese community

In relation to Sudanese-background settlement in Australia, the vast majority of Sudanese arrivals (89%) have come to Australia since 1996. DIAC (Community Profiles 2006) notes that, nationally speaking:

> The median age of the Sudan-born in 2006 was 24.6 years compared with 46.8 years for all overseas-born and 37.1 years for the total Australian population. The age distribution showed 26.6 per cent were aged 0-14 years, 24.4 per cent were 15-24 years, 36.4 per cent were 25-44 years, 10.2 per cent were 45-64 years and 2.5 per cent were 65 and over. Of the Sudan-born in Australia, there were 10,320 males (54.2 per cent) and 8730 females (45.8 per cent). The sex ratio was 118.2 males per 100 females.[11]

[11] DIAC, 'Community Information Summary: Sudan-Born', http://www.immi.gov.au/ media/publications/statistics/comm-summ/pdf/sudan.pdf

However, it should be observed that country of birth is not a wholly reliable guide to the numbers of Sudanese-background people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australia, especially in relation to younger people, since many younger Sudanese-Australians were born outside Sudan while their families were in transit in refugee camps in neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Chad, or in other host countries such as Egypt, while seeking asylum and humanitarian entry to a new country. Nor does it reflect the number of first generation Australian-born Sudanese youth, the eldest of whom will be around 15-16 years of age in 2010, who identify strongly as Sudanese-Australians.

The 2006 ABS Census data show that Melbourne is the most popular city of residence for Sudanese arrivals at 31%, or about 5,900, of Australia's national total of approximately 23,000 residents of Sudanese background, followed by Sydney (28% or about 5,300). Turning to the City of Brimbank, this LGA has a high level of recent arrivals and migrants across the general Brimbank population, particularly in relation to young people aged 12-24. According to the Brimbank City Council *Youth Policy and Action Plan 2008-2013*,

> Approximately one quarter of young people in Brimbank in 2001 aged 15 to 24 years were born overseas. ... The municipality continues a long tradition of welcoming migrants and refugees. Over the past six years, Brimbank has become the third highest settlement location for newly arrived migrants in Victoria and the second for Humanitarian Visa arrivals. Around one quarter of the 8,985 new arrivals to Brimbank between 2001-2006 were aged 10 to 19 years, and another one third were aged 20 to 29 years. Of the 2,750 humanitarian arrivals to Brimbank over this period, 23% were aged 10 to 19 and 20% were aged 20 to 29, making the total percentage of youth arrivals 43%. Many of these humanitarian arrivals were from Sudan and other African countries.[12]

These figures should be viewed in the context of the Census data (ABS 2006) showing that overall 12,889 young people aged 15-19 lived in Brimbank with rough gender parity across young men and young women in this age group (6,643 males/6,246 females). These figures are projected to change only marginally for the total 15-19 year age group by 2010 with a slight increase in males (+135 from 2006) and slight decrease in females (-47 from 2006) by 2010.[13]

In 2006, Sudanese-background residents accounted for about 0.7% of the total population of Brimbank LGA (ABS 2006). Almost all Sudanese young people aged 15-19 in Brimbank are likely to come from refugee family backgrounds. The majority ethnic Sudanese background in Brimbank is Dinka, but there are also other Sudanese language and tribal groups. Many but not all young Sudanese speak good to fluent English, and many are bi- or multilingual in languages including Sudanese Arabic, Swahili, and a range of Sudanese indigenous and tribal languages. Not all Sudanese young people live with one or both parents and some do not have close relatives in Australia, relying on extended family, friends and community support systems. There are experiences of ongoing intergenerational conflict for some young Sudanese men and women as they and their families meet the challenges of settling in a new country where community values may differ at times from what is culturally acceptable in the home country.

As noted above, some young Sudanese people from refugee backgrounds now living in Australia were neither born nor have lived in Sudan itself, but nevertheless strongly identify culturally and ethnically as Sudanese and have strong links with the wider Sudanese inter-generational community. Consequently, some young Sudanese people continue to deal with issues related to the trauma and displacement associated with their refugee

[12] http://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/Files/YouthPolicyandActionPlan2008to2013.pdf, page 7.

[13] City of Brimbank Population Forecasts, forecast.id, http://forecast2.id.com.au/ default.aspx?id= 103andpg= 5210.

experiences and/or with that of their parents, siblings and extended families, and there is a developing research base on the Australian and international settlement experiences of Sudanese adults and young people (e.g., Ben-Moshe et al., 2006; Deng and Andreou, 2006; Pyke and Grossman, 2008; Holtzman, 2007).

Many Sudanese living in Australia have Christian faith-based identities and networks, reflecting the original humanitarian intake from South Sudan which is dominated by people with Christian and animist belief systems. However, an increasing number of more recent Sudanese arrivals are Muslim, in line with recent shifts in the geographical and cultural demographics of refugee populations from this region. Important cultural attributes for all Sudanese communities regardless of religious affiliation include strong extended family and kinship structures, expanded group-based social networks, and high educational aspirations for themselves and their children. However, many Sudanese-Australians are dealing with the challenges of interrupted education and/or placement at inappropriate educational levels based on age rather than educational skill level. They face limited employment opportunities, but English language skills are less of a barrier for young Sudanese people than for their parents and other older adult community members.

As highlighted elsewhere in the report, the Sudanese community, and in particular young Sudanese men, are over-represented in media reports as both social antagonists and as victims of high-profile assaults and fatalities. Because of their relatively recent arrival in Australia, there is a comparatively low research base around Sudanese young people, crime and community safety compared with other ethnic groups; recent contributions in this area include the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians (2009), the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission report, *Rights of Passage: The Experiences of Australian-Sudanese Young People* (2008), and the Victorian Legal Services Board's report from its recent Racism Project, *'Boys, you wanna give me some action?': Interventions into Policing of Racialised Communities in Melbourne* (2010), which focuses on the experience of African-background youth, many of whom self-identified as Somali or Sudanese (Smith and Reside, 2010: 7).

6.2 Background information on the Pacific Island community

While the history of settlement in Australia for people of Maori and Pacific Islander heritage is long and complex, stretching back into the colonial histories of both Australia and New Zealand, recent years have seen a significant increase in Maori and Pacific Islander migration to Australia, which together comprise 'one of Australia's fastest growing immigrant groups' (George and Rodriguez, 2009:2; ABS 2006). Because a number of Pacific Islanders come to Australia as citizens of New Zealand, and because of some compliance issues with the collection of census data (George and Rodriguez, 2009: 3), the demographic data on migration and settlement are not always clear. However, despite the challenges of gaining precise census data, approximately 93,000 Maori and 72,000 Samoans, Tongans, Niueans and Cook Islanders reported residence in Australia in the 2006 census (ABS 2006).

Within the Brimbank area, there are well established Pacific Islander communities, especially around the suburbs of St Albans and West Sunshine. As noted earlier in the report, people from self-identified Pacific Islander backgrounds account for about 1.41% (approximately 2,385) of the total Brimbank population (ABS 2006), or about double the number of Sudanese-background community members in this LGA.

The majority of Pacific Islanders in Australia are Christian, with very active church membership and church-based social and community networks. Extended family networks are robust and trans-national, and there is a strong sense of trans-generational cultural identity as Islanders linked to ethnic origin rather than country of residence.

Hamer's 2007 qualitative study of Maori in Australia identified the major drivers for migration to Australia as both economic and social, but also indicated some Pacific Islander families and individuals wanted to remove themselves from an environment of gang-based violence in New Zealand. This study further found that many Pacific Islanders do not consider themselves to be 'migrants' and thus do not rely on or consistently set up the kinds of community based support and access to government services that have characterised other migrant group patterns of settlement in Australia (Hamer, 2007; George and Rodriguez, 2009).

Pacific Islanders living in Australia are fluent in spoken English, and some community members are bi- or multi-lingual in various Maori and Pacific Islander languages. Educational achievement is valued by parents and community leaders, but there are historically poor to indifferent levels of culturally specific/appropriate education offered at schools attended by Pacific Islander-background children throughout Australia and consequently relatively low levels of educational engagement amongst Maori and Pacific Islander youth, particularly young men (Horsley, 2003). The adverse cross-generational impact of colonial histories relating to labour policies, cultural assimilation and forced migration continues to be felt and reflected in the levels of socio-economic disadvantage experienced by many Maori and Pacific Islanders, both nationally and within the Brimbank region. Most Australians know relatively little about Pacific Islander culture, heritage or history beyond contemporary stereotypes of Pacific Islanders, for example, in relation to sport, particularly rugby.

Compared with other migrant and transnational diaspora groups present in Australia for similar periods of time, there is a relatively modest research base on Pacific Islander young people, crime and community safety, although recent studies have begun to address this. In addition to a very recent study by Collins and Reid on minority youth, crime and belonging in Australia (2009), significant studies including a focus on Pacific Islander youth include White et al.'s 1999 study, *Ethnic Youth Gangs: Do They Exist? – Report No. 3: Pacific Islander Young People*, and work by Collins, Noble, Poynting and Tabar on young people, multiculturalism, crime and social issues (2000, 2001, 2002, 2004). However, with the exception of White et al.'s 1999 research, most of these studies are New South Wales or Queensland-based and the research base in Victoria is slim (e.g. a 1994 study by Bessant and Watt on violence in Victorian schools that touches on Pacific Islander youth).

6.3 Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people's perspectives on gathering in groups in public places

For young people, 'community' can variously be a source of pride or of stigmatisation (White and Wyn, 2008). Young people develop identities which sometimes resonate with ethnic, religious or lifestyle associations, but which can also often demonstrate a socio-territorial identification with their neighbourhood or school and the people they associate with in these locales (White, 1997; David-Ferdon and Hammond, 2008). As White has previously theorised, for young men in particular, finding a place to belong in the community is crucial to individual health and well-being, yet there has been a raft of ideological and social and economic barriers to young men finding a place in their community in recent times (White, 1997). As White and Wyn also argue (2008) the processes of strengthening 'community' in national and local contexts has too often focused on processes of 'othering', with ethnic minority youth being targeted as 'troublemakers.' In particular, if cultural practices, customs, social ties and beliefs deviate from the 'mainstream', young people can experience social exclusion and discrimination. This has been most evident with the emergence of numerous 'moral panics' about the deviant behaviour of ethnic minority youth in Sydney and Melbourne, an effect that has stigmatised whole communities (Poynting et al., 2004; Hage, 1998; White et al., 1999).

This theoretical context is relevant if we are to better understand the tensions, challenges and opportunities inherent in thinking about the factors influencing the behaviour of both young men and young women from

Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities in relation to how they spend their time with each other and with their peers in groups in public places within the Brimbank region.

6.3.1 Recreational time in groups

Most Sudanese young men in the focus groups reported that they tend to spend time in groups that are sport-focused on weekends (basketball, soccer, jogging), and study-focused during the week. Recreational time in groups for young Sudanese women was reported to involve shopping and general socialising on weekends, with study and housework taking precedence during the week.

In common with the representative survey sample, hanging out in groups in public spaces during the week was reported generally by Sudanese young people of both genders as occurring after school and before dark, mostly at common meeting points such as transport hubs in Sunshine and St Albans. Local parks were not seen as desirable gathering places by young Sudanese people in the focus groups, due to their concerns about territorial rights to parks amongst different neighbourhood-based groups. In contrast, however, transport hubs were perceived by young Sudanese as equal-opportunity public-access spaces.

Neither young men nor women in the Sudanese focus groups were enthusiastic in general about publicly held or night-time-based recreation in Brimbank, which they perceive to be risky and trouble-prone, although a number said they would sometimes go into Melbourne's CBD to clubs and dance venues. They are more likely to attend private parties (cultural events, weddings, birthdays, etc.) within and beyond the Brimbank area, especially since such events are culturally significant occasions for recreation and community cohesion within the Sudanese community more generally.

However, parties are also associated by a number of Sudanese young people with major risks revolving around alcohol use, police presence, and violent conflict. An important finding raised by the issue of private parties and risks to safety and wellbeing for this group of young people is the question of whether large social events and parties of the kind described in the focus groups challenge the traditional boundary lines between the 'public' and the 'private'. These events may start off as 'private' but often spill into the public domain. The advent of rapid SMS and text messaging amongst young people in this age group has seen many parties that begin on private premises (whether households or local halls and centres rented by an individual, family or group) quickly become large events that are swamped by people unknown to those hosting the party, moving out into shared public spaces such as footpaths, adjoining local streets an onto other private properties such as adjacent yards or driveways nearby.

During focus group discussions Sudanese young people of both genders expressed concerns for these reasons about the capacity to contain and manage large group events in locally available spaces, as well as the affordability factor for young Sudanese and their families of renting suitably-sized venues and/or hiring security. In addition, these kinds of social and cultural events were frequently identified as taking place in different parts of Melbourne, with young Sudanese people travelling in groups to different parts of the city and suburbs for particular events or to join up extended family or other social networks. Large group gatherings were therefore seen as not being contained or defined by LGA or other suburban boundaries.

In contrast to Sudanese young men, who emphasised their participation a range of sporting activities in groups during weekends, Pacific Islander young men indicated during focus group discussions that they preferred hanging out and general unstructured time with each other as their main form of group recreation, although there was strong interest in and commitment to playing in local rugby teams. However, they also noted that the lack of rugby facilities in Brimbank involved having to travel to Footscray for the nearest rugby ground.

Their preferred locales for spending time together in groups in their local neighbourhood included *'hanging out at the station'* [Sunshine] or at local St Albans and Sunshine venues, such as internet cafes and food outlets. A minority of young Pacific Islander men in the focus groups cited larrikin behaviour such as the egging of cars and houses or *'borrowing clothes from clotheslines'* as common activities when spending time together in groups. Similar to young Sudanese women, Pacific Islander young women cited shopping at local shopping centres, eating, talking and hanging out at the main transport hubs of Sunshine and St Albans as their preferred group activities.

6.4 Community safety for young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders

6.4.1 'There's just this projection about Africans': community safety issues for young Sudanese

Race and Place

For young Sudanese men in the focus groups, the main theme that emerged around feeling unsafe or anxious in public was experiencing threats to safety based on racially-motivated incidents. These incidents included both verbal and physical threats and conflicts as well as both one-one-one and group-based encounters. Sudanese male participants identified local streets, transport hubs and being in and around schools as the key places where young Sudanese men feel least safe. The issue of feeling unsafe in and around schools is highlighted here as it contrasts with the 90% of young people from the representative survey sample who reported feeling safe at school (Figure 6). As young men in the Sudanese focus groups noted:

> *I was walking down the street and these guys came up in a car and they started throwing bottles at me…I was coming from school.*
>
> *Some people are racist to you, and they bully you and say, 'You don't belong in this country', so sometimes it makes me scared, to not belong to the society… All of this insulting is not just happening on the street but even inside the school.*
>
> *Some people might just stick their head out of the car when you're driving past and call you names; most of them definitely know that you will get offended and so they will not stop.*
>
> *There's just this projection about Africans, they are perceived as being violent or aggressive and so people will not approach you [or sit next to you [on the bus or train] because they just have some bad picture of you in mind*.

By contrast, most young Sudanese women in the focus groups said they felt relatively safe in their local areas, and did not cite the racially-based encounters or concerns that the young men identified. However, young women did identify some gender-specific fears about safety in public spaces in relation to being followed (by both men and women) on the street; being out after dark, especially in deserted areas, e.g. alleyways, and being around people who are alcohol-affected. Young women were especially concerned that police would not be near enough to assist if they encountered trouble or their safety was threatened. They also felt less safe when out on their own instead of being in a group.

While the Brimbank region in general was cited as 'pretty safe' by young Sudanese female focus group participants, the local suburb of Braybrook (a small slice of which is in Brimbank, the rest in the City of Maribyrnong) was singled out as an unsafe space that was avoided for hanging out and general socialising by these young women:

There's always something going on in Braybrook. There's just drama always, so, like police, kids, somewhere is getting broken into, something, you know. I live in Braybrook, but I never hang out there.

6.4.2 'They might just turn around and chop ya': feeling unsafe for young Pacific Islanders

Antisocial behaviour, cultural difference and substance abuse

For young Pacific Islander men and women, feeling unsafe in public places was linked primarily to the following themes: the prevalence of fights; different cultures; alcohol and drug use; hooning, and weapons carriage in the local Brimbank area. They described feeling unsafe in a chronic, or every-day, sense in relation to these issues, and young Pacific Islander men in particular suggested that all of them contributed to a pervasive sense of anxiety and vigilance around their own personal safety in public places.

Whereas, in common with young Sudanese women, young Pacific Islander women were very concerned about alcohol and drug use (see below), young Pacific Islander men said that while alcohol use by others can heighten their sense of feeling unsafe, it can also increase confidence in overpowering a perceived threat: as one male Pacific Islander put it, '*They're pretty weak when they're drunk'.*

Young male participants in the Pacific Islander focus groups identified a generalised culture of street fighting in parts of Brimbank which they saw as posing a threat to safety because it was easy to become entangled in a physical conflict simply by being a witness or bystander:

> *In Sunshine there's heaps of fights and, you know, they don't really care who they're going for…So if you're standing round watching, someone might think you're part of the people that they're fighting with and just turn around…and chop ya*.

Hooning and overt weapons carriage by others were also identified as contributing to a generalized sense of being unsafe when out in public spaces for young men in these focus groups:

> *You feel unsafe when you hear a car just going hard and revving the car up 'n' everything the second you cross the road…you don't know what to expect*.

> *Beer bottles, broken…they might stab you with a knife…they have weapons, they might slice me. … Hoses… Machetes… We see it pretty much every day…sometimes people are walking down the street holding machetes or poles…You can fit them down the trackies and all that, yeah*.

However, feeling safe in public when confronted by such perceived threats or risks increases significantly for this group of young men when they are together in groups: *'There's no fear if you are with your boys.'*

Some Pacific Islander young people of both genders said they felt less safe around people from non-English speaking cultural backgrounds. This is a significant finding because of the high level of culturally and linguistically diverse young people in the Brimbank region, and the strong emphasis on intercultural engagement and tolerance promoted through schools, the local council and other local and state government initiatives around social cohesion and harmony. The experience of 'different' cultures creating a chronic sense of risk and threat to young Pacific Islanders of both genders was reflected in comments that expressed feeling unsafe around:

People who don't know how to speak English. Like sometimes that scares me when a group of them starts screaming in their language, yeah, that's freaky. You just feel like telling them to shut up. … Migrants. (Female Pacific Islanders)

All different cultures, it's a variety of different cultures. … You can get jumped by any of them, I expect it at any time. … [Ethnic group] and [ethnic group]. (Male Pacific Islanders)

For Pacific Islander young women, in addition to feeling less safe around people from non-English speaking backgrounds, drug use/drug dealing and large group gatherings on the street were cited as the most common elements that contributed to their feeling unsafe in public:

Druggies, yeah… People that are on drugs or chroming and they come up to you and ask you for money… A druggie came to our church and he was scary…and he was going up to every girl.

They [large group gatherings] might do something bad, like steal your bags and that, anything can happen.

6.4.3 Where do these young people feel unsafe?

Traditionally, issues regarding public safety and the regulation of space have targeted problem youth behaviours (e.g. 'youth gangs': see White et al. 1999; White and Mason, 2006; Collins et al., 2000, 2002) but recent research has found that young people are in fact at the greatest risk of being the victims of violent crime in public places (Pain, 2001). In particular, ethnic minority youth, often because of their heightened visibility in public places, have been the subject of increased scrutiny and regulation. This finding is reinforced in Australian research by various studies where ethnic minority youth claim to have experienced violence and harassment in public places based on their ethnicity or race (White et al., 1999; Collins et al., 2000, 2002). Young people in these studies also say they have felt victimised by police in public places (see for example *Rights of Passage*, 2008; Smith and Reside, 2010).

As youth studies research over the last decade shows, the marginalisation of young people in relation to their use of public space has had a negative impact on child and adolescent well-being, leading to feelings of isolation, exclusion and being 'out-of-place' (White and Wyn, 2008; Robinson, 2000; Valentine, 1996; Malone and Hasluck, 1998; Malone, 1999). Karen Malone relates this phenomenon to the increased commercialisation and commodification of public spaces by private interests in late modernity (Malone, 1999; see also White et al., 1999). She claims that privatisation has been accompanied by increased monitoring, policing, controlling and exclusion of youth from public space. The increased focus on street-level youth activities also relates to the influence of 'moral panics' which construct young people as deviants, troublemakers and 'youth gang' members (White and Wyn, 2008; White et al., 1999). The cumulative effect of these processes has been noted through young people's loss of mobility, social identity and their growing fear and unease in relation to their personal safety in public.

A number of models of participatory planning and place-making with young people have emerged in youth studies literature to counter these processes and to determine how young people use space to construct their identity and to enhance well-being (Malone, 1999). However, the findings for these two communities of CALDB young people in the Brimbank region suggest that young people from ethnic minority communities continue to face specific challenges about how to negotiate safety, well-being and a sense of belonging in relation to public spaces in their local neighbourhoods and environments.

Public 'hot spots' for young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders in the local community

Responses in the focus groups to this topic from both Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people across both genders reflected both community-specific and shared or common 'hot spots' perceived to be high-risk locations for community and personal safety.

Ironically, some of the 'hot spots' identified by both groups (detailed below) where they felt particularly unsafe or at risk are also the most accessible or preferred locations for them to spend social time hanging out together in public places within the Brimbank locality. These locations are preferred places for hanging out and socialising because of ease and convenience for young people in the focus groups. They represent places that are easy to reach via public transport (including public transport hubs themselves) and also accessible relative to free time for school-age young people (for example, after school on weekday afternoons). They are also convenient in terms of spaces identified by large numbers of young people as locations where their peers are likely to congregate and be found easily.

For participants from Brimbank Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities of both genders, the Sunshine transport hub was the most commonly cited 'hot spot' where they felt less safe or unsafe compared to other locations within their local environment. For both Sudanese and Pacific Islander males, the areas both in and around their local schools were also identified as places of heightened risk and lack of feeling safe.

For Sudanese young men, additional places identified with heightened risk and lack of safety included the train stations at St Albans, Ginifer and Watergardens, and the suburb of West Sunshine in general. For Pacific Islander young men, additional places identified with heightened risk and lack of safety included the suburbs of Kings Park and Footscray (the latter based in an adjoining LGA); both suburbs have high levels of cultural diversity, which relates to the earlier comments from this group about feeling uncomfortable in areas characterised by people from a range of different cultural backgrounds. Specific internet cafes and food outlets associated with territorial rights and rival groups of young people were also identified as places of heightened risk, as were some local parks.

Gender, safety and place

The data from the focus groups in both communities suggest that there can be subtle differences in perceptions of lack of safety for young men and young women in these communities. For example, other than Sunshine train station, neither Sudanese nor Pacific Islander female participants identified specific places within Brimbank where they felt particularly unsafe, focusing instead on behavioural, environmental and circumstantial factors.

For young men in both the Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities, feeling unsafe or less safe related to a more territorially-based perception of geographical boundaries and a consequent sense of belonging or conversely being unwelcome or at risk in particular named areas. They expressed a geographically defined sense of feeling unsafe or less safe in particular places or areas within Brimbank.

However, for young women in both communities, feeling unsafe or less related more to circumstantial, behavioural and environmental circumstances (such as being on their own; alcohol being consumed in area; being out after dark; being followed; drug use and/or dealing in area, etc.) than to a geographically perceived lack of safety within the local Brimbank environment.

Feeling different, fearing difference: race, ethnicity and feeling unsafe

The focus group data suggest that for Sudanese young people, particularly young men, perceptions of lack of safety were often linked to fear of being racially targeted on the basis of their skin colour and ethnicity.

For both Pacific Islander young men and women in these groups, however, their perceptions of lack of safety were at times linked to a generalised fear of other, non-Pacific Islander ethnic groups, as noted above. This is not reflected in earlier studies dealing with cross-cultural youth conflict, perceptions of group and gang activity or studies focusing specifically on Pacific Islander youth. In White et al.'s 1999 report on Pacific Islander young people,[14] for example, the focus from young Pacific Islander participants at that time was much more on perceived tensions between Anglo-Australians and Pacific Islander youth, or on conflict between other ethnic groups (e.g. Vietnamese-Australians and Anglo-Australians), linked in turn to perceptions of Anglo-Australian racism or ethnic bias against 'wogs', 'nips' and Islanders themselves (White et al. 1999/3: 30-33). Ten years on, however, the evidence from this focus group data suggests that some Pacific Islander young people may feel challenged by recent changes to community ethnic profiles in their local neighbourhood that have been ushered in by Brimbank's migration and refugee intakes over the last several years.

Previous recommendations from earlier studies looking at cross-cultural tensions and inter-ethnic violence amongst Australian youth such as Perrone and White (2000) have suggested that 'young people in general be provided with specific education in cross-cultural and issues in order that...specific ethnic groups be better understood by all concerned', and further argued that programs be designed to 'give young people from diverse cultural and ethnic background the practical opportunities to get to know each other at a personal and group level' (Perrone and White, 2000: 5). In this context, what some young Pacific Islander men and women have said in the *Don't Go There* study around what makes them feel less safe in their community may suggest that such educational strategies need to be strengthened, re-examined or redesigned in local communities within Brimbank. Further investigation is needed to examine what programs around cross-cultural exchange and knowledge-sharing between young people are available within Brimbank, how effective they are, and to explore in more depth the causes of existing anxieties concerning cultural diversity for a proportion of young Pacific Islanders so as to better understand and address this phenomenon.

6.4.4 When do these young people feel less safe?

In relation to feeling safe in public places when linked to time of day or night, while both young Sudanese men and women associate generalised feelings of being unsafe with time of day and time-specific activities (i.e., their sense of feeling less safe increases after dark and is linked to perceptions of intensified alcohol consumption by others in public after dark), young Pacific Islander men feel generally *unsafe* both during the day and at night:

> *Both, yeah, I'd say both. … When you walk anywhere… if you go to take your bin out. Anytime. … On your way to school, anything*. (Pacific Islander males)

6.5 Gangs

The issues that have emerged for Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people on this subject are complex and at times contradictory**.** While young people in the representative survey sample were fairly confident about distinguishing between a 'group' and a 'gang', the issues are not so clear-cut for some CALDB young people, many of whom expressed varying levels of indignation and concern about social groups being confused with 'gangs' in the public consciousness.

[14] Report No. 3 in *Ethnic Youth Gangs in Australia: Do They Exist?*

6.5.1 'Gangs' versus 'groups'

Young Sudanese: 'A gang is a more negative word for a group of people'

As noted above, a racialised media discourse around ethnic and particularly African youth 'gangs' has received significant airplay in recent times in relation to African youth in Melbourne's south-eastern and western suburbs, where large concentrations of new arrivals are clustered (Windle, 2008). Yet in the focus groups Sudanese young people themselves were ambivalent about what constitutes a 'gang' and the extent to which gangs may exist in Brimbank, although they were vocal and impassioned on the topic of 'gangs' versus 'groups' in relation to how young African-background males are characterised in popular consciousness, as reflected in both media reporting and in their own experience and day to day encounters.

Perceptions of ethnic difference were pivotal to discussion of this topic in all the Sudanese focus groups. A number of participants felt frustrated by what they perceived as the distinctions made between assemblies of young Anglo-Australians, who were seen as 'groups', and assemblies of young Africans who were perceived as 'gangs'. As one young Sudanese man commented,

> *Like Aussies in a group together – people would just walk past them and have a positive perception about them, but if it's a group of Africans, the person would definitely branch off the street, I reckon*.

Many young Sudanese people in the focus groups cited cultural habits and precedents for the presence of moderate to large groups (10 or more) of young Sudanese gathering in public:

> *Because we have a different cultural background, especially Sudanese, the place where we come from, young people used to walk together, like 10 or 15…now, here, they say that we are gangs but it's not a gang in my country, so…in the place where we come from young people can walk together*. (Sudanese male)

> *It actually happens a lot with people from an African background because a lot of African people like to hang out together, they have tribes and communities and they stick together, when they come here they can't just stop … In Australia people look at that wrong, they judge by the cover*. (Sudanese female)

Young people in the focus groups perceived media representations as especially culpable in driving public perceptions of young African people, and particularly young men, as anti-social and threatening members of 'gangs':

> *It is actually all on the media, because it is just victimising Sudanese, mostly. … Most African nationalities nowadays just do crime and when the police ask them [other African-background people] just say, 'We're Sudanese'. And the police get sucked in*.

> *Especially last year [2007], one of the reporters said that the Sudanese migrants should be put away from their community because when they [go] out they become wild, and become one of the gangs… But we have gangs here in Melbourne and everywhere in the world – it is not just because they came here*.

Others, however, also felt police were complicit with the media in stereotyping young Sudanese as predisposed toward gang membership and activity:

> *If there are 8 kids walking the police will come up to them and they will be asking...'Are you a gang?' and they will take your ID for no reason. …Then I tell [the police officers] 'Can I have your identification too?' but then when I said that they didn't talk any more. They just went*.

Defining gangs: 'troublemakers' versus 'fitting in'

Young Sudanese people in the focus groups – reflecting a similar trend in the research literature in this area as described in Chapter 3 above – did not reach a consensus on what the term 'gang' means. However, they did offer a range of ideas about what gangs might mean to them in particular contexts. The two main themes that emerged in focus groups concerning perceptions of what gangs are and why they exist involved perceiving gangs as primarily concerned with either criminal activity and violence on the one hand, or social belonging and bonding on the other. Interestingly, there were no comments from participants that linked criminal activity and social belonging as part of the same dynamic or perceived these to run along a continuum; rather, they were presented as divergent views on why gangs come into being. Representative comments from young Sudanese men and women on these two themes included:

Criminal offences, violence and intimidation:

> *Gang people like to attack other places, killing people on the other side.*
>
> *Gangs rob people, or vandalise the properties of someone.*
>
> *Gangs are just troublemakers, that's all. Because they're not good at being troublemakers so they join together.*
>
> *They want people to fear them.*
>
> *It's a group that … like to meet and bash people up.*

Social groups that promote bonding and belonging:

> *['Gang' is] a more negative word for a group of people.*
>
> *You like to get a lot of friends…it's about belonging, yeah, and sharing ideas too.*
>
> *I think [those in gangs] have this problem, like an identity crisis, and you know, they're probably just young, they're lost, and they probably want to fit in…and sometimes these gangs and groups take it too far…*
>
> *It's like you mostly hang around with that person.*

'Gangs' and sexual intimidation: issues for young Sudanese women

Although the focus group questions did not ask about specific gender-based perceptions concerning gangs, the inclusion of single-gender focus groups nevertheless allowed gender-specific issues around the topics covered by the study to emerge if participants raised them. In the Sudanese context, two young Sudanese women in the all-female focus group raised the issue within this part of the discussion of young men whom they perceived to be using their 'gang' membership for the purpose of sexual intimidation and coercion, including the threat of physical violence towards young women themselves or their family or friends. These young women commented:

> *[I'm] scared of being attacked. Some [young men perceived to belong to gangs] ask the girls out and if the girls say 'no' they might plan to bash her. Yeah, it's happened to some. …*
>
> *Sometimes if they can't bash you up they will bash your boyfriend or someone that they know you have a relationship with. It happens a lot, yes.*

All the young women in the Sudanese all-female focus group agreed with these claims. While these comments are neither representative nor generalisable for this community as a whole, the identification of this concern by some participants and the agreement of others with these claims would merit further research with young Sudanese women in the local area to explore this issue in greater depth.

Perceptions of young Sudanese on 'gangs' and ethnic background

Whereas a little over half the young people in the representative survey sample identified similar ethnic backgrounds as a significant reason for joining a 'gang' (Figure 13), shared ethnicity as a feature of gang membership did not feature largely in the Sudanese focus group discussion around gangs. While one young Sudanese man mentioned a particular ethnic group in relation to his perception of gang activity in the local area, most other Sudanese focus group participants saw 'gangs' as characterised by cross-ethnic formations, as the following comments suggest:

> *Like, different nationalities…young [people] from Africa, young Islanders as well, and even some Asians.*

> *I've heard of a group called the Bloods. There's different cultures [in this group].*

Young Pacific Islanders: 'You've got to be courageous to wear a bandana in the streets'

Young Pacific Islanders were more confident and assertive in their definitions of and apparent familiarity with what they perceive as 'gangs' and 'gang' culture. Pacific Islander males in particular associated gangs predominantly with the relationship between 'colours' derived from American youth gangs (e.g. Bloods and Crips), geographically based dominance, and assault. As one young Pacific Islander man said, *'Every area has a gang: like Sunshine, there's like [named group]…Deer Park [named group]'.*

Young male participants in the focus groups saw locally based interpretations and applications of colours as significant and pervasive markers of gang orientation in the local Brimbank area, as these comments indicate:

> *You've got to be courageous to wear a bandana in the streets. Like, I could chuck on a bandana, see other colours, and get bashed straight away*.

> *I think in Sunshine it's more [colour] than [colour]… Most of the people in Sunshine wouldn't go against the colour ___…even [named ethnic group] call themselves [named group] in Sunshine*.

> *I've been jumped before for wearing [colour]…this guy came up to me and said, 'Do you want a hiding' and I said, 'Bring it on'…and the next day my brothers went down*.

> *It all depends on where you're from and where the colours originated, who originated them in that area*.

Themes in the Sudanese focus groups relating to social belonging and feeling safer in a group emerged also for young Pacific Islanders: *'It's sometimes just boys helping out each other…they just back each other up'; 'Yeah, most of them [join up a gang to feel safer]'*.

However, some young Pacific Islanders suggested that many young people in 'gangs' were either simply members of local 'wannabe' groups, or alternatively were seeking status or reputation through membership of a larger group:

> *There's groups that give themselves names, but not for, like, gang rites – just for like, so they can identify themselves*.

> *It's not necessarily everyone that wants to join a gang, though, just some people want to follow or want to act tough*.

Status… I think it's trying to build up a rep.

Like young Sudanese, Pacific Islander young people also noted the presence of cross-ethnic rather than single-ethnicity gang formations in their local area – *'Like, there's a new crew, they're dangerous, they're called [named group], they're [three separate named ethnic groups]'* – and saw these formations as relatively flat in structure: *'If you're in a crew, basically you're all leaders because you're all brothers*.'

6.5.2 Are gangs perceived as a problem in Brimbank?

Young people in both communities were somewhat ambivalent or sceptical about the definitional and social issues surrounding local 'gang' culture amongst youth, slightly more so in the case of young Sudanese, as indicated above. Yet both groups also feel that 'gangs' are a problem in the Brimbank area. As these comments from young Sudanese people suggest, the themes of geographic dominance and place-based identification are significant in their thinking about local 'gang' activity:

> *Yes, in some parts of Sunshine. We don't know that there is a specific group but people have been scared. Especially in West Sunshine there are gangs. They are organised groups*.
>
> *It's very big, because every day people get hurt, every day*.
>
> *Sometimes I can see when it happens. In St Albans they call themselves [named group] and then if they see the [named group] boys there will be a fight, always. St Albans can't come to Sunshine, Sunshine can't come to St Albans*.

Young Pacific Islanders were more succinct in expressing their view on whether gangs were a problem in Brimbank, but similarly emphatic:

> *Huge, I reckon. … Pretty big. … Big. … It's really complicated for some people to walk on the streets, because if they see a gang they're gonna piss themselves. Or they're gonna run, like something's gonna happen. They look for a way to escape*.

6.5.3 Neither groups nor gangs?

Like the Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people in the study's focus groups, we do not think that the group cultures and behaviours in the Brimbank area explored in discussion with Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people constitute 'gangs' at the more formal end of the definitional spectrum in the literature, particularly as these relate to adult groups and collectives with an emphasis on drugs, criminality and violence (White and Mason, 2006; Howell, 2003).

As the foregoing discussion of the data suggests, young people in the focus groups for this study have not identified the groups or activities they have in mind when asked about their perceptions of 'gangs' with the formal features of what Sullivan (2005) calls 'named' gangs,[15] which usually include some combination of any or all of the following: leadership structures, initiation hurdles, membership rules, ritualised bonding activities, identity constraints, dominance of territory and/or criminal and profit-making enterprises (Sullivan, 2005: 175). Nor do the group formations described by focus group participants always and everywhere meet the criterion of 'shared ethnicity, language and culture' identified by some researchers as a characteristic of group membership in the context of youth gangs (White, 2008: 150).

[15] This is the case even when such groups do have self-nominated, local or transnationally derived names, e.g. 'Kickback Krew', 'Sunshine Boys', 'Bloodz' or 'Crips'.

On the contrary, the local youth formations canvassed in the focus groups display cross-ethnic membership in which other shared individual and social characteristics – age, neighbourhood, school, gender, social inclusion/exclusion and the desire for belonging, status and/or protection – are likely to be more important. The local groups discussed by the majority of focus group participants are too mixed, too democratic, too disorganised and too fluid in relation to identity, activity and social formations to be characterised as 'gangs' at the more highly structured end of the spectrum (see for example Klein, Maxson and Miller, 1995; Huff 1996; White 2006); they are more aligned with White's (2006) definition of 'street culture' groupings or Sullivan's (2005) 'cliques', as well as with what both Australian and American young people involved in similar studies have referred to as 'crews'.

Nevertheless, the socially bonding, activity-based, identity-building and maintaining formations carried out through some kinds of groups described by young people above can at times constitute more than just unfocused or non-symbolic 'public gathering'. In our own initial thinking, we termed these formations *alliances* – a common, consensual bond or connection engaged for a variety of reasons, looser than 'gangs' yet more focused and sustained than 'groups', similar in many ways to Sullivan's 'cliques'. Our data from both the survey and the focus groups suggest that such alliances may be filial (based on biological family or more broadly defined kinship bonds, including those of ethnicity and culture); strategic (as a response to perceived threats from other groups or to consolidate power and dominance); corporate (based on the desire to belong and to feel part of something larger than the individual), or compensatory (to compensate for exclusion from other kinds of filial, social or community belonging).

All of these kinds of alliances – whether filial, strategic, corporate and compensatory – may overlap or combine in some instances, and all are at least implicitly present in the data gathered from focus group participants. Yet none of them appear to have led – at least in the perceptions of the young Sudanese and Pacific Islander people who participated in the focus groups – beyond the 'street culture' or 'clique' categories of youth alliances that form part of a broader dynamic of social processes around negotiating identity, belonging, marginalisation and social status.

However, while the notion of 'alliances', 'cliques' or 'street culture' may work for police, academics and policy makers who are seeking to analyse and operationalise understandings of youth groups and gangs in the context of strategies to tackle crime and community safety, this phenomenon may be better encompassed from the point of view of the young people we spoke to for this study by the term 'crew'. In Sullivan's (2005) three-site ethnography of urban youth gangs in New York City, he includes the following exchange between an interviewer and a local youth, 'Ali', regarding the difference for 'Ali' between a local 'group' and a 'gang':

> ***Interviewer:*** *That's not a gang, is it?*
>
> ***Ali:*** *No. Well, yes….*
>
> ***Interviewer:*** *What's the difference?*
>
> ***Ali:*** *Not a gang, but the crew. It's like people you know. (Sullivan 2005: 181)*

This echoes the comment above of a Pacific Islander young man in our focus groups who commented, *'If you're in a crew, basically you're all leaders because you're all brothers.'* The term 'crew' – with its associative links to brotherhood, back-up and pulling together and a vague but suggestive connection to stereotypes of more organised bonding (e.g. 'the Carlton Crew') – may thus best describe how young people themselves frame the existence of such alliances in the Brimbank region.

6.6 What makes conflict worse?

This theme reflects focus group participants' perceptions of the social, cultural and psychological conditions and triggers for the escalation of conflict into violence and other safety-threatening behaviour when young people are in public places.

6.6.1 Responding to racism, threats and insults

As reflected above in the survey data (Table 39) a representative sample of young people drawn from the general population identified 'acting and talking tough' (23%), disputes where 'neither side will back down' (11%) and displays of physical aggression such as pushing or the display or use of weapons (9%) as the main triggers for how smaller, primarily verbal arguments transform into violent confrontations. Only 4% of young people in the representative survey saw 'racism and discrimination' as a key factor in why arguments might turn violent (Table 39), although 10% saw 'discrimination and racism' as the primary reason for why arguments between young people might occur in the first place (Table 38).

However, this picture changes significantly when we turn to focus group respondents, who placed strong primary emphasis on race and racial taunting as a key conflict escalator for both Sudanese and Pacific Islander young males. The most frequent causes for conflict escalation in public places cited by young people from both communities included retaliation for threats or insults and racism and racial taunting.

While both young Sudanese and young Pacific Islanders of both genders mentioned racism as a clear trigger for escalating conflict between young people, young Sudanese men related to this more specifically and in greater detail. As three different Sudanese male focus group participants put it,

> *When you talk to people and they say the bad word – that can lead you to fight. … If someone calls you the 'n' word you will get pretty upset about it.*
>
> *If he calls you a nigger you do it [hit him] straight away – you don't even need to talk about it.*
>
> *If someone says a really strong word and you can't control your anger, and then when you can't control your anger and you hit that person… [Otherwise] they would just keep going and they would tell their friends to call you that.*

Conflict escalation triggers for young Sudanese: loyalty, racism and reputation

A second significant trigger identified by young men in the focus group centred on the dynamics of peer support and loyalty. Both young Sudanese and Pacific Islander men felt strongly about the need or obligation to back up friends and/or family members, including extended family, involved in another dispute.

However, young Sudanese in particular may become involved in conflict escalation only reluctantly or ambivalently under such circumstances. For example, both young Sudanese men and women discussed not wanting to fight but feeling compelled to do so in order to avoid loss of respect and support from peers.

A number of young Sudanese men also commented on the importance of standing up against perceived racism and discrimination by social or emergency services, e.g. ambulance, police, Department of Human Services, and saw such discrimination as a trigger for escalating conflict. Finally, a few mentioned reputation-building as an element in escalating conflict, where a young person wants to enhance his social standing within a community based on cultural ideas about masculinity for young Sudanese:

> *They want to create something, they want to say to the community, 'I did this or that'.*

Conflict escalation triggers for young Pacific Islanders: respect and retaliation

Many of the community-specific triggers for conflict escalation articulated by young Pacific Islanders revolved around social etiquette and socially acceptable/unacceptable behaviour according to their sense of cultural norms. These included *swearing*, which some young Pacific Islander men saw as aggression or an invitation to engage in conflict; *dissing,* which involves being the object of disrespectful comments about oneself, one's family or a person's cultural group; *eyeballing* or being stared at, particularly by members of other ethnic groups; and *backstabbing*, when a young person becomes subject of gossip and rumour in schools that is seen to damage or impact negatively on their reputation or social status.

Young Pacific Islander men in particular were also sensitive to what they perceived as implied social superiority displayed by others relative to Islanders, and they identified this as an incitement to further conflict. Disputes over young women were also cited by some Pacific Islander young men in the focus groups as perceived challenges to their social standing and masculinity.

For young Pacific Islander women, *sexual taunting* – what one young Pacific Islander woman termed *'calling you things that you're not'* – was the main conflict escalation trigger for female focus group participants.

Other conflict escalation triggers specific to Pacific Islander focus groups of both genders were alcohol – fighting over grog as well as being alcohol-affected – and 'colours' relating to perceived gang identity or membership.

Attitudes to physical aggression

One of the key themes to emerge in this portion of the study relates to attitudes to violence and physical aggression across Sudanese and Pacific Islander young men. As indicated above, Sudanese young men in particular tended to see violent escalation as dictated by specific circumstances – in other words, as a circumstantially based *reactive response* to particular situations, particularly when race-based or retaliative:

> *There is a point where you can't argue anymore and that is the point where you take action*.

Pacific Islander young men, on the other hand, tended to see violent escalation more as a *pre-emptive response* designed to forestall further conflict either at the time or at some future date:

> *We're mainly physical. Probably Australian people, they're just verbal*.
>
> *Yeah, because the verbal stuff is going to get you nowhere. It all ends in this bullshit and that bullshit*.
>
> *Whereas physical stuff leaves it in that place and that time, and that's it. … If they come back for a second time, let's go round two. If you come for round three – it's good exercise*.
>
> *It puts them in their place. That's how we resolve things. Violence comes first. Plus they don't come back and verbal*.

'Come over, there's a fight!' From argument to brawl

Within the focus groups, the triggers and motivations for large-scale brawling were virtually identical across both the Sudanese and Pacific Islander cohorts. Peer pressure, backing up one's mates and issues around group belonging and identity dominated discussion on this topic for both groups. Young people of both genders in these communities made the following representative comments about why smaller disputes can turn into full-scale violent brawls in public:

Peer pressure: *There ended up being 100 people there [at Highpoint]. And she didn't want to fight, like she wanted to talk it out but there were so many people around her and they were pushing her and she ended up on top of [another girl] and bashing her … and after everyone left she apologised.*

Loyalty to peers, back-up: *If everyone gathers round, no one's going to turn down and back away because they've got their friends there.*

Reinforcement of belonging to group: *I'm not fighting 'cause I need to, it's because my friends are here and I don't want to look bad.*

Fear of loss of status within or exclusion from group: *To back down from something while all your mates are around, is like being a wimp.*

Strategic response to threat: *If the person is bigger or stronger than you, you're not going to fight them, you're going to call someone else to fight for you.*

6.6.2 'Just those ones that are different from the rest': why young people become victims of violent crime

The survey questions on this topic were directed towards fear of violent assault, the experience of victims of previous violent assaults, and how young people felt they could avoid becoming the victims of violent assault. However, the issue of why some young people might be more likely than others to become the victims of violent assault was a question asked specifically within the focus groups. The slightly different emphasis in the focus groups was designed to elicit more insight into what young people themselves in the Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities felt were the main causes for why some young people are more likely to be victims of assault than others, based on anecdotal reports of higher than average levels of violent assault as both victims and perpetrators within each community in the 15-19 year old age group in Brimbank.

The question of how young people may come to be victims of crimes against the person created uneasiness for many participants in the focus groups. It was difficult for some participants to publicly identify with or as victims in the group setting of the focus group discussions. Nevertheless, some key issues and insights around why young people may become victims of violent assault by their peers emerged from participants from both communities. All revolved around one or more expressions of perceived cultural, behavioural or social difference from peer-group norms as these are understood by young people themselves.

They included differences based on racial/ethnic identity, with young people from specific cultural or ethnic groups being perceived as more likely to be victimised because of perceptions that they were hostile to other racial or ethnic groups, less likely to retaliate, had desirable and expensive gear, and/or were perceived to dislike and feel superior to young people from both Pacific Islander and Sudanese communities. School uniforms were also cited as highly visible ways of signalling difference and demarcation between groups of young people. Inter-school rivalry and conflicts were seen as major elements in making young people the targets of violence, particularly across territorial boundaries; removal of school shirt or jacket was cited frequently before entering certain areas.

In a more general vein, those who are perceived as 'different', 'weak', 'unattractive', 'losers', 'freaky', or relatively isolated and friendless within peer groups were seen as more likely to be targets of violent behaviour. Similarly, transgressing boundaries, which included violating or ignoring established (although often fluid) social and cultural norms – for example, asking out the 'wrong' girl, wearing the 'wrong' clothes – was cited as making some young people more vulnerable to violent assault.

Finally, some Pacific Islander young people cited 'guilt by association' as a perceived factor in making non-Islanders who hung around with Islander youth were more likely to be targeted for violence by others because of their friendships with this community, perhaps to build status (without physically taking on Islander youth themselves).

Overall, these responses suggest that conventional ideas about social conformity and the perception of shared values and identities that characterise how young people negotiate social relationships and status within mainstream communities apply for these two cohorts as well. Other than the motif of 'guilt by association' for some young Pacific Islanders and the perceptions of some ethnic groups as more 'culturally' vulnerable to assault, there is little to suggest that the factors leading to some young people being more likely to be victimised than others has any grounding in culture- or community-specific norms or understandings for either Sudanese or Pacific Islander young people.

6.7 Perceptions of and relationship with the police

6.7.1 Young Sudanese: 'They don't start off nice, they just give you attitude'

For Sudanese young people of both genders across all three focus groups, there was a strong belief that police in general are racially and culturally biased against people from Sudanese backgrounds. This includes the belief that:

- Police think all Sudanese are hardened to violence as normative because of their refugee experiences of war and displacement, and thus less likely to require assistance or support.
- Police respond to calls for assistance from young Sudanese based on assessing their accents over the phone, which results in delays in response time or failing to respond at all.
- Young Sudanese are excessively singled out for stop and search procedures.
- Young Sudanese are blamed for the transgressions of other African-origin youth.
- Police stereotype young Sudanese as 'gangsta', 'gang' members or troublemakers based on superficial stylistic features such as clothing, or non-criminal behaviours in public such as public gathering and socialising.
- In a cross-ethnic dispute, the police are more likely to bail up young Sudanese and question, caution or arrest them even though they may have been the ones who first called the police and/or who are the victim(s).

'If you have a negative experience, you will have a negative attitude, yeah'

There was also a sharp sense of indignation and injustice at what young Sudanese see as unfair or unreasonable attitudes and behaviours by the police. Some of these perceptions appear to be based on lack of understanding of or objections to Australian police culture itself, as well as police powers in relation to things like stop-and-search, but most relate to perceptions of stereotyping, over-generalising, lack of respect for young people, and failure to recognise the difference between 'troublemakers' and other young Sudanese and Africans more generally.

One anecdotally reported widespread assumption amongst service providers, including police, who deal regularly with African refugee communities is the belief that young Sudanese come from backgrounds where police are

feared and hated, and that this carries over to their experiences of police in Australia. While this may be true for some young Sudanese, not all of them share this perception, as this comment from a young Sudanese woman reflects:

> *In Africa, where I come from, we see police as our friend but in Australia we see police as our enemy…. Like, police in Africa, they look at both sides because people all have the same colour. They don't say, 'You are this one or you are that one', they just get the truth out of it. But here they judge by colour or nationality, or they just judge by colour*.

'There are good police and bad police'

Nevertheless, young Sudanese men and women in the focus groups did not have completely negative perceptions of the police in Brimbank. Positive comments reflected an understanding for some young Sudanese that the police are there to protect and ensure the safety of the community, and suggested that they discriminate between 'good' and not so good police behaviours and individuals:

> *To make sure they're not up to something [on stop and search].*
>
> *To keep the community safe.*
>
> *Some of them are not all bad.*
>
> *There are good police and bad police. Like the ones that are racist and the ones that aren't.*
>
> *Some people think that the police is good because they help a lot.*
>
> *I don't blame the police… The police are not meant to be nice or they're going to get stepped on*.

6.7.2 Young Pacific Islanders: 'They come and ask me for my name when I haven't done anything'

As for young Sudanese, Pacific Islander young people's perspectives on relationships with and attitudes toward the police combine negative and critical assessments of police and police behaviour with some positive and supportive perceptions of individual police in particular. On the negative side, some young Pacific Islanders in the focus groups felt that racism influences the behaviour of police toward young people in their community:

> *'Because we're black' [referring to why police stop and search Pacific Islander young people].*

They feel a similar sense of injustice to young Sudanese regarding the taking of details and stop-and-search procedures. They are also frustrated with police culture, particularly the lack of justification for apparently random questioning and stop and search. Young Pacific Islanders in the focus groups said they would like to see more police officers from Islander backgrounds in their local area:

> *Yeah, most of the cops, see, they're white so I've never seen a FOB [fresh off the boat] cop…Yeah, they've got a different mindset to us*.

'I don't mind the police, I think they're alright'

However, there were also a number of positive observations about police from young Pacific Islanders, as well as distinctions between 'good' versus 'bad' cops:

Because it's their job [on stop and search].

They want to make a better place, like make the area safer.

I like one policeman. His name is ____. He's the best cop you'll ever meet.

There's some cops that you like, but there are others that hassle you for no reason.

I don't mind the police, I think they're alright.

Overall, young people in both communities expressed ambivalence about the police. On the one hand, there was clear dissatisfaction and a sense of injury for young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders related to how they feel they are treated by the police, and the sustained perception of racism and discrimination. On the other hand, successful and positive relationships with individual police officers were cited by both groups, suggesting that while as an abstraction, police are not well liked and are feared at times, once individual relationships are established there is an improvement in perception, attitude and experience for young people in both communities concerning how they perceive and relate to police.

Moreover, like young people in the survey, young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders want the police to be there for them, and they want to see police more actively involved in their communities, as will be discussed further below. In fact, much of the dissatisfaction with police within these two cohorts stems from believing that the police are less responsive to them than to other sectors of the community, but this does not equate to not wanting a relationship or a response. Young people in these communities were clear that they want to feel safe, and they see police as an important part of this – but they also feel at times that police put their safety at risk.

6.7.3 Who ya gonna call? Why young people do and don't ring the police

Many young Sudanese men and women adopted a demonstrably pragmatic risk-management approach to this issue during focus group discussions. They identified the degree of risk (low, moderate or high), the proximity of family and/or friends, the criminal severity of the threat and the degree of trust in police in the local area as variables in whether they would choose to contact police in a safety-threatening situation. They were also alert to the potential negative consequences for family and friends of ringing the police; they were more likely to ring the police if safety-threatening situations involved strangers rather than people known to them.

Young Sudanese women in particular felt a lack of trust when calling police, citing negative experiences with reporting sexual assault, language barriers, feeling discriminated against on the basis of accent, race and nationality, and concerns for the impact on their status, reputation and risk levels within their own community. Some young women in this group also said they bypassed police in Brimbank in favour of ringing police in Footscray, whom they felt had better cultural and gender-based understanding of their needs and concerns. General comments around calling the police included:

[If a person calls as a victim of violent crime], the police think that's what you do in Africa so keep going… that's what they think because of the war in Africa… They think that you have the attitude of war inside you, or maybe they think that you're one of the people that used to fight wars in Africa.

I would call the police to get help but I won't depend on them.

I would call them if it was a situation where I knew that I couldn't handle it and no one can help me, but I won't count on them.

Another thing on not calling the police is the language barrier. They will more likely call people they can speak to in terms of emergency – and those would be their friends.

For young Pacific Islanders, the issues were less to do with risk management and more to do with relationship management, including lack of trust and confidence in police responses; loss of status/reputation and social exclusion based on dobbing, and fear of retribution through others finding out they have called police:

If someone hears you calling the police, everyone's going to think of you different, no one's going to want you around.

I wouldn't call the cops. They're not someone you can rely on.

I know some Islander cops who still hassle you no matter what, they don't really care.

Sometimes it's just fear that you would be part of it… He might come and do it to me…like, I would be scared to [ring]. [Female participant]

6.7.4 Improving relationships between Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people and police

Both Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people had specific ideas and strategies about how to improve relationships with police and how to build more confident and sustainable channels of communication and exchange. High on the list for both communities are the following issues:

- ***Social and cultural engagement between police and young people:*** Sudanese and Pacific islander young people want to get to know police better as individuals and community members, rather than as the abstract 'blue wedge' (Sandor, 1993) they are often perceived to be. They want to engage positively with and be engaged positively by operational police, not just community, multicultural or youth resource officers – though some value and feel positively about these roles.

  They want police to learn more about and appreciate their ethnic and cultural backgrounds – where they come from, what's important to them, what their cultural values and systems are. To achieve this through enhanced police-youth activities and opportunities for further contact and exchange, they suggested youth-police camps, forums, barbecues, music, dancing and sport. They emphasised that they would also like opportunities for police to enter their own cultural world of contemporary youth culture, rather than being asked to participate solely in police-led social activities and events.

- ***Reciprocal education in rights and responsibilities:*** Young people in both communities want more education from police about rights, constraints and responsibilities for young people and for the police themselves. This is a particular issue for the Sudanese community, who are less familiar with Australian police, criminal and justice codes and find it frustrating to be on the receiving end of demands and actions that seem unfair, illogical or culturally and socially inappropriate. As one Sudanese participant suggested, they want:

  The police telling us what their job is and what they do. Letting us know what's our rights and what's their rights… and when they can take action and when they can't.

- ***To be heard and listened to non-judgmentally****:* Again, young people in both communities cited the importance of being listened to by police without always being judged or challenged. This issue emerged in relation to both street encounters and the proposal for community forums between young people and the police.

- ***'No assumptions. No stereotyping. No racism.'*** Young people in the focus groups stressed that they want to feel they are equal under the law, treated with the same level of respect and concern as adults, and also as they perceive other sectors of the community to be treated. They want to be seen as individuals within groups, not generalised or stereotyped as groups. They want to be seen beyond the colour of their skin or the sound of their voices by police:

  > *I think they could start to learn that teenagers are teenagers, and we're not always going to think that they're right and we're not always going to do what's right, and not to think that because a certain group of people does this or that that everyone does it*….

6.8 Making the community a safer place

The final section of data from the focus groups relates to young Sudanese and Pacific Islander people's perspectives on making the community a safer place. Responses were divided between community capacity-building suggestions on the one hand, and more stringent policing and security measures on the other:

6.8.1 Community capacity-building suggestions

Youth-specific cultural awareness training/development for police and the general community – '*Just like the whole activity thing', 'joining with the community'.*

Regular community meetings between police and young people to enhance cross-cultural communication and knowledge-building, increase tolerance – '*Something where [police and young people from different groups] get to know each other'.*

Better sporting facilities for young people in the local area – Pacific Islander young men noted the absence of rugby facilities in Brimbank and the relative inconvenience of having to travel to Footscray for the nearest rugby ground.

6.8.2 Policing and security suggestions

These included increased police presence at Sunshine transport hub, not just foot and car patrols but an ongoing police presence such as the Footscray Police 'shopfront' at Footscray Market across from Footscray Station; more police on the streets, particularly foot patrol; more security cameras; more roller shutters; better response times from police when called; improved nuisance policing - *'Stop gangs and also drunk people';* and harsher penalties for those convicted of crime – '*Just a slap on the wrist, that annoys me.'*

6.9 Summary and discussion of the focus group findings

The perceptions of community safety and lack of safety for these two groups of young people are strongly influenced by both shared and distinctive cultural backgrounds and attributes. Racism and its negative impact on feeling safe in the community is a key concern for both groups, but is experienced more *acutely* by Sudanese young people based on both skin colour and their status as refugees/new arrivals, and more *chronically* by Pacific Islander young people based on history, culture and experience in Australia.

Both groups of young people lack trust and confidence in the responsiveness and understanding of police when their safety is threatened or at risk. This lack of trust and confidence is based on perceptions of racism, cultural stereotyping, failure to take young people seriously, and awareness of limited police resources in responding to call-outs and reported incidents.

The perception of the police by both groups of young people is that police simultaneously enhance the safety of young people by their presence in the community – but also place the safety of young people at risk by the behaviour of some police in the community. Young people in these communities want to know police better and be known better by them to improve their sense of community safety. They also want to see increased numbers of police from their own cultural/ethnic backgrounds serving in their local area.

Sudanese young people in the focus groups tended to present as more worldly but less street-smart than Pacific Islander young people when it comes to understanding and negotiating relationships with the general community and the police. This may be related to their status as recent arrivals and may also reflect their level of comfort with cultural diversity as part of the refugee experience. Pacific Islander young people in the focus groups, on the other hand, tended to present as more street-smart but less worldly than Sudanese young people in the same contexts. This may be related to their longer-term established presence in Australia and is reflected in part by the sense of anxiety some expressed about other ethnic groups, including recent migrants.

Pacific Islander young people may be more confident and assertive about life in Brimbank, yet their relative discomfort with some cultures and ethnicities can also make them more vulnerable to issues around community safety. Sudanese young people's responses suggest they tend to adopt risk-management strategies to negotiate issues of community safety and the police, whereas Pacific Islander young people's responses suggest they tend to adopt relationship-management strategies for the same issues.

There is no suggestion from the focus groups of highly structured, formalised youth gangs in Brimbank with economic gain as their primary locus of organisation corresponding to the 'adult criminal organisation' model cited in the literature on gangs (see Chapter 3). The localised groups we have termed 'alliances' or 'crews' in this study are less structured, more fluid, less organised and more porous than formal youth gang entities, and these alliances also tend to be cross-ethnic and based on shared location and social interests, rather than comprised of single ethnicities based on cultural, filial or criminal interests. Across a continuum familiar to American and European youth gang researchers, they range across a spectrum from 'troublesome youth groups' and delinquent groups who hang out together in public places and may be involved in minor misdemeanours or other forms of antisocial behaviour and activity (Esbensen and Weerman, 2005) to some reports of 'school-based youth gangs' who may be involved in stand-over offences against less powerful individuals and groups within school settings, to street gangs (Sullivan 2005) with shared interests and desires around both social bonding as well as comparatively low-level, often spontaneous criminal and antisocial behaviour based on territorial or other localised bonds and affiliations.

While the threat or presence of violence and confrontation with local youth alliances has emerged as an issue of significant concern for young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders in Brimbank, there is no evidence from young people themselves that either Sudanese or Pacific Islander youth have become organised at street-gang level, though there may be cross-ethnic groups that are either heading in this direction or already displaying many of these features. More detailed and in-depth research is required to understand better the way in which alliances and semi-structured 'crews' of young people are operating in the Brimbank region, with what impacts and effects, and the extent to which either Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people are participating in significant numbers in such groups and behaviours.

Cultural obligations around family relationships play a meaningful role in relation to community safety and lack of safety for both groups. Around the edges of focus group discussions we found perceptions of increased vulnerabilities for both Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people based on the imperative to protect other family members, e.g. the sexual coercion of girls to prevent the bashing of relatives; the luring of boys to a staged fight or bashing by first attacking a younger brother or cousin.

Conflict triggers for young people in these communities are similar to those for young people in the general community apart from the heightened focus on racism and racial taunting, as is the greater likelihood of physical conflict between young men, but physical assaults between women within these communities also occur. Racial and ethnic abuse and taunting are a significant additional conflict trigger for both communities. Dread of social exclusion and its feared impact on reduced community safety encourages higher risk behaviours around safety in both communities. Gathering in groups increases perceptions of safety for young people in both communities, but creates problems as a result in their relationships with the police and the general community.

Perceptions of routine weapons carriage by others, and a corresponding hike in perceptions of lack of safety, were seen as normative by young people this age group within these communities in Brimbank, particularly based on reported observations of weapons carriage by other ethnic communities in the area.

Young Pacific Islander men in particular expressed a chronic sense of threat and lack of safety both during the day and at night in Brimbank, whereas Sudanese young people tended to feel safer during the day than at night. Public gathering is a critical part of socialisation and cultural reaffirmation and bonding for both groups, and young people in these communities want its positive benefits need to be supported through appropriate measures while limiting its negative impacts.

Most importantly, the focus group data suggest that young people in both communities are interested in strengthening the social fabric of their local neighbourhoods and public spaces through developing increased cultural awareness, tolerance, respect and joint activities between police, young people and the general community. This is seen as a key element of increased community safety by young people themselves in both the Sudanese and Pacific Islander focus groups.

7 EVALUATION OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TOOL: SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS

This section of the report evaluates the methodology designed for this project. The purpose of this review is to consider the transferability of the survey and focus group methodology, and the robustness of the evidence base resulting from the methodology. This relates two of this project's aims: the aim of developing a transferable youth engagement tool for Victoria Police to employ across the state in conducting region-specific community surveys of young people in relation to community safety and crimes against the person; and to the production of a robust and targeted evidence base regarding young people's knowledge and understandings of policing, crime and community safety, including young people from CALDB backgrounds.

The project has provided an innovative, best-practice survey and focus group methodology for seeking young people's perspectives and input on community safety, policing, crime prevention, and violence and conflict between young people in the community that can help Victoria Police develop a targeted and robust evidence base on which to build further community safety policy, strategy and implementation initiatives.

The project has produced quantitative data with a high level of validity and qualitatively rich data from more than 550 young people drawn from both representative and CALD backgrounds, allowing the voices, perspectives and ideas of a large and diverse range of young people on community safety issues in a particular locality to take front-and-centre position in the research design.

The mixed-method on-line survey and focus group methodology is a highly transferable means for engaging, collecting and managing the input of young people anywhere in the state on similar issues, and will allow for multiple comparative data sets to be developed that help enrich and flesh out any variations or nuances between the perceptions of different cohorts of young people in relation to community safety based on variables such as age, gender, cultural background, local or regional setting, and others. The survey and focus group instruments can also be further adapted and customised in relation to particular community or regional needs, priorities and settings. The project has also delivered best-practice methods for collecting data from young people with uneven literacy levels through its innovative use of an animated, interactive, voice-option survey instrument that is further complemented by the focus group instrument.

Moreover, the ability to gather rich and fine-grained as well as wide-ranging data from young people on these critical issues is an important element in determining community safety and policing priorities and responses, so that programs and resources can be strategically developed and allocated in response to localised and community-specific problems and challenges around community safety and policing. The evidence base the methodology provides allows Victoria Police to tailor its resource allocation and strategic priorities at the regional and community level, enhancing responsiveness to local needs and perspectives within an overarching and proactive integrated strategic framework.

Taken together, the data generated through both the survey and the focus groups have provided a rich source of evidence around the main issues of concern for this study, including how young people perceive neighbourhood and community safety in their local area; their perceptions of the job and role of police within the local community; and their perception of young people's levels of trust in the police within the locality.

7.1 Evaluation of survey design

The survey was specifically developed for this project and thus was run for the first time in Brimbank. While the initial project brief had called for a DVD-based survey to be administered using laptops brought into schools and other community settings, the research team decided to move toward an interactive animated on-line survey

design based on a review of previously piloted youth-focused survey methodologies that enhanced engagement and coped more effectively with varying literacy levels for CALDB young people. This shifted the parameters and challenges of the survey design significantly, but has produced a higher quality and more innovative survey instrument than envisaged in the original proposal.

The survey was designed to provide the maximum opportunity for young people's voices to be heard, and succeeded extremely well in this regard because of the mix of open-ended and drop-down questions and because the survey design itself encouraged and supported engagement and responsiveness for participants. The overall completion rate to this survey was very high (498/501), accompanied by very low levels of missing data for each survey question; almost all questions were answered by all participants. All of the questions produced usable data; none were misunderstood or interpreted in a way different to the intention. There were some humorous or facetious responses in the qualitative sections of the survey which can be expected in this age group. The qualitative data elicited by the survey was richer and more copious than we had expected.

As it was the first time this survey was run the decision was made to allow for maximum open ended responses to questions. Any instrument aiming to capture information from such a large number of participants must be designed to balance the qualitative responses and quantitative data. Quantitative data is more efficiently reported from large samples than qualitative data, and it allows more powerful statistical analysis then qualitative data. However, the data depends on the relevance of the question. An open ended question eliciting qualitative data provides richer data than a forced choice range of options. However, once the open ended question is categorised a forced choice set of common answers would provide an easier and more efficient data set. The provision of 'other' as an option where respondents are able to elaborate can cover for responses not captured in the forced choice questions. The very rich qualitative data and responses generated by this version of the survey could be used as the basis for designing further drop-down questions that can be quantitatively analysed, which would increase the overall efficiency of the instrument.

The experience of engaging 500 young people through an on-line interactive survey instrument that required face to face administration of the survey to ensure participant authenticity was nevertheless a challenge. The main challenge posed by the survey was the recruitment of young people through schools and, to a lesser extent, through TAFE and university mechanisms. Schools are busy and often under resourced in general. While the large sample size was ultimately successfully recruited, the project was delayed when one school pulled out after agreeing to participate, and because other schools faced technical difficulties in loading the survey instrument onto their IT systems. If this method is used in other locations, an earlier partnering process with schools could produce a smoother rollout of the survey. Local school representatives should also be included in the project reference group to facilitate the planning for and trouble-shooting of technical and logistical requirements.

There were also some technical problems in overcoming schools' firewalls to enable access to the online survey. The recruitment of school IT staff assisted in meeting and overcoming this challenge, and this could be made an explicit part of the partnership with schools if the survey is administered through schools in other areas.

A number of young people chose to comment directly on their experience of completing the survey in the 'Any other comments?' section of the survey, to which 355 young people added comments. A range of spontaneous positive to highly positive feedback on the survey instrument itself was received, including comments such as:

This was a good survey. Really got me thinking about the safety in my neighbourhood.	*This survey is very relevant to letting people like me let out my issues about the neighbourhood.*
Thank you very much. It is good to see people are making an effort to help to create a better and safer community.	*This survey was fun.*
It was a good colourful survey.	*This is a great thing to do...*
Hope to see a good change come out of this.	

Three spontaneous negative comments on the survey instrument were also contributed in this section, the most significant of which doubted whether it would produce meaningful change and results:

> *This survey is not goin 2 change nothing.*

7.2 Evaluation of the focus group design

The focus group method generated rich and meaningful data on difficult or sensitive topics from a group of relatively culturally homogenous young people who may nevertheless have sharply divergent views on various topics raised by the research. The focus groups worked equally well with two different CALDB cohorts.

Focus group engagement was very strong in both the mixed and single gender focus groups with Sudanese-background young people. Pacific Islander young people were also continuously engaged in each of the focus groups in which they participated, and on the whole offered more succinct responses than did Sudanese young people, although these differing cultural styles of response do not affect the quality or reliability of the data itself.

One of the most encouraging aspects of both focus group cohorts was the ability of young people to disagree with each other and take different points of view, even when this risked placing a young person in a minority position with respect to the views of his or her peers. The ability to generate and work through divergent perspectives on a number of key issues arising in the focus group questions was further evidence of the robustness of the data generated.

The first of the five CALDB focus groups was run as a pilot focus group to assess how well the questions and design of the focus group methodology were working for CALDB participants. The focus group questions were slightly revised and re-ordered following the evaluation of the pilot. This was an important and useful aspect of the method allowing for modification and re-sequencing of questions and tailoring of the method in line with the specific characteristics, experiences and orientations of particular CALDB groups, ensuring that flexibility can be achieved without sacrificing data comparability when analysing the results. This worked to ensure a reliable and engaged focus group.

Focus Group 1, consisting of eight Sudanese young males plus the community research assistant (who also contributed some data during the focus group), was used as the pilot focus group to test the efficacy, comprehension, structure and order of focus group themes and questions.

A few general issues emerged as a result of conducting the pilot. The age range of 15-19 had been dictated by the desire of Victoria Police to focus on an age grouping that is overrepresented in crime statistics in relation to both offenders and victims of crimes against the person in public places in the Brimbank LGA. However, the focus group experience revealed, not surprisingly, that the older the young men were within this range, the more

confidently they spoke and the more mature their views were. The younger participants on the whole were much quieter. One 16 year old contributed more at the beginning but then dropped off; another 16 year old was quiet for the entire session. Key factors identified by the researchers were that younger members risked being intimidated by the expressive skills of the older young men, and some lacked confidence in English levels despite having a community-based translator present.

Further thought was given to managing the spread of maturity and confidence levels within this age range in the remaining focus groups, and strategies for ensuring young participants were not intimidated by the higher level expressive skills of older participants were introduced in subsequent groups.

As a whole, the group was lively and responsive to questions and the participants were articulate and impassioned as well as analytical. Some of the non-verbal signals (e.g. eye contact and facial expression) exchanged between participants suggested some collusion or signalling about whether or not to respond to certain questions, particularly where the issues of ethnicity of other groups had emerged, or where the discussion came close to personal witness or involvement in interpersonal or group conflicts between young people. Having said this, there was a surprisingly high level of candour and openness in response to many of the questions, and the general tenor of the group was engaged and interested, even though the session was a long one. Researchers were explicitly sensitive to non-verbal signals and used these as opportunities for further exploration of issues in subsequent focus group sessions.

At various points, including probes about personal experience, young people in this group chose to talk about specific experiences or scenarios in terms such as: 'this friend of mine', 'I know some people this happened to', 'I heard about', etc. The researchers felt that at times this was likely to have been a strategy to tell a story that related to the question but to avoid implicating themselves in a particular scenario. There were some stories in which participants were willing to locate themselves as key actors, but these were relatively rare.

When coding the data, the researchers have been sensitive to the slippage between personal experience and attribution of experience to others as a deflective strategy that nevertheless empowers narratives of the kind the project is seeking to elicit. As a result, attribution to self or others for particular scenarios and experiences has not been a factor in the analysis of the data.

Overall, the themes and questions worked well. Theme 5, 'Young people and crimes against the person in public places', was a 'hot spot' in the sequence of focus group themes and questions. It was a delicate and difficult topic for participants and particular sensitivity and skill was needed on the part of the focus group facilitators to minimise the sense of vulnerability and renewed anger that recounting stories of violent encounters (both 'offensive' and 'defensive') and loss of control (both emotional and physical) potentially created for participants. Several focus group questions were slightly revised to make them more easily understood, and the sequencing of two questions was also altered following the pilot to address issues of potential participant discomfort with talking about their experience as victims of violent crime.

The issue of participant fatigue also arose for researchers when reflecting on the pilot focus group. In some later focus groups a brief 2-3 minute break was offered to provide participants with a few minutes to refresh before moving into this part of the discussion.

The key methodological recommendation emerging from the review of the focus group design is to consider the inclusion of at least some one-on-one interviews with CALDB young people if the same study is run in other areas with a similar population of young people. Individual interviews will avoid the tendency to grandstand in front of peers, to attribute one's own experience to others in an effort to minimise damage or harm to one's reputation or standing within the group, or to self-censor some kinds of information and perspectives for fear of how this will be received by others within the group. It should be emphasised that for many young people in these groups, there was a significant degree of risk involved in their disclosure in a group setting of information,

views and opinions around issues concerning safety, gangs, weapons carriage and both the victims and the perpetrators of violent crimes and other conflict scenarios, and their courage in doing so should be noted. However, on the whole, young people in the focus groups in both communities showed considerable honesty and candour in how they responded to the focus group discussions, and in their thoughtfulness around particular key issues in the research.

7.3 Other benefits and outcomes of the method

The project has also generated genuine capacity-building opportunities for police and young people to improve their relationships with each other in community contexts because of the explicit focus in the methodology on how these relationships are currently perceived and experienced by young people themselves, and on what young people see as the best way to promote positive change in this context. The ongoing consultation mechanism developed by the project further supports the capacity for improved relationships and community partnerships between young people and the police through drawing on a combination of project findings, research literature and international best-practice models in this domain.

The conduct of *Don't Go There* itself as a research program within the Brimbank region was seen by the great majority of young people who participated as evidence that Victoria Police cared about what young people in the region thought, how they felt, and what they had to say. It provided an outlet and an avenue for a group of young men and women who do not usually have easy access to articulating their opinions and their concerns around community safety to engage with a series of topics and questions that took their views seriously and promised to incorporate those views into the findings of a project that was funded by but conducted independently of the police.

The integrity of this collaborative research design meant that young people were more inclined to trust the research process and more eager to share their views and ideas because they could see a real prospect that the project might make a positive difference in how community safety can be improved for and by them. The research program enhanced the sense of participants that they were seen as part of the solution and not merely as part of the problem, a benefit that has been emphasised in the research literature on engaging young people through community participation and social connectedness.

The project's benefits also extended beyond young people in general within the Brimbank region through its specific engagement with two CALD cohorts – the Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities. At a Victoria University seminar presentation of interim findings from the *Don't Go There* CALD focus groups in September 2008, the audience for a seminar anticipated to attract about 20 people swelled to over 70 attendees. They included representatives from state and federal government agencies, including DIAC, VMC, and DHS; youth workers and community legal representatives; and a significant number of leaders and members from both the Pacific Islander and Sudanese communities across Melbourne. While the presentation itself was very well received, the most important outcome of the seminar was the reputational benefit for the police derived from being seen as proactive and committed to engaging in a collaboratively designed research program that would potentially deliver real benefits for and engagement with these two communities. The goodwill and contributions of many Sudanese and Pacific Islander representatives during the post-presentation dialogue suggested that two communities who have felt themselves to be at the 'pointy end' of both media and police attention in many contexts over recent years believed they were now being positively engaged with by Victoria Police through the auspices of the *Don't Go There* project.

8 FUTURE STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

A number of the recommendations that arise from the data generated by this project are addressed in the ongoing youth-police consultation model discussed in the next section. These include strategies for responding to young people's concerns about improving their relationship with police through establishing better ongoing communication and consultation pathways; reciprocal education for young people and police about rights and responsibilities, cultural considerations, and the impact of attitudinal and behavioural messages in encounters between young people and the police. They also include strategies for dealing with better understandings of the causes, triggers and alternatives for dealing with conflict between young people, particularly violent crime.

The consultation model, which incorporates both the survey and focus group methodology and further stages of ongoing dialogue and consultation, is an important outcome of the project and offers a structure for continued information and data gathering, dialogue and exchange, and prioritising and implementation of responses around young people, safety and policing in the community. Beyond this, however, a number of key issues have been raised by young people throughout the study that require additional comment and attention. Accordingly, the recommendations below are intended to complement the consultation model by drawing together key areas of concern and suggestions for addressing these based on the data that have emerged throughout the course of the research program.

It should be kept in mind, however, that the project brief for *Don't Go There* did not include a comprehensive review of either Victorian or interstate and national youth-police liaison initiatives undertaken over the last few years to improve community safety, youth-police relationships and crime prevention in relation to young people. Accordingly, the strategies and approaches suggested below should be cross-referenced by Victoria Police to existing or planned community policing initiatives with young people that may already be achieving, or are intended to achieve, similar outcomes.

8.1 Young people's perceptions of safety in Brimbank

Relevant findings: By far the strongest message emerging from this data is the lack of safety while waiting for public transport. Waiting at the train or bus station was the most unsafe place identified by participants, where about half felt some level of safety while a third felt a level of being unsafe. Waiting for public transport was reported as less safe than travelling on public transport. When asked to nominate places they reported feeling unsafe while waiting for trains and buses at local stations or transport hubs, particularly in Sunshine and St Albans.

Young people in Brimbank report lower levels of safety than reported in previous Victorian studies. In this survey three quarters of the young people (75%) reported feeling safe in their local neighbourhood in general: 50% felt safe to extremely safe and 25% felt somewhat safe. Some said neither safe nor unsafe, and 12% reported feeling unsafe. Only 58% reported feeling safe walking down the street, being in the local park or being on public transport. Of the 47% who reported they did not see police in their neighbourhoods very often, 58% said they felt safer (37%) to much safer (21%) when they did see police on the streets in their local area.

Young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders additionally reported feeling unsafe in response to racism and racial taunting, and young Sudanese identified the areas in and around schools as places where they felt unsafe. Young Pacific Islanders reported that people from other cultural backgrounds, particularly those who speak English as a second or foreign language, can make them feel less safe in public, which increases vulnerability for this particular group.

Strategic issues and actions:

The data strongly support specific and urgent attention being given to improving both the perception and reality of community safety in the Sunshine Transport Hub area, as well as at other suburban train stations including St Albans and Watergardens. This is a complex problem that requires a coordinated approach amongst key stakeholders, including the local council, police, youth workers, transport operators, state government representatives and young people themselves. Ways of addressing this could include:

1. A purpose-specific taskforce could be set up within Brimbank, including police and youth representatives from the local community, to develop a 'Safer Sunshine Transport' plan that addresses the concerns and feedback provided by young people through the project.

2. Victoria Police could respond to the perception that a more visible and frequent police presence at Sunshine Transport Hub would improve community safety and enhance young people's sense of access to police through resourcing increased foot and vehicle patrols in the area between 3 pm and 5 pm during the week and on Friday and Saturday evenings. This could be run for a trial period that would then assess what difference, if any, this makes to perceptions of community safety for young people who use Sunshine Transport Hub on a regular basis.

3. Young people's desire to have greater access to and better relationships with local police could be addressed by establishing an ongoing 'shopfront' presence for local police at the Hub, similar to the Footscray Market shopfront for Footscray Multicultural and Youth Resource Officers in that suburb, or else by establishing a mobile 'police station' run out of a bus or van that is rotated through the Sunshine Transport Hub on at least a weekly basis, ideally in the after-school period between 3 – 5 pm on weekdays. This is an outreach program that would seek to transform the existing perception of Sunshine Transport Hub as a negative and dangerous community space into a more positive social space that encourages young people to feel the police are actively engaging with their presence and their concerns. It could also provide an opportunity for some of the educational and communication exchanges that young people have said they want to have with police to occur through displays and community awareness campaigns being run from either an ongoing or mobile police 'mini station' at the Transport Hub.

4. Victoria Police could consider responding to the suggestion from the purposive focus group on how police can best engage young people in ongoing consultation by setting up, in cooperation with other relevant community stakeholders, a recreational event that draws young people to the Sunshine Transport Hub on a regular basis to engage socially with operational police, for example through music, dance or other community events.

5. In partnership with schools and relevant community organisations and agencies, Victoria Police could focus specifically on inter-cultural community policing strategies and activities that help promote cross-cultural learning and understanding amongst the rich multicultural community of Brimbank, with special attention devoted to creating socially positive bridges and bonds between young people from different backgrounds across the locality to help reduce anxiety and misunderstanding about people from different cultural backgrounds and countries.

8.2 Hanging out in groups

Relevant findings: Hanging out with friends was the primary reason for young people gathering in groups in public. More than three quarters reported hanging out in public places, generally in the afternoon. They reported hanging out in groups in public to spend time with friends, to be involved in planned activities, to have access to friends and to feel safe, with African-background youth the most likely to report hanging out in groups in public to feel safe. The data suggest that many young people feel that police behaviour and attitudes when approaching or dealing with groups of young people hanging out can have a negative impact on young people's attitudes towards police, primarily through experiencing what they see as unfriendliness, the arbitrary exercise of power, or lack of respect for young people as citizens. Young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders feel they are specially singled out by some police on the basis of race, appearance and dress style.

Strategic issues and actions: Young people in groups need to feel they are legitimate users of public spaces when they are behaving appropriately, and to feel confident that police have appropriate working knowledge and understanding of the difference between a 'group' and a 'gang'. This could be strengthened through the following strategy:

1. Victoria Police could further develop the capacity of operational police to understand and respond appropriately to social groups of young people gathering in public as distinct from local street gangs or youth alliances that gather specifically for the purpose of antisocial and/or criminal activity. Some of this capacity building for operational police could involve developmental training that brings young people and police together to identify and set boundaries around what police need to do in discharging their duties and what young people can reasonably expect to do or not do when they are spending time in public in groups.

   This is particularly important in the case of operational police and CALDB youth, where the potential for misunderstanding and miscommunication about public gathering and the use of public space is pronounced. Improved cultural understanding for operational police about why larger group sizes – traditionally equated with 'gangs' in the literature (e.g. White 1999) – do not equate with gangs but are characteristic of social gathering in public for both male and female Sudanese-background and Pacific Islander young people suggests the importance of making such developmental training cross-cultural in focus.

8.3 Gangs in Brimbank

Relevant findings: Three quarters of participants thought there were gangs in their local area. One third of all participants reported having had encounters with gangs in their local areas and young men were twice as likely to report gang encounters as young women. Half reported some fear of gangs in their local area. They thought young people joined gangs to belong, for criminal activity, to look 'cool' or tough, due to having the same ethnic background and for self defence. Young people were able to produce a wide range of 'gang' names and groups when asked whether they were aware of any gangs operating in their local or adjacent areas. Gangs were most commonly defined by perceived elements of anti-social behaviour and specific appearance markers by young people in the study. Paradoxically, however, young people also said they did not want to be judged on the basis of their appearance or dress style alone by police who are focusing on youth and gangs.

Young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders were concerned about local gangs and gang activity in their local area, but some also felt that they were unfairly perceived by police and the general public to be in 'gangs' when they were gathering in social groups in public. The groups and activities described in the focus groups with young Pacific Islanders and Sudanese do not suggest the presence of highly organised, hierarchically structured or criminally oriented gangs in the Brimbank area. The collectives described were largely cross-ethnic and were more likely to come together to promote a sense of belonging, feeling safe, bonding through territorial or kinship

links and countering feelings of social exclusion rather than to engage in organised criminal behaviour for financial gain.

Strategic issues and actions:

1. Consideration should be given to acknowledging the widespread perception amongst young people themselves that gangs exist in the Brimbank area. Continuing a strategy of downplaying the existence and operation of local youth gangs, while understandable in the context of both the data and the literature that suggests that local street 'gangs' often come into existence through self-naming as such, also risks alienating young people who may perceive that the police are deliberately denying or minimising something young people themselves take for granted.

2. A more useful strategy might be to employ a continuum model, in which lower-level street gang activity is acknowledged but also put in its place relative to more highly organised, sophisticated and criminally active gang formations. This would also be helpful in allowing for the development of strategies to enhance protective factors that minimise the risk of young people becoming involved in local street gangs, and raising community awareness about the realities and consequences of engaging in gang-related activities and group identity.

3. Careful consideration could be given to the terminology used to describe local youth collectives to avoid the tensions and conflicts that can arise when the label 'gang' is used. Describing local youth collectives that display some antisocial or delinquent behaviours as 'crews' or 'street groups' rather than 'gangs' may help shift the emphasis away from the challenges of defining 'gangs', helping to focus instead on the broader social processes that lead to youth violence and conflict in the community.

4. A public awareness campaign about ways for young men and young women to feel strong, confident and empowered without becoming involved in local street gangs is also a strategy that should be considered, drawing on a number of recent and current approaches in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom that are addressing similar issues (see Listen and Learn model in Chapter 9 below). Such a campaign could usefully draw on the developing literature on socially resilient communities that emphasises building social cohesion and tolerance as a key element in enabling people to resist groups and ideologies that foster discontent, conflict and violence.

8.4 Understanding conflict

Relevant findings: Acting tough, looking for a fight or wanting to be seen as 'cool' were the main reasons given for the causes of arguments between young people, followed by differences of opinion. Young people thought conflict turned violent through acting tough, lack of back down, being cool and showing aggression. They also felt that lack of self-control and lack of verbal skills in conflict resolution could help escalate an argument into a violent conflict.

Strategic issues and actions: The reasons that conflict occurs and escalates for young people, like many of the issues canvassed in this study, are complex and multi-factorial. However, a clear finding in the research is that masculinity, particularly around image, reputation and peer status, is critical in conflict escalation, especially in group settings. Accordingly:

1. A public multi-media campaign titled 'How cool is that?' showing graphic representations of the consequences of violent conflict – loss of life, disfigurement, arrest and imprisonment, the loss of support

from friends and family, etc. – could be a powerful counterweight to the current cultural pull towards violence as a means of negotiating masculinity, identity and empowerment for young men in particular.

2. Beyond such a campaign, it is recommended that community stakeholders, including schools, police, social service providers and local councils work together to develop specific conflict resolution and conflict de-escalation resources and toolkits for young people to encourage the development of alternative conflict resolution skills for youth in Brimbank. Young people who feel that there may be no alternative to 'backing down' other than to fight or become violent need education and support about why this is a myth. Such a toolkit would need to be designed to be CALDB sensitive and to learn from alternative and traditional dispute resolution approaches already in place within CALDB communities whose effectiveness may be threatened by cross-cultural disputes where parties in conflict do not understand each other's codes and triggers. Specific information about what is understood as provocative or threatening across different cultural groups could be workshopped and better understood as part of this process.

3. Racism and discrimination between young people on the basis of ethnicity and cultural background has been identified as a significant trigger for escalating conflict and violence amongst CALDB young people in the study, and particularly for Sudanese young people. The link between racism, discrimination and violent responses to these experiences needs to be understood as part of a broader community safety and crime prevention strategy in which young people from all backgrounds understand that they are also responsible for escalating conflict when they express racist or ethnically derogatory or inflammatory sentiments to their peers, even if they do not themselves become physically violent. This is part of a broader education and awareness campaign that is addressed in the 'Listen and Learn' ongoing youth-police consultation model.

8.5 Weapons carriage and violent crime

Relevant findings: Half the participants reported knowing young people who carry weapons regularly. Young men reported more weapons knowledge than young women. Poles, trolley poles, bats, baseball bats, various knives, guns and machetes were reported as the main weapons of choice. There was a difference between weapons of convenience such as trolley poles and other poles, which were used spontaneously when under threat in public, and knives, which were more likely to be carried and used to make young people feel safer or (for a minority) for planned or expected violence. Young people thought that the main reasons for carrying weapons were to feel safe, for self-defence and for protection. One quarter reported carrying a weapon for any reason. Victims of crime were more likely to carry weapons than those who had never been a victim of crime. Just over a third reported being worried about being attacked in public, particularly in certain places. One fifth (19%) reported having been a victim of violent crime in public with almost twice as many reports from young men as compared to young women. Young men were more likely to report assault than young women and young women more likely to report behaviour in public than young men.

Despite periodic weapons amnesties, these have shown limited effectiveness in reducing the incidence of weapons carriage for the same reasons identified in earlier studies (e.g. Bondy et al., 2005), which was to make young people feel safer when in public or in areas they felt to be dangerous in their local area. A new strategy is needed to address this persistent problem. School and other educational campaigns recommended by earlier research do not appear to have resulted in a noticeable shift in attitude amongst young people that dislodges the link between carrying weapons and feeling 'safer' or more able to defend themselves in public spaces.

Strategic issues and actions:

1. The data show that trolley poles were a clear weapon of convenience and choice for young people. Victoria Police could work with manufacturers of shopping trolleys and the proprietors of shopping malls, particularly Highpoint but also Sunshine Plaza, Watergardens and other local consumer hubs, to make trolley poles less easily accessible.

2. Knives are easily transported, easily concealed and easily used by young people. The intractable persistence of knife carriage and use requires a full-scale public media campaign that, like road safety, binge-drinking and other campaigns aimed at youth, graphically illustrates the consequences of carrying knives. To be most effective, the campaign needs to dislodge the myth that weapons carriage makes young people safer and focus instead on the ways in which weapons carriage in fact places them at greater risk for their safety. At the heart of such a campaign would be the effort to change the culture and thinking around weapons carriage for young people and to transform the role of weapons in the social relations that young people have with each other and with public spaces in their immediate and broader environments.

3. Such a campaign could usefully focus on three key areas:

    - How easily a weapon such as a knife can be turned against the carrier by a stronger, more agile and/or more experienced offender.
    - Better educating potential victims of knife- and other weapons-related crimes on how to engage in evasive or avoidant strategies that minimise their risk of being victimised through weapons carriage. A public awareness strategy empowering potential victims, as well as on potential or existing weapons offenders amongst young people, may produce a shift in thinking about weapons carriage and its impacts that has been elusive to date for this social group.
    - A campaign that aims to make weapons carriage into a 'shame job' through negative peer reactions to young people who carry weapons may also produce a shift in attitude, behaviour, and the underlying social relations that currently inform the issue of weapons carriage and youth.

8.6 Reducing conflict

Relevant findings: Young people suggested four main themes regarding reducing conflict: more education and encouragement of self control and respectful behaviour towards others; more education about communication and conflict resolution skills; greater police and/or adult supervision with stronger consequences; and more prevention measures such as counselling, controlling drugs and alcohol, separating groups and shared activities.

Strategic issues and actions:

1. Victoria Police could further strengthen its work with schools and with CALDB community leaders and groups to develop clear and realistic expectations and guidelines focusing on conflict prevention rather than conflict intervention. This is an example of an area that could be one of the priorities for a pilot program in the 'Listen and Learn' ongoing youth-police consultation model.

2. It would be highly strategic to incorporate specific CALDB approaches to conflict reduction be incorporated into operational police awareness and training to assist in minimising conflict involving CALDB youth that may arise on the basis of cultural misunderstanding and/or competing values and approaches.

3. There is also a clear place for education around self control, respect for others, communication and conflict resolution skills. This could include strategies for emotional regulation and how best to diffuse conflict, with a particular focus on strategies for young people to minimise the risk of verbal arguments becoming violent or large-scale confrontations.

8.7 Young people's relationships with the police

Relevant findings: Half of the participants reported they trusted or completely trusted the police, while a quarter reported a lack of trust. Just over 50% of the sample gave examples for what might stop them calling the police if their own or someone else's safety were in danger. The most commonly cited barriers to calling police included fear of violent reprisals, negative consequences, or escalation of the situation. The belief that the police won't respond in time to the call, will be ineffective in handling the situation, will not be interested in the problem, or won't take their call seriously were also reported. Young people said they would feel more comfortable calling the police if the police were friendlier, if the police were more respectful, if young people could be more confident that they would be assisted, and if the call could be more private or anonymous.

Young people also said they want to be treated respectfully and with greater friendliness when they have casual contact with operational police on the street, and for police to have greater understanding of the needs and concerns of young people at their particular stage of life. The literature emphasises that while positive encounters with police have only a weak impact on positive appraisal of police performance, negative encounters with police have a strong correlation on negative appraisal of police more generally. Improved behavioural and attitudinal changes for operational police will result in more trust and confidence and greater potential for reporting of crime.

Strategic issues and actions:

1. Victoria Police could develop a set of specific strategies, designed in conjunction with Youth Resource Officers and Young Police Commissioners (see 'Listen and Learn' model) that allow operational police to better understand youth-specific listening and engagement skills, and that emphasise a protocol of *mutual listening and respect* between young people and police that cuts both ways.

2. The issue raised by young people around their reluctance to contact police for fear of reprisals by peers could be addressed through the establishment of a local 'Youth Hotline' or similar mechanism that provides young people with an easy to remember free-call number on which they can report crime or provide information relating to community safety concerns where they believe their own or someone else's safety is at risk.

   Since young people also reported a lack of confidence about dealing with police when they do make contact, with many young people saying they felt too intimidated to ring police even when they needed them, such a hotline could be staffed by personnel who have expertise in dealing with young and inexperienced callers who require support or can provide important information to police about criminal activity in their local area.

3. An educational campaign could be developed that helps young people understand when to call 000, when to ring their local police station, and when to contact a portfolio-specific officer such as a Multicultural Resource, Youth Resource or Emerging Communities Resource Officer. There is both confusion and resistance amongst participants about how to contact police and what to expect when they do.

4. Young people need to be provided with clear, accessible and easy to understand information by Victoria Police about how to lodge a complaint against a police officer(s) if they feel their treatment by police warrants this. This is a particular issue for CALDB young people in the study, who have reported instances of asking for police details in order to lodge a complaint and either not receiving these details, being abused when they ask for this information, or being unclear about how to pursue a complaint when they do receive identifying information from a police officer. This is also based on a recommendation that was made in 1999 by the Jesuit Social Services Ethnic Youth and Police Project in the City of Yarra, but does not appear to have been taken up in the current Victoria Police ESD Community Service Charter.

5. Victoria Police can show they have heard and made a positive investment in young people's concerns and contributions to issues around community safety and policing through disseminating information and updates about strategies and programs arising from the Don't Go There project. This could be achieved through school bulletins, local newspapers, community forums, and other means of ongoing consultation about the issues raised and how Victoria Police in Brimbank are working in partnership with young people in addressing these issues.

8.8 Gender-specific issues for young women around community safety

Relevant findings: While more young women than young men in the survey reported feeling somewhat less safe or unsafe in the community, specific issues around sexual assault, coercion or harassment did not feature in what they had to say around safety, violence or being victims of crimes. While the study did not specifically investigate issues of sexual assault, this issue did arise in an all-female focus group, where young Sudanese women related stories about sexual coercion and bullying by young men they identified as belonging to local gangs. Some of these young women reported they had become sexually involved with 'gang' members in order to avoid either harm to themselves (e.g. being bashed for not 'consenting' to They also reported some negative experiences in dealing with police when they tried to report sexual assault over the telephone. This group of young women also felt that they were discriminated against when they rang police in Brimbank, and some young women said they deliberately bypassed police in Brimbank by ringing police in Footscray, whom they felt had better cultural and gender-based understanding of their needs and concerns. It is possible that under-reporting of sexual assault and coercion is occurring within this community as a consequence, specifically in relation to young Sudanese women between the ages of 15-19 and local young men who are identify with or belong to local gangs.

Strategic issues and actions:

1. A culturally appropriate multi-media information and awareness campaign could be run by police in partnership with culturally appropriate community organisations specifically for young women in the Sudanese community about who to call and how best and most safely and comfortably to report incidents of sexual assault, coercion and victimisation, including information about victim support and advisory services available through Victoria Police and other community-based agencies.

2. Further culturally sensitive and appropriate research needs to be undertaken to gain further knowledge and understanding of the specific issues around sexual assault and coercion for young Sudanese women, since this is an under-researched dimension of community safety within this CALDB community with implications for both other CALDB communities and the general community.

3. The issue of why some Sudanese young women bypass Brimbank police in favour of contacting police in other nearby localities can be explored and addressed through appropriate operational education and training in responding to young CALDB female callers making contact in relation to sexually based crime.

8.9 Improving community safety

Relevant findings: Young people's suggestions for improving community safety in both the survey and focus groups included: more police; greater reporting of crime to police by young people; more environmental security measures such as cameras and guards; police and community members working collaboratively; encouraging mutual understanding and respect; a 'keeping safe in public' campaign; getting rid of gangs, drug dealers and dealing more effectively with aggressive and antisocial behaviour such as drunkenness and public fighting; more allocated public spaces to hang out; stronger mechanisms for promoting cultural understanding and tolerance between CALDB youth and police; and shared activities for groups of young people both with and without the police.

Strategic issues and actions:

These issues and strategies to address them are dealt with through the 'Listen and Learn' model of ongoing youth-police consultation, priority-setting and implementation of community safety partnerships and pilot programs between young people and the police discussed in Chapter 9 below.

9 LISTEN AND LEARN: A MODEL FOR YOUTH-POLICE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS

'Listen and Learn' is a proposed model for ongoing consultation and community safety partnerships between young people and the police in Brimbank. The model is informed both by the research findings from *Don't Go There* concerning the current relationship between young people and the police and by consideration of some recently trialled models for youth-police consultation in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States.

Drawing on these sources, the model outlined here suggests how Victoria Police might best set up an ongoing consultation mechanism between young people and the police focused on:

- Gathering information and feedback from young people at community level about community safety and policing issues;
- Building better relationships between young people and the police;
- How young people and the police can best educate each other about how to feel and be more safe in the local community; and
- How young people and the police can develop ongoing strategies for making their local community a safer place within a community safety partnership setting.

The model has at its core the principle of *community safety partnerships* between young people and the police. Community safety partnerships have been developed and implemented as part of the UK's National Crime Strategy[16] and have been widely adopted across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Community safety partnerships emphasise:

- *shared responsibility* for community safety;
- *shared understanding* of the problems faced by local communities around crime and safety, and
- *shared commitment* to addressing issues identified by stakeholders in the partnership.

They also join up police, community members service providers and other stakeholders in a coordinated 'cascading' model that is supported by the National Strategy but with flexibility as well as accountability in implementing the partnerships at the local level. While the partnership model discussed here focuses on a two-way partnership between police and young people in relation to consultation mechanisms, it would clearly be advantageous to look at how key government and service stakeholders could be brought in to support and enable the model to optimise its reach and sustainability.

It became clear during the development of the consultation model that any worthwhile mechanism for consultation between young people and the police is also simultaneously an *engagement* model that seeks not only to consult but to connect young people with the police and to keep that connection alive, positive and flourishing. Accordingly, it should also be noted that this model may be used to supplement or extend existing programs and strategies implemented by Victoria Police for engaging pro-actively with young people, including those from CALD backgrounds. This study did not include a review or analysis or existing Victoria Police programs specifically targeted at youth engagement and consultation. However, the proposed engagement model below is intended to serve as an independent framework for engaging and responding to the concerns of both young people and police around community safety that may also draw on current programs and initiatives to strengthen its core aims and outcomes.

[16] Revised in 2007; see *Cutting Crime: A New Partnership 2008-2011, http://www. homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/crime-strategy-07*.

What does *Don't Go There* tell us about how young people view the relationship between young people and the police in Brimbank?

The evidence gathered in this study suggests that young people in Brimbank feel ambivalent and at times offer contradictory views about the police, with both positive and negative perceptions of police and youth-police relationships reported in various segments of the study. A brief review of relevant data from both the survey and focus groups is in offered here to contextualise the model that is discussed below.

9.1 Relevant survey findings

Perceptions of stop and search in public

This is a significant issue for young people in Brimbank. They are highly critical current stop and search procedures, particularly when police stop and speak to groups of young people in public places. They do not understand why they are being stopped and feel they are being unfairly targeted either because of their age, their race or cultural background, or both. They do not have a clear understanding of the law as it relates to stop and search or to the obligation to provide details such as name and address when asked by police. The last point is particularly relevant for more recent arrivals such as members of the Sudanese community who participated in the project.

Perceptions of police in general

Close to half the sample in the study reported that they believed *young people in Brimbank in general* had somewhat to extremely negative perceptions of police in the local area. These negative perceptions centred on the perception that the police are not around enough; are not helpful; can be racist or discriminatory; don't want young people to have a good time; are ineffective or indifferent to young people's concerns about community safety; and do not always behave professionally or well; do not really care about or have a commitment to the wellbeing of the local area and its residents.

However, there is also some evidence that where young people have negative perceptions of police, this is influenced by the fear and anxiety that many young people feel when they are dealing with police, even if the contact is casual or unrelated to specific incidents or crimes. Their views of police as 'intimidators' and 'enforcers' tend to dominate the perceptions of this group of young people, whereas those young people who see police primarily as 'service providers' or 'helpers, listeners and advisors' are more comfortable and positive about the role of police in the community.

How comfortable do young people feel about calling police when they or others are at risk?

A high proportion of young people (54%) said they would not always feel comfortable calling police if their own or someone else's safety was at risk. The reluctance to call police in such situations was attributed to fear of direct and violent reprisals from others if they rang the police; fear of other negative consequences such as getting into trouble themselves, getting friends into trouble, attracting unwanted police attention, or escalating a bad situation; the perception that police would either not take the call seriously, not be interested in the problem, or that they would arrive too late and/or do too little to be of real help. Some young people were also concerned with being seen as dobbers, or were susceptible to pressure from peers not to call police, while others felt they could better handle the situation on their own, with friends or with family without involving police.

Nevertheless, implicit in many of the responses from those who were reluctant to call police when their own or others' safety was at risk were two key issues: lack of confidence on the part of young people when speaking with police either over the phone or in person, and both the relevance of good listening skills by police and the

negative effects of their converse, poor listening skills when dealing with young people, particularly in threatening or tense situations where a young person feels their own safety or that of others is endangered.

A further key concern for young people when ringing the police is related to confidentiality and anonymity. This is related to the fear of reprisals if a young person is found to be a dobber and to the desire to avoid jeopardising themselves if they have been involved in a situation where they may also be found culpable by police. A number of young people said they would like to know that they can ring police confidentially, even if their anonymity cannot be preserved. There is not a clear understanding amongst young people in the study about why anonymity may not be appropriate when providing information to police, although there was some awareness that Crime Stoppers, for example, offers precisely this.

Ease of access to police through dedicated phone numbers (other than 000, which some young people are either reluctant to use or confused about) that were easy to remember and registered as freecalls were also cited by some young people as an issue in this regard.

Perceptions of police roles in the community in relation to feeling safe

Young people's perceptions of how police could help them feel safe are clustered around six key areas: greater police visibility and better response times; use of authority to impose order and control in public; improving the attitudes and behaviour of police towards young people; listening to and providing support for young people by police; the opportunity for young people and the police to mutually educate each other about their issues and concerns; and the perception that nothing the police do could help young people feel safer.

Amongst these responses, several key perceptions about the primary roles of police emerged from the data, in which young people's responses suggested that they see police variously as: service providers; enforcers of order and control; intimidators; listeners, helpers and problem solvers; educators and advisors; and irrelevant to helping young people feel safe.

When asked what young people themselves would do to make their community a safer place, the top 3 suggestions offered through the survey were: a) greater police presence, such as foot patrols, and reports of crime to police, particularly relating to safety concerns and incidents at public transport hubs; b) improving the level and type of environmental security measures, such as more security cameras (particularly around areas of public transport such as train stations), better street lighting and more public phones; and c) greater collaboration between police and community members, including community consultations, more school visits, and youth-specific consultations between police and young people. There was also a desire to have police involved in facilitating greater knowledge of each other between neighbours and local residents in the immediate areas where young people lived.

Improving relationships between young people and the police

In relation to how young people in Brimbank think the relationship between the police and young people in the local area could be improved, three key areas were emphasised in the data:

- *Better communication pathways*, including both formal and informal opportunities for young people and the police to speak and get to know each other in non-threatening and safe environments;
- *Improved behaviour and attitude of police* towards young people, including the police being less aggressive or argumentative, less intimidating, more polite, more respectful and friendlier when speaking to young people; and
- A greater focus on *reciprocal educational activities between young people and the police.* Young people in both the survey and focus groups said they wanted to learn more about what police do and why they do it.

They also want the opportunity to teach the police about young people, and to have them understand more clearly where young people are coming from and what motivates their behaviour and attitudes toward community safety, conflict and relationships with the police.

Positive change

The primary focus provided by young people themselves in this portion of the data is on positive change. In general, most young people in Brimbank do not see improved relationships with the police as a lost or futile cause, and only a relatively small minority feel that police are irrelevant to their safety, or feel so alienated or marginalised that they are not interested in pursuing a more positive relationship with police. The majority of young people in this region are eager for improved relationships and positive about the prospects for achieving this if they feel that police genuinely care, are willing to be 'equal' partners in building a better relationship, and are willing to learn side by side along with young people.

Individual relationships between young people and the police

However, they are wary of and put off by what they perceive to be negative police attitudes and behaviours towards them, and often feel diminished and belittled in their casual or everyday encounters with operational police out in the community. By contrast, the data show that where young people have encountered portfolio-specific police such as Multicultural Liaison or Youth Resource Officers, the contact is generally positive to extremely positive, as is contact when individual relationships are developed between young people and the police. This suggests that the main focus on relationship-building between young people and the police needs to occur at the operational level, in addition to the specialist portfolios mentioned above. However, specialist Liaison and Resource Officers have an important role to play in disseminating the information and approaches they have developed in these portfolios for the benefit of operational police more generally.

Finally, the data suggest that there are important differences between how young people perceive the police as an abstract or collective group, and how young people perceive individual police officers with whom they have had contact. Both negative and positive emotions were higher, for example, in the focus groups when discussing specific police officers or specific encounters with police. Many young people were able to recall particular encounters that made them feel either safe, helped and valued, or alternatively feel aggrieved, unsafe or threatened when dealing with police. Within the group of young people who had generally negative perceptions of this police, this was offset at times by a 'but' clause (e.g., '*I don't like the police, but…*') in relation to a particular officer with whom that young person had had a positive or helpful encounter. Many young people in the survey showed a willingness both to generalise about the police, but also to move beyond generalisations in thinking about exceptions to the views they had just articulated.

In many ways, this relates to the desire of young people in groups to be seen by police as individuals, rather than merely as an undifferentiated 'group' or 'gang' of youths. In both cases (the generalisations about young people in groups by police, and the generalisations about police as a group by young people) it is where individualised contact and knowledge has been able to prevail that better relationships and more positive attitudes have been fostered and sustained.

Overall, the data strongly support the desire of most young people in the survey to relate to police as listeners and problem solvers, educators and advisors, and service providers (Chapter 5).

9.2 Relevant Sudanese and Pacific Islander focus group findings

From the focus groups that engaged young people from the Sudanese and Pacific Islander cohorts, a number of issues raised above also resonated with these two communities, particularly in relation to ambivalent feelings about police in general; stop and search procedures in public and the attitudes and behaviours of some police towards young people; perception of police roles in the community, and improving relationships between young people and the police. However, a set of other issues specific to these communities were also identified, and sometimes issues common to both survey and focus group participants were given a slightly different slant from the perspectives of these two CALDB groups. This is particularly important for understanding some of the nuances that emerge for CALDB communities when thinking about generalised models for ongoing consultation and communication.

The relevant key findings from the focus group data provided by Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people are:

Perceptions of racism and discrimination by the police toward young people of Sudanese and Pacific Islander backgrounds

Sudanese young people expressed a strong belief that many police are racially and culturally biased against young people from Sudanese backgrounds. They reported perceptions that police:

- Think Sudanese people experience violence as normative;
- Are less likely to require help and support from police;
- Discriminate against young Sudanese when they ring police based on perceptions of their accent over the phone;
- Single out young Sudanese for stop and search procedures based on cultural and racial bias; Erroneously blame young Sudanese for the transgressions of other African-background youth, some of whom may deliberately misreport their cultural backgrounds when questioned or arrested;
- Stereotype young Sudanese as 'gangstas' or 'gang' members based on superficial assessments of dress style or adornment, or on behaviours such as public gathering in groups; and
- Are more likely to question, caution or arrest young Sudanese in a cross-ethnic conflict even though young Sudanese may have been those who initially rang the police and/or who are the victims in such a conflict.

Regardless of whether these beliefs are grounded in fact, or if so to what extent, the strength and consistency with which they were articulated by young Sudanese of both genders across different focus groups means that dedicated investment of resources and strategies needs to be made in order to work through some of these issues between police and young people from Sudanese backgrounds. It is critical to develop approaches that avoid such beliefs becoming further entrenched, with likely negative consequences for relationships between young Sudanese and the police in future if they do. This is all the more important given that the current reasons reported for reluctance to contact police about crime and safety issues above replicate the findings of an earlier (2000) study by the Victorian Multicultural Commission, which found that younger migrants would not contact police because they felt they risked becoming the targets of racially based discrimination if they did so (see Chapter 3) suggesting this is a common and widespread pattern over time for new and recent arrivals in their perceptions of dealing with police.

Linked to this is the lack of clarity and understanding some young Sudanese people have about Australian police culture and the law. This is particularly the case in relation to procedures such as stop and search, the request for personal details, and the reasons why young people in groups in public might be moved on by police.

The data from the focus groups suggest that young Sudanese people's perception of police is influenced much more strongly by *current interactions with police* in Australia (in this case, in Brimbank and surrounding areas in the West) rather than by any historical negative associations they have brought with them about police in either their home country or countries of transit. In this regard, young Sudanese people said both positive and negative things about their perceptions of police in their local community. In addition to the negative perceptions noted above, they also felt that many police are just 'doing their job', that they have an important role to play in community safety, that the police are not there to be 'nice' but to be effective, and that police are looking out for the interests of the community at large, which for some young Sudanese (but not all) includes procedures such as stop and search or questioning of groups of young people in public.

The findings from young Pacific Islanders in focus groups were similar in many respects to that from young Sudanese. Young Pacific Islanders of both genders also feel that racism can influence the behaviour of police toward young people from this community and they also object to what they see as arbitrary or capricious stop and search procedures. They are more likely than Sudanese young people to feel that police engage in stop and search in order to hassle or 'cheek' young people in groups in public as an arbitrary exercise of power or to relieve police boredom while on patrol. They have commented on the absence of Pacific Islander background police as role models in the local community and would like to see more Islander-background police officers in their local neighbourhoods. They tend to report more positive perceptions of police when speaking of relationships between young Pacific Islanders and individual police officers, strengthening the project's findings that it is more broadly based and positive individualised contact between operational police and young people that needs to be built upon at the local level within CALDB communities if both perceptions of and relationships with police are to be meaningfully improved.

Language and communication barriers between young people and the police

Young Sudanese felt that significant language barriers existed between some young Sudanese people and the police, particularly in relation to reporting crime, being witnesses of crime, and providing information and intelligence when being questioned. This is largely a factor related to the level of English skills and the length of time resident in Australia. However, some young Sudanese do not feel well understood at times by police in terms of their expression regardless of their level of English fluency and are sometimes uncomfortable with what they perceive to be an aggressive and unfriendly style of questioning by police.

Perception that police are less responsive to young people from Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities compared to the general population

Both groups of young people expressed their perception that police in general seem to care less about young people from either the Sudanese or Pacific Islander communities than about the general population, and are less responsive to their needs and concerns.

Managing risks and relationships: calling the police when own or others' safety is at risk

For young Sudanese**,** *risk management* is foremost in their thinking about whether and when they might call police when their own or others' safety is at risk. They take a pragmatic approach to assessing the risk posed by different situations and are not reluctant to ring police if they feel the situation is serious enough to warrant police intervention or if they feel they are not in a position to handle a threatening or unsafe situation on their own or with nearby family or friends. The issue of whether they trust police in a local area, however, is a complicating factor in their risk assessment approach, with reports from some young Sudanese women that they bypass ringing police in Brimbank in favour of contacting police in Footscray, where they feel there is better understanding of Sudanese people and culture by police.

However, for Pacific Islander young people, the approach to calling police is different. *Relationship management* is at the core of whether or when they might call police, and young Pacific Islanders are generally reluctant to ring police if their own or others' safety is at risk because of concerns both about how this might affect their relationship with others in their community, and about their relationship with local police more generally. Their reluctance to call police is based on two main factors: a general lack of confidence in police, and a potential loss of status and reputation amongst their peers or others within the community if it becomes known they rang police for assistance. They are generally not trusting of the police in the abstract but have higher levels of trust for individual officers with whom they have had positive experiences.

Social and cultural engagement between police and young people in CALDB communities

Both Sudanese and Pacific Islander young people stressed the importance of getting to know police better as individuals and as community members, rather than as the abstract 'blue wedge' they are often perceived to be. They want to engage positively and proactively with operational police at the local level, rather than just community, youth or multicultural liaison officers – though some young people from both communities feel very positively about their relationships with police in these roles. Young people in both communities also stressed the importance of police learning and understanding more about the cultural values, beliefs and behaviours of people from both Sudanese and Pacific islander backgrounds.

Reciprocal education in rights, responsibilities and cultural knowledge

Young people in both communities also want more education, going in two directions. On the one hand, they want more education *from* the police about rights, constraints and responsibilities in relation to both young people and the police themselves. On the other hand, they also want the chance to educate police from young people's perspectives about specific cultural approaches to issues such as solving or de-escalating conflict, mediating disputes, gathering in groups and the interface between public and private forms of socialising and recreation.

Listening to young Sudanese and Pacific Islanders' views and concerns

Once again, both young Sudanese and young Pacific Islanders share a common view about wanting to be listened to and heard by police about the issues that most concern them in relation to community safety. The phrase 'don't judge a book by its cover' was used often by young people from both communities in different focus groups when asked what message they most wanted to get across to police through this project. For young people in these communities, the data suggest that this phrase means two things for them: first, not judging people on the basis of skin colour or cultural background, and second, seeing and treating young people, even in groups, as individuals, rather than as an undifferentiated mass of 'troublesome' or 'shifty' youth. They believe that many police are generically suspicious of them solely because of their age group, their racial or cultural background, or a combination of the two. They would like police to stereotype them less and to spend more time listening to and learning about who they are and their needs and concerns in relation to safety in their local area.

Sensitivity to gender-based issues for young people when dealing with police

While Pacific Islander young women in the mixed and general population focus groups did not identify gender-specific issues when dealing with police, some young Sudanese women in the all-female group did. They reported finding it difficult to communicate with police around issues of sexual assault, particularly over the phone, and the focus group discussions suggest that some incidents of sexual assault or coercion may go unreported because of this. They also feel conflicted about reporting crime and other community safety concerns because of their roles as caretakers for younger siblings whom they risk getting into trouble – not because the siblings are themselves involved in crime, but because younger brothers in particular may be at risk

of harm by others within the community who do not like young Sudanese women going to the police about particular incidents or issues.

Community capacity building suggestions

Young people from these two CALDB communities had common suggestions for both capacity building and policing and security measures that they would like to see taken to improve safety and relationships between police and young people in the Brimbank region. The two most common suggestions were:

- youth-specific and youth-focused cultural awareness training for both police and the general community
- regular community meetings between police and young people to enhance cross-cultural knowledge and communication, and to increase tolerance

Pacific Islander young men also noted that rugby facilities are not easily accessible within Brimbank and that this limits the kind of positive contact they might have with police through police-youth rugby games if such facilities were more widely available within the LGA and accessible by public transport.

Policing and security suggestions

Young people in both Sudanese and Pacific Islander communities stressed equally the need for increased police presence at Sunshine transport hub. The most common points raised under this theme include the perceived need not only for enhanced foot and vehicle patrols, but also for an ongoing police presence at the Sunshine hub, similar to that established at Footscray Market across from the Footscray Train Station by police in that locality.

More generally, they would like to see increased foot patrols throughout the locality; more and better use of security cameras; better response times from police when called; and improved public order policing initiatives to 'stop gangs and also drunk people'. This is an interesting finding because it suggests that young people from these communities embrace a fairly conservative agenda in relation to public order issues, in which their expectations that police will be or should be effective in shutting down low-level antisocial behaviour (e.g., public drunkenness) are higher than those of the general community, which may generally, if reluctantly, have a higher tolerance threshold for such activities. The data also suggest that young people in these communities feel particularly threatened in terms of community safety by public drunkenness and drug use, more so than young people in the general population sample of the survey.

9.3 Relevant general community focus group findings

This focus group of 14 young people (8 males and 6 females) was composed of young men and young women from diverse representative cultural backgrounds in Brimbank, including African, Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern and Anglo-Australian, and were recruited through the Visy Cares Youth Hub in Sunshine.

In general, young women in this group reported feeling safer in the community than young men. Participants perceived that young men between the ages of 15-18 are more frequently targeted by the police, and they did not always feel safe or trusting when dealing with the police, largely (as for survey and CALDB focus group responses) based on perceptions of aggressive or 'hostile' behaviour and lack of respect by police towards young people. They do not feel trusted in turn by police: as one young man said, *'Most police, they don't believe kids these days',* which in turn makes these young people reluctant to call police when safety issues arise because they are uncertain whether they will be believed or taken seriously if they do call.

Youth Hotline

However, some young people in this group were nevertheless interested in a suggestion that emerged from the group about a Youth Hotline that young people could ring if they felt their own or others' safety was at risk. They felt positive about the idea that police on the other end of a Youth Hotline would be there specifically to listen to and assess their concerns and reports about unsafe or criminal incidents in the community.

Knowledge and trust between young people and police

The majority of the focus group discussion explored how young people and the police could best develop an ongoing community consultation model to improve community safety and relationships between young people and the police. Young people in this group felt that youth themselves were often in the best position to know what was happening in their neighbourhoods:

> *Young people who live in the community, they are more wise to what's going on*.

However, they also felt that in order for young people to share their local knowledge with police, either individually or in a program-based or community forum setting, greater knowledge, trust and familiarity between young people and local police first needed to be established. As one male participant put it:

> *[The police] need to make themselves to be like normal people and go out there and share jokes and be more connected with the young people, because the closer you get to them the more they're going to give you their point of view. If you stay far away or try to tell [young people] to do something or make [them] feel funny, [they] won't tell you nothing, but if you go and act like you're a normal person, and you try to get something from them they will come closer.*

This quote highlights the importance that young people in the ongoing police-youth consultation group placed (as did a significant majority of participants in the study as a whole) on communication pathways and informal, non-threatening exchanges between police and young people in safe settings as the foundation for improved relationships and shared purpose around improving community safety.

Key points from general community focus group on youth-police consultation mechanisms

- Young people in Brimbank want to get to know police better as 'normal' people, beyond the uniform. They specifically want to engage with police out of uniform during community consultations; they are intimidated by the uniform and feel it is a barrier to free and open communication between youth and police.
- They want operational police who work 'on the street', rather than 'in an office', to be at the forefront of consultation and engagement activities.
- They place high value on opportunities for reciprocal education programs between police and young people, where young people get to teach police about their experience and their cultural backgrounds, as well as learning from police.
- They question the value of running police-youth educational programs in schools; on balance, this group felt that choosing a non-school, community-based setting would be a more effective way to engage young people at the community level, particularly those who are alienated from school for one reason or another.
- There was strong support for engagement and consultation opportunities that involved not only young people and the police, but local youth workers and the local council. It was suggested that having youth workers present would help young people see police, in the terms used elsewhere in this report, less as 'intimidators' and more as 'service providers' and 'helpers/advisers'.

Overall, young people in this group suggested they wanted both *formal and structured* and *informal and semi-structured* opportunities to engage with police around issues of community safety and building better

relationships between young people and police. They felt that a combination of both formal and informal activities as part of a general program of consultation and trust-building between police and youth in Brimbank would best meet the goals of 1) young people and police getting to know each better and move beyond stereotypes, and 2) allowing the voices and concerns of both young people and police to be brought together as a way of finding solutions to commonly identified problems.

Informal, semi-structured, youth-focused consultation and engagement activity

The informal, semi-structured proposal that emerged from this group was for a weekly program on Fridays at Sunshine transport hub in the after school period (between the hours of 3:30 – 5 pm) during which police (preferably out of uniform) would be available for young people to chat with informally: '*They could have something in place where you can go and talk to police if you're not feeling safe or something*'. In addition, they suggested some focused entertainment activities – '*music, disco dancing, hip-hop*' – to draw young people in to 'have fun before they go home' in a safe atmosphere.

Young men in the group were also interested in the opportunity such events could provide to learn more about the 'hardware' of police business; they were keen to have *opportunities* for police 'show and tells' about what is inside a police car, for example. While some of this may reflect the usual level of public curiosity and voyeurism about the 'secret business' of police operations, it may also reflect a more profound desire on the part of some young people to have aspects of the business of policing demystified so that their understanding of what police do and how they do it becomes less intimidating and more accessible, without compromising the operational integrity of police in such contexts.

The suggestion for a regular informal consultation and engagement mechanism based at Sunshine transport hub is innovative in that it proposes to transform a negatively perceived public space identified as notoriously 'unsafe' by a sizeable majority of participants in the study into a positively valued space actively shared by both young people and police for a limited time on a regular basis. The desire to transform a public-space negative into a positive with the participation and support of police is a powerful idea generated by young people themselves. The intention was for a broad cross-section of operational police whom young people might encounter in their daily lives to participate in these gatherings.

Formal, structured youth consultation and engagement activity

The more formal, structured proposal that emerged from this group was for a monthly inter-agency community forum in which young people and members of Brimbank Council, local police and community representatives would raise current issues or concerns around community safety and look at solutions for addressing these. This would be held in a community setting such as a local community centre or hall; and there would be an opportunity for young people and police to chat informally once the main business of the forum had been concluded.

9.4 Key research themes informing the consultation model

The findings reviewed above have produced a number of key themes and emphases that usefully inform and can be embedded in an effective mechanism for ongoing youth-police consultation. This has meant developing a model that:

- Assumes that both young people and police have a positive and shared interest in and commitment to promoting enhanced community safety in their local area, even where a minority of people in either or both groups may not always demonstrate that commitment.
- Allows both young people and police to articulate their concerns and interests in a safe and non-confrontational setting.
- Emphasises, encourages and resources the front-line role of operational police in becoming more knowledgeable about and connected to young people at the community level.
- Promotes *mutual* respect, tolerance and genuine understanding of each other's views, even where these diverge, between young people and police.
- Explicitly seeks to build trust between young people and police, and foregrounds ways of addressing the absence of trust in particular relationships, encounters or settings.
- Helps develop confidence building for young people when dealing with police as a key objective of the consultation and engagement process.
- Where and as appropriate, facilitates individualised contact and relationship-building between young people and police, particularly operational police, as a complement to larger-scale relationship building exercises between groups or communities and the police.
- Invests in educating young people about police powers and actions, including stop and search, moving on groups of young people in public, asking for personal details through to arresting and charging a member of the community.
- Allows young people to have a pro-active role in educating police about their views and perspectives from a variety of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and stages of residence in Australia.
- Balances the role of police in the community as service providers, advisers and educators with their role as enforcers of the law, and decreases an emphasis on their role as intimidators.
- Tailors aspects of ongoing consultation with young people in the community in ways that suit the backgrounds and needs of young people from different backgrounds and stages of residence in Australia.
- Is sustainable, collectively 'owned' by both police and young people involved, has consistent and clear goals and vision but is flexible enough to adapt to changing needs and circumstances, and can be evaluated, reviewed and improved on a regular basis.

What can we learn from recent models of youth-police consultation in other countries?

As part of our thinking around best-practice community consultation models for young people and the police, we have looked to other countries where similar issues around improving the capacity of police and young people to consult, exchange views and implement actions around issues that can inform community safety strategies have been trialled. Three of these international approaches to youth consultation and engagement are briefly discussed below.

The Toronto Youth Gang Prevention Pilot Project (2009)

Toronto is a major capital city in Canada characterised by a high level of cultural and linguistic diversity, including significant numbers of migrant background residents: 'Almost three-quarters of Torontonians aged 15 or older have direct ties to immigration. About one-half (52%) are themselves immigrants while another 22% are second-generation immigrants with at least one parent born outside of Canada. The remaining 26% of the Toronto population (aged 15 or older) is comprised of individuals who were born in Canada to two Canadian-born parents'.[17]

[17] Immigrants in Canada's Census Metropolitan Areas - Grant Schellenberg, Statistics Canada, http:// www.toronto.ca/ quality_of_life/diversity.htm

The development of the Toronto Youth Gang Prevention Pilot Project was auspiced by the City of Toronto's Community Safety Secretariat, and confirmed as eligible for municipal funding bids in particular localities within the Toronto CMA (Census Municipal Area) in early 2009.

The Toronto Youth Gang Prevention Pilot Project is an ***intensive, intervention-based, population-specific*** model for youth consultation and engagement that focuses specifically on gang activity and involvement in the Toronto area. It is underpinned by both research and government data on community safety and has a demonstrated commitment to interagency coordination and cooperation in running the various components of the project. Police are an important part of this, but they are engaged in coordinated liaison with other community service providers and agencies. This is an example of a model in which a specific cohort of young people involved in a specific domain of antisocial and/or criminal activity and behaviour are targeted for community outreach, education and transformational relationships by police and other providers and agencies as part of a whole-of-local-government approach to improving community safety.

The main features of the Toronto Youth Gang Prevention Pilot Project model are:

- An intensive outreach and referral strategy to engage at risk and gang-involved youth;
- An intake and screening process to evaluate the level of risk of gang affiliation or activity;
- Pro-social group training sessions with instruction in conflict resolution, anger management, goal-setting, substance abuse and the impact of crime on victims and neighbourhoods;
- Individualized case management supports to engage youth participants with sports, recreation, arts, culture or other activities and support their regular participation;
- Individualized case management supports to provide a range of employment and education supports to assist youth in obtaining employment skills, employment (part or full-time) and improve educational qualifications;
- Family-based supports to link family members with appropriate resources in the community; and
- Community education initiatives to increase awareness of gangs and their prevention.

[City of Toronto Backgrounder, http://www.toronto.ca/pdf/media_release/youth_gang_prevention_2009.pdf]

The Toronto project seeks to reach and engage approximately 300 young people over a period of three years who are at risk or gang-involved and will provide community education and public awareness initiatives to about a further 500 community members. Its implementation in particular localities within the Toronto CMA is based on:

- Socio-economic and demographic data such as the number of youth residents, median household income, unemployment rates among youth, percentage of tenants spending more than 30 per cent on shelter, and drop-out and literacy rates;
- 'Positive' data such as the number of youth safety programs in the area; and
- 'Negative' crime data as well as perceptions of neighbourhood safety.

[City of Toronto Backgrounder, http://www.toronto.ca/pdf/media_release/youth_gang_prevention_2009.pdf]

West Midlands Police Authority Regional Youth Conference (2008)

The West Midlands in the United Kingdom, in which the major regional metropolitan centre of Birmingham is located, is similarly characterised by high levels of youth cultural and linguistic diversity, low SES and relatively high levels of unemployment and youth disengagement.

The West Midlands Police Authority's approach is based on engaging young people as part of a broad, community-based consultation process around community safety. It is an example of a ***broad-based, issues-focused, exploratory, short term*** consultation and engagement model between young people and the criminal justice system in the West Midlands.

Working with the region's Local Criminal Justice Board, other agencies and service providers and the police, they convened a 'regional young people's conference' in late 2008 that solicited young people's views on anti-social behaviour, gangs and street violence, staying safe, violent extremism (religious and political), and young people's perceptions of criminal justice systems and agencies. The young people's conference was held at a regional convention centre and engaged 150 young people between the ages of 11-20. The Conference consisted of a series of break-out workshops on themes including gang violence, staying safe, community cohesion, perceptions of criminal justice agencies, and also used 'ice-breaker' creative workshops to engage young people in voicing their views and concerns using community theatre techniques. Earlier this year, the Authority produced a report on the conference, which found that:

- Safety was a key concern for young people and that young people feel at particular risk of victimisation during school, travelling to and from school, during the hours of darkness, and when travelling on buses.
- Young people are concerned about reporting crimes to the police. This concern can be exacerbated by how young people feel they are treated by the police. Young people's experiences of the police have a direct bearing on their perceptions of the police service as a whole. Young people have high expectations of the police, but often feel let down by the response they receive and many young people said the police don't make them feel safe.
- Young people recognise criminal justice agencies including the police have a difficult job to do but do not consider criminal justice responses to be effective.
- Positive experiences are more likely to impact on young people's confidence in the criminal justice system, whilst negative encounters will continue to act as a barrier.
- Young people recognise the importance of early intervention for dealing with crime, including support for offenders with mental health and drug dependencies along with the increased use of community sanctions for minor offences.
- Young Muslims feel unfairly treated by criminal justice organisations and feel the media portrayal of terrorism as a Muslim problem has played a major factor in discrimination against them.
- The term 'gang' is used by young people to define their social behaviour. By the criminal justice system, however, the term 'gang' is used to define antisocial and criminal behaviour. The current media focus on gangs and violence does not reflect the reality for many young people in the West Midlands. Whilst for some young people gangs, postcodes/territories and violence affect their daily lives for many others they do not affiliate with any gang or represent an area. Young people's fear of crime encourages some to carry weapons, because carrying a weapon makes them feel safe.
- Young people who took part in the consultation event valued their involvement and most would like ongoing dialogue with the police and criminal justice agencies to improve relations between them and ensure their continual involvement in work towards reducing crime and the fear of crime in the West Midlands.[18]

[18] *Listening to Young People,* West Midlands Police Authority (UK), June 2009.

A number of the findings generated by the regional youth conference in the West Midlands resonate with those of the *Don't Go There* study, particularly in relation to issues around where and when young people feel unsafe; the relationship between perceptions of police and willingness to report crime or call police when at risk; competing youth and criminal justice definitions of 'gangs' and the reasons why young people become involved in gangs; and the desire by young people to improve their relationship with police through ongoing dialogue.

The New Haven Youth-Oriented Policing Initiative (ongoing since 1995)

New Haven, Connecticut is a medium-sized city on the eastern seaboard of the United States. While it is home to one of America's most prominent Ivy League institutions (Yale University), there are ongoing socio-economic and communities safety challenges for non-university-linked residents within the City of New Haven itself, including the city's young people. New Haven has a comprehensive integrated youth planning approach in which the city's Youth Services Bureau plays a leading role in developing programs dealing with community capacity building, delinquency prevention, protective factor enhancement and other initiatives designed to address a range of challenges presented by and for young people in the region.

The New Haven Police Department has a wide-ranging Youth Oriented Policing strategy (http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/police/youthorientedpolicing.asp), once again coordinated with related local agencies and service providers, that includes a number of key initiatives designed around proactive crime prevention and early intervention for at risk youth models. While many of these, such as the 'Safe Corridors', 'Truancy Intervention' and 'Guns Are Not Toys' programs, respond to specific local circumstances in New Haven and elsewhere in the US, several aspects of their program are also relevant to the Brimbank area with respect to improving youth-police relationships and promoting ongoing dialogue and consultation between young people and police at the local level.

Of particular interest are New Haven's Young Adult Police Commissioners initiative and the Mentoring Program initiative. These programs, conducted cooperatively with schools and (in the case of the mentoring program) other emergency service personnel in the local region, both provide positive and pro-active role modelling, developmental opportunities and active participation from youth with direct police involvement. They are examples of ***developmental, responsive, long-term community partnership*** consultation and engagement models that seek to offer young people the opportunity to connect with mainstream organisations, including the police, who can help define alternative paths in life for young people at risk of marginalisation and lack of appropriate adult support and guidance in the community.

The Mentoring Program run by New Haven Police Department is ambitious and both time- and labour-intensive, relying heavily on a spirit of volunteerism and community investment amongst police and fire service personnel, as well as substantial coordination with schools and interagency cooperation from youth services in the region. It is a long-term program that involves significant input and resourcing from municipal and state governments. While it has tripled its numbers in the 15 years of its operation (from 20 police and fire department mentors matched with youth in 1995 to 65 mentors matched with young people in 2009) it is a relatively low-impact program in terms of population for the amount of resourcing it requires to be run effectively. Consequently, we have not provided a detailed consideration of the mentoring program here.

However, we are interested in the potential benefits for the Brimbank region of the second New Haven program, the Young Adult Police Commissioners initiative. This well-established program, described below, has created a 'board' of representative young people drawn from around the City of New Haven to advise police command in the region on various issues that are relevant to young people in the community. Youth represent either a school

or a neighbourhood, and reflect community diversity in their composition. They receive training and support as youth ambassadors, are resourced to visit other national locations to see how young people, police and communities are dealing with similar issues elsewhere, and are encouraged to be pro-active in being part of the solution to problems within the community that concern youth in particular.

Unlike either the Toronto or West Midlands projects, this initiative explicitly addresses youth leadership and role model capacity-building between young people and the police, which is critically important in forging ongoing dialogue and communication between police and youth in the community. The outline of the program from the 'Youth Oriented Policing' section of the New Haven Police Department's website is as follows:

Young Adult Police Commissioners

Police Departments are most often criticized by youth as being insensitive to their needs. In response, the New Haven Department of Police Service worked with high school students to create a representative group of students who would act as advisors to the Chief of Police on matters that interested and involved them. Currently, 22 high school students represent either their specific school or a neighbourhood and reflect the diversity of New Haven's population. While there is a yearly turn-over of at least one-third of the Board due to graduation, these young leaders have had the opportunity to travel around the country acting in the capacity of youth ambassadors. They also impact on the operations of the police department by interviewing all Police Academy Students. In 1996 they were instrumental in the defeat of a proposed curfew ordinance because they were able to convince the City's legislative body that such an ordinance would be hard to enforce and would only harm law-abiding young adults.[19]

9.5 The Listen and Learn youth consultation model

As the previous discussion suggests, the proposed Listen and Learn model for ongoing consultation between young people and the police in Brimbank draws on many of the elements discussed in the review of relevant project findings, as well as youth-police consultation and engagement models focused on community safety developed in related contexts elsewhere in the world.

The international models we have examined represent three different kinds of approaches to youth consultation and engagement by police that can be summarised as:

- *Exploratory, information-gathering, youth specific, short-term* (West Midlands)
- *Intensive, intervention-based, at risk-youth and offender specific, medium-term* (Toronto)
- *Developmental, responsive, gender and youth specific, long-term* (New Haven)

Each of these approaches offers something of value to the challenges faced within Brimbank around ongoing youth-police consultation.

Consultation model aims and objectives

Based on project data and findings, the key objectives and design of Listen and Learn are focused on enhancing the capacity for *shared education, dialogue, trust, confidence and problem-solving for* both young people and the police in consulting about issues related to community safety and crime prevention. In particular, the model seeks to provide an approach that will result in:

[19] Retrieved from http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/police/youthorientedpolicing.asp

- Strengthening communication and trust between young people and the police
- Strengthening the capacity for young people and the police to listen to each other non-judgementally
- Strengthening knowledge and understanding of the challenges around community safety for both young people and the police
- Strengthening mutual confidence, respect and tolerance between young people and the police
- Strengthening the capacity for young people and the police to educate each other about their concerns, ideas and potential to bring about positive change in the community
- Strengthening the access of CALD young people in the community to community safety dialogues so that police can better understand their specific cultural backgrounds and concerns

Listen and Learn employs a five-part model to achieve these aims.

The first four parts are designed as stages in a cycle that can be repeated over time as priorities, strategies and needs around youth-police consultation and engagement on community safety issues change and develop. These four stages are structured around the capacity to set up a formal, recurring dialogue between young people and the police focused on the need to *identify*, *explore* and *prioritise* community safety issues for young people and the police; *develop* programs and strategies to address these priorities; and *review and evaluate* their outcomes for both young people and the police at the local community level before the cycle starts again.

The fifth component involves *ongoing informal dialogue and exchange* between young people and the police throughout the consultation cycle.

Stage 1: Identifying community safety issues for young people and the police: information and data gathering

This is the information and data gathering stage of the Listen and Learn model. It uses the survey and focus group methodology designed by the *Don't Go There Project* and informed by its findings to allow police to consult with both a representative range of young people in a particular community or region, as well as to purposively sample specific sub-cohorts within the youth population based on age, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, risk profiles, or any other selected variables introduced into the study design.

Stage 1 provides baseline data from the perspective of young people themselves about their experience and views on community safety in their local area, linked to policing focus and priorities identified through the question content of the survey and focus groups. It commences with a specifically youth-friendly, engaging and interactive data gathering model that promotes high levels of participation and responsiveness from participants as demonstrated by the conduct and evaluation of the *Don't Go There* survey and focus group methodology.

The timelines for Stage 1 would be approximately 3-6 months.

Stage 2: Exploring identified community safety issues with young people and the police: listening and dialogue

Stage 2 is designed to build on the data and information gathered in Stage 1. It uses the mechanism of a regional youth conference that includes focused workshops dealing with key themes and issues identified through the initial survey and consultation process in Stage 1.

The regional youth conference is primarily a listening mechanism for police to engage with what young people have to say, but also allows for mutual dialogue around key themes and issues emerging from the conference at the conclusion of its proceedings. This responds directly to the emphasis that young people in the *Don't Go There* project have placed on needing to feel that police both listen and hear what they have to say in a way that foregrounds their views in a non-judgmental setting.

The model for this community-based forum is based on the West Midlands Police Authority's regional youth conference, which uses both creative and theme-specific workshops to gain further in-depth knowledge and insight into the preliminary issues raised within the survey and focus groups. For example, in 2008, the Authority's regional youth conference program ran workshops for 300 young people (plus police attendees) focusing on gangs and street violence, antisocial behaviour, staying safe, community cohesion and what the police are doing to promote community safety in the West Midlands. Community-specific themes of joint concern for young people and the police around community safety and policing, such as those identified through the *Don't Go There* project in Brimbank, would be used to generate themed workshops sessions for Stage 2 of the model.

The West Midlands model also uses 'ice breaker' creative workshops to engage young people and the police at the beginning of the conference. These workshops are facilitated by professional arts practitioners and deal with, for example, anti-social behaviour through graffiti art; gangs and street violence through rap music, and police and justice agencies through community theatre role play. The benefit of this approach is that it allows a connection to be made between young people's concerns and popular modes of expressiveness and creativity with which they can articulate key themes and ideas that might not emerge during more formal or conventional discussion.

The 'traditional' workshop groups on community safety themes are size-limited to allow for facilitated discussion and consensus building about outcomes; the West Midlands groups were limited to a maximum of 40 per workshop, but we would recommend lowering this number to a maximum of 25-30 within the Listen and Learn model to allow for the wide array of CALDB and Indigenous youth who may participate in Melbourne and elsewhere in Victoria, and for whom a slightly smaller group size would be more advantageous, particularly if their English language skills are at variance with those of native English speakers.

Based on information available about the West Midlands experience in 2008, the costing for the running of a similar event using the themes and issues already identified through the *Don't Go There* project (Stage 1 in this model) would need to take into account the publicity, recruitment, venue, catering, technical and administrative arrangements needed to support the conference and its aims.

The timelines for Stage 2 would be a regional youth conference every 2-3 years to allow for the pilot interventions in Stage 3 to be implemented and generate outcomes that could be reported on, reviewed and assessed at later conferences. The regional youth conference itself is a day-long event and would be organised to follow on shortly after Stage 1 is completed.

Stage 3: Developing partnership pilot programs for addressing community safety issues with young people and the police: priorities, pilots and strategies

This is the point in the Listen and Learn model at which the outcomes of both Stages 1 and 2 are used to develop a series of *pilot programs and strategies* that seek to address and intervene in the issues identified as priorities by young people and the police around community safety in a local area. This element of the model draws on the Toronto experience, in which the preliminary data they drew on regarding at risk and offending youth linked to gang activity in the Toronto CMA was developed into an intensive outreach, support, engagement and education program that had as its primary focus reduction in gang membership and minimisation of gang activity in the region.

In the Listen and Learn Model, initiatives would be piloted that seek to respond to overarching issues within a given Victorian community locale for young people and community safety. These might be initiatives that seek to provide solutions to conflict escalation amongst youth; that focus on improving relationships between young people and the police through partnership-based educational training and awareness strategies; that focus on

improving safety and reducing the incidence of street violence and assault in a particular setting such as the Sunshine Transport Hub; or that deal with weapons carriage and alternatives to feeling and being safe for young men in the community. The pilot programs would be developed using the community safety partnership model and would involve joint police/youth input at each stage of development and implementation.

Stage 3 relies on the clear setting of *identified priorities* arising from Stage 2 of the Listen and Learn cycle. Ideally no more than three strategies or programs should be piloted to avoid loss of focus and commitment for both young people and police at both operational and command levels, and to minimise placing stress on limited resources in an effort to do too much too soon. The success of the programs and strategies generated and trialled in Stage 3 is based on the kind of depth strategic approaches that can be achieved through an intensive focus on one or two key problems and issues, not a broad scattergun approach that promises much but struggles to deliver.

Optimally, these pilot interventions would be designed to run between 6-24 months, depending on their focus, aims and design. A maximum of two years is desirable to allow for timely review and evaluation of pilot programs in Stage 4 below.

Stage 4: Young Police Commissioners: collaborative review and evaluation of pilot programs and strategies

Stage 4 of the Listen and Learn model draws on the New Haven experience of setting up a Young Police Commissioners[20] program. A group of secondary school students recruited through schools and also relevant youth-based community organisations would be selected by police, teachers and youth workers for their leadership potential and capacity to advise Victoria Police on the impacts and outcomes of the pilot interventions developed and trialled in Stage 3. These young people would work with nominated members of Victoria Police at the local and regional level in reviewing the pilot interventions and providing a report back to the community on whether they are working, if changes and refinements are needed to improve their effectiveness, or if they are of limited value and should be replaced by new strategies and interventions.

A key benefit of this stage within the Listen and Learn model is that young people are able to participate in offering executive-level advice on pilot programs to the police and also to develop leadership skills that they can bring back through role modeling to other young people in the community. This element of the model ensures that young people are engaged in the consultation process not just as 'informants' or 'respondents' at the local community level but as *key strategic partners* ,along with police, in assessing the effectiveness and viability of the strategies that have been implemented based on earlier stages of the model. Stage 4 also functions to allow both young people and police to 'listen and learn' from each other at an 'executive level' that can have a positive impact on policing policy and operations, as the New Haven initiative has demonstrated over time. Finally, it allows young people with commitment to community safety and the desire to develop advanced leadership skills to do so in an explicitly police-identified context, which may lead to greater understanding about police operations and careers that can filter back to young people in the community more generally.

[20] While we like the idea of using the phrase 'Police Commissioners' in thinking about a title for this part of the model, we would not suggest using the phrase 'Young Adult', which has a specifically American connotation. We recommend instead calling this the 'Young Police Commissioners Program' without using the word 'adult' in the title.

The final element in Stage 4 is the holding of a locally based Community Forum on Young People and Safety in which the Young Police Commissioners and police personnel jointly report back on the progress, outcomes and status of any pilot initiatives mounted in Stage 3. This is a critical part of the community feedback mechanism that informs an ongoing consultation cycle and ideally would be held at the conclusion of the Regional Youth Conference discussed in Stage 2 above.

The timelines for the Leadership and Community Forum report back components of Stage 4 are 1-2 years for the Young Police Commissioners program and a 2-year cycle for the Community Forum report back.

Stage 5: Community Safety On-Line: dialogue and awareness about community safety, young people and the police

We recognise that, regardless of the capacity of the staged Listen and Learn consultation model to engage significant numbers of young people in a given locality through the survey and focus groups, the regional youth conference and the pilot interventions, strategies and leadership programs in which they may be directly or indirectly involved, there will be many young people who are not directly reached through these mechanisms but who may have something to contribute and/or need to make their voices and views on community safety heard by the police.

To this end, the final element in the model involves setting up and maintaining a website titled 'Listen and Learn: Community Safety, the Police and You' that directly targets and invites the participation and contributions of young people through a range of web-based multimedia formats, including youth and police based blogs, community forums, community safety 'chat rooms', and other on-line mechanisms. Young people today are computer and web-savvy in a way that earlier generations were not. While embodied, face to face consultation and communication remains a key element of any meaningful consultation process, it would be wise to maximise the potential for a much broader array of young people with interests in and concerns about community safety to interact with police and with each other on these issues using virtual technologies of social connectedness and social inclusion.

The website would be set up and maintained by Victoria Police, possibly in partnership with schools or other community based agencies, services or local councils. It would provide access and channels for young people to voice their views and queries around community safety and policing who might not be able to participate in other elements of the consultation model, and this access would balance the interest of Victoria Police in maintaining a platform to communicate a series of messages about community safety to a target audience of young people in a youth-friendly, technologically savvy way. This would address concerns about previous consultation models that have been criticised for using youth-police consultation mechanisms purely as a means of delivering key messages and agendas from police to youth without being responsive in turn to young people's voices and concerns (see Chapter 3).

None of the consultation models we have considered in our necessarily limited review while developing Listen and Learn have dealt with the delivery of key community safety engagement and consultation initiatives using a web-based set of strategies or forums. However, we believe that a web-based platform, as one element of a broader, multi-pronged strategy, offers an ideal way of maintaining **informal, ongoing consultation and dialogue** between young people and the police around community safety, whether to propose or promote safety messages, to listen to and gather information, proposals, ideas, opinions and informal data, or to expand the available repertoire of existing modes of communication and exchange on community safety issues.

Moreover, it is a relatively cheap way of maintaining connectedness between police and young people, many of whom are very comfortable in a web-based environment and who would be able to afford (both economically and socially) to engage with community safety processes and thinking in this fashion. Finally, it would address some of the compelling issues around confidentiality, since young people might feel empowered through virtual communication to provide the kinds of information or intelligence on community safety or criminal activity concerns that they are reluctant to disclose either face to face or over the phone to police.

The timeline for this element of the model is ongoing throughout the cycle.

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11 APPENDICES

11.1 Ethical principles

Ethical principles in community-based research[21]

- respect for privacy and confidentiality;
- voluntary participation in the project and the right to withdraw at any point;
- openness and transparency of the research process;
- respect for culture, religion, language, gender, age, ability and other factors;
- ensuring that no harm is done through the research process;
- recognition of the barriers to access and equity;
- belief in the genuineness and dignity of individuals;
- showing respect for sensitive issues such as trauma and abuse;
- recognition that participants are as much a stakeholder in this research as the researcher;
- use of culturally sensitive research methodologies; and
- ensuring the integrity of the research is maintained.

[21] See Revision of the Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice, 2nd consultation, February 2006, Canberra.

11.2 Survey and focus group questions

11.2.1 Survey questions

About you (15 questions):

1. How old are you? 15 /16/17/18/19

2. What is your gender? Male/Female

3. What country were you born in?

4. How would you describe your cultural background? (you can tick more than one box)

5. If you were born in another country, how long have you lived in Australia? 1-2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years More than 10 years

6. Which suburb do you live in now?

7. How long have you lived there? 1-2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years More than 10 years

8. Which one best describes you?

I live with my mother/my father/my mother and father, I don't live with either of my parents, I live with my relatives (like an uncle/aunt, brother/sister or grandmother/grandfather), I live with my friends, I live with my husband/wife/partner, I live on my own

9. What best describes the main income earner in the house?

Working full time/Working part-time/Casual work/Seasonal work/Unemployed/receiving government benefits

10. What kind of residence do you live in?

Rented house or flat/Owned/mortgaged house or flat/Public housing/Temporary residence/Homeless/Unsure

11. What languages are spoken at home? English /Other: Please list other languages spoken

12. Are you currently studying? Yes/No

13. What are you studying? High school: year 10/year 11/year 12; Apprenticeship; TAFE course; University course

14. What best describes you?

Employed FT/Employed PT/Employed in casual work/Unemployed looking for work/Unemployed not looking for work

15. What form of transport do you take to school/work/university? Walk/Train/ Bus/Train and bus/Car/Motorbike/Bicycle

Community Safety (7 questions):

16. What does 'safety' or 'feeling safe' mean to you?

17. How safe do you feel in your local community or neighbourhood in general?

Extremely Safe/Safe/Somewhat Safe/Neither Safe or Unsafe/ Unsafe/Extremely Unsafe

18. How safe or unsafe do you feel in the following places in your neighbourhood during the day? At School, On public transport, At train or bus stations, At the library, At the local shopping centre, Walking down the street, In the local park

Extremely Safe/Safe/Somewhat Safe/Neither Safe or Unsafe/ Unsafe/Extremely Unsafe

19. Are there any places in your local neighbourhood where you feel unsafe?

20. What is it about these places that makes you feel unsafe?

21. Are these places more unsafe at night, during the day or all the time? Night/Day/All the time

22. Do you feel safe on public transport? Never/only during the day/all the time

Young People in Groups (10 questions):

23. Do you regularly hang out in groups in public places? Yes, fairly often/Sometimes/ Not often/Not at all

24. What are the main reasons for wanting to hang out in groups in public places? (Tick as many boxes as you like)

To feel safe/To belong/ be accepted by friends/To spend time with friends/To be involved in planned activities/Other: please describe

25. Where are you most likely to hang out in public?

26. When are you most likely to do this? Morning/Afternoon/6pm-10pm/After 10pm

27. When, in your opinion, does a group of young people become a 'gang'?

28. How can you tell the difference between a gang and a group of people hanging out?

29. Do you think there are 'gangs' in your local area? Yes/No

30. Have you had any encounters with gangs? Yes/No

If yes, describe what happened (do not include the name of any person).

31. Are you scared of gangs? Very scared/A little bit scared/Not sure/Not very scared/Not scared at all

32. Why do you think people join gangs? To belong/self defence/same ethnic background/criminal activity/Other Please describe:

Young People and violent crime (10 questions):

33. Why do young people commit violent crimes?

34. Do you worry about getting attacked or beaten up when you're out in public?

35. Have you ever been a victim of violent crime in a public place before? Yes/No

If yes, describe what happened but do not include the name of any person in your answer.

36. How do you think young people can keep themselves safe from violence?

37. What do you think causes arguments between young people hanging out in public places?

38. What do you think makes arguments and other conflicts between young people turn violent?

39. Do you know many young people who carry weapons regularly? Yes, a lot/Yes, some people/Not sure/Unlikely/No, no one I know

40. What kinds of weapons do the people you know carry?

41. Why do you think young people carry weapons?

42. Have you ever carried a weapon for any reason? Yes/No If you answered yes, please explain under what circumstance:

43. Why do you think small arguments between young people get bigger?

44. What do you think might help reduce conflict between groups of young people?

45. Who do you think is best able to deal with conflict between young people? Young people themselves/Youth workers/Religious or community leaders/Mother/Relatives/Family friend/School counsellor/Father/Someone else in your community/Friends/Police

Young People, police and community safety (9 questions):

46. If you need help with a problem, who do you go to? Mother/relatives/family friend/school counsellor/father/someone else in your community/friends/police/telephone help line/teacher/Other

47. In general, how much do you trust police? Completely trust/Trust/Not sure/Don't trust/Completely don't trust

48. How can police help you to feel safe?

49. How often do you see police on the streets in your local area? Often/Sometimes/Not very often

50. Do you feel safer when you see police on the streets? Much safer/Safer/Neither safe or unsafe/Less safe/A lot less safe

51. Why do you think police might stop to speak to young people in public?

52. What do young people in your local neighbourhood think about police?

54. What might stop you calling police if you thought your safety, or the safety of someone else was at risk?

55. What would make you feel more comfortable calling police?

Working Together to improve community safety (4 questions):

56. If you could do three things to make your local neighbourhood a safer place, what would they be?

57. Should young people be telling police what the local issues for safety are? If so, what is the best way to do this?

58. What is the best way for police to develop a good relationship with young people in your local neighbourhood?

59. Any other comments you'd like to make?

11.2.2 Focus group questions

Theme One: Young people in groups

Thinking now about your home community of Brimbank, what do you most like to do with your friends in a group in public places?

Give me a typical scenario of when you are most likely to gather in a public place as part of a group.

Theme Two: Perceptions of lack of safety in the community

Thinking of yourself personally:

> What leads to your feeling unsafe in public places? (When? Where?)
>
> Can you name one or more places in the community where you tend to feel unsafe?
>
> Give me a typical scenario where you feel unsafe.

Theme Three: groups or gangs

Some people say that there is a difference between a group of young people hanging out together in a public place and a 'gang'. What do you see as the difference between these?

How big a problem do you think gangs are in Brimbank?

Theme Four: Young people and conflict/violence

What makes an argument between young people turn violent?

Why do you think small conflicts between a few people escalate or get bigger?

Theme Five: Young People and crimes against the person in public places

We'd like to talk with you now about your views on 'crimes against the person' in public places – this means things like physical assault with or without a weapon, punch-ups, sexual violence, and so on.

What circumstances do you think could contribute to young people being victims of crimes against the person in the community?

What circumstances do you think contribute to young people committing crimes against the person in the community?

Theme Six: Relationships between young people, the police and community safety

Now some questions about the police:

> Why do you think police might stop to speak to young people in public places?
>
> How would you describe the attitude that *young people* in your community have toward your local police?
>
> Assuming you have access to a phone, what might prevent you calling police if you thought your safety or the safety of someone else was at risk?
>
> Are there particular places and areas in your local community that you think need special attention from the police?

Theme Seven: Working together to improve community safety

Thinking about your home community of Brimbank,

> If you could do three things to make your community a safer place what would they be?
>
> The police want to learn more from youth about issues concerning community safety, young people and the police. What do you think the best way is for the police to understand youth issues?

11.2.3 Pilot focus group: evaluation of question efficacy

The efficacy of focus group questions, themes and structure was evaluated following the pilot focus group with young Sudanese men in 2008. Below are the outcomes of that evaluation which, following minor amendments, ensured the robustness of the focus group instrument for the remainder of the project.

Theme 1: Young people in groups

Questions within this theme worked well as a 'warm up' and offered some insight into how this group of young people structured and approached their leisure time in groups with each other, as well as drawing out some useful data on public and group assembly and transit and destination issues.

Theme 2: Perceptions of lack of safety in the community

Based on the pilot responses to questions 3-5, the original question 5, which elicited scenarios already produced in narrative responses to questions 3 and 4, was incorporated into question 4, which had the benefit of reducing the overall number of questions for the focus groups.

Theme Three: Groups or gangs?

As anticipated, this theme generated a great deal of discussion, much of it rich and perceptive. There was a strong tendency to use personalised scenarios and memory of specific incidents to flesh out responses to this, as well as some pointed analytical commentary as to the likely causes and motives around perceptions of 'African' youth gangs. Media coverage was a big focus here.

However, participants really struggled with some of the definitional issues around 'groups' versus 'gangs', and this group of young Sudanese males had difficulty getting away from the sense that we were talking about 'African' gangs, etc. The sense of being aggrieved because of misunderstandings about Sudanese groups gathering in public places coloured this part of the discussion to a significant degree.

Accordingly, the researchers offered a clearer definition of 'gangs' at the beginning of this theme. They then asked participants to agree or disagree with this as a way of tackling a difficult and sensitive topic that minimised discussion becoming derailed.

Theme Four: Young people and conflict/violence

Questions in this section were reordered for later focus groups following the pilot because of the flow of discussion, which was impacted by the previous 'heat' generated by the focus on gangs in the previous section and also to sustain the emerging focus on youth/police relations that would be followed up in more detail later in the sequence.

The interviewer assessed participants as being more receptive to thinking first about being victimised and only then thinking about the commission of crimes against the person. This re-ordering worked well and was maintained for each focus group.

Theme Five: Young people and crimes against the person in public places

This generated a series of interesting responses during the pilot. Participants felt that they were under a kind of public pressure to respond with physical aggression or violence and identified racial taunting as the tipping point for conflict. Participants also talked about becoming victims because they were left with no escape routes (physical as well as verbal) or way out of a threatening or confrontational situation.

Overall, Theme 5 was the 'hot spot' in the sequence of focus group themes and questions. It was a delicate and difficult topic for participants and particular sensitivity and skill was needed on the part of the focus group facilitators to minimise the sense of vulnerability and renewed anger that recounting stories of violent encounters (both 'offensive' and 'defensive') and loss of control (both emotional and physical) potentially created for participants.

The issue of participant fatigue also arose for researchers when reflecting on the pilot focus group. In some later focus groups a brief 2-3 minute break was offered to provide participants with a few minutes to refresh before moving into this part of the discussion.

Theme Six: Relationships between young people and the police

This theme generated some initial resistance. One participant said he did not want to answer the first question within the theme, even though the question was focused on the attitudes of other young people. The sense of being victimised by police on the basis of race or racial appearance continued to emerge as a focus of discussions within the pilot group. However, later questions within this theme really pulled the group together and produced a rich range of responses and elaboration.

Theme Seven: Working together to improve community safety

Participants responded enthusiastically to this theme, but the researchers felt that the final question was awkwardly phrased and needed to be amended for ease of comprehension, as follows:

> **Old version**: 'The police want to learn more from youth about issues concerning community safety, young people and the police. What do you think the best way is for the police to understand youth issues?'
>
> **New version**: 'What do you think is the best way for the police to consult with young people in an ongoing way about youth issues and community safety?'

The 'new version' of the final question was used in all later groups and worked well.

11.3 West Midlands Police Authority Youth Consultation Model

Please see Annexe A, provided separately to the body of this report, which contains both the Draft Programme for the West Midlands Police Authority Regional Youth Conference held in November 2008 and *Listening to Young People* (June 2009) which reports on the outcomes and findings from this youth engagement and consultation model.

11.4 Additional Tables

Participant countries of birth

	Percentage		Percentage
Albania	0.2	Japan	0.2
Australia	73.3	Kazakhstan	0.2
Bosnia	0.6	Kenya	0.2
Bosnia and Hercegovina	0.2	Korea	0.2
Burma	0.2	Lebanon	0.2
Burundi	0.2	Liberia	0.2
Chile	0.4	Macedonia	0.8
China	0.2	Malta	0.4
Croatia	0.6	New Zealand	2.8
Cyprus	0.2	Pakistan	0.4
Djibouti	0.2	Philippines	2.4
Dubai	0.2	Poland	0.2
East Timor	0.6	Samoa	0.2
Egypt	0.2	Serbia	0.6
Ethiopia	0.4	Singapore	0.2
Fiji	0.4	Somalia	0.4
Germany	0.2	Sri Lanka	0.6
Hong Kong	0.6	Sudan	6.3
India	0.8	Thailand	0.2
Indonesia	0.4	Uganda	0.4
Iraq	0.2	USSR	0.2
Ivory Coast	0.2	Vietnam	1.8
Jamaica	0.2		

How safe do you feel at school?

	Percentage
Extremely safe	21
Safe	54
Somewhat safe	15
Neither safe/unsafe	5
Somewhat unsafe	3
Unsafe	1
Extremely unsafe	1
Total	100

How safe do you feel on public transport?

	Percentage
Extremely safe	6
Safe	22
Somewhat safe	30
Neither safe/unsafe	20
Somewhat unsafe	13
Unsafe	6
Extremely unsafe	4
Total	100

How safe do you feel at train or bus stations?

	Percentage
Extremely safe	3
Safe	15
Somewhat safe	29
Neither safe/unsafe	19
Somewhat unsafe	14
Unsafe	12
Extremely unsafe	8
Total	100

How safe do you feel at the library?

	Percentage
Extremely safe	36
Safe	44
Somewhat safe	12
Neither safe/unsafe	4
Somewhat unsafe	1
Unsafe	1
Extremely unsafe	2
Total	100

How safe do you feel at your local shopping centre?

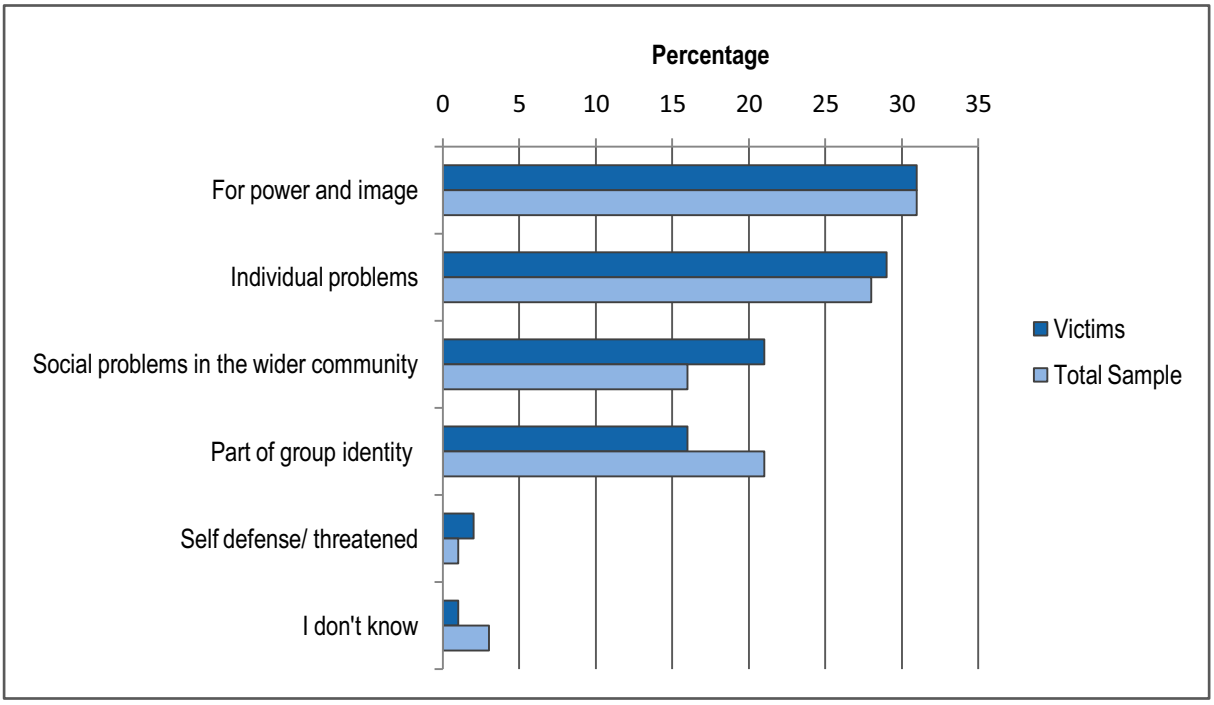
	Percentage
Extremely safe	19
Safe	45
Somewhat safe	21
Neither safe/unsafe	9
Somewhat unsafe	4
Unsafe	2
Extremely unsafe	2
Total	100

How safe do you feel walking down the street?

	Percentage
Extremely safe	8
Safe	24
Somewhat safe	26
Neither safe/unsafe	18
Somewhat unsafe	10
Unsafe	9
Extremely unsafe	5
Total	100

How safe do you feel in your local park?

	Percentage
Extremely safe	10
Safe	26
Somewhat safe	23
Neither safe/unsafe	19
Somewhat unsafe	10
Unsafe	8
Extremely unsafe	4
Total	100



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