



Improving community safety through collaborative efforts

Safe Communities Foundation New Zealand

Improv

Case Study: Benefits of Reaccreditation

New Zealand has a well-established local, regional and national Safe Community network that supports wellbeing, placemaking, resilience and injury/violence prevention initiatives. Safe Communities Foundation New Zealand (SCFNZ) SCFNZ is a non-government organisation with charitable trust status, and is a Safe Community Support and Accrediting Centre of the Pan Pacific Safe Community Network (PPSCN). SCFNZ adopts both public health and community development principles in its approach to build social capital and increasing wellbeing through community safety promotion actively supporting the Government wellbeing agenda, alongside the Sustainable Development Goals. SCFNZ also aligns to the theory of Injury Prevention as Social Change (McClure RJ, et al. Inj Prev June 2016 Vol 22 No 3. webinar) reframing injury prevention at the population level through a systemic approach.

SCFNZ supports and encourages community governance groups to increase social capital through community strengthening and building safety capacity to achieve recognition as Pan Pacific Accredited Safe Communities. Since inception there has been exponential growth of Safe Communities within NZ, with 2 out of every 3 New Zealanders living in an accredited Safe Community.

Reaccreditation: Case studies survey

Report on interviews conducted with key stakeholders

Method

In September 2016 a letter was sent to the Chairs and Coordinators of six New Zealand Safe Communities that have been reaccredited within the past 12 months. The letter, reproduced below, set out the purpose and questions in the survey and invited the recipients to email a date/time for a phone interview. The following participants responded, and their comments were noted during the interviews. This report represents the summary of responses and does not attribute every comment or observation to the respective participants.

Participants

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|---------------------|---|
| Safer Hutt Valley: | Wayne Guppy, Mayor, Upper Hutt City, Chair Safer Hutt Valley Governance Group |
| | Matt Reid, General Manager Community Services, Hutt City Council |
| | Lesley Davies, Coordinator, Safer Hutt Valley |
| Safer Napier: | Liz Lambert, Coordinator, Safer Napier |
| | Natasha Carswell, Manager Community Strategies, Napier City Council |
| | Sally Phelps, ACC Community Injury Prevention Coordinator |
| Safer Whanganui: | Lauren Tamehana, Safer Whanganui Project Leader Whanganui District Council |
| Safer Rotorua: | Bruce Quedley, Neighbourhood Support, Chair Safer Rotorua |
| Safer Christchurch: | Claire Phillips, Manager - Community Support Team, Community Support, Governance and Partnerships Unit. Christchurch City Council |
| Safer Taupo: | Hellmuth Hartung, Strategic Partnerships Advisor, Taupo District Council, Coordinator, Taupo Safe District |
| | Tony Jeurisson, Senior Sergeant, NZ Police, Chair Taupo Safe District |

Background

Reaccreditation every 5-6 years is a requirement for Safe Communities that wish to retain their accreditation status. Previously, the process was a repeat of the Application for Accreditation and involved significant time, energy and cost. SCFNZ and Pan Pacific partners have sought to streamline this process by making it less prescriptive, and more flexible and adaptable to each Safe Community. Accreditation based on the Safe Communities model is recognised by WHO and worldwide as an effective and acceptable intervention to improve community safety.

Key Findings

The overwhelming response from participants in this survey is that reaccreditation is a valuable process. It brings legitimacy and credibility to the local coalition. It creates a platform for high-level strategic governance that is a driver to create on-the-ground action and deliver programmes. It gives communities the boldness and honesty to confront real and complex social issues. And it forges and reaffirms diverse partnerships and collaboration as innovative and effective processes/means to address those issues.

Safe Communities is seen as a mechanism for bringing together agencies and groups that usually work in silos to develop a collective 'lens' and generate a collective 'weight' to the process of identifying and responding to pressing community issues. Safe Communities is seen as a setting where conventional thinking can be challenged, and where new and innovative ideas are developed. And where there is a balance between tactical and strategic thinking/planning.

Reaccreditation gives communities the occasion to 'take stock' and review their activities, and celebrate their achievements. It provides a tool for monitoring and analysing the performance and effectiveness of activities, and for developing high-level indicators/benchmarks. As one respondent put it "we couldn't afford not to do it".

Reaccreditation reaffirms place-based and community-led approaches to community safety that are flexible, collaborative and responsive to local needs and issues.

Finally, it joins local communities into regional, national and international networks of like-minded organisations for the benefit of sharing learnings and experience, and examples of best practice. World Health Organization recognition is highly valued.

Impact of the reaccreditation process

The preparation of the Application for Reaccreditation was reported as being a useful exercise. It presents the opportunity to review the activities and achievements of the coalition during the period since Accreditation. This includes reviewing progress against the feedback and recommendations from the previous Accreditation Report; (re)confirming the membership, commitment to collaboration, and governance structures; and both self- and independently assessing the performance of the organisation against the six criteria.

There was positive support for the site visit as it personalised the process and gave the applicants and assessors the opportunity to show, see and discuss the application and the unique circumstances of each community. Care must be taken to ensure that site visits are well-managed and understood by all parties to get the maximum benefit.

The site visit creates a platform for individuals and groups to 'step up' and tell their stories. And it is an opportunity to publicly thank coalition partners for their contribution and celebrate a 'job well done'.

Reaccreditation is being used by Safe Communities as the basis of strategic planning, and at 'grass roots' level when working with local groups and neighbourhoods.

Safe Communities use local media, Council Communications and public meetings to promote reaccreditation and raise the profile of their activities within the community.

Refining the reaccreditation process

The consensus concerning the reaccreditation process is to allow sufficient lead-time to get it done, and take everyone along. Timeframes ranged from 3-12 months. Pulling together a Project Team and developing a Project Plan is strongly recommended. This ensures that the additional workload is realistic and shared, while at the same time maintaining 'business as usual'. Regular updates to coalition partners, and putting together a comprehensive Communications Plan are also strongly endorsed. The gathering of data and the writing of the application are seen as valuable in consolidating and highlighting the achievements of the previous five years.

The clear message to SCFENZ is to keep streamlining the reaccreditation process, and in particular to be clear about what documentation is required and the key elements that need to be addressed. This must be balanced against making reaccreditation too easy, and thereby diminishing its value. The Six Criteria are the defining elements that differentiate Safe Communities from other ad hoc associations, and these should remain the key areas of focus.

Monitoring and reaccreditation of New Zealand Safe Communities

Safe Communities are monitored primarily in three ways: firstly they must submit an Annual Report on their previous 12 months activities. This includes updates on changes in governance; examples and case studies of activities in priority areas; and issues and challenges. Secondly they undertake a Governance Survey. This is a 'health check' on the synergies and functioning of the governance and coalition. Thirdly, they are expected to send representative(s) to the Annual National Forum/Hui. In addition, communication is maintained through periodic phone calls/emails; through regional forums and training opportunities; and through periodic site visits by SCFNZ staff. Through these means, SCFNZ is generally well-informed about the on-going status and performance of the Safe Communities in the network.

With this in mind, the reaccreditation process is an opportunity for two outcomes: firstly for SCFNZ to reassess the Safe Community against the Six Criteria and give feedback on issues and opportunities to strengthen the programme. This is undertaken by a team of trained assessors and invited observers, and is peer reviewed internationally. Secondly it is a catalyst for communities to review their own structures, goals and activities, and to celebrate their strengths and achievements.

It is worth noting that in the 17 years since the first Safe Community was accredited in 1999, not one community has relinquished their accreditation, or opted not to seek/achieve reaccreditation. One respondent remarked "that with Safe Communities people want to reaccredit, whereas how many other 'collaborative' initiatives even make it to five years?"

Government Agencies' engagement with Safe Communities

The ongoing support of government agencies is key in the success however concerns were raised about the level of commitment from government agencies: in particular the impact of the termination of ACC funding for coordination after five years; the lack of funding from ACC for projects at a local level; and the complete withdrawal of funding from Ministry of Justice. It was reported by some that there was a 'disconnect' and the sense that some government agencies didn't fully appreciate the function and effectiveness of Safe Communities, and were more focused on their own priorities and objectives, for example Social Sector Trials. As one respondent put it "Some government agencies are only interested in using Safe Communities to get the things they want and done their way, but are unwilling to pay or take the lead". There was also the view that government agencies are overly demanding in terms of data and reporting that they should themselves be providing. Consequently participation/commitment at a local level is variable and inconsistent compared to the commitment exhibited by local agencies and community groups. There was a very real sense that reaccreditation was undertaken because it was valued by the local communities in spite of dwindling resources and less than whole-hearted government engagement.

Conclusions

The survey of the six most recently reaccredited safe communities reveals that despite changes in funding and other resourcing issues, reaccreditation is viewed as a positive and productive exercise: in particular the reassessment against the six criteria; the stock-take of past and present structures and activities; and the opportunity to celebrate what has been achieved.

Reaccreditation and the associated national and international recognition provides credibility and reaffirms the power of the collective. It empowers communities to challenge conventional thinking and find innovative solutions to complex issues. It reinforces community-led and place-based activities and interventions.

Appendix A: Summary of Responses

The points noted below are not directly attributed to individuals, and are statements or summaries that reflect the views of the respondents.

What were the biggest 'drivers' for you to achieve reaccreditation?

- Our communities are stronger and safer
- We have experienced and seen the benefits; the difference that it makes
- Continuity – keeping it going
- Addressing issues together
- Engaging with other agencies
- Legitimacy for the agencies working in the sector
- Credibility that it brings
- Being part of the wider Safe Communities network, nationally and internationally. Sharing learning and experience
- Having the WHO recognition
- Knowing that you meet the Criteria, and are following best practice
- It is in the Council 10 Year Plan
- Risks associated with not doing it – loss of prestige
- Getting on and doing it ourselves – not waiting for or being dependent on government agencies
- As the result of an independent review
- The challenges raised during the initial accreditation: in particular improving the relationship and engagement with Maori

How did you address any 'barriers' moving forward?

- Ensuring that everyone involved understood the benefits, and appreciated what was being achieved
- Make sure you take everyone along and keep them informed
- Mending some relationships and repairing some reputational damage
- Having a good Communication Plan helps mitigate potential problems
- Keeping the process simple, and avoiding unnecessary stress, and pressure to 'overachieve'.
- Setting realistic expectations.
- Ensuring there is sufficient time to complete the reaccreditation process comfortably
- Maintaining the availability and commitment of partner agencies, especially as they are 'doing their own thing' and working in their own spheres
- Barriers highlighted included:
 - Challenges of local government restructuring
 - Challenges of government programmes such as Social Sector Trials
 - Cuts to funding from key government agencies – ACC and Ministry of Justice
 - The biggest 'barrier' is the attitude and 'disconnect' of government agencies that want to be a part of it, but don't want to pay. Happy to sign and have their say, but not make a financial contribution.
 - Government agencies demand for data, evidence etc that they themselves should be providing. Prescriptive in what they want, but unwilling to commit people or funding to achieve it. Some government agencies seem to have no concept of community development.
 - Don't have the 'decision-makers' from government agencies at the table. Getting consistent participation and engagement. Lack of consistency around mental health in particular. These central government agencies are not part of the community.

What are the greatest strengths of your coalition and how did reaccreditation affirm and consolidate those strengths?

- Collaboration: everyone has a part to play
- Relationships
- Constancy of membership from the beginning
- Bringing together sectors that generally work in silos
- Creating a collective 'lens' and a collective 'weight'
- Opportunity to 'take stock' and reflect on what had happened, and to look forward to the future
- Clear priorities and workstreams
- Focus on evaluation and monitoring, developing benchmarks
- Opportunity to reconfirm commitment and induct new members and bring them 'up to speed'
- Diversity of people, strong cross-section from across the community
- Strong Maori contribution
- Finding the balance between tactical and strategic focus
- Having people in influential positions who are committed to the SC process
- Innovation, SCs are a great opportunity to create new and innovative projects
- Challenging conventional thinking both within the coalition and externally
- 'place-based' approach that works with local and discrete communities
- Local decision-making, discussion about needs and priorities
- High trust/High output
- Opportunity to undertake an independent review of SC
- Feedback on the Application and Site Visit for Reaccreditation from the Assessment Panel was informative and helpful

What did the reaccreditation process involve for you? In particular – time, cost, information, drafting, submitting?

- We couldn't afford not to do it!
- A much easier process than the initial Accreditation
- Once the decision is made to proceed, then do the planning so that it doesn't become onerous
- Allocate resources, share costs
- Appreciated having the time to get things sorted
- A lot of work to coordinate and tie everything into the Plan
- Between three and six months preparation time alongside 'business as usual'
- Monthly meetings – identifying what people needed to contribute; updating and showing the document at each stage
- Working through the criteria raised and highlighted aspects that needed attention – useful process
- Overwhelming at times
- Brought in a contactor to help

Were there aspects of the process that could be improved?

- Ensuring that SCs are clear about SCFNZ requirements for reaccreditation, so that they can produce the necessary documentation in a timely and efficient manner
- More guidance around the key points in the documentation – keeping the process streamlined
- Implement a word limit to ensure documents are short and to the point
- But don't make it so easy that it devalues it. Standards must be maintained
- It was a good process, not too prescriptive. Maybe more detail and support required for people attempting it for the first time
- Ensure the assessors roles and questions are well-managed and to the point

How did you use the reaccreditation process within your coalition and within your community?

- Community Site Visit was a critical part of the process
 - Agencies were proud and passionate about presenting
 - It gets people to 'step up'
 - Reasserted that it was community-owned – not a Council programme
 - Great opportunity to see and hear: don't always get the whole story from documents
 - Great opportunity to reaffirm and celebrate that we are 'doing a great job!'
 - Great opportunity to raise issues such as funding with partner agencies and Council
 - New Chief Executive was 'blown away' by the 'people in the room' supporting reaccreditation
- A Communications strategy is critical
 - Using Council Communications to spread the word
 - Media releases
 - Opportunity for the Mayor to publicly thank organisations
 - Promote accreditation/reaccreditation at community events
 - Raise awareness amongst candidates in local body elections

How has reaccreditation impacted on your coalition and on your community?

- Writing the Application was a useful exercise in pulling together the achievements of the first five years together
- The Reaccreditation document is used as a foundation for Annual Workshops and Strategic Planning
- Not sure if the 'man in the street' knows what it is about but that doesn't matter as much as keeping the coordination and collaboration going, and achieving positive outcomes
- The opportunity to collect the data and demonstrate that we are making a positive difference
- 'Main-streaming' community safety
- Re-energised the agencies and reaffirmed their commitment
- People in influential positions are actively involved
- Continuation of business
- True collaboration, not just a Council show
- Reinforced the good work by Council, Police and others to have consistency in engagement and capacity-building at a local level
- Using reaccreditation as a vehicle at 'grass roots' level and with community-led initiatives
- Reaffirmed the power of the collective
- It gives us confidence to be up-front about the issues in the community, and positive about finding ways to address them (rather than minimising or sweeping under the carpet)
- Taking it down to local community/neighbourhood level
- Strengthens our case for access to funding and resources
- Embedded in key strategic documents
- Getting Strategy, Annual Reports, Implementation Plan completed