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Empowering Communities

The Building Safer Communities program is a core component of the government's Crime Prevention Strategy. Over \$19 million has been invested in the Program since the 2020-21 financial year, which comprises four grant streams, including:

- Creating Safer Places
- Crime Prevention Innovation Fund
- Youth Crime Prevention Grants, and
- Empowering Communities Initiatives.

The key objectives of Empowering Communities:

- Build the capability of the community to understand crime related issues and design, build and implement effective crime prevention approaches.
- Engage and mobilise the community to address issues of local concern.
- Strengthen relationships between community stakeholders to work in partnership and leverage community capacity to deliver sustainable outcomes beyond the funding period.
- Build the evidence base for successful community development initiatives that address crime and safety issues.

The Empowering Communities grants have provided \$700,000 (plus GST) each to nine sites across Victoria to support innovative, evidence-based and locally-led initiatives to address crime and improve community safety.

Two rounds of the Empowering Communities, including:

- Round 1: The cities of Brimbank, Hume and Melton
- Round 2: The cities of Knox, Casey, Greater Dandenong, Ballarat, Wyndham and Greater Shepparton.

Additional funding was also provided to deliver Building Safer Communities Forums in each location. All Empowering Communities sites hosted forums in the early stages of the initiative to:

- consider data and other evidence of issues that impact on crime and safety in the community
- identify priority areas for action to inform the focus of Empowering Communities activities, and
- identify strengths the community can build on, including activity that is already underway or planned that complements the Empowering Communities work.

The Greater Shepparton initiative

Crime related issues identified in EOI

Key crime issues impacting the community include drug offences, public/domestic violence, late night safety, speeding and hoon driving, burglary, vandalism and property damage.

Analysis of CSA offence data between 2012 and 2021 demonstrated a number of significant rises in offences for Greater Shepparton within the following areas:

- Crimes Against the Person – 65% increase
- Drugs offences – 74% increase
- Justice procedure offences - 519% increase.

Crime Statistics Agency (CSA) data for the 12-month period to 31 March 2021 recorded a 52% higher criminal rate per 100,000 population than the Victorian State average.

Through community engagement Greater Shepparton Council documented the following areas of concern:

- Reducing crime
- Homelessness
- Family Violence
- Youth (engagement and school safety)
- Racism
- Place making / Infrastructure improvements to increase safety.

Focus of the Greater Shepparton Initiative

A local Community Action Group comprising of diverse community representation was established in March 2022 to assist with the development and implementation of the initiative.

The Greater Shepparton Community Safety Forum was held in April 2022, building on the collective knowledge of the community and local stakeholders to consider issues that impact people in Greater Shepparton. The key themes identified, included the need for:

- acceptance and sense of belonging
- positive role models
- outreach to vulnerable and multicultural groups to understand their needs

- safe spaces for women
- specialist services for young people
- practical support for homeless.

The Action Group, in conjunction with City of Greater Shepparton conducted a range of targeted community consultations and participated in a number of workshops to consider the themes and issues raised at the forum. The Action Group agreed on a Common Goal to guide its effort and investment opportunities.

The Common Goal:

Greater Shepparton will have a primary focus on community where, at its core, each project improves safety outcomes for young people aged up to 24.

The Action Group will consider four key project objectives, including

- **Connection** – *opportunities for young people to connect, celebrate within the broader community and increase cultural inclusion and connection between neighbours*
- **Support** – *increasing support provided to young people experiencing vulnerability*
- **Access** – *increase access and promotion of existing community services*
- **Safety** – *improve cultural safety, perceptions of safety and community pride.*

Funded Projects

The Shepparton Empowering Communities Action Group established a grant program as their funding model, which was delivered over two stages.

The Action Group provided the community with flexible and innovative options to express interest in the Empowering Communities grants, including face to face pitches, video expressions and in writing, which were open between 14 February 2023 and 15 March 2023.

Following panel review by the Action Group, shortlisted projects were invited to complete a full application process and the Action Group reviewed the applications in consideration of the funding criteria, Common Goal and project objectives.

The Action Group then worked with the Department’s Community Crime Prevention Unit, which has endorsed eight projects to share in \$500,000 of funding;

- **Echo Hope: Empowering the Voices of Young Refugees (Masomo Mbele Foundation Incorporated)**
\$100,000

The program aims to change perceptions of African youth refugees and myths about displaced people. By sharing their journeys and empowering the local in African community with innovative education opportunities to bridge gaps and provide a safe opportunity for positive pathways. The program will include four discreet projects, including:

1. *Declo Global Youth Talks Conferences*

2. *Introductory Legal Education and English Classes for Refugees*
 3. *Homework Club and Digital Competency Program*
 4. *Skills Building Knowledge Program.*
- **Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project (Family Haven)**
\$100,000
This program supports women and families in need to navigate complex personal issues, access basic needs and appropriate services for the right support needed. The investment will support the employment of a Life Links Coordinator at Family Haven for 12 months to provide mentoring to manage challenges and build positive relationships to enable the community to thrive in the wake of the 2022 floods.
 - **Breaking Down Barriers (Goulburn Valley Gangaru Parasports)**
\$100,000
A targeted approach, providing a universal 'all welcome' active program, allowing groups to socialise, participate and engage with the community and network with individuals and organisations. Providing a healthy minds and bodies philosophy, the project will provide testimony of both aspirational and cautionary insights into the dangers of alcohol/drugs and anti-social behaviours.
 - **Justice Diversion Program (Giz a Break Limited)**
\$80,000
A one year justice diversion program designed for twelve 14-17 year olds, using a therapeutic framework embedded in a '4 Wheel Drive Touring format', facilitated by a team of youth, justice and social workers. The program will focus on support, opportunity, connection, safety and access with the objectives of reducing offending and building positive pathways into the community.
 - **Youth Mental Health First Aid Program (International Association for Psychiatric Nurses)**
\$40,000
The project provides free youth mental health first aid training for groups and individuals who support young people. The training will help build the communities capability to recognise and assist young people who experience mental health challenges. The project will train up to 244 individuals from Greater Shepparton who will achieve a Certification in Mental Health First Aid.
 - **Art Mural project (Mooroopna Education and Activity Centre)**
\$40,000
The Art Mural, which will be developed by young people from the community, will face the Mooroopna Education and Activity Centre, providing a creative outlet for young people to engage with artists, develop skills, build confidence and take pride in what they have achieved together, building their own foundations in the community.
 - **English Lessons for Young People Program (Umoja Empowerment Group)**
\$20,000

The project involves a connection pathway program to support 15 young people to obtain their drivers licenses and prepare for employment opportunities. The program involves an English language support program to prepare for job applications and understand how to convey skills in English for job interviews or education opportunities. The program will also incorporate music, soccer and healthy eating.

- **Secure Shepp Kids Project (Thana Leader)**
\$20,000

An afterhours community and group based program designed for parents and carers of children aged 0-12, creating opportunity for up to 50 local families to develop secure relationship bonds with their children. The program will focus on identifying ways children signal a need for greater connection and emotional support and how to meet these needs effectively.

Next steps

Projects and programs are planned to be delivered by 30 June 2024. The Action Group will focus on promoting and supporting the local projects, supporting sustainable outcomes and evaluating the initiative to contribute to best practise for future Community Crime Prevention.

Crime prevention funding

Including this grant, the government has invested \$3,245,650 in 37 crime prevention projects in the Greater Shepparton local government area since 2015. This includes investment for projects focussed exclusively on Greater Shepparton, as well as those that include Greater Shepparton.

Additional recent significant investments in Greater Shepparton include:

- \$225,000 to Greater Shepparton City Council for Shepparton CBD Revitalisation - Maude Street Community Plaza and Public Facilities from the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund 2017-18.
- \$190,687 to Greater Shepparton City Council for Safer City Camera Network - Stage 2 from the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund 2018-19.
- \$1,270,000 in Youth Crime Prevention Grants to '54 Reasons' for Save the Children Outreach (2016-17, 2019-20, 2021 -22, 2022-23, 2023-24 funding rounds).