



**City of Irvine 2015 Program Synopsis**

# **Safety in the Community**





## **City of Irvine**

### **Program Synopsis: Safe Community**

The City of Irvine's organizational chart says it all. While most cities simply identify their police department as such, Irvine's Department of Public Safety is an all-encompassing operation overseeing and providing liaison for a multitude of programs including police services, fire services, emergency preparedness, crime prevention, animal control, youth and family services, business license, and development review. In fact, by City Council resolution the Irvine police chief's official title is Director of Public Safety/Chief of Police.

The message is clear: While a high standard has been set for police services in the City, Irvine's recognition as one of the safest cities in the nation is based on the principle that being a safe community touches on virtually every aspect of municipal operations.

Sustaining a safe and secure environment is one of the City's most important goals. As one of the largest 100 cities in America, Irvine has had for ten consecutive years the lowest violent crime rate in the nation based upon FBI statistics for cities of more than 100,000.

Irvine's philosophy is built on the premise that a community's perception of safety and security is critical to a high quality of life. Studies have shown that when people fear crime, they tend to alter their behavior to avoid becoming victims. People avoid strangers, drive when they could walk, limit their use of public parks and other community facilities and stay home at night.

These changes in behavior often lead to deterioration of the social fabric as people begin to feel isolated, less loyal to the community, withdrawn from neighborhood life, and contemplate moving elsewhere. High levels of fear in a community may also result in negative impacts on its economic base because businesses and residents will naturally move to areas where they feel safe. Therefore, Irvine has placed a high priority on addressing and preventing both the reality and the perception of danger and disorder within the community.

In many cities, the response to fear of crime is solely a reactive police presence. While emergency response is an integral component of Irvine's plan, it is also the most costly and often is least effective in reaching long-term solutions. Therefore, Irvine focuses special attention on active prevention strategies such as graffiti removal and maintaining landscaping, streets and public facilities to help prevent disorder in the community. Other Irvine crime prevention strategies include community-oriented policing, environmental design concepts, community programs that promote socially productive behaviors in our youth, family assistance and special events that draw our culturally diverse community together.

From a police perspective, Irvine's geographic-policing model is designed to bring citizens and government closer together to identify problems and find solutions to neighborhood and community-wide issues.

The City's geographic-policing plan was implemented in 2003, after 14 months of research and planning. Rather than randomly patrolling the City, officers are assigned to one of three geographic regions with a commander and support staff assigned to each area. These areas were determined through the use of a software program that analyzed police officer workloads, as well as the type and volume of officer responses. Other major considerations include the need to maintain natural borders and to recognize pre-established villages within the community.

Police officers are deployed into defined areas for extended periods of time. By focusing on specific geographic regions, officers gain a better understanding of what is going on in and around that neighborhood. As a result, Irvine police officers are better poised to help address and solve localized problems.

Irvine received a 2009 Excellence in Victim Services Award from the International Association of Chiefs of Police. The award recognizes the Family Violence Prevention Focus Group, a collaboration comprised of members of the Police Department, Community Services Department and other community partners. This group works to reduce the occurrence of family violence, to educate victims about available resources and to increase reporting of these crimes which tend to be underreported. The message to the Irvine community: there are individuals, police officers and agencies that are ready and willing to help victims in need.

The City also recognizes that our youth are disproportionately both the victims and the perpetrators of crime. Statistics indicate that children are being drawn into criminal behavior at increasingly younger ages, partly because they are not prepared to make appropriate choices about how to use their unstructured time. While the direct costs of crime are enormous, investing in proactive, preventive programs such as after-school activities has proven to be a bargain by comparison.

The City has found the most cost-effective long-term approach to securing a safe community is through promoting socially productive behaviors in childhood. Young people need positive away-from-school activities that provide the opportunity for them to form healthy adult relationships and develop a high degree of self-direction and personal responsibility.

The City plays a logical role in this process by offering a variety of age-appropriate activities throughout the year. These programs ensure that Irvine youth have many opportunities to interact and develop respect for other members of the community. In turn, these activities increase community safety by decreasing the likelihood that young people will become involved in criminal activity.

Youth activities and programs offered through the City's Community Services and Public Safety departments encompass a broad spectrum of issues and interests. The City has also developed an extensive network of public parks and facilities to ensure that places exist for large groups of youth to safely interact, including 19 community parks, 37 neighborhood parks, two vista point parks, and a community skate park facility.

In 2008, the City Council approved the *Strategic Plan for Children, Youth and Families*. The plan promotes a safe, secure, protective, healthy, and stimulating environment for all of our city's youth and families.

One of Irvine's strengths as a community is its rich cultural diversity. As the City's multicultural population grows and flourishes, the benefits and challenges increase as well. The City is committed to maximizing opportunities for people from diverse cultural backgrounds to engage in their community.

The City supports a number of multicultural organizations and activities that are dedicated to promoting understanding, harmony and respect between cultures through educational and social programs for people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds

The City further promotes activities that encourage social cohesion and community participation, important elements that help Irvine maintain its reputation as one of the safest communities in the nation. The City provides access to municipal services which promote a safe environment where people interact with their neighbors and gather as a community, including the City's signature Irvine Global Village Festival each fall ([www.cityofirvine.org/globalvillage](http://www.cityofirvine.org/globalvillage)).

Through the City Council's leadership, Irvine will continue to focus resources on sustaining a safe environment for residents, businesses and visitors. The City's strategies are based on the assumption that prevention is one of the most important and, in the long run, most effective means of sustaining a safe and secure community.

For more information on the City of Irvine's safe community efforts visit <http://www.cityofirvine.org/ipd/> or contact:

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