

Case Study: Walkwise Wellington (ADT Armourguard)

Safe Communities Foundation NZ, January 2008

Armourguard Security Ltd is a division of ADT Security a large worldwide electronic security company. It is involved in the provision of security solutions to more than eight million residential, commercial and retail customers worldwide. As part of its services Armourguard Security offers the Wise Group of Services which includes: Walkwise a safety ambassador programme focussed on reducing anti-social behaviour and crime.

Walkwise was developed: to be a friendly enhancement to traditional law enforcement; to provide a helpful and friendly presence to deter crimes such as graffiti and vandalism; and to work alongside local councils community groups and the New Zealand Police to suit the specific requirements of each Territorial Local Authority.

Walkwise city safety officers in their bright yellow jackets are a very visible safety intervention in Wellington City central and have earned an excellent reputation with Wellington City Council, Police, retailers and Wellington residents. The 24-strong team (15 full-time equivalent staff) patrols the city 24 hours per day, seven days a week discouraging crime and anti-social behaviour. Approximately eight officers are on duty at any one time. A flexible roster is in place to ensure that more officers are available during large scale city events. During the day officers work alone while in the evenings they are partnered together to work as pairs. Their main tasks include:

- deterring crime through visibility;
- being the eyes and ears of the police;
- identifying hazards in public areas;
- promoting the public image of the 'safe city';
- distributing information;
- greeting and directing visitors to the city;

- assisting citizens; and
- providing feedback to utilities.

Results from the 1999 Wellington City Council Residents Satisfaction Survey showed that only 30% of the residents felt safe in the central city at night. Recent analysis of the most recent Wellington City Council Residents Satisfaction Survey showed that 72% of respondents reported feeling reasonably safe or very safe in the central city at night an increase of 42%. This increase was attributed to the development, management and training of Walkwise City Safety Officers as well as development of the Community Policing Base in Cuba Street, the introduction of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), the liquor ban in the central city and the Homeless Taskforce. An Awareness and Perception Survey carried out by independent research company A.C.Nielson in March 2002 showed high levels of acceptance by residents and retailers with a large proportion believing Walkwise contributed significantly to a reduction in crime in the city. Specifically 80% of residents believed Walkwise made the inner city safer. In addition Walkwise makes a significant contribution to injury prevention in the city by providing information on problems associated with city assets (buildings, pavements, roads, lighting etc) prompting a more rapid response and lowering costs of damage.

The Walkwise team in Wellington report around 80-100 incidents each week – approximately half of which are reported to Police, the remainder to the council. The Wellington City Walkwise Officers were awarded the Wellington Area Police Commander's Certificate of Appreciation for "outstanding assistance to Wellington Area Police in contributing to the reduction of crime throughout the City 2004-2005". In 2007 the Walkwise programme operating in partnership with the Wellington City Council was a finalist in Category Four– "Outstanding business or organisation that is contributing to the great well-being of its own workforce and the community in general" at the New Zealand Community Safety and Injury Prevention Awards.

Following the success of Walkwise in Wellington, Lower Hutt and Manukau have adopted the same model for their cities. Dunedin and Porirua cities have also adopted similar models. This would indicate that the Walkwise model could be a successful model able to be adapted to the requirements of any Territorial Local Authority.