

Sexual Violence Prevention Action Plan

Wellington City Council's response to a call to action from the community.

LEAD BUSINESS UNIT:
CONNECTED COMMUNITIES,
WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

FOCUS AREA:
REDUCING HARM

This case study shares feedback from 15 key partners in the Wellington City Council Sexual Violence Prevention Project (SVPP). Partners were invited to participate because of their influence and impact on the project, and included members of the Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence, sexual violence and hospitality partners, political influencers, project leaders, subject matter experts, Wellington City Council staff and student leaders.



Wellington rally against sexual violence. Photo: RNZ

Where it started

In late-2020/early-2021, local communities raised concerns about safety in central Wellington. The Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence (The Alliance), a coalition of youth-led organisations passionate about sexual violence prevention, were a key voice in the call for Wellington City Council (Wellington City Council) and its partners to prioritise and invest in sexual violence prevention.

In March 2021, The Alliance held the #LetUsLive rally which mobilised the community around three main asks:

- For a joint strategy for sexual violence prevention in the hospitality industry.
- To increase funding for community-based sexual violence prevention.
- For upcoming urban design changes to include sexual violence prevention.

Actions included a submission by The Alliance to Wellington City Council's Long-Term Plan and a student-led survey of people's experiences of harm in the central city. These collective efforts resulted in a \$1.2 million investment from Council into alcohol harm reduction and sexual violence prevention as part of Pōneke Promise, to be phased over three years. The vision was for:

"A Pōneke free of sexual violence (and the fear of harm), where everyone is free to be who they want, go about their lives without worry, and whose space is filled with joy."



Night time Urban Design Hīkoi

The Sexual Violence Prevention Project

The Sexual Violence Prevention Project (SVPP) was Council's response to this call. The SVPP worked to prevent sexual harm before it happened and includes a Roadmap and Action Plan for sexual violence prevention that reflected a strengths-based approach and holistic understanding of what 'counts' as prevention.

The project adopted a systems-based approach working across these areas:

- organisational and workforce strengthening
- community mobilisation
- communications
- trainings and workshops
- research and evaluation
- policy reform and advocacy
- coordination and partnerships.

The SVPP involved the implementation of over 30 projects between 2021-2024. The diverse range of projects demonstrated that sexual violence prevention includes intersections between social issues, and social, cultural, and environmental interventions.

For example,

- The Safer Venues Project, a collaboration with RespectEd Aotearoa and Hospitality NZ on sexual violence prevention strategies in the hospitality sector.
- Urban design changes in Wellington's central city integrated sexual violence prevention by engaging affected communities through the Day and Night Urban Design Hīkoi.
- Local creatives developed a public art installation promoting positive sexual consent, supported by an educational audio tool and an ongoing campaign.
- Subject matter expertise led to the Council getting recognition as a key partner in ACC's Regional Primary Prevention Practitioner pilot, highlighting its influence in sexual violence prevention in Pōneke.
- The establishment of the Pōneke Prevention Practitioner Network to foster collaboration and support for sexual violence prevention among local specialists, with WCC and student partners.

The successes and impacts of the Sexual Violence Prevention Project in Pōneke

Partners said that the SVPP had a range of impacts for Wellington communities, city safety and Wellington City Council, but most significantly the deep engagement with communities and the impact on the wider relationship between community and Wellington City Council.

The Project Lead brought in existing strong community trust and relationships and has helped build valuable connections with the partners. This has helped increase Council's approachability and strengthened ties with student groups, specialists, and the hospitality industry. Participants were proud of being part of a project led by their Council that represented their voices and drove evidence-based action. They saw the possibility for an effective and sustainable approach to change.

Students in particular loved having a genuinely student-led campaign in which their perspectives drove the approach. Student leaders said they knew their voices were being listened to and felt confident and empowered to continue championing change. Members of the Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence also highlighted how being included at decision-making levels has helped shape a project in which they feel genuinely represented.

Participants highlighted the impacts on physical spaces, especially how the Te Aro Park and Courtenay Place urban design changes had led to them feeling safer and using the space more comfortably. Students talk about feeling more at ease moving around at night and being able to enjoy the city more. As students were involved from the project's inception, the ability for them to 'have a say' over the spaces they use and see the tangible impacts of their feedback has provided a sense of guardianship and accountability in the space.

The Safer Venues Project showed how a cross-industry partnership can bring together industry specialists, subject matter experts, and council leadership to create a strong community-driven approach to sexual violence prevention that effectively balanced both worker and patron safety. A strong focus on community collaboration, relationship building, and engagement were pivotal in bringing together diverse stakeholders for meaningful dialogue and tangible action.



The Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence, with Project Lead Jahla Lawrence and Green MP Tamatha Paul at the launch of the Sexual Violence Prevention Roadmap and Action Plan

"We are proud of the package of interventions we have developed; it is an easy-to-follow guide that demystifies sexual violence prevention and is not held by experts, but something the community can pick up and run with."
Safer Venues Project team

Participants were clear that Wellington City Council's collaboration and approach to sexual violence prevention has shown strong leadership, providing necessary amplification and coordination, and setting precedent for other councils across Aotearoa.

Wellington City Council's leadership and institutional credibility helped normalise and legitimise sexual violence prevention approaches, lending much needed weight to the kaupapa. Partners said that WCC has set a benchmark for accountability, demonstrating a commitment to acknowledging survivors and mainstreaming sexual violence prevention as a core commitment in safety and wellbeing approaches.

"Signing on to the Sexual Violence Prevention Roadmap and Action Plan highlights the accountability and acceptance of Wellington City Council in our contribution to a historically harmful culture. Being aware of it, naming it, and calling it out, helps us take accountability for the actions we take in response." MP Tamatha Paul

As New Zealand's sexual violence prevention landscape grows the SVPP has highlighted the impact that local government leadership can have on their communities, drawing the attention and investment of central Government partners.

Overall this project is seen by the community as being extremely successful, fulfilling not only the original asks of the Alliance's LetUsLive rally, but also delivering on an approach that represented all the voices and perspectives of those involved. With a strong focus on collaboration and community mobilisation, the SVPP successfully brought together a diverse range of people and organisations uniting them with a common goal and a shared approach.

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Stakeholder engagement for the Sexual Violence Prevention Roadmap

The Challenges of the Sexual Violence Prevention Project

As the first Council in Aotearoa to lead such a project, there were no existing structures or precedents to support such a comprehensive approach to sexual violence prevention. As sexual violence prevention is still a new subject for many individuals and organisations, there were inconsistent understandings which effected willingness to be involved. Addressing cultural taboos surrounding sexual violence discussions required strategies to foster open dialogue and engagement, both internally and externally, and had varied levels of success.

*“We underestimated how much internal culture change was needed for staff to all feel as if they were on the journey”
Wellington City Council Staff member*

Sexual violence prevention requires a specific and named focus to address the issue. It is often packaged within wider discussions of safety – diverting attention from the unique challenges, needs and levers required for prevention. Partners said it was challenging to combat this more familiar Council narrative of safety and ensure the specific focus on sexual violence. This meant that balancing the SVPP aim of highlighting the broad range of activities that ‘count’ as prevention, with the specific need to name sexual violence often proved difficult.

Participants also voiced concerns about ongoing Council capacity and the long-term sustainability of sexual violence prevention specific initiatives to ensure enduring impact. They said ensuring appropriate resource allocation and strategic planning would be important for the project moving forward.

Reflections

The impact of the project on people’s feelings of safety, their relationship to council, and in the journey from protest to project has been powerful. They speak to the ripple effect that the projects system model has had across both the sector and the community of Pōneke, laying the foundations for ongoing holistic change.

Their reflections recognise the indispensable role of sustained leadership and commitment in combating sexual harm. The importance of strong partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders including student leaders, social services and Wellington City Council surfaced as a cornerstone of the SVPP’s success.

At the heart of the SVPP lies the empowerment and engagement of students. Their active involvement in decision-making processes proved to be instrumental, affirming the importance of student representation and empowerment in initiatives affecting them directly. Through their participation, students ensured that their voices were not only heard, but valued, driving the project forward with vigour and purpose.

Partners said it was the dedication of individuals that truly brought life into the project. They expressed a deep sense of personal significance and passion for the work, recognising its transformative effects on their own lives and on the wider community.

“The protest, and what happened after, is one of the things I am most proud of being a part of” Michael Turnbull, Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence

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