In November 1989, an ABC radio morning program conducted a campaign to highlight what it considered to be a major outbreak of street crime in the Rundle Mall area of the Adelaide’s central business district. Several assaults had been reported to police involving ‘gangs of marauding youths and individual young people’. Some of the young people attacked were private school children who were either passing through the Rundle Mall area or meeting with friends. The family of one youth who was attacked was known to the producer of the ABC radio program and therefore became the focus of a law and order campaign.

A wide spectrum of concerned individuals were interviewed both on radio and by the printed media, including high ranking police officers, Adelaide City Council representatives, youth workers, Victims of Crime Service representatives, traders within the Rundle Mall area and concerned residents of the inner city. Retrospective reports of criminal activity in the inner-city area were also made, often giving impression that such activity was rising at a phenomenal rate. Double counting of assaults in press reports was not uncommon.

The youths identified as the source of the trouble included some of Southern European origin who were said to be engaged in a process called ‘steaming’. It was said that large groups of youths were moving quickly from one end of the Mall area to the other and committing various kinds of offences including shop stealing, assault and indecent interference along the way. Aboriginal youths from the city’s northern suburbs were also given responsibility for some of the assaults, and a wide variety of opinion was expressed about how such behaviour should be curbed. This opinion primarily focused on increasing police presence in the area and toughening
up the juvenile justice system in order that significant penalties might be imposed.

Within two weeks of the initial reports, sufficient people had been interviewed to form the basis of an action group which was called together by the South Australian Police Department. The first meeting of this group—which by then consisted of police, youth workers, city traders, representatives of the Adelaide City Council, representatives of ethnic groups, Aboriginal representatives and city residents—decided that the formation of an action group was justified and desirable. The action group met with the initial intention of setting goals directed at reducing crime in the inner-city area.

In line with the state government’s ‘Together Against Crime’ strategy the Inner City Cooperative Action Group (as the action group later became known) (ICCAG), was based on the presumption that an increased police presence and more draconian penalties—such as changes to loitering laws—would probably only go a small way towards solving the problem that existed in the Adelaide inner-city area. Youth workers, for example, were arguing that the problem in the inner-city area was one that involved far more than simply young offenders. The small representation of traders on the committee took the line that they deserved more protection, and the local government officials present took a cautious but open approach. The Police Department—with a view to its developing policy on community policing—was basically seeking the assistance of all interested parties to come to some conclusions about the way the inner-city problem ought to be solved.

The initial constitution of the organisation had an extraordinarily large duty statement contained in its terms of reference. This included:

- bringing together the appropriate agencies and groups concerned with the minimisation of confrontational incidents between members of the public in Rundle Mall and Hindley Street areas in Adelaide; and
- to develop cooperative strategies between inner-city agencies traders and the public, which will lead to a more effective crime prevention program.

Another general objective was:

- to reduce crime in the Adelaide Central Business District; which led to the next objective
- to reduce the fear of crime thereby encouraging greater patronage of businesses and services in the zones concerned.

This objective holds the clue to the tremendous level of anxiety and energy that was available to undertake the task of new crime prevention strategies.
The final objective was:

- to encourage cooperative action between businesses, police and human service providers through information exchange and an understanding of respective roles and potential joint projects.

This final objective was prophetic, to say the least, and has become the foundation of any achievements made by the ICCAG.

Months of discussion between ICCAG members, both in a full meeting and in small group situations, resulted in developing an awareness that little could be done without resources. Such resources were hard to detect until it was suggested that contact be made with the Attorney-General’s Crime Prevention Policy Unit.

Because the ICCAG was large in its plenary form, it was decided that smaller working groups should be established to consider problems and report back. These three groups included:

- a Youth Coordinating Committee;
- a City Watch Group which was charged with the responsibility for promoting a program similar to Neighbourhood Watch amongst City Traders; and
- an Urban Environment and Crime Prevention Group which considered seeking funding for an environmental study of the inner-city area from a crime prevention point of view.

**Youth Coordinating Committee**

The Youth Coordinating Committee, as it became known, set out to improve relationships within existing youth service agencies in the area, the Police Department, and the Adelaide City Council. A program of Blue Light Youth Camps was commenced which involved youth service agencies and the Police Department. These camps offered weekend activities at conference centres for young people who frequented the inner city area and who were perceived as potential leaders of other young people.

Such activities led to the eventual appointment of a Youth Coordinator and Crime Prevention Officer for the inner-city area and this is expected to make a significant difference to the levels of cooperation and communication between the many existing youth agencies.

**City Watch Group**

The City Watch Group was charged with the task of establishing a program to encourage traders to become more cooperative in their efforts against crime. Overseas experience, particularly in The Netherlands and France, indicated such an approach could have widespread effects on feelings of security and actual initiatives undertaken to prevent criminal activity.

The City Watch group reasoned that, if a trader merely took responsibility for the area immediately in front of his or her shop, then little could be done to develop a coordinated approach to crime prevention in an area like Rundle Mall. Traders were therefore encouraged to communicate with each other.
about their problems and to cooperate in the detection and prevention of criminal activity- this is similar to the Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

The initial meeting to establish a City Watch program was very poorly attended by inner-city traders. A subsequent meeting held approximately one month later was better publicised and held in a more accessible location. It resulted in a successful launch of the scheme. A second City Watch program began in mid-1991 in the inner-city area.

**Urban Environment and Crime Prevention Group**

The Urban Environment and Crime Prevention Group concentrated on the process of financing a specialist crime prevention and the urban environment study of the inner city. This was achieved with significant assistance of the Crime Prevention and Criminology Unit, Attorney-General’s Department. Wendy Bell and Associates successfully tendered for the study.

A combination of crime mapping and a thorough review of items such as lighting, vegetation and building design have made the study unique in South Australian experience. Its many recommendations will provide the ICCAG with opportunities for innovation for many months to come.

These three working groups met frequently, and made successful funding proposals to the Attorney-General’s Crime Prevention Policy Unit.

**Summary**

During the eighteen months in which the ICCAG has functioned, many lessons have been learned about community crime prevention initiatives. These are listed and described in no particular order of importance.

- The task confronting such a community group needs to be defined by the group itself and not by outside interests. Such a group has the advantage from the beginning of political independence and should also be independent of pressure applied by other groups such as local government, private enterprise and the media. There is no doubt that the initial pressure which resulted in the formation of the ICCAG was a result of the widespread publicity initially given to specific acts of violence in the Rundle Mall area. The ongoing decisions that ICCAG subsequently made were independent and hopefully with the interests of the inner-city community in mind.

- It is important that individuals involved in crime prevention programs listen to each other carefully. The initial meetings of ICCAG were fraught with hidden agendas, different perspectives and a wide range of hoped-for outcomes. Traders, youth workers, police, local government, the public service and residents comprised a group that had almost as many agendas as individual members. It took a great deal of patience on everyone’s part to reach the point where useful dialogue and planning occurred.
• It is important to set an agenda that is clear, comprehensive, focussed and understood in order that it might be kept. The temptation to lose sight of goals and become fragmented was never far from ICCAG’s activities.
• Sources of finance are crucial to undertakings such as this. It was not until ICCAG was able to locate resources under the state government’s ‘Together Against Crime’ strategy that achievements began to be measurable. Such achievements in turn contribute to the morale of the committee and to its energy.
• The media, although probably responsible for ICCAG’s birth, was always a source of some anxiety. It was decided that, in order to avoid sensationalism and distortion, group members’ contact with the media should be controlled and coordinated.
• The goals set by ICCAG were always achievable and have remained so. Relatively simple processes are undertaken which lead to clearly defined outcomes. Trying to change the world too quickly would probably result in low morale and a lack of energy within the group.
• It has been important for the group to take setbacks in its stride. The failure of the City Watch program to capture the imagination of traders within the Rundle Mall area was a major setback which resulted in the need to regroup and change plans.
• The division of tasks is crucial to this process. The establishment of the Youth Coordinating Committee, City Watch and Urban Environment and Crime Prevention working groups within ICCAG have probably significantly contributed to the clarity with which tasks have been approached. Large meetings can lead to long and rambling discussions and result in little action.
• Tasks must be completed once undertaken. Outcomes need to be measured, assessed and expected.
• Finally, groups such as ICCAG should be encouraged to research and read about similar projects. The author’s study trip to Europe in 1990, as well as access to materials to other parts of the world, have resulted in useful input to the committee and has assisted ICCAG to think both laterally and innovatively towards achieving its goal.

The Adelaide Inner City Cooperative Action Group (ICCAG) has achieved some of its original objectives, but still has a significant task in terms of coordination and the implementation of the specialist urban environment study by Wendy Bell and Associates. It is hoped that the energy and commitment evident so far will continue as the group seeks to work ‘Together Against Crime’.