Starting a New Neighbourhood Watch Group Online

This starter kit is based on our experience setting up an online group in Willoughby, NSW, in 2018.

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Introduction

Hi,
We recently started a new Neighbourhood Watch Group in Willoughby, NSW. We chose to go online rather than the traditional format of neighbourhood meetings and printed newsletters. Here are a few tips to help you do the same.

Why start a Neighbourhood Watch group?
- If there is an increase in crime in your area (real or perceived)
- Under-reporting of suspicious behavior
- Residents post on social media instead of contacting the police
- Wanting to discourage criminals from coming into your neighbourhood by making it less attractive to wrongdoers
- Wishing to make your area a friendlier, more neighbourly place, where people look out for the people and properties near them

Why do this online?
- Many people are time-poor and don’t have time to go to meetings or read long newsletters
- People will join an online group but may not wish to attend a meeting in case they get landed with work to do!
- Online groups via Facebook are free, versus printed materials costing money to print
- Quick posts on Facebook are not time-consuming for the co-ordinators, versus writing and editing newsletters and distributing these through letterbox drops and arranging meetings, and can be done in a very timely manner making them more useful and relevant
- Printed materials cost money
- You can reach hundreds or even thousands of people online versus just a few people in person
- Facebook has 15 million active monthly users in Australia; 4.5 million under 25, 10.2 million aged between 25 and 55, and 2.8 million aged over 55. (Source: Socialmedianews.com.au July 2018)

Why read this Starter Kit
- To save your time by providing tips and tools which we had to find for ourselves across multiple websites and documents
Where to start – questions to ask yourself

• **What geographical area will you cover?**
  - We chose to cover the whole of our Local Government Area so that we could link up with the Council for support and publicity, and because there was an existing Facebook community group with >12,000 members for a wide variety of local news which we could also work with
  - You could choose a certain postcode or group of postcodes

• **Will you hold any local events** as well as being online or online only? This affects whether you need to find some money to pay for this event/s. We decided to hold one or two mini events each year to promote our group and provide specific useful items to the community (for example, tamper-proof number plate screws)

• **Who can help you** and how will you appeal to them for assistance? See list in the next section and work out what is in it for them to help you

• **What do you want to achieve?** Will you focus on crime and crime prevention only or will you also cover tips on being a good neighbour?

• **What is your “Mission statement“?** This may help you get funding and support by quickly summarising what you are doing and why. Our mission is “Helping everyone feel safe and protected."

• **How will you attract members** to your online group? See section below about Publicity

• **Will you have a Facebook page, website, Twitter account, Instagram, personal emails or other options?** We chose Facebook and website only. You could just use Facebook

• **How will you balance the information you provide?** We try to raise awareness of crimes and safety precautions without scaring people into thinking they live in a really unsafe area
• **What will you NOT cover?** We exclude:
  
  o crime stories from out of our area – unless the perpetrators might have come from or travelled through our area and people may have seen something helpful
  o general community information which is not crime or neighbour-related

• **How much time are you prepared to spend on this project?** We estimate we spend:
  
  o 20 minutes per week reading emails, other Facebook pages etc to find a couple of stories to post on our group page
  o 15 minutes per week posting (including finding relevant pictures/photos)
  o 5 minutes per week responding to any comments from our group
  o 2 days per year to complete a grant application, including sourcing quotes for items to be purchased with the grant money
  o 1 day per year on the close-out report for the grant
  o 1 day per year setting up print jobs such as the business cards and fridge magnets
  o 3 days per year setting up and running small public events
  o 2 days per year preparing presentations for meetings and attending these meetings
  o 1 day per year meeting with local police Crime Prevention Office (CPO)
  o 1 day per year meeting with Councillors or other community members
  o Total per week for ongoing work – 40 minutes
    Equates to about 33 hours per year
    Equates to 4.5 full days per year
    **Plus** ad hoc days as shown above – 11 days
    **Total days per year = 15.5 days**

• **We did NOT:**
  
  o Register the group to get an ABN. Some grant applications require this but the NHWA grant does not
  o Set up a separate bank account – we just used our own account but ensured that the NHW money was clearly accounted for in our grant financials and close-out report
  o Take it too seriously – we are volunteers, and this is not a job!
Where to get support

Neighbourhood Watch Australasia

NHWA is the overarching organisational body, embracing all neighbourhood watch programs in Australia and the neighbourhood support program of New Zealand.

- Check their website for existing registered groups near you – use the “Find a group“ button
- Register your new group on NHW Connect – this involves completing an online form
- Read their quarterly publication, which is on their website, for ideas from other NHW groups
- Take a look at the online store – there are some great ideas for stories for your Facebook posts
- Apply for small grants – applications open only once a year (February) and the information requirements and reports are quite time-consuming with limited timeframes to apply and close-out
  - Tip: try to ensure you include the details of everything you want to purchase in the initial application – you cannot claim later for items even if you are underspent in other areas, unless you complete another form and get authorisation

Police

Contact your local Crime Prevention Officer (CPO) to explain about your new group and your aims. He/she can help you immensely with:
- Information – crime statistics are available on the BOSCAR website (see below) but you may be invited to community policing meetings and also receive emails with media updates and stories. If you sign up to the Local Area Command Facebook page you will also see stories and information you can use yourself.
- Support at events – our local CPO has happily helped us to man a stand for our launch event. Having a police officer present adds to interest and credibility, and he brought along banners and other marketing material.
Council

- Write to, or meet with, the Mayor, General Manager and your local Councillor(s) to outline why you have started your group and ask for their support. They want to make their area safer and friendlier, so they should be really keen to help.
- Council will have a website where they might feature information about your group and also advise residents of upcoming news and events for you.
- If you want to hold an event Council will probably need to give you advance permission to set up in a certain place, on a specified date and time.
- Council may also offer small grants to help community groups.

Local Social Media

- In many towns and local areas there is an existing online community “noticeboard” type group, where people can ask questions, request recommendations for services, raise concerns, report missing pets or persons, etc. Ours is called Willoughby Living and this has more than 12,000 members.
- Contact the administrators and ask for their support in publicising your new group and any public events. You will need to write a short post and include a link to your Facebook page/group. You will not be poaching their members – just giving their members an additional forum to join on the subject of crime, safety and looking out for their neighbours.

Local newspapers

- It can be difficult to get newspaper editors to cover your story, but it is worth a try. You need to write an information piece with something interesting to catch their and their readers’ attention. It needs to be short, punchy, free of typographical errors, and preferably with a relevant good quality photo.
- Many papers have a “What’s On” section and you can advise on any upcoming events by submitting a story a couple of weeks out.
Local social groups

To promote your messages and attract new members you could present at local group meetings.

- **Progress Associations / Precinct meetings** or whatever they are called in your local area. You can find these on your Council website. Contact the President and ask for 10 minutes to present at their next meeting and if they will include a short story in their next newsletter. You can find a link to a PowerPoint presentation we gave to a local group, which you may find useful as a template, under the RESOURCES section of our website ([www.willoughbyneighbourhoodwatch.com.au](http://www.willoughbyneighbourhoodwatch.com.au)).
  
  - Tip: when presenting it is worth asking if anyone in the audience has been involved in NHW before – this may get you some useful information, ensure you don’t overlap with another group (only online groups are on the NHWA website and some of these may be missing) and acknowledge that what you are doing is not new, just a bit different

- **Rotary / Probis / Lions Club** – often these groups are keen to attract speakers, so you could present your initiative to quite a large number of community-minded individuals

- **Ethnic groups** - our area has a high percentage of people born overseas, particularly China and Korea. There are several community groups for people from specific countries and they may be interested in joining your group. Ideally you might find someone in the group who is willing to translate your Facebook posts and any support documents into their language and place these in their newsletters or their own social media.
Dear ....
We are hoping for your assistance as we establish a new Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) scheme, covering all the Willoughby Local Government Area (LGA). We have noticed several reports recently on Willoughby Living, on other social media and in the North Shore Times about suspicious activity, theft and break-ins. So we decided to do something..................

Our aims include:

- **promote community participation and a shared responsibility for community safety through the exchange of information and partnership building between the local community, local government, and police**
- **enable safer and vibrant communities**
- **help strengthen community capacity to create local solutions to prevent and reduce crime and anti-social behaviours**

**In summary**, if we can all make Willoughby less “friendly” to crime, by locking doors, windows and cars, securing and marking other property, promptly reporting suspicious behaviour and looking after our neighbours, we can make Willoughby less attractive to criminals.

We are working closely with the Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator at Chatswood police station, Constable Michael Alexander as well as Willoughby Living. We are hoping that we might engage with yourselves as well.

I’m not sure when your next newsletter goes out. Could you please include something like this story below? We hope you think this is a worthwhile initiative.

**“Local safety and security**
A new initiative has just been launched by two local residents in our area - Willoughby Neighbourhood Watch, covering the whole Willoughby Local Government Area. Willoughby Neighbourhood Watch is an online group of community members, dedicated to making community living safer for everyone. The group is working with Chatswood Police, to ensure that we all do everything we can to help everyone in the Willoughby area be, and feel, safe. The focus is anything that relates to crime, crime prevention and looking out for your neighbours. There are regular posts on the Facebook Group about what’s happening locally, and stories and tips to help you stay safe, and we invite members to also share recommendations, questions, and pictures.

**Facebook:** [https://www.facebook.com/groups/WilloughbyNeighbourhoodWatch/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/WilloughbyNeighbourhoodWatch/)

**Website:** [www.willoughbyneighbourhoodwatch.com](http://www.willoughbyneighbourhoodwatch.com)

Willoughby Neighbourhood Watch will be hosting an event on the 14th April between 11am and 1pm, with a stand in Chatswood Mall. Did you know that if your car licence plates are stolen you will have to spend time and money getting new numbers and plates from the RMS and updating your car insurance and other documentation? Most number plates can be easily removed by criminals looking to use them for petrol theft and other robberies. FREE tamper-proof screws will be available at this event and other tips around car security will be available too. All are welcome.”

We would also be keen to spend a few minutes at one of your Progress Association Meetings to share with your members what we are doing and why. Please let us know if you are interested.

Kind regards
Social Media

Facebook

https://www.facebook.com/groups/WilloughbyNeighbourhoodWatch/?source_id=397314670681356

It is easy to set up a Facebook page for yourself, but it is a little harder to set up a Facebook Group. We chose to have a “Closed Group” so that we could control who was a member of our group and block someone if necessary. When people applied to be members the “application form” asked them where they lived. This enabled us to exclude someone who lived in Willoughby in Ohio, USA and also people from well outside our local area. With the benefit of hindsight, we could probably have achieved the same goals by just having a WNHW page, unfriending anyone unsuitable, and not having the group. We find it difficult to ensure people go to the group page and not the page you have to set up before you can set up a group page. We have a picture at the top of the basic page directing people to the group page, but it is still a bit tricky. Having a group page does mean you can track how many members you have, which is useful information about whether you are reaching the right people and how interested they are in your initiative. As at September 2018 we have 400 members.

Neighbourhood Watch Australasia has provided a free Facebook training resource
The video training is available to all Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) members and NHWA jurisdictions. The training can assist anyone wishing to utilise Facebook to better communicate with group members.

The training outlines the following:

Profiles, Pages & Groups. What’s the difference?
Module 2: How to set up a business page
Module 3: How to set up a group
Module 4: What makes a good Facebook post?
Module 5: How can I tell if anyone likes what I’m posting?
Module 6: What is Post Boosting and do I even need it?
Module 7: Simple, Free Tools to enhance your Facebook Posts
Module 8: How to create a plan to get what you want
You will be able to watch and learn at your own pace and come back at any point.

The video series is available on the NHWA web site.
To register, simply use the following link:

Content for Social Media

We aim to have at least two new Facebook posts per week to keep members informed and engaged. Most of the time the topics just happen, through the media releases from the local police, stories on other NHW Facebook pages (we subscribed to one adjacent to our area which has been running for some time), from stories in the newspaper or by Googling various topics and getting ideas and stories.

Suggested topics:
1. Local crime – specifics or crime rates from BOSCAR (see below)
2. Local arrests
3. Tips to keep your house, car or person safer
4. What to do when you go on holiday
5. Making friends with your neighbours
6. Tools available from us – engravers, UV pens, tamper-proof number plate screws
7. Household CCTV, locks, and all sorts of other gizmos on the NHWA shopping site
8. Missing persons – we don’t cover missing pets.
9. Persons of interest to the police
10. How to report crime and how to give descriptions to the police
11. Computer, phone and other scams
12. News on any public events you are holding

Other tips:
- Facebook posts move down the page as you add more, which means that the only place people can find out a bit about your group is in the “About” section when you set up your page. Make sure this is short and interesting to potential future members (see what we wrote below)
- Keep an eye on your page to answer any comments directed to you as the organisers of your group and to delete any problem posts
- Pictures on posts attract more attention than just text, so use photos; your own or from a resource like Google Images – just try to watch out for any copyright issues
- Facebook does not enable sharing a post from a closed group. If one of your members wants to share a post they will need to screenshot or cut and paste.
Website

http://www.willoughbyneighbourhoodwatch.com/

We built a simple, almost free, website using WIX.com. We did this so that anyone not on Facebook could still Google and find us, and so that key information could sit on the website and not be pushed down the page as new stories were added.

Process:

1. Register a domain name using GoDaddy.com (we paid 99 cents for one year)
2. Use the WIX template to build your site
3. Get someone to review it for you for typos or any clarity issues
4. Go live
5. Review every 6 months or so, to add new information or updates

Tips:

- Do not put your email address anywhere on your website – you will receive countless scam emails from Russia and elsewhere. WIX offers the option of a Contact Form which sends emails to you but doesn’t reveal your email address to users. We recommend using this.
- Some groups have a link on their website if you want to receive their newsletter by email. We didn’t do this because we don’t want to be committed to writing a regular newsletter – we just want to do short posts on Facebook.

Other social media

We chose not to use Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and all the other options, because we felt Facebook and the Website delivered the highest reach to our audience and suited our needs.
Publicity

To attract members to your NHW group you could try any of the following marketing ideas:

1. Post a story on another community Facebook page – such as your local community page, in our case, Willoughby Living. Ensure you include your Facebook and website addresses
2. Write a media release to the editor of your local newspaper, with Facebook and website addresses
3. Present to local community groups such as Progress Associations, Rotary etc
4. Ask local Councillors to include a story about your group on their own social media
5. Use your own social media and face-to-face conversations to promote the work you are doing
6. Run a small launch event (see below)
7. Print business cards with your details and pop these into letterboxes and give out at community meetings or events. And/or print fridge magnets with useful phone numbers to give away (note, we forgot to add our Facebook details on this one). We used the online print company, Vistaprint, because we have found them to be easy to use, cheap and reasonably quick (about one week)

Business card

Fridge magnet
Tips:

- You will need logos to use for printed items. For larger printed items you will need high resolution (hi-res) images and so you will need to ask for these from NHWA. If you are proficient at photoshop you can use photoshop to create your own hi-res images from low res versions or create your own.
Launch Event

We decided to hold a small launch event, for two hours, in a shopping mall on a Saturday morning, because:

1. this gave us something to aim for and meant we had a deadline to get everything ready
2. it gave us something tangible to write about to get publicity in the newspaper, Council website, local Facebook community group and Progress Association newsletters
3. it helped attract new members to our Facebook group

Event checklist:

1. Decide on your offer – we focused on protecting car number plates from theft by providing free tamper-proof screws
2. Book a suitable location with local Council – we chose a busy local shopping mall
3. Ask for support to man the stand – we were joined by the police (CPO), our Mayor and a local Councillor who can converse in Mandarin
4. Gazebo – buy or borrow. Check you can put it up easily by practicing before you get to location
5. Trestle tables
6. Give-aways – we had tamper-proof screws and bolts, with a spreadsheet showing which cars needed screws or bolts
   o Screws and bolts were bought from Bunnings – we had to order them in as they didn’t have enough on shelf
   o WNHW business cards
   o WNHW fridge magnets
   o NHW stickers and bags provided by the police
7. Banner – we had a large banner printed by Vistaprint (see photo below) to show what we were promoting
8. Pull-up banner – this was provided by the local police
9. A4 laminated sheets detailing our new NHW group, the tamper-proof screws and the other items. You need something to hold these – we used metal menu holders from Officeworks.
Our banner (approx. 2 metres long)

A4 laminated signs

Did you know..................?
Car number plates are stolen by criminals for petrol theft and other robberies.

If your number plates are stolen, you will have to:
1. Order new plates (and new rego number) from the RMS
2. Collect the plates
3. Amend your insurance details
4. Amend your registration documents

Anti-theft screws or bolts are installed in the usual way but cannot be unscrewed without using a special tool.

We plan to run another mini event later in the year, in a similar format, to promote the protection of portable property through the use of property engravers and UV marker pens. We have sourced these from Bunnings and the NHWA online store.

The local police station is full of recovered property that they cannot return to owners, and children’s scooters are constantly reported as lost on the local community Facebook page.
Pictures of our street stall and publicity in local newspaper

**What's On**

**Writers Festival**
The Sydney Writers Festival is coming to the Chatswood Library. The two-day event will be held on May 2 and 3, with talks from celebrated authors Sofie Laguna and Tony Jones. Both presentations are free but bookings are essential. Call 9777 7900.

**Jazz club**
The Killers Music Club is bringing jazz to Gordon for one night only. The Sydney Conservatorium Jazz Orchestra will be performing at the Ravenswood School Auditorium on Monday April 16, from 7.30pm. Tickets are $20 and can be purchased at the door.

**Timeless comedy**
The Coal Theatre Company performs Oliver Goldsmith's *The Wages of Virtue* at the St Albans Performance Space in Lomandra next month. Directed by Peter Farmer, the show begins on Friday May 11. For tickets visit www.trybooking.com/UVN.

**Footloose**
The musical is coming to The Concourse for two days only. The musical is based on the 1984 hit movie (above) and is sure to get audiences tapping their feet. The musical is presented by Laid Theatre Company and will appeal to all young. Two performances only, on April 13 and April 14. To book tickets visit Ticketek or phone 8075 8111.

**Reggae in Roseville**
Tongan reggae band, V Tribe - who have shared a stage with everyone from Maxi Priest, Julian Marley (son of Bob) and Sebasky - play the Eastern Lounge in Roseville. The band will be playing a mix of their own music, as well as covers of other artists like Bob Marley, Bruce Mars and Blackstreet. The show will start at 8pm. www.eastenlounge.com.au/tickets.

**Market celebration**
The Great Market Linfield celebrates its third birthday on Sunday. There will be stall therapy, a range of delicious food, fun activities for the kids and cake to mark the occasion. The market will take place between 9am-2pm at the East Linfield Community Hall.

**Historic open house**
The historic Ryde House in Gordon will be open to the public on April 14 and 15. Built 184 years ago, the property is now seen as one of the north shore's most important heritage sites. Morning tea will be available, to book ring 9498 2271.

**Acacia Quartet in concert**
The Acacia Quartet are set to serenade audiences at the Independent Theatre in North Sydney from 3pm. The musicians will perform a concert including pieces by Puccini, Verdi and Turina. To book phone 9955 3000.
Sourcing information and stories

Crime reports
BOSCAR – online resource to get up-to-date reports on crime levels for a wide variety of crimes in your area, sorted by postcode, suburb or LGA. [https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au](https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au)
It takes a few minutes to work out how to use the website, but you can then source graphs and maps as required.
Click on the Crime Mapping Tool icon towards the top right of the screen.
On the next screen you can put in your year and suburb, postcode or local government area and then choose from the rate map, hotspots map, table or graphs.
Neighbourhood Watch Shop

Lots of ideas for safety and security products.

Google
Think of a topic and do a bit of research online.

Wishing you luck and enjoyment with setting up your own NHW group online.

Linda and David