



## Community Safety Audits

### *What is a Community Safety Audit?*

Safety audits help people to evaluate how safe a physical environment feels, and identify tangible solutions that would make it safer for everyone. During a safety audit, people walk through a space, noticing what feels safe and what does not. The safety audit checklist encourages them to consider things like:

- What is the lighting like?
- Can I see what's up ahead?
- Are there places someone could be hiding?
- Could I get help if I needed it?

The findings from this "walkabout" form the basis for an action plan to make the space safer.

Safety audits were first developed by the Metro Toronto Action Committee on Public Violence against Women and Children (METRAC). Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments has adapted the safety audit checklist to better include the concerns of women with disabilities, francophone women, rural women, aboriginal women and immigrant and visible minority women. The revised "made in Ottawa-Carleton" kit was published in September 1996.

### **The safety audit checklist is based on:**

- Community experiences of what feels safe and unsafe in a physical environment
- The principles of good planning
- Studies of how offenders use public space

### **Safety audits have been used to assess and improve the safety of many places:**

- University campuses, including Carleton, Ottawa and Guelph Universities
- Ottawa Board of Education Schools
- Neighbourhood parks and recreational pathways in Ottawa
- City blocks
- Public transit systems, such as transit way stations in Ottawa, and subways in Toronto
- Work sites, such as Federal government buildings
- Apartment buildings

- Parking lots and garages

### **Safety Audits have many benefits:**

- ♀ They lead to tangible improvements in the safety of the area audited. Safer environments reduce the opportunity for violent or threatening behaviors. If a space feels safe, it also attracts more people, and busy places are safer.
- ♀ It is an opportunity for people to share their experiences of feeling vulnerable. This reduces isolation and helps those responsible for a facility respond to the concerns of users.
- ♀ The experience of being listened to and creating change (no matter how small) builds confidence and increases individuals' sense of control over their lives.
- ♀ Safety audits are a fun and effective way to build a sense of community.
- ♀ Participants in a safety audit learn about their physical environment; the others who share the space, and the impact of violence on women and other vulnerable groups.