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**TORONTO STAR**

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## Taking safety to the streets

### Volunteers conduct 'safety audits' in crime-prone areas

#### First of 13 surveys to look at neighbourhoods across city

Aug. 4, 2006. 01:00 AM

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STAFF REPORTER

For years, the area around Kingston and Galloway Rds. in Scarborough was plagued by the Galloway Boys gang as well as drugs and prostitution.

Yesterday a different kind of gang, this one armed with pencils and surveys, set off from Morningside Mall to assess the safety of their community and how lighting, signs and other features might make it safer.

The 60 people, who broke off into four groups with each assigned to a specific area, were part of the Kingston-Galloway-Morningside audit.

It's the first of 13 such audits across the city as the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children teams up with the City of Toronto to assess the safety — and recommend improvements — in trouble-prone neighbourhoods.

Councillor Gay Cowbourne (Ward 44, Scarborough East) said the police play an important role in cleaning up the streets but citizens can't just stand by and watch.

"(The audit) is an opportunity for the community to come together to voice their concerns and to look for solutions," said Cowbourne, who took part in the audit.

"We can't just rely on a group of men and women in uniform to do the job for us. We have a responsibility, as well, as members of a community to ensure that our community stays safe."

The Galloway Boys gang was broken by a massive arrest of members in 2004.

But nobody is declaring this area trouble-free.

There was a rape last fall in one of the four areas surveyed. Last year, a body was found last year in another of the neighbourhoods, said Gordon Mack Scott, a community safety consultant with Toronto Community Housing.

Residents cite less dramatic, but nevertheless troubling, incidents as a drawback to living in one of the city's toughest neighbourhoods.

"You feel uneasy in some situations," said Rhio Gracias, 18, recalling a walk home from work when he was almost mugged by two men who wanted marijuana.

Delali Heimann, also 18, said he moved from the Galloway and Kingston Rds. area to Markham Ave. and Kingston Rd. because his mother thought the first neighbourhood wasn't safe.

Heimann added: "You could easily be influenced by gangs and get into drugs."

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Councillor David Soknacki (Ward 43, Scarborough East), who also took part in the audit, said it's important to identify improvements that can be made to a community to make people feel safer, but the city can't stop with perception.

"What I see as one of the main purposes of the audit is not only to deal with the public safety perception, but also to reaffirm the public space," said Soknacki

Other audits are planned for the Jane-Finch, Malvern, Rexdale and Flemingdon Park neighbourhoods.

All 13 audits are to be finished by early 2007.



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