Crime statistics released by the South African Police Service last month

that Grahamstown has contributed to the overall decrease in the incidence of crime in the province since last year. The SAPS report, a record of crime

tend to indicate

the province since last March 2008 to April 2009,with comparisons from previous years, according to both category and area from March 2008 to April 2009,with comparisons from previous years, does however present an interesting case in so far as petty theft and robbery is concerned.

The statistics seem to reveal that crime in the area, as reported by the Grahamstown Police Precinct, has in general been marginally reduced with incidences of residential- and property-related crime, however, remaining relatively high.

Occurrences of robbery with aggravating circumstances, for example, have increased from 144 last year to 186 this year. Stock theft has also increased from 59 to 94 occurrences.

The rate of common robbery, on the other hand, has decreased from 179 to 150. Burglary at residential premises have decreased as well with

breaks-ins this year numbering 917 as opposed to 976 at the end of April last year.

Despite this relative drop in break-ins in residential suburbs, Grahamstown is one of the highest contributors to the incidence of residential burglaries in the province, rivalled only by the areas of Kabega Park and Walmer in Port Elizabeth.Particularly worrying is the fact that, while the number of robberies has decreased, the incidences of these robberies being heavily aggravated to a point that it becomes viewed as a serious crime has increased from two occurrences to 26 in the past year. Globally, South Africa is ranked fourth in the highest incidence of robbery per Capita and while the Eastern Cape doesn't feature prominently as a province in the frequency of robbery, Grahamstown represents a hot-spot in the country when it comes to this specific category of crime. The statistics released by the SAPS are by no means a true reflection of crime in Grahamstown or the country for that matter, with many incidences such as theft and petty crime not reported to the police or not recorded correctly. The statistics do however point to the frequency of specific crimes in the area and might be useful in explaining how residents in the area are affected by the psyche of crime.

What do you do if you are a Victim of crime & have nowhere to go

Work with the SAPS as well as the existing community forum by letting them know that you would like to set up a neighbourhood watch for your immediate area.

These agencies are critical to a neighbourhood's credibility and are the source of necessary information and training.

Make use of the internet and email in getting information to fellow residents regarding the neighbourhood.

Hold regular meetings to help residents get to know each other and to decide upon necessary and appropriate programmes, strategies and activities.

Work with the community forum. They may be able to provide an existing infrastructure you can use on a smaller scale.

Sponsor a crime prevention initiative at a public place of gathering to raise awareness about the subject and recruit members to support the cause.

Translate crime prevention materials into different languages spoken within the community. If necessary, have a translator at meetings.

Consider linking with a larger existing organisation, such as the community forum. They may be able to provide an existing infrastructure you can use on a smaller scale.

Gather the facts about crime in your neighborhood. Check police reports, conduct victimisation surveys, and learn residents' perceptions about crimes.

Often, residents' opinions are not supported by facts, and accurate information can reduce the fear of crime. Sponsor cleanups, encourage residents to

Physical conditions like abandoned cars or overgrown vacant lots contribute to crime. Their duty is to ask neighbors to be alert, observant,

beautify the area, and ask them to turn on outdoor lights at night.

Work with small businesses to find out if they have positions available and relay this information to any who might be interested, clean up littered streets, report broken streetlights and create jobs for young people.

Start a block parent program to help children cope with emergencies while walking to and from school or playing in the area. Emphasise that neighbourhood groups are not vigilantes and should not assume the role of the police. Their duty is to ask neighbors to be alert, observant, and caring—and to report suspicious activity or crimes immediately to the police.

Stories by Aslam Seedat. For more articles visit our blog or website