

# MISSING THE MARK

A Study of the Portrayal of Crime by the Print Media  
in particular Cairns Suburbs

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*"Young people are not the problem, but they are part of the solution".*

## PREFACE

Community fears about crime are of great concern. This is particularly the case for those who feel vulnerable such as the elderly. When these fears are unnecessarily heightened on the basis of information which is flawed these fears create anxiety which significantly erodes communal solidarity which impacts on the quality of life for all citizens.

In our society, we have become increasingly dependent upon the media to provide information about crime. More often than not the portrayal of crime in the media is uncharacteristic with an overrepresentation of bizarre and unusual crime images. This is a problem throughout Australia. This Report examines the way that such images appear to have influenced people's attitudes in particular Cairns suburbs and proposes strategies in those places to reduce fear and increase community connectedness.

It is no surprise that leaders in Local Government, the voluntary and business sectors are prepared to work with the police and other law enforcement agencies to recreate safer communities.

ACRO has worked closely with such leaders in the Cairns region and has been proud to consult with them in the implementation of creative community safety initiatives. The publication of **The Crime of Fear** in 1994 provided the blueprint for change in a way that no other document has at a Local Government level in the country.

This could only be achieved with the dedication and sense of community spirit of such people as Ton Pyne, his fellow councillors, Roly Dargusch and the Queensland Police Service in the region who have refused to accept that nothing could be done. They went forward, and took the community with them, in spite of criticism from others whose agenda of crime fear promotion was questionable and counterproductive.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABOUT ACRO

ACRO Australian Community Safety and Research Organisation was established in 1962, is a charitable not-for-profit association incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act and registered as an Australian Registrable Body with the Australian Securities Commission.

ACRO accepts that crime is a major social problem which the criminal justice system cannot tackle alone. Crime and fear of crime reduce the quality of life for everybody in our communities, with massive human and financial costs. At the same time there is a growing awareness that as well as preventing crime, we have to do more to prevent criminal behaviour through families, schools and communities to change public attitudes.

Working throughout Queensland and in other parts of the country, ACRO's mandate is to:

- provide consultancy and developmental services to government and other providers of public services;
- develop new and innovative approaches to community safety and crime

prevention;

- promote social crime prevention through projects, publications, conferences and campaigns;
- provide direct service delivery that will reduce the stress caused by criminal acts and which augment government policy.

### **This Report Talks About Crime**

When discussing crime there are three sources of information that are important to access:

The Police  
The Media  
The People

This Report will review all three sources in an investigation of:

Community Concerns about Crime  
Media Reporting of Crime  
Prevention of Crime

This Report will discuss what the media say, what the police report and how the people in Manoora, Mooroolbool, and Manunda feel about crime.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

*If you aim at a target with a blindfold on, not only are you likely to miss the mark but you may also injure innocent people on the ridges, So too, it is with information about crime. If you have a view about the causes of crime based upon flawed information, you become like that blindfolded person, in that if you choose to use inaccurate material as a weapon and lunge at a target, you will cause harm.*

This Report is based upon the principle that information about crime should be accurate and that it can be used in a positive manner to prevent crime rather than fuel anxiety and fear.

The impetus for this Study came with the publication of a number of articles in The Cairns Post from late January 1995 to early February 1995. Headlines such as "Gang Terror in the Suburbs", "City Ghettos behind Strife", and an editorial headed "Suburban Fears Rooted in Reality" spoke of some 30 gangs representing "more than 400 youths from 12 to 30" "terrorising the neighbourhoods of Mooroolbool, Manoora and Manunda" "stalking and pack-raping women and children and breaking into and vandalising people's homes and cars and savagely assaulting innocent people in their own homes". When the region's Assistant Police Commissioner and others attempted to refute these claims, the print media responded through its editorial by stating that "by trying to sweep the matter under the carpet - simply so that police do not appear as if they have lost control of the situation - Mr. Dargusch (the Assistant Police Commissioner) is doing a great disservice by the people he has sworn to protect". This is a very serious allegation, but then so are the assertions put forward by the Press about alleged gang activity in the Suburbs of Cairns - notably involving youth. Young people are, it seems, large and exploitable targets.

In an attempt to present a more rational position ACRO undertook a Survey of a sample of the population of Mooroolbool, Manoora and Manunda to determine their feelings about crime. The researchers also reviewed the literature on the issue of media reporting on crime; accessed anecdotal information on the crime picture in those three suburbs reviewed programs of best practice for youth and went on patrol with the police one Friday night after midnight. As a consequence of this activity the writers present a series of recommendations of crime prevention rather than fear development for consideration by the people of the affected neighbourhoods and the City Council.

In one of its editorials, the Cairns Post asserts that "the media did not create this issue of youth gangs - or groups of young people, or however else you might like to describe them - causing fear in the suburbs" (28.01.95). Maybe not, but it would seem that, on the basis of the Research undertaken, that the style of reporting of same has been contributory to the escalation of fear in the community. It is the opinion of ACRO that the sensationalised representation of information such as that demonstrated in the Cairns press in recent times is not helpful to a reasoned debate on issues that are of public significance. As Ezatt-Fattah noted " The media's quasi obsession with crime, its sensationalisation and overdramatisation of crime news, though understandable, is disturbing. Mundane, average or typical crimes do not make headlines and are not, by any account, big news. What makes the news are the atypical, the abnormal and the extraordinary. The more unusual the crime, the more newsworthy it is. The selection, the filtering and the dramatisation mean that the public is presented with an uncharacteristic and unrepresentative image of crime" (Fattah, E. in Begg, C. [ed], p.23). Whilst the media is a business that needs to implement strategies to successfully market its product, it also has a responsibility to the community to fairly represent the truth.

On the matter of the generalised portrayal of Cairns youth as "ruthless" (Cairns Post, 21.01.95, p.3), this characterisation is doing a great disservice to a sector of citizens who are powerless to respond. There are young people who are involved in other than nuisance crime and they need to be isolated and dealt with - but there is by far a larger number who are, and will become, responsible citizens capable of decision-making and leadership. As remarked at a Conference in Brisbane in 1993, "Youth are not the problem,

but they are part of the solution" (ACPC Conference, 1993). Merely because of their conspicuousness in groups within our community, they must not be perceived as threats - nor should they be promoted as such by the media. A Social Action Strategy is proposed for the youth of Mooroolbool, Manoora and Manunda that encourages participatory management for the young is isolating issues of concern to them; finding solutions and, with the support of relevant adults, implement a plan of action. ACRO is already undertaking with the Mulgrave Community Safety Consultative Committee a similar process for young people in various High Schools in the Cairns region called Youth Action Panels. It is important nonetheless not to discount those of high school age who are not regularly attending formal schooling. It is of equal importance that adults work in partnership with these young people to resolve their difficulties within the community.

*If you take the blindfold off and apply skills, knowledge and principles of best practice, then you will not miss the mark and you will surely make an important difference. If you keep the blindfold on, then you will nearly always miss the mark and instil extraordinary fear in all those standing nearby as you lunge carelessly in the dark.*

## 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The findings of the present research tend to support the contention that the media reporting of crime influences public perceptions of crime. The extent to which the media has influenced the attitudes of those respondents involved in this research cannot be stated definitely, however, the responses by residents surveyed in the suburbs of Manoora, Mooroolool and Manunda do appear to support the view.

The media portrayal of crime reviewed in this research was quite clearly focused on the alleged existence of a 'youth crime' problem in specific Cairns suburbs, a problem that demands immediate attention if proven to be the case, a possibility that is significantly discounted in the context of police information, anecdotal information and previous research (CJC).

Although respondents felt crime in their suburb had generally not increased at an alarming rate and that crime in their suburb had not increased more than crime in the CBD (both accurate judgements) they also reported that they had a considerable fear of crime and that they were most concerned about youth crime.

When these two contrasting patterns of responding are compared it is a reasonable conclusion that the recent media reporting of crime in these suburbs has indeed influenced residents attitude about crime and a resultant effect may be an increase in the fear of crime and an increase in the concern about youth crime.

Respondents were also asked to put forward their own recommendations in terms of what can be done to prevent crime. Some of these recommendations were unexpected in view of past research but serve to emphasise the importance of community consultation and practical participation in any efforts to combat crime. Punitive and reactive solutions to crime such as imprisonment are costly to the entire community and ultimately ineffective. It is time now to look for alternatives to crime prevention. The recommendations proposed are action oriented, low cost (other than for those in relation to town planning issues) and will be achievable with the support of the local community.

The residents of Manoora, Mooroolool, and Manunda have, through their participation in this research, told you what they want and what they feel will be effective in combating crime in their local community. All recommendations that have occurred as a result of this community consultation should continue the process of engaging the local community in the resolution to locally identified problems.

### 3 THE MEDIA

Media 'raises crime fears'

<b>The Headlines</b>	
Gang Terror In The Suburbs	23.01.95
Victim Slams Police	25.01.95
City 'Ghettos' Behind Strife	01.02.95
Family Lives With Break-In Threat	08.02.95
City Mums Who Live In Fear	10.02.95
<b>The Editorial</b>	
Suburban Fears Rooted In Reality	28.01.95
<b>Letters To The Editor</b>	
Law Protects Young Criminals, Not Police	02.02.95
Gangs of Cairns	02.02.95

The media has become a powerful source of information particularly in the latter half of this century. This power brings with it significant responsibilities and obligations in the dissemination of balanced and reliable material.

The media is not only a powerful source of information. It also influences the judgements that people make regarding the 'truth' of a situation and the relative importance of an issue.

It is not yet widely accepted that the media influences collective or individual perceptions, our perceptions, on social issues. Yet research does indicate that this is indeed the case. The media is a vehicle, rather than a creator, of information and as such great care is required in editorial discretion on issues of significant public concern.

Recognition of the media's influence on public attitudes has been demonstrated both within the academic arena as well as elsewhere. In 1989 a Home Office (UK) Standing Committee Conference reported that the media portrayal of crime plays a central role in the public impression about crime. Last and Jackson (1989) found that the majority of participants in their research attribute their knowledge of crime to information gained from the mass media. Other researchers have established that people who read newspapers with a high focus on crime generally feel significantly less safe across a range of situations than others who read papers classified as less sensational (Williams & Dickinson, 1993). In a Study by Begg & Boorman (1994) it was noted that student respondents identified "hit and runs" as being one of the most common crimes in Mulgrave. This trend followed the publication of newspaper articles reporting attempts to run down students outside Cairns schools. In the absence of substantiating information from the police to confirm this belief (i.e., that "hit and runs" are one of the most common crimes in Mulgrave), Begg & Boorman conclude that the perception by students can reasonably be explained by the influence of newspaper articles. The Criminal Justice Commission (1994) concluded from its study in Toowoomba that fear of crime has a potential to increase when fuelled by the media and other influences.

It can be sensibly argued that the print media in Cairns (The Cairns Post) holds a relative monopoly on local tabloid reporting for the region. There are no other daily papers that can claim the local readership of the Cairns Post and as such it can be reasonably assumed that in terms of print media this paper may influence Cairns residents in the





public perception that youth crime is a major problem, and to what degree do the media contribute to this perception? In an effort to determine the most appropriate response to this question survey research was conducted in the suburbs targeted by recent media reports of 'youth gangs' involved in juvenile crime.

If the public is indeed influenced by the media, as research indicates, then one would expect that the residents of these suburbs would report high levels of concern about crime and would feel that their fear of crime is most accurately focused on youth, as they are portrayed as the most significant perpetrators of crime.

## **THE SURVEY**

### **Who**

One hundred residents chosen at random from the Suburbs of Manoora, Moorooool and Manunda

### **What**

Residents were asked questions regarding their attitudes towards crime, safety and the media. Certain demographic information about respondents was also obtained

### **When**

The Surveys were completed during the week commencing 20 February 1995

### **Why**

Because these suburbs in particular had been referenced by the print media as subject to "gang terror"

## 5 THE PEOPLE

One hundred residents of Manoora, Mooroolool and Manunda were surveyed regarding their attitudes toward crime, safety and the media. Streets to be surveyed were selected through a systematically random process and residents were selected through the same process.

Table 1 provides a demographic breakdown of the residents who responded to the survey and a corresponding breakdown of Cairns population demographics collected in the 1991 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1993).

	Current Survey	ABS Statistics
<b>AGE</b>		
Under 20 years	13%	16.1%
21-40 years	44%	34.9%
41-60 years	30%	21.4%
over 60 years	13%	15.4%
<b>GENDER</b>		
Male	46%	49.8%
Female	54%	50.2%
<b>ABORIGINALITY</b>		
Aboriginal Australian	7.1%	3.4%
Torres Strait Island	23.2%	2.9%
Other	76.6%	86.9%

**TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS COMPARED TO ABS CENSUS DEMOGRAPHICS**

An examination of Table 1 shows that the sample selected by systematic randomisation yielded demographic characteristics reasonable similar to that reported by the ABS 1991 census. An apparent over representation of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island individuals is possibly explained by the information that the targeted suburbs include a substantial proportion of public housing that has an estimated population of 40% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island occupants.

It can be concluded that the 100 survey respondents constitute of an accurate representation of residents in these suburbs.

When asked about crime in their area, 38.2% of respondents reported that they were very concerned, while only 9% reported that they were not at all concerned about crime in their area.

When asked had crime increased in their area since they first moved there, 34.4% of respondents felt that crime had increased moderately to greatly, while 53.2% of respondents felt that crime had increased not at all or only slightly since they had first moved there.

When asked if they felt that crime had increased more in their suburb than in the CBD, 75.9% of subjects responded that NO they did not feel that crime had increased more in their suburb than in the CBD.

The responses to these questions indicate that while respondents tended to feel that crime had not particularly increased in their suburb (and certainly not more than in the CBD) they still felt considerable concern about crime in their suburb. Is it reasonable for people to be so concerned about crime in their suburb when they also feel that crime is not an overwhelming problem in their suburb?

Responses to these questions also indicate that the fear of crime as represented by 'concern' must be fuelled by a source other than the individuals personal perceptions of crime in their suburb. Given the recent media focus on crime in these suburbs it may be that a resultant effect has been an increase in the 'fear of crime' for residents in these suburbs.

### **Perpetrators of Crime**

When asked who they felt committed the most crime, youth or adults, 81.1% of respondents felt that youth committed the most crime.

When asked what types of crimes they were most concerned about, respondents overwhelmingly selected crimes perpetrated by youth: 46.9% of respondents selected youth perpetrated offences against property and 46.9% of respondents selected youth perpetrated offences against people. 11.2% of respondents selected adult perpetrated offences against property, and 28.6% of respondents selected adult perpetrated offences against people.

**NB.** Percentages for this question do not equal 100% because many respondents selected more than one response.

When asked what factors they felt contributed to an increasing crime rate, 83.7% of subjects felt that a lack of parental supervision contributed to an increase in crime. Lack of parental supervision was selected as a contributing factor more than any other of the seven provided factors, including unemployment and poverty.

**The responses given to these three separate questions show a strong pattern of respondents being most concerned about youth crime. Respondents felt that youth committed more crime than adults, they were most concerned about crimes perpetrated by youth, and also felt that a lack of parental supervision was the strongest contributing factor to an increase in crime.**

**These findings are problematic in that they indicate a pattern of attitudes across questions and across respondents that youth crime is a problem of serious concern. Although all crime is a concern, evidence does not support the contention that youth crime is as much of a problem as these respondents feel that it is.**

**Responses to these questions indicate that the perception of residents in the suburbs of Manoora, Moorooool and Manunda is that youth crime is of a major concern and indeed that youth are the major perpetrators of crime - a perception that is clearly not based on fact<sup>1</sup>. The attitude toward youth crime as demonstrated by the responses of residents may have been influenced by the media reports of crime in their suburbs, reports that clearly targeted the youth of these suburbs.**

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<sup>1</sup>Through anecdotal information provided to surveyors in relation to respondents experiences with crime in the area, it was noted that a significant number stated that there was a crime problem in their suburb. However when asked about any specific incidents or where specifically these crimes were occurring, all respondents (except one who said she had been the victim of a property related crime) said that these were not in their house or street, but that were "over there" pointing off into some abstract direction. This response was given by people surveyed from all areas including those streets named as the "hot spots" by some residents. Clearly the perception is of a crime problem, however given that nearly all respondents failed to nominate their own area as problematic, one is left wondering where exactly the "problem" exists. This lends weight to the contention that other influences are at work in the shaping of opinion about crime in these areas.

## Media Reporting of Crime

When asked who they felt most accurately reported about crime in the Cairns region, the print media or the electronic media, 49% of respondents felt that neither accurately reported crime. Of the remaining 51%, 29.2% felt that the electronic media - television and radio - reported most accurately, while 19.8% felt that the print media - newspapers - reported most accurately about crime.

When asked about the accuracy of recent newspaper articles regarding crime in their and nearby suburbs, 42.6% of respondents felt that the articles were not at all or only slightly accurate, while 35.9% of respondents felt that the articles were moderately to very accurate.

When asked if they felt the articles had influenced their level of concern about crime in their suburbs, 47.9% felt that the articles had influenced them not at all or only slightly, while 36.1% of respondents felt their level of concern had been moderately to greatly influenced by the articles.

**The three questions regarding the media reporting of crime yielded mixed findings. A large proportion of respondents felt that neither the electronic media nor the print media accurately reports about crime in the Cairns region. Anecdotal information in relation to this question indicates that many respondents felt that the media inappropriately sensationalises crime and sometimes bases reports on hearsay rather than fact. Of the remaining 51%, more respondents selected the electronic media as more accurate than the print media. Anecdotal reports indicate that the increased confidence in the electronic media (television) was because respondents felt they could better determine accuracy from an overtly visual medium rather than a written report.**

While only 19.8% of respondents felt that the print media accurately reports about crime in the region, 35.9% of respondents felt that the recent articles were moderately to very accurate. Despite an apparent mistrust of the reporting of crime by the print media these respondents still felt that the recent articles were mostly accurate. These findings while a little confusing indicate that the print media, despite being doubted in accuracy of reporting, is still a potent source of information in the shaping of community perceptions.

36.1% of respondents felt that the articles had moderately to greatly influenced their level of concern about crime in their area. When the patterns of responses to previous questions is considered, then it is reasonable to propose that the percentage of respondents influenced was actually higher than this. Responses to questions show a pattern of a considerable fear of crime, a targeting of youth as the major perpetrators of crime, and the lack of parental supervision as the most important factor for an increase in crime. This pattern of responding indicates that residents have responded to the focus of recent articles of youth crime being a major problem in their suburb.

## Crime Prevention

Respondents were asked what they felt should and could be done to reduce the crime they were most concerned about. As respondents indicated that they were most concerned about youth crime responses to this question also tended to be focused on youth. As responses to these questions were open ended (supplied entirely by respondents) they were then assessed by the researchers and placed in categories, as shown below. A number of respondents did not complete this question, a common occurrence in the use of open ended questions.

### 1. Activities for Youth

22 respondents felt that many of the crimes and socially inappropriate behaviours displayed by youth were due to the 'boredom' factor. Whilst respondents tended to feel that in spite of youth focused activities and services being available in the community, they were not being utilised to

their best capacity and that steps should be taken to encourage their full and proper usage by youth in the region.

## **2. Community Involvement**

24 respondents felt that a lack of community involvement was a significant factor to the occurrence of crime, particularly youth crime. Respondents referred to such factors of 'caring about one another', 'a sense of belonging to the community', and 'more involvement between youth and adults' were important matters in reducing youth crime.

Adult respondents tended to report that they felt alienated from youth and were confident that more positive relations between youth and adults in the community was a key factor in the reduction of youth crime and socially inappropriate behaviour. This importance of a sense of belonging to community as expressed by respondents is highlighted by the finding that 49% of respondents felt that a lack of community spirit contributed to an increase in crime.

## **3. Parental Role**

27 respondents reported that parents and the care given to youth was an important issue that needed to be addressed in any effort to prevent crime. It may be that parents are in need of more support than is currently available (or available but not utilised) in the care of the youth of our community. This concern with the parental role is emphasised by the finding that 83.7% of respondents felt that a lack of parental supervision was a contributing factor in an increase in crime.

## **4. Community Workers**

11 respondents felt that youth workers participating directly in their local community was an important factor to crime prevention. Although respondents tended to state that a lack of 'youth welfare orientated' services was not the problem, they felt that crime prevention would be more effective if the workers had a direct involvement in the youth's community rather than predominantly operating from a city office. In other words, bring Mohammed to the mountain rather than the mountain to Mohammed.

## **5. Police Presence**

11 respondents felt that a more visible police presence was an important factor in the reduction of crime. These responses tended to fall into two anticipated effects in terms of a more visible police presence. Firstly, some respondents tended to report that a more visible police presence would serve as a deterrent of youth crime. Secondly, respondents felt that a more visible police presence would foster more positive relations between youth and police. One respondent used the term 'friends not enemies' to express her opinion.

## **6. Environmental Safety**

10 respondents reported that increased lighting in the area would help in the reduction of crime in that the opportunity for crime would be significantly reduced if the streets were more adequately lit.

## 6 THE YOUNG PEOPLE

As the principle focus of concern for adults both in the areas surveyed and through comments published in the print media was youth, some analysis of what works to reduce criminal activity by young people would seem appropriate.

Much of the crime commissioned by young people is nonviolent, opportunistic and is often caused by boredom and lack of access to recreational and social activities, a matter reported consistently in major research throughout the world. Frank Warburton has reported that as much as 90% of juvenile boys (10-16 year olds) commit a delinquent act at some time, whilst only a small percentage of these will be involved in serious criminal activity (Warburton, 1991). Some researchers have noted that only 6-8% of young people will become persistent offenders (Waller, 1992). Most jurisdictions concede that the vast majority of young people will grow out of this behaviour of their own accord. Indeed official intervention may increase the tendency for further criminal behaviour (Home Office, London, 1983).

Commonplace crime can, nonetheless, seriously reduce the quality of life for other community members and certainly contributes to the level of fear which people experience, a matter confirmed by the present research. The expressed desire by the respondents in suburbs surveyed to build a greater sense of community and become involved in processes that engage young people to achieve this goal is extremely encouraging.

### WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE THINK

Surveys conducted overseas and locally confirm that boredom and a lack of participation in mainstream community activity exacerbate the juvenile crime issue. An analysis of survey results suggest that:

Most young people perceived themselves as potential victims rather than potential offenders;

Major concerns expressed centred upon physical safety and wellbeing;

The most promising crime prevention target is likely to be potential occasional offenders who are capable of being influenced;

Generally young people believe that services are imposed upon them rather than viewing themselves as customers of the services;

The recurring challenge appears to be to find the ways to involve young people

in the design and execution of community safety strategies, and they do wish to be involved.

**POLICIES DEVELOPED THAT HAVE AS A PRINCIPLE COMPONENT THE REDUCTION OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR PARTICULARLY AMONGST YOUTH SHOULD:**

Incorporate the range of difficulties confronting young people which will include the provision of educational, training, recreational and employment opportunities with a level of support that may be otherwise absent from their lives. Long term as opposed to ad hoc projects which are co-ordinated and resourced should be given the highest priority.

Recognise that it is not only the attitudes of young people that need to change. Given the opportunity and the forum together with respect, young people have an enormous amount to contribute.

Accept that change is not the sole responsibility of young people - the police, youth services and others may need to modify their approach and/or the way in which they provide services.

Accept that young people have ownership of the process for program design and implementation.

**A REALISTIC APPROACH TO JUVENILE CRIME ISSUES MUST BE TO ADDRESS THE MATTER IN THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE PROBLEM EXISTS AND MUST BE MANAGED BY THE CLASS FOR WHOM THE PROBLEM EXISTS.**

It is important to note that any support given by adults to young people not become directive nor patronising. The ability for young people to isolate issues of concern to them, to propose "solutions" and to follow through with implementation strategies should not be underestimated. The significant role of adult members of the community is in the provision of connectedness, resources and encouragement. A principle problem with the YACCA Program is that the agendas for a number of such projects have been taken over by adult interests which have not necessarily been connected with those of younger people.

## **YOUTH INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY**

The most successful strategy that engages young people in crime prevention work is one in which they actively participate. It is imperative that young people retain ownership of this process at all stages and are not directed by adults or adult controlled organisations. This strategy consists of the following elements:

### **CONTACT**

As many of the affected group needs to be contacted with trust developed between them and those youth workers or facilitators involved in this initial stage.

### **CONSULTATION**

Issues of concern for young people are determined on the basis of a survey process which should provide information on young people's perception of crime and victimisation, their opinions about their Suburb and the services provided, their willingness to become involved in any future activity and so forth.

### **ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

"Solutions" to the problems isolated are considered. With the assistance of significant others (eg. Police, Mayor, Business and Community activists) young people will be involved in the development of a plan of action, establish goals and implement strategies.

The success of the alternative youth controlled and directed strategy proposed here can be measured against crime statistics for those regions where a similar process has been trialed in the United Kingdom. In the case of the Junior Youth Project - Milton-Keynes, a significant reduction in crime activity has been registered comparing a pre-program set of data with post-program implementation (eg. all auto crime [-18%]; shop theft [-25%]; criminal damage [-7%]; burglary [-36%]; all crime [-25%]) (Crime Concern, 1990, p.12).

In the case of the Top End Youth Action Group - Paisley, the rates of reduction in crime activity is highly significant (1988 police figures compared with 1985 police statistics) (Vandalism/Malicious Damage [-22%]; Petty Assault [-32%]; Reckless/Wilful fire-raising [55%]; Supply/Possession of Drugs [-100%]; total Selected Crimes [-30%]; All Crimes [-5%]) (ibid. p.14).

## **THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION STRATEGY**

1. Discussing problems with young people (consultation)
2. Enabling them to identify problems
3. Facilitation (offering options and helping to find solutions)
4. Assisting them to bring about change

In essence these results have been achieved by adherence to basic principles of best practice;

1. **Bring together all those involved in an area**
2. **Consult with and involve young people from the beginning**
3. **Systematically analyse the issues and problems for the area**
4. **Design "local" solutions to deal with "local" problems**
5. **Base action upon facts and not fears as well as upon those things that we know will work**
6. **Above all, don't just respond to crises - put some energy into tackling causes (Crime Concern).**

The first step in creating a meaningful strategy that seeks to reduce offending behaviour by young people is to undertake a youth crime audit. This process has not yet been completed for the Suburbs of Mooroolbool, Manunda and Manooora simply because an important part of the process should, through necessity, be done by young people themselves. The audit will bring together facts and opinions in a way which will crystallise issues and provide the motivation for a range of constituents within the Suburbs (both individuals and organisations) to take collective action. In considering an audit, three pieces of information are required: statistics on crime, opinions of the community and its agencies and; the opinions of young people.

It is the third of these which is the most important, as it acts as a vehicle to bring together young people and adults with a common purpose - revitalise "community spirit" which may have been eroded through suspicion of each group against the other (adults against young people and young people against adults).

Part of the problem for young people in the Suburbs of Mooroolbool, Manunda and Manooora may be their lack of connection with the community. This would not be a situation that is peculiar to these Suburbs. As the "youth crime problem" throughout Australia generalises to a youth problem as a result of their conspicuousness in groups and their subcultural differences, there has developed a polarisation between the young and adult population - a "them and us" mentality.

In the present research we were told by the vast majority of respondents that parental supervision was lacking for young people and that this was, in their opinion, an important issue to be considered to prevent crime. This may be the case, however, what options are available to provide adequate supervision for the supporting parent who may have to work to make ends meet? Should this issue become a collective responsibility? Without sufficient information we can merely speculate.

Let young people tell you what you need to know and then assist them to arrive at informed decisions, based upon reliable information and access to reasonable services. At the same time use their skills, their motivation and their desire to "belong" to reduce opportunistic crime and fear in the community. ACRO is an organisation that will assist in the facilitation of such processes.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are derived from several sources:

- the formal data provided by responses by residents to survey questions
  - anecdotal information gained by the researchers during the survey process
  - observations made by researchers during their progress through the suburbs of Manoora, Mooroolooloo, and Manunda while conducting surveys.
1. An assessment be carried out of facilities available to youth within these suburbs (and their accessibility) in terms of their usage by the youth of Manoora, Mooroolooloo and Manunda.
  2. A commitment made by relevant bodies that consultation will be undertaken with the local community, particularly local youth, to examine possible changes to the Moody Creek reserve to render it:
    - more accessible and welcome to all residents of this area
    - as a meeting place for youth that fosters positive relations between all residents of the local area

Basic amenities such as lighting, seating, shading, playground equipment, upgrading of the basketball court and so forth should be considered, with planning and construction of same engaging end users of the area (i.e. youth).

3. Facilities for young people and the broader local community incorporate young people on management committees with a commitment by adult participants on committees to actively consult with youth on their role in the community. Youth specific facilities should be solely managed by young people.
4. Community and all other relevant workers currently employed who have contact with young people from these suburbs make efforts to participate directly in the community and the activities of its youth.
5. Relevant bodies should actively consult with members of the local community on environmental and town planning aspects with an aim to “open up” areas and thus reduce the potentiality for the commissioning of opportunistic crime.
6. Examine the possible alternatives that will encourage and foster more positive relations between police, older residents and young people in the local community.
7. Given the difficulties for young people in the region to access entertainment venues by virtue of a lack of transport options, it is recommended that either late night transport be considered by the Council, or that Cairns Community organisations with access to transport (minibus/shuttle) make available a service, in conjunction with local residents and youth (e.g. to enable young people to attend PCYC functions).
8. It would seem that given the concern about lack of parental supervision for young people, that alternative supervisory activity should be considered. It is recommended that local schools negotiate with community members to enable a voluntary post school hours operation to commence in the region. Alternatively and linked to a previous recommendation to redesign the Moody Reserve, it is recommended that structured out of school hours activity for young people be considered at this location. It is the belief of the researchers that there will be no shortage of community-spirited adults to assist in this proposed venture.

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