

NSW POLICE CITIZENS YOUTH CLUBS - WORKING WITH SCHOOLS TO ADDRESS TRUANCY PROBLEMS

As part of their youth crime prevention initiatives, Police Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYCs) have been providing schools with real alternatives to deal with students who have chronic behavioural problems and poor school attendance.

One approach has been to establish alternative schools in the Club premises of the PCYCs. There are currently three such schemes operating in NSW at Nowra and Wollongong on the South Coast, and at Bathurst in the Central West of the State.

PARK ROAD UNIT

The "Park Road Unit" commenced operation at the Shoalhaven PCYC at Nowra at the beginning of the 2nd school term in 1991. The program was designed for high school students who were long-term truants. Nearly all the students enrolled had not attended school for about 12 months, and under the age of 15 years.

The students who have been involved with the program suffer from a range of problems including separation anxiety, alcoholism, depression and various other conditions that affects their ability to cope in a normal school environment.

The program includes education, socialisation, recreational and vocational components and operates 3 days a week catering for a maximum of 10 students. The Unit is staffed by a specialist teacher provided by the Department of School Education and the students are also enrolled in a distance education program for their curriculum.

On the days that the Unit does not operate students work from home with their distance education material.

A specialised classroom was established in the club and in addition the club's recreational, transport and other facilities have been made available for the benefit of the program and the students. Police Officers and other staff attached to the club assist in the organisation and supervision of various activities and outings in addition to providing other support functions.

The local Home School Liaison Officer from the Department of School Education, Bill Dicker, who was instrumental in establishing the Unit maintains a close

working relationship with the program, the students and their families.

In October last year the Department of School Education conducted an evaluation of the scheme assessing the program in relation to participants attendance, academic achievement, social & communication skills, self esteem, drug & alcohol use, and criminal activity. Overall the evaluation was most positive recommending among other things that the Department look at extending the operation of the program.

This year four students attending the program are studying for the Higher School Certificate, a result which has been far beyond the expectations of education authorities, the students parents and indeed the students themselves.

For more information contact the Co-ordinator of the Shoalhaven PCYC, Sergeant Peter Sutton, on (044) 21 8297.

ALTERNATIVE TRANSITION PROGRAM

Another successful joint alternative schooling program based at Bathurst, is the "Alternative Transition Program" which has been operating since the 4th term in 1991. The program is a joint initiative between the Bathurst PCYC and the Department of School Education's Home School Liaison Program.

This program was designed to provide an alternative schooling environment to facilitate the re-entry of students into school after long term non-attendance, suspensions or involvement in crime.

It caters for students under 15 years of age and is designed to be a transition period preparing the student for re-entry into the school or a "time-out" preventative measure of a fixed duration.

The program aims to benefit the students by improving:

- numeracy and literacy skills and re-orientation towards continuing schooling, hopefully to at least the school certificate,
- self esteem and
- employment prospects.

A specialist teacher is employed to cover academic and personal development skills. In addition the students are involved in a range of activities including recreation, crime prevention education, community work and living skills. On occasions the group are also taken on excursions.

The program currently operates 3 days a week catering for groups of between 6 and 10 with groups usually staying in the program for one term. The majority of students who have been involved in the program have returned to school and some have gone on to TAFE courses.

The success of the scheme at Bathurst has lead to the program being established in other locations in the Western Region at Orange and Wellington.

For more information contact the Bathurst PCYC on (063) 31 2191.

NORTHGONG SPECIAL SUPPORT UNIT

The Northgong Unit commenced operation with students at the beginning of this year.

The Unit caters for students with chronic behavioural problems who have exhausted all other avenues for rehabilitation. The program aims to provide another option for these students, to help them reach the legal leaving age by engaging them in a specialised program proving skills in need.

Participants attend the program 2 days a week and are expected to attend school the other 3 days to participate in a "negotiated" curriculum. At the unit the students are involved in a varied program covering literacy and numeracy skills, counselling, living skills, job search skills, work experience, excursions, leisure skills and other activities to develop self esteem.

Again a specialist educator co-ordinates the program with the support of police officers from the club.

Although in its infancy the program has been achieving tremendous results from the students in terms of their attendance at the Unit, numeracy and literacy development, behaviour and in a couple of cases, placement into further education and employment.

For more information contact the Co-ordinator of the Wollongong PCYC, Senior Constable Tony Stackhouse, on (042) 29 4418.

Important aspects relating to the success of these programs has been the provision of a non-threatening and non-

authoritarian environment for the students to work in, the specialised attention the students are able to receive which is not available in the mainstream school system, and the support and involvement of PCYC police officers in the program to reduce negative attitudes these students may have against authority figures.

Apart from the schooling aspect of these schemes PCYCs also provide students with venues and activities to develop interests and a sense of belonging.

The program also has the added benefits of providing opportunities for these young people to develop skills and self esteem and diverting them from a delinquent lifestyle.

Police Citizens Youth Clubs and the Department of School Education are currently looking at the development of such schemes in other high need areas.

YOUTH CHALLENGE PROGRAM

The Campbelltown Police Citizen Youth Club in conjunction with Home School Liaison Officers from the Department of School Education developed a joint initiative in 1992 to deal with 'hard-core' truants and students with behavioural problems.

The 'Youth Challenge' program focuses on outdoor educational activities and aims to develop self esteem and a range of personal skills through challenging outdoor activities.

As part of progressing through the course it is also hoped that students will develop relationships with teachers involved, improve school behaviour and improve school attendance.

The program involves a series of 'challenge' activities which are usually conducted once a week. These activities include abseiling, caving, ropes courses, hiking, canoeing, orienteering, map reading, first aid, bush rescue/first aid, bushcraft, sailing and camping.

The pilot program, held in the last school term of 1992, involved a group of 12 male students from South Redfern High School, Minto, selected by Home School Liaison officers and teachers of the school. Comments about these students included "they're the worst group of year 8 boys we've seen", "these boys are heading for suspension", etc. The school considered this group extremely difficult to effect any change with. Some of the boys had already been involved with juvenile crime.



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HAVE A GO!
TAB

Instructors for the program were the Home School Liaison Officer (Teacher), a police officer from the Campbelltown PCYC, Constable 1st Class Steve Alchin, and a paid outdoor educator. The program involved an orientation session and six full days of activities (1 day per week).

In addition to the activity sessions the Home School Liaison Officer, outdoor educator and Police Constable made home visits, and visits to students and teachers whilst at school to discuss progress, and address any family problems or concerns. Parents were also encouraged to make contact.

The program progressed along well for all concerned with positive feedback from students, their parents, the instructors, schools and the Home School Liaison Officer being received.

Overall, the school felt that there had been visible improvements in attendance, behaviour, attitude and co-operation at school. Considering that this pilot group contained some of the most difficult students at the school under the age of 15, this was considered a good level of achievement by the school.

The Home School Liaison Officer's report indicated that a significant attendance improvement was made in 9 out of the 12 cases. This level of improvement had not been encountered with any other form of intervention previously implemented by school authorities. Some participants have also become regular members of the Campbelltown PCYC.

From the school's and the Home School Liaison Officer's point of view the program should continue in 1993 with the possibility of involving students from other high schools in the area.

More information on the program can be obtained from Constable 1st Class Steve Alchin from Campbelltown PCYC on (02) 603 8229

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