The Australian community is becoming increasingly aware that a growing number of its young people are living in crisis situations brought about by:

- the breakdown of families;
- inability to get work;
- drug and alcohol dependency;
- having to live on the street;
- sexual abuse, including incest; and
- being unloved and unwanted by their families.

The major cause of all the above is the lack of love in the everyday life of young people. It is often taken for granted that our children know that we love them. This is a fallacy. Children must constantly be reassured that they are loved by their parents. Out of love grows trust and compassion which provides the basis for a positive self-image and the strength to survive.

**Youth Insearch Project**

Youth Insearch was established as a result of a number of young people attending a workshop to discuss the needs of youth in Riverstone, New South Wales.

The material needs of young people were discussed, but it was the general consensus of those present that it was the emotional life awareness and coping skills which were the most important needs for these young people.

Those present expressed a desire to participate in discussion groups conducted at residential venues, held in a relaxed, safe and confidential environment. Consequently, the Youth Insearch Program was written up which included such topics as:

- communication;
- self-esteem;
- drugs, alcohol and the adolescent;
- adolescent sexuality;
- peer and social pressures;
- how to say no; and
- parent/adolescent relationships.
A suitable venue was found to conduct this first camp. It was an overwhelming success, and formed the basis of the many camps that followed.

Youth Insearch is a simple concept based on love, caring and trust, for youth of all lifestyles. It does not become involved in controversial, religious and political issues. The aim is to help young people learn the positive values of life and turn away from drugs, crime and despair.

The program works by encouraging participants to deal with reality and take positive steps in life. It offers support by drawing on the resources of those around to help participants reach their goals more easily. For those with no hassles, this is a learning experience and they provide support for those who need it.

The camps have shown that all people like to live in an atmosphere of care and support. Youth Insearch provides this 'world' away from the other world, where youth are inspired to achieve feelings of love, happiness and stability, and apply these in their everyday lives. For this reason the camps are conducted in hostel-type conditions in tranquil, bushland settings.

Camps are designed and run by youth with a group of supportive adults. An atmosphere of caring and support is created by Youth Insearch leaders who can identify and understand the feelings and hardships of participants because of their own experiences.

Youth find stability, learn the good side of themselves and develop a positive self-image. This results in young people finding alternatives to their current lifestyle and taking on a positive direction with regard to drugs and alcohol and education. It also promotes recovery of the family unit.

The special needs of the participants made it necessary to set up a network of support groups. Like the camps, these groups have grown and have been assisting many other young people find stability, develop a positive self-image and sense of worth as well as helping them to continue schooling or obtain employment.

Over the past three years, nearly 4000 young people, from all over Australia, have successfully participated in the program.

The Youth Insearch concept is not designed to be a lifelong commitment, rather a learning experience. We provide help to those in need, however, it is our ultimate aim that they will become self-reliant.

Youth Insearch was featured on a special ABC TV '7.30 Report'. It had a tremendous impact on the nation and thousands of phone enquiries were received along with a flood of letters and donations.

The documentary shown in 1989 in the ABC's Real Life Series—'I Want to Know What Love is', produced a similar reaction. In fact requests have been received from hundreds of localities throughout Australia to set up Youth Insearch. However, lack of funds is the major item hindering future development of the program at the current time. The New South Wales Government has provided premises for camps. Other than this, Youth Insearch has not been given any financial assistance from any government. The Youth Insearch Program is funded entirely from the private and corporate sector.

To safeguard the interests of Youth Insearch and to assist in the establishment of projects nationally, the Youth Insearch Foundation (Aust) Inc. has been set up. The Foundation is a registered charity and incorporated in New South Wales.

After attending a Youth Insearch camp a schoolteacher wrote a report outlining her impressions of the project. The following extract from this report best sums up Youth Insearch's contribution to society:

This program gives me faith that our society will work through its troubles. It gives me hope that we will care and support each other rather than fight and put each other down. It convinces me that many lives are being saved from ruin through drugs, and self-destruction, and it follows that this is saving me as a taxpayer a lot of money in the future through giving these people back their personal power, their self-
confidence and self-esteem rather than be future dependents on the welfare system or even perhaps the prison system.

Conclusion

Many people ask, 'Why does the program work?' Simplicity! It is based on love, trust, and compassion. The program was written by young people, and is administered by young people. Many times it is the simple uncomplicated things that work best. Youth Insearch is a low cost solution to a high cost problem.