A Community Driven Response to Juvenile Offending

Allan Carter and
Neil Drew
Cleveland Youth Centre
Townsville, Queensland
he Townsville Regional Attendance Centre (TRAC) developed from our desire to provide the courts, the police, and child care officers with an option between reporting and signing a book and incarceration. This paper will provide a background to the program and describe how it operates. It will provide information on its two components, the Compensatory and Correctional Curriculum, and draw attention to the fact that it is community based. It will highlight the fact that it is presently not funded and look at the ways we are trying to overcome this. During this process you will see that the program offers considerable potential and early results are encouraging.

Although outdoor programs are to be strongly advocated they do not address all issues. There appear to be two gaps:

- was what children learnt or experienced transferred to the community setting?

and

- did the program actually address the child's offending?

It seems that outdoor activities have benefited children by improving their self-confidence, self-reliance and from the interaction they experienced with caring adults. These programs often addressed offending behaviours in general, rather than individual offending behaviours, through campfire discussions. However, there was little input on how to avoid offending.

The program to be discussed here includes an adventure component, the 'Compensatory Curriculum', and a component which addresses the child's offending, the 'Correctional Curriculum'. Two programs have been run by the Centre and although, due to a lack of resources, no statistically reliable results can be produced, our qualitative evaluation has been very encouraging.
History

In 1987, other than signing a book, nothing was being provided for children placed on Supervision orders by the court. The policy in Townsville and other areas of Queensland, due to the high number of child abuse reports, was that children on supervision orders had to report to their Child Care Officer (CCO) and sign a book. If the child's CCO was present the child could see the CCO for a short time, but nothing substantial was offered; nothing in the way of a structured intervention program.

The local Juvenile Aid Bureau were far from impressed and magistrates were frustrated with the lack of options open to them. Although section 67 of the *Children's Services Act 1967-80* (Qld), has included reference to attendance centres, they have seldom been used. To the authors' knowledge only one other attendance centre operates in Queensland, Shaftsbury, and this is based primarily on the Compensatory model, so it was decided to use this section of the Act to provide the impetus for the program.

Community Based

The program involved early offenders who were placed on a supervision order with the condition that they attend the attendance centre. Without funding, volunteers and other youth organisations were relied on for support. Although this step was taken because of the lack of funds, it had the added advantage of providing contact with a variety of organisations and people. It also provided greater variety and flexibility while not over-taxing any one organisation or individual.

The 'stockpiling' problem was avoided by involving the young person in activities as soon as possible after their court appearance. This step also helped overcome the perceived concern of many that there is little consequence associated with juvenile offending. This staggered start was also useful for the purpose of evaluating aspects of the program in order to look at the relative effectiveness of the component parts.

Compensatory Curriculum

The program was initially run on a fortnightly basis on Saturday afternoons. Activities included abseiling, canoeing, sailing, map reading and orienteering, touch football and rock climbing. The program commenced with one youth in attendance but after eight weeks the group had grown to six. During the fortnightly activities considerable rapport was developed between the young people and the authors and this greatly facilitated group work processes during the Correctional activities.

With a group of six the intensive phase of the program was commenced. This involved the group meeting twice weekly on a Tuesday and Thursday evening, 6 pm to 9 pm, at a high school for five weeks. On the Tuesday of each week a compensatory component which included: screen printing, photography, Aboriginal and Islander child care agency providing information about Aboriginal culture, horse riding and a barbecue was conducted. On the Thursday the Correctional Curriculum, one of the most rewarding sections of the program was conducted. (See Figure 1, referral process and program flowchart).

Correctional Curriculum

The TRAC intervention framework (including the Correctional Curriculum) is based on the theoretical model proposed by Denman of the Centre for Youth Crime and Community at Lancaster University in the UK. Denman argues that traditional intervention programs with
juvenile offenders offer what he calls a 'compensatory curriculum'. Compensatory curricula address the general milieu of disadvantage typically experienced by young offenders and therefore offer activities focused on education, leisure and outdoor activities to build confidence and skills. He goes on to say that whilst these activities are an important part of any program they have 'more to do with caring than delinquency reduction' (Denman, 1984 p. 43). Research has shown that to focus solely on 'compensatory' activities does not lead to a reduction of delinquent behaviour. In TRAC a program is offered which acknowledges the need to develop explicit, complementary compensatory and correctional curricula.

Figure 1

Townsville Regional Attendance Centres
Referral process and program flowchart
Again drawing from Denman's model (Denman 1984) the correctional curriculum is designed to address the individualised needs of each participant. Preliminary assessments seek to uncover the reasons behind each individual's behaviour rather than general causes for the delinquent acts. In other words, there may be five individuals who have engaged in identical behaviours but for quite different reasons. This clearly has implications for group work. To draw from our own experiences: Billy and John were both convicted of 'break and enter' offences. Billy says at one point during assessment that he is 'bored' a lot of the time. John on the other hand reports a serious argument with his father just prior to the offence. In the former case group activities are structured to look at possible alternative behaviours. In the latter, the focus is on the basics of rational thinking. On the face of it those working in the area might argue that this is self-evident, but our experience has shown that unless each participant is individually assessed and their needs articulated, there is a tendency for workers to take the 'line of least resistance' in their group work and to operate 'as if' the bogey of peer pressure, for example, is once more to blame!

The group work skills required to address a correctional curriculum are as follows. The first step is a detailed assessment of each participant in the program. Such an assessment in the TRAC program may take up to four hours for each individual and will look at all areas outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Intervention Framework

- Offending/Delinquent Behaviour
- Assessment
- Correctional Curriculum
  - Group work: situational social skills (offence specific)
  - Group work: reasoning processes (offence specific probabilities, evaluations and motivations)
  - Group work: general perceptions/beliefs
  - Family therapy—concentrating on:
    (a) Phenomena related to the offending
    (b) Phenomena related to the compensatory curriculum
- Compensatory Curriculum
  - Educational
  - Leisure
  - Vocational
  - General abilities skills
In addition to general group work, one important technique that has been found invaluable is the use of 'stop points'. First articulated by Thorpe et al. (1980) to address situational factors, it has been found to be a useful way to look at the range of factors precipitating an offending episode. In essence each participant draws a cartoon scenario of a 'typical' offence for them. The episode is filmed using the author as director and the others as actors. The scene is reviewed and 'stop points' identified by group discussion. Stop points are those points in the episode where the participants could have thought, felt or behaved differently in a way that may have lead to a different outcome (that is no offending). Episodes are re-filmed with the appropriate changes. Two points are important. The first is that alternatives are generated by the participants themselves and not imposed by an 'outgroup' authority figure and secondly, that they have the opportunity to try on the new behaviour in the company of their peers. The importance of the detailed assessment process becomes evident, allowing the group workers the chance to maximise the learning opportunities for each participant according to their uniqueness. Our experience is that even the most resistant are drawn by the fun elements of the exercise—it brings out the ham in them!

This is not to say that group work with these young offenders was easy. It was very hard work. An excellent article on group work with sexually abused girls by Wayne and Weeks (1984) gives a graphic account of the difficulties encountered in working with young people. We found we could easily relate to the experiences they described.

One further program has been run with similar results and we have been encouraged by the responses from the young people involved. Of the eleven children involved, one has spent a period in custody and two have reappeared in the Children's Court. Pre- and post-program testing has indicated positive attitude change, particularly on those indices that predict further delinquent acts. Positive changes in the dynamics of the group and the willingness of the group to attend was encouraging. Although it was compulsory to attend it is significant that only two boys missed attending on two occasions. All had to give up something they enjoyed doing at some time. Probably the most telling example of the willingness to be involved was one boy who could never be contacted during the course of the week. His mother was never sure of his whereabouts. But, on the Saturday morning of an activity the boy would phone us to find out where we were meeting and what we were doing.

Funding
This program is currently without funding. It does not fit the criteria for funding from state or federal governments and although we are receiving encouragement and support from the staff of the Department of Family Services in Townsville the program cannot progress without funds. It is ludicrous that a problem which costs the community millions of dollars can exist, while a program such as ours does not fit any guidelines for funding. It does not require a huge input of monies. TRAC requires a base and a full-time coordinator to get it fully functional. It will eventually require additional funds, but it is considered that for $100,000 a year an effective program can be run. This may seem expensive to some but consider that if 50 young offenders are able to be diverted from custody, the savings to the government alone would be in the order of $500,000. The savings to commercial operators, insurance companies, private individuals and the like would also be considerable. It would involve community participation which still has some difficulties to be overcome, but these are not insurmountable. Although funding is being sought from the government, it is also planned to tackle the corporate sector for funding. It is our intention to set the program up as a Trust and to seek support from the industries most affected by young offenders: the insurance industry, small business organisations, industry and commerce groups.

We have also been approached by Community Corrections about being involved in an attendance centre for offenders aged between 18 and 22. We are negotiating with them for
their facilities and resources to be shared with TRAC in return for our expertise. Magistrates in Townsville and the surrounding district are fully supportive. Thus the provision of a base and the payment of a coordinator would see the program well underway.

**Flexibility And Portability**
A final aspect of the program is its flexibility and portability. TRAC is flexible in so far as not only one particular strategy is adopted. Most programs provide one type of service or activity, for example, camps or evening functions. We take a theoretical/methodological position (compensatory/correctional curricula) and use whatever suits given existing constraints (for example money and staff). So TRAC has already run fortnightly activities with a five-week intensive phase, a weekend camp, one-off activities, and a week-long camp is now being planned. Because it utilises community resources the program could operate in Brisbane or in Burketown. The TRAC model mobilises existing resources and therefore is extremely portable. In this regard it helps to overcome much of the inherent disunity which for one reason or another exists amongst those providing services for youth.

TRAC is still very much in a developmental phase and unless some positive support to resource the program is received it will prove very difficult for this initiative to offer the sort of hope for effective intervention with young offenders that we believe it can.

**Conclusion**
To conclude, the main points and issues highlighted in this paper, which distinguish TRAC from other programs and go some way towards addressing the concerns raised in this area are reiterated:

- Correctional Curriculum
- Community Based
- Funding and Corporate Sponsorship
- Flexibility and Portability.

**References**