As part of the South Australian Crime Prevention Strategy a major effort is aimed toward youth. ‘Youth’ is a term which covers the first stages in life during which dramatic physical and character changes occur. At the younger end of the scale, youth is a time of innocence, new experiences and, more importantly, character and attitude development.

A person’s attitude towards others is an important factor when considering the tendency to commit crime, and many workers in crime prevention agencies believe that ‘community caring’ guidance and instruction is necessary at an early age. If the initial attitudes formed are correct, then the long-term goal of juvenile crime reduction can be achieved.

The South Australian Police Deputies Club evolved as an endeavour to create popular, caring ideals amongst very young members of the community. It is a crime prevention scheme targeted at primary school children (aged between 5 and 12 years) but welcomes the involvement of older children who have particular disabilities. The Police Deputies Club actively teaches young children to become aware of their community responsibilities through constant contact utilising a series of meaningful assignments. Regular visits by local police officers to school classrooms are also encouraged as part of instructional development and also to attract new members.

History
In 1985 the South Australia Police Department obtained sponsorship through local businesses to launch the Police Deputies Club at the Royal Adelaide Show. Posters and collector stickers of police activity were given away to young children in an effort to improve police/child contact and trust. Although highly popular from a child’s viewpoint, no records were kept of the children involved and no other activity was planned. This was a successful public relations exercise, but the lack of follow-up by police and feedback from the youngsters failed to reinforce the Club’s purpose.

As a result of the Attorney-General’s Crime Prevention Strategy in 1989, the Police Deputies scheme was revamped to go beyond public relations and
become a true club with the prevention of crime as its primary objective. A grant of $65,000 was allocated to the South Australia Police for this purpose. The new Police Deputies Club was designed to maintain the children’s interest through a series of fun assignments and quizzes intended to encourage contact with crime prevention agencies and, at the same time, educate children in community awareness.

**Objectives**
The objectives of the Police Deputies Club are to:
- engender a spirit of community involvement;
- create a lasting and friendly relationship between children and police;
- promote crime prevention philosophies in primary schools;
- educate children as to their community responsibilities and encourage a respect for law and order; and
- prevent future crime.

**The New Police Deputies Club**
The Police Deputies Club was organised and is operated by police personnel attached to the Community Affairs Branch of the South Australia Police, however, the main promotion of the scheme rests with local police as part of their community duties. A target of 5,000 members was set for the first year of operation, however, any child who demonstrated the desire and motivation to join was not to be refused membership.

The most important aspects of the Police Deputies Club from an administrative stance were:
- the Club did not have give-aways, all rewards had to be earned; and
- regular contact had to be maintained with members.

**A Course in Crime Prevention**
The new Police Deputies Club was launched in November 1989 through the use of local publicity and paid newspaper advertisements. Application forms and promotional posters were sent to all government primary schools and police stations. The application form required details of name, address and age as well as the school which the applicant attended. These details were used to establish a database on a personal computer which became the administrative ‘brain’ of the Police Deputies Club.

The application forms had a community police message that encouraged children to report incidences of unacceptable behaviour. On receipt of these
forms, the Club administration returned via post an entrance Quiz Book which required the child to research answers for a number of crime prevention and police related questions. The concepts in the book were not easy and it was not expected that a child would be able to finish the book without asking questions from parents, teachers and police officers. Some questions actively encouraged the children to approach other crime prevention people, such as local Neighbourhood Watch leaders, and to be aware of the importance of public telephones and 'Safety Houses'.

It was recognised that some effort and motivation would be necessary for children to complete and return the entrance quiz and a 'drop-out' rate was expected. However, those that persevered were rewarded by a visit of a local uniformed police officer to their school where the child was sworn in as a Police Deputy in front of their peers and presented with a 'starter pack'. This pack consists of:

• an identity card;
• a badge;
• a pencil case, ruler and pencil;
• a Police Deputies Club code book;
• a welcoming letter from the Deputy Commissioner of Police;
• an explanation letter for parents; and
• the first of a series of activity books.

The activity books are a five-part series which separately addresses different topics associated with crime prevention, safety and social issues at an appropriate level. Each activity book contains a different story about the Police Deputies Club character 'Deputy Koala' and friends. For example, Book One reinforces the points that Police Deputies:

• always tell their families where they are going;
• respect other peoples’ property;
• never leave litter;
• care about their school;
• respect senior citizens;
• never use bad language.

The content of the activity books was a joint contribution by police officers involved with the Club and primary school teaching staff enlisted to help.
The middle pages of each activity book contain a question and answer sheet that can be removed and returned to the Club administration. On receipt, the next activity book is posted out until all five activity books have been completed satisfactorily. When this occurs the member is promoted to the rank of 'Senior Deputy' and is issued with a new badge and a certificate of achievement. The next step is for the member to pursue the highest rank-Deputy Leader-by completing a local or school community activity as set in the activity book.

Whilst the correspondence course continues, regular newsletters and competitions are also conducted, for example, a design-a-poster competition aimed at increasing respect for school property. Eight winners from a large response were selected (two from four age levels) and the children were made police officers for a day. This involved visits to many police areas including the air wing, water police and the mounted branch where the children became involved with planned activity. They also received a new bicycle for their efforts, and winning idea was produced into a printed poster that was distributed to all schools.

Future competitions planned are 'Write the Words' for a Police Deputies Club song which will be put to music by the police band, and 'Deputy Days' have also been organised-one such event at Renmark attracted about 600 children.

Review
Over 11,000 children have applied to join the Police Deputies Club and between 50 and 100 applications per week are still being received. About 2,300 children are currently corresponding and some school classes have taken on the program as a social studies activity. Judging from the large response, the Police Deputies Club has been successful, although it was hoped that more children would persist with the activities. This lower level of continuation was accepted as the level of motivation required to complete the course is high, whilst the large number of children who continue with the Police Deputies Club have demonstrated that they are the likely leaders of tomorrow by expressing learned community values to their peers.

Conclusion
A regular contact Police Deputies Club with a printed correspondence course and other planned activity requires a substantial sum of money to maintain. The administrative duties are constant and require a small and dedicated staff. Overall evaluation-as with all crime prevention schemes-is difficult but comments received from all areas of the community thus far are positive and encouraging.

Without the support and work of local police officers and school staff the Police Deputies Club cannot succeed but, with the appropriate encouragement, the potential to achieve the stated objectives is high. If the juvenile crime figures reduce in six to ten years within South Australia, perhaps the Police Deputies Club can rightfully claim some of the kudos.