Blue Light Camp Beginnings
During late 1989 and early 1990, juvenile crime in Adelaide was in the forefront of public interest. The media featured a glut of information which confidently suggested that Adelaide was faced with an unprecedented wave of juvenile crime. Such pronouncements contributed little to the community understanding of juvenile crime, created further confusion in the community, raised fears, and unfortunately provided leverage to meaningless generalised condemnation of youth. As occurs with all waves, it eventually subsided and now perhaps laps at the shores of indifference in the minds of the wider community until again generated by another public pronouncement about the level and seriousness of juvenile crime. It was in this climate that the Blue Light Youth Camp program was established by the South Australian Police Department in cooperation with the Adelaide inner-city youth services sector. The camps were funded by the Crime Prevention Policy Unit, Attorney-General’s Department.

The development of the Blue Light Youth Camp program was an initiative motivated by the need to identify and experiment with youth crime prevention programs that would be intelligible to the young person, that is, programs which would make sense within young people’s experience and perceptions. Furthermore, the program was to be cost-effective and therefore needed to utilise existing community and inter-agency resources, expertise and skills. Consequently, a model of inter-agency intersectoral cooperation in the provision of crime prevention services, and programs for and with young people, was required.
It was considered important that young people were encouraged to participate in the program planning and implementation process as it was assumed that young participants experiencing this process would be more committed to the program, less resistant to change, and have increased opportunities for learning, sharing and positively influencing their peers. It was also considered that young people have both the potential and desire to make productive contributions to a community which is prepared to accept them as valued participating members. Such assumptions are now well-proven as the momentum for the program is currently generated by young people who have previously contributed to the program.

Why A Camp Program?

The Blue Light Youth Camp program was inspired by the concerns of both the inner-city youth services sector and the Police Department—but particularly street workers and beat patrol officers, who intervened with an increasing number of young people frequenting the inner-city streets. It was observed that many young people viewed the excitement and variety of the street as an accessible avenue for having fun. Consequently, some young people were at risk of the hazards associated with the street environment—alcohol, drugs, street crime, sexual exploitation, prostitution and physical danger.

The responses by many young street users to the interventions by police officers and youth workers was determined by their predisposition to view authority in a hostile light, by the central importance of antisocial behaviours to their self-image, and by the adequacy of control exerted to impede these behaviours. Unfortunately, as limits were tested, attitudes were reinforced, resistances built, and mutual understanding and working together became more difficult. This contributed to frustration, suspicion and occasional hostility, and barriers were created between youth workers, police officers and young street users.

These barriers were eroded following an agreement between local police and youth workers. Both parties agreed that improved professional relationships could be achieved if there was a more informed understanding of the occupational roles of the respective service sectors, and that increased cooperation would result in an optimum service, particularly to young people with a high street presence. Furthermore, the aforementioned adverse media attention concerning the perceived high incidence of juvenile crime in the inner-city environs served to forge stronger links between the youth street work agencies and the police beat patrols.

In their joint quest for greater understanding about each other’s roles and work, a climate in which the concept of cooperation and coordination could grow was created. This concept was nurtured and developed when representatives of young street users agreed to work in partnership with police and youth workers to explore strategies which could possibly reduce juvenile crime in the city. The suggestion was made that the three parties involved collectively explore ideas, issues and possible crime prevention strategies in a camp setting. The Blue Light Youth Camp program was subsequently established and, following a successful trial period, it appears
that the Blue Light Youth Camp program will be implemented on a statewide basis as funding is made available.

What Is A Blue Light Youth Camp?
Since October 1989, nineteen Blue Light Youth Camps have been conducted with participation from approximately 250 young people. The camps have attracted young people from varying cultural backgrounds and both male and females have participated. Efforts are made to target high profile inner-city street users who are considered to be at risk of either offending or serious antisocial behaviour by their peers and service providers.

Duration of Blue Light Youth Camps
Predominantly, the Blue Light Youth Camps are two-day, weekend experiences, however, the camps have been modified on occasions at the direction of the local Blue Light Youth Camp Consultative Committee. For example, there has been a longer-term (four-day) wilderness camp (canoeing trek) with Aboriginal male adolescents, police officers (STAR Force) and youth workers, and a four-day residential leadership training camp.

Objectives
The objectives of the Blue Light Youth Camp program are broad and include:
- increasing the self-awareness of the all participants (young people, police officers and youth workers);
- encouraging and assisting in the development of participants’ social skills and personal competence;
- enhancing participants’ sense of social responsibility, and their willingness and capacity to help others; and
- providing opportunities for participants to contribute to the development of a caring community.

It is anticipated that the camping experience leads to mutual support between young people and service providers which is maintained outside the camp environment. Expectations are set whereby the young camp participants, on their return to the wider community, engage in a creative and responsible contribution to others-this in itself is considered an essential core element of any youth crime prevention program.
Aims

The aims of the Blue Light Youth Camps are to:

- establish positive relationships between young people, police officers (preferably known to the young camp participant by local policing contact) and youth service providers;
- provide information and/or educational opportunities designed to assist young people in minimising their contact with the juvenile justice system;
- assess young people for potential role model abilities and leadership skills;
- develop a camp 'code of conduct' which demonstrates minimum standards of acceptable behaviour to young street users and which can also be modelled and reinforced by all camp participants in their street contacts with each other and other inner-city street use;
- acknowledge that camp participants have knowledge and expertise, particularly concerning street behaviour of young city users and, therefore, the setting of expectations that such knowledge/expertise can be capitalised for the benefit of future crime prevention programs.

Conclusion

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions of the effectiveness of the Blue Light Youth Camp program as a systematic follow-up study has not yet occurred. However, it is our impression that camp-oriented crime prevention programs involving young people, their local police officers and youth workers serve a useful crime prevention and interpersonal relationship development function for the kind of population described. It has been observed that, although at times there is mutual distrust and lack of understanding of how to work together effectively, this is outweighed by the learning, growing and developing through real involvement between service provider and young person in the camp experience.

To develop a youth community-based crime prevention program, effective relationships between youth community members and providers is essential. Moreover, emphasising the positive potential for growth, learning and development and taking a stronger crime prevention educational approach with the young camp participant will help to create a climate of expectation of success.