Croydon: The Good Neighbourhood Program
An Innovative Approach to Youth Programs

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In October 1988, Croydon Council supported a Victorian government initiative known as the Good Neighbourhood Program. The aim of the program is to reduce juvenile crime and vandalism. The Croydon Good Neighbourhood committee was formed using funding support from the state government and it consisted of a wide selection of interested people from a variety of organisations.

It was decided that, as the task of reducing juvenile crime and vandalism was daunting and the resources available were minimal, a new approach to the problem was warranted. The new approach utilised by the committee has resulted in some incredible developments between 1989 and 1991. These developments were partly due to the fact that the committee went about the task by working to some commonsense guidelines. The guidelines were:

- achieve;
- use resources, find resources, create resources;
- take risks;
- limit bureaucratic behaviour;
• excite and involve the whole community; and
• evaluate, stay in touch and be prepared to change quickly.

The Croydon Good Neighbourhood committee adopted the approach of relying heavily on traditional forms of information gathering, as well as speaking to many people from all sections of the community. The results were real and useful, allowing the committee to draft suggested programs, feed these programs back to the community, refine the programs and put them into action.

The Croydon Good Neighbourhood committee programs and approach are innovative only to the extent that they value simplicity and commonsense.

The Programs
From the commencement of the Good Neighbourhood committee, a number of urgent needs were identified:
• lack of entertainment;
• lack of information;
• transport safety;
• there was no youth venue; and
• the music potential was under resourced.

Rather than develop a fragmented approach to these needs, it was decided to use music as the tool for change. Through a number of stages the tool for change has proved far more useful than could have been planned. Croydon’s music movement has developed an energy of its own with bands on trains, recording facilities, students employed to promote events, a live underage music venue, and recently the staging of the first Australian Youth Rock Conference (Ausyrock).

The following information on programs that have been developed is only brief and is aimed to give an overview of what is possible with energy, networking and commonsense. Many of the programs have been developing through a number of stages since 1989, so it is difficult to fully outline all details. Further information or assistance on any of the programs can be obtained by contacting Croydon Council.

Garage bands
Facilities
The Garage Band Movement is run by a committee of musicians ranging from ages fifteen to twenty-six years. Their main role is to maintain and supervise the practising studio and recording facility.
Underneath Croydon Hall is a fully-equipped studio and recording facility. The venue is booked seven days a week for a total of approximately forty hours. Currently the studio caters for forty-two local bands, offering a recording facility at a fraction of the costs asked by private enterprise.

The studio was built in conjunction with the Office of Corrections, local business, Croydon City Council, the Good Neighbourhood Committee and the Garage Band Committee. By using this form of network resourcing, the studio was built for less than $2,000, whilst the equipment has been purchased through Good Neighbourhood funding with heavy subsidies from local business.

_Ausyrock_

February 1991 saw the occurrence of the first Ausyrock. The aim of Ausyrock was to offer skill development to young musicians. Ausyrock was set up on a massive scale involving forty-one workshops with 250 young musicians learning from industry greats like Steve Housden (Little River Band), Jerry Speiser (Men at Work), Jimi the Human & Spectre 7, Wendy Stapleton, Jack Howard (Hunters & Collectors) and many more. In addition to workshops on instrument development, also on offer was the chance to learn about live production, management, women in rock and vocals.

With music exhibitions, live concerts, a battle of the bands competition, and jam sessions, Ausyrock was an event not attempted before in Australia and it was quite fitting that Ausyrock was chosen as the venue to launch the 1991 Melbourne Music Festival. Plans are already underway for Ausyrock 1992, an event that will cater for 1,000 young people from around Australia.

_The Hull_

Still operating in 1991, and now two-and-a-half-years young, The Hull has stood the test of time. As Melbourne's only live underage venue, The Hull has hosted over 100 live band performances on Friday evenings. With bands such as Boom Crash Opera, The Angels and Roxus playing next to Croydon's home-grown garage bands it has proved to be a remarkable success with benefits for both the performer and the 'rager'.

The Hull is open Friday nights between 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. and attracts young people aged between fifteen to nineteen years. The venue has strict security, dress standards and a behaviour code, as any nightclub would be expected to have.

Since its inception, The Hull has been run by a strong and innovative committee of young people who have designed their own uniform and business cards, marketed the facility, planned the entertainment and trained themselves as a group through weekend planning camps and consultant input.

_Safe Train and Shuttle Bus_

The Safe Train was set up to address the perception that train travel, especially on a Saturday evening, was unsafe. The Safe Train departs Lilydale Station at 5.58 p.m. every Saturday and stops at all stations, arriving at Flinders Street Station one hour later. It returns the same evening, departing
Flinders Street Station at 11.34 p.m. The Safe Train may vary from three to six carriages and carries a youth rock band on one carriage and a juke box on another. The other areas of the train are deemed ‘quiet carriages’.

The Safe Train is manned by two plain-clothed police from Croydon and a number of community volunteers. The role of volunteers on the train is to give the impression of ownership and concern by the community. So far, the Safe Train has been extremely effective.

On its return from the city, the Safe Train is met by ten community volunteers at Croydon station. The station is normally deserted at this hour and the volunteers create a sense of security for those travellers normally disembarking during quiet periods. Once all patrons have departed the area via foot, taxi or car, the volunteers return home. There have been no incidents since the station volunteers began in October 1989, and on many occasions the volunteers have been able to assist passengers in a variety of ways, the most dramatic to date involved helping a young girl who had an epileptic fit in the station carpark.

The youth bands who perform on the Safe Train are drawn from Croydon’s garage band movement. The entertainment has proved a useful ploy in that it has helped create an artificial peak hour. This in itself is the most effective form of safety. The major benefits of the bands on the Safe Train are that they distract bad behaviour, soften the environment, give a sense of ownership to those involved and create employment opportunities for young people. So far, the Safe Train has had no reported incidents of vandalism and has increased the patronage (quite considerably) on some occasions.

Another phase of the Safe Train Project is the Shuttle Bus. Soon after the Safe Train began, community volunteers reported a number of young people travelled home on foot—some of them travelling amazing distances. To assist these young people, a scheme was put together involving the National Australia Bank and the South Croydon Anglican Church. A twenty-two seater bus was purchased, twenty volunteer drivers trained and the Shuttle Bus—a free service—was born. The bus aims to assist those young people who need transport and is not considered a replacement for parental responsibility.

The Victorian Government has just released the results of an evaluation that has been carried out on the Safe Train, and it is indicated that the Safe Train will expand, with a number of other train lines in Melbourne and South Australia already in the planning stages.

**Student Information Officers**

Information was highlighted as being a great need for young people. At the time of the consultation there were two major events occurring in the Croydon community. One was the opening of a Council-run coffee shop for which Council Officers had flooded schools and the community with over 2,000 brochures. Posters had also been put up and articles were included in the local press. The other event was a Saturday dance being arranged by a private promotions company. This company had produced similar posters, brochures and advertising material. Both of these events were occurring in a city where very little was happening (in an entertainment sense) on Friday or Saturday nights. When school students were asked about these events, some 4
to 5 per cent had knowledge of either of these events. This indicated that there was a communication difficulty in conveying information to young people in the Croydon community.

Rather than produce more brochures, better posters and larger articles in the local newspapers, it was decided to employ one Student Information Officer (SIO) in each of the fifteen secondary schools throughout Croydon and its immediate environs. The SIOs are students and receive an honorarium of $20 per month. They attend a monthly meeting and receive training in advertising procedures. SIOs are also given information on what is occurring in and around Croydon and the resources to promote these events properly. Each school selected their SIO in a different way, for example, through the Student Representative Council or via a special student election.

The SIO system is proving remarkably effective. In addition to the benefit of information spread to young people, the SIOs are a very useful vehicle to feed information back to the Croydon Good Neighbourhood committee—the information flows both ways.

Challenge '89, '90, '91

Since 1989 the Croydon Good Neighbourhood committee has run a series of outdoor adventures known as the Challenge. The Challenge is aimed at young people who are traditionally labelled ‘at risk’. It was believed, and has now proved to be so, that if a group of young people having problems with the social system were thrown into a physically challenging experience over a ten-day period in an isolated area, the potential for change would be created.

The Challenge involves canoeing, trekking, climbing and basically pushing the young people to their limit. The results have been very encouraging, with follow-up a priority of the Challenge. The last Challenge took a team from the Today Show and the video of this Challenge is available to provide others with greater knowledge of the Challenge.