The Youth and the Law Project: Community Crime Prevention Through Youth

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What is the Youth and the Law Project (YALP)?
The Youth and the Law Project (YALP) is a non-profit community youth organisation which has been operating in the Macarthur region of Sydney since 1985. YALP is funded by the Law Foundation of New South Wales and is a crime prevention initiative which works with young people at risk of offending.

As a youth crime prevention project, YALP is concerned with three major issues:

- youth reactions to community problems;
- community reactions to youth behaviour; and
- traditional, reactive approaches to youth behaviour.

There have been two major stages in the development of YALP. The first was the development of eighteen youth project groups through five annual Community Youth Forums. Approximately 150 young people attended each of the Community Youth Forums. At these Forums, young people were involved in presenting and better understanding local issues. They were also involved in designing projects which they would carry out as part of a project group working with YALP staff. Local one-day workshops using a similar process also led to the development of project groups.
The second major stage in the development of YALP resulted from an extensive independent evaluation carried out in 1989. YALP now has a focus on working jointly with other youth organisations to implement YALP processes in the wider community. This has led to the development of joint-working projects with the Federation of Police-Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC), the Sydney City Mission, and Campbelltown and Marrickville Community Youth Services.

**Focus on Process**

YALP takes a proactive approach to youth crime prevention, where crime control and prevention happens through community, government and youth interaction. This proactive approach makes crime prevention the responsibility of youth and the wider community. Young people are involved in the design and implementation of their own projects with the support of YALP staff who act as process facilitators.

Two key examples of project groups are C.T.’s Under 18’s nightclub and the Say G’day to a Cop campaign. Other projects include Child Abuse-No Way, SK8 Campbelltown and Get it Right the First Time.

**Dissemination Through Joint Working Projects Versus The Quick Fix**

When an organisation wants to implement its processes into the wider community, some vital issues need to be addressed. These include:

- the adaptability and receptiveness to change of both the organisation and its processes;
- the significance of developing appropriate resources, and of developing these resources with the section of the community that is involved in the implementation;
- the significance of commitment to the whole process of implementing new strategies in a new area; and
- the development of appropriate evaluation materials and resources.

YALP is currently developing resources as part of a joint working project with the Federation of Police-Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC), which will involve the development of three pilot projects in Mudgee, South Sydney and Blacktown. These resources include:

- how to run a workshop day;
- how to run a project group;
- skills modules to use with project groups;
• techniques for facilitating various YALP processes; and
• methods for evaluating the pilot projects.

The joint-working project also involves regular review and development workshops for YALP and PCYC staff and management. This ongoing support, resourcing and feedback between YALP and PCYC will be the key to the success of implementing YALP processes in this way.

Joint working projects also highlight the problems associated with a ‘quick fix’ approach to strategy implementation in areas which are new to the idea of community crime prevention. The quick fix approach cannot coexist with community crime prevention strategies because the community is not involved in the process of implementing the strategies. The quick fix approach also assumes that one strategy of working with youth should work for all youth—which is not the case.

YALP processes rely heavily on the participation and dynamics of the youth and this is generally considered to be a high risk approach. Perhaps the question of the value of the youth participation is really the issue that both makes and breaks YALP in many people’s eyes.