JUVENILE CRIME ISSUES HAVE BECOME A MAJOR FOCUS OF COMMUNITY concern in recent times in Queensland. Extensive public debate and media attention has surrounded the problem of juvenile offending, the cost to the community and public safety.

A sustained media campaign continued for some eighteen months, focussing heavily on break and enters, with claims that Queensland had the highest rates of assaults, rapes and robberies and that Queensland had become a California style crime mecca, in the grip of a serious crime wave set to double in the 1990s. Repeated school vandalism, theft and breaking and entering have triggered public calls for severe solutions such as curfews, vigilante groups, and "sending feral kids outback".

Over the past two years, public meetings have been held in numerous Queensland communities including far North Queensland, Brisbane suburban areas, provincial cities and South-West Queensland to discuss community responses to the juvenile offending.

The Queensland Government responded with the development of a Juvenile Crime Strategy, announced in the 1992-93 State Budget. This strategy has two main components, crime prevention and legislative reform. Through the crime prevention component, YACCA (Youth and Community Combined Action), a range of community programs will be established to prevent young people becoming caught up in criminal behaviour in the first place.

The legislative reform of the juvenile justice system has commenced with the passage of new juvenile justice and children's court legislation. The Juvenile Justice Act and the Children's Court Act will come into effect at a future date which has yet to be decided.
This paper concentrates on the crime prevention component of the strategy. It provides a brief outline of the development of the initiative, the principles and objectives underpinning it, the key features of the program to be funded through the 1992-93 State budget, and details of the main elements of the program.

**Background to Youth and Community Combined Action**

The Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs was allocated responsibility to develop, coordinate and implement crime prevention programs in October 1990 although resources to enable this to occur were not provided at the time.

In October 1991, an interdepartmental working group was established to prepare options for an integrated juvenile crime prevention initiative. A whole of government package was developed for consideration by the mid-term Cabinet Budget Review Committee. In January 1992, Cabinet considered matters relating to juvenile crime and crime prevention and the Premier publicly announced the formation of a Task Force to further develop options in relation to legislative reform and crime prevention.

Consultations were held in early 1992, to gather feedback on the draft proposals for the Juvenile Crime Strategy. Amendments were made to both the crime prevention and legislative reform components of the package in response to this feedback. Feedback from the consultations indicated strong support for the Juvenile Crime Prevention Initiative, and in particular, for its promotion of local community participation in the design and implementation of the program.

The Initiative recognised the links between social and economic disadvantage and crime, and included five key elements.

- local community participation;
- involvement of police;
- school based programs;
- improved access to housing, health and labour market programs; and
- training for project workers, volunteers and management committees.

**Previous Action on Youth Crime Prevention**

A pilot project, which aimed to lay the ground work for the YACCA program, was implemented in June 1992 with one-off funding of $119,000. Five Juvenile Crime Prevention Action Research Projects were established in Cairns, Mackay, Logan City, Banyo and Toowoomba.

In addition, funds were provided to establish a Mainstream Youth Organisation Task Force involving youth organisations such as the Scouts and Girl Guides, Police-Citizens Youth Clubs and the Sports Federation of
Queensland. The task force is examining the interest and capacity of the state-wide youth organisations to pool their collective resources and put them behind the efforts of local community groups in order to respond to disadvantaged youth.

The Centre for Crime, Policy and Public Safety at Griffith University has been funded to develop an evaluation methodology for the program and to document some existing crime prevention activities in Queensland.

**Funds Allocated to YACCA**

The Queensland Government allocated funding for the Juvenile Crime Strategy in the recent State budget. The Juvenile Crime Strategy will be phased in over two years with a commitment of $4 million in 1992-93 and $6 million in subsequent years.

YACCA was allocated $1.5 million in 1992-93 and $2 million for subsequent years in the 1992 State Budget. Of this total, $1,271,000 has been allocated to the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs to fund the establishment of community projects in 1992-93 with $1,725,000 earmarked for 1993-94.

The Department of Education has also been allocated $205,000 for the development of school based programs aimed at enhancing the capacity of both schools and parents to assist young people experiencing difficulties with mainstream education. In addition, $45,000 has been allocated to the Department of Tourism, Sport and Racing to fund training activities for project workers, volunteers and management committee members.

**The Goal of the YACCA Program**

The goal of YACCA is to enhance the capacity of targeted communities to engage young people in planning and implementing social and economic activities which are meaningful to them, with one of the anticipated outcomes being a reduction in levels of juvenile offending.

*Principles*

Key principles include:

- active and productive participation in community life and the opportunity to contribute to community well-being are believed to be essential to the growth and development of young people;

- young people have the knowledge, vision and desire to participate as active partners in community life and have a right to the opportunities and resources to do so; and

- recognition of the importance of family and social networks that serve to integrate young people into the wider community.
**Objectives**

The objectives of the program are:

- to assist approved organisations in the provision of services and activities which support the participation of disadvantaged young people in their design and development;

- to enhance cooperation and build networks between the community, non-government organisations, local government authorities and government bodies in the development and implementation of services and activities funded under this program;

- to ensure that disadvantaged young people are provided with maximum opportunities to participate in the development of activities supported by the program; and

- to ensure that disadvantaged young people gain equitable access to services and activities in their local areas.

**Program Components**

*Community Activity Projects (CAP)*

Community Activity Projects will be established in up to sixteen areas throughout Queensland. These projects will involve broad consultation and participation from the local community in the planning, design and implementation of community activities aimed at reducing youth crime. Strategies will be established to provide disadvantaged young people with opportunities to have a major input into the shape and direction of the project.

Local coordinating committees will be established with the support of all relevant government agencies providing services in the local area. These committees will include participants from community groups, parents and young people.

The CAP projects aim to provide young people with attractive and productive alternatives to offending, and to strengthen the bond between young people and their communities.

Some suitable responses may include;

- development of supervised and self-employment opportunities such as:
  - property maintenance;
  - gardening, lawn mowing and landscaping;
  - fence painting and building; and
  - house cleaning and catering.

- skill development programs in:
• maintenance and repair of engines and machinery;
• computer literacy programs;
• learning to drive leading to the acquisition of drivers’ licences; and
• stenographic, clerical and literacy programs.

- recreational activities including:
  • outdoor adventure activities such as canoeing, abseiling, hiking and camping trips;
  • sport, skateboard riding and swimming;
  • discos, bands and break dancing; and
  • modern art and mural painting.

It is expected that each project will develop a plan for addressing the needs and concerns of local young people during the initial phase of the project. In developing this plan, it is expected that each project will consult with and actively involve young people, as well as local schools, police, child care officers, youth clubs, traders and community groups, particularly those with a knowledge of the needs of disadvantaged groups in the community.

The planning phase will produce an implementation proposal identifying the target area, young people's needs and concerns which have emerged as priorities and the specific range of activities for addressing those needs. Local projects will be expected to ensure that the planning phase involves input from young women, young people with disabilities, young people from non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and young people who are homeless.

Neighbourhood Youth Projects (NYP)

Neighbourhood Youth Projects will be established in a small number of communities where no infrastructure or support for young people exists. These areas will require a higher level of resourcing and support than those locations targeted for Community Activity Projects.

The projects will bring together those adults who have the most significant contact with young people known to be likely to offend. These may include parents, teachers, police, local traders, doctors, sports coaches and relevant others.

As with the Community Activity Projects, it is expected that the Neighbourhood Youth Projects will undertake a two-phase process. The first phase will involve planning and consulting with young people and a broad constituency of government and non-government agencies, community groups and youth clubs.

During the second phase, Neighbourhood Youth Projects will have the potential to provide a level of direct service to young people disconnected
from family, school, and community support, in addition to activities with a preventative focus identified during the planning phase.

Services which may be provided under NYP projects could include helping young people gain access to housing, health and labour market programs as well as income security, legal services, family counselling, education, transport and recreation.

**Involvement of mainstream youth organisations**

Many mainstream youth organisations make a significant voluntary contribution to the well-being of young people throughout Queensland. By assisting these organisations to extend their skills, services, and facilities to young people at risk of offending, vital opportunities become available for these young people to participate in positive alternatives to crime.

The types of organisations which have indicated an interest in becoming involved include:

- community services organisations;
- organisations representing the interests of young people from a non-English speaking background;
- Girl Guides and Scout Associations;
- Boys and Girls Brigades;
- church based youth organisations;
- sporting and recreational bodies;
- Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Welfare Association; and
- Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and Outward Bound.

These groups are being encouraged, through the program, to pool their resources and put them behind the efforts of local community projects.

**Evaluation**

In order to gauge the impact on juvenile offending in targeted localities, and to inform future policy development, a formal evaluation will be implemented. A suitably qualified consultant or organisation will be funded to undertake the evaluation, which will be a comprehensive analysis at a program and project level. The evaluation will commence early in the first year of the program.

A specific data collection will be established, and funded projects will be required to participate in the collection. The availability of data will be essential to the evaluation of the program.

Departmental officers will support the development of projects, and will be available to local groups and management bodies to assist with organisational and target group matters as required. Through the support process, the Department will monitor the progress of each project.
Community participation

A strong partnership between government and the community will be an integral factor in the success of this program. Youth organisations, churches, service clubs, and young people will be involved in the delivery of appropriate responses at the local level. This approach will harness the resources of local government, industry, schools, youth and community organisations, churches and local residents to address the particular needs and concerns of the local community.

Local coordinating committees will be established with the support of relevant government agencies and will include participation from a wide range of community groups, parents and young people. These committees will be resourced to enable them to design and provide a range of constructive recreational, educative, and employment-related activities for young people in the local area.

Project management will vary by location and community type. For example, in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the establishment of appropriate management arrangements will require further consultation at the local level to identify community leaders and management structures preferred by clan and family groups in the community.

Whole-of-government approach

It is recognised that the challenge of preventing youth crime will require the combined resources of all relevant government departments, and will need to be coordinated, planned, designed and implemented in partnership with local community groups and youth organisations.

A Joint Officers Group (JOG) comprising representation from relevant government departments will be established to oversee the broad direction of the YACCA Program. The role of JOG will be to ensure that the various components of YACCA are coordinated, and that a whole-of-government approach is sustained. The JOG will work to develop an effective partnership with the community sector and ensure that the programs have access to available facilities and infrastructure. Interdepartmental collaboration in the targeted locations will be encouraged and enhanced through participation in local crime prevention committees.

Six State government departments: Education; Tourism, Sport and Racing; Housing, Local Government and Planning; Health; Employment, Vocational Education, Training and Industrial Relations and the Queensland Police Service have indicated a commitment to participate in the program. These departments will cooperate to ensure greater interdepartmental coordination in activities directed to addressing some of the social and economic disadvantages which contribute to youth crime in the areas targeted by the program. In particular, these departments will aim to improve access to employment, training, housing and health care services and increase youth participation in school life and in the community in general.
Conclusion

The YACCA Program aims to reach ten to sixteen-year-olds who are on the streets at night and at risk of offending or joining groups involved in illegal activities. Children's Court data indicates that about 33 per cent of all appearances involve young people under the age of fourteen. Therefore the YACCA Program is aimed at the late primary and early secondary school years.

Strategies are required to ensure that disadvantaged young people, particularly those groups over-represented in the juvenile justice system, are involved in activities funded under this program. The ultimate success of YACCA will depend very much on the continued and significant involvement of young people themselves at every stage of local projects. Equally as important will be the development of a strong sense of community ownership of YACCA projects. This can only be achieved through the solid support of community members and organisations and government agencies.

POSTCRIPT

In the time since this paper was presented, the YACCA Program has made significant progress. Early indications are that the Program is achieving success in key areas, namely: the continued and significant involvement of young people, the establishment of ongoing community-government-business partnerships, and the development of a strong sense of community ownership. Developments to date are summarised below:

Community based projects
Sixteen CAP projects and four NYP projects have been funded across the State. Most of these projects have now completed the planning stage and are commencing the implementation of specific activities and services in response to identified needs.

School based projects
Funding has been provided to the Department of Education to develop school based projects that will link with and complement the community based projects in the targeted areas. Grants will shortly be made to twenty-five schools.

Mainstream youth organisations
A Mainstream Youth Organisations Task Force (MYOTF) has been established to bring together major voluntary youth organisations in Queensland. Eleven organisations, with a history of commitment and involvement with young people are involved on the Task Force. Up to seven areas have been targeted by the MYOTF to develop projects in conjunction with the local community based YACCA projects.

Training
The Youth Sector Training Council of Queensland has been funded under the YACCA Program to provide training to the range of organisations involved in YACCA, that will assist projects to meet the needs of the target group, and to be responsive to the characteristics, cultural diversity and conditions of the target locations.

Evaluation
Griffith University has been funded to undertake the evaluation of the YACCA Program, and will produce a report in June 1995 which evaluates the process and impact of YACCA at the state-wide and local levels. This will be crucial in informing the review of the Program to be conducted in 1995.

YACCA is a new program and still in its early days, but the process of allowing time for planning and consultation has been applauded. The emphasis on linking young people with the widest possible range of community support appears to offer the best direction for the ongoing development of the Program.