The Inter-Departmental Committee on Youth Affairs
Crime Prevention Working Party

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The Inter-Departmental Committee on Youth Affairs is coordinated and chaired from within the Division of Youth and was established in 1988 out of the need for close cooperation between those departments which were directly involved in delivery and regulation of youth affairs.

The following state government departments have representation on the committee: Education; Employment, Vocational Education, Training and Industrial Relations; Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs; Police; Health; Housing and Local Government; Attorney-Generals; Ethnic Affairs; Corrective Services; and Premiers.

To give direction to its work, the committee established a number of working parties operating in the areas of youth policy, information services, juvenile offending and youth week. Recently, the coordination of the state government response to the Burdekin Report was handed over to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Youth Affairs for the purpose of upgrading its contents in preparation for a submission to Cabinet.

Part of the role of the committee is to deal with issues of concern regarding youth matters, which may be raised by individual state government departments. These issues are discussed at the Inter-Departmental Committee and a coordinated approach between the relevant government departments is used to overcome the problem. The most recent example of this work has been the move by the Government to coordinate the funding of community facilities. The end result of this process is that these facilities can be used on a more regular basis by an increased number of community groups and the funding can be more equitably distributed.

The Working Party on Juvenile Offending

The Working Party on Juvenile Offending was established in 1988 in order to develop a proposal to combat youth crime in Queensland. On joining this group in February 1989, I was pleased to find that the members considered that the best strategies available to the Inter-Departmental Committee to tackle the prevention of offending were to ensure that government services to families and youth were coordinated, integrated and developed in collaboration with communities.
It was also suggested that such strategies could be relevant to other social problems affecting young people such as homelessness, drug abuse and youth suicide and that these problems were themselves interactive to some extent. As part of the work, the Working Party presented the following proposals to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Youth Affairs in July 1989:

- Focus on young people 'at risk' should not be lost to the Inter-Departmental committee. Such young people are visible early in life in schools, clinics and in community and welfare agencies, and yet, many proceed inexorably towards destructive lifestyles.
- We should examine the merits and limitations of present responses before seeking resources for new, additional ones.
- One of the limitations of present responses to social problems may be that they are designed too much according to the form of government departmental structures, rather than social reality.
- Until recent years, there has not been much in the way of the development of a common frame of reference, sharing of information and ideas, coordination of services or collaborative development of strategies.
- The Inter-Departmental Committee is able to initiate such sharing, to generate and explore possible strategies and to develop proposals for negotiation.
- These activities would be likely to impact on a number of interrelated youth problems and family issues also, not just offending.
- A suggested process for the operation of the Inter-Departmental Committee would be:
  (a) a departmental representative presents a paper to a meeting on 'Key Issues Affecting Youth in the Next Five Years—A Departmental Perspective'. Such a presentation outlines:
    - the issues as perceived;
    - the data available;
    - the strategies used or that are being developed;
    - the possible relevance to other departments;
    - proposed action by the Inter-Departmental Committee;
  (b) a discussion follows of the elements of the presentation as above, leading to decisions or action plans which might, at their simplest level, be to share information, data, etc, with relevant people beyond the Committee, to the identification and development of possible new strategies.
- Where necessary, individuals or small working parties could be nominated to report back to the Inter-Departmental Committee.

It was through this process that a presentation was given by Mr Ian Peers from the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs which outlined what appears to be quite a complete approach to the issues of juvenile offending.

The essence of the approach is contained in the following areas:

**Area 1: Individual Control**

(To punish, restrict or compulsorily manage offenders or their parents.)

**Area 2: Individual Guidance and Assistance**

(To increase the ability of the individual to meet his needs constructively in the existing environment) e.g.
• employment preparation
• social skills training
• living skills training
• remedial education
• personal or group counselling and therapy
• accommodation support

Area 3: Family and Community Support and Development
(To assist families and communities to respond more effectively to the needs of young people), for example

• family counselling support
• family and community networking
• funding, training
• assistance to community youth organisations

Area 4: Advocacy and Public Awareness

• to raise public awareness of the facts and issues concerning juvenile offending
• to advocate on behalf of young people affected

The critical point about this approach is that no one area can stand alone as the answer to offending behaviour. What is needed is an approach which incorporates all of the points outlined above.

It is interesting to note, however, that there has been quite a great deal of development in New Zealand regarding the youth justice system. At a recent Crime Prevention Conference in Melbourne, hosted by the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Commonwealth Youth Bureau, the representatives from New Zealand indicated that the number of police in New Zealand had been reduced and that institutions for young offenders and those needing the care of the state had declined from forty to three. A system of incarceration had largely been replaced by a process of family and community consultation designed to resolve issues between offenders and those offended against.

Recently in Queensland, a great deal of attention has been given by the media and some individuals in the political arena to the area of juvenile offending. This has resulted in a range of reactive solutions to address the problem. The most notable of these was the proposed 'curfew' legislation of 1989. While this received some recognition from the general population, it failed to capture the support of the majority of workers with young people and the police.

This increased attention to the area of juvenile offending led the Inter-Departmental Committee on Youth Affairs to re-establish the Working Party made up of representatives of government departments concerned with young people. Following discussions at recent conferences in Melbourne and Brisbane, a decision was made to expand the group to include representatives from a number of peak community sector organisations.

The Bonnemaison Approach

Initial Working Party investigations focussed on the development of a statewide, coordinated, community based program which would allow communities to address the issue of juvenile offending at their local level. Hence the development of a proposal based
on the philosophy and principles of the Bonnemaison program became the conceptual starting point.

The important element about this successful French experiment was not so much the programs but the assessment of the causes and the careful application of community development processes. These include the following:
- acceptance of a causal link between crime and the issues of social inequality and poverty;
- national commitment to increase community awareness about the problems and causes;
- cooperative link between the three tiers of government;
- provision of adequate resources;
- devolution of power to local committees;
- involvement of community and organisation representation at the local level; and
- commitment to a change in socio-economic outcomes for communities and young people.

The Bonnemaison approach is founded on the belief that a policy based substantially upon repression fails both in terms of reducing crime and in its efforts to make people feel more secure. The failure of traditional methods underlines the need for a broad coordinated approach combining social preventative measures working alongside existing enforcement measures.

The concept is also based on the understanding that there is no one single cause of juvenile crime. It is rather the combination of causes which gives rise to criminality.

The Victorian 'Good Neighbourhood Program' and the South Australian 'Confronting Crime' program are adaptations of the Bonnemaison approach.

Investigations into these programs have provided a number of principles for successful operation. They are as follows:
- there must be real and substantial involvement by the community at all levels;
- young people must be involved in the development of the program;
- the program must be supported by all political groups;
- the program should not be hosted by the police department or any government agency which has statutory responsibilities for young people; and
- an evaluation program must be developed at the start of the program.

The Working Party Report to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Youth Affairs

The Working Party in its report to the Inter-Departmental Committee has adopted the following goals and objectives for the proposal.

Goals
- Research the motivating factors behind juvenile offending.
- Increase community awareness of the factors and realities relating to juvenile offending.
- Introduce programs, based on research findings, that will take a preventative approach to the issue of juvenile offending behaviour.

Objectives
- Establish a partnership between state government, local government and the community;
- increase awareness about the nature and causes of juvenile offending and develop prioritised action strategies; and
reduce and help prevent instances of criminal behaviour through programs that:

- enrich young people's relationships with and participation in their community, its groups and organisations;
- strengthen community cohesion;
- increase young people's access to education, training, employment and cultural and recreational activities; and
- research the juvenile justice system and juvenile offending. This research would be undertaken collaboratively by government and community sectors.

The report also contains information on program management which includes allowances for a Standing Committee, made up of government and community representatives and a Resource Unit for the day-to-day administration of the program. It also contains information on the possible role of local government, local coordinating groups and funding proposals.

Now that the Working Party has submitted its report to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Youth Affairs, it is being studied by various government departments and community groups with the view of finalising the proposal for submission to Cabinet before the end of the year. It is hoped that before too long, Queensland will have a substantial community based crime prevention program.