

Helping young people at risk



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Police have long suspected that they encounter young people with problems before any other agency. This sad fact is now supported by research which has revealed that police come into contact with young people at risk of committing serious offences or self harm up to a year before other agencies become aware that there is a problem.

But there is a positive side to that knowledge.

“Queensland Police officers are in a unique position in that they are able to provide assistance to young people at the earliest possible opportunity,” said Inspector Bruce Graydon.

Over the past four years police in the Metropolitan North Police Region have been developing the Coordinated Response to Young People At Risk (CRYPAR) Program.

“The Program aims to address the social causes of crime, and is a whole of government initiative that assists young people and their families on a wide range of issues,” said Inspector Graydon, Manager of the CRYPAR Coordination Unit.

The first stage of the program is an obvious process of relying

on the police officer’s instinct and experience.

When North Brisbane and Pine Rivers Police District officers encounter a young person they consider to be at risk, they fill out a simple referral form in consultation with the young person.

“For the purpose of the project, an ‘at risk’ person is defined as one who has significant issues in their life and seeks assistance with those issues. If left unaddressed, these young people are potentially our future offenders,” Inspector Graydon said.

The referral form is then faxed to any one of 15 agencies who have agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding to respond to referrals within 48 hours.

“To date those agencies have promptly responded to crises or ongoing issues affecting the lives of more than 450 young people.”

The findings of an independent evaluation by the University of Queensland yielded excellent results and found that the program has the strong support of all stakeholders, including respondents, police officers, and all government and non-government agencies involved.

“Importantly it reduced repeat calls for service and police workload,” Inspector Graydon said.

The Champion of the Program, Assistant Commissioner Peter Barron, believes that CRYPAR is a benefit not only to the young people it refers, but to the community as a whole.

“In addition to the many lives that have benefited from the services provided through the 450 referrals to date, the implementation of CRYPAR has seen the enrichment of community support networks and the fostering of more assured communities,” he said.

It is a view endorsed by the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport, Judy Spence.

She believes the program is successful over a wide range of issues.

“The partnerships and improvement in service to the community has provided a restorative effect for families and young people with issues, reduced calls for service for police, and provided greater collaboration and engagement between agencies resulting in an enhanced social infrastructure and a safer community,” said Minister Spence.

“This Program is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, reducing calls for service and secondly, creating sustainable partnerships with agencies that we have historically struggled to engage.”

“Of greatest importance though, is the success we are having in changing young people’s lives, to the point that they do not commit crime or engage in self harming behaviour,” said Inspector Graydon.

“These are the things that we set out to do. One of the pleasant surprises for us though, has been the multiple referrals that have resulted from a single police referral.

“Agencies are now working together in treating dysfunctional families as a whole, which is good for everyone – the young person, the family, the police and the community in general.”

For further information Inspector Graydon can be contacted at the CRYPAR Coordination Unit on telephone 3364 3482.