

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) and the YMCA are working in partnership to deliver the U-Turn Program aimed at reducing motor vehicle theft and giving young offenders the opportunity to turn their lives around.

The 10-week program is based on similar diversionary programs in Australia and the United Kingdom and offers young people training and education in a number of areas including the automotive industry, road safety, personal development, literacy and numeracy.

U-Turn is jointly funded by the Australian Government's National Crime Prevention Program and the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (NMVTRC) and is based on the NMVTRC Best Practice Model.

The program aims to break the offending cycle of young offenders and those at risk of offending by helping them develop new skills based around vehicle maintenance and repairs.

A total of eight courses will be delivered during the two-year pilot, each comprising 10 participants.

U-Turn is being delivered by Logan YMCA Youth Services from a fully equipped workshop.

The program targets young people aged between 15 and 20 with an interest in cars and a history of vehicle theft.

The Queensland pilot is off to a bold start: eight participants graduated from the first course on November 28, 2004; six received a Certificate 1 in Automotive; five of these are presently in full-time employment; and two have continued their studies on U-Turn Course Two to gain the full certificate. None of these young people have re-offended at this time.

The YMCA employs a project manager, two mechanical trainers and a youth worker to focus on addressing the underlying issues contributing to offending behaviour and linking the young people to networks of support, further training and employment.

U-Turn Program

turns lives around

By Sergeant Kim McCoomb, Media and Public Affairs Branch



Participants are trained in a workshop where they develop new skills based on vehicle maintenance and repairs.

The QPS and YMCA have engaged key government and non-government agencies to refer young people to the program. Referrals have been invited from police, the courts, and supervisory agencies as well as from the community with self-referrals and referrals by family members.

Case management plays a large part in the U-Turn Program. Initial discussions and interaction with the participants indicated many of their problems resulted from a combination of low self esteem, poor communication skills, anger management problems, drug use and lack of persistence. Underpinning this is the fact that most have very limited education.

The caseworker has been able to capitalise on everyday activities to use as real life examples of learning, such as bad behaviour, attitudes, language, quitting and selfishness and to use those examples as discussion points in their twice weekly group meetings.

The group discusses issues such as what the behaviour was, the impact on themselves and the rest of the group, what was achieved and alternate ways of handling the situation.

The staff pay equal if not greater attention to any positive behaviour or improvements and emphasise, reinforce and discuss the consequences of the improved behaviour.

The Moreton Institute of TAFE performs an independent assessment of the program participants, giving them the opportunity to obtain a Certificate 1 in Automotive and the ability to pursue a career in the automotive industry.

All participants are provided with tutoring in general road and driver safety and can complete a learner driver theory-training program. They are also given the opportunity to take on additional studies in numeracy and literacy.

In accordance with the Best Practice Model, course participants are given the opportunity to take part in recreational activities.



Young people and their facilitators during the U-Turn program, where they learn about motor vehicles.

These activities have been designed to broaden their experience and knowledge by providing them with a variety of activities that they are unlikely to have experienced.

The emphasis for the young people is that there are more ways to have fun than undertaking illegal activities that are harmful to others.

The first course participants attended tours of Aviation Australia, Boeing and the Brisbane Airport to see aircraft engines and training centres, John Deere to see heavy farm and construction machinery and engines, Fairways Driving Range to play golf, Queensland Rail to see large diesel and locomotive engines and workshops, Willowbank Raceway and the Dick Johnson Racing Workshop.

The trips successfully built team spirit and showed it was possible to have legal and constructive fun.

As part of the program the young people are given assistance by the caseworker to develop resumes and job application skills. They are also learning life skills such as cooking and cleaning.

From the start of each course the kitchen is made available to participants to cook themselves breakfast and lunch.

Part of the program entails the group organising a rotating lunch roster where two or three of the group cook and three are rostered to clean.

Although not initially popular, by the end of the first course the group were all participating, providing them with a strong sense of teamwork, new skills and the opportunity to get guidance into healthy eating.

A large part of the training involves restorative justice, enabling the groups to build self-esteem and contribute in a positive way to the Logan community.

Each course is given a vehicle and parts from local businesses and insurance companies to repair and present to an individual or family who have been the victim of a car theft, resulting in hardship.

The recipients for the restored cars will be chosen from the Logan community.

This program is another example of the QPS broadening its approach to crime prevention and working in partnership with government and non-government agencies, industry and the community.

Enrolments for future U-Turn courses are now being taken.

More information on how to enrol or to nominate a victim of crime to be considered as a recipient of a repaired car from U-Turn can be obtained through the Queensland Police Service website www.police.qld.gov.au or by contacting the YMCA U-Turn Manager, Michelle Venables on 3208 9715.