

Westrek is a Perth based organisation working with young people; particularly young offenders and youth at risk. Paul Rajan, the General Manager of Westrek, provides an insight, through this article, into the work and philosophy of the Foundation.

The primary purposes of responding to offending behaviour might be to record an objection to the impact of offensive behaviour upon the community and to reinforce that objection with a reaction which is designed to deter the offender and others from like actions in the future.

If we believe that children and juveniles need special responses in the justice system then we are bound to ask ourselves how we best represent those needs and those of the broader community in responding to juvenile offending.

An important difference between juveniles and adults in the criminal justice arena is the developmental vulnerability of young people. Through incarceration a young person loses, perhaps irretrievably, opportunities for development and maturation of personality and attitudes to the adult world at the most important time of his or her life.

The damage likely to result from such an action, or even one far less severe, can be seen in countless case histories of young offenders who have been sucked too early into the formal criminal justice system and who have continued to be its occupants for years thereafter.

We know that there are a number of social/environmental factors which correlate highly with youth offending; poverty, poor housing, domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, unemployment, lack of educational opportunity and so forth. It is not easy to imagine how additional impoverishment of opportunity will convert disillusioned, alienated and angry young people into the model citizens of the future.

The skill and wisdom we need to find in developing effective sentencing options for young people must be expressed in a 'win-win' formula. This would allow the community to feel it had made comment on unacceptable behaviour and had been protected and allow the young offender to accept the sentence as a lesson as

well as an opportunity to grow. For young offenders if the sentence does not present an opportunity for change and growth it will have been a waste of effort and of resources.

The Westrek Foundation offers some of these opportunities. In its eight year history Westrek has run some 60 projects in over 30 locations around Western Australia offering places to some 700 young people between the ages of 14 and 24 years. These young people have been unemployed, have been in conflict with authority at home and at school and have been offenders. More generally they have been unmotivated, depressed and angry.

After participating in a Westrek program they have got jobs, places in further education and training, have been able to break substance abuse habits and in many cases have moved away from offending behaviour into productive and secure lifestyles.

A survey of referring agencies carried out last year sought to follow up those offenders who had passed through our Youth at Risk programs in 1989 and early 1990. Of the 24 young people who started these three programs, 22 completed the eight weeks. Of those 70% have not re-offended and 14 remain in work or training programs. One young man was student of the year at his college last year.

While not pretending the approach is a panacea, it does offer some of the preconditions for self development and personal change which I mentioned earlier as central to an effective juvenile crime prevention program.

Westrek's programs are special because they concentrate on an holistic approach to each individual. The program is not about offending or about school or about any other one thing. It is centrally about each participant asking themselves the same question. The question is "Who do I want to be and how do I get there?". The programs are structured around a community based work project and are focussed upon the exercise of personal responsibility and the exploration of individual circumstances.

Participants are required to live harmoniously with a group of their peers and undertake an active role in the community in which the program is based. By developing partnerships with host communities Westrek has been able to combine the educational and experiential needs

ACCOMMODATION



Radisson
NORTH QUAY HOTEL

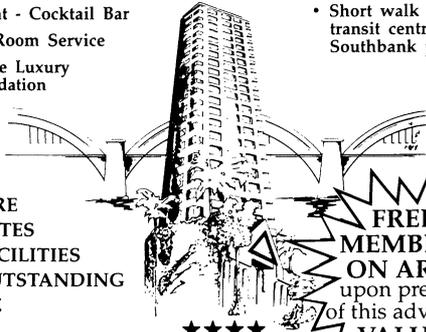
EXTREMELY COMPETITIVE RATES

- 5 Conference Areas for 10-200 Delegates
- Conference Equipment & Business services available
- Restaurant - Cocktail Bar
- 24 hour Room Service
- Affordable Luxury Accommodation at a central location

\$69

STUDIO ROOM
(RIVER VIEWS)
SINGLE OR TWIN
OCCUPANCY

- Luxury suites fully self-contained are also available
- Pool and spa
- Short walk to city heart, transit centre & Southbank parklands



COMPARE
- OUR RATES
- OUR FACILITIES
- OUR OUTSTANDING SERVICE

**FREE VIP
MEMBERSHIP
ON ARRIVAL**
upon presentation
of this advertisement
VALUE \$180

★★★★
ACCOMMODATION

Phone: (07) 236 1440 • Resv. Toll Free: 008 777 694
293 North Quay Brisbane RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

of young people with the practical needs of the community. It is partnership which builds self esteem and confidence among participants and an appreciation of the contribution young people can make to the community.

For many at risk young people this is the first time anyone has said "well done" or accepted they have done anything positive. Similarly this is often the first experience of peer praise for anything but delinquent behaviour.

A participant on a recent program was named 'the magician' by members of her group due to her ability to disappear on the work site. She can turn herself into a tree or any other object to avoid work they said. At a job interview training session towards the end of the program some ten weeks later hers was voted the best interview performance **by her peers.**

At the completion of the six week residential component of the program the group was congratulated by the Shire President upon its achievements, a townscape project in a small country town in W.A. This and the positive comments of local people passing by and taking an interest in the work will have done more for their ability to find an appropriate outlet for their energies in the future than any enforced response could ever hope to do.

There is only one thing one can say with any certainty at the beginning of a sentence and that is that one day it will finish and, formally at least, the "debt to society" will have been paid. Whether any overall improvement for the community or for the offender will have resulted is the key to the question of its success. The best answer we can offer for most sentencing options is 'probably not'. Such an answer, it seems to me, is an indictment of our sentencing process and a criticism of the value system which underpins it.

Westrek programs and others like them offer an opportunity to swap rhetoric for reality in the juvenile justice system and approach a 'win-win' option with some hope of real change for all of us.

(Edited from a conference workshop presentation held in Fremantle, W.A.)

Commonwealth Government Bookshop...

proudly supporting the Australian Crime Prevention Council

❖ **Crime Prevention for Older Australians**

by Marianne Pinkerton James

Offers many useful strategies for reducing fear of crime among older people, so that they can continue to lead useful and fulfilling lives.

Cat. No. 93 5556 1 \$15

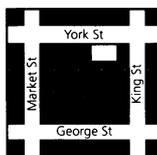
❖ **Preventing Retail Crime**

by Susan Geason and Paul Wilson

Offers useful suggestions on preventing shoplifting, employee theft, fraud, robbery and violence to staff.

Cat. No. 92 6848 0 \$15

Sydney

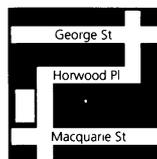


32 York Street

Tel: (02) 299 6737

Fax: (02) 262 1219

Parramatta



Shop 24, Horwood Place

(off Macquarie Street)

Tel: (02) 893 8466

Fax: (02) 893 8213



AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING SERVICE