

**EVALUATION OF THE ACRO YOUTH ACTION
PANEL PILOTS CONDUCTED IN VARIOUS
QUEENSLAND STATE HIGH SCHOOLS
1994-1996**

CLIVE BEGG

SEPTEMBER 1996

ISBN: 0 646 29549 7

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACRO, the Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated, is Australia's principle crime prevention community-based organisation having been established since 1962. It is a not-for-profit nongovernment organisation which is incorporated in Queensland under the Associations Incorporation Act, registered as a Charity in the same State and which is an approved Australian Registrable Body with the Australian Securities Commission. More information about the organisation can be found at ACRO's Homepage on the World Wide Web at <http://www.uq.edu.au/~zzacro>

Research conducted overseas (Crime Concern London) and in Australia (ACRO, 1994) has shown that young people wish to become actively involved in crime prevention strategies given the opportunity. The same research indicates that young people see themselves as potential victims rather than offenders, are concerned about personal safety and that they turn to their peer group for advice and support rather than rely upon adults. As the proportion of young people who are persistent offenders within the community is extremely small (estimated at 6-8% of young people), there is a significant number of responsible young people whose value in the fight against crime has gone unnoticed - until now.

In 1992 ACRO brought the Youth Action Panel Program to Australia, a Program initially designed by Crime Concern in the United Kingdom.

Youth Action Panels consist of young people who come together to talk about issues of concern to them, to engage the broader school body in a process of better defining these issues, to prioritise needs based upon the consultation with the broader school community, to propose solutions to deal with those matters and finally, with the support of the adult community to implement strategies that they believe will make a difference to reduce the level of concern held. Of fundamental importance is that the process for Youth Action is owned and controlled by young people themselves with facilitation only by accredited adults until such time as Projects are in the implementation stage and require financial and/or other support from adults. There are in excess of 800 Youth Action Panels operating across the United Kingdom with crime prevention strategies including cycle/property marking, anti-graffiti Projects, anti-racism campaigns, anti-bullying campaigns and anti-sexual harassment campaigns. Personal safety strategies have encompassed the problem areas of bullying, racial discrimination and so forth. The information from Crime Concern in the UK is that the Program is a huge success in that country.

Panels are typically schools-based, comprise young people aged 12 - 17 years, can be constituted of between 5 and 25 young people, meet weekly or fortnightly and are supported by a trained facilitator.

Since 1994 ACRO has conducted Youth Action Panels in some Queensland State High Schools. With the co-operation of the Principals of Bremer State High School, Trinity Bay State High School and Smithfield State High School, pilot programs have been conducted in those schools. The Pilot Program at Bremer High commenced in 1994 and at the other two schools in 1995. The ACRO facilitators on these Projects have been a qualified teacher (and ACRO Education Officer, Ms. Fiona Begg) and a qualified psychologist (and ACRO Far North Queensland Regional Co-ordinator, Ms. Stephanie Whelan). Two other schools in the Far North of the State were involved

however it was the opinion of ACRO that these schools may not have adhered to the Program guidelines (and have not been facilitated by ACRO).

ACRO determined to undertake an evaluation of those Projects directly facilitated by it to determine whether the aims and objectives for the program were being met and to determine the effectiveness of the Program for broader implementation in High Schools across Australia.

During August 1996 and with the support of the Principals of the involved schools, ACRO surveyed young people who had been Youth Action Panel members at the schools, young people who were not directly in Panel work at the schools, Principals and teachers (including "supervisors"), to determine the impact of Youth Action Panels on the student body and within the schools from the perspective of Staff. At the same time, ACRO examined the process of Youth Action Panel development at pilot schools in the context of the aims for the Program and reviewed any subsequent Projects established. This Evaluation Report is the result of this investigation.

The Project at all three schools is a "good news" story. The following results from the evaluation are noted:

- C All respondents, including Principals and teachers, (except for one Panel participant) felt that the Project was "very useful" or "useful". The Panels have become, in the opinion of the writer, an important adjunct to the educational agenda for all three schools during the relatively short lifetime of the Project.
- C All respondents indicated that the facilitation of the Project by an outside community based organisation was highly successful. From the students perspective this style of facilitation enabled more frank and open discussion of contentious issues and from the Principals and teachers perspective the ACRO involvement enabled students to interact with the outside community in a structured and beneficial manner.
- C Respondents reported significant positive outcomes from the conduct of the process both in terms of schools based issues (such as the enhancement of self esteem, group work, cross age participation) and community based (such as dealing with issues that are problematic to the broader community, the enhancement of practical citizenship, problem-solving and interaction with members of the adult and general community). Youth Action Panels have been shown to be an important device in the augmentation of significant citizenship processes that are begun in the home, extended into the school and which will eventually lead these young people into leadership positions within the community.
- C Principals reported their strong desire for the continuity of the Program given the high level of ownership of issues and the development of "solutions" to these issues and the enhancement of school camaraderie.
- C The vast majority of respondents, including all Principals, disclosed that the Panels had value-added to the school. Responses on how this had occurred ranged from helping others, experiencing and dealing with issues that otherwise are not dealt with within the education context, keeping young people out of trouble and influencing the social fabric of the community through active participation.

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- C The vast majority of respondents, including all Principals and teachers, endorsed the Program by affirming that they would recommend the process to other Principals, teachers and students.
 - C Respondents reported extremely positive experiences from their work with the Panels including the opportunity to deal with matters such as racism, collective decision-making, the attainment of goals and gaining respect from other students, staff and the Principal as a direct result of their involvement with the Project. It is the opinion of the writer that Youth Action Panels provide the nexus between theory and practice in education and is therefore a most potent vehicle for social change which harnesses the creativity and optimism of a most valuable resource, our youth.

At each of the three schools the Youth Action Panels established have successfully engaged the student bodies in a survey process that has disclosed those matters of concern to students, worked towards "solutions" to these problems and with the support of students, teachers, the Principal and the broader community implemented creative Projects including anti-graffiti, bicycle marking, anti-smoking, anti-racial discrimination, Road Safety, Fundraising Dances, anti-bullying, anti-vandalism and anti-theft.

A few quotes from Principals about the Project are:

"YAPs provide an additional positive component in the school which has great potential for generating discussion of relevant issues and promoting active pursuit of solutions to perceived problems"

"It has been approached differently. The facilitation has been expertly given, values driven, unobtrusive, non-authoritarian and non-bureaucratic, everyone involved went well."

"I think the achievements far exceed my expectations and are a great credit to (the facilitator). Seems to me she got it right and built great relationships all round while she did it."

"Two Projects have tangible positive and effective outcomes to benefit all students of the school. Both fixed needs that have been obvious for years but we never got at them."

"It works! Demonstrated success".

"I believe it is an important, significant lifetime memory, experience for the students and a significant reminder of the good values that our youth still support and hold."

"The strategy is proactive."

"I have witnessed a group of students willing to discuss issues important to them."

"It has heightened the relevance of the 'community' in the minds of the students (particularly those involved). The school does not have the personnel to do something as H.R. intensive as this."

" The YAP is a very positive activity for students to be involved in and for the school to benefit by."

Teachers comments were equally supportive and positive and is best summarised by this response from a supervising teacher:

" It is a great concept and I thoroughly recommend it to all schools."

The comments from students were extremely positive and can be reviewed in the body of this Report.

Whilst there was little negative comment about the process from Principals, teachers nor students it is evident that for the Program to be utilised to maximum advantage Youth Action should be accommodated within school timetables. The issue for Principals and teachers about lost class time, irrespective of a rotational strategy to minimise disruption by the facilitator at those schools that didn't timetable the process, can be effectively managed by building the Panel work into curricula components as was the case at Bremer High.

A further issue that emerged during the course of the Pilot relates to the sensitivity of some Principals to particular social issues. One Principal from a non-ACRO facilitated school became quite defensive about the disclosure by students through their Survey that bullying was a problem for young people. There seemed to be a view that bullying was somehow exclusively resultant from behaviours in the school environment. This is clearly not the case, although bullying strategies may well be effectively managed within that environment through the peer processes of Youth Action. The particular Principal made public statements that appeared to contradict the opinions of students and thereby undermined the potential for action by the students at his school to deal with what is a generic problem for them within the community. Such sensitivities are, in the opinion of ACRO, unwarranted and should be set aside in the interest of resolving an important issue for our youth. There is scope for changing the belief that schools are somehow "closed" institutions - the fact remains that many of the belief structures that lead to intolerance, discrimination, sexual harassment and violence are initiated from within the family and within the general community and are merely transported through other structures such as educational institutions. Young people should be viewed as the "experts" in the resolution of such matters since they are the ones that are directly involved. As ACRO and Crime Concern have said repeatedly "Young People are not the problem, but they are part of the solution".

It is the opinion of the writer that the pilot Youth Action Panels at these three schools have been an unqualified success. Panel Respondents have enjoyed their involvement in that it has enabled them to interact with other school members (across age levels), other schools and members of the broader community in a proactive way that has enhanced levels of understanding and tolerance. It has also given these respondents the opportunity to negotiate and argue a position for either additional resources or assistance from significant adult groups through the application of practical Programs that address real concerns. From the perspective of Principals and Staff, the process has had definable and positive outcomes that have impacted on the entire school community in an unobtrusive way.

Youth Action Panels are clearly an important vehicle for citizenship training for young

people in their preparation for dealing with the adult world. It is a process that is fun but which has very real and definable outcomes that contribute to both the development of the individual and the collective. This pilot replicates the success of the UK experience with YAPS albeit with some cultural modifications.

It is strongly recommended that Youth Action Panels be considered for implementation by other Australian High Schools.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Young people are an important resource, albeit as yet untapped, in the fight against crime. In major research conducted by Crime Concern in the United Kingdom and replicated in Australia by ACRO (1994), young people have made it clear that they are concerned about personal safety, they view themselves as potential victims rather than offenders, they turn to their peer group for advice and support rather than rely upon adults, are bored and feel disconnected from the broader community. Most important of all young people have made it clear that, given the opportunity, they wish to become actively involved in Crime Prevention strategies.

Youth Action Panels are a process originally designed by Crime Concern in the early 1990's. There are now some 800 Panels operating throughout the UK. ACRO imported the Program into Australia in 1992 and established Panels initially at the Bremer State High School in 1994 and subsequently pilot Projects were implemented in a number of State High Schools in the Far North of Queensland in 1995 .

In essence Youth Action Panels consist of Young people who come together to talk about issues of concern to them, to engage the broader school constituency in a process of better defining those issues, to prioritise needs based upon the consultation with the broader school community, to propose solutions to deal with those matters and finally, with the support of the adult community, to implement strategies that they believe will make a difference to reduce the levels of concern held. Of fundamental importance to this process is that the groups are started by young people who draw upon the resources of the adult or broadly based community as they need it.

Youth Action Panels recruit young people who may not normally be engaged in Committee work within schools (such as School Representative Councils and Prefect systems) through processes of involvement on issues of direct social relevance to them. Whilst School Representative Councils and other such Committees have an important role to play within schools, they can be perceived to be overly bureaucratic and at times elitist. They can also be perceived as directed, albeit subtly, by Principals and as such may not in some cases be seen to advance the legitimate concerns of the majority of students. Youth Action Panels capture the imagination and enthusiasm of young people who otherwise would not be involved as participants in the practical application of their school experience.

Panels are typically schools based, comprise young people ages 12 to 17 years, can be constituted of between 5 and 25 young people, meet weekly or fortnightly and are supported by a trained facilitator from within the community. Crime Prevention action strategies in the United Kingdom have included cycle/property marking, anti-graffiti Projects, anti-racism campaigns, anti-bullying campaigns and anti-sexual harassment campaigns. In the United Kingdom personal safety strategies have encompassed the problem areas of bullying, racial harassment and so forth. Youth Action has been developed as a curriculum vehicle within many UK schools. ACRO believes that the benefits of Youth Action Panels to school management include a reduction in crime activity and an improvement in personal safety as well as strengthening the school institution. It is a process that also improves ethos and relationships between young people of various ages, young people and older people as well as improving risk management. It is a highly cost effective, value for dollar Program.

ACRO together with other significant organisations have conducted research on the nature of crime and the reasons for promoting Youth Action Panels can be found embodied in that research;

25% of crime is committed by young people under 17 years of age

Between 50-70% of young people suffer the effect of bullying

Young people are concerned about crime and fear becoming the victims of crime.

A large percentage of young people want to join with others to do something about crime

ACRO=s philosophy for the development of Youth Action Panels is:

ATo encourage young people to become actively involved in a process which enables them to identify and address issues of direct concern to them in relation to safety and crime prevention, through developing their knowledge and skills of participatory democracy within their school and local communities=.

The aims of ACRO=s Youth Action Panels are;

- 1 To involve all young people in crime prevention and personal safety
- 2 To increase the number of Youth Action Groups in schools and Youth Organisations
- 3 To increase the involvement of more Young people from ethnic minorities
- 4 To increase the range and quality of Youth Action work
- 5 To reduce levels of intimidation and harassment in the school environment
- 6 To provide practical citizenship based upon democratic principles
- 7 To increase awareness among young people and the community generally about the impact of crime particularly on young people
- 8 To encourage young people to take an active role in devising solutions to addressingkey concerns
- 9 To facilitate access for young people to existing structures within the community which they need to assist them
- 10 To assist young people to prevent crime and make our schools and communities safer

The agreed content and delivery of Program applied by ACRO in the development of its Youth Action Panel Program is as follows;

- 1 Students are addressed on the broader issues of crime prevention and community safety
- 2 A sub-group of students is formed (the original Panel) which is representative of the age and racial groupings of the school
- 3 The members of the sub-group consult widely with other students on issues of concern.
- 4 The outcomes from this initial consultation are used to draft a questionnaire to be distributed to the student body.
- 5 The information from this larger survey is used to highlight the areas of concern for the student body

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- 6 The Youth Action Panel then meet to discuss this material and propose solutions to them with the assistance of the facilitator and, as required, other community representatives
 - 7 Projects are initiated dealing specifically with the issues isolated and on the basis as agreed from the strategic planning.

Given that Youth Action Panels have now operated in selected Queensland State High Schools since 1994, in the case of Bremer State High School, and since 1995 at Trinity Bay State High and Smithfield State High Schools, ACRO determined to undertake an evaluation of those Projects to determine whether the aims and objectives for the Program have been met and to determine the effectiveness of the Program for broader implementation across other High Schools in Australia.

3.0 SCOPE AND RATIONALE FOR REVIEW

The first pilot Youth Action Panel was established at Bremer State High School in 1994. A history of the progress of that Panel will be found at the conclusion of this section.

The ACRO facilitators are Ms. Fiona Begg (B.A., DipEd., who is a qualified teacher in the State of Queensland and the ACRO Education Officer) and Ms Stephanie Whelan (B.A.[Hons], psychologist and ACRO Far North Queensland Regional Co-ordinator).

In relation to the pilot Program in the Far North of Queensland (Cairns), ACRO's participation emanated from the publication of the **Crime of Fear** (ACRO. 1994) which had as one of its major recommendations to the then Mulgrave Shire Council the extension of ACRO's pilot of Youth Action Panels.

ACRO agreed to joint venture the conduct of Youth Action Panels with the then Mulgrave Shire Council in four Far North Queensland State High Schools, those being Trinity Bay, Smithfield, Cairns and Babinda. The original agreement was that the ACRO worker in the region would facilitate Youth Action Panels at Trinity Bay and Smithfield State High School and that the Mulgrave Shire Council Community Safety Worker (later to become the Cairns City Council worker) facilitate Youth Action Panels at Cairns and Babinda State High Schools. Explicit to an agreement between ACRO and the Council was that ACRO would have supervisory rights over both workers and ensure that the Youth Action Panel Program was co-ordinated along lines specified by ACRO. During the intervening period two models for operation have apparently evolved - one based upon the original >bottom up= process which engages young people initially and which requires young people to drive the process (the Crime Concern / ACRO model) and a second >top down= approach whereby all decision-making became apparently vested with the Principal or the School Representative Councils. The evolution of this "top-down" model has led to considerable disquiet on the part of ACRO which determined to undertake a review of those schools directly under its control only (ie. Trinity Bay State High School, Smithfield State School and Bremer State High School) and exclude those which, in its view, had failed to meet the program ideals. ACRO consulted with Crime Concern in the United Kingdom extensively and both organisations share the view that Youth Action Panels **must** be driven by young people and that there should not be any overriding control of the process by either Principals or other adults. Accordingly this evaluation extends only to Programs operating in the three ACRO facilitated High Schools which, in ACRO's opinion, conforms to this rationale.

It is agreed that an evaluation of a Program such as Youth Action is imperative not only in terms of its utility to other High School settings but also in terms of the impact that Youth Action has had on the participating school communities and the broader community in which those schools are located. This evaluation will seek to draw together the important elements of Youth Action work in the three ACRO facilitated High Schools.

The History of the Development of the Bremer State High School ACRO Youth Action Panel

The initial contact between Bremer High and ACRO resulted from a teacher at the school requesting information in relation to Corrections in Queensland. After an address to the students by ACRO staff member, Fiona Begg, discussions were held with the Human Relationships Education teacher and the Guidance officer in relation to ACRO's role in community safety. Ms Begg then presented an outline of the Youth Action Panel strategy for consideration by the Principal and in consultation with the teaching staff at Bremer High. It was agreed that students would benefit from this Program.

During 1994 ACRO Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated worked with a group of 30 year eleven students to examine the issues surrounding crime and community safety and how young people are affected by these concerns. As a result of these discussions the young people involved formulated a survey document incorporating key areas of concern to them to investigate the attitude of their peers to issues including bullying, youth as offenders, youth as crime victims, sexual harassment, their perceptions about their school and local community and avenues for youth participation within the community. Since the students were to be involved in the analysis of the data it was necessary to keep the data in manageable proportions. Therefore the students nominated two classes per year level to complete the survey. These classes were selected randomly and due to timetable constraints it was not possible to have an equal number of students from each year level participate. Some 220 respondents completed the Survey Questionnaire. The results from this larger Survey were published in 1994 (Begg & Begg). The young people then analysed the results and used their findings as a blueprint to devise action strategies to address their concerns and establish themselves within their school and local community as a force for change.

With the co-operation of school personnel at Bremer State High and the enthusiasm of students, ACRO was able to successfully negotiate for the Youth Action Panel to be allocated as a special Program option within the school timetable for students in years 11 and 12 to begin planning their action plan. A group of young people aged between 15-17 met twice a week with the initial group numbers swelling to include young people from all year levels by the time their first strategy was implemented. The Panel's biggest problem initially was their >invisibility= within the school. They were aware that to be effective they needed a profile. They devised several strategies to address the problem;

- * a youth action Panel launch on the school assembly featuring their mascot >Youth Action Man=
- * Youth Action Panel stickers, posters and letterhead featuring the YAP mascot were designed. Stickers and posters were distributed throughout the school and Panel members made regular appearances on school assemblies to give progress reports
- * Regular updates were provided in the school newsletter.
- * Minutes of all meetings were kept which were available to all interested parties.
- * A strategy was devised which would target a problem not being addressed by anyone else within the school community and had the potential to involve as many people as possible from throughout the school and the local community.

Different methods have been employed by facilitators to best meet the needs of the students and also to meet the requirements of the schools involved. At Bremer the Program began with the

support of a teacher at the school (year co-ordinator) and the school curriculum included a special Programs option for students in year 11 and 12. This meant that the Panel could be offered to students in these year levels within their existing timetable structure. However it also meant that students from years 8-10 were not able to attend regular meetings. To an extent these students were able to access the Panel through lunch time meetings but regular contact was not always possible. Therefore the Panel has consisted over the two years of its existence at Bremer primarily of year 11 students, and also primarily of female students. Several males have been involved in the Panels over time but few have maintained their interest.

Initially the facilitator addressed year level assemblies and then as the Panel became better known throughout the school word of mouth amongst students kept interest high. The Panel began with 8-10 students from years 11 and 12 and presently numbers 20-25 students. The Panel runs as a semester option for students but some students choose to stay with the Panel for the full year. Over time a small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been involved in the work of the Panel, principally on the Art Project which attracted involvement from students from throughout the school. Several students from year 8 became involved in the work of the Panel through the Art Project and wished to remain involved. One meeting per week is therefore allocated as a lunch time meeting to allow these students to participate.

The Panel has run at Bremer twice a week since the beginning of 1995. This has involved a single lesson one day and a double lesson on another. Teacher support has always been available but flexibility is always available if the teacher needs to do work elsewhere.

The History and Development of the Far North Queensland ACRO Youth Action Panels

As stated earlier, the Far Northern Panels were established as a result of a recommendation to the former Mulgrave Shire Council from the **Crime of Fear** (ACRO, 1994) study in the region. The Schools first introduction to the Program occurred when schools in the region were invited to participate in a full day workshop (hosted by the Regional Education Department Office) facilitated by ACRO's Education Officer, ACRO's Regional Coordinator and the councils Community Safety Officer. At the workshop the history, aims and processes of the program were introduced to school staff members and students, with interested schools further participating in more specific discussions of how the program could operate in their schools. Subsequently the two schools currently participating in the program and which are facilitated by ACRO (two not being) agreed to take part in the pilot program of ACRO Youth Action Panels in Far North Queensland.

Both of the Panels that ACRO facilitates in two Far North Queensland High Schools were commenced in Second term 1995. The Panels have the same facilitator who is an ACRO employee and both started with the same preparation and methods, however both Panels have evolved into very different groups after six school terms of operation.

Prior to the commencement of the panels proper, the facilitator visited both schools in an attempt to arouse interest in the Program amongst the student body. From the initial contact with the school, contact with the adult members of the school population was minimal. Since participation in the Panels was strictly a matter of interested students volunteering and actively seeking out the Panel to join, it was important that a certain awareness level of the Program existed (amongst students). This was achieved as a result of facilitator visits to the school.

Visits to the school to raise awareness of the Panel involved several activities. The facilitator placed posters around the school advertising the Panels with the facilitators name and phone number. The facilitator addressed full and year level assemblies. The facilitator informally introduced herself to students during out of class time at the school and she also visited classes and gave some brief information about the Panels.

During the preparation, the facilitator focused attention on several pieces of information; what a Youth Action Panel is, why young people should be involved with them and when and how young people would have an opportunity to get involved at their school.

The first meeting at both schools was held at lunchtime and continued on through class time. The facilitator organised for local fast food restaurants (MacDonalds, Hungry Jacks) to donate lunches for those attending the first meeting, however this did tend to attract a number of hungry yet uninterested people. A number of the students who attended the first meeting of the Youth Action Panel at their school are still involved, eighteen months later. The panels at both involved schools have slightly different operating procedures. One panel meets once a week in lunchtime and then works through a single or double period as needed. The other school work during a single or double period each week, with >free time= being used by the panel members as necessary. As the Program has not been afforded an area of the curricula at either of the Far Northern schools, panel meetings are rotated through the days of the week to avoid panel members missing the same class on a regular basis.

Several projects have been completed by the panels in Far North Queensland, including the completion of comprehensive surveys by over 350 students in the region, and the analysis of survey results. An anti graffiti project has been successfully undertaken by one panel, a project that required approximately 55 hours to complete, twenty five hours of which were students lunchtimes or after school free time. A smoking education program has also been developed that involves peer education about the dangers of cigarette smoking and is currently being trialed in Far Northern primary schools (presented by the panel members). In addition to the completion of these projects, both panels are currently in the development stages of strategies that will deal with racism, and road safety education (pedestrian behaviour and drink driving) amongst the young people of their community.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The aims of the evaluation were twofold;

- 1 To determine the effectiveness of Youth Action Panels in terms of the perception of participants and non-participants.
- 2 To determine whether the ACRO facilitators at the various schools had worked towards the realisation of the aims of the Project as initially designed;

In relation to the first of these aims two questionnaires were designed for completion by various involved persons within each school. One questionnaire was designed for completion by Panel members, Teachers and Principals. This questionnaire comprised 30 questions, 11 of which were "open-ended", 10 of which required a "Yes/No" response, 7 of which required a rating from 1 - 10 (1 representing the lowest possible score, 10 representing the highest possible score) and one question that required a selection of a "Very Useful/ Useful/ Not Useful" response. A second questionnaire was designed for persons not directly involved with Youth Action Panels throughout the various grades in each of the participating schools. This questionnaire comprised 11 questions, 6 of which were "open-ended", 4 of which required a "Yes/No" response, and a section for additional "comments" for respondents. A copy of both questionnaires is appended.

All questionnaires were completed over two days in late August 1996 in each of the subject schools.

In relation to the second questionnaire to non-participants on Youth Action Panels two students were chosen at random from each grade level (years 8-12 inclusive) and were completed. All surveys were returned except for one Grade 8 student from Bremer State High School.

In relation to the second aim of this evaluation, the process of each Panel was examined in the context of the aims for the Program with any subsequent Projects established reviewed.

5.0 RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

PART ONE: THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

YOUTH ACTION PANEL PARTICIPANTS, PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

The three schools subject to this evaluation were Bremer State High School, Trinity Bay State High School and Smithfield State High School. 46 completed questionnaires were received from Panel members, 29 completed questionnaires were received from non-Panel members, 3 completed questionnaires were received from Principals and 8 completed questionnaires were received from teachers (two of whom were >supervisors= of the Projects).

There were 16 respondents who were Panel members attending Bremer State High School (all of whom were students in year 11), 14 respondents who were Panel members at Trinity State High School (all of whom were students in year 10) and 16 respondents who were Panel members at Smithfield State High School (7 of whom were in year 8, 1 in year 9, 7 in year 10, and 1 in year 12). The Principal at each of the three High Schools completed a questionnaire as did members of the teaching staff of each school (3 from Smithfield State High, 2 from Trinity Bay and 3 from Bremer).

In response to the question ADo you consider the Project useful?≡, 45 respondents who were Panel members felt that it was either very useful or useful with only 1 respondent saying that it was not useful. Two Principals expressed the view that the Project was very useful with one stating that he thought it was useful. Those teachers who had a supervisory role with the ACRO facilitators stated that it was a very useful Project.

The answers from respondents from the question ADo you consider the Project useful?≡ demonstrates that Youth Action Panels have been considered to be either very useful or useful in the Projects evaluated, with only one person indicating that they felt the Panel was not useful. Importantly Principals and teachers also viewed Youth Action Panels as very useful or useful. The Panels have become an important adjunct to the educational agenda for all three schools during the pilot period. On the basis of this information it is evident that Youth Action Panels are a useful device that should be implemented in other places.

In response to the question AWhat benefits have there been in having an out of school organisation facilitate this Project?≡, the following comments were noted from Panel members;

"More on a level with (the facilitator) - you don't have someone down on stuff before you start like teachers do"

AMore things being done with outside organisations≡

ADon=t feel uncomfortable about talking about the school.≡

Teachers who completed the questionnaire noted the following in relation to this question;

AContact with community organisation that schools do not have.≡

A Professional guidance and support.≡

Alt has heightened the relevance of the >community= in the minds of the students (particularly those involved). The school does not have the personnel to do something as H.R. intensive as this.≡

The following responses from Principals to this question are noted;

A Exemplifies broader concerns to students.≡

A Facilitates open discussion amongst students.≡

A Provides additional perspective to identified concerns.≡

A The more people on school solutions the better.≡

Alt has been approached differently. The facilitation was expertly given, values driven, unobtrusive, non-authoritarian and non-bureaucratic, everyone involved went well.

A The person provided has been able to manage the Project. Without this support its continued operation would not be likely.≡

The responses received to the question A What benefits have there been in having an out of school organisation facilitate this Project?≡ strongly indicate that all respondents felt that there were positive benefits in having an out of school organisation facilitate Youth Action Panels. From the students perspective the general view appeared to be that students felt more comfortable about talking through issues in relation to the school through outside facilitation then they otherwise would be if the process had been facilitated by teachers. From the perspective of teachers and Principals it was clear that they wanted the students to have contact with outside community organisations and were more than happy with the professional guidance and support that ACRO had provided during the pilot period.

The interaction of the school as an institution within the community in which the school is located is obviously important. Youth Action Panels give the opportunity for a >whole of community= response to education. The comments by one Principal that the facilitation was "expertly given, values driven, unobtrusive, non-authoritarian and non-bureaucratic" is indicative of how well the schools can function with the support of community groups such as ACRO. The clearly defined strategic approach adopted by ACRO is an important element to this success. It is evident that future involvement will require adherence to the fundamentals of the ACRO model with a clearly articulated, results driven, yet flexible, design that involves educationalists but which is not directed by them.

Respondents were then asked to answer the question A What do you consider is the main benefit

for young people involved in Youth Action Panels?≡ to which the following is a sample of responses;

- ALearning to work in groups.≡*
- ABuilds self-esteem.≡*
- ASo young people can work as one≡*
- AA lot of fun≡*
- ABeing able to learn about different problems and improving them.≡*
- ALearn about responsibility.≡*
- AGetting involved with older people out of the school.≡*
- ADoing things for others.≡*
- ABeing able to express views.≡*
- ATheir community/area becomes better for them.≡*
- ATo learn how to solve problems in groups.≡*

In response to the same question teachers made the following comments;

- AStudents have ownership of the group. They identify the problems, seek solutions and implement them.≡*
- AThe opportunity it provides for them to experience the positive aspects of working together to find solutions to community concerns.≡*

The responses from the three Principals to the same question were;

- AGives them the opportunity to be active citizens - great device for empowerment.≡*
- AThey are able to identify their own issues and develop strategies that address the issues. Filtering the issues raised is an essential part of the process to avoid adoption of issues presented by TV/other media.≡*
- AThey took the responsibility for making it happen and they now have the intrinsic benefit of knowing that they did it so successfully.≡*

The benefits derived from Youth Action Panels for young people are very positive particularly in the areas of group work, the enhancement of self-esteem, learning to deal with issues that are problematic to the broader community from which young people come and the important aspect of good citizenship by engaging young people in the pursuit of activity that is beneficial to a larger number of people. Responses also suggest that Youth Action Panels give young people the forum to express opinions and participate to improve not only the school environment but also their community. The main benefits for young people in Youth Action Panels from the teachers perspective is vested with the matter of ownership of problems and process whereby solutions are sought to deal with problems. This matter is also reflected in the views of Principals. Youth Action Panels are an important device in the augmentation of significant citizenship processes which are begun

in the home, extended in the school and which will eventually lead these young people into leadership positions within the community. This style of intensive Human Relationships involvement which is participatory rather than intellectual has obvious long-term residual benefits for students and the community through practical application and problem-solving of "real issues".

Respondents were then asked to discuss what they considered to be the major achievements of the Youth Action Panel so far. All Panel participants exhibited an extremely good understanding of the achievements of their group. The following points were raised by Principals in relation to the major achievements of Youth Action Panels;

AThe high level of ownership of the students involved and the respect delivered them by the students and school at large.≡

Alt=s continuing existence and consolidation.≡

AProviding a forum for students to identify concerns and then plan and take action to address those concerns.≡

AInvolvement in shared hands on Project of painting toilet blocks.≡

AThe strategy to raise awareness of issues associated with smoking. The strategy is proactive".

Some comments from teachers in relation to this question are as follows;

AThe painting of the girls toilets to enhance the physical environment of the school. The installation of boys and girls locker rooms to improve personal security. The coding of year 8 students bicycles to assist identification.≡

AThe beautification of the year 8 locker rooms.≡

AThe anti-bullying Project.≡

APositive influence/focus of the group.≡

The question about what respondents considered to be the major achievements of Youth Action Panels to date was intended to glean information from panellists about their knowledge of the Program. It is the view of the writer that all Panellists who responded were very aware of the Projects that have been undertaken and the implications both to them and their school (as well as the community). The Principal's responses indicated a strong desire for the continuity of the Project given the high level of ownership of the students involved and the respect delivered them by students in the school in general. Responses reinforced the view that the process is not only useful but that the theory of

education can have relevance for students in the "here and now" and "real world" and within the school context. The goal of creating active citizens through education has been realised through the participatory nature of Youth Action, whereby students define the problems and set about to resolve them - a skill that they will need for the rest of their lives.

In response to the question AHow do you feel the facilitator could improve the Youth Action Panel at your school?≡ Panels members made the following comments;

A Make us more known in the school.≡

A Different ideas and higher goals and greater cross section of school.≡

A I don't think it could - what ever we want to do it=s been done.≡

In answer to the same question one teacher asked that the facilitator Abe here every day!!!!≡. Another teacher suggested greater promotion of their aims and achievements (visually and orally) with staff and students.

Principals raised the following issues on how they felt the facilitator could improve the Youth Action Panel in their school;

A Continued efforts to broaden the participating group particularly amongst marginalised students.≡

A Not applicable. I think the achievements far exceed my expectation and are a great credit to Fiona (the facilitator). It seems to me she got it right and built great relationships all around while she did it.≡

A One cost is that students do at times miss lessons. This needs to be monitored.≡

The responses to the question AHow do you feel the facilitator could improve the Youth Action Panel at your school?≡ elicited few responses and certainly none that were negative. The majority of Panellists and teaching staff believed that the facilitation process was working well. There was nonetheless a general view by Panellists, teachers and Principals that the Youth Action Program should be made better known throughout the school and that greater promotion of the aims and achievements of Panels needed to be highlighted to the student body. It is the view of the writer that this is not the sole responsibility of the facilitators and it may be that the positive view held by teachers and Principals of the Project should be translated into more proactive support (without direct intervention) to "spread the word" in consultation with Panellists. This is an issue that may well be dealt with through advertising within the school, greater exposure through school assemblies and on notice boards or by way of newsletters.

There is a view shared by the writer that timetabling the Youth Action Panel within a

discrete part of the schools curriculum across all grades would also increase participation by all grade levels.

Respondents were then asked how they felt that young people could improve the Youth Action Panel at their school. The following responses from Panel members are noted;

ANo need for improvement besides making us more aware of the school and community.≡

AMore ideas≡

AGreater involvement≡

AWork together and keep an open mind about the situation at school.≡

Teachers believed that young people could improve the Panels at their schools by;

ATaking up their activities and aims amongst their peers≡

Another teacher noted that Amost of the impact so far has been in the senior school. Logistics aside, it would be good if we could access the junior school. More promotion.≡

Principals made the following comments on how young people could improve the Youth Action Panel at their school;

APromoting it amongst their peers - continuing to provide visible evidence of its existence.≡

Alt doesn=t need to be any better than it is.≡

AUnable to comment.≡

On the question of how young people felt that they could improve Youth Action Panels at their school, respondents reiterated that an involvement by more students would be useful, which would in turn provide a greater bank of ideas and concepts. To be an effective peer process, it is important that a broad cross section of young people from all age levels be involved in Youth Action Panels. In those Projects where there has been cross-grade involvement such as the anti-graffiti Project at Bremer State High School a very large number of students became involved. It is noted that non-panellist responses at Bremer State High School about the knowledge of Projects at that school were higher than for any other school or group of students.

Panel members were then asked to rate the competency of the facilitator. In a scale of 10 to 1 (ten meaning the highest level of competency and one the lowest), 44 of the 46 respondents rated their facilitators at levels seven and above with 21 respondents rating their facilitator a ten. This view of the facilitators is echoed in the responses by teachers, supervising teachers (1x10, 1x9) and Principals (1x10, 1x7,1x8).

On the matter of the perception of the competency of the facilitators involved in Youth Action Panels at the schools, it is clear that all respondents felt that these people had a high degree of competency and respondents were satisfied with the level of involvement by these people with their groups.

Respondents were then asked to rate the impact of Youth Action Panels on the school environment in a number of situations. With respect to whether the Panel is known amongst the students there was a clustering of responses around levels five to eight (on a one to ten scale, one being the lowest, ten being the highest) with 34 responses in this cluster. 29 respondents felt that this level was satisfactory. In relation to whether the Panel was known amongst staff, whilst the dispersion of responses is broader (from level five through to level ten inclusive) the majority (30) felt that this level was satisfactory. A different picture emerges in relation to the knowledge of the Panel in the local community where very few responses were received for the upper end of the scale and there was a significant number of respondents who scored local community knowledge of their work at the lower end of the scale. The vast majority felt that this was an unsatisfactory level. In relation to whether the Panel was known by parents there was a fairly even spread of opinion from the highest rating to the lowest with a clustering of the majority of scores at levels five, six and seven (19). There was a correspondingly even spread of opinion as to whether this was a satisfactory level. When asked whether the achievements of the Panel were acknowledged by the students, 35 respondents indicated level six through ten inclusive in their response, with 32 respondents believing that this was a satisfactory level. However when one looks at the perception by students of staff in relation to achievements of Panel work there is a larger number of respondents who felt that their level of knowledge was unsatisfactory (28).

One Principal expressed the view that knowledge of the Panel was satisfactory in all categories (Panel known amongst students [rated 10], Panel known amongst Staff [rated 10], Panel known in local community [rated 7], Panel known by parents [rated 8], Achievements acknowledged by students [rated 10], Achievements acknowledged by Staff [rated 10]). Another Principal rated all levels as unsatisfactory (Panel known amongst students [rated 5], Panel known amongst Staff [rated 6], Panel known in local community [rated 4], Panel known by parents [rated 5], Achievements acknowledged by students [rated 6], Achievements acknowledged by Staff [rated 7]). The third Principal believed that levels of awareness of the Panel and its work were satisfactory in two categories (Panel known amongst students [rated 5] and Panel known in local communities [rated 6]). In the opinion of this Principal all other categories had unsatisfactory levels of awareness (Panel known amongst Staff [rated 4], Panel known by parents [rated 4], Achievements acknowledged by students [rated 4], Achievements of Panel acknowledged by Staff [rated 4]).

The question as to whether or not respondents felt that Youth Action Panels had impacted on the school environment in a number of situations received mixed reactions. The perception amongst Panel participants is that a large number of students who are not direct participants in the Panel are aware of Panel activities. The perception amongst Panel members is that the awareness of the teaching staff is satisfactory. However Panellists were concerned that their work was not well understood within the broader

community. This is a matter that will require some attention, firstly to test whether that perception is accurate, and secondly, should it be the case that the local community is not aware of the work of the panellists, that processes be devised to make it better acquainted with Panel work thereby become more directly involved. Whilst the panels were happy with the level of understanding of their work by staff, they were not so sure about whether the staff rated the achievements of Panel work positively. This is a matter that requires some attention as support from amongst teaching staff is necessary as feedback to positively reinforce the work of the students. It should be noted that the perceptions of the Panel and its work by Principals is governed by their level of participation in the process and their willingness to promote the Program amongst Staff and within the community. The fact that two of the Principals felt that levels of awareness were unsatisfactory even within teaching Staff, whilst recognising the value of the Project, is problematic.

Respondents were then asked to indicate whether they believed the Youth Action Panel had value added to the school. The vast majority (43) indicated that they believed the Youth Action Panels had value added to the school. This was the view shared also by teachers and unanimously supported by Principals. When asked why they believed Youth Action Panel had value added to the school the following responses are noted from Panel members;

ABy trying to help others.≡

ABy teaching new things that we don't usually learn at school like drugs and alcohol, racism etc.≡

ABecause it shows the community that not all students are trouble makers and are trying to solve problem issues.≡

AGet kids out of trouble.≡

ABy having the smoking game show we have been in the paper several times.≡

ABy painting the girls toilets.≡

ABy teaching us about different things and giving us responsibility.≡

AWe can help fix many basic problems in the school.≡

AHelping the school a lot.≡

AGet the people involved.≡

AWe raise issues and solve them.≡

AWe try to solve problems that no one else bothers to sort out.≡

The view of teachers is reasonably encapsulated in the following quote: Athe students are tackling problems, giving them ownership. This encourages a sense of pride in their school.≡ Principals believed that the Project value added to the school;

ABy focusing on active citizenship and on trying to solve our own problem.≡

Alt has provided a worthwhile forum for a special interest groups.≡

ATwo Projects with tangible positive and effective outcomes to benefit all students of the school. Both fixed needs that have been obvious for years but we never got at them.≡

It is very encouraging to realise that the vast majority of respondents to the questionnaire believed that Youth Action Panels had value added to the work of the school, a matter that was unanimously supported by the Principals. The beliefs held by respondents about why they felt Youth Action Panels had value added to the school are wide ranging and include very proactive responses about helping others, experiencing and dealing with issues that otherwise are not dealt with within the education context, keeping young people out of trouble and influencing the social fabric of the community through active participation. The responses to this question further reinforces the "success" of Youth Action Panels as a proactive educational tool which augments, in a practical way, the role of teachers and administrators.

On the question of whether respondents would recommend Youth Action Panels to a number of interest groups the following responses were given;

Other students -	45 respondents said that they would recommend YAP
Other teachers -	40 respondents indicated that they would recommend it to other teachers.
Local Communities -	41 respondents indicated that they would recommend YAP

All teachers and Principals noted that they would recommend the Program to other students, other teachers and local communities.

The answer to the question as to whether respondents would recommend Youth Action Panels to other students, teachers and local communities strengthened ACRO=s belief that the process does indeed work. Those who are actively involved in Youth Action Panel work believe that the process should be extended both to other schools and within the community. It is an important footnote that all teachers and Principals said that they would recommend the Program to students, other teachers and local communities. In spite of some initial doubts by some Principals, their trust in ACRO to facilitate Youth Action in the first instance in their schools has been rewarded and their recommendation of Youth Action and ACRO is without reservation.

On the matter of what has been the most important aspect of your experience with Youth Action Panels, Panel members made the following comments;

AI can talk to them and have my say without being quiet all the time.≡
ADoing the No Butts About It Program and going to the primary schools.≡
ANever to smoke.≡
AGetting into the community and showing the results of our hard work≡
AQuit smoking.≡
AGetting a chance to help younger people and peers.≡
ASharing.≡
AMeeting people≡
ARacism.≡

AWe have successfully completed our Project on graffiti and we are in progress to tackle racism.≡

AHaving fun.≡

AFriendship and responsibility.≡

AWe know what is happening at the school and know how to solve it.≡

ALearning to work in a group.≡

AHelping other students.≡

ABeing involved in organisations.≡

ATo reach goals and listen to others.≡

ABeing respected by other students, staff and Principal.≡

On the same question Principals made the following comments;

AThe promotion of responsible behaviour.≡
Alt works!!! Demonstrated success.≡

In answer to the question AWhat has been the most important aspect of your experience with the Youth Action Panels?≡, respondents again gave very positive feedback about the worth of the Project. It is evident that the diversity of Programs and discussions possible through Youth Action Panels enables young people to deal with matters that otherwise they would not have an opportunity to deal with such as racism, collective decision making, the attainment of goals and gaining respect from other students, staff and the Principal as a direct result of their contribution to the Program. Youth Action provides the nexus between theory and practice and as such is a most potent vehicle for social change

which harnesses the creativity and optimism of a most valuable resource, our Youth.

On the question of what they believed to be the most important contribution that they could have made in relation to Youth Action Panel at the school, teachers comments included;

AWillingness to support acknowledge and advocate role.≡

AGiving the students the opportunity to identify and tackle the problems which are important to them.≡

To the question of what respondents thought was the most important contribution they have had or could have in relation to Youth Action Panel at their school, respondents said;

ABeing involved and participating.≡

ALetting people know about our activities.≡

AAwaring the students.≡

ALetting everyone know about YAP.≡

AHelps us to learn more about other cultures and others.≡

AGiving my ideas.≡

AArt.≡

AGetting people involved.≡

ALessening the racial discrimination in our school.≡

AHelping to organise the conference and dance.≡

AContributing ideas.≡

In answer to the same question Principals said;

Alt is always my place to support those involved in >good work=.≡

AMy contribution has been one of support.≡

APromoting the concept (have had/could have) - being supportive.≡

Responses to the question AWhat was considered the most important contribution they have made in relation to Youth Action Panels at their school?≡, suggest an eagerness to participate, making other people aware of issues, gaining a broader appreciation of other cultures and expressing ideas. Again extremely positive sentiments are expressed by respondents.

Question 13 was a question which asked respondents to, in one sentence, inform other potential YAP participants of the process. The responses from Panel members indicated a very clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Project. The responses from Principals are relevant and follow;

AYAP>s provide an additional positive component in the school which has great potential for generating discussion of relevant issues and promoting active pursuit of solutions to perceived problems.≡

AThe process, properly managed can identify issues within communities. Adversely the issues can require significant resources.≡

Alt works, it changes things for the better and it didn=t cost anything.≡

Again this question was designed to test respondents knowledge of the Youth Action Panel process. It is evident from responses from Panels members that they have a very clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Program. From the Principal=s point of view, Youth Action Panels have provided an additional resource through which discussion on relevant issues can be promoted. As one Principal pointed out Alt works, it changes things for the better and it didn=t cost anything≡. The reference by one Principal about requiring "significant resource" alludes to timetabling issues for participation by students (some lost class time which occurred in two of the schools). This matter must be addressed by allocating time specifically for the purpose as occurred at Bremer State High School.

The respondents were then asked to answer the question AWhat have you enjoyed most about your involvement with Youth Action Panels?≡. The following is a summary of some of those responses;

ATeaching the other kids what we are about and want to do.≡

AGetting to know other students from other schools.≡

Alt=s been a nex (excellent) experience as I have never done this kind of stuff before.≡

AEverything.≡

ABeing in a group and knowing that you have actually helped the community.≡

AMaking the game show.≡

AI really liked painting the lockers, everyone got along well and we got to know everyone.≡

AHelping people in school.≡

AWe made lots of friends.≡

ABeing able to be heard.≡

ATo meet other people.≡

ABeing able to improve things in the school.≡

Alts a great feeling knowing that you have accomplished something.≡

In answer to the same question Principals made the following comments;

Al believe it is an important, significant lifetime memory, experience for the students and a significant reminder of the good values that our youths still support and hold.≡

Al have witnessed a group of students willing to discuss issues important to them.≡

AThe positive energy created by the facilitator and the group.≡

Responses from teachers were equally supportive.

Clearly respondents have enjoyed their involvement with Youth Action Panels in that it has enabled them to interact with other school members, other schools and members of the broader community. It is also given the respondents the opportunity to negotiate and argue a position for either additional resources or assistance with significant adult groups. In this respect Youth Action Panels appear to be an important device for citizenship training and preparation for young people to deal with the adult world. It is a process that is fun but which has very real and definable outcomes that contribute to both the development of the individual and the development of the collective.

The final question put to respondents was *AWhat have you least enjoyed about the Youth Action Panel at your school≡* to which the following responses were put;

AFighting.≡

Al sometimes don=t know what is going on around the table when all of us are discussing stuff.≡

AWhen meetings weren't organised.≡

ANot that many involved in it.≡

ANothing - sometimes missing school.≡

AThis≡ (meaning the survey)

Alts wonderful I love it all.≡

Responses from the Principals were as follows:

ANothing really with the exception of some time table disruption and the anticipated initial

sorting out problems we have not had any real negatives.≡

A There have been times where procedures may have led to adverse publicity particularly when sensitive school issues can be presented to the public.≡

A Nothing≡

There were very few responses to the question **A What have you least enjoyed about the Youth Action Panel at your school?≡**. Those comments that were expressed revolved around personality issues within panels that from time to time led to conflict. It is noted that this conflict, whilst not exhibited often, did disrupt the process of meetings and did disrupt progress towards the attainment of goals. It is noted in discussion with the facilitators that personality conflicts when they do arise tend to factionalise the group and are therefore counterproductive to the aims of the panel. The view of facilitators is that a better comprehension of conflict resolution should be considered for all young people. It may well be that the skills to negotiate positions that would normally give rise to conflict (or indeed once conflict has occurred) have not been adequately covered in the curriculum. It is a matter for the Education Department to determine whether processes such as Youth Action can provide the forum for such processes to be negotiated or whether it should be an issue incorporated into Human Relationships Education should it not already be the case. One needs to be careful not to generalise from the experience in one or two schools to the broader school community in the country. This is a matter however that is brought to the attention of Education Departments for consideration. The "adverse publicity" referred to by one Principal was generated by a non-ACRO facilitated school Principal who chose to suggest that bullying was not an issue in his school in spite of a request from the Panel at the school recommending the opening of an anti-bullying room at that school. It is imperative that the sensitivities of Principals do not hinder legitimate efforts that address social problems that do not emanate from within the school but which must be of concern to that environment as much as to the broader community.

NON-YOUTH ACTION PANEL RESPONDENTS

Non Panel participants were asked a series of questions to determine their understanding of Youth Action Panels. The first question was **A Have you heard of Youth Action Panels at your school?≡**, to which 22 replied that they had and 7 responded that they hadn't. Asked about how they heard of the Youth Action Panel, 16 respondents indicated that they had heard people speaking of it, (on assembly or by way of notices) 5 indicated that they had knowledge of the Project through facilitators and Panel members, 7 had no answer and 1 didn't know. Asked what respondent's understanding of the Panels role in the school was, 19 indicated that they knew, 7 that they didn't and 3 were unsure. Asked if they were aware of any of the Projects the Panel

had undertaken at their school, 13 indicated that they did with 16 indicating that they didn't. It was interesting to note that Bremer State High respondents were more aware of Projects than the other two schools most possibly because of the conspicuousness of their Projects.

On the question of whether the respondents were aware of ACRO, all responses for all schools were negative. Respondents were then asked if given the opportunity would they participate in Youth Action Panels, to which 15 indicated yes, 9 indicated no and 5 indicated that they may. Asked how the profile of Youth Action Panels could be raised, students suggested more activities and greater advertising.

The responses of those who are not directly involved in the Youth Action Panels from throughout the school community indicate that the panel process is fairly well understood and that the promotion of the Program by way of assembly notification, newsletters and participation in conspicuous Projects (such as dances and conferences) clearly extend the understanding of Youth Action Panels to a broader cross section of the school community.

PART TWO: THE ACRO YOUTH ACTION PANEL PROJECTS

This section of the evaluation will deal with the agreed content and delivery of the Youth Action Panel Program adopted by ACRO to determine whether the facilitators at the three participating schools adhered to this process.

With respect to the initial discussions held between the facilitators and the student body on the matter of explaining the process, it is noted that at all three school this occurred and that the broader issues of crime prevention and community safety were discussed.

It is further noted that a sub group of students was formed at each of the participating schools which became the original Youth Action Panel. This recruitment was one of self selection by interested students who had heard the presentation from facilitators.

It is noted that the members of the sub-groups at each school did consult with other students on issues of concern and subsequently met together to use the outcomes from this initial consultation to draft questionnaires to be distributed to the broader student body.

1. The Initial Surveys

Trinity Bay State High School Survey

Over 200 students at the Trinity Bay State High School completed the surveys with 209 of these

completed questionnaires being used for data analysis. The sample comprised 85 males (21 from year 8, 17 from year 9, 18 from year 10, 19 from year 11 and 10 from year 12) and 124 females (28 from year 8, 32 from year 9, 40 from year 10, 14 from year 11 and 10 from year 12).

The results of the survey indicated an interest in tackling matters that would improve the school such as more seats, cleaning up the swamp, locks on toilet doors, shady areas etc, as well as confronting what were perceived by the student body to be the main problems that concerned them such as getting good grades, violence at school, being safe, bullying, getting in trouble, family problems, sex and so on. Young people at this school rated the following issues in order of priority to be dealt with;

Most important

- Drugs and racial discrimination
- Smoking and Alcohol
- Theft
- Bullying
- Graffiti
- Entertainment and Activities
- Transport

Least important

- Toilet facilities (at school)
- Racial Discrimination

It is significant to note that Racial discrimination had nearly equal rating as the most important issue and the least important issue. This was a confusing result yet significant in its implications. Worthy of note is that 18.5% of young people (that were surveyed) said that they had been discriminated against because of race.

The young people surveyed also rated smoking as an important concern to them, the greatest percentage of those surveyed gave cigarette smoking a rating of two (with one being the issue that they were most concerned about).

Other very significant results were found in relation to drugs, alcohol, theft, bullying, graffiti and entertainment and activities.

Smithfield State High School Survey

At the Smithfield State High School, a survey was designed by the Youth Action Panel for completion by the student body based on a selection of issues that had been discussed as being of concern to young people. 178 students ranging in age from 12 to 17 years completed the survey.

Respondents to the survey noted that they were most concerned about bullying, drugs and racial discrimination, smoking, alcohol, graffiti, sexual harassment and unsatisfactory toilet facilities. The issue that they were least concerned about was transport and entertainment activities.

It is noted from surveys conducted by ACRO and by other organisations in other parts of the world that bullying is a recurring problem for young people. Recent research has shown in fact that bullying is a problem in the workplace. In significant research undertaken by ACRO in 1994, it

was shown that just over a third of all respondents across all age groups had experienced bullying at sometime in their lives. Racial discrimination also rated significantly in this survey as did concern about cigarette smoking, alcohol use, graffiti, and sexual harassment.

Bremer State High School Survey

At this school initially one class of year 11 students looked at the issues involved in crime and how it affects them. The initial group of students then designed a questionnaire for distribution throughout the school. Since the students were to be involved in the analysis of the data it was necessary to keep the data in manageable proportions. Therefore the students nominated two classes per year level to complete the survey. As a result some 220 respondents completed the survey questionnaire.

The three main concerns by students about their school in order of priority were; violence/bullying, drugs, stealing and theft. The survey respondents also clearly highlighted their need for counselling/support networks within their school and their belief that such services should be staffed by non school personnel and incorporate peer education programs. The survey further emphasised a perceived deficiency in students schooling in relation to information about crucial social issues, in particular drugs(including alcohol and smoking) sex education and information about violence and crime. Sexual Harassment was also an issue of concern to many respondents with the majority of concerns related to harassment by students of their peers.

2. Analysis of Project Development

Each of the three participating schools produced a Fact Sheet or Report which was distributed widely to students at the schools and which spoke about the aims of Youth Action Panels. These Fact Sheets also provided an analysis of the data from the surveys together with some proposed strategies to deal with those issues raised. It should be pointed out that there was some consternation amongst Principals in the Far North of Queensland about the publication of these Fact Sheets on the basis that the information contained within this documentation may have, in some way, impugned the reputation of the school. Whilst it can be appreciated that there would be some sensitivity about the coverage of some of the issues (specifically in relation to matters such as bullying, theft and violence) it is an unreasonable belief that these matters are somehow exclusive to the school environment. In fact ACRO argued quite strenuously that these were matters that were generic to all young people within the general community and that the disclosure of information from young people voicing their concern was not an expression against the school but an expression of concern in relation to matters that permeate the entire community. There was one Principal at a non-participating ACRO Youth Action Panel who felt compelled to suggest publicly that bullying did not exist in his school in spite of the Panel students recommending the creation of an anti-bullying room for their school and the overwhelming research material from both within Australia and overseas that bullying is a major issue for young people. The reality is that bullying, as has been previously suggested, is a matter of great concern to young people all throughout the world and high levels of bullying have been disclosed in major surveys particularly in the United Kingdom. In that place the Education Department appears to recognise that such issues exist within the broader community and are not an outcome of anything negative that has occurred within the school context. There is scope for changing the belief that schools are somehow a "closed" institution and that issues of concern to

young people who attend these schools occur only within those institutions - the fact remains that many of the belief structures that lead to intolerance, discrimination, sexual harassment and violence are initiated from within the family and within the general community and are merely transported through other structures such as educational institutions.

It is evident that the agreed content and delivery of the ACRO Youth Action Panel Program has been adhered to in all schools from the point of initial discussion about community safety and personal safety issues to the broader constituency, through to the surveying of opinion across the school, and then to the prioritisation of those issues. The final part of the Program delivery is vested with the development of strategies by young people and the implementation of Programs that they believe will make a difference to reduce levels of concern.

In that context an overview of the Programs conducted at the various schools will follow.

3. A Review of ACRO Youth Action Panel Programs

Bremer State High School *Anti-Graffiti / Art Program*

The Panel at Bremer State High School determined to get runs on the board and initiated a Project with an achievable outcome for the first strategy. The panel spoke with other young people and met with school staff, looked at their school environment and found that a particular amenities block had become the target for a considerable amount of graffiti and vandalism and that the school administration had tired of patching up the continuing problem. The Panel took up the challenge, researched the problem, enlisted the support of key people and organisations to refurbish the amenities block on the school grounds. The Panel requested, and were given, donations of paint from most of the local paint suppliers within the region. At the same time Panel members determined the issues that they wanted to highlight through the Project - which included Aboriginal art, Feminist art, the environment, music, sport, relationships and community organisations who provide support services to youth. The school art teacher gave invaluable assistance, the Panel cleaned and undercoated and began to paint. This is a particularly important Project in that the initial 15 or 20 young people swelled their numbers to several hundred young people who would come through the amenities block before school, during lunch time and after school to participate and talk about the issues in relation to the Project. Participation from all age levels was strong and co-operation was the hallmark of the success of this particular Project. The amenities block has not been subsequently vandalised nor graffitied.

Locker Project

The focus of the Bremer Youth Action Panel changed following the initial Project to look at the safety of young people in terms of personal safety and also property safety. It was concluded by the Panel that each year a considerable amount of student's belongings were lost or stolen at school, which caused distress and considerable amounts of hardship to parents and people concerned. Many senior school text books were also very heavy. The Panel initially turned their attention to the perceived need for lockers for year 11 students and a short questionnaire was devised to assess the level of support for the idea. Through the good will of many staff within the school the Panel was able to provide (from existing resources within the school), lockers for all year 11 students who wanted them. The Panel collected lockers from throughout the school and

opened the area adjacent to the girls toilet as a year 11 locker room. The Panel charged students a non-refundable fee of \$5 and collected enough money to pay for a new set of lockers. The Panel wanted to be able to provide lockers for all the boys in the senior classes who wanted them as well so they drafted a proposal to the P & C and requested (both in writing and via a personal representation at a P & C meeting) that they provide funds to purchase new lockers for the boys. The Panel presented a submission to the P&C requesting an amount of \$5000 and an agreement was reached between the Panel and the P&C to repay half the amount over a five year period. The P & C agreed to fund the Project and provided \$5000 towards the purchase of additional new lockers for use in the school. A very important foot note to this Project is that the Youth Action Panel made an initial payment of \$500 back to the P & C shortly after the lockers were installed which prompted a very positive letter from the secretary of the Parents & Citizens Association at the school. There is no doubt that the enhanced relationship and respect between the P & C and the students will lead to further successful Projects funded by the P & C in the future.

Bike Coding Project:

Members of the Panel who were in year 9 and who have met on regular Friday lunch times devised a strategy aimed at increasing the security of bicycles. The students met with the local police who agreed to assist with a bike engraving Project. This system of engraving discourages thieves and also allows for a much greater recovery rate for stolen property since police can automatically contact the owner should a stolen engraved bike be recovered. This Program was conducted in early August 1996 and was highly successful.

Fundraising Dance:

The Panel determined to operate a fundraising dance in the Bremer Region to secure funds in the operation of a proposed Youth Action Panel Conference to be held in Cairns in October 1996. The participating schools in the Far North will host the proposed conference and some 20 panellists from Bremer State High being flown to Cairns and accommodated to participate. The school Principal made available the assembly hall for use by the Panel, a Coca Cola Dance machine and a DJ was contracted to provide the entertainment. The dance was the first 'open' event to be held at the school for several years, i.e. students from all schools were permitted to attend and on the night between 700 and 800 young people attended the dance. This was a well organised Program with relatively few incidents (all of which were minor). Several members of the local police and security personnel made available their time and expertise free of charge to support the young people. It was noted by several police and school staff present on the night that the event was so successfully organised and participants so well behaved that it would be desirable for such an event to become a regular function. The issue of lack of youth entertainment and venues in the local area was also a prominent concern in the Bremer survey in 1994. At that time the local PCYC operated regular discos on Friday nights. These events have since ceased, leaving no organised events for youth in the area.

Bremer Buddies Program

The Panel has recently undertaken a strategy to address concerns in relation to bullying, particularly in the junior school. The students have submitted a proposal to the school administration to undertake a buddy program during 1997. This will involve a two day training

session for student volunteers from current year 10 and 11 to work in pairs as buddies for year 8 students next year. Participants will then meet once or twice a week with a facilitator to discuss issues raised and strategies to be undertaken. The submission has received positive support from the administration and training will commence during term 4.

Summary

Clearly the Youth Action Panel at Bremer State High School has performed credibly and the facilitator has met all the objectives stipulated for the Project by ACRO. The scope of the Projects undertaken and their success has buoyed the young people to start considering some of the more serious social issues of concern such as bullying, racial discrimination and so forth for consideration in the coming year. It seems important that the Youth Action Panel concept gain legitimacy within the school setting both in terms of the students perceptions as well as that of the staff and the broader community. The decision by the Bremer Youth Action Panel to commence its activity with an achievable goal is highly commendable and showed significant insight on their part in gaining kudos from a successfully initiated first Project which in turn lead to a second, a third and so on. There is no doubt that this particular school has now aligned itself to accept that the role of young people and their Youth Action Panel can deal with contentious and sometimes controversial issues.

Trinity Bay State High School

No Butts About It:

This innovative Program, developed by the Trinity Bay Youth Action Panel, is a game show which, through peer processes, teaches younger primary aged students about the negative effects and facts about cigarette smoking in a fun and effective way. This Program evolved as a result of the survey information gleaned from students at the High School. Whilst the Panel was concerned about the dependence level of the students in their school, they acknowledged that certain curricular Programs already in place and the Aquit \cong Program were already available. The panel became interested in ways to prevent young people from taking up smoking in the first instance. As a result the game show was devised, electronic buzzers were designed and made specifically for the Project and the Project was undertaken in a regional state primary school. Research from other places shows that such processes will indeed impact to reduce the incidence of this style of behaviour by virtue of peer impact and by making the process interesting and enjoyable. It is anticipated that the information obtained by primary aged students through this game show will be retained for a much longer period. As the information is presented by young people not that much older than themselves the impact is much more likely to be productive than through a lecture format from an adult.

The Program has been reviewed by the Queensland Cancer Fund which is apparently keen to replicate the Project in other parts of the State. This is a great credit to the Youth Action Panel at Trinity Bay State High School in terms of providing to the community a proactive Project that seeks to stop future young people from becoming nicotine dependant.

Road Safety Project

The Trinity Bay Youth Action Panel is currently working on a Project which focuses on road safety. This Program was initially brought to the attention of the Panel as a safety issue for young people by fellow students who were involved in road accidents near the school. The strategy will tackle two issues the panel has highlighted as important to young people regarding road safety;

the behaviour of young people as pedestrians (particularly around their school environment) and the behaviour of young people both as drivers and passengers in situations where drink driving may be a problem that they have to deal with. At this stage in development the panel members have viewed traditional education tools (obtained from Queensland Transport) about these topics and have highlighted aspects of these programs which they feel will be effective or ineffective with their peer group and have also conducted a survey of student safe and unsafe behaviours outside the school after school one day. The decided strategy will be an education program developed and starring young people that will tell a story about these issues that is relevant and meaningful to young people.

Through this dual strategy the Panel hope to achieve greater awareness in road safety for young people in specific areas where they appear to be at risk of being involved in physically dangerous activities. The panel is also keen to include the wider community in this strategy and seek to educate all drivers about the dangers surrounding schools at peak times of students movement, in the hope that a combined effort may see a reduction in the risk (and real events) of tragic accidents involving students and motor vehicles. It is also understood that the local community within a several street radius of the school will be canvassed for support to have the speed limit outside the school ground at the crossing reduced to 40Km per hour in a bid to enhance the safety for young people when entering and leaving the property.

Smithfield State High School

Anti Bullying Strategy

The Smithfield Youth Action Panel initially attempted to deal with the concerns that young people had about bullying which was revealed from the surveys conducted at the school. The Panel decided to raise people awareness of the problem and with this in mind launched a poster design competition around the theme of bullying and its unacceptability. The winning entries were printed and distributed throughout the school. The strategy is to be followed up by a handout written by the Panel about identifying and dealing with bullying and what processes exist within the school for dealing with the problem. This was a fairly ambitious undertaking for the conduct of the first activity for the Youth Action Panel.

Vandalism and Graffiti

The Panel identified vandalised and graffitied school toilets as an area in need of attention and recognised the potential for a refurbishment Project to involve many young people throughout the school and therefore raise the profile of the panel. This Project was undertaken with paints and equipment donated from within the community and young people, using out of school hours to sand, clean and paint the toilets in various thematic designs. The Project has been highly successful and since completion only a minor recurrence of graffiti has occurred in an area persistently graffitied previously.

Anti Racism Project

Panel members are currently developing a strategy to deal with issues surrounding racism and racial intolerance in their school and local community. This issue was raised as a concern for a great number of students in the original survey process. The strategy will involve two parts, the organisation of an Anti Racism Carnival to introduce the issue to students in an inclusive and

non-threatening manner to be followed up with a series of anti-racism workshops for all students in the school later in the year.

Summary

The various schools have implemented different strategies to deal with the addressed concerns of young people in their various schools. It is the view of the writer, the panellists, other students, the Principals and teachers that all of these strategies have been highly successful and that they have had beneficial residual outcomes for Panel members beyond the conduct of the Projects themselves. There has been the development of camaraderie between the various year levels, the students and teachers generally, and reciprocated respect between the Principals and the students has been enhanced. As suggested the panels initially have attempted to run Projects with achievable goals in order that they may get some legitimacy within their schools to then proceed with the more significant issues of social concern both to themselves and to the community. There is no doubt that many of the issues that these young people will be attempting to deal with are well beyond their scope alone. They will need the support of the broader community, the resources of professionals in design consultation and at the end of the day they will be seeking to change levels of tolerance within the school environment and the broader community that have historical antecedents and which will be difficult to modify.

In terms of this evaluation, the scope and successes of Youth Action Panel Projects throughout the three schools are established and the facilitators are to be commended for applying an appropriate methodology to meet the agreed method for the ACRO Project.

6.0 ENCLOSURES

EVALUATION SHEET

YOUTH ACTION PANEL PROGRAM - PANEL PARTICIPANTS, PRINCIPALS & TEACHERS

The purpose of this sheet is to attain feedback from the participants in this program to ensure the content is relevant and that the program is delivered by the Facilitator in a useful and competent manner. No names are required.

Please tick the appropriate box below :

Trinity Bay State High Smithfield State High Bremer State High
 Student Teacher Principal

Year Level : *Grade 8* *Grade 9* *Grade 10* *Grade 11* *Grade 12*

1. Do you consider the project useful?

Very useful *Useful* *Not useful*

2. What benefits have there been in having an out of school organisation facilitate this project?

3. What do you consider is the main benefit for young people involved in a youth action panel?

4. What do you consider to be the major achievement/s of the Youth Action Panel so far?

5. How do you feel the facilitator could improve the Youth Action Panel at your school?

5(i) How do you feel the young people could improve the Youth Action Panel at your school?

6. How would you rate the competency of the Facilitator involved in this project ?
(10 being the highest and 1 the lowest)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

7. How would you rate the impact of the youth action panel on the school environment ? (i) Panel known about amongst students

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In your opinion is this awareness level satisfactory?

YES NO

(ii) Panel known about amongst staff

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In your opinion is this awareness level satisfactory?

YES NO

(iii) Panel known about in local community

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In your opinion is this awareness level satisfactory?

YES NO

(iv) Panel known about by parents

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In your opinion is this awareness level satisfactory?

YES NO

(v) Achievements of the panel acknowledged by students

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In your opinion is this awareness level satisfactory?

YES NO

(vi) Achievements of the panel acknowledged by staff

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In your opinion is this awareness level satisfactory?

YES NO

8. Please identify any specific knowledge and/or skills which you have gained from your involvement with the youth action panel?

9. Do you believe the Youth Action Panel has 'value added' to the school ?

YES NO

How?

10. Would you recommend this program to :

Other students YES NO

Other teachers YES NO

Local communities YES NO

11. As a Student/Principal/Teacher, what has been the most important aspect of your experience with Youth Action Panels?

12. As a Student/Principal/Teacher, what do you think is the most important contribution you have had/could have in relation to the Youth Action Panel at your school?

13. If you had to inform another Student/Principal/Teacher about Youth Action Panels in one sentence what would you say?

14. What have you most enjoyed about your involvement with the Youth Action Panel at your school?

15. What have you least enjoyed about your involvement with the Youth Action Panel at your school?

EVALUATION SHEET

YOUTH ACTION PANEL - NON PANEL PARTICIPANTS

The purpose of this sheet is to establish the level of awareness in schools about the youth action panel amongst students and staff not directly involved with the panel.
No names are required.

Please tick appropriate box below.

Trinity Bay State High Smithfield State High Bremer State High

Student Teacher Other (please specify)

Year Level: *Year 8* *Year 9* *Year 10* *Year 11* *Year 12*

1. Have you heard of the Youth Action Panel at your school ?

YES NO

2..If yes, how did you become aware of the panel ?

3. What is your understanding of the panel's role within your school ?

4. Are you aware of any of the projects which the panel have undertaken at your school?.

If so, please list.

YESNO

5.Are you aware of the organisation ACRO The Australian Community Safety & Research organisation?

YES NO

6.If yes, what knowledge do you have of the organisation?

7.If you had the opportunity, would you like to participate in a YAP?

YESNO

Why?

8.Do you have any suggestions as to how the panel=s profile could be raised with your school or local community?

Comments: