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Minister's Message

The NSW Police Service Youth Policy Statement is another significant step in the partnership between young people and the NSW Police Service.

The NSW Government is committed to building and maintaining strong ties with young people to prevent and reduce crime. We must ensure they have an active role to play in making NSW safer for all.

The NSW Government and the Service have a number of initiatives already in place to address the needs of young people.

These include:

- The Young Offenders Act, which encourages young people charged with less serious offences to take responsibility for their crimes through cautions and conferencing, and promotes their reintegration into the community by diverting them from court and detention;
- The appointment of Youth Liaison Officers and Specialist Youth Officers at the 80 Local Area Commands across NSW to assist young people who come into contact with police;
- Protocols with key government agencies to ensure a consistent approach to young people;
- The Crime Prevention Workshops Manual designed to be delivered to school students by teachers and police covering a range of issues relevant to young people;
- Community relations programs and specific initiatives designed to tackle truancy and graffiti; and
- The Police and Community Youth Clubs, which provide ongoing opportunities for contact between police and young people in a positive, friendly environment.

The Youth Policy Statement builds on and consolidates these achievements by providing the Service with a clear focus for the future.

It aims to ensure that young people across the State are treated appropriately regardless of how they come into contact with police, whether as victims, offenders, or witnesses, through ongoing programs or at a PCYC.

It also recognises that a strong partnership between police and young people can have a positive impact on crime reduction in the years ahead by promoting greater trust in police and respect for the law. Any positives achieved today by the Service through its work with young people will resonate through future generations and benefit the entire community.

I have every confidence that all members of the Service will play their part in implementing the Youth Policy Statement and ensure it achieves maximum effect.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Whelan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Whelan
NSW Police Minister



Commissioner's Message

The New South Wales Police Service is committed to working with young people to reduce and prevent crime, to enhance relationships and to promote a safer community. The Service will strive to build on the positive developments in recent years, particularly the tremendous contribution of Youth Liaison Officers and Police and Community Youth Clubs.

The Service acknowledges the human and financial cost of youth crime. All people, especially children and young people, have the right to be safe. Research has shown that young people are the group most likely to be the victims and perpetrators of crime. This means that the Service must work with young people and the community to prevent crime, support victims of crime and educate young people about their responsibilities to the community. In doing this, the Service is committed to upholding the law fairly. Ethical and respectful policing can show young people the importance of the law and promote trust of police.

Young people are key partners in the prevention and reduction of crime. The Service values the input of young people and will continue to involve young people in developing solutions to local problems. Police working with young people to solve local crime problems encourages open communication and reduces the stereotypes often held by police and young people.

The Service recognises that only a small proportion of all young people will have contact with police because of criminal behaviour. A considerable proportion of contact between police and young people will be amicable and take the form of a casual conversation at the local train station, via a school lecture or at a PCYC club. Police will strive to maximise the positive nature of these contacts.

I am encouraged by the progress that the Service has made in recent years to responding to the needs of young people. Further challenges remain, particularly in relation to the policing of public space and total compliance with legislative responsibilities. This Policy provides a clear direction for this often challenging, always important and rewarding work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P J Ryan'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

P J Ryan
NSW Police Commissioner

Youth Policy Statement

The NSW Police Service Youth Policy Statement specifically applies to young people between the ages of 10 and 18 years. The principles and spirit of the Policy apply to children and young people of all ages.

The Service has a strong commitment to developing positive relationships between police and young people.

The Service recognises that young people will have different needs. Age, gender, culture, and previous experiences with police will influence interactions and must be considered by police when dealing with young people.

Police officers have discretion in relation to how police powers are used. Officers will ensure this discretion is used in an appropriate, fair and professional manner when dealing with all people, including young people.

The Service encourages young people to accept responsibility for their behaviour, particularly offending behaviour. Where appropriate, police will divert young people from the court system, comply with legal requirements and encourage young people to understand the impact of their actions on victims, the community, their family and themselves.

In cases where young people have committed serious and violent offences they will be prosecuted via the court system to protect the community and reduce the impact of serious juvenile crime.

The Police Service also has a clear role to educate the community, including young people, about police responsibilities for youth related issues, the responsibilities of young people in the community and the manner in which police resources will be organised to address youth issues.

Where young people are victims of crime, the Police Service will provide these young people with relevant information about their matter, along with referrals to any appropriate services.

Purpose

This Policy serves two key purposes:

- to provide a clear strategic corporate direction for police in dealing appropriately with young people, and
- to inform police personnel and the wider community of the principles and priorities for the policing of young people in New South Wales in the next three years.

Objectives

The Service aims to:

- Reduce youth crime
- Divert young people from crime
- Prevent youth crime
- Build partnerships
- Enhance effective relationships

Principles

The Service will be guided by the following principles in seeking to achieve these objectives:

- Professionalism
- Youth Participation
- Equity
- Accountability
- Collaboration

Key Issues

Policy Environment

The first NSW Police Service Youth Policy Statement was drafted over five years ago. Since this time, there have been considerable developments in the context of policing of young people, including legislative changes and internal police reforms. This current Policy has been developed and released into a complex, challenging and dynamic environment.

This Policy is released at a time when there have been significant developments in the Service's response to young people. The deployment of Youth Liaison Officers, the significant commitment and use of diversion for young offenders, the reinvigoration of the Police and Community Youth Club movement and increased training opportunities for police, are but some of the positive developments which have been adopted by the Service in recent years. This Policy seeks to build on these positive initiatives.

Legal Context

The last five years has seen considerable debate and change in the law and the context of police and youth relations. The introduction of the *Young Offenders Act 1997*, the *Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act 1997*, the *Crimes Amendment Legislation (Police and Public Safety) Act 1998* and the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, are but some of the key legislative changes currently influencing the interactions between police and young people.

These and other laws influence police behaviour in certain circumstances, particularly when a young person has been the victim of abuse or neglect or the perpetrator of an offence. Legislative compliance is an important goal for police personnel.

Development and Transition

Young people experience adolescence differently. For the majority, it will be a time of experimentation, growth and enjoyment. Contact with police will be limited. For others, adolescence will be a difficult time. Testing of boundaries, risk-taking behaviour and anti-authoritarian attitudes might result in police contact.

This contact can be vital in modelling respect for the law and the individual.

Police are often called upon to deal with disruptive or rowdy adolescent behaviour.

Police must balance the rights of young people and those of the community.

In so doing, police assume an important role in educating the community and young people about appropriate behaviour and challenging misconceptions that might result in inappropriate demands on police resources.



Recognising and Understanding Diversity

Young people represent diverse communities. Cultural, sexual, religious, linguistic and social differences contribute to the formation of identity. Understanding and recognition of the value of different practices and beliefs are crucial to responsive policing.

Environment of Police-Youth Contact

The environment will affect the context and nature of interactions between police and young people. A significant proportion of contact currently occurs in schools, youth clubs, and sporting environments.

For other young people, contact with police is traumatic and is prompted by experiencing or committing crime. For young victims of crime, support, understanding and acknowledgment will be important. Being taken seriously and treated with the same attention as an adult victim will be important.

Young people, who have contact with police due to their offending, pose one of the greatest challenges. Respectful treatment will often promote greater understanding and appreciation for the law. Maintenance of rights of young offenders will show the need to respect the rights of others. Where appropriate, police will seek to divert young offenders from court. Young people will be encouraged to accept responsibility for their offending and recognise the impact of their behaviour on the victim.

An increasing site of contact between police and young people is in public areas. Diminishing accessible public areas and the creation of large shopping complexes has increased the visible presence of young people in public spaces. The conflicting claims about the right to access and use public space is an issue demanding increasing police time and resources. Police have a vital role in affirming the rights of young people to access and use these spaces and to promote their obligations to the other consumers or users of these spaces.



Objectives

The Service aims to:

Reduce Youth Crime

Police have responsibility for enforcing the law, protecting the community and reducing the incidence and impact of youth crime.

Energies will continue to be directed toward the minority of young people engaged in crime. The reduction of crime is and will continue to be the central function of the NSW Police Service.

The Service recognises that the risk factors associated with offending are often beyond the influence of law enforcement agencies. The Service will continue to work with the relevant agencies to promote effective rehabilitation and reintegration of juvenile offenders. Cessation of offending behaviour will serve to reduce the incidence of crime, protecting the community and reducing demands on police resources.

Measure: The Service will work with the community, business and relevant agencies to reduce the proportion of young people participating in crime and to stop juvenile offenders escalating in their offending.

Actions: The Service, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, will develop a series of performance indicators to assist police assess their performance in relation to the policing of young people. A key element of this self assessment system will be the reduction of juvenile crime within a legislative and rights framework. Continued use of "Intergrated Crime Management Model" (*Future Directions 2001-2005*) to improve effectiveness of detection, arrest and diversion or prosecution of youth offenders.



Divert Young Offenders

The NSW Police Service aims to increase the number of young people appropriately diverted from court by use of the provisions of the *Young Offenders Act 1997*. Diversion of Indigenous young people and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds will be of particular interest, to ensure that diversionary practices are equitable.

Measure: Increased diversion rates under the *Young Offenders Act 1997* and greater equity of diversion.

Action: A number of actions will be employed to improve diversion and compliance, including review and modification of Specialist Youth Officer training, review of existing training on the Act, integration of training on the Act into other relevant police courses, continued promotion of the Legal Aid Hotline and local and corporate scrutiny of diversionary statistics.

Prevent Youth Crime

The NSW Police Service will provide advice, expertise and leadership to identify and address factors resulting in youth crime.

Police are unable to address the underlying causes of crime such as unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, family disruption, abuse and neglect, education difficulties and poverty. The Service recognises and supports the need to look beyond traditional policing responses. The Service has considerable knowledge and expertise to assist other agencies and sections of the community better placed to prevent youth crime through tackling the underlying causes of criminal behaviour.

The Service is committed to ongoing collaboration with the Department of Education and Training in the delivery of Crime Prevention Workshops. Youth Liaison Officers and the Police and Community Youth Clubs are ideally situated to assist the Department of Education and Training deliver these workshops to students, which promote social responsibility and instruct young people how to avoid crime.

Measure: The Service will seek to measure achievement of this objective through the number of partnerships developed and the effective contribution to broader crime prevention strategies.

Actions: Develop a model for youth crime prevention, which identifies the role of the Youth Liaison Officer, Police and Community Youth Clubs and other internal and external stakeholders. This model will identify responses to particular youth crimes and identify the role of police and other agencies. The Department of Education and Training and the Crime Prevention Division of Attorney Generals Department will be critical partners.



Build Partnerships

The Service will continue to work closely with other government agencies, local councils, business organisations, community groups and young people to develop effective relationships.

The complexity of issues related to the prevention of crime, juvenile offending and community safety, dictate the need for collaborative approaches.

The Service has developed strong partnerships with the Crime Prevention Division, NSW Attorney Generals Department, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Community Services, the NSW Health Department and the Department of Sport and Recreation. Maintaining these relationships and strengthening those with the youth and community sectors, young people and the community, will be vital to achieving our objectives.

These partnerships between agencies are supplemented by local practices. The Police and Community Youth Clubs and Youth Liaison Officers have and continue to build substantial networks. The forging of these local relationships will serve to further integrate the work of these officers in the functions of all Local Area Commands. An outcome vital to improving upon the foundations established by these officers.

Measure: Number of joint initiatives established during the duration of the Policy. Satisfaction of the key stakeholders in the response, accessibility and commitment of the Service to working collaboratively.

Actions: Key projects will be developed with external agencies to address particular concerns or issues. These projects will include: developing strategies to ensure that young people with intellectual disabilities or mental illness are not inappropriately dealt with by police; to ensure that state wards and young people with few support persons are not disadvantaged by the criminal justice system; and Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse young people's needs are met. These projects will require close liaison with appropriate agencies.

Enhance Relationships between Police and Young People

Police will work to develop effective relationships with young people in the community.

The Service is committed to engaging young people as partners in working towards making the community safer for everyone. Increasing accessibility by police involvement in local activities and programs will help to increase mutual understanding and promote greater respect. Projects successful in bridging the gap between police and young people will be extended and promoted in all Local Area Commands.

Measure: Complaints by young people about police behaviour. Numbers of young people participating in programs and activities conducted by police.

Actions: The Positive Contact Program, which brought small groups of police and young people together to discuss common issues, provides a useful model for possible application in other areas of NSW. Training, particularly recruit training, will be reviewed to determine suitability for achieving objective.

Principles

In meeting the objectives of the Policy the NSW Police Service will be guided by the following principles:

Professionalism

Police will treat young people with professionalism, fairness and respect.

There is an onus on police to ensure that the use of their discretion is exercised in an appropriate, fair and professional manner. Police will be supported to interact with young people in an ethical, fair and professional manner through effective general and targeted training and education on youth specific issues and through the effective enforcement of the NSW Police Service Code of Ethics.

Youth Participation

Police will extend opportunities for young people to contribute to decisions that effect them as individuals and more generally about the policing of young people.

Greater involvement and participation of young people in decisions which affect their lives has lead to more creative and relevant solutions, greater ownership and investment by young people in particular strategies, and the development of shared understanding between police and young people of contemporary youth concerns. Local and corporate consultation and participation structures will be developed to enable young people to meaningfully contribute to policy and procedural issues directly affecting them.





Equity

Police will interact with young people in ways that is appropriate to the circumstances of the situation and not on the characteristics of the young person.

Young people in the community come from a diverse range of social circumstances and cultural backgrounds. While police need to be responsive to this diversity, it is important that there is consistency and equity in police responses to young people. Police should interact equitably with young people regardless of their particular life circumstances, gender, ethnicity, Aboriginality, disability or even style of dress. This involves being fair and just without prejudice.

Consistent, fair and equitable treatment when dealing with young people will avoid unnecessary conflicts and distrust. It will assist in building long-term positive relationships between young people and police.

Accountability

Police decisions regarding young people must be transparent and able to be justified.

Young people must be informed about the reasons for the decisions and actions taken by police and be provided with information about their rights. Young people are more likely to accept police actions if they are informed of the reasons why particular action has been taken. Additionally, statistics indicate that young people do not readily access complaint procedures when inappropriate decisions or actions may have been taken by police. The Service will continue to work with the relevant agencies to improve the accessibility of complaint procedures.

Collaboration

Police will work in partnership with all sectors of the community to achieve its aim of reducing the incidence and impact of youth crime.

The Service strives to embrace and harness the community as a partner in reducing and preventing crime. The most successful examples of law enforcement frequently involve cooperation and collaboration between government, community and business.



Support Structures in the Police Service

Youth Issues Working Party

The Youth Issues Working Party (YIWP) is the peak internal structure responsible for the coordination of youth issues. The YIWP, chaired by the Corporate Spokesperson for Youth, consists of representatives from various sections of the Service, including the Commissioner's Office, Youth and Child Protection team, Police and Community Youth Clubs, Youth Liaison Officers, Information and Intelligence Centre and Education Services.

The YIWP is responsible for implementing and monitoring major projects related to youth, developing, communicating and promoting the Service's strategic direction on youth and providing advice to the Commissioner and the Minister on youth issues.

Youth Liaison Officers

A designated Youth Liaison Officer (YLO) position has been established in each LAC.

The YLO is specifically responsible for supporting the implementation of the *Young Offenders Act (1997)*. Education of police, making determinations under the Act, issuing police cautions, liaising with officers of the Department of Juvenile Justice in the referral of young people to Youth Justice Conferences and maintaining quality control are some of the tasks associated with supporting the Act.

YLOs work closely with relevant police to monitor and respond to juvenile crime. Developing profiles of serious juvenile offenders, mapping the location of juvenile crime and the development of strategies to reduce this crime are key responsibilities of YLOs.

YLOs are responsible for establishing and maintaining networks with relevant service providers. Cooperation and shared understanding of joint and individual responsibilities allow YLOs to more effectively reduce juvenile crime and support victims, offenders and other young people.

YLOs work particularly closely with Department of Education and Training and PCYC personnel in developing strategies to reduce truancy and prevent juvenile offending. Working in schools and with young people at risk of offending, helps to reduce juvenile offending.

The Youth Liaison Officer portfolio will be strengthened through the provision of further training, development opportunities and increased support at the local and corporate level.

These officers will also form youth teams with PCYC personnel, providing Local Area Commands with the necessary skills and expertise to enhance the policing of young people.

YLO Executive

The YLO Executive consists of one nominated YLO from each of the 11 police regions. The region representatives meet quarterly to review and develop strategies associated with the implementation of the Young Offenders Act and issues affecting YLOs. The Executive provides the Service's Youth Spokesperson with support and advice on the progress and performance of YLOs across the state.

Specialist Youth Officers

The position of Specialist Youth Officer (SYO) is established under the *Young Offenders Act 1997*. Matters deemed inappropriate for a warning or caution must be referred to the Specialist Youth Officer for determination in all cases, whether or not the young person has admitted the offence. This is a crucial decision making, review and quality assurance mechanism for the effective operation of the Act.

SYOs have been identified and trained in every Local Area Command to support the effective implementation of the Young Offenders Act. Further SYOs will be identified and trained consistent with local needs.

Police and Community Youth Clubs

Police and Community Youth Clubs (PCYC) is a state wide partnership between young people, the community and the NSW Police Service aimed at assisting young people develop the qualities to be responsible citizens and leaders and to avoid becoming offenders or victims of crime.

The PCYC network provides one of the best avenues for the police to work with other agencies and the community in developing crime prevention programs aimed at reducing the involvement of young people in the criminal justice system.

Police attached to the PCYC have a primary responsibility in developing and delivering a range of programs that focus on youth crime issues identified by Local Area Command Crime Management Unit and a secondary responsibility for crime prevention through the provision of services to young people at risk of offending or victimisation.

Blue Light and other Service Agencies

NSW Blue Light is an interactive partnership between young people, NSW Blue Light Inc., the NSW Police Service and the community, which provides entertainment and educational activities. Through these activities, Blue Light aims to reduce youth related crime, enhance relationships between young people and police and to promote alcohol and drug free entertainment.

The Service also contributes, manages and conducts various other youth programs and initiatives. These services contribute to improving the relationship between police and young people, promoting safety and preventing youth crime.

Policy Into Action

While the Policy Statement serves to establish the direction of the Service in relation to youth issues, an Action Plan will be developed. This Action Plan will be developed in conjunction with key stakeholders and will identify the various strategies and initiatives employed to support the implementation of the Policy. The Action Plan will be a living document, responding to needs and developments as they arise.

The following are key initiatives for the Service. They will be incorporated into an Action Plan.

Participation of Young People

The Service will undertake a review of existing guidelines and policies for the Volunteers in Policing Scheme and Neighbourhood Watch. Where age barriers apply to entry, representation will be made to the relevant corporate spokespersons to make allowances for young people less than 18 years to participate in these schemes.

In consultation with the Office of Children and Young People (Cabinet Office), the Service will seek to utilise the expertise of a Customer Council to advise the Service on ways to improve youth participation.

Police and Community Training (PACT)

The PACT program, which is jointly funded by the Community Relations Commission and the Police Service, serves to promote greater understanding between police and culturally diverse communities. A number of the projects developed under this scheme, have focused specifically on youth issues. One component of the Campsie/Bankstown project, the Positive Contact Program, brings police and local young people together to discuss mutual concerns and issues. The program was evaluated in 2000 and the key recommendation was that PACT needs to be expanded. In March 2001, the Police Service secured ongoing Treasury funding for PACT. New PACT projects will be set up in many urban, regional and remote areas.

Indigenous Young People

Statistics continue to reveal the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the criminal justice system. The Service, beyond continuing to work with relevant agencies to promote diversion of Indigenous young people, will also explore the development of programs aimed at improving relations between Indigenous young people and the police. In conjunction with the Aboriginal Coordination Unit, an analysis will be conducted of those programs implemented by the Service, with a view to recommending the extension of the most successful programs.

Public Space

The Service will continue to work with the Youth Action Policy Association (YAPA) to identify measures to reduce problems with young people's use of public space. Proactive involvement of police in addressing these problems and educating the community of the issues, will help to reduce inappropriate demands on police resources to respond to these matters.

Training

Police training on youth issues is an important ingredient in improving police-youth relations. A review of the existing training will be conducted. Accuracy and adequacy of the attention given to these issues will be considered. In conjunction with the relevant stakeholders, training packages will be developed to address particular issues: young people and the law; young people and drugs; public space; police operations; young people in criminality; the prevention of juvenile crime and cultural issues.

Accountability

The implementation of the Policy Statement and Action Plan at corporate, region and local levels is vital. Failure of the objectives, principles or spirit of the policy to influence operational policing will be a sign of the shortcomings of the policy. Consequently, accountability will be vital in ensuring and demonstrating the implementation of the policy.

Rather than develop separate infrastructure, youth issues will be integrated into the various local, regional and specialist command planning cycles. Utilisation of existing infrastructure will assist in the integration of youth issues into general policing functions.

Partnerships and Collaboration

The Service will continue to be represented on the many working parties, advisory and steering committees. The Service's contribution to the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council, the Youth Justice Advisory Committee, the Young Offenders Mentor Scheme Steering Committee, the Juvenile Crime Prevention Committee and the many other groups will continue to be vital. These groups provide an invaluable opportunity for the Service to both provide and receive information about the progress that the Service is making in relation to youth issues.

The Service will also conduct periodic meetings with the key stakeholders to assess performance against the policy and action plan. This will augment other strategies adopted to enable consultation and participation and extend the procedures established in the development of this Youth Policy Statement (2001-2005).

