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MEDIA RELEASE

An Evaluation of the NSW Youth Justice Conferencing Scheme

The Youth Justice Conferencing scheme created under the NSW Young Offenders Act has won high praise from both victims and offenders alike, according to an evaluation released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics.

Youth Justice conferences are an alternative to court for juvenile offenders who have not committed certain kinds of violent offences or certain other serious kinds of crime.

Under the scheme, juvenile offenders who plead guilty can elect to go before a Youth Justice conference instead of court. At the conference the victim is given an opportunity to explain the impact of the crime. Offenders, on the other hand, are encouraged to provide some form of restoration to the victim.

To evaluate the scheme, the Bureau surveyed a total of 969 conference participants; including victims, offenders and 'support persons' of offenders (usually the offender's parents).

Participants were asked to rate various aspects of the scheme, such as its fairness. The survey responses indicated that:

- at least 87 per cent were either 'quite satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the arrangements made for them to get to the conference;
- at least 92 per cent stated that they understood what was going on in the conference;
- at least 95 per cent believed that the conference was either 'somewhat fair' or 'very fair' to the offender;
- at least 91 per cent believed that the conference was either 'somewhat fair' or 'very fair' to the victim;
- at least 92 per cent perceived that they had been treated with respect during the conference;
- at least 91 per cent felt that they had had the opportunity to express their views in the conference;
- at least 89 per cent felt that the conference had taken account of what they had said in deciding what should be done;
- at least 78 per cent perceived that the outcome of the conference was 'fair' for the offender;
- at least 89 per cent perceived that the outcome plan was either 'somewhat fair' or 'very fair' for the victim; and,
- at least 79 per cent were satisfied with the way their case had been handled by the justice system.

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Commenting on the findings, the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn said that they were remarkable given the general discontent often expressed toward the treatment of victims and offenders by the justice system.

‘Victims of crime often come away from conventional court proceedings feeling that the impact of the crime on them has not been fully understood. Offenders often fail to see or fully appreciate that impact’.

‘The Young Offenders Act has shown us that when victims of crime get a chance to confront the offender with the harm he or she has done and offenders get a chance to make some form of restitution, the result is a greater level respect for the justice system as a whole.’

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