



## ANZSOG Case Program

# Mutual respect: Tackling youth crime in Blacktown (Epilogue)

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In late 2016, seven years after the first COM4unity meeting, the partnership was still going. Many members remained the same, but some had moved on after a four year period of productive stability.

### The dream team disbands

Marist Youth Care CEO Cate Sydes had taken over as Chair on the departure of Blacktown Commander Mark Wright in early 2014, and was still enthusiastic and committed to COM4unity's vision. But Marist was expanding across the eastern seaboard, and some months she needed to send a representative instead of attending the meetings herself. The Blacktown police representative was now a Youth Liaison Officer at the constable level, who was not able to make the same kinds of decisions as Wright had. And the departure of Westpoint Operations Manager George Giannikos several years earlier had led to a lack of buy-in from the shopping centre management, who as Sydes reflected had not been around to see why the partnership was necessary in the first place:

I've got this wonderful person who works for Marist Youth Care who says the [Westpoint] management have 'come to the harvest' – reaping the benefits of what was already there. They come and they only see the crop that's been nurtured and has flourished, it's a beautiful saying, and you understand what I mean. The weeding and the ploughing, the moving of rocks, all of those things had been done by a man like Mark Wright when he saw the problem. ...It doesn't take very long, two or three years, for it to go back to the way it was.

Two years before, the partnership had nearly been shut down when Westpoint decided not to continue covering COM4unity's insurance. Eventually, because they couldn't run any of the showcases without insurance, Marist decided to pick up this cost. Westpoint's disengagement also

This case was written by Sophie Yates for Professor Paul 't Hart, Utrecht University. It has been prepared from field research and from published materials as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The assistance of Mark Wright, George Giannikos, Cate Sydes, Joanne Tau and Alan Pendleton is appreciated, but responsibility for the final content rests with ANZSOG.

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meant they had less access to the stage, and were not able to run the showcases as often as previously. Overall, everything seemed to take that little bit longer – and as Jojo Tau (who now ran the Blacktown Police Citizens Youth Club) commented, “dealing with youth, they won’t wait for six months for something to happen”. Tau and Sydes agreed that whatever the successes of the program, their job was not complete. Said Sydes:

The one thing we’re not short of is kids. Kids that are disengaged, kids that are sitting on the outside of society. That’s the sad thing, that there is still a need.

### Could it work elsewhere?

Despite this, the program’s success in fostering community cohesion had led a number of members and supporters to consider the suitability of the model in other troubled locations. Wright thought COM4unity’s success had been about having the right group of people, with a vested interest in the community and an ability to “park self-interest”. Former Mayor Alan Pendleton acknowledged that Wright’s leadership and vision had been crucial but couldn’t see why, with the right ingredients, a similar partnership couldn’t work in Parramatta or Guildford:

I think a program such as this will succeed anywhere as long as it’s got people that are committed to making it work, or trying to make it work. I say that because I’ve been in a leadership position many times in my life, and in many organisations, and all they need is the right leader, the right people around the table, and if it’s going to work it will work, and this one has worked.

Sydes felt the same, as long as the partners didn’t think they could operate in a top-down manner: “I think it was the quality of the people that were sitting around the table, was that they were able to say ‘OK the kids can do it’”.

### A new collegiality

The icing on the cake for Tau was that outside the partnership, previously combative NGOs were starting to see the value of collaboration:

I feel like there’s more stuff happening, the services are finding that if there’s a need, we can work together to do that. I’m still very connected outside COM4unity with the police, Marist, Sydwest, so we’re still doing work with them individually. So I think if anything, [COM4unity] really activated that partnership and desire to work together, whereas I think before it was very much ‘it’s all about me, I want to see what I can get’.