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OPERATION GIVES SHEPPARTON YOUTH A NEW START

Victoria Police and Save the Children Australia launched the first regional branch of Operation Newstart today in Shepparton.

The program, which is aimed at students aged 14-17 years of age who are at risk of dropping out of school and offending, has had great success in metropolitan Melbourne.

Senior Constable Ross Fifoot of Shepparton Police and Kristy Sewell of Save the Children Australia are the local co-ordinators, with Senior Constable Fifoot believing the city was an excellent choice for the program.

“Shepparton is over represented with regards to the youth crime rate and with early disengagement of youth from schools,” Senior Constable Fifoot said.

Peter Falvey, Program Manager Australia for Save the Children Australia said he welcomed the opportunity to expand the program into Shepparton.

“Save the Children Australia has been delivering successful programs around Shepparton since 1965 when our kindergarten was established in neighbouring Mooroopna. By entering into a program such as Operation Newstart, we are able to continue to deliver additional long-term programs that will benefit the youth in the area,” he said.

Mr. Falvey was also on hand at the launch to hand over the keys of a much-needed new mini-bus to the co-ordinators of Operation Newstart. The bus was kindly donated by supporters of Save the Children Australia.

Operation Newstart caters for eight students per term – two from each of the high schools in the Greater Shepparton area – with participants spending each Monday at their respective school then attending the program from Tuesday to Friday.

An extensive array of activities is available for participants, from camps through to various life skills.

“What Operation Newstart does is get the young people out of their comfort zone, challenging them both mentally and physically,” Senior Constable Fifoot said.

“As well as going out on camps and doing activities like caving, kayaking and surfing, we also teach them a number of important life skills.

“These skills include a diverse range of post-secondary and vocational courses such as first aid training, driving courses, resume writing, nutrition, stress management, CFA training, drug education and more.

“The aim is to expose the participants to activities not normally available to them,” he said.

Participants need to be enrolled in school to be eligible for Operation Newstart and can be referred to organisers by a principal, teacher or welfare worker.

“Operation Newstart is an opportunity to get involved with these kids early, it allows them to take some control of their lives and improves their self worth and esteem,” Senior Constable Fifoot said.

“A lot of the time these kids have great potential but they’re not reaching it. This program engages them in community work such as working with the elderly and handicapped, so they are doing something with purpose.

“Some of the kids are on to their second school – their last chance so to speak – and this program shows them that there are alternative educational or trade opportunities out there for them,” he said.

Another important aspect of the program is that it allows participants to work with police. They depend on each other during the term to complete the range of activities and develop a mutual respect for each other.

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Note to Editors:

Save the Children Australia is working with children ‘at risk’ to reach their potential in Australia and overseas. Save the Children works in over 100 countries and is the world’s largest independent child rights agency. www.savethechildren.org.au

For media enquiries please contact:

Sharyn Hanly
Corporate Affairs Adviser
Save the Children Australia
(03) 9938 2011 or 0418 560 810
sharyn.hanly@savethechildren.org.au

www.savethechildren.org.au