

# Addict preyed on juvenile gullibility

**I**N one of the most complex and protracted investigations ever undertaken by uniformed members, a 38-year-old man from Latham in the ACT has been sentenced to eight years imprisonment for offences which included injecting juveniles with amphetamines.

The investigation and subsequent brief preparation required five months' work. In August 1992 a task force was established after an alarming number of burglaries were committed in the North Patrol District. The Task Force comprised Constables Doug Ninness and Todd Brown, uniformed members from Belconnen Police Station.

The northside suburb of Latham appeared to be the regular target of day-time burglaries. Constable Joe Bauer, the North Patrol District Intel Officer gained information regarding an adult male who may have been supplying drugs to juveniles in exchange for stolen goods. This resulted in Peter John Cooper, 38, of Milford Street, Latham being placed under surveillance.

Seven juveniles thought to be committing the burglaries were eventually directly linked to Peter Cooper: three girls aged 15 years and three boys aged 15 and Cooper's 16-year-old nephew who lived with him.

A breakthrough came when one of the girls reported her own television set stolen. A search warrant executed on Cooper's house recovered the stolen television set along with a small amount of other stolen property. At this stage Cooper was not arrested.

Eventually the entire sordid story was revealed. It was alleged Cooper's nephew would invite friends back to the house. Cooper would leave cannabis about the house for the use of these visitors. On the earlier visits this cannabis was free. Cooper provided these juveniles

with a safe haven where they could smoke cannabis, stay away from school and generally escape parental control.

The juveniles would visit the house at least four days a week. Cooper, who was a speed addict, would inject himself with amphetamines in front of them. They became curious about the effects of speed and eventually he began injecting them with the drug. At first the speed, like the cannabis, was free, but Cooper then asked them to pay for each further hit.

At first they could pay with money from home, but soon found their needs outweighed their income. Cooper then suggested that he could dispose of video recorders and televisions if they could get them for him.

It is alleged that then the juveniles began a campaign of burglary around the area, taking the proceeds to Cooper for his disposal. The juveniles allegedly stole about \$27,000 in property in a three month period. Cooper injected them with amphetamines as payment, but it is unlikely that he provided them with \$27,000 worth of amphetamines.

Peter Cooper was charged with 87 criminal offences including :

- supply a drug of dependence to a person under 18 years,
- administer a drug of dependence to another,
- supply cannabis to persons under 18 years,
- receiving stolen property, and handle stolen property.

The Task Force was faced with the problem of proving the presence of amphetamines as no physical evidence of the drug was obtained from the warrant or from the juveniles. They only knew that it was "speed" they had been injected with.

To assess what they had been injected with, the juveniles were

interviewed and assessed by Professor Starmer, a clinical pharmacologist from Sydney University.

Cooper entered a not guilty plea and a committal hearing on 14 December 1992 heard evidence from Professor Starmer that it was his opinion the juveniles had been injected with amphetamines.

On examination of the evidence, the defence changed the plea to guilty. Chief Justice Miles had to reserve his decision on sentencing for a period of time as there was no legal precedent to be found in Australian Courts with which to compare this case.

On 9 February 1993 Cooper was sentenced in the Supreme Court to eight years imprisonment with a minimum to serve of five years.

At the time of writing, the juveniles had not attended court. Briefs had been submitted to the DPP and police strongly sought indemnity for all the juveniles because of their assistance with the conviction of Cooper. However, the DPP had decided to proceed on the property charges.

The episode has had a number of unfortunate results; a number of the juveniles are now addicts; one 15-year-old girl has since been linked to prostitution under another criminal identity who has been known to use young girls to raise drug money. A number of average families have been devastated by the actions of this person and will suffer long term effects.

In pursuing the investigation, the Task Force members provided a great deal of support and advice to the families of the juveniles and, in doing so, formed a close relationship with these parents who had no idea that their children were users.

Constables Ninness and Brown were paraded before the ACT Attorney General, Mr Terry Connolly, and praised for their thorough investigation and the successful outcome.