

## **DIVISION OF EXPERIMENTAL CRIMINOLOGY**

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Lorraine Mazerolle, Sarah Bennett, Emma Antrobus and Elizabeth Egginns  
are the 2017 recipient of the  
*The Award for Outstanding Experimental Field Trial* for their efforts on  
*Ability School Engagement Program (ASEP) Field Trial*

Seven years ago, some of the lowest socio-economic communities across Brisbane (Australia) experienced significant truancy problems and tensions between police and schools. Anecdotally, police recounted how they could not walk onto school grounds without getting pelted with left over lunches. Crime analysts identified that 97% of the



high-level truants in these communities came from families with extensive histories of contact with police. Police leaders and school principals responded by reaching out to the UQ team to collaboratively develop a new, innovative approach to addressing the crime and truanting problems. Drawing on the theory of Third Party Policing (Mazerolle and Ransley, 2006), we designed the Ability School Engagement Program (ASEP). As a theory-driven intervention, ASEP sought to foster students' willingness to attend school and reduce anti-social and offending behaviour. The ASEP is characterized as a partnership between police and schools that adapts a family group conference forum to increase parental and child awareness of truancy laws (and the consequences of noncompliance). Using the dialogue of procedural justice, the ASEP conference forum aimed to foster willing compliance with the truancy laws and develop concrete action plans to motivate the truants to attend school. These action plans were monitored by police (specifically, the ASEP-dedicated police officer) for six months. Mazerolle, Bennett, Antrobus and Egginns evaluated, under randomized field trial conditions, the effects of ASEP on school attendance, offending and a range of adult and child perceptions, attitudes and self-reported behaviour. Using a case flow design, 102 truanting young people were randomly allocated to a business-as-usual control condition ( $N=51$ ), or the ASEP experimental condition ( $N=51$ ). Surveys at baseline, and then approximately at 3 months, 6 months, one year and two year post randomization as well as official school and police data are being used to assess the trial outcomes. Early results demonstrate



that the ASEP police-school partnership increased students' willingness to attend school (Mazerolle, Antrobus, Bennett & Eggins, 2017a), increased parental awareness of prosecution likelihood (which moderated students' school attendance) (Mazerolle, Bennett, Antrobus & Eggins, 2017b), and reduced offending (Bennett, Mazerolle, Antrobus, Eggins & Piquero, 2017). With these early promising results, the plan is to alter the role and function of school-based police officers to adopt the role of the ASEP police officer, working in partnership with schools experiencing high levels of truancy. Our goal is to then replicate the ASEP approach across different school environments and with different types of truanting young people to assess the universality of the intervention.

## References

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