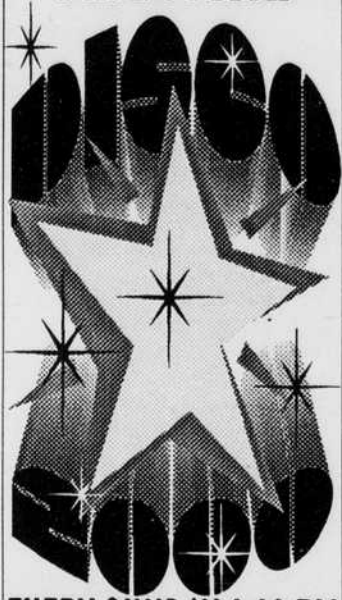




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STATE NEWS

State forces teens to atone for crimes

Half of Oregon's counties have programs requiring teenage offenders to apologize to their victims

The Associated Press

DALLAS — When Hannah Flug went joyriding with friends to California in a stolen Thunderbird, she figured she might land in detention if caught.

The 14-year-old not only got detention, but a judge ordered her to do something she dreaded even more: apologize to the owners of the car.

She cried. "I would do community service, detention, anything," said Hannah, now 16. "I just didn't want to see these people. It would be so embarrassing."

The meeting taught Hannah that her weekend of fun had cost a family more than \$5,000 in damages and losses and had broken

their sense of security.

But most of all, it forced Hannah to take responsibility for her crime.

"It really made me realize what I had done and what kind of people I was hanging out with," she said. "It made me understand what these people went through."

As court counselors try to keep teenagers from repeating their crimes, they are turning to ideas such as the program in Polk County. It was one of the first in Oregon to bring teenagers and their victims together. Half the state's counties now have similar programs.

"For a lot of crime victims, having a face-to-face meeting with the kids is helpful," says Gail Lambert, an advocate for victims of juvenile offenders in Multnomah County.

"They find out the kids aren't little evil beings, that they did something stupid, and maybe they're sorry, and maybe they feel stupid."

Juvenile intake officers review

cases and recommend teenagers for the program, which can cost about \$220 — less than the minimum \$1,500 expense of winding a case through court, according to Sandie Pattison, the program's director.

The teenagers who are accepted first meet with a program mediator and then, if the victim agrees, they meet.

Teens also must pay for their damages and perform community service.

Polk County doesn't track the teenagers once they've completed the program, though an informal study found that 94 percent didn't commit another crime in the next three years.

Hannah's mother believes the program will keep her daughter from committing another crime.

"Meeting with her victims taught her much more than anything that I could tell her," Prindi Flug said.

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