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A hip-hop helping hand

At-risk youths and musicians create a CD and a message of hope. By Kathryn Kernohan

For many aspiring hip-hop artists, the idea of collaborating with some of Australia's premier acts including True Live and The Herd would be a fantasy.

But for 22 guys aged between 15 and 21, it became a year-long reality, thanks to Living Music's In-House Music Program. The program partnered at-risk young men and youths in detention in Victoria's juvenile justice system with established hip-hop acts, forming a rare mentorship.

For project coordinator John Favaro, it was exciting witnessing friendships form.

"Even now that the project is completed, some of the mentors have continued to work with and write with the participants. It was a life-changing experience for everyone involved."

Favaro was responsible for matching the participants with suitable mentors, and he says it was an easier task than expected.

"A lot of it was simply based on musical interest and personality in how the two got along.

"A couple of the participants were more advanced than others but still had a couple of weaknesses in their songwriting so I tried to pair them with mentors who could help them in specific areas," he says.

Safire, a 21-year-old Koori songwriter, said before he got into music he was "doing stupid shit like drug dealing and fighting". He was partnered with Curse ov Dialect's MC Raceless.

During the course of the project, called Underground Loop, participants and mentors

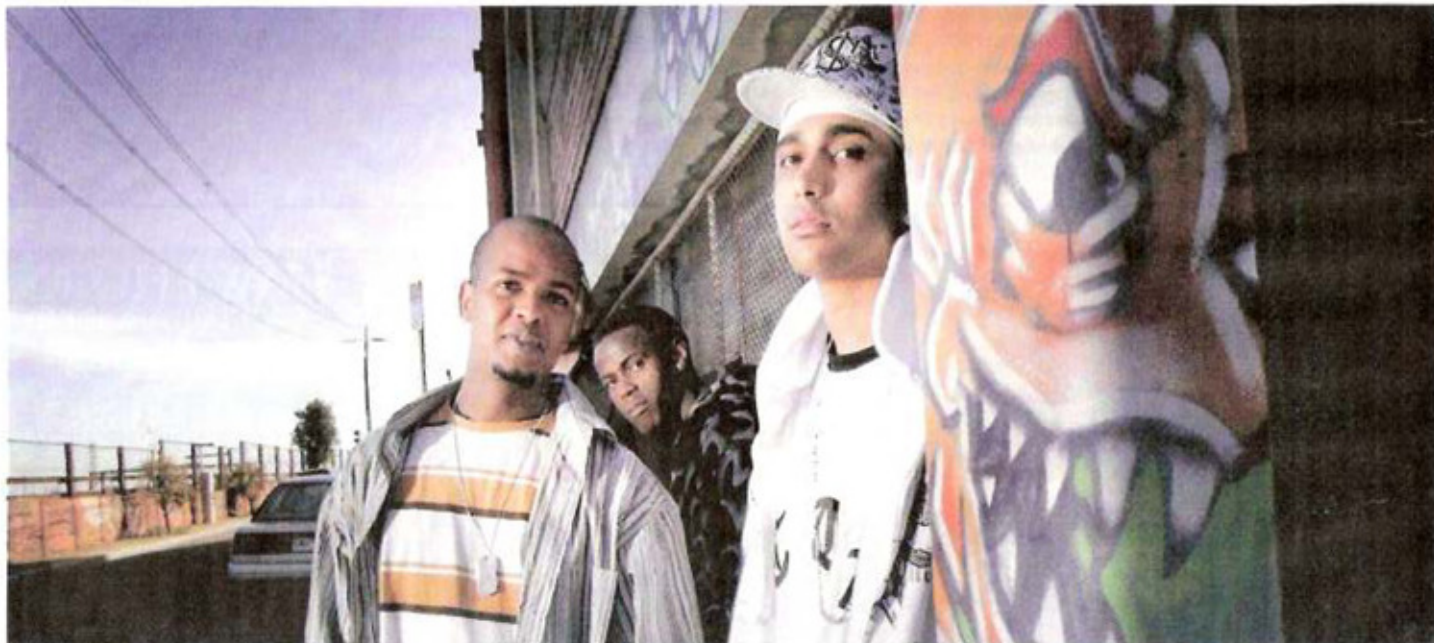
were asked to compose two original songs with the aim of performing them live. The project was made possible by grants from Arts Victoria and the Australia Council. After a successful performance last October, the groups then retreated to the artists' personal studios to record their tracks.

The result is *Underground Loop*, a 21-track double CD launched last week in Collingwood.

Favaro found the experience so rewarding he is keen to do it all again.

"There are certainly enough people coming through who are keen to get involved, and if we can employ the right people to make it happen again, we will," he says.

The CD is available through SoundVault and online at www.livingmusic.com.au



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