

PAYING FOR GRAFFITI UNTIL 2021

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By Stacy Farrar

What you do as a teenager can cost you until your middle age. Stacy Farrar reports:

A GRAFFITI vandal guilty of more than 800 offences across the Onkaparinga Council area will spend the next 21 years compensating the council for cleaning up his damage. The 18-year-old has been ordered into a direct debit scheme \$25 will be automatically taken out of his fortnightly youth allowance payments until 2021. If he gets a job, the money will be taken out of his pay.

The youth was caught vandalising council property through special surveillance cameras. He admitted to the offences after being showed photographic and video evidence of his crimes.

Onkaparinga asset maintenance manager Roger Saltmarsh said pursuing offenders through the civil court, as a last resort, was proving successful. "In the language of the street, this is the deterrent that is actually getting through to them," Mr Saltmarsh said. "We hit them right in their own hip pocket."

The council's security teams have caught 56 vandals; of these, nine have ended up in court. Mr Saltmarsh stressed that legal action only occurred after the nine refused to work with the council's contracted counsellors, or agree to community service work. "They only finish up in court through non-cooperation, and failure to make any efforts. If we're continually met with that then we sue them," he said. Several of the nine were also paying small amounts through direct debit; other cases were still to be heard in court.

Since introducing a cost recovery program in February 1998, the council has got back more than \$55,000 from vandals. This is not counting the hundreds of hours of community service performed in lieu of payment. "We take them to the civil court because they award based on the damage, rather than on the age of the offender," Mr Saltmarsh said. "In the criminal court, firstly you're lucky if you get a conviction, and then the maximum amount is only 10 per cent of costs." The cases are heard in the minor claims court, not requiring costly lawyers. "It proves the support for the program, that we're getting these successes without legal representation," Mr Saltmarsh said.