

THE PEOPLE versus CRIME

• By R.J. CAHILL, Chief Magistrate of the A.C.T.

THE Australian community in the past has laboured under a false ideology that it was not the people's role to assist police; rather, that crimes were committed against authority, not against society. Although a misguided ideology, it permeated community perception of the role of the police in the prevention and detection of crime. Consequently, while police in Australia acknowledged the fact that community support was necessary, they did not seek it, nor did the public accept that the police force was the community.

Increasingly, however, this attitude is undergoing somewhat of a reversal. The community is now beginning to face up to reality and reject the myth that the mere injection of more financial resources and manpower is the answer to law enforcement problems. More and more people have come to realise that crime is not so much an assault on authority, but an assault on a community of which they are part — and therefore a problem requiring direct community involvement.

The notion of community involvement in law enforcement and crime prevention is not new. The history of community policing can be traced back over several centuries, with its most positive aspect of development occurring in London approximately 150 years ago. In establishing the Metropolitan Police Department of London, Sir Robert Peel created the first police community relations program. He believed that no police force could be effective without the active support of the community it serves. Unfortunately, this concept took a considerable time to gain acceptance in other countries. Australia was slow in adopting the principle of active community participation in policing. However, the ongoing escalation of incidence of crime and disorder within Australian communities has placed demands on both the police and the community to rethink traditional strategies and seek alternative methods to reverse current trends. In turn this has led to the promotion of combined police and community action to prevent crime and disorder at the local level.

Initially there were several obstacles to the effective use of community involvement. Police were uncertain of their own role in the scheme envisaged and were reluctant to change existing traditional practices. General apathy and a reluctance to become involved in policing also had to be overcome to ensure popular community support. The position now reflects a changing societal attitude. There is an increasing awareness of the need for a more unified effort to help society. Certainly, the nature of crime affecting the community most often — car theft, vandalism, housebreaking and stealing — and the direct and indirect consequences of financial loss and community fear have provided the impetus for a greater degree of community policing. It is now obvious that the ultimate responsibility for crime detection and prevention rests with society as a whole; and as has been the recent experience, the greater the degree of community support, the more effective a police organisation will be in its operation and purpose.

Current developments in community policing in Australia have favoured a generalist responsibility in the style of proactive policing which seeks to utilise the wider community in the control of crime. The trend in developing a planned and balanced integration of community support is based on the



increasing need for police administration to deploy diminishing resources to service an array of complex policing problems in the most effective and efficient manner.

The majority of Western world police agencies have modelled their goals and philosophy on Peel's Eleven Principles of Law Enforcement — which hold that securing the willing co-operation of the community and promoting crime prevention are central to the police mission. Australian experience in police/community involvement has demonstrated the willingness of the general public to actively participate in police initiated programs aimed at crime control.

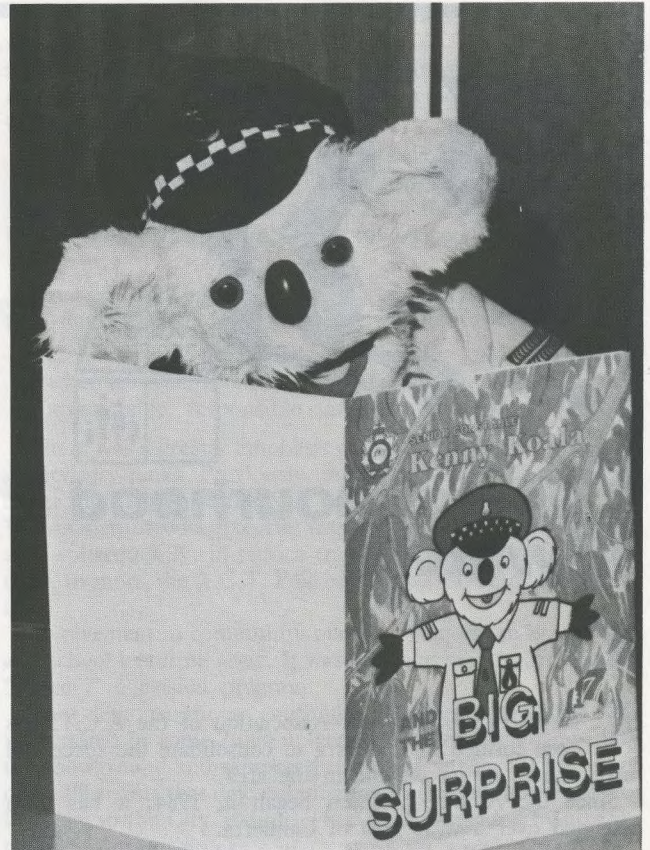
Community support in Australia has been most evident in the enthusiastic support given to the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. Based on similar programs established in Asia and the United States, the Australian scheme aims to involve the general community in activities designed to protect property, and encourage early detection and reporting of crime. The scheme upon which Neighbourhood Watch was based sought to reduce the rate of preventable crime, and in particular residential burglary. This is achieved by residents organising into neighbourhood zones, and through a process of crime prevention awareness and action, reduce the likelihood of criminal attack upon their property and person.

The pilot Australian Neighbourhood Watch scheme began in Victoria in 1983. The scheme was so well received by the Victorian public that in 1984, the Australian Federal Police, through its Police/Community Relations Unit, developed and introduced a similar pilot program in the Tuggeranong Valley in the A.C.T. Again, the scheme was so enthusiastically welcomed by residents that in January 1985 a decision was taken to implement the program on a selective basis throughout the Canberra area. At present, almost 42,000 Canberra residences are actively involved in the scheme, covering approximately 68 "zones". Each zone contains 600 houses, and within those zones individual leaders are chosen to co-ordinate implementation of the various elements of the scheme. The Neighbourhood Watch program has been an unqualified success. The implementation of Neighbourhood Watch generated significant media interest which has also heightened people's awareness of crime prevention. An aspect of major significance is that while dramatic reductions occurred in burglary in Neighbourhood Watch areas in 1985, there was no continuing increase in Territory burglaries.

Community policing is not a new concept, but in a democratic society like Australia it remains a vital concept which offers some exciting and timely opportunities for change. The A.C.T. experience with the Neighbourhood Watch program serves only to enforce this notion. It is a program heavily reliant upon public participation for its success and momentum. That it continues to grow in strength demonstrates the enthusiasm with which the community has welcomed the scheme. In a paper delivered at an Institute of Criminology Seminar on Community Policing in 1984, Inspector David Smith, of the Research and Development Branch of the Victoria Police, stated:

"Necessity and desire appear to be creating a climate in which the police can gain additional public support — if the police make the effort. A starting point is an energetic Neighbourhood Watch Program."

The A.C.T. experience has demonstrated that community support of policing is both effective and rewarding. The AFP has made a strong commitment to the scheme, and the continuing and overwhelming support of the Canberra community has established a neighbourhood spirit which has effectively combated the high incident of criminal activity at the community level. The scheme is worthy of the highest praise and continuing support is to be encouraged to ensure that the notion of community policing remains a vital element in the fight against crime and disorder in Australia.



WHAT A SURPRISE!

IF the reaction of children at Royal Canberra Hospital is any guide, Kenny Koala is about to become a best-seller author. That is, of course, if his new publication was for sale.

Kenny's first publishing effort is a colouring and bed-time story book titled 'Senior Constable Kenny Koala and the BIG SURPRISE!'

The launching took place on 16 July in the children's activity room at the hospital and was attended by Assistant Commissioner Val McConaghy and Capital 7 Television's Chief Executive, Mr Bill Rayner. Both were presented with copies of the book by the AFP's graphic designer, Terry Browne, who 'helped' Kenny write and illustrate the story.

The theme of the book, children's safety, is woven into the pursuit of the 'BIG SURPRISE'.

Initial distribution is free and will be by request to Capital 7. The book also will become a part of the AFP Safety Education Unit's regular children's education program.



They soon came to a road that they had to cross. They all held hands and stopped at the kerb to listen and look for any cars or trucks that were coming. They looked to the right then they looked to the left and then they looked to the right again. They couldn't see or hear any cars or trucks coming down the road so they walked quickly across to a bus stop on the other side.

When the bus came, they waited until it had stopped and opened its doors before they moved towards it. They stepped aboard quickly and, as there were plenty of empty seats, they sat down.
"Is the bus ride our surprise?" Cathy asked Kenny.
"No," said Kenny. "I have to give you a BIG SURPRISE!"