

Many skills are needed in a policing career

At high school Audrey Fagan's career counselling included air traffic control and thoughts of teaching or perhaps flying, but she decided she wanted to be a police officer.

Circumstances then led the South Australian-based teenager to join the AFP in 1981 as a protective service officer.

Twenty-three years later the AFP's Chief of Staff thinks that diversity is the key to successful policing having applied a wide range of skills drawn from a wide range of professions during her own policing career.



*Audrey Fagan APM
AFP Chief of Staff*

In 1981 Audrey Fagan wanted to join the police.

Having deferred her university studies, she initially approached the South Australian Police but found her age a barrier.

"I was in between ages," Federal Agent Fagan said. "At 17 you were classified as a cadet, and at 19 you were an adult; at 18 I was in between."

So on 23 February 1981 Federal Agent Fagan began her career with the AFP. Working initially as a protective service officer and then in 1982 in ACT Community Policing roles, she remembers a time when laptop computers and micro chips were objects of science fiction novels.

"I remember typing out Criminal Offence Reports on an old manual typewriter," she said.

"Only three errors were accepted on a COR and because it was six sheets in duplicate you always had on your desk white out, blue out, pink out and yellow out for the inevitable typo."

While career counsellors at school told her she should be an air traffic controller, Federal Agent Fagan also had an interest in maths and science teaching.

"I deferred from university and joined the AFP, but returned to study. That was a personal goal that was important to me and I went back and studied part-time," she said.

"I did a science degree including some maths. I know it may sound bizarre but I can see similarities in careers of air traffic controlling, policing and maths teaching.

Federal Agent Fagan's first role was that of a Protective Service Constable and this experience was very relevant when she was appointed to the new role of Executive Director Protection with responsibility for protection services in both the Australian Protective Service and the AFP.

This role included heading the project to integrate the APS into the



Protective Service Recruit Course 5/81. Four of the class remain in the AFP. Current Chief of Staff Audrey Fagan is circled.

AFP after being separate organisations for 20 years.

“Everything came full circle when with my team we worked on the integration; it was a rewarding experience,” Federal Agent Fagan said.

“The integration of the APS was a major job for me to be involved in and a very exciting job for the team.

“I was able to draw on some of my experiences in protective security and appreciated the specialist skills required in fulfilling that role.

“Within that first year I also did the general duties course and began work in community policing in Canberra, first in juvenile aid, then fraud squad and general CIB. I also worked extended periods in Adelaide in relation to Medicare fraud investigations.

“In 1985 I was posted to Christmas Island and worked there for 18 months.”

“It was a time of great change on the island with the introduction of the PAYE tax system and change occurring in the small community.” Federal Agent Fagan said. “The island’s first ever reported murder also occurred when I was there.

“The man’s murder was reported to the police station by one of the local Chinese women after she saw his ghost walking down the road; it was quite amazing.

“We had no flights and no shipping movements, so we knew the murderers had to be on the island. I joined the CIB team from Canberra who came up to the island to conduct the investigation.

“Two young men were arrested and charged with that murder; they were prosecuted under the Singapore penal code which applied at the time.

“In down time the island was wonderful; I used to play golf and scuba dive. It was a place to experience small community policing.”

Following a short time in the international division, Federal Agent Fagan turned her skills to training, working with detectives and recruits on investigative interview techniques and police practice.

“If you ask me why I find policing such a rewarding career, it’s the diversity of work, postings and experience,” she said.

“I’ve experienced operational work, taught, investigated, worked in Ministers’ offices, policy and commercial areas.

“That’s what gives a wealth of experience. Some people are happy to find one place that works for them; for me its diversity.

“I remember being warned that it could be very boring, but as an 18-year-old joining the AFP I thought it just sounded so exciting.

Federal Agent Fagan’s recruit class of 22 included five women. There are still five members of that class within the AFP, two of whom are women. They got together for a quiet celebration at the 20 year mark.

Among the many things that have changed over the years are terms and conditions for staff.

“We were very focused on terms and conditions back then,” Federal Agent Fagan said.

“We had clauses for everything; it was focused much more on an industrial blue collar framework.

Audrey Fagan as Executive Officer Protection visiting APS staff at the Pine Gap Joint Defence Facility in 2002.



“Contrast that with how our Certified Agreement looks today where we embrace flexibility within the workplace. Today’s workplace is quite different and I believe enhances how we deliver for the community we serve.”

Technology has also undergone rapid change since the days of the manual typewriter and first generation personal computers.

“While computers made things easier, we didn’t have the systems we enjoy now,” Federal Agent Fagan said.

“Early computers were not much more than an electric typewriter and it took a while for our in-house systems to be developed. Back then it was all cable traffic compared to the advantages of real time connectivity and interactivity that we enjoy now.”

However the changes were not limited to word processing.

“I was also thinking about the introduction of taped and video interviews as positive enhancements to our work.

“At the time there was some perception that police wouldn’t want this technology, however it was embraced whole heartedly as another enhancement to our operational work.”

According to Federal Agent Fagan, the greatest change within and around the AFP during her career has been the accessibility and pace of information and supporting

disciplines of Information Technology, Information Management and subsequent media management issues.

“Look at transnational crime today,” she said. “We can dismantle crime groups throughout the world; it’s an exciting time being part of the global effort.

“Our profile with the community has also changed. The community appreciates the role of the AFP, particularly the inter-relationships we have with our colleagues in the State and Territories, and around the world.

“That is a real positive.

“On the other side are the expectations that rest on our shoulders too, particularly in ensuring we continue to achieve our mission across all crime types including counter terrorism, transnational crime, major fraud and illicit drugs and recognising the harm they can cause to the community.

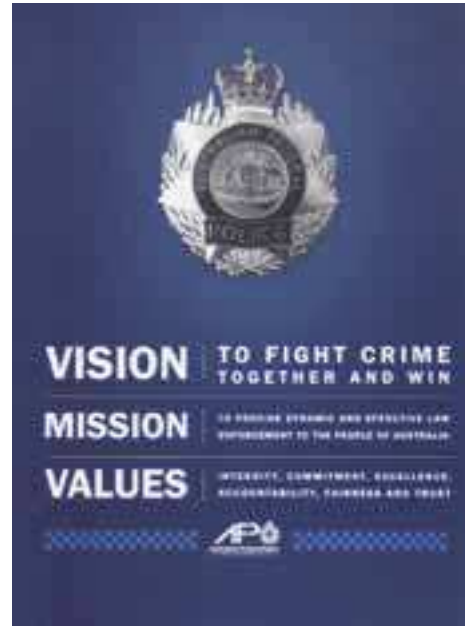
“I think these expectations will continue to present, but we have now put in place business systems and processes to define, monitor, measure and manage our business.

“We have embraced scenario planning and environmental scanning. We are looking at the short term through scans of 18 months, and conducting scenarios five or ten years out; this is an important focus in my new portfolio as Chief of Staff.

However, time and technology don’t change everything.

“While the tools have got better, preventing and investigating crime, preparing a brief for court and having the justice system take its course are fundamental principles that don’t change.

“It’s the scale and access that these tools have given that aids our thinking and investigative efforts. Maintaining updated skills is critical to this effort.”



A recurring theme within Federal Agent Fagan's career in the AFP has been rising to the challenge; something highlighted by world events.

"Obviously a key time for me in protection was 11 September 2001," she said.

"That day was the last planning meeting for CHOGM in Brisbane. Within hours of coming back from Brisbane, we were all in an emergency meeting.

"I just remember walking back into our protective security office at one or two in the morning and seeing the majority of teams there, we were all in. No-one rang up particularly to call in people; we all pitched in to the task at hand. That's the spirit of the organisation.

"The Prime Minister was overseas with his close personal protection team; I didn't need to check as partners and wives had all been contacted.

"It was the commitment to duty and the caring for each other and our families that was dominant, and really important.

"I believe it is our shared vision and our values that bind us through conduct of the very important work we do.

"You know you can rely on that shared values system."

And the future looks bright.

"I think statistically we are on good ground. We are in a period of great growth, our budget has expanded, and our attrition rate is the lowest it has ever been.

"Coupled with the work and family awards we were awarded this year, we are genuinely making our organisation a place that is good for all our staff, and it brings alive that notion of employer of choice.

"That is what it is actually about.

"Our key challenges are now to be true to our role, working with agencies in ways that enhance our contribution to a shared effort to prevent and combat crime.

"It is really about being active participants in problem solving, crime prevention and crime fighting.

"Our greatest challenge won't be an event, it won't be an atrocity such as Bali or 11 September; we know everyone will pull together and attend professionally to the task.

"The AFP exists in its own right and is a robust organisation, and I'm not sure any one thing would threaten that. I think the rigour of our processes, our commitment to planning and business continuity have built a very robust entity.

"One challenge will be ensuring our commitment to continue to learn, to be a learning organisation, to continually improve at every layer from new recruits through to the Commissioner. We need to ensure we constantly identify any gaps in our knowledge and invest in learning for the future.

"If you look at our values, they are a good credo for how we as a collective want to work."