

How do you find someone when they struggle to find themselves?

Each year in Australia, more than 30,000 people are reported to the police as missing. The AFP, through the National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC), is providing national leadership to reduce the incidence of missing persons and to alleviate the impact on missing persons, their families, friends and the broader community.

National Missing Persons Week is part of a campaign educating Australians and raising the awareness of the significant trauma and issues missing persons and their families and friends experience.

National Missing Persons Week aims to support and assist in the resolution of missing persons cases through heightened awareness and increased sighting reports encouraging the public to report sightings of missing people.

Bottom: AFP Commissioner Keelty at NMPW launch. Top right: 2007 NMPW poster.



Photo by Brian Harrigan

At the National Missing Person Week launch in Canberra in August, Commissioner Keelty highlighted the incidences and issues surrounding missing persons and the AFP's determination to assist in finding missing persons.

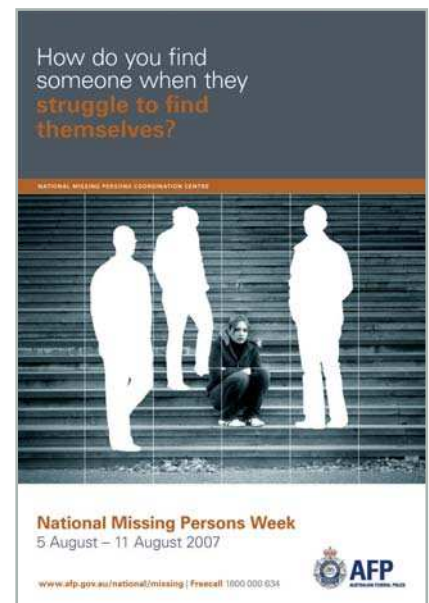
"For every missing person reported to police, at least 12 other people are affected," Commissioner Keelty said. "For some, the impact on their lives goes on for years and sometimes for a lifetime."

"When you consider that one person is reported missing to police in Australia every 18 minutes, you can begin to see why our work in recovering loved ones is essential. It also highlights the importance of community involvement in providing key pieces of information that may lead to the recovery of missing people."

The 1998 research study, *Missing people: Issues for the Australian Community*, conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology, found that missing people cost the Australian economy more than \$72 million per year. There is no measure of the distress endured by family and friends of missing persons, as well as the person missing.

In 2006, the Australian Government agreed to enhance the national coordination of missing persons by establishing the National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC).

The Coordinator of NMPCC, Leonie Jacques, explained that the Centre

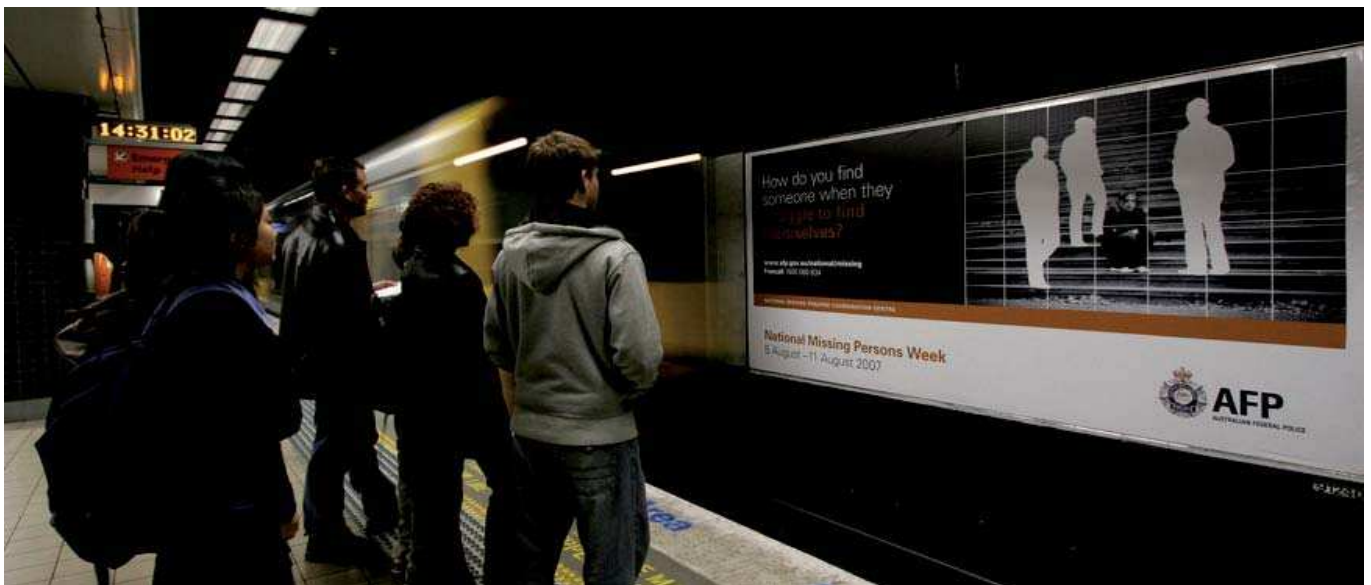


is hosted by the AFP and works with State and Territory police services and community-based organisations to: coordinate and promote a nationally integrated approach to reduce the incidence and impact of missing persons; and educate the broader community about the significance of the missing persons' phenomena.

The Centre's work is driven by the national missing persons' policy framework of PLEaS (Prevention, Location, Education and Support) which provides a common goal and approach for those affected by missing person's issues and the agencies that work within the missing persons sector.

"We want to work together to reduce the incidence and impact of missing persons and to assist groups most at risk of going missing," Ms Jacques said.

"National Missing Persons Week is a significant campaign coordinated by the Centre each year to highlight the



issues missing people deal with and to educate the community about what they can do to help in preventing people from going missing or assist them in finding a resolution.”

“This year’s theme, *How do you find someone when they struggle to find themselves?*, acknowledged that people who suffer from, or have a history of, mental illness are a key group at risk of going missing. Other groups most at risk of going missing are youth and the elderly,” Ms Jacques said.

The 2007 NMPW launch attended by master of ceremonies Mike Munro, families and friends of missing persons, AFP Executive, ACT Legislative Assembly members, partnership agencies, and representatives from Police Missing Persons Units across Australia, highlighted the collective commitment to finding missing people and dispelling myths.

Mr Mike Munro, who is closely connected with the missing persons sector through his work on the Australian Nine Network’s *Missing Persons Unit* series, introduced Sandra Lang, sister of Stephen Mitchell who has been missing since March 2007, as this year’s guest speaker. Sandra spoke of her brother’s illness with schizophrenia and the personal ordeal and impact of a loved one going missing.

A serious campaign for a serious issue

Ms Jacques said that this year, in addition to the launch and the church service, the Centre embarked on an intensive media and advertising campaign to help promote key messages to the Australian public.

“We are pleased with the response the AFP has been receiving from the community and Australia-wide since

rolling out this year’s NMPW campaign such as increased hits to the website, increased phone calls and sighting reports,” she said.

“In the lead-up to the launch, the Centre produced strong media profiling of missing persons across television, radio and print with significant increases during the peak period of 5 to 11 August.”

Commissioner Keelty, the National Manager of Economics and Special Operations, Roman Quaedvlieg, NMPCC Coordinator Leonie Jacques and family and friends of missing persons appeared on Australian television programs including *Sunrise*, *9am with Dave and Kim* and the *Today Show*.

The Centre also worked with cable network Foxtel to produce a number of information segments with Deputy Commissioner Tony Negus, Ms Jacques and family members of missing

persons. These segments aired on Foxtel's *Crime and Investigation Network*.

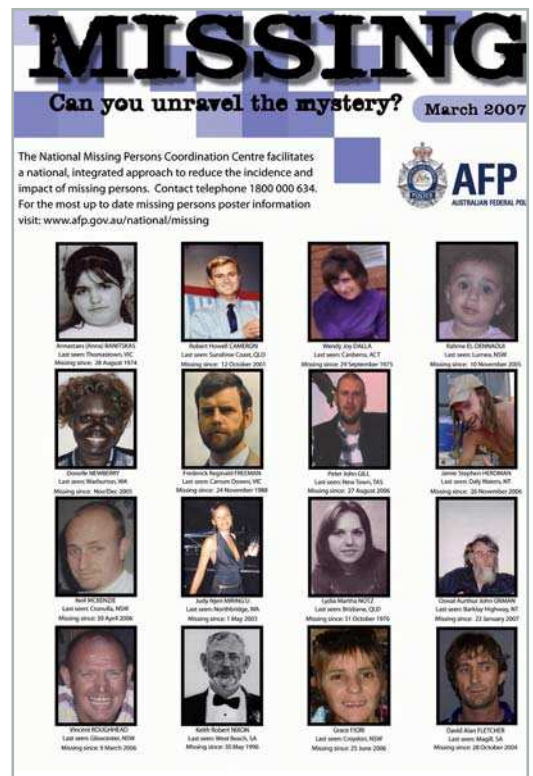
Missing persons' cases continued to be profiled at the conclusion of the television program *Without A Trace*, as well as appearing on Foxtel and the Australian magazine *Woman's Day* website.

A national advertising campaign complemented these strategies and included:

- a NMPW television commercial aired on all commercial networks and Foxtel in metropolitan and regional Australia
- 575 advertisements placed on buses in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Canberra
- five large billboards placed in Central Station, Sydney
- 100,000 postcards distributed through 1,250 venues across Australia
- 6,500 NMPW posters distributed through McDonalds' restaurants and through NMPCC networks

The NMPCC is now working on a three-year communications strategy with each year focusing on a key group at risk of going missing.

"The AFP is committed in a national capacity and in partnership with the government and community to help locate missing people and encourages the community as a whole to also help in preventing this serious and significant issue," Ms Jacques said.



Missing Persons facts

- The police definition for a missing person is "anyone whose whereabouts is unknown and there are fears for the safety and welfare of that person".
- 30,000 people are reported missing in Australia each year – one every 18 minutes.
- 99.5 per cent of people are located – 85 per cent within a week of being reported missing.
- At present, there are 1,600 long-term missing persons i.e. persons who have been missing for more than one year.
- Approximately one-third of people go missing more than once.
- Approximately two-thirds of missing persons are under the age of 18 (i.e. 20,000).
- The three at risk groups of going missing are: people suffering from a mental illness; youth; and the aged.
- People go missing for a variety of reasons – both voluntarily or involuntarily.
- You do not have to wait 24 hours before reporting someone as missing.
- Going missing is not a crime.

Kim's prayer...

Kim O'Donnell's step-sister, Amelia Hausia, went missing in December 1992. Amelia was last seen at a local shopping centre in the ACT and was last heard from after she phoned her biological mother in Tonga to tell her that she was okay. No further contact has been made since.

On behalf of Amelia's extended family and friends Kim read a poem she had written for the NMPW Church Service:

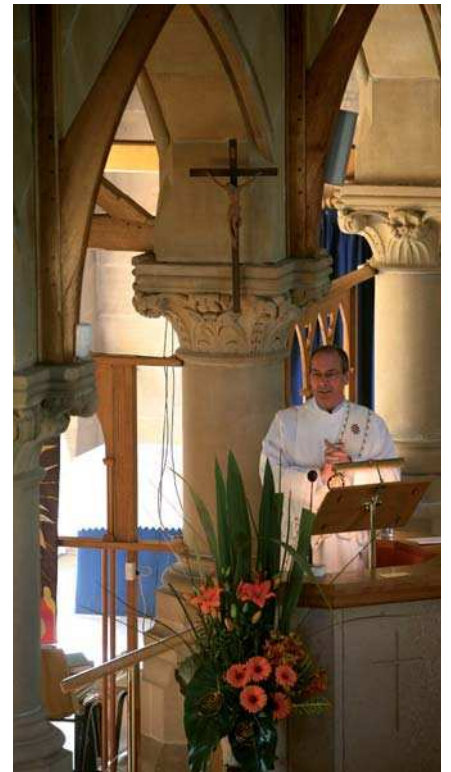


Photo by Brian Hartigan

Far left: Amelia Fua Hausia. Centre: Flowers at church service symbolising hope.

Top: AFP Chaplain Roger O'Donnell at church service.

Amelia Fua Hausia, born 21st July 1974. Daughter, sister, niece, grand-daughter, aunty and friend. A strong woman raised together with her loving and resilient Tongan and Aboriginal families.

Mia - her nickname affectionately used when we share our individual memories and stories about her.

Energetic, spirited, lots of 'fuzzy hair'!

Loves dancing, singing, playing sport and her family and friends.

Infectious laughter inquisitive nieces and nephews longing to meet her.

Away for 15 years, missed by many, but not forgotten. We will never lose hope of seeing her again. Hope is the ingredient that keeps our spirits strong. Amelia, please come home if you can. We love and miss you deeply...

NMPW church service

A church service attended by ACT Chief Police Officer Andy Hughes, was held on Sunday 5 August at All Saints Anglican Church in Canberra in honour of missing persons and those who love and search for them.

Invited guests, AFP Executive and representatives, families and friends of missing persons and the congregation all placed individual flowers in a vase to symbolise hope and love for those missing persons.