

Helping police and the community

It may surprise you to realise that the first person most people see at the front counter of ACT Police Stations is usually a volunteer.

The Volunteers in Policing Program provides a valuable service that allows police to spend more time on the beat, and gives community members an opportunity to interact with police in a positive and rewarding way.

The Volunteers in Policing (VIP) Program started in 2001. There are currently 44 Police Volunteers in the ACT, ranging in age from 39 to 81 years. They perform a variety of roles, including welcoming people at the front desk and providing Justice of the Peace services to the public and AFP members. These men and women use their skills, experience and knowledge to make a positive contribution to the community by supporting the work of the AFP.

VIP Program Manager Sharan Slater is based at Tuggeranong Police Station in the ACT's southern suburbs. She is a passionate supporter of Volunteers in Policing, but says those who want to become involved face a rigorous testing process.

"Volunteers must undergo a selection interview, psychological testing, illicit drug testing and they must obtain a security clearance," Sergeant Slater said.

"These things are important, because they work side-by-side with police, and are exposed to matters of a sensitive nature in the course of their duties. It also gives police officers confidence to

know that the volunteers have been through similar clearance processes to their own."

Once the volunteers are accepted, they attend an eight-day training course at the AFP College. Experts from across the AFP give the volunteers an overview of the organisation, the way it works and the different areas of operation. Volunteers are then able to nominate the work they wish to do from 30 approved roles.

The roles include various tasks from filing to bus driving, role-playing for recruit training, catering and ceremonial support duties. The volunteers who undertake reception duties at ACT police stations are also trained to take fingerprints. This enables them to fingerprint consenting adults for things like visa applications, pre-employment police checks and taxi, casino and liquor licence applications. The fingerprints are then printed out and either given to the person, or sent to AFP Criminal Records for checking. They are then destroyed using secure document destruction.

Police Volunteers also help the AFP to ensure community events such as the 30th Anniversary Open Day are a success. For the Open Day, volunteers prepared 5000 showbags, drove buses full of visitors around the site and provided an all-day sausage sizzle to feed the crowd. They also helped

to staff display stands and manage activities for children. Although hundreds of AFP staff were also on hand, the volunteers were an essential part of ensuring around 15,000 visitors enjoyed the day.

A Police Volunteer can work up to 16 hours a week, which is the international standard for voluntary hours. Since the program began, Police Volunteers have contributed more than 81,000 hours of unpaid work to the community. Their contribution means that operational AFP members can focus on higher priority policing matters such as investigating crime.

But the AFP is not the only beneficiary of the program. The volunteers also gain a lot from their experience.





01: Volunteers Richard Dickman and Ed Harding **02:** VIP Program Manager, Sergeant Sharan Slater **03:** Volunteer Noel McLaughlin with staff member Karen McDevitt at Tuggeranong Station **04:** Volunteer Margaret Porter with Constable Brendan Steenberg **05:** Volunteer Brian Hodgkinson cooking sausages **06:** Volunteers Richard Dickman, Cynthia Ponting and Brian Hodgkinson holding 30th Anniversary Kenny Koalas.

Margaret Porter joined VIP when it first started in 2001 and says she is still enjoying the work and the friends she has made.

"I decided to become a volunteer after my husband passed away," she said.

"My husband had always done everything for me, so when I attended the first meeting I didn't think I would be able to speak up, but I soon found my voice.

"The Program has given me confidence in myself and my abilities, and I enjoy the interaction I have with my colleagues and the public. It's like having a second family."

Members of the VIP Program have won the Volunteer of the Year Award (Emergency Services Category) four times, including consecutive wins for the past three

years. Two volunteers have been awarded Australia Day Medallions for their services to the AFP, and in 2008 the Program was awarded an Australia Day Achievement Medallion for its ongoing assistance to the AFP's Recognition and Ceremonial team.

The work the volunteers do can make an enormous difference to police. Sergeant Slater cites the compilation and maintenance of an ACT business key-holder registry as one example.

"This mammoth task meant volunteers had to visit every business in the ACT and record the names and contact numbers of people who hold keys for the premises," she said.

"This ensures ACT Policing can contact the relevant person quickly in an emergency, and gain access

to buildings outside of business hours when necessary.

"This is an ongoing task for the volunteers, but it is vital for ACT Policing to be able to contact the key-holder in case of robbery, fire or any other police matter."

The VIP Program enhances the AFP's abilities to perform its core policing function and is considered a strategic partner in helping the AFP to meet its performance outcomes. The Program also fosters strong links between police and the community and creates a positive perception of the AFP in the public arena.

"Our volunteers do a fantastic job, and both police and the public appreciate their efforts," Sergeant Slater said.

