

# School Based Community Policing—Northern Territory

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**T**he commencement of the School Based Community Policing was as far back as 1984 when a pilot program was introduced at Casuarina High School, one of Darwin's largest schools located in the northern suburbs. The school had a population of about 1,000 students from Year Eight to matriculation. About half of the students came from a lower socioeconomic, multicultural background.

The forerunner to this program was an 'adopted school' scheme where members of the Criminal Investigation Branch were allocated secondary schools in an endeavour to build a rapport within the school community. This system failed for many reasons but the major factor was the growing workload and other commitments that members of the Criminal Investigation Branch were required to carry out. The scheme became disjointed and was limited in meeting its objectives.

Initially the School Based Community Policing program met with resistance from within the police force, the education system (teachers and unions) and some outspoken school councils. Examples of this resistance follow.

- **The Police**  
The appointee was seen by many as a 'kiddy cop' and not seen to be doing the job of a 'traditional' police officer.
- **The Education System**  
Many within the education system believed that police should leave education to the educators who were trained in their field and that police should be doing what they are trained for, i.e. policing.
- **School Councils**  
Amongst school councils there was a perception that the school must be bad to have a police officer stationed at their school.

Once these myths were dispelled by consultation and accurate information about the theory of school based community policing this new concept of policing was about to take a great leap forward.

One of the first duties of management was to write a 'Position Profile' for the position of school based community police officers.

## POSITION PROFILE

POSITION AND RANK:

Constable, school based community policing, community relations branch, executive policy command.

**SHIFTS WORKED:**

Day shift.

**SECTION OBJECTIVE:**

To reduce the incidence of juvenile crime in the community and improve community confidence in the police.

**ACCOUNTABILITY OF INCUMBENT:**

Responsible for developing and maintaining good school community police interaction and rapport. Improve or consolidate the attitude of the school community and public towards law and order issues.

**ACCOUNTABLE TO:**

Superintendent, Community Relations Branch.

**JOB DESCRIPTION:**

In addition to the functions listed under 'Common Functions' for police, the following apply to the position:-

- Be seen as a member of the school community.
- Liaise with school staff, parents and shopkeepers.
- Take any complaints or particulars of offences.
- Lecture within the schools on selected topics if requested.
- Advise on security.
- Observe the performance of monitors at school crossings.
- Advise on parking restrictions in the vicinity of the school.
- Monitor the activities of any undesirables in the area.
- Liaise with truancy officers and home liaison officers.
- Counsel students as required.
- Pass on information to other instrumentalities or elements of the police force as necessary.
- Liaise with relevant government departments regarding welfare of students, e.g. Health, Community Development.
- Attend appropriate school council meetings.
- Assist in organising approved after school activities.
- Be responsible for the teaching of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) in feeder primary schools and preschools.
- Perform normal police duties as required.

The selection of personnel to take up these positions is extremely important. In fact if the right type of person is not available, the position is just not filled by anyone. It is better to go without rather than appoint an unsuitable person.

An arrangement exists between the school and the police which allows for a six month trial period. If the school does not suit the police officer or the police officer does not suit the school then the appointment is not confirmed and another applicant is recruited.

All school based community police officers are trained in classroom techniques, methods of instruction course and are comprehensively examined in relevant legislation affecting children such as the *Juvenile Justices Act 1984*, the Criminal Code, and the

*Community Welfare Act 1984*. They are also trained in DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education). A school based community policing manual has been developed which acts as the constables' 'Bible'. This together with the DARE manual equips each school based community police officer to carry out his/her job in a most professional manner.

There was a need for a consistent level of information to be imparted to any person who asked questions of the constables. In other words if a question was asked of a school based constable no matter where he/she was stationed—Alice Springs, Jabiru, Nhulunbuy, Darwin, Katherine, Yuendumu, or anywhere else for that matter, the answers given would be consistent, dependent upon the circumstance.

Serving a very multicultural, multiracial and intellectually diverse community saw a need to standardise the information given. Although, the individual interpretation, involvement or degree of depth required to formulate the answers may vary, the basic facts remain the same. Standardisation throughout the Territory is important when information is given by any one of the constables.

Whilst it is not in dispute that teachers are the best people to educate children in the three Rs, the police input adds the other two Rs (Rights and Responsibilities) to the school communities. The School Based Community Police are walking, talking library books. They have become a tremendous resource in assisting teachers with their curriculum. In the Northern Territory 'Youth and the Law' is a core subject at Year Ten level. They also assist in other subjects such as legal studies, forensic science, home economics (domestic violence), student driver education, and act as advisers and consultants in protective behaviours education.

All constables are under the direct guidance of a sergeant co-ordinator of the school based community program. The duty statement for the Sergeant is as follows.

#### **DUTY STATEMENT**

- To consolidate a complete lesson content and program for all school based constables and co-ordinate the implementation.
- To supply to the school based constables all salient and modern information on matters relevant to children including drug abuse and use, legal and public safety information.
- To facilitate exchange of information regarding offending youths.
- To co-ordinate and arrange the involvement by the school based constables with such programs as the Junior Police Rangers, Blue Light discos, proactive patrols, diversion program, police and citizens youth club, holiday care and other similar programs.
- To assist in promoting constant and substantial interaction by operational police with school based constables.
- To provide the various sections of the Department with relevant information regarding juveniles, e.g. licensing problems, patrol recommendations, training and legal requirements, drug abuse and use trends.
- To identify and arrange training needs for the school based constables.
- To assist in identifying recruit and in-service training needs as it relates to the community's young people.
- To directly assist the Junior Police Ranger program.
- To oversight the DARE program.

The Northern Territory Police have one sergeant co-ordinator and 18 constables servicing all of the 20 high schools and secondary colleges, 58 primary schools and

associated preschools throughout the Territory. Special attention is being paid to Aboriginal schools such as Kormilda College in Darwin and Yirara College in Alice Springs. The majority of children who attend these colleges come from communities far and wide. The school based community police at these colleges have the added responsibility of servicing these communities such as Port Keats, Bathurst and Melville Island, Daly River, Santa Teresa, Yuendumu, Papunya, Oenpelli and many others. These duties are carried out in addition to other policing functions performed at these settlements or towns.

Another benefit of the school based community police is to identify children at risk. Each case has to be handled on its own merit. It may be that just a friendly chat is all that is needed in some cases, while other cases may require intervention of a relevant authority. Some children are placed in a diversion program by the police while others get direction from activities such as Police and Citizens Youth Club, Wongabilla Equestrian Centre (pony club run by police), Aboriginal stock handlers courses, Blue Light Discos, Junior Police Rangers or other outdoor camping programs run by police.

There may be a case for a child and his family to be 'walked' through the juvenile justice system by the school based community police officer. All processes (for example, summons) issued by the Juvenile Courts are served by these members. Some magistrates impose reporting conditions on some young offenders and use a school based constable as a resource for this process to occur.

The commitment of the Northern Territory Police to the School Based Community Program is just less than 3 per cent of our sworn police officers. Whilst that percentage of human resources may seem high, the Education Department also contribute to the maintenance of these officers by supplying an office and telephone within the school.

All school based constables are issued with a specially identifiable vehicle fitted with a removable police radio. These vehicles are 'home garaged' and allows tremendous mobility and flexibility when dealing with the school communities. These highly visible vehicles are seen by the general public at schools, shopping centres, attending various meetings, on underage drinking patrols or at school sporting functions and other activities. The police officers themselves carry out their duties in full uniform unless commonsense dictates otherwise, i.e. police sports uniform at sporting functions or school camps.

During the school holidays the school based community police officers conduct holiday care programs for all comers. They enlist the help of youth (15-16 year olds) to assist with these activities. The holiday care program of activities is dictated by the age groups of those that attend.

Some of the junior police rangers assist with these activities together with some of the equipment belonging to the junior police rangers, e.g. canoes, abseiling ropes, compass and map reading equipment. Police and Citizens Youth Club venues and equipment are also used to assist with the school holiday care programs, e.g. holiday care instructors supervise the use of Wongabilla Equestrian Centre horses, basketball, volleyball and other sporting equipment and direct other instructors.

Let us analyse the contact each of these school based community police would have with their community on a day-to-day basis: high school or secondary college (approximately) 800, feeder primary and preschools (approximately) 1,200 plus school teachers, school councils and parents of the children. It's easy to see that the commitment of the Northern Territory Police to its youth and school communities is enormous; particularly if the contact made by our other activities such as Junior Police Rangers, Police and Citizens Youth Club (1,400 per week) and Blue Light Discos (over 20,000 for the year) are included in the figures.

In short, using ball park figures, 3 per cent of the Northern Territory Police have daily contact with nearly one third of the entire population in a proactive policing mode. Whilst it is important to have a very good reactive police service, proactive policing programs are equally important to serve and protect our community.

It is worth noting that all of the proactive policing programs in place in the Northern Territory did not happen overnight. More importantly the human resources committed to these programs were not taken from the operational areas. Very solid and properly

constructed cabinet submissions were used to elicit government assistance for funding of equipment and human resources over a period of time to allow the Northern Territory police to achieve this high level of commitment to proactive policing.

Like many other proactive police programs, evaluation and research into police effectiveness are sometimes difficult to achieve in black and white statistics. It will only be with longitudinal studies using many and varied performance indicators to know if proactive policing programs in place in the Northern Territory will in fact fulfil the community's desire to be policed in this manner.

Programs being evaluated in the Northern Territory at the moment are:

- School Based Community Policing; and
- Neighbourhood Watch.

Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) has been evaluated professionally by the Northern Territory University and the results were indeed positive. DARE has been accepted by the Department of Education and Health to be taught in all Northern Territory schools as a curriculum subject by trained uniformed police officers (school based community policing). The level of co-operation between police, education and health all working together in the Northern Territory under the 'Link' document is a partnership not enjoyed by any other state or territory.

The phrase 'The community are the police and the police are the community' has been attributed to Sir Robert Peel. The School Based Community Policing program can be seen as a cornerstone to build strong foundations for the police and the community to work together in the 1990s for a better partnership for the future.