

Keeping the streets safe

Chief Inspector Taylor out on the beat talking with two visitors to the Woden Bus Interchange in Canberra, Nick Nakis, 16, and Tony Klobecar, 15, both from Woden Valley High School. (Picture by Terry Browne)

IN my area less than one percent of the population commits 60 percent of the crime. It would greatly assist the welfare of the community if we could take them out of the scene.

'The area's level of car theft, for example, fell significantly recently when two offenders were gaoled,' said Chief Inspector Graham Taylor, the officer in charge of Woden Station in Southern Canberra.

'Eliminating hooliganism is a high priority of this station and we need the support of the community to do that,' he said.

'We also have to be able to concentrate on known criminals but this does raise the question of whether police powers are sufficient.

'We have to look at the whole crime picture — not just that of the criminal.

'We need to look at the victims of crime which raises issues such as whether it is safe for people to walk the streets. We need to get back to the times when people had respect for the law and regard for each other,' he said.

Chief Inspector Taylor supported moves for penalties for other than habitual criminals such as community work and being restricted to home to make Canberra a more law abiding community.

Chief Inspector Taylor joined the ACT Police in 1963 and has worked in most areas of ACT policing. In 1968 he spent a year with the UN Peacekeeping Force on Cyprus. From 1972 to 1974 he was seconded to New Guinea to advise police there.

He's strong on community policing.

'I was the first officer in charge of Neighbourhood Watch,' he said.

'I began the first zone pilot scheme in the southern Canberra suburb of Kam-

bah in late 1985 and have seen it grow since.

He said that the level of youthful violence and drunkenness in his command seemed to have plateaued.

The Fight Against Louts.

'We are concentrating a lot of our forces on combating louts in shopping centres and other public places. Police speak to many of the young people they see hanging around and there has been a definite decline in poor behaviour,' he said.

'Recent changes to the ACT Liquor Ordinance have given us some powers to deal with under-age drinking. We can now take them to the police station and hold them until their parents arrive. These young people are given one warning and if they offend again they are charged.

'Of the more than 20 so far cautioned, none have been spoken to again by police.

'We also have the power now to ask juveniles for details of their name, address and age which we didn't have before,' he said.

Chief Inspector Taylor said that kids often seemed to know the limits of police powers.

'People are much more legally aware these days,' he said.

'I mentioned two car thieves earlier.

'There are others whose apprehension would greatly cut the crime rate. The police and the courts should be doing something about the people who habitually commit crime.

'The police are well aware of some people who base their lifestyle on habitually committing crime,' he said.

'Perhaps the previous laws covering consorting and habitual criminality were not so old fashioned because they did give police more control over known criminals.'

(Laws which allowed courts to declare people habitual criminals, and others which made consorting with known criminals an offence were abolished under the the ACT Police Offences Ordinance.

Laws against loitering were abolished when the Games, Wagers and Betting Ordinance was re-drafted in October last year).

'While we have gained some powers to control under-age drinking we don't have the power to move people on and people over the age of 18 can drink alcohol legally in any public place in Canberra,' he said.

'I believe alcohol is often the crux of a lot of crimes. Even people of a legal age when they drink in groups begin to fight and harass people passing by. Often that's when with some Dutch courage they plan criminal activities such as break-ins and car thefts.

'In my view people should not be able to drink in public places such as shopping centres and bus interchanges because that sort of behaviour only encourages people below the legal age to drink as well.

'I think most reasonable people would agree that there are some situations in

which drinking is out of place.'

Chief Inspector Taylor said that not being able to move people along often frustrated his officers when gangs of young people in public places annoyed others but stopped short of the definition of offensive behaviour.

'We often know a group can be planning trouble but we don't have the power to move them on. In many cases if we did have that power we could stop trouble before it begins.'

Public Support

Chief Inspector Taylor said it was important for policing to have public support.

'The people must be prepared to report crime to the police. Witnesses must be prepared to go to court to give effective evidence against trouble-makers. The public on its part must report incidents and the police must respond quickly.'

On police response, Chief Inspector Taylor said one of his objectives was to have officers out on the road more often.

'My men spend 20 percent of each shift in the station doing administrative and typing work, which is the general average in the AFP. Perhaps this could be lessened.

'Their place is out on the streets as far as is practically possible to ensure the fastest possible response time. The new computer system being introduced by the AFP will be a great help. It will cut down on the duplication of reports.'

'The streamlining of the crime reporting system clearly demonstrates that the Information Systems and Scientific Services Division has recognised the deficiencies in the computer area.

'I'm very pleased that the use of computers is moving more into the area of the working police,' he said.

(The latest developments will provide immediate access to information; for example state vehicle registrations, driver's licence particulars or criminal details. The immediate access could be vital to police in the field because it would warn them about whether a subject could be armed or dangerous. The AFP's computer developments are featured in this issue of 'Platypus')

Chief Inspector Taylor had one final piece of advice for working police in the ACT: 'Never think investigating a case of a stolen bicycle and similar small crimes against children is not important police work. I've known of cases where a kid has saved for years to buy himself a bike. When you recover it for him, that kid will love the police for ever more!'

A POLICE FAMILY MOURNS

Sir,

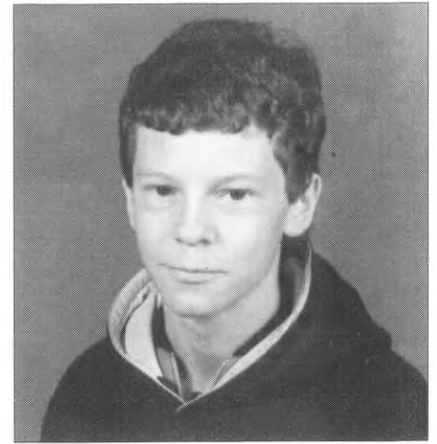
On behalf of Rita, Rob, Craig and myself I would like to thank all members of the AFP and support sections for the support we have received since our 16 year old son, Grant Andrew Cameron, was allegedly punched and kicked to death at the Duffy Primary School fete on Saturday, October 31, last year.

It has been a very traumatic period for us — as it would be for any family that lost a loved one under any circumstances — but it has been especially hard for us due to the circumstances under which Grant died.

I have had considerable trouble trying to make up my mind whether I wanted to be a police officer any more because I had some fears that I may become too emotionally involved if I were faced with a situation similar to the one under which Grant died; that I might do the wrong thing either by myself or by the Police Force and that is the last thing I would want.

I returned to work on January 4 and I am going to give it a go.

A special thank you to the following people: The previous Commissioner, Mr Grey, Assistant Commissioner (ACT Region) Val McConaghy, for their support and assistance during the period that I made several press statements and



Grant Cameron

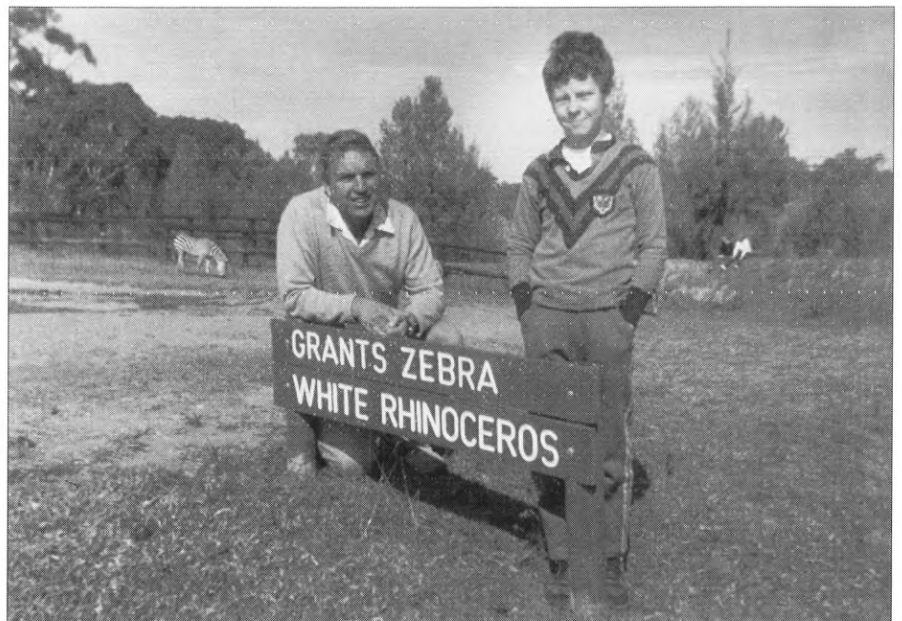
appeared on TV; Detective Sergeant John Lawler (Woden CIB, ACT) for his kindness and thoughtfulness; Sergeant Angela Brown (Welfare Officer) for her help and for just being a good friend to Rita and I during this period. Thanks Angie; Garry Fulton from the AFP Association for support and assistance and Dr Don Smyth for his assistance and kindness.

The article in the November 'Platypus' entitled 'Violence Growing' quoting Dr Smyth was written before Grant was killed and his death has certainly proved Dr Smyth right.

Thanks for your support and assistance 'Doc' and I wish you a long and happy retirement.

I also want to thank Chief Inspector Graham Taylor (OIC Woden, ACT) and workmates at Woden and all the other people who attended Grant's funeral at Cowra, sent flowers, cards, made telephone calls and visited us. Thank you. You will never know how your support has helped us.

Senior Constable Bob Cameron.



Sen. Const. Bob Cameron with Grant.