

# “More to follow”, a capacity development update



**Federal Agent Paul Chambers has spent more than two years assisting the Solomon Islands Police Force to create and maintain a professional and effective Forensic Services team. A steady approach to capacity development has produced a team recognised for providing consistent, valuable and reliable support to their organisation, but is the ‘more to follow’ sign-off on their reports a clue to the future?**



Photo: PPF-Media

Federal Agent Paul Chambers

In June 2005, five members from the then Criminal Records Office were selected to form a SIPP Forensic Service. With formal knowledge limited to their fundamental understanding of the principles of crime scene recording and some ability in classifying and identifying fingerprints, the members put their positive attitude and willingness to learn to good use.

Four office rooms, cluttered with many years' worth of mis-filed and un-filed fingerprints, became the first home of the fledgling Forensic Service. Advisors recently relocated from the Law Enforcement Cooperation Program in Papua New Guinea arrived and initiatives to get a dependable, functional Forensic service got under way.

First, an assessment of primary needs revealed that SIPP investigators required fingerprint classification and identification, crime scene examination and photographic services. Criminal history checking in the form of police clearances was also needed.

Once an early target for Forensic

achievements was agreed by the PPF and SIPP Executive, work began on an internal assessment of skills and resources in order to best structure any development initiatives. In the interests of sustainability, and before developing technical skills in a particular specialist discipline, the team proposed and agreed on its identity, its mission and its values. In the absence of a purpose-built facility, the team and advisors set about repainting and refurbishing the area on their own initiative with PPF providing the materials.

While the SIPP Forensics Services Team developed their sense of identity and ownership through the renovations effort, active advisor participation produced the unexpected benefit of increased buy-in, due to the practical demonstration of universal commitment to a brighter future for the team.

Since this beginning, the team has introduced service improvements systematically to maintain the integrity and reliability of those provided before. In support of the SIPP, the section is now able to provide:

- Eleven trained members, servicing fingerprints, crime scene examination and photographic requests.
- A 24-hour on-call crime scene availability with a dedicated 4WD vehicle and mobile phone.
- Completely sustainable operational collection of fingerprints classified and stored in the manual Henry system.
- A team of members trained in the maintenance, use and interpretation of the fingerprint main collection.
- Reliable crime scene examination and follow-up comparison of latent fingerprints found at scenes with the main collection and a hot list of known offenders.
- Digital photographic workshop producing evidence court books of a high standard, with stored and backed-up images on CD.
- A fully operational and functional forensic case management system
- Case files featuring detailed original notes, sketch plans, thumbnail images, and police statements, with 100 per cent review by a senior SIPP Forensic member.
- In-house fingerprint training for inductees to a standard suitable for classifying and searching fingerprints.
- Training for SIPP recruits and operational police on the use and services of the SIPP Forensic Services.
- Reliable, accurate and timely monthly reporting from the Director Forensic to the SIPP Executive.
- A refurbished and secure laboratory and outfitted offices for examination and storage of exhibits.



Far left: Women Police Constable Minnie Leigh; middle left: Coordinator Bruce Giles and SIPP Commissioner Jahir Khan presenting WPC Pretty Vaea with training certificate. Bottom: Sergeant Edwin Matou with WPC Ethel Lamana and WPC Pretty Vaea examining louvres for prints.



Photos: PPF Media

The future of the team is exciting and bright. Proposals for 2008 include the:

- development of further occupational health and safety procedures in relation to the chemical enhancement of latent fingerprints.
- completion of procedures manuals and the delivery of advanced (specialist area) crime scene training modules developed in-house with the assistance of specialist advisors.
- development of a broader base of specialisations for the team in response to emerging demands from investigators.
- expansion of the team into two outposts (Gizo and Auki) so that remote police posts within the Solomon Islands are afforded better access to quality forensic support.

The team has earned the recognition of its own organisation and of the PPF for achieving so much in the short time since its formation. As one who has traveled the path with these members, it would not be a great stretch of the imagination to see this team take what they have learned and deliver it to their Pacific neighbours some time in the future, providing lessons they have discovered themselves, a home-grown standard of forensic service and delivery specifically designed for Pacific environments. I have no doubt in my mind that for this team, there will certainly be "More to follow".

- A recently completed laboratory area suitable for chemical enhancement of fingerprints such as Superglue and Ninhydrin treatments.
- Well-maintained forensic decontamination area including shower and toilet facility.
- Organised and dedicated exhibit store with the capacity for refrigerated or frozen exhibits.
- Maintaining a collection of examination and consumable equipment suitable for services provided.

Although simple in comparison with modern western ideas of forensic services provision, the delivery and quality has progressed well past the rudimentary stage. What the SIPP Forensic Services team has been able to achieve is the cornerstone of fundamental forensic support to investigations using a systematic approach with simple, but

trusted, methods to provide a service that is both reliable and sustainable.

The key to consistency in delivery of agreed standards has proved to be a strong sense of pride within the team. Pride in team achievement is also boosting confidence in the community and in the SIPP, and this is reinforced through provision of consistent services of a quality that is adding real value to investigations. This is one of its key objectives in support of the SIPP Business Plan.

Members of the SIPP Forensic team have undergone training in searching and using the Henry system. The internally developed course is currently being considered for endorsement as an externally recognised qualification. This endorsement would increase the credibility of internal graduates submitting their work to the judicial process.