

# Policing partnerships create communities

**The benefits of community policing programs are well documented but not always well understood in countries where civil unrest, social dislocation and conflict have disrupted policing programs over a long period.**

Learning how to work with the community is an integral part of police training in Australia. Recruits are taught to walk the beat, talk to people in their neighbourhood and identify potential problems before they arise.

The AFP is committed to helping developing countries build more effective and accountable police services and to collaborating with Australian Government and partner agencies in that endeavour.

One way it does this is through creating a better understanding of community policing. In Timor-Leste, the Policia Nacional de Timor-Leste (PNTL) has partnered with the AFP to create the AFP's Timor-Leste Police Development Program (TLPDP), and a key part of the program is community policing.

After gaining independence in 2002, Timor-Leste adopted a community policing model, but the new nation had little experience of how to create that type of police organisation. Through the TLPDP, the AFP aims to work with PNTL members to determine what they need to enhance their capabilities as police officers and how they can implement effective strategies to achieve those goals.

One of the PNTL's main goals is to implement an effective community policing model and changing perceptions within the PNTL and within the community is a challenge.

"This is a significant change in philosophy for police officers in Timor-Leste," said Federal Agent Daryl Meldrum, who is based in Dili.

"In the past, there was very little interaction between the police and the community. Police jobs were very role specific, so unless something happened which required a police response, the police would not talk to members of the public."

Federal Agent Meldrum and his colleague Federal Agent Ian Jowers agree that it will take a long time to change this attitude, even though the PNTL leadership strongly supports the change. So a significant element of their work is building relationships with members of the PNTL to find out what they think about policing, the community and their role.

"The importance of building a relationship with our Timorese counterparts cannot be understated," Federal Agent Meldrum said.

AFP members in Timor-Leste, and in other countries where they work in capacity development, are conscious of the importance of overcoming cultural differences and language barriers. Over time, friendships between members of different policing organisations help to build an international policing community that is as important to peace and stability as the

developing relationship the PNTL has with the people of Timor-Leste.

Through the PNTL's Community Policing Unit, officers are being taught how to build on their existing networks to more effectively use community support and knowledge.

Work has also been done to ensure the community policing model adopted in Timor-Leste is suitable for the country's needs. PNTL Community Policing Unit director Joao Belo dos Reis has undertaken significant research to ensure the most applicable model is developed.



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01: The Community Policing logo 03: Federal Agents Daryl Meldrum and Ian Jowers.

"Sub-Inspector Belo has travelled to several other countries to study community policing models and tried to bring together those elements which will work in Timor-Leste," Federal Agent Meldrum said.

"His passion for getting the police more involved in the life of their towns and villages has helped to ensure the model being implemented will work over the long term and be embraced by the police and community alike."

The PNTL now ensures that all officers receive training in community policing, either as recruits at the academy or by

taking part in workshops that are being held in districts across the country. These workshops enable officers to remain abreast of new developments, and discuss ways that the police and the community can work together to address existing problems.

The AFP also has its part to play, working at a strategic level with the PNTL to help it improve the operation and effectiveness of the Community Policing Unit. Federal Agents Meldrum and Jowers have been instrumental in assessing the current work practices and capabilities of the unit, and are now working with their PNTL colleagues to improve the workshops that are being rolled out across Timor-Leste.

So far, it is going well.

"The workshops are being received really well," said Federal Agent Meldrum.

"This is a new philosophy for most members of the PNTL, but they are embracing it with enthusiasm, and beginning to apply it to the police work they do on a daily basis."

A series of ongoing surveys will help to provide a concrete measure of the success of these workshops in changing both the PNTL and Timorese community's perceptions of community policing. The surveys will be conducted by external agencies, and are supported by the US-funded Asia Foundation as

well as the New Zealand-UNPol Community Policing Pilot Program.

This is also important to ensuring there is adequate support for PNTL members trying to maintain strong links with their communities.

"There are so many other issues facing police in Timor-Leste" said Federal Agent Meldrum.

"A real challenge is getting people to take community policing principles on board and show them the benefits that can flow into every area of policing as the result of having strong links with the public."

It is hoped that as community policing becomes embedded in PNTL culture these benefits will become more apparent. They include a greater awareness of issues that may affect crime rates in the community, less suspicion of police activity and a greater willingness to provide information by members of the community. Over time, this will help to improve the rule of law in Timor-Leste, reducing crime rates and the fear of crime within the community.

Through creating strong links within the policing community, as well as links to the wider public, the PNTL is working towards more effective policing practices. The AFP is proud of the work it is doing to help it in this endeavour.

