

FLEMINGTON

Working with the local community



Constables Andrew Allen and Donna Allen (no relation) talk to Tony Krstevski from Newmarket Cellars during a foot patrol

In recent times the population at Flemington has changed dramatically with the arrival of refugees from the Horn of Africa. Cultural differences and a mistrust of police because of experiences in their homelands have made policing in the area a challenge – a challenge the members at Flemington have tackled head on, with success.

Abdurahman Osman is the President of the local Somali Community and he works closely with the police at Flemington to make the assimilation of his people as smooth as possible with as few problems as possible for all concerned.

Both Osman and Senior Sergeant Tony Langdon agree that there

have been some problems in the past but they believe those days are behind them. These two community leaders have built a strong bond and a mutual respect working together and their friendship is obvious.

“There have been problems between the police and some of our children,” admits Osman. “If the older people are with the children

they don’t make mistakes. The elders will go and talk to the children on the streets and tell them not to stay there...to go home.”

Osman believes these patrols have solved some of the problems. He is now working with the Somali and Eritrean youth workers to set up activities for the young people, to get them off the streets. “If we don’t initiate to make them busy there will be problems and they will make mistakes,” says Osman.

The police, the local Horn of Africa people and Jesuit Social Services are working together to help the new members of the community assimilate and enjoy their life in Australia. They are establishing employment programs and social activities. This includes AFL clinics and soccer tournaments. The young people have played the Victoria Police Soccer Club on several occasions.

The police and local council held



Senior Sergeant Tony Langdon and Abdurahman Osman

a youth camp attended by kids who have been identified as 'youth at risk'. This was aimed at breaking down the barriers. Young mentors are being nurtured to work with the troubled young people and keep them on the straight and narrow. As part of this the station has appointed a multicultural liaison officer, Leading Senior Constable Glenn Birt, who will work with the schools and other community

alcohol related. In Flemington there are no alcohol free areas and no active accord between the police and local licensees. Patrons from the local nightclubs cause problems when they leave in the early hours of the morning. The accord is being re-initiated this month with a meeting between police and local licensees.

"That is something we need to address. We need to lessen the

Walking the streets of Flemington with the local police you can see the rapport between the members and their community. People come up and ask questions or seek advice. Others just come up to say hello and pass the time of day. The traders obviously appreciate the presence, coming out of their shops for a chat.

The newer residences from the Horn of Africa mingle with older



The unsworn members – Tina Greco, Lou Ilijoski and Pauline Parra



The CIU – Senior Constable Jasmine Hill, with Detective Senior Constables Vic Sherini, Adrian Wrout and Greg Cotter

groups within Flemington and the greater Moonee Valley police district.

Osman says that some people in the Flemington area didn't want the Horn of Africa refugees in their community. People would go to the newspapers and complain. "Some people wanted the relationship between the police and our people to be bad. I believe this."

"But it is getting better now," stresses Tony Langdon. "Our aim is for all members of our community to know their rights and their obligations. When a crime is committed there is a statutory obligation on all people and when people are charged there is an obligation. We acknowledge and respect their rights but they must acknowledge their obligations."

This is only a small part of the work for the police at Flemington. The high-rise housing estates in the area do generate a lot of work. The socio-economic issues related to these estates generate crime issues such as drugs, serious assaults and robberies. "And that has always been the case," says Tony Langdon. "no matter who is living on the estates."

Many of the serious assaults are

impact on the local traders caused by drinking on the streets and unless they are intoxicated we have no power to move them on or remove the alcohol."

Tony Langdon is a firm believer in proactive policing and the importance of a visible police presence. More often than not he is able to put out a foot patrol.

"They take a car, do a foot patrol for a couple of hours, get back in the car and move to another location. This roving patrol means they can respond and provide a backup service if they are needed."

residents who probably suffered the same problems with integration when they arrived in Australia from Europe and Asia decades ago. It is an interesting mix – offering the best of a multicultural society.

Senior Sergeant Langdon is very proud of the members at Flemington. "Our members are very professional and thorough. They are fantastic coppers and they are tireless. They are good, honest people and they do a good job. There is no bigotry. There is no racism and there is no unprofessional behaviour."



left to right – Leading Senior Constable Nathan Vipond, Constable Natalie Keogh, Senior Constable Paul Sorbian, Leading Senior Constable Glen Birt, Constables Donna Allen (front), Kat McGlashan, Andrew Allen (back), Jacob Finlayson, Lorraine McGrath, Lou Ilijoski and Senior Sergeant Tony Langdon