

Dutch look at graffiti model

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THREE Dutch police officers visited Cranbourne last week to gather ideas for their country's anti-graffiti program.

Sergeant Jeffry Hartevelde, Sergeant Irma Heidt and Sergeant Martin Pronk spent the majority of their 10-day trip learning about the City of Casey's Residents Against Graffiti Everywhere (RAGE) program.

Sgt Hartevelde has been coordinating an anti-graffiti program for six years and decided to come to Casey to meet RAGE, the council and traders with a view to taking the local program and ideas for implementation in the Netherlands.

"Our program has been very much based on enforcement and making the offenders accountable but I haven't been able to get the same level of community involvement that there is in Cranbourne so I wanted to come over and look at how Casey motivates people to report graffiti," he said.

Sgt Heidt said she was instantly impressed with the appearance of Cranbourne.

"We have driven right around Cranbourne and saw it was very clean and were impressed by how everyone has worked together to achieve it from police, council and residents... it is good to see that the victims have had an impact in actually helping to catch it," she said.

Strathard Ward councillor and RAGE founder Steve Beardon said the Dutch police were taken on a tour of Cranbourne to meet with locals and see for themselves where 8000 square metres of graffiti had been removed.

"They heard from locals who confirmed that vandalism including the slashing of shade cloths, broken beer bottles and damage had dropped off significantly, coinciding directly with the removal and drop-off in graffiti vandalism.

"This has amounted to savings in replacement and clean-up costs as well as providing a healthier and more inviting environment," he said.

Cr Beardon said the officers also had the opportunity to meet Cranbourne Chamber of Commerce president Peter Scollo, who spoke of the problem from a trader's point of view.

Sgt Hartevelde said he would take Mr Scollo's advice and photograph the graffiti damage to present to his own government when he lobbies for future funding.

Cranbourne Regional Uniting Church minister Paul Creasey said he also met the officers and discussed the importance of involving community from their respective positions as to ensure the program worked.

Sgt Hartevelde said the officers had learned many things from their trip that they would take back for consideration in their own program.

"We would like to set up a similar database to Casey which maps the graffiti damage and the tags offenders use along with a toll free phone number to assist with cleaning the damage up within 24 hours," he said.