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LOSING THE WAR ON GRAFFITI
By **EMMA GRAHAM**

THE war against graffiti vandals is being lost because the council has abandoned an award-winning graffiti strategy, the program's architect says.

ExOnkaparinga council staff member Roger Saltmarsh, who founded the graffiti program, said last week it should never have changed tack.

“We knew who these (vandals) were, we knew where they were, we had all the evidence and we were making prosecutions in court.” In 2000 the strategy won a national Innovation in Local Government Award. Mr Saltmarsh was made redundant in 2001 in a council management restructure.

“Everybody with two eyes could see they are losing the battle. Tags on the retirement village read AOD, which means artists of destruction.

“In the case at Woodcroft there was COA, which means constantly on attack.

“The signs and evidence are in front of them but they don't have systems in place anymore.

“Vindication is such a sweet human nature.”

Graffiti lobbyist Steve Beardon says the latest bashings of two men in Woodcroft proved the danger of challenging graffiti vandals.

Mr Beardon agreed Onkaparinga had erred in abandoning its Graffiti Solutions program last year.

“They moved to involve the community with a new reward program and that was the worst thing to do,” Mr Beardon said from his Melbourne home last week.

“You end up with residents confronting the vandals and the vandals will retaliate.

“If you remove their graffiti you remove their signpost and they don't take kindly to that.”

Formerly of Morphett Vale, Mr Beardon successfully lobbied Casey Council in Victoria to adopt Onkaparinga's program.

“Where we have this program in place we have . . . hardly any graffiti, less broken bottles and house breakins and the gangs have moved on.

“We were just mimicking what Onkaparinga had- putting in place deterrents, and then your council moved away from it.”

The original program included a database of tags, a graffiti hotline and prosecution in civil courts.