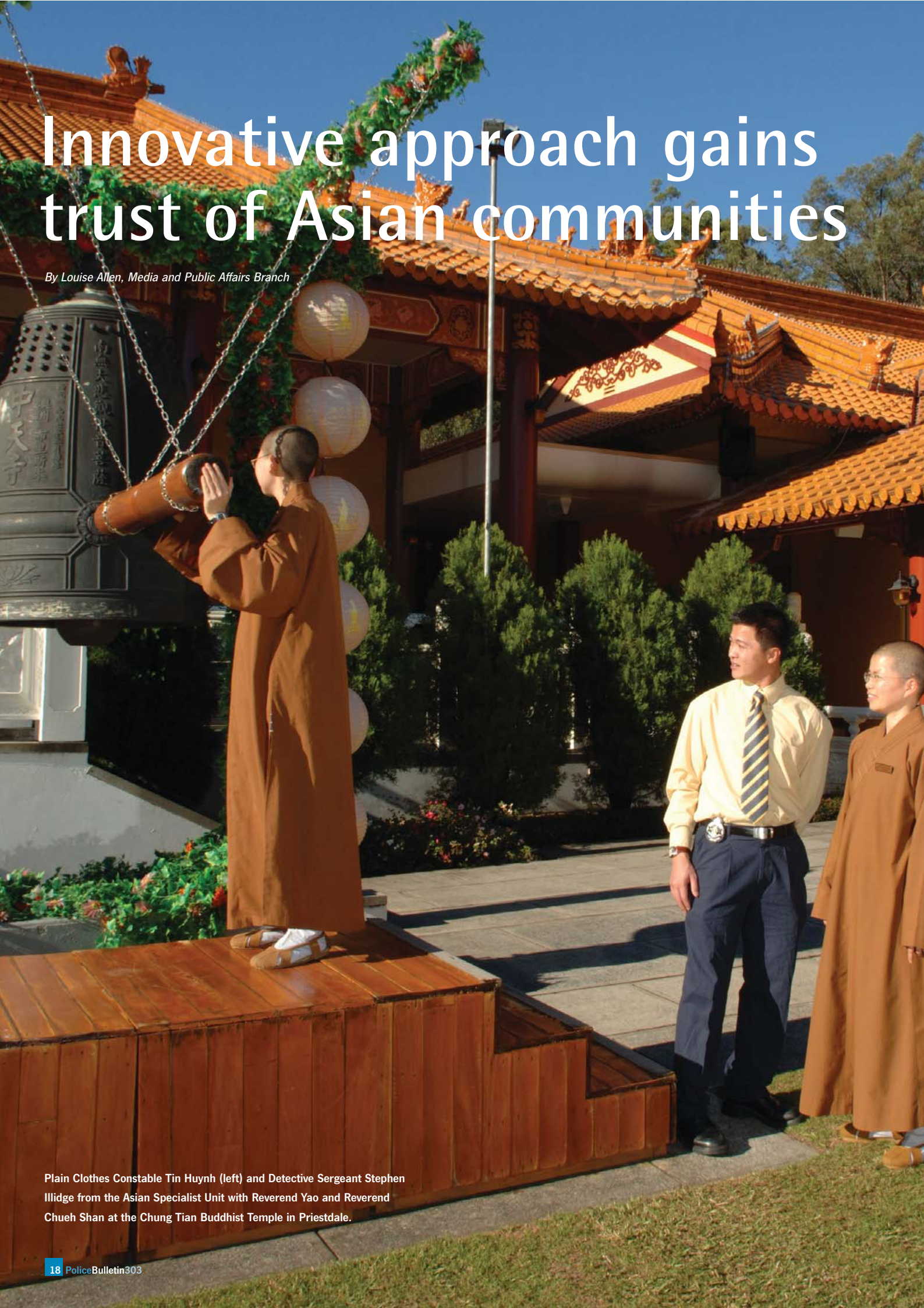


Innovative approach gains trust of Asian communities

By Louise Allen, Media and Public Affairs Branch



Plain Clothes Constable Tin Huynh (left) and Detective Sergeant Stephen Illidge from the Asian Specialist Unit with Reverend Yao and Reverend Chueh Shan at the Chung Tian Buddhist Temple in Priestdale.



Policing is not what it used to be. With a growing multicultural community, it has had to adapt and in some cases be reinvented.

Leading the way is the Queensland Police Service's (QPS) Asian Specialist Unit (ASU), which was created to ensure services and resources were provided to various groups with differing cultural experiences and expectations.

Detective Sergeant Stephen Illidge, Officer in Charge of the ASU, said the unit focused on the Australian Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese and Korean communities.

"Within these communities there is widely ingrained distrust of law enforcement agencies," he said.

"Their negative perceptions of authority stems from hostile experiences in their homelands and as such members of Australian-Asian communities can be reluctant to report crime or assist police with their investigations," he said.

Detective Sergeant Illidge said ASU officers through their language and cultural skills have developed innovative approaches to policing Australian-Asian communities.

"To date, conventional policing responses have had minimal success due to limited intelligence gathered from the Australian-Asian offenders and community members.

"The ASU is the only unit of its kind in Australia that monitors local Asian language media as a source of intelligence.

"Our officers use unorthodox policing strategies to gain the

trust of the Australian-Asian community and encourage their members to report crime.

"Specialist officers collect information on offenders from Asian backgrounds, assist with the management of witnesses and try to identify new informants and implement strategies to investigate targets from Asian backgrounds," he said.

The unit's expertise is often called on to assist with major operations.

In November and December last year, officers from ASU conducted a joint drug and traffic operation with Metropolitan South Police Region.

Operation Delta Peace was established when members of the Australian-Asian community were identified as repeat drink drivers and traffic offenders in the South Brisbane area. This was despite aggressive crime prevention and road safety media campaigns warning of the associated risks.

Detective Sergeant Illidge said the situation was compounded by cultural attitudes and perceptions acquired overseas, where some police agencies do not overtly target traffic offences.

Following the operation, details were publicised in local Asian media outlets, delivering the message of the QPS commitment to responsible driving. A number of drug offences were also detected during Operation Delta Peace, and several search warrants have since been executed resulting in arrests being made.

A few years ago the ASU helped coordinate Operations Jasmine and Lotus, using methods that

Detective Sergeant Illidge described as "pioneering in Australian law enforcement".

The unit was approached by the Office of Fair Trading for operational support in targeting Asian tourism operators believed to be scamming Chinese tourists on the Gold Coast.

Information was received that tourism operators were allegedly working with duty free shop owners and tailoring itineraries specifically designed to extract as much money as possible from the tourists.

They would collect the tourists from the airport, take them to hotels which were not close to other duty free shops, control their freedom so they could not see other shops or prices and direct them to specific restaurants.

In some cases it is believed the tourists, who spoke little or no English were being charged "environmental taxes" to go to the beach or to watch a sunset.

Detective Sergeant Illidge said the operations were established to prevent tour operators and duty free shop owners from monopolising inbound tourists.

"During the operations buses carrying Asian tourists were intercepted, and then linguistic specialists boarded the buses and informed tourists of their rights.

"Information pamphlets were handed out to the tourists in Chinese and Taiwanese.

"Some tourists who we spoke to were law enforcement officers in their own countries. They thought it was fantastic that police were so proactive in warning tourists of potential scams," he said.