

QPS leads the way in child safety on the internet

By Simon Kelly, Media and Public Affairs Branch

As the national leader in internet investigations, Queensland's Sexual Crimes Investigation Unit has put the state at the forefront of detecting offences against children.

The Sexual Crimes Investigation Unit consists of Task Force Argos, the Child Abuse Unit and the Child Safety Coordination Group.

Task Force Argos is recognised as a leader in its field for monitoring paedophilia activities on the internet. They also investigate extra-familial paedophilia – child abuse not committed by family members.

Starting in 2000, Queensland was the first state to introduce covert operations that target people who use the internet to procure children for sex.

Other Australian states have approached Task Force Argos with the aim of launching similar covert operations based on the Queensland model.

Since new provisions were introduced under the Criminal Code in April 2004, detectives from Task Force Argos have arrested 44 people in covert operations and identified eight Queensland children who have been exploited by people they have met through internet chat rooms.

Last year, eight Task Force Argos detectives were awarded Commissioner's Certificates for arresting an internationally wanted man in relation to serious sexual offences against children.

Officers also educate children and their parents about how to take preventative measures while using the internet.

The Child Abuse Unit investigates the intra-familial physical and sexual abuse of children, while the Child Safety Coordination Group focuses on policy, procedures and training for officers.

As head of the Sexual Crimes Investigation Unit, Detective Superintendent Ross Barnett became the Queensland Police Service's inaugural Child Safety Director in June 2004 – one of 10 appointed to Queensland government agencies.



Detective Superintendent Ross Barnett, Plain Clothes Senior Constable Craig Foreman, Detective Senior Constable Adam Bycroft and Detective Acting Senior Sergeant Stewart Kerlin from Task Force Argos.

Photographs by Karen Crook, Media and Public Affairs Branch.

With 28 years service, Detective Superintendent Barnett has been a detective in Brisbane and the Northern Police Region, worked in the armed hold-up and drug squads, and been seconded twice to the National Crime Authority.

Detective Superintendent Barnett, a graduate of the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) Academy of Quantico, USA, has also worked with the Queensland Crime Commission where he was involved in the Project Axis report into the behaviour of repeat child sex offenders.

"Working in the Sexual Crimes Investigation Unit takes extreme dedication and professionalism," he said.

"It's a personally demanding place to work, especially for people who have children."

Detective Superintendent Barnett encouraged parents to be vigilant as they were the first and best line of protection for their children.

"However, parents shouldn't be unduly alarmed about incidents of paedophilia in the community.

"There hasn't necessarily been an upsurge in incidents, more an increase in reporting offences and a willingness for public debate on the topic.



Detective Acting Inspector Jon Rouse, Task Force Argos.

“More people are prepared to expose this type of conduct and see the offenders punished rather than let things go unreported as in the past,” Detective Superintendent Barnett said.

Last year, Task Force Argos launched the *Who's Chatting To Your Kids?* booklet, which provides safety advice for children using the internet. A revised version this year will address mobile telephone safety for children.

A sought after speaker on detecting internet paedophilia, Detective Acting Inspector Jon Rouse, Task Force Argos said parents should be aware that new varieties of mobile telephones could give users access to the internet.

He said Task Force Argos regularly liaised with other police departments throughout the world, sharing intelligence to track offenders and victims across international borders.

Tips for ensuring children are safe using the internet include:

- Consider installing filtering software.
- Ensure you are able to access your child's email and randomly check the contents.
- Keep the computer in a room the whole family accesses, not the child's bedroom.
- Check your telephone bill for outgoing calls.
- Check with your child's school on what safety measures they have in place.
- Tell children not to send pictures of themselves to someone they don't know, not to give out personal information on the web and, not to arrange face-to-face meetings through the web.
- Parents are encouraged to keep the computer turned off and immediately contact police if a child has received child pornography, been sexually solicited or received sexually explicit images.

The QPS encourages parents to start teaching their children protective behaviours from an early age.

There are two important messages to teach children:

- we all have the right to feel safe all of the time
- that a person may have to take action to look after themselves.

Parents should teach their children to look out for early warning signs, such as a pounding heart, goose bumps and wobbly knees. These signs should be listened to and appropriate action taken to feel safe. These actions may include breaking a rule such as telling a secret, running away or hitting and kicking someone.

Nothing is so awful that they can't talk with someone about it. Children should be encouraged to openly talk about their feelings. If they feel unsafe, they should approach someone they trust and always trust and act on their instincts.

Suggestion for parents and caregivers:

- always keep an eye on your children
- always be observant
- always be aware of your surroundings, and
- immediately report any suspicious behaviour to police or local security.

These suggestions are not intended to be an exhaustive list but are relevant to all situations. Parents and caregivers should use common sense to ensure the safety and welfare of their family.

It is important for parents and caregivers to keep the fear of violence in perspective as this could result in unnecessary limitations being placed on their lifestyle.



Child victims are allowed to play in this room before they are interviewed by officers in another room.