

## ROTARIANS BOOST POLICE SKILLS

A LANDMARK mentoring program that sees Rotarians develop police officers' community outreach skills is now entering its second decade – and earning accolades from the top ranks of the force.

Police within the program meet with Rotarians from districts 9810, 9820, 9780 and 9800 once or twice a month to safely discuss sensitive issues and pick up management and outreach skills from Rotary veterans.

Originally, a Rotarian and business executive pair mentored a police officer from any of the senior ranks. However, it was decided several years ago it was more effective for executives to mentor Superintendents and upwards, while Rotary focused on the Senior Sergeants. Assistant Commissioner Kevin Casey chairs the 10-person steering committee, comprised of four senior police representatives, three business

leaders and three Rotary members.

"Police are good at solving problems and getting straight to the point. But in the past, they operated mostly from a perspective of a lifelong career only in policing," the Assistant Commissioner said. "My own mentor was a female Rotarian younger than me. She was a non-judgmental sounding board, giving me insights and options for experiments.

"My three current deputies have all done the program. That speaks volumes about the benefits," said VicPol Chief Commissioner Graeme Ashton at a recent celebratory Rotary breakfast. "You're now challenging our people on the community frontline to find new perspectives and check their assumptions. The program's longevity shows how effective Rotary has been."

Now Ambulance Victoria has started a parallel Rotary mentoring program for its future leaders.

Senior Sergeant Paul Gauci was another participant of the program, who posed his Rotary mentor with a problem, leading to fantastic results.

He was upset by the decline of the kids' soccer club in the Dandenong area, due to parents being unable to afford the costs. As a result, the mentor showed him ways to access local council support, which led to some funding to purchase new balls and cover the kids' fees.

But this was only the beginning. Increased involvement from kids led to parents joining Zumba fitness classes and siblings joining the homework club. Next thing, the powerful Melbourne Victory soccer club came in with a pledge of two years' jumpers, coaching and gear. On top of that, the Football Federation agreed to halve the club's annual dues. Within a year, the Dandenong club multiplied from two to six mixed teams. Over 100 youngsters are now signed up, with many of their families also involved in programs as well.

"The club brings smiles to the kids faces, and we hope it will also make them see police in a different light," Senior Sergeant Gauci said, with many thanks to the Rotary mentoring program where it all began.



Senior Sergeant Paul Gauci with community coach Anastasia Andrew run an evening practice session for future soccer greats at Dandenong, Vic.