

Cyber crime fighting with The Angels



For one Tasmanian police officer, the crime fighting doesn't finish when he hangs up his utility belt.

For New Norfolk officer, Constable Peter Sweetlove, the crime fighting takes on a new dimension via his home PC – tackling cyber crime across the world.

Peter is a member of Cyber Angels – an online worldwide group of law enforcement officers, information technology specialists, and educators who assist victims of cyber crime – especially in cases of cyber stalking and hacking.

He coordinates a team of professionals from across the world – people whose aim is to make Internet use safer by detecting and assisting in the prosecution where possible of cyber predators.

“This includes a lawyer from New Zealand, an assistant DA from the United States, a volunteer police officer from the UK, and IT specialist/reserve police officer also from the United States and a judge from France,” said Peter.

“Information technology specialists are imperative when it comes to dealing with hacking, spyware and chat room problems.”

According to Peter, cyber stalking is on the rise and he spends between 10-12 hours a week in front of his screen working with Cyber Angels.

“Borders don't matter and the Internet means people can take a dislike to anyone anywhere across the world.”

“Characteristics of normal relationships are conducted via the Internet chat sites with some couples even engaging in cyber sex. Generally most have swapped photographs and personal details, such as names, addresses and phone numbers.”

“The only difference is these relationships cross national and international boundaries and often a spurned party can post personal details on the Internet.”

Cyber Angels was initially started under the banner of the Guardian Angels – the red beret wearing private security teams who rose to prominence during the 1980's by tackling crime on the New York subway.

In the mid 90's the Guardian Angels moved to fighting crime in cyber space – their efforts winning an award from President Clinton in 1998. Initially Cyber Angels provided assistance to victims of stalking in chat rooms.

As the program evolved, law enforcement officers began to take an interest as cases of cyber stalking began to be reported to them. Often the offender was in another jurisdiction, or even another country, and police worldwide needed assistance in tackling this rising crime.

As a result of his work, Peter has liaised with Interpol, National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (US), and the British Internet Watch Foundation. Mostly he refers information on cyber stalking to local law enforcement officers for further investigation.

One case Peter referred to UK authorities came from a complaint from a girl in Brisbane. She was being cyber stalked by a male in the UK who had recorded their Internet conversations and posted them on the net with her profile.

A case in the United States was one of suspected child abuse. A woman in North America contacted Cyber Angels after receiving chat room traffic from a man in Dallas, who claimed to be having sex with his daughter.

The woman got further information from the man but wasn't sure who to report it to. She passed the information onto Cyber Angels and the case landed on Peter's computer.

"I managed the case and passed all details onto Dallas Police," said Peter.

"I believe this male is now under investigation." He recounted an Australian case where a male posted notices about a woman on the Internet –stating she was a prostitute. He even built a website featuring the woman and her personal details.

Peter can receive up to five cases a day and most come from people seeking advice on Internet safety or identity theft and privacy issues.

He is adamant that many home computer users aren't aware of the dangers of the Internet. "The Internet is a very dangerous tool and I wish more people understood just how dangerous it is."