

GETTING TO KNOW CLARE MCGRATH



Neighbourhood
Watch ACT

*A monthly feature on the members of Neighbourhood Watch ACT
by Emily Harding*

January 2026

"I've been involved since 1984 in Ainslie—it's in my DNA"

Clare McGrath OAM - Vice President, Area contact for Ainslie Member since 1984 to Current

How long have you been involved in Neighbourhood Watch, and what first motivated you to join?

I have been involved in ACT NHW since it started 1984. When the program started in Victoria, information was sent to the ACT Police to help inform and involve the community about NHW. Police attended local suburb meetings initially until Neighbourhood Committees could be formed.

I was motivated to join because I grew up in a small country town where there was a strong sense of community. After moving to Canberra, I wanted to recreate that feeling—getting to know people, helping them feel comfortable and safe in their neighbourhood, and building friendships. Being part of NHW ACT allowed me to contribute to a community while raising a family.

How did you first hear about Neighbourhood Watch ACT?

I first heard about NHW ACT through letterbox leaflets distributed by ACT Policing in 1984.

What roles have you held, and what does your current role involve?

I first started as President of the Ainslie group, coordinating 52 people to distribute newsletter and leaflet drops. I later became Vice President for the North Side, where I help manage enquiries, support new members, make and organise personal



welcome packs and visits to new Members, and coordinate volunteers for leaflet distribution. My current role focuses on sharing valuable information and helping people feel welcomed, connected, and safe in their community.

What aspect of Neighbourhood Watch are you most passionate about, and why?

I am most passionate about neighbours looking out for one another, which helps create a safer community. NHW ACT encourages people to report concerns, no matter how small, because the community's "eyes and ears" play an important role in preventing crime and keeping neighbourhoods safe.

What skills or experiences have you gained through your involvement?

Through my involvement, including 13 years on the NHW Australasia Board, I have gained valuable insight into how different states work with police and communities. I have also developed a strong, collaborative relationship with Police, which has helped strengthen community safety initiatives.



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What achievement or experiences in Neighbourhood Watch are you most proud of?

I am most proud of working with Aged Care facilities alongside Police and Multicultural groups. This included engaging with six different cultural groups using Interpreters, providing safety information, and helping people understand that local Police are trustworthy.

How has your involvement in Neighbourhood Watch impacted your local community?

My involvement has helped encourage Ainslie neighbours to look out for one another and feel more connected. People see the suburb as a safe place, and if something is happening locally, they often contact the local Facebook group to share information and stay informed.

What advice would you give to someone thinking about joining?

If you want to help make your community safer, NHW ACT is a great way to do it. You learn a lot, show that you care about community safety, and become part of a shared culture of looking out for one another. I've been involved since 1984 in Ainslie—it's in my DNA. The more people who get involved, the more change we can make. We're stronger together.

What keeps you motivated to continue volunteering?

I'm motivated by knowing that my efforts help keep the community safer and raise awareness about how everyone can contribute to a safer neighbourhood.

Can you share a memorable moment from your time in Neighbourhood Watch?

A memorable moment was being nominated to represent the ACT on the Neighbourhood Watch Australasia Board for 13 years. I don't focus on personal achievements—I simply aim to help people feel safer. Receiving the OAM award was also a very special recognition of that commitment.

What do you enjoy most about your local community?

What I enjoy most about my local community is the people. Neighbours greet each other, know one another, and treat each other with respect. I value being part of a multicultural, welcoming community where volunteering and helping each other is part of everyday life.

What do you do outside of Neighbourhood Watch — hobbies, work, interests?

Outside of NHW ACT, I enjoy spending time with my family and gardening. I've been happily married for 64 years.

From a NHW perspective, what are the most significant concerns in your community?

I feel not enough people are reporting suspicious activity. Crime Stoppers is an anonymous service. It's also essential to keep NHW ACT updated on social media to communicate effectively and stay current with the times.

What do you consider to be the greatest challenge(s) for NHW going forward?

One of the greatest challenges for NHW ACT going forward is promoting safety and community in multi-story buildings and apartment complexes, where it can be harder for neighbours to connect and look out for one another.

What direction/assistance from NHWACT would assist you to improve the safety and security of your community?

Making people feel comfortable using NHW ACT as a sounding board to share concerns—especially if they feel too overwhelmed to contact Crime Stoppers. Even reporting a small piece of information can help complete the bigger picture and support the police in keeping the community safe.

**An interview with Clare McGrath
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