

# GETTING TO KNOW MELISSA



Neighbourhood  
Watch ACT

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

April 2026

***“My greatest achievement has been bringing our community together to work toward a safer neighbourhood.”***

- Admin for Hawker/Weetangera Facebook Group from 2025
- Member from 2000 (McKellar)

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

I have been involved in Neighbourhood Watch since 2024. I was motivated to join because I noticed many stories and social media posts raising concerns in our community, but there didn't seem to be any coordinated action at a local or strategic level. I wanted to help bridge that gap and make a positive difference.

## **How did you first hear about Neighbourhood Watch ACT?**

I was initially involved in Neighbourhood Watch back in the early 2000s in McKellar and rejoined in early 2025.

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

I set up the Hawker/Weetangera Neighbourhood Watch group in mid-2025 and continue to be an active member of the team.

My goal has always been to foster collaboration, improve safety, and ensure our community feels supported and heard.



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

I am passionate about addressing youth crime and changing the narrative for our younger generation. It is important to not only support our kids but also revive some of the values many of us grew up with, which have diminished over time. Through conversations with community members, I have learned that everyone has a story to share. For me, it is about creating meaningful connections between younger and older generations and finding respectful common ground to strengthen our community.

## **What skills or experiences have you gained through your involvement?**

Through my involvement with NHWACT, I have been able to further strengthen my skills in community engagement and strategic outreach. I have refined my ability to connect with diverse groups, promote community awareness, and foster pride in local initiatives. This experience has also positioned me to focus on growing younger membership and developing inclusive programs that bring people together—initiatives I am eager to implement in the near future.



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

My greatest achievement has been bringing our community together to work toward a safer neighbourhood. Through Neighbourhood Watch, I've helped build stronger connections and encourage people of all ages—especially younger members—to get involved. Our very first community event stands out the most. It was sparked by my close friend Kim, whose support after repeated car-theft attempts — including personally helping to fund our very first newsletter — brought residents together around a shared purpose. Seeing that collaboration grow into something powerful has been incredibly rewarding.

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

Due to many different demographics in our local suburbs, we adopted a hybrid engagement model that includes a bi-monthly newsletter, a Facebook group, regular community events, and an annual forum where residents can speak directly with NHWACT, Crime Stoppers, and ACT Police. In just a few months, we have produced several newsletters—now printed and distributed at local shops thanks to our partnership with Softball ACT. This approach ensures we reach a wide audience and keep the community informed and connected.

### **What advice would you give to someone thinking about joining?**

Do it! There's a saying that 'It takes a village to raise a child,' and I believe it also takes a community to create real change. The more people who get involved with a community focus, the stronger we become in supporting NHWACT, Crime Stoppers, and ACT Police to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour in Canberra. Your participation can make a genuine difference—every voice and every effort counts.

### **What keeps you motivated to continue volunteering?**

I stay motivated because I'm not someone who stands on the sidelines hoping things will improve on their own. I believe in taking action—when something isn't working, I want to help fix it, highlight the issue, and be part of the solution. Making a real, tangible difference in our community is what keeps me inspired and committed. None of this would be possible without the incredible support of our local volunteers, especially Kate. She has generously dedicated countless hours, not only to our Hawker/Weetangera group but also to NHWACT more broadly. Her commitment, energy, and willingness to step in wherever needed has been instrumental in everything we've achieved to date. Kate is a truly valued member of the NHW Hawker/Weetangera team. I honestly couldn't do this without her—her enthusiasm and support make it easy to stay motivated and continue volunteering for our community.

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

It's a moment that fills me with mixed emotions, not because it's sad, but because it reminds me how powerful our community can be when people come together. Over the past months, I've watched neighbours, volunteers, and supporters step forward with generosity, resilience, and a genuine desire to help one another. Seeing that unity in action has been one of the most rewarding parts of this journey.

At the same time, we're all facing real challenges — pressures on families, safety concerns, and the constant need to adapt to a changing world. But witnessing how people rally around each other gives me hope. It shows that even in difficult times, our community has the strength, compassion, and determination to keep moving forward together.



### **What do you enjoy most about your local community?**

I have lived in both suburbs for most of my life whenever I've been in Canberra, and they hold so many wonderful memories—especially growing up with school friends, many of whom still live nearby. I love being able to say hello to familiar faces at the local shops and knowing that, at the heart of it, we all share the same goal: to live in a harmonious, safe, and crime-free community.

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

One of the most significant concerns in our community is youth crime and antisocial behaviour. Residents are increasingly frustrated by incidents such as shoplifting and the lack of respect shown toward local businesses, their staff, and the public. These issues not only impact safety but also erode the sense of community pride we're working hard to restore.

There have also a number of significant issues involving fires, dumped rubbish, and safety concerns at the old, abandoned Hawker Tennis Centre. We have been working with other community groups and key stakeholders to shine a light on this issue and try to assist with a suitable outcome for our residents.

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

One of the greatest challenges for Neighbourhood Watch moving forward is shifting outdated perceptions of what the program used to be and demonstrating its relevance today. We need to illustrate that NHW can be a powerful mechanism for bringing communities together and tackling modern issues such as youth crime, social cohesion, and safety in our suburbs. Adapting to these evolving needs while engaging a broader, more diverse membership will be key to our success.

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

I believe pilot programs in the Hawker/Weetangera area, focused on engaging younger generations and creating positive outcomes would make a significant difference.

Initiatives that educate, empower, and involve youth in community safety can help build long-term resilience and reduce crime. Support from NHWACT in developing and trialing these programs in our area would be invaluable.



***An interview with Melissa,  
April 2026***

