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Graffiti vandals being scrubbed out of Sunbury

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Matt Johnston May 26, 2009 12:00am

A HUMAN cleaning machine with a handful of part-time volunteers has driven suburban graffiti vandals out of town, saving ratepayers \$250,000 in the process.

Alan Douglas, 61, has been on call 24 hours a day since August and has even removed graffiti tags at 2am to ensure Sunbury vandals get no satisfaction from their "work".

The result is a dwindling numbers of vandals, who are seeing their tags disappear without a trace.

"It's under control now. Originally, there were about 45 or 46 kids putting graffiti on, and there's only a handful of them now," Mr Douglas said.

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A retiree, Mr Douglas responds to reports of graffiti to Hume Council, which enters the complaint in a database.

He started the "Sunbury graffiti trailer" as a favour to Sunbury police, whom he praised for their work cracking down on vandals.

He found the work gave him something to do while caring for sick family members, so he kept it up. And, of course, he likes a good clean fence.

"I don't like graffiti. I don't have OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) over it, but we live here. There's a good feeling after cleaning up," he said.



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The Sunbury graffiti trailer was supported by Hume Council, police and the **State Government** when it officially began in August 2008.

Hume Mayor Jack Ogilvie said the volunteers had cleared just over 10,000sq m of graffiti since July 2008 - "the equivalent to saving the community \$250,000".

"The whole visual impact of the town has changed, due to the diligence of the volunteers," he said. "Even when graffiti does appear it is removed almost immediately."

Mr Douglas said the team used biodegradable, non-toxic chemicals to strip graffiti from fences, playgrounds, homes and businesses.

He admitted to a sense of triumph in clearing graffiti the night it appeared.

"Graffiti artists actually speak to me and say they have given up because we clean it up before their friends even walk to school," he said.

"I have even taken it off at 2 o'clock in the morning. Sometimes I miss a bit off a roof and . . . occasionally the kids win, but not very often."

The Sunbury model will be rolled out in other Hume suburbs, and has been adapted by Moonee Valley council.

Mr Douglas said there had been inquiries from New Zealand and the US.

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