

PLEASE CROSS POLICE LINE PLEASE CROSS POLICE LINE PLEASE CROSS POLICE LINE PLEASE CROSS POLICE LINE

Sarah's a Federal agent

THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE IS NOT JUST LOOKING FOR CRIMINALS. IT'S ALSO LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO CATCH THEM. THAT IS WHY THEY'RE SO KEEN ON SARAH HAMMOND. SMART START REPORTS.

Growing up in country Victoria, Sarah was one of those few people who always knew what she wanted to do. "I always wanted to join the Australian Federal Police," says Sarah, 24.

Yes, but why the AFP? Why not the state police?

"I didn't want to be restricted to one state and I enjoyed the thought of travelling and being able to work all around Australia. Plus the crimes the AFP investigate are on a larger scale. I didn't want to be a cop in country Victoria, pulling up my friends for speeding," she laughs.

At Catholic Regional College, Traralgon, she concentrated on the sciences because she was fascinated by forensics – that was the angle she had in mind with the AFP.

So, armed with good Year 12 marks, she signed up for a bachelor of science (genetics) with a view to taking the science route into the AFP.

All was going well – she was having a blast living on campus at Newman College.

"Uni life was fantastic," says Sarah. "In fact, the college lifestyle gave me just as many useful experiences as my degree did!"

"What the degree was really useful for

was learning how to learn and how to apply myself."

Sarah had researched the AFP and knew very well they didn't take just any character wandering off the street. She also knew that although they always wanted people to apply, they weren't always taking on new recruits. It is all part of the process of getting the best possible people. So Sarah wanted to get her name in the system.

During the final year of her degree she started the application process, which mainly included completing "a lot of forms".

By the time she graduated, Sarah decided it was time to pursue her love of travelling and off she went – through South America and North America to New York. Then she hit Europe, working a variety of odd jobs and having a great time.

Halfway through her trip she got an email from the AFP telling her she had passed the first hurdle of the recruitment process and had been offered the chance to sit aptitude and psychological tests.

The AFP was her dream, but she was only halfway through an overseas trip. That's called a quandary!

"I replied to the email and made it clear that if this was my only chance to join the AFP, I

would come back to Australia right away."

Fortunately, the AFP offered her a place in another round of testing when she returned after a year. So Sarah finished her trip, headed back to Australia and started the challenging process of showing she was the right person for the job.

Initially there was a day of exam-style tests which included psychological, aptitude and personality tests. As Sarah was successful in those she was offered an interview. This was where a panel of three AFP people asked detailed questions and referred to answers she'd given in the exam-style questions.

While this was going on, Sarah, like all applicants, was subject to strenuous security checks. All her referees were contacted, and the AFP even talked to people such as employers, former school teachers and other friends in her life. More than anything, the AFP is making sure the numerous forms that applicants have filled out have been filled out honestly.

The AFP is not necessarily looking for people who have never had a parking ticket or a speeding fine. What they are looking for are people that can own up to making mistakes and then learn from those mistakes. More than anything, honesty is important.

The AFP also requires applicants undergo a medical and fitness test. These tests ensure recruits are able to reach a suitable level of fitness – while you don't have to be super-fit, you certainly need to have a moderate to high level of fitness.

When *Smart Start* caught up with Sarah, she was half-way through a 90-day training program at the AFP training college in Barton, ACT.

"It's fantastic. I really like the diversity. Like the job, no one day is the same."

Sarah also reckons that because both the training and the participants are so diverse, different people excel at different tasks and subjects. Everyone has their own strengths.

When she's finished recruit training, Sarah will be moved between different areas of the AFP to get more specialised, hands-on knowledge. Recruits have special mentoring programs as well as a work-book which they complete to complement theory training in everything from fraud to drugs to firearms to interviewing skills.

The process will help the AFP figure out what area it thinks Sarah is best suited to, and it will help Sarah decide what she likes the best. At the moment, she's finding her initial desire to work with forensics is being

SARAH'S AFP TOP 3

- Diversity.
- Opportunities to travel and work.
- People.

superseded by the many exciting things she's learning.

"To be honest, I am more than happy to go into any department."

What about her long-term goals? Sarah's fizzing with the prospect of just starting her career with the AFP, but when pressed she admits that an overseas posting would be something she would jump at in few years.

Travel AND being an Australian Federal Police officer? Rock on! •

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- www.afp.gov.au; or call 02 6223 3000

SARAH'S KEY CAREER STEPS

- Identifies career goal.
- Pursues useful study.
- Researches dream employer and gets in the system.
- Gathers wider life experiences.
- Applies herself when given the chance.

KEEN TO GIVE IT A GO?

Selection for AFP employment is highly competitive, but don't get frightened off because it takes all sorts.

The AFP likes to closely mirror the Australian community, so they make a point of employing people from a wide range of backgrounds – about 60 languages including sign language are spoken at the AFP.

The minimum education qualification is the completion of Year 12, or Year 10 plus a trade certificate. The AFP recruits people with degrees, as well as people with other skills such as trades or languages. Of course, tertiary qualifications may add to your competitiveness. But bear in mind the AFP seeks to recruit graduates from a wide range of disciplines – not just to law and criminology.

There is no minimum height requirement for AFP recruits. People of all shapes and sizes are needed, as long as they are fit and healthy.

The key strengths required to police modern society are intellect and good interpersonal skills.

The AFP is interested in good school results – no subjects are preferred – and a capacity to think critically, so pursue subjects you are interested in.

