

How volunteering as a special constable supports my day job

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Just knowing that I have done something to help colleagues and the community makes it worthwhile

Views 4 mins read

I have been a special constable for nearly three years. It sounds trite and a cliché but I'm genuinely motivated by helping other people.

I don't come from a policing family so I hadn't had much involvement with the police until I joined the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) 10 years ago. I have been a researcher at the College of Policing since it started back in 2012 and I am currently on secondment to Operation Talla, which is the national police response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of my research projects, I shadowed police officers on shifts – seeing the impact they had on the lives of other people but also how the job affected them – and so I wanted to get more involved and help out.

At the College, we are often accused of sitting in our ivory tower, making decisions that affect policing without knowing what it's really like on the ground. In some respects, that is a fair challenge and I'm always up for a challenge.

I could see the benefits being a special constable could have for me personally. I also felt it would offer me insights into the reality of policing, which would be of huge benefit to my day job. I applied and haven't regretted it for one minute.

I volunteer with Kent Police Special Constabulary. The beauty of being a special is that you can fit shifts around other commitments, like work and family, but also target them to when you are most needed. As I work Monday to Friday, I often do shifts on Friday evenings or at weekends.

Special constables play a valuable role

The College are part of the employer supported policing scheme so I can take a set number of days as paid leave to do shifts. As part of Operation Talla, I'm also fortunate to be working with senior police leads who recognise the value specials can bring so they've been very supportive in giving me time to do shifts.

It can be hard to fit everything in and you need to be flexible. One of the first things I was told when I joined the specials was that home life and work life came first. While I always want to do more, there are only so many hours in a day and keeping a balance is important.

Special constables have the same powers as regular police officers, the only real difference being we don't get paid for it. That is both a huge privilege and a great responsibility.

I – probably like most specials – don't do it for any sort of reward or recognition. Just knowing that I have done something to help colleagues and the community, even if that's just being another pair of boots on the ground, makes it worthwhile.

I'm privileged to be a special inspector, so it is always rewarding seeing the journey of other specials from when they first join – apprehensive as to what they are letting themselves in for – to becoming confident and competent officers who are a real credit to the service.

I have been Operation Talla's policy and legislation lead since June 2020. We were in the midst of the first coronavirus lockdown then and the Government's first set of restriction regulations were in force.

My predecessor assured me it would be calm from then on. That was similar to saying the Q-word in policing – it's been anything but quiet!

It has been quite a steep learning curve for me: having to learn how to read, understand and interpret complex legislation in a short space of time, identifying the implications for policing, negotiating with Government departments and helping to translate the regulations into something meaningful for forces.

I'm lucky to be working with a group of hardworking, dedicated and extremely knowledgeable people.

Responding to the pandemic

COVID-19 has been challenging for everyone. At its height, the pandemic felt all-consuming. Along with many other people, I was working long hours focusing solely on COVID-19. It was all that was being discussed on television and by friends and family – there was no escape.

Getting out doing specials shifts when I could became a lifeline.

Policing during COVID-19 has been far from normal. 'Unprecedented' has been used a lot over the past year, but the sheer volume and pace of change to the legislative landscape really has been like nothing we've seen before.

More than 130 coronavirus-related pieces of legislation were laid in the past 12 months. It's been interesting being involved in discussions about the policy intention behind the legislation as part of Operation Talla to then seeing how it's implemented on the ground while doing specials shifts.

It's given me a real insight into the challenges of policing COVID-19 restrictions, which I was then able to take back to my Operation Talla role at the College.

Just do it!

For anyone considering volunteering as a special constable, my advice is just do it! I've learned a huge amount since joining the specials. I've developed skills that benefit me outside of policing and I've also met some amazing people.

The special constabulary attracts a wide range of people from all walks of life. We have people who work in care homes, airline pilots, university students, software developers, shop assistants – to name a few. Everyone brings something different.

It can be challenging, tiring, emotional but also fun and very rewarding.

Tags

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