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NEWS 11



HEAR, HEAR TO A HEART OF GOLD

MELBOURNE'S Samantha Merritt couldn't hear the thunder of hoofs at Caulfield Racecourse at the weekend.

But the eight-year-old is thrilled that dozens of horses ran to raise money for hearing-impaired children just like her.

Wearing her blue hearing aid, Sammy — who has a rare genetic condition that causes hearing loss — nuzzled up to one of the geldings that ran his heat out for her on Saturday.

In return, the three-year-old thoroughbred, Light Motion, displayed a special connection to Samantha and

playfully brushed her hands and hair with his soft, whiskery muzzle.

Samantha's mum, Elissa, said her daughter was delighted that all the money raised from Light Motion's race was donated to Taralye, a centre for hearing-impaired children.

"Sammy's used Taralye's services since she was diagnosed ... they fitted her with her hearing aid and made sure she was completely prepared for mainstream schooling.

"... Taralye relies on people's generosity to exist, so this event was just phenomenal," she said.

Taralye's development manager, Kevin Gray, said he was deeply grateful for the Herald Sun-sponsored event that raised \$30,000.

Samantha Merritt gets to know new best mate Light Motion. Picture: JASON EDWARDS

Police reveal secrets

More of our cops are abusing the system

PETER MICKELBROUGH

DISHONEST cops are being caught snooping or passing on secrets in growing numbers despite the force's efforts to protect the private information of millions of Victorians.

Complaints of police abusing information were up 54 per cent in the 21 months to September 2014 on the rate in 2012, while proven cases doubled.

The force's long-troubled LEAP database remains the central concern despite more than a decade of warnings and calls for its replacement.

Internal records obtained by the Herald Sun under Freedom of Information laws show 229 suspected cases of police abusing private and sensitive information were investigated, including 111 involving LEAP.

One in three were proven, with the rate of substantiated LEAP abuses more than a third higher than in 2012.

Law Enforcement Data Security Commissioner David Watts says although awareness of the need for greater security was growing and the force had finally accepted all his 2009 recommendations to improve information security, police "attitudes and behaviours have not changed".

"While there is evidence that Victoria Police's cultural change strategy is having a positive effect, it has yet to influence attitudes and behaviours," he wrote in his annual report last August.

Mr Watts says replacement

of the force's ageing and over-stretched law enforcement data systems, including LEAP, remain a "significant current challenge".

Mr Watts also warned of a growing risk of security breaches attributable to lapses in personnel security, in particular the risk of "insider intrusion", with a need for on-going checks of personnel, information and communication security.

The force's Professional Standards Command said enormous progress had been made since Taskforce Keel was established in 2013 to investigate allegations a police member had leaked sensitive information to outlaw motorcycle gang members.

"The creation of this task force, and an organisation-wide effort to build awareness and understanding of the risks involved, has led to significant increases in reporting," spokeswoman Lisa Beechey said.

"We recognise the need to improve our approach ... We're confident information security breaches will decrease in the future because our members now better understand the consequences of these actions."

LEAP was to be replaced in 2009 but delays and cost blow-outs saw the new LINK rollout dumped in mid-2011 at a cost of \$60.5 million.

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