



## **NEWSLETTER**

**August 2006**

### **A victim-offender conference – Everyone involved got something positive from participation**

Nick was working nights, driving his taxi. He picked up a passenger in an isolated rural area. That passenger, Paul, was armed with a knife that he pulled out and used to threaten Nick. Nick was told to get out of the car, which he did. Paul followed Nick around the car demanding answers to personal questions. Paul was crying and stated that he had a gun and would blow Nick's head off. Nick was terrified and feared for his life. A car drove down the road and Nick ran towards it. Paul took money from the taxi and ran off. The police arrested Paul later that night. Initially Paul denied the offence though later made a full admission.

Both parties resided in the same rural area though they did not know each other prior to the offence.

Paul was charged with being armed with intent to commit an indictable offence and larceny. Paul was convicted and sentenced to 2y8m with a non-parole period of 1y4m.

A Welfare Officer at the prison referred Paul to the Restorative justice Unit (RJU). Paul was assessed as suitable to participate in the programs of the RJU as he demonstrated responsibility for the offence, victim empathy and insight into his offending behaviour.

Nick was contacted and agreed to meet with the RJ Co-ordinator. At this meeting Nick and his wife spoke of the impact of the crime. Nick had suffered a partial nervous breakdown and had received counselling and medical treatment from a psychiatrist. Nick was unable to work for some months due to

the stress of the offence. This placed a large strain on the family finances. Nick's wife was distressed and felt uneasy at night. She visualised the offence over and over and imagined Paul as monstrous. Nick's children were affected in a similar manner. When Nick eventually returned to work he felt uneasy and vulnerable. Nick's wife and children were terrified that something would happen again.

Nick and his wife agreed to participate in restorative justice. Nick consulted his psychiatrist and his boss who supported this decision. Nick was concerned about his children and did not want Paul to meet them. Nick's boss and the Police Officer agreed to attend as support people for Nick.

Paul's mother and grandfather agreed to attend the conference. They were very distressed that their son/grandson was in prison for the first time and expressed feelings of guilt for his actions.

At the conference Nick was very nervous and distressed. He could not look at Paul. Paul was also very anxious about facing Nick.

Paul spoke about what had happened when the crime was committed, what had happened since to him and his family and how everyone had been affected by what he did. Nick then spoke in great detail about the specifics of the offence. This affected Paul, his mother and his grandfather who became very distressed.

Nick appeared to slowly develop a sense of empowerment at this stage

as he relayed the events to everyone and spoke of the impact on his family. Nick's wife and boss then spoke about how they had been affected. Then the police informant spoke about his role, the empathy he had for Nick and also for Paul who was serving his first prison sentence as a result. Paul's mother spoke at length about the shame and sense of guilt she felt and how she could empathise with Nick and his family. Paul's grandfather was too upset to talk. Paul then offered an apology that was received as genuine by Nick.

Nick expressed what he would like to see happen to help him move on. It was at this stage that a dramatic change occurred for Nick. He spoke at length about how Paul needed to turn his life around and that it was all up to Paul. A dialogue then developed between them and Nick started to give advice to Paul. As Nick gave this advice on controlling drinking, working and family responsibility he became more and more confident and empowered.

Since the conference Nick has reported that he is 'doing really well' that he is 'glad he did it' and that he has 'moved on'. Nick's wife reports that she feels a 'big relief' after meeting Paul and that she sleeps better at night. Nick's daughter is not as worried as she used to be about her father going to work.

Paul reports that he feels proud that he participated in restorative justice. Paul feels good that Nick and his family 'got something out of it.' Paul feels better about himself since apologising for what he did. Paul's mother reports that she is 'so glad it happened' and that she is 'less worried about when he gets out of gaol.' Paul's grandfather also reports feeling better since the conference.

## Victims Register statistics

A full audit of the Victims Register reveals:

### 790 victims of crime registered

- 72% female and 28% male
- 352 registered victims live in Greater Metropolitan Sydney, 316 in other areas of New South Wales, 116 interstate and 6 overseas

### 614 offenders with registered victims

- 97% male and 3% female
- 42 % serious offenders

### Offence Breakdown (by major offence if more than one)

Murder:	<b>207</b>	<b>33.7%</b>
Sexual Assault:	<b>185</b>	<b>30%</b>
Assault:	<b>40</b>	<b>6.5%</b>
Manslaughter:	<b>37</b>	<b>6%</b>
Major Robbery Armed Robbery Robbery with Assault Home Invasion:	<b>34</b>	<b>5.5%</b>
Aggravated Driving Dangerous Driving:	<b>23</b>	<b>3.8%</b>
Other Robbery Break Enter Steal Other Steal:	<b>21</b>	<b>3.4%</b>
Attempted Murder Conspiracy to Murder:	<b>17</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
Detain for Advantage Kidnap:	<b>15</b>	<b>2.4%</b>
Other:	<b>35</b>	<b>5.7%</b>