

Wishing peace and good will to colleagues and supporters of the Restorative Justice Unit



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NEWSLETTER

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International Restorative Justice Week

The Restorative Justice Unit recently hosted an event in recognition of International Restorative Justice Week. Amanda and Cheryl were key contributors; both have first hand experience of the impact of serious crime.

Amanda was attacked and physically assaulted by a home intruder, she fought back and received knife cuts to her face and hands before a neighbour arrived and the offender ran off. Cheryl's son was shot dead four years ago in a callous execution style killing.

Amanda and Cheryl were accompanied by Jane, a victim's advocate and Denise, a Homicide Victim Support Group Counsellor. All four women had previously participated in victim-offender conferences facilitated by Restorative Justice Co-ordinator, Glenn Duhigg.

Amanda and Cheryl answered a question which comes up in relation to any discussion of victim-offender conferencing – "*Why did you want to meet the offender?*" Amanda explained that she really wanted the offender to hear from her about the affect of his actions. She wanted the opportunity to tell him that nothing excused his choice to commit an offence against her.

Cheryl explained that she wanted the offender to know her son as a

person in order to humanise the impact of what he had done. Cheryl also had many unanswered questions about the day her son was murdered which only the offender could answer.

Amanda and Cheryl spoke about how they first heard about Restorative Justice, what the preparation stage was like for them, how they felt before and immediately after the conference. They also shared with those present how they are feeling now. Amanda thinks about the offender and the offence a lot less these days. Jane talked about Amanda being far more resilient since conferencing with the offender. Cheryl has more peace of mind; she no longer goes to sleep every night wondering what happened to her son. Denise emphasised that despite her concerns when Cheryl decided to meet with the offender, the conference had been a resoundingly positive experience.

The Honourable Tony Kelly, Minister for Justice, A/Commissioner Luke Grant and other departmental colleagues were joined at the event by representatives of victim support and advocacy groups and other government agencies who work with victims of crime. All were indebted to the contributors for agreeing to talk about their intensely personal experiences.

The Honourable Tony Kelly thanked Amanda and Cheryl for their courage in allowing him to become part of their life journey through his limited exposure to a very real and personal aspect of their lives. He explained that hearing the participant's accounts of victim-offender conferencing gave him a better insight into the work of Restorative Justice Unit team members.

The Minister said that "The impact of crime on victims is significant and can unfortunately, manifest itself in many ways. Restorative Justice is a process that goes a long way in helping to repair some of the damage done by criminal acts and as we saw today, it gives victims of crime a voice. From today's experience I can see first hand why our Department is considered a world leader in this field."

From the outset in 1999 the needs of victims of crime have been central to this department's model of Restorative Justice; something strongly called for by Howard Zehr, a pioneer of Restorative Justice. While many Restorative Justice programs appear to have significant potential for addressing victim concerns and needs, closer scrutiny reveals significant shortcomings in practice. Restorative Justice offers a hopeful vision of justice for victims but "good intentions" and "wonderful ideas" are not enough. Restorative Justice Unit team members have overcome substantial challenges in order to make this vision a reality for the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services.

Victims Register Q&A

Q- How do I know if there is a registered victim?

A- There will be a 'V' alert on OIMS if there is a registered victim.

Q – What does this alert indicate?

A- That the Victims Register should be contacted on 8346 1374 in the event of the death or escape of the offender, consideration of external leave or release.

Q – When else might I consult with the Victims Register?

A- In preparing pre-release reports; the geographical location of a registered victim is one of many factors in need of consideration in preparing to undertake a home visit and risk assessment. Victims Register staff will be able to discuss this information in broad terms with the Probation and Parole Officer.

Q – Can I discuss the fact that there is a registered victim with the offender?

A – No, this information is only included on OIMS so that officers of the department can liaise with the Victims Register when appropriate. Confidentiality is a matter of significant concern to victims of crime.

Q – Can a registered victim access any departmental reports and records?

A – Yes, a change in legislation allows victims of "serious offenders" to access the information held on file by the State Parole Authority; this includes all or part of any reports you write now and those written since October 2005.