

F FEATURE



Photos DAVID LEFCOVITCH

Ken Marslew, anti-violence advocate and founder of Enough is Enough.

The PEACEMAKER

When tragedy turns to triumph – how one man's loss has become a lesson in living for NSW school students.

By HEATHER VAILE

Ken Marslew is a man who has been on a long and difficult journey.

Ten years ago, he was woken in the middle of the night to discover two young policemen standing at his front door. It was a moment every parent dreads.

What the police told Ken was that his son Michael, just 18-years old, had been killed at his part time job at Pizza Hut. It was not a case of a car or workplace accident – but an attempted armed robbery gone terribly wrong.

The words took some time to sink in. This was not New York – just a quiet, leafy suburb of Sydney. People don't get shot cleaning up after a night's work, here.

But, tragically, this was not a bad dream and there was no mistake.

After recovering from the initial shock, Ken's sense of loss and grief consumed him. Worst of all was a burning rage that Ken felt could only be extinguished by an act of revenge, then suicide.

"Talk to me about revenge ... I could taste it, I could feel it, I wanted it, I lived it," he says.

However, at Michael's funeral, the sermon given by Reverend Gordon Bradbery also put other ideas in Ken's mind.

Less than a year after Michael's death, Ken founded Enough is Enough (EIE) – a non-profit, antiviolenace organisation which uses education as a catalyst for social change.

EIE offers a referral and support service to victims of crime and their families, and works with the police, schools, councils and community groups on targeted education programs. Ken also meets with offenders in NSW gaols to help them understand the impact of their actions on others.

'It's not what happens to you in life, it's what you do when it happens that makes the difference'

Ken says EIE shows people that the most effective way to break the cycle of violence is through empowering people to deal with adverse or extreme situations in positive ways.

'It's not what happens to you in life, it's what you do when it happens that makes the difference' he says.

Ken's approach is holistic.

Part of EIE's strategy for achieving lasting change is the Peacemaker Project developed for primary and secondary school students and their teachers.

The project is comprised of life skills modules, covering everything from anger management and bullying, drink-driving and binge drinking to sexual violence and gender issues. It is designed to

complement the PDHPE syllabus but also fits comfortably with Legal Studies, Peer Support and a range of other welfare-related programs offered through NSW schools.

The modules are taught by dynamic presenters, many of who have experienced real-life tragedies in their own families through violence, drugs, alcohol or the death of a loved one.

Debra Anderson, who works on the Peacemaker Project with Ken, says that the program is powerful because many of the speakers have suffered tragedies of their own brought about by someone who made a bad choice.

"Their passion comes from experience and the students respond to that," she says.

Ken agrees: "The people that are with us are people who have turned the single most negative experience in their life into something positive. And if you can give kids a message or a role model like that, in today's environment, then you can give kids hope."

The project is offered as a series of sessions at a cost of about \$3 per student. It can also be run as an entire day's program, at the school's convenience. The course presenters are able to customise material for individual schools or for particular groups of students within a school dealing with a common issue.

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According to Debra, school principals enquiring about the Peacemaker Project often remark that "15 per cent of their kids take up 90 per cent of their time."

She highlights the Relationships and Responsibility or "R" module of the Peacemaker Project, designed for students who need special attention. This module teaches troubled kids concepts of empathy, responsibility, personal choice and the real-life costs and consequences of anti-social and aggressive behaviour. It is an adaptation of the highly successful award-winning (National Heads of Government Award) workshops Ken runs in NSW gaols to help offenders face up to their actions and take responsibility for what they've done.

'Our mission is to reach as many kids as possible – of any age – to reinforce what they are being taught about on the core values of society'

Ken's benefits from the project, too. His own healing journey has taken him from vengeful father to life skills educator and motivator.

He attributes the success of the program to the presenters who connect strongly with the students because their stories are real.

"When it's first person, it's real. There's a bit of video footage to back it up and it's interesting and informative. You get kids to listen.

"Sometimes I'll go to a school and the teachers will say to me, 'You don't know what you're letting yourself in for – these kids are tough.' But then I get in there with them and you can hear a pin drop. And later on, a bit further down the track, you'll find some of those students have become leaders."

Ken says the Peacemaker Project is not just aimed at young people at risk, but is relevant for most students. In his view, they all have issues of some kind they need to work through and some students may not always feel comfortable approaching a parent,

teacher or counsellor.

"You go to some schools and the kids will not come to you because of peer pressure or something," he says. "In other schools, you will find someone will come up to you and say 'My cousin is in gaol', or someone, a relative, is in gaol. Someone else will have lost a friend on the road.

Sometimes there'll be 20 or 30 kids around me at the end of the presentation, all wanting to ask questions and get involved. Some of them will want to disclose things that they probably haven't told anyone before. We're all prepared for that and we take the appropriate protective behaviours response to protect those kids."

EIE is funded partly through the NSW Premiers Department and partly through private donations. Today, EIE employs 12 part-time staff and is supported by about 30 volunteers. Ken describes the organisation as a "a living memorial" to his son.

Ken would like to see the Peacemaker Project become as common in schools as the annual swimming carnival. "It's about breaking the cycle of violence" he says. "Our mission is to reach as many kids as possible – of any age – to reinforce what they are already being taught about on the core values of society.

"If you have a look at the new values set put out by the current Minister for Education and Training - integrity, responsibility, care, respect and so on - it's everything that we do. That's the stuff we teach" he says. "For a kid to come up to me at the end of a presentation and say 'Thank you, Sir', well, that makes it all worthwhile."

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Schools or Community Groups should contact 02 9542 4029 for details on the Peacemaker Project or the Speakers Bureau.

Editor's note: Schools should be aware that programs such as Peacemaker can raise issues for some students. Principals should consult with the school counsellor, district guidance officer or student welfare consultant when considering their use within the school's student welfare strategy.



MICHAEL'S STORY:

Michael Marslew was an 18-year old university student studying to become a primary school teacher when he was murdered in a bungled robbery attempt at Jannali Pizza Hut on Sunday 27 February 1994.

Employed as a delivery boy, Michael could have gone home after his last job for the evening but, instead, he chose to stay behind

to help his work mates clean up. In a senseless act of violence, he was shot dead at point-blank range in the back of the neck. Remembering Michael, Ken says: "Michael was gentle. He was an academic. He died contrary to the way he lived ... and in his name, I'm committed to preventing violence in our society."