



SUMMARY

The 5th annual Family Forum for families and friends of missing persons was held at the Parramatta Justice Precinct on 13 April 2013. The Forum was well attended by 18 family members and friends along with staff from the NSW Police Missing Persons Unit, NSW Coroner's Court, The Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit (FFMPU), Victims Services, and media. The day was an opportunity for families to come together, to share ideas, provide mutual support and hear about updates in the missing persons' sector.

The Forum opened with a presentation from guest speaker, **Deputy State Coroner Magistrate Paul MacMahon**, about the Coronial investigation of missing persons' cases in NSW. During this presentation families asked the Coroner a number of questions about the role of the Coroner, how the Coronial system differs to and intersects with the criminal justice system, and ways in which they can seek more information about the Coronial process. For some, the opportunity to learn more about the Coronial process helped reduce confusion and allay fears about upcoming inquests. Families and friends had an opportunity to speak with Mr MacMahon throughout the day and many commented how positive this was.

Please note: Families with questions about the Coronial process in NSW are invited to contact the NSW Coronial Information and Support Program on 8584 7777.

The Forum was attended, in part, by a media crew filming **"Outback Coroner,"** an eight part documentary series that looks at the coronial jurisdiction in remote regions around Australia. Screentime and Evershine in Sydney are producing this documentary. The media crew attended the Forum to film Deputy State Coroner Magistrate Paul MacMahon's presentation. With the consent of family members, the media crew also interviewed some families about their experience of the Coronial process. Families involved with this media reflected their hope that media such as this will help raise awareness about missing person's issues within our community.

Chief Inspector Paul Roussos, Manager of the NSW Police Missing Persons Unit, gave a presentation on the role of the Missing Persons Unit and changes in policing procedures in missing persons' investigations. Families asked a number of questions about police practices and there was specific interest in learning more about DNA collection procedures. Families and friends who attended this presentation commented that the opportunity to interact with Missing Persons Unit staff and hear updates about police practices is an essential part of the FFMPU forum.

Two young people from the FFMPU **In the Loop** group for young people gave a presentation on the work they are currently doing to create a book for young people, families and friends of a missing persons and the community. The book includes illustrations and comments about their experiences as young people living with someone missing in their lives. FFMPU commends these young people on their courage in addressing the forum and their openness to sharing with the group their own experiences and thoughts. Families and friends spoke about the value of this presentation and the importance of knowing about the support options available for young people. Some reflected on ways in which family members can better include and support young people who may have a loved one missing in their lives.

In the afternoon, two groups were formed to allow families and friends to participate in either **a discussion or a quilting project**. The group who met to discuss a topic, shared with each other their story, and discussed a variety of issues including social media and ways to raise awareness in the community about missing people. The other group, a quilting workshop, is an initiative led by a family member. The quilt workshop was an opportunity for families and friends to join together in creating a quilt for their missing loved one. Some family members commented that creating a unique square for their missing loved one has helped them feel more connected to each other and the people that are missing. The quilting group is an ongoing project due for completion by **Missing Persons' Week** which will be held this year from **28 July to 3 August 2013**. If you would like to participate in the quilt project please contact the FFMPU for further details.

FEEDBACK

At the conclusion of the day, participants completed a feedback form. Thirteen forms were returned. Below is a summary of the questions and responses provided by families about the day:

Ten of the 13 respondents had attended an FFMPU family forum in the past.

What was the most useful part of the day?

Twelve of the 13 respondents provided comments, while some responded on more than one aspect of the day.

- ◆ Ten listed the Coroner's talk and being able to interact and speak with the Coroner as the most useful part of the day, commenting:

The Coroner's and police presentation were both very informative. I have learned a lot in one day.

The attendance of the Deputy Coroner was a pleasant surprise. Information great in relaxed atmosphere.

Meeting the Deputy State Coroner and asking some questions relating specifically to our situation.

Hearing from the Deputy Coroner. It helped me to understand how the Coronial Inquest works and how it could help with our case. I am less fearful of going to Coroner's Court now.

- ◆ Five suggested the talk from NSW Police Missing Person's Unit, Chief Inspector Paul Roussos, and the opportunity to *ask questions and interact with Chief Inspector Roussos was most useful and very informative.*
- ◆ Three listed connecting with other family members and *talking to people who have been through similar situations* as the most useful aspect of the day.
- ◆ Three listed the Quilting project as the most useful part of the day *particularly helpful to me was the Quilt project.*
- ◆ While others listed updates about issues such as the young people's group as the most useful aspect of the day.
- ◆ Two indicated *all was useful* and *hard to pick.*

What was the least useful part of the day?

Nine respondents provided comments.

- ◆ Eight of the nine suggested there was not a least useful part of the day commenting *All was useful; Everything was exactly relevant; Nil; All good. A most rewarding day; All useful information; and Talking with others.*
- ◆ One had commented *Some of the coroner's info was not relevant to me but probably to others.*

How respondents rate the following topics

a) Missing people and the role of the Coroner

Twelve respondents rated it as *very relevant* and one rated it as *not very relevant* providing the comment that it *was still interesting*. Other comments included:

Lovely man who outlined his role and the Coronial process really well.

The information has given me a greater awareness of my [family's] case and how/what all the things they have been through and have dealt with and how I can support them. Very interesting and informative.

All of my questions of the Coronial system were clarified.

Answered so many questions.

Gives you confidence in the system.

His talk was illuminating.

I am less fearful now I understand how a Coronial inquest works.

Although we have already had an inquest it is always interesting to learn more and have the opportunity to ask questions.

b) Work of the NSW Police Missing Person's Unit

All 13 respondents rated this talk as *very relevant* providing the following comments:

Great to see how process are being reviewed and improved.

Thankfully the cases are being revisited and reviewed.

Always admirable.

Good to know things are being updated and improving.

The latest updates are very encouraging. We have come a long way in four years.

I am a strong advocate of this unit and its continuance.

Good to hear this information again. I was encouraged to hear that the MPU reviews all the cases periodically.

Was able to ask questions and have some points clarified. Interesting also to know how the national data base is progressing.

c) Family group discussions

Eight respondents indicated the family groups were *very relevant*; one indicated they were *somewhat relevant*; and four indicated they were *not applicable*. Comments included:

Very informative and eye opening to see what people deal with, how they cope, helping other families.

Networking terrific.

Good to see how other people are handling their lives with a missing person as part of every day.

This is critical to help people grieve.

d) Other activities

Five did not provide a rating, however one commented *Quilting went well*. Three rated it as *very relevant* without further comment, and five provided the rating *very relevant* in relation to the quilt project commenting:

Enjoyed the group ... and the making of the quilt. Very pleased with the idea of this project.

Quilting workshop- good to see something practical being done by those that can participate. It will be a great reminder and memory of our missing loved ones.

Mingling and talking to other people & listening, being empathetic.

The start of the remembrance quilt is a good innovation.

Quilt workshop. Great and thanks to Sue.

Suggested improvements for future Forums

Suggested improvements included:

Info sessions/booklets for family members.

No. Just keep up the updates one and all.

It might be helpful to have a discussion on managing the affairs (financial and other) of missing persons'. I didn't quite know the legal aspects of this until recently having to appeal to the Supreme Court.

For those in the early days of missing, a check list of steps to take would be helpful. When you are thrown into this situation most people are confused and not sure what to do after notifying the police. A handy card/folder would be a convenient format.

Additional comments

Ten respondents provided additional comments:

Would like to thank you all for all the effort you put into organising the forum. I find these days helpful and look forward to seeing the people I have met over the years as well as meeting new people.

Thank you for the time and effort you all put into supporting the families. I certainly appreciate being able to meet other families in similar situations. Very encouraging.

I can't emphasise – mingling and talking to other people and listening and being sympathetic– enough.

Thanks to the [FFMPU team] for all the continued hard work and support.

Food great! Thanks for a nice day one and all.

Thank you for today – all the sessions have been highly informative, presented very professionally in a very caring, supportive manner & I hope to give my 'utmost' support to my family through this journey. I have learned a lot today and value every moment today. Thank you so much.

The forum was most beneficial to me and I applaud the efforts of the FFMPU. The refreshments & lunch were excellent. It was good to catch up with people in support & persons in similar circumstances.

I enjoyed the day.

Love [the] idea of a face book page.

Thanks to FFMPU for organising. Was interesting to hear from the Juniors!

Please note: The feedback received has been recorded as written by respondents. It reflects the individual opinions of the family members and friends present on the day.

CONTACT DETAILS

For further information about this material or other topics, please call us on:

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