

2018 FFMPU Family Forum

Summary

The 10th annual Family Forum for families and friends of missing people was held at the Parramatta Justice Precinct on Saturday 7th April 2018. The Forum was attended by 23 family members and friends and 14 professionals.

The official forum welcome was delivered by Kathrina Lo, Deputy Secretary of Justice Services, NSW Department of Justice. Speakers included:

- Sgt Matthias Zierholz (team leader, NSW Police Missing Persons Unit [MPU]);
- Deputy State Coroner Magistrate Harriet Grahame (NSW State Coroner's Court);
- Keyana Low (FFMPU Coordinator, Victims Services),
- Stephanie Dartnall and Keesha Quinn (counsellors, FFMPU).

This forum provided opportunities for families to raise questions, hear about the work occurring within the missing persons' sector, and connect with, and learn from, other family members in attendance. Throughout the day, families shared their personal experiences, questions and reflections. Professionals reflected on the value of attending such an event to enable them to share what they had learned with other professionals in their workplace.

A production company, Evershine, was in attendance to film for a documentary being produced which is provisionally titled *Missing in K Town*. Some families and FFMPU staff were interviewed as part of this production.

Presentations

The **FFMPU team** delivered a presentation that summarised the work of the unit and provided updates about:

- the range of FFMPU services;
- research projects and progress;
- new and updated publications;
- referrals to FFMPU and the different types of support provided to families over the last 12 months;
- awareness raising initiatives, including social media, community education, family events, and the dissemination of FFMPU posters to local councils;
- our ongoing support meetings – the range of topics explored and how they operate.

FFMPU also provided a summary on the 2017 National Missing Persons Conference. Families took this opportunity to provide reflections on FFMPU services – sharing their experience of working with FFMPU staff and the different aspects of the service that they found helpful for their individual needs.

Sergeant Matthias Zierholz introduced new MPU staff and spoke to families about the distinct roles of MPU and local police in a police missing person's investigation. Sgt Zierholz clarified that local police investigate and provide information to families seeking an update on the progress of an investigation. By contrast MPU carries out a range of functions including: provision of support and advice to police in the field; reviews of risk assessments, liaison with the coroner's court, and managing and updating police missing persons' databases. Sgt Zierholz clarified that for the most up-to-date information about an active investigation the officer in charge (OIC) is the primary and best contact point and if the OIC is unavailable and the matter is urgent, the next best contact points are the Police Area Command (PAC), the Supervisor or Crime Manager.

This was a very interactive session with many questions raised by families – responded to by the NSW Police MPU team, including questions about what families can do to assist police investigations and what happens to an investigation following a coronial investigation.

Deputy State Coroner Magistrate Harriet Grahame participated in a Q&A session facilitated by Stephanie Dartnall. The purpose of this session was to allow families an opportunity to raise general questions about the coronial process – providing families critical information about:

- the role of Coroners;
- the purpose of inquests;
- family rights and support services; and
- the variety of ways families can be involved, or have a voice, in the coronial process.

Some of the points discussed included Magistrate Grahame encouraging families to write to the Coroner before the inquest begins to share their views on what they think happened to their loved one and what questions they want answered at the inquest. She spoke about the Court's wide ranging powers to obtain documents and that it is beneficial to identify early what documents might be required and inform the Coroner. Magistrate Grahame spoke about the benefit of a strong, focused coronial system being that there is a thorough examination of all of the evidence. She also spoke about taking back to her colleagues what she learns from families to ensure continuing education about the important issues raised at the forum.

To close the day, **Keyana Low** spoke about family victims' applications made under the *Victims Rights and Support Act 2013* (the Act). The purpose of the presentation was to provide an overview of family victim applications for support under the Act and in particular, how these applications may be relevant to families following a Coroner's findings. The presentation explained the organisational context of victims' services, the types of support available, how to make an application and the process.

Feedback

At the conclusion of the day, participants completed a feedback form. Eighteen forms were returned. The majority of respondents (67%; 12 people) had been to a family forum before.

Most useful part of the forum

Seventeen (95%) respondents provided one or more comments about the most useful part of the 2018 Forum. Below is a summary of the responses provided by family members about the most useful aspect of the day:

- **Coroner's Q&A:** Nine people listed the Coroner's presentation as the most, or one of the most, useful aspects of the day. Attendees provided a range of comments about the Coroner's Q&A, including:

Hearing [the Deputy State Coroner's] talk on the coronial process. Wish we had heard it prior to our own inquest;

Coroner's presentation. Very informative and great advice for anyone requesting an inquest;

Coroner's Q&A was very thorough;

The Coroner's Q&A was also very good and informative.

- **All topics:** Five people indicated that all aspects of the day were helpful, providing a range of comments including:

It was all relevant new information and conversations and input from all present. Excellent, Police, FFMPU;

Everything – a very informative day;

All useful awareness. Thank you.

- **Other families:** Three attendees reflected that the opportunity to interact with other families was the most, or one of the most, useful aspects of the day, stating:

Being with others who understand is very therapeutic;

Sharing with others & supporting others;

People sharing their information and feelings.

- **NSW Police MPU, FFMPU & Victims Services:** The Police, FFMPU and Family Victims Claims topics were each listed by one attendee as the most useful aspect of the day.

- **General:** Attendees also reflected on general aspects of the day they found to be the most useful:

*Insight into a better future for missing persons; and
General information.*

Not really – we gained a good balance amongst the audience and the participants. Guest speakers a good idea as always;

You are continually improving. Thank you;

Keep up the excellent job;

N/a;

Everything was great.

Least useful part of the forum

When asked to comment on the least useful part of the Forum, Eleven (11) did not comment or indicated there was no aspect of the day that was the least helpful, writing:

N/a;

Nothing;

All was very useful; or

None! everything was relative/relevant to someone in attendance

Two indicated the talk on victims impact claims was the least useful for them as it was not directly relevant to their situation; one felt statistics were the least helpful aspect

Statistics need more relevant to individuals not statistics."

Two felt certain aspects of the police talk – about making police reports was the least helpful to their current needs. Suggestions were also made to control audience participation better.

Topic relevance

Respondents were asked to rate how much the four forum topics were relevant to their individual needs on a 5-point scale (where 1 = not very relevant to my needs and 5 = very relevant to my needs). Respondent results are summarised in the table below.

When asked to suggest improvements or issues for future Forums, fourteen (14) respondents provided comments. Four comments did not suggest changes but made comments:

Other attendees suggested the following improvements for future forums:

All worked well. How about a speaker from REAC (Rewards Evaluation Advisory Committee) to discuss how their decisions are made and communicated to applicants.

Maybe introducing each person if they wish.

A bit longer day and have tables share some common thoughts.

Sometimes it is difficult to hear questions especially when people have soft voices.

Maybe let people bring in an information sheet on their family missing person to share around to each other.

Fourteen (14) respondents provided additional comments:

Not really, only the obvious – Some new items learnt – always good. Good vibe all around. Police, FFMPU, VS!!.

All great.

Thank you so much for your great work today. Very much appreciated.

I found the event extremely helpful and want to thank each and everyone who gave time and research to this event. Job well done. I will be a big advocate of the importance and the significance of this event to family and friends who are experiencing the loss of a missing person or persons.

Thank you!

Did you find topics relevant to your needs?							
Topic	Not very relevant to my needs 1	2	3	4	Very relevant to my needs 5	Rating average	Response count
FFMPU presentation	0	0	1	5	12	4.61	18
MPU presentation	0	3	1	4	10	4.17	18
Q&A with Deputy State Coroner	0	0	0	3	15	4.83	18
Victims Services	1	0	1	5	11	4.39	18

Excellent team, we really appreciate all your help and support and knowledge. Thank you!

Will definitely attend again next year. Thank you.

I do not feel that a person can be declared deceased where there is no proof.

Thank you for the opportunity to attend. Really appreciate all you do. We are fortunate to have FFMPU in NSW.

Thank you for the time and efforts to organise this day. It is very helpful to us as families. I appreciated that the police and Coroner were available for most of the day to talk to.

I enjoyed talking to Police and the Coroner

No

I really appreciate the professionalism of the whole team. They were all very welcoming and approachable.

Please note: The feedback reflects the individual opinions of the family members and friends present on the day. FFMPU endeavours to take this feedback on board in planning of future forums.

Contact details

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

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