

Elton John sang “Sorry seems to be the hardest word”.

He wasn't referring to offenders, but it's nonetheless true that those who carry out crimes find it as hard as anyone to apologise and seek forgiveness. Quite often the offender never really has to front up to the pain and anguish he or she has caused. Victims are left bruised, unsatisfied and angry. That's what led to the Sycamore Tree program.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Victims and offenders meet for eight 2-hour sessions, usually over a period of 4 weeks. Using a tested discussion guide, the facilitator leads the group through a series of topics leading naturally to a time in which both victims and offenders can share letters and covenants which express how they feel and how they wish to move forward. Offenders are invited to explore ways of making restitution for the harm caused by their criminal behaviour. Victims are given the opportunity to consider ways in which they can take control of their lives and begin their journey toward healing and restoration. Finally, the group meets with representatives of the community in a time of celebration and closure.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Prison Fellowship ran this program in prisons between 1997 and 2003 at its own cost. Sycamore Tree is now running in 12 prisons, and about half the cost is met by the Department of Corrections.

If Prison Fellowship is to keep this program running, and to continue to transform the lives of victims and prisoners, we will need continued financial support.

YOUR DONATION WILL HELP US

If you would like to donate to Prison Fellowship you can:

1. Donate online using your credit card via a secure server at www.pfnz.org.nz » Make a Donation
2. Call our toll free line at **0800 777 887** and donate using your credit card
3. Send an email to admin@pfnz.org.nz and we will contact you
4. Send a cheque to:

**Finance and Funding Officer
Prison Fellowship New Zealand
PO Box 40 657, Upper Hutt**

www.pfnz.org.nz

SYCAMORE TREE PROJECT

An In-Prison Victim-Offender Panel Program



PRISON FELLOWSHIP
OF NEW ZEALAND



THE IMPACT ON PRISONERS

Those prisoners who volunteer for the program get the chance — often for the first time — to understand the results of crime on victims and the community. As a result of this program, most agree to take responsibility for their actions, and to begin to make amends by taking part in an act of restitution — perhaps by writing to the victim of their crime, admitting guilt and seeking forgiveness. Some go on to do community work in the area where they offended as part of pre-release rehabilitation. Some victims and offenders on this program move on to meet with their own offender/victim, in a facilitated victim-offender conference.

THE IMPACT ON VICTIMS

Victims get an opportunity to talk about and reflect on the offence committed against them and its results. They explore concepts of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. They ‘tell their story’ to convicted prisoners, and hear prisoners acknowledge that what they did was wrong. This has helped victims to experience closure and peace. Sycamore Tree victims don’t meet with the actual people who offended against them. But after the program, if an offender wants to express remorse to his victim, Prison Fellowship can arrange a meeting— if the victim agrees. This requires very careful and sensitive management, with a facilitator present.

FIND OUT MORE AT: www.pfnz.org.nz
» Restorative Justice Services
» Victim Offender



Read what program participants think of the program:

Dave – Inmate

For years I have been without love – I received it during this program, I opened up a lot. I’m in here for trying to kill my partner. Up to now, I treated it as a crime of passion. Now I know it was attempted murder. Things will improve – the healing has begun.

Cheryl – Victim

I knew that I had addressed the trauma of being raped as an 18 year old in my head. As a 43 year old, I am now dealing with it in my heart.

Ray – Inmate

I’m in for murder – I killed my ex-partner. For the first time in prison, I’ve started speaking from the heart – this program has brought out the honesty in me.

Cecilia – Victim

I witnessed a man murdering my father. I have been carrying this hatred and hurt for more than 25 years. For the first time, I can truly say that I have forgiven the man that murdered my father. The feeling is something I can’t describe.

Ty – Inmate

I’m doing ten years for rape. Until the start of the Sycamore Tree, I didn’t care. This is the only program that has meant something to me – I have talked in detail about my crime. It was awesome – I can’t believe I’m standing up here telling a bunch of strangers all this.

Jack – City Councillor

I’m in an insincere business. This would have to be one of the most sincere experiences I’ve had.

John – Inmate

As a cannabis grower, I thought I was conducting a community service. I have now come to terms with the impact of what I have done on others.

John – Member of Parliament

One of the most humbling experiences – we must do this program again and again.

DOES IT WORK?

Two recent evaluations of the Sycamore Tree program demonstrated meaningful changes in offenders’ attitude toward crime, and a significant increase in empathy toward victims. Victims reported an increased sense of healing and closure, and have highly recommended the program to other victims.

FIND OUT MORE AT: www.pfnz.org.nz
» Restorative Justice Services
» Sycamore Tree Project



ARE YOU INTERESTED IN KNOWING MORE?

Would you like to take part?

If you would like to share the experience of being a victim in a Sycamore Tree program, we suggest you discuss it with our Manager, Restorative Justice Services, Jackie Katounas. You can contact her at:

Phone: (06) 843 6819

Mobile: 027 404 1433

Email: restorativejustice@pfnz.org.nz