



THE DAY A FATHER BECAME A PARENT

"You'll never believe what I've just seen! Come and have a look." All present rushed to the window of the conference room that overlooks the footpath leading to the school gate.

A father was walking his child to school. Some would not consider that an unusual sight in itself, so why the fuss? For many years this father had neglected his family. He had a long history of alcohol abuse and violence. He had been the subject of numerous Magistrates Court notifications and Education Queensland notifications to the Commission over a period of only 13 months, and had been in and out of custody over the last couple of years. It also looked like the child would follow in his father's footsteps having recently been identified as one of a number of youths who had been responsible for acts of vandalism.

To resolve the issue relating to the damage caused by their actions the children and their parents received a written invitation to attend a meeting with the Queensland Police Service, Local Commissioners, Justice Group and the Council. Eight of the children came with at least one parent to the meeting. Each of the families met in private with the Local Commissioners and other parties, and then met collectively to discuss responsible behaviours and appropriate actions to rectify the damage done to assets and the community. The consequences of their actions were brought home to them by the Local Commissioners explaining that the community bus and building provided support to many Elders who could have easily been hit in the head with a rock, or lost valuable transport and medical care provided by the community bus. Over the following weeks the Local Commissioners and parents met often and taught the children the meaning of respect for their Elders. The parents were encouraged to become more involved in their children's lives and to become role models for their children. Commissioner Glasgow and the

Local Commissioners also worked with the parents to increase the children's attendance at school. Gradually the behaviour and attendance of the children began to improve. Education Queensland was very pleased to advise the Local Commissioners at their last meeting that the children's behaviour and attendance at school had greatly improved.

The father looked at his own life in these meetings. He had refused for two years to attend a Commission conference and subsequently in February 2011 he came for the first time and asked for help to become the parent he wanted to be for his children. He agreed to attend the Ending Family Violence Program, set up a budget that would help to ensure there was always food for the children and agreed to help with getting his child to school.

He had decided to take responsibility for himself and his child. During the next month he attended the Ending Family Violence Program and commenced walking his child to school most days. He later told the Local Commissioners he would sit for a time in the classroom to make sure the child was settled and then leave and go home. He is now seeing and feeling the difference in his home life and the attitude of others towards him. He has taken the next step and is looking for fulltime work with a positive attitude.

The child's mother was also the subject of School Attendance notifications and a number of Magistrates Court notifications over the past year. Her attitude to the Commission is also changing as she sees the changes in her family. She has become more truthful and forthcoming at conferences. The Commissioners feel her improved attitude is in part due to her partner stepping up and helping her. She can see that he is trying to improve the family's day to day living.

The day the father looked at his own life, and resolved to take responsibility for his child and his family life, he became a parent.