

In the first week of December 2005 our family experienced a break-in at our home. This occurred on a Thursday night sometime between 9 and 11 pm. No-one was home at the time. I was away with my three children aged 10, 8 and 6. My husband was at his parents for the night.

He arrived home from work on Friday afternoon and unlocked the garage to find there was way too much room. He inspected the house and found that the home had been entered by cutting a security screen on an upper level window. The thieves in our case were professional. They were part of an organised group who steal motorbikes to order. The police and the insurance investigator estimate there would have been 3-4 young men that would have spent approximately 2 hours at our home loading our property onto our trailer. They stole motorbikes, riding gear, helmets, boots, gloves, pants, tops, tools fuel cans, and the chains used to lock the bikes. They then searched around the house and collected anything in eyeshot - watches, jewellery, playstations, gameboys and the games, remote control cars, surfboards and camping equipment.

We were very fortunate however that they didn't open cupboards or drawers and didn't vandalise anything. Apart from the empty spaces around the home where things had gone, the only mess was made by police attempting to find fingerprints.

My husband phoned me where we were holidaying to let me know what had happened. My first reaction was to be thankful that he had not been home and to take comfort in the fact that we were insured and everything was able to be replaced.

I has no idea at this time how the next few months would be for my family. It started on our return from holidays with the children not wanting to sleep in their own rooms. This lasted until February.

My 8 year old son would become very agitated when it started to get dark. He would not go into his room on an upper level of the house if the window was open and wouldn't spend time in any room of the house alone. He was always conscious to make sure someone was with him. He would hold my hand at shopping centres and feared that someone would take him also. At a carols night he insisted we leave as "bad" people ruined parties like that and if we had to run away he would lose us. Seeing these reactions from him would constantly reduce me to tears. It was very difficult to watch my children feeling so scared and vulnerable when my husband and I had always put so much effort into making them feel safe and secure and loved.

My 6 year old son was fearful that the robbers would return as many well meaning friends and family had advised us not to replace the motorbikes as surely they would be back for them. He wouldn't sleep alone or walk downstairs during the day or night. He too was afraid that sometimes bad people take children from their homes. He was angry that someone had

taken the things that he loved and the fact that they didn't know his Daddy wasn't at home when they broke in.

My 10 year old daughter handled the situation well. She has not wanted to sleep alone initially but after a few weeks she was fine. She was supportive of her brothers and they continued to sleep in her room. We thought that she was coping until a night that she had an outburst, throwing pillows around the room, lots of tears and yelling. She was very angry that these people had targeted us and ruined our lives. She was very distressed that her brothers couldn't sleep and were so scared.

All three of them were concerned for my husband and my safety and would become stressed on the days they were at school and I was at home alone. I would have to tell them each morning that I would be out that day.

All of the children's fears mounted up as the school holidays progressed until it became clear to me that despite my best efforts to make them feel safe I needed help from someone with experience in this area. I contacted the police officer who had attended our home and she referred me to Victims Counselling and Support Services (VCSS).

In the last week of the school holidays the children and I met with a counsellor. The children felt very comfortable with the counsellor. Through games and discussions the counsellor was able to pinpoint the areas that were concerning each of them and worked on those. One of the best pieces of advice I picked up from the counsellor was to go with the flow. They would not want to sleep together forever and they would not have the same level of fear forever. Things will and did improve.

After 4 or 5 sessions we felt we were ready to "graduate". I had seen a vast improvement in the way the children were feeling and their normal routine was returning. I am very grateful to the counsellor who saw my family through a really difficult time. It is hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel when you are dealing with something like this but it does come.

The most valuable thing that you lose in a break-in cannot be replaced by your insurer. It takes time to rebuild your sense of safety and trust and feel that you are in control of what happens to you and your family. In our case it has taken 3 1/2 months to see any improvement in these areas and we are so very grateful that we continue to see our lives returning to normal.

As a result of our experience we have become a much closer family unit. Our children have seen first hand how stealing can affect other people and we hope that they will take this with them throughout their lives and know not to involve themselves in any way with that kind of activity.

We have also learned to ask for help. It is out there. You can take as much or as little on board, but you don't have to try to deal with everything on

your own.

My husband, children and myself thank the counsellor whole heartedly for her kindness and understanding. The counsellor is a special person who has made a difference in our lives.

Posted: 4 May 2006