

Youth justice group conferencing case study

Kris*, 15 years old, Darwin



Context

Kris is a 15 years old boy who identifies as Aboriginal. Kris had been staying with family outside Darwin. Kris found life slow and lonely over the holiday period and so returned to the city to spend time with friends. One evening back in Darwin, Kris received a text message from friends who were going for a drive around the suburbs. The night ended in a series of break-ins to local businesses. Kris was ordered by the Court to participate in Youth Justice Group Conference.

The Conference

The conference was attended by local business owners who had been broken into, supported by a Victim Support Officer from Victims of Crime NT. Kris attended the Conference with his mother and sister for support. The conference was also attended by Kris' lawyer, Youth Outreach and Re-engagement Officer (YOREO) and a local community Elder.

At the Conference, the victims explained clearly to Kris the impact of his behaviour on them personally, their families, their businesses and the wider community. Beyond the material and financial damage caused, they spoke with disappointment about the loss of trust and breakdown in community that happens when young people offend. They expressed their hope that Kris could be a leader and take a better path.

Kris listened closely to the victims and apologised for the hurt he had caused; he also offered to write letters of apology to the two business owners who did not attend the conference.

Kris' family and the professionals working with Kris spoke about his many positive qualities and urged him to step up as a strong role model for his siblings and other young people in his community. The community elder explained that since his offending, Kris has begun to show leadership, spending time at the local recreation centre and acting as a mentor for the younger boys – engaging them in after school activities, reinforcing positive attitudes and generally being a positive role model. He has also thrown himself into sport, showing commitment to his goal of playing professional football. As part of his outcome plan, Kris committed to continuing to work with the local Elder as a means to give back to the community, and staying engaged with football to take him towards his goal of being a professional player.

“We have been running these Conferences in the NT since 2017, and I have lost count of the number of young people who have switched to a better path as a result of this process.”

Julie Edwards, CEO, Jesuit Social Services

After the conference

Since the conference, Kris has continued to work closely with the local Elder, acting as an advocate and mentor young people in his community. He is a dedicated and high performing member of his football team and is keeping his appointments with his YOREO.

As promised, Kris wrote an apology letter to the two victims who did not attend the conference. He also honoured his commitment to meet with one of the victims six months following the conference to talk about his progress. The community Elder accompanied Kris for support, and at this meeting, Kris returned items he had stolen from the business. The victim was very pleased to see Kris and impressed by the positive path he is taking.

Name: Kris

Age/Gender: 15, male

Offence: break-ins, property damage.

Conference attendees: Kris, supported by mother and sister, his lawyer, a youth worker and a local Elder.

Local business owners, supported by a victim support officer.

Conference experience: Victims explained financial loss but also loss of trust.

Outcome: Kris provided full apologies and has worked to become a positive role model, acting as an advocate and mentor for those in his community.

He is heavily involved in sport which is providing positive pathways.

The victims have seen positive changes in Kris through the conference process.

**Names and images have been changed to protect identity*