

# Troubled teens victims too

As an organisation dedicated to working with at risk teenagers, we here at START Taranaki feel an obligation to respond to the sentiments expressed in the article posted on February 1 titled "Masterton Crash Boys Had History of Making Trouble, Says Man Whose Car They Stole."

We would firstly like to state that working with vulnerable young men is the most rewarding work. We all cherish every opportunity to help our rangatahi to facilitate change and realise their potential and value. Unfortunately as Celia Lashlie put it "this vulnerability derives from their capacity to make split- second decisions, seemingly without any awareness of the potential consequences. Sadly for many young men, the split-second decisions they make lead them directly to the gates of prison or, even worse, to an early death".

In response to the article, Mr Grice suggests that framing this incident as a tragic loss of life is simply a "sob story". This shows a high level of insensitivity to the whanau and friends of the two young men deceased in Sunday's crash. Death of any nature is upsetting, the horrific and avoidable loss of two people who by all accounts were just kids embodies the notion of a tragic loss of life.

Mr Grice, speaking of the boys mind set states "there were just no consequences", this is actually precisely the issue and it relates to brain development in our teenage years, although not the same point Mr Grice was attempting to make. A publication issued by the US National Institute of Mental Health states the adult brain processes information through the pre-frontal cortex which allows us "to respond to situations with good judgement and awareness of long-term consequences". The teenage brain however processes through the amygdale, responsible for emotion. This is why teens often cannot explain what they were thinking when they have acted irrationally because simply "they were not thinking as much as they were feeling".

Mr Grice also states that these boys were not victims, rather the victims were solely those whose property they interfered with. Granted those who had been stolen from are victims. However, anyone who has worked with 'at risk youth' and who have knowledge of the background that typifies a recidivist youth offender would find it impossible to argue that these young people are not victims. They are more often than not victims of societal and generational neglect as well as systemic failings. The responsibility to correct this most certainly lies with the community who have long found it easier to isolate, ignore and lay blame.

To the Mayor of South Wairarapa, Adrienne Staples, who says the community is tired of having the finger pointed at them. Is this finger pointing or are people simply suggesting we could all do more to avoid such tragic circumstances and trying to fuel the debate as to how? We understand that part of your role is to promote safe communities but surely it is the duty of the community and its leaders to draw-in the most isolated and vulnerable sectors of society in an attempt to work together for positive outcomes, not further ostracise those in greatest need.

To the facilitator of the Youth group Rangatahi to Rangatira Hope Sexton who worked with the two young men and paid tribute saying they were both "good-natured and helpful" adding that while they were troubled, "What teenager isn't?" We thank you for being the only voice of reason in this article and for the work you do in your community. Furthermore we hope your words resonate with people and to challenge them to think about their own teenage years.

Ask yourself, did you always make wise decisions as a youth or were you just lucky enough to escape your poor decisions intact? We can always do more to avoid incidents such as that on which occurred on Sunday night and we suggest everyone should consider how.



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