

What takes many years to unravel can take a surprisingly short time to put back together again, given the right skills and knowledge.

IOSIS Family Solutions, the Baptist families ministry, runs several programmes aimed at just that – equipping families with tools to help them mend or strengthen broken or weak relationships. The Family Resilience Programme is one of these. The course is always well-subscribed, and it is no wonder why with results like those for Lily [names have been changed to preserve privacy], who recently graduated from the programme.

When Todd assaulted Lily, his wife of 26 years, it was totally out of character. He wasn't a violent man normally and he had no past convictions. It was the visible sign of something deeper that was going horribly wrong. The stress of a crumbling relationship and a struggling business had piled up for too many years without being addressed. Separation seemed inevitable.

However, Lily wanted to give her relationship one last chance. So, after being referred to IOSIS by both Victim Support and a friend, Lily enrolled in the eight-week Family Resilience Programme in February 2013.

The group-based course focuses on personal understanding, relationships, communication, finances and parenting. To be honest, when Lily enrolled she thought Todd needed the programme more than her. But when the course began she realised she had a lot to learn.

"The first lesson was about looking deeply at yourself, at your past history and how it affects your relationships. About forgiving and forgetting. All these light bulbs went off in my head," says Lily.

Week by week, Lily lapped it up and applied all she was learning. One of the light bulb moments was discovering people have different "love languages" – the way they individually prefer to show and receive love. Lily learned that the love language of Todd, their 14-year-old daughter, and their young son is "time".

Now Lily finally understood why Todd would ask her to come with him when he drove down the road to get the milk. He just wanted her company! The programme facilitator encouraged Lily to spend at least 15 minutes a day one-on-one with her family members. The results were

incredible, especially with their teenage girl.

Over the years, Lily and Todd spent thousands of dollars buying their daughter a computer, a television and all sorts of gadgets to show their love. However she didn't seem to return their affection. She locked herself in her room for hours, using the very things her parents had given her to isolate herself from them. All she really wanted was for her parents to spend time with her.

Lily, who has been a stay-at-home mum for many years, says, "Before I would be in the house with the children but I've learnt that is not actually quality time. Now I spend time with my kids, baking and playing together."

Their daughter has emerged from her bedroom and happily helps around the house and joins in family meals.

Todd, who by this time was attending one-on-one sessions in IOSIS's Men's Development Programme (MenD), realised he needed to make changes too. He used to work six days a week. Now he takes on less work so he can spend more time doing things with Lily and the kids.

And he has learned Lily's love languages are words of affirmation and touch. So each morning he now tells Lily how much he appreciates her, and gives her a hug before leaving for work.

Lily graduated from the Family Resilience Programme in April 2013, and had follow-up sessions in May. She is now considering parenting courses.

She and Todd are no longer heading for separation. In fact, they are closer now than they have been in the last 10 years. At the urging of the programme facilitator, they are now planning and budgeting for a holiday away together, their first in 25 years.

They are involving their children in family decision-making, have new goals, and a bucket list of things they want to achieve.

For Lily that may include some small business training so she can help manage their contracting business. Now her children are all at school, she is thinking of a possible career of her own. Teaching and counselling are options.

"This saved my 26-year relationship and reignited my motivation," says Lily. "The flame had gone out and I had lost my direction. I had lost my passion to go out and do things. I've become a much better parent, more patient.

"I think it would be good if people did this course even

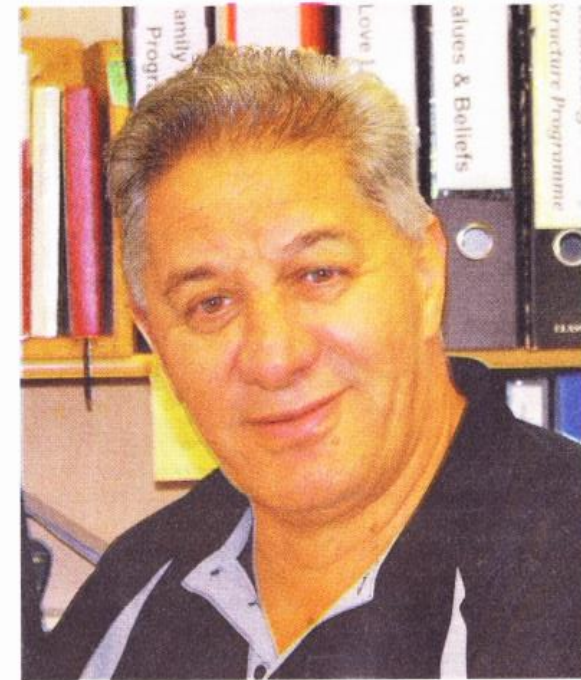
before they got married. It helps you to understand yourself and each other. Before I used to blame others for my problems; I couldn't see that the problems were my own.

"I wish everybody could do it. If you are serious about becoming a better parent and person, this will really do it. But you've got to want to do it."

It is amazing to think this transformation took just three months. It shows what can happen when a family is equipped to stay safe and strong together.

IOSIS's Family Resilience Programme has been running since 2009. It is an eight-week course, repeated each term for new groups of participants. Thirty-four people are enrolled in the second term course, which began May 14.

• *Linda Grigg is communication and fundraising co-ordinator for IOSIS Family Solutions*



John Thrush, MenD facilitator at IOSIS, worked with both Todd and Lily in their journey to a restored marriage.