

The u-turn on an off-road

By Linda Grigg

A former drug dealer is transforming into a hard-working family man through applying what he learnt in a course with Iosis Family Solutions.

David is 24 years old, and a father of four. He graduated from Iosis's eight-week Family Resilience Programme (FRP) in July 2013. He first heard about the programme while serving an 18-month prison sentence. Although he promised himself he would go straight when released, he wasn't pleased at being made to attend FRP by his probation officer. In fact, David was decidedly belligerent at first.

However, little by little, the defenses dropped and the learning began. For David, a key part of this was, as he puts it, the vibe of the group. He also came to appreciate the length of the course, as it gave him time "to patch up all the potholes" he had missed in prior attempts to sort out his life.

"I could have left Iosis ages ago, and breached and went back in. But I knew I had to patch things up and the group I was in, the brothers and sisters here, it was awesome. They were just on the same boat, the same problems as me. Everyone just got along with each other because everything was the same, instead of an individual being outcast with a different problem. That's how my confidence built up. I started realising more about myself, what I should have done when I was around with my family."

He has decided his former life of drug dealing and

being "on the road 24/7" is not what he wants for himself anymore, and more importantly, is not what he wants for his children—three daughters aged two, four and six, and a new son. He has stuck at the waged job he got on leaving prison, and has paid off his financial debts. Now he is intent on mending his relationship with his children and partner, respecting them and putting them first before himself.

"I stopped it, eh, and went straight for my family. I can't keep that around my kids, and them growing up knowing their dad is a drug dealer and running on the road, earning all this kind of money. I don't need that other money anymore. It wasn't making me happy; it was just making me greedy. It was all about me. Now the kids have got stuff that I got them with my sweat money," he says proudly.

Those closest to him can't ignore the changes.

"Everyone knows my background in prison, and for a person like me to change, to do a big u-turn on an off-road..." he chuckles at the transformation, which has taken even him by surprise.

"It's a dramatic change. I didn't know I was going to change this way. It unlocked things I have never unlocked. The kids are happy, starting to talk. Previously they wouldn't talk to me because of my own selfish needs. Like they would come up to me, 'Oh, Dad, this thing at school'... and then the boys text me this thing and, boom, we've got to do a job, and I'm out. It was like money first."

His relationship with his parents has taken a turn for the better too. Previously David would only visit them briefly, and generally just to collect something he needed, not to socialise. Now David says they are excited to have their son back, and he is equally pleased to be close to them again.

"They start talking to me a lot in their lingo [Tongan and Niuean language]. I haven't heard the lingo in say 10 years, because I hardly ever talked to my parents," he says.

However there is sadness for him too. Ruefully he reflects that a younger brother has followed his footsteps into a life of crime and is currently serving a seven-year prison sentence.

David wishes a better outcome for his own children.

"I hope I raise them right, to succeed in life. Because once they succeed in life I will know I have done my job as a father. I know my father would be saying the same thing, but ah – it can be, it can be now. Just not before."

• *Linda is fundraising and communications co-ordinator for Iosis Family Solutions, the Baptist families ministry.*

Rob Francis, who is one of the facilitators of the Family Resilience Programme.

