



Personal Insights

Michael Crutcher, Chief of Staff, The Courier-Mail.

The first Sunday morning of 2008 brought home the harsh reality of the *Save A Life A Week* campaign. The news spread about a crash near Warwick the previous night that had killed four of the town's best and brightest young people.

They were the first deaths of the year and they reminded us that this campaign would be long and littered with tragic stories. But it's about hope and the prospect of preventing even one death will make it more than worthwhile.

The campaign was generated during a chat with the Commissioner over Christmas during our holiday road toll campaign. We discussed the chance of extending the usual focus on the road toll—the Easter and Christmas holiday periods—into a year-long campaign. With the enthusiasm of the Commissioner and the help of the likes of the Premier, and the Police and Transport Ministers, the campaign developed in a matter of days. It means that *The Courier-Mail's* reporters will keep a close eye on all aspects of the road toll, including the stories of those killed on the roads.

Journos don't generally look forward to 'deathknocks'—the practice of approaching families of people who have died. The reactions can vary and we're always grateful and in awe of the families willing to talk, sometimes hours after a death. The end goal is to bring a human face to the statistics, delivering a powerful message about the need for safety on the roads.

We were delighted to get behind the campaign, because it's a way of doing something positive. And we value the assistance of the Queensland Police Service and the State Government. We know the campaign will take time but it's worth it.

Senior Sergeant Sean O'Neill, Project Coordinator, Save A Life A Week campaign

I speak to the families of people who've been killed in crashes after they've been notified by the investigating police officer, and they've identified their loved one. I contact them because the details of the deceased can't be released without their consent. I ask them if they want to be involved in telling their stories, because it may help prevent other families from having to go through the same thing.

At this stage only one family has declined the opportunity. Most people actually want to talk about it because it's a way of acknowledging the life of their son or daughter or spouse or friend. They're not just another number—there's a name put to that crash.

I have two boys, aged five and two. So far there have been no crashes with little kids involved, but there's always an anxiety speaking to parents, trying not to put yourself in their shoes.

Last week I rang four families on one day and at the end of it I was mentally and emotionally exhausted. When I speak to them it's all very raw. I spent an hour and fifteen minutes talking to one woman recently. She spent most of the time yelling at me and then apologising. She just had to vent. Some of these people just want to speak to someone, someone they don't even necessarily know. You get off the phone and they thank you for calling. In that way you feel you may have helped a little.

Every time there's another crash I'm really disappointed, but some weeks the road toll is less than it was last year, so that's encouraging.

