

LICENCE TO CLEAN

By Nicola Silva

They work with blood and gore cleaning up after violent crime and death, but experienced nurses Pam and Bronwyn say, far from being regarded as gruesome, their work is much appreciated.

BVM Clean Scene is the fledgling business of registered nurses Pam Marsden and Bronwyn Ward. "It's a unique and valuable service to victims of violent crime and other bereavements who wish to put the incident behind them as quickly as possible," said Pam.

The idea for the business had come from an article in the Financial Review describing a similar outfit in California.

After considerable research, Pam discovered there was no cleaning service specialising in cleaning up after a crime. "From the Victims of Crime Association we discovered that victims often had to do the cleaning themselves and found it pretty horrific," Pam said.

"Most of the time with such cases there's only domestic cleaning. And that's not doing the job properly," Bronwyn said. "We will remove carpets, get rid of contaminated material, treat floorboards, if necessary, sanitise the walls and deodorise the place. We put the contaminated material into bags which are then incinerated. Biological material can be hazardous and we're always very aware of the risk. We take every precaution."

This includes wearing a complete outfit of protective gear, sealed double gloves, goggles and masks. "This can be hot and cumbersome to work in but it's worth it," said Pam.

And how do they deal with the unpleasant aspects of the job? "It's a difficult job but someone has to do it," Bronwyn commented. "And we're better qualified than most people."

EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

"Being nurses we're used to cleaning up," Pam added. "And we don't get emotionally involved with the relatives. We don't know who has died or in what circumstances. We don't have to see the body."

Because they work part-time as nurses, Pam and Bronwyn prefer to do their cleaning in the evening. "It's better to go in the evenings when we're not in full public view."

Their first job was a rather messy suicide. "The victim had cut his throat and it was a real mess. The smell was overpowering," recalls Pam. "We went in and removed the carpet which was contaminated. We tried to clean it at first but we could not get it to stop coming up pink. The blood had seeped into the floor and we had to treat the floorboards as well."

However, when Pam and Bronwyn finished the job they went away with a feeling of achievement. "It was a very difficult experience for the relatives who were going through a tough time. They were impressed with the work."

Since setting up their business, unique as it is, Pam and Bronwyn have been getting mixed reactions.

"We got hell from our friends," Pam said. "Yellow Pages was in a muddle. They didn't know where to put us. We had a lot of people in hysterics."

The most positive response so far has been from the Victims of Crime

Association. "They were very keen on the idea." A Victims of Crime Bureau has been mooted by the Carr Government with funding for funeral expenses, accommodation and cleaning. "This will be a full-time bureau with service providers on their list. Once this gets up and running it would be easier for us."

BVM Clean Scene has, so far, been hampered by the obvious limits on publicity.

"The biggest problem has been getting the message out there," Pam commented. "It's a real niche market and you can't really advertise our services."

Pam and Bronwyn have mainly spread the word through police. "We began the hard slog visiting police stations. We then thought it's better to work smarter than harder and used the fax instead. We faxed 150 stations" However, the response has been very limited.

"It's been a bit disheartening really," admitted Bronwyn. "We feel we can help victims of crime and are willing to do so. But we have our hands tied with not being able to advertise."

For the future, Pam and Bronwyn are hoping to target real estate agents, funeral directors, and police through this article.

BVM Clean Scene is available for specialised cleaning, not domestic, after any violent crime, be it in Sydney or the country. If you need more information please contact Pam Marsden on 018 775 348 or Bronwyn Ward on 0419 841 084 or fax (02) 9482 4246.



Protection: Because of the biological hazards Pam and Bronwyn wear full gear when cleaning up after crime