

Franziska S. (real name withheld) relates her experience at the STP:

“Early in the evening on New Year`s Eve in 1994 my husband, my small 4 year old daughter and I returned home after a short visit at about 7pm. We unlocked the front door, entered and were surprised to see quite a mess on the stairs leading to the cellar. First we thought that our daughter may have played there but when I looked into my kitchen I suddenly realized what had really happened and got very frightened: Burglars had been in our house or maybe were even still there. I was carrying my daughter on my arm who was just as frightened as I, and started to cry. We ran outside very fast because we were not sure whether anyone was still around. Together with our neighbors we searched each floor. Nobody was there but the chaos and the mess were horrible. From this moment on our daughter did not want to sleep in her own bed anymore but rather be with us during the night. She was extremely frightened. I was not able to calm her down because I could not tell her that this would not happen again and that no one would ever come back.

Eleven months later we went on vacation for three weeks. When we came back we found a note on our door telling us not to go into our house but to contact the neighbors first. We had been burglarized again. This time we tried to hide it from our daughter; but two days later, while taking a walk, we met an acquaintance who started talking about it right away and really scared our small daughter. She was beside herself and her fears grew even bigger, especially because we had not been honest with her. Everything started all over again. She only slept in our bed and we needed a lot of patience until she finally went to sleep in her own bed again, even with Mom or Dad by her side. At night she often screamed and cried for us.

Two years later our neighbors were burglarized. The neighbor fled onto a small roof over her front door and shouted for help. Our daughter witnessed everything – how my husband rescued the neighbor with a ladder and how the policemen walked around the house with their dogs. During that very same night even other neighbors were burglarized. All these events really disturbed our daughter.

She is 21 years old today. Last year, when we went on vacation for a week, she did not stay home alone! Friends and also her grandma came to stay overnight but even then we would not sleep in her own bed but on a mattress next to her grandma`s bed. She is generally rather fearful and never takes the car, the tram or bus alone when she goes out in the evening. The break-ins have marred her soul deeply. If burglars knew what damage they can cause – and I am not talking about the material damage- maybe some of them would make a different decision.

Those burglaries have changed quite a lot in our family. When we want to go out in the evening we take many precautions from fear of another break- in! I never feel quite at ease when I am away from home and at night every sound startles me. I often thought up a strategy for what I could do if there was another break-in. The events were pushed into the background over the years and I tried to block out a lot.

At the STP everything resurfaced. I was able to tell the whole story aloud and -opposite to my misgivings before this class- I felt that I was being taken seriously. I knew that everything I said would stay within the group, nothing would be related to the outside and that was very important for me! The STP was my therapy. Forgiveness and reconciliation were able to take place! I have peace deep down in my heart

and only peace enables us to live a truly meaningful life. I want to encourage all victims to take this step and participate in these talks. It is definitely worth it! I also believe they are thought-provoking for many offenders who just do not realize what an impact such a "little break-in" can have.