

## **Victims to fight back**

By Karen Casey

YESTERDAY the criminal. Today bugger it, let's take on the nation.

A small but determined group of south-east residents have banded together to fight for the rights of law-abiding Australians.

Eight members of the Victims of Crime Awareness Week committee (VOCAW), many of whom have suffered from brutal crimes, spent the past few months travelling the country to gather support for their cause.

The committee is calling for tougher sentences for criminals, greater legal protection for victims defending themselves and their property and, most of all, greater understanding of victims' issues.

It hopes to establish an annual awareness week to bring victims together and educate the public.

"It's a huge job," member Janine Bramley said. Her mother, Marie Zidan, was murdered in her Seaford home four years ago. "You can get support in small groups but bringing people together empowers them. "

"I thought of this idea last year and finally everything is coming together. We have spoken to victims groups all around Australia. We have been to Canberra to speak to ministers. Next week we have a meeting with the Justice Department."

Cranbourne North resident Steve Beardon has also joined the committee after becoming fed up with criminals getting "lenient" sentences. His stint doing jury duty was the last straw.

"As it turned out we convicted the accused only to discover after handing down our verdict that the person had a record longer than my arm and had continually received suspended sentences," Mr Beardon said.

**Caption:** Janine Bramley, David Blewitt, Steve Beardon and George Halvaxis.

**Illus:** Photo

**IllusBy:** N16CS106

**Section:** NEWS