

Top deck help for victims of crime

NORWOOD

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WHEN it comes to the subtleties of guiding victims of crime or domestic violence towards hope, travel agents usually do not come to mind

But, for more than a decade, former Commissioner for Victims' Rights Michael O'Connell would routinely call on a Norwood agent to help find the missing pieces to the puzzle. Top Deck Travel has been quietly helping victims during their time of need – often after hours, with no charge and zero fanfare.

It all started when Mr O'Connell used Top Deck for his own private holidays, and



the team gradually took an interest in his work. Pretty soon, Top Deck began “plugging the gaps” when the travel arrangements of victims or their families came unstuck on their way to court hearings or funerals.

Over the years, the team has helped bring families from countries including South

Sudan and Guinea to Australia, stepping up when “extraordinary needs” had to be met.

“They’ve never said they didn’t have the time to help,” Mr O’Connell says.

“They’ve never not set aside paid work to help out when I’ve asked.

“They have no obligation to treat victims of crime with respect, but they always do.”

Agent Clare Horton says Top Deck is happy to lend a hand.

“We said if there’s anything we can do to help out, and it progressed from there,” Mrs Horton says.

“He (Mr O’Connell) has been able to contact me out of hours ... when things haven’t gone right.”

While there is a State Gov-



Meredith Symonds and Clare Horton from Top Deck Travel, which, for years, has helped victims of crime and domestic violence.
PICTURE: ROY VANDERVEGT

ernment-appointed provider for travel assistance for victims, Top Deck will often provide the little extras, such as visa advice.

“There were a few times where the government agency couldn’t help, so we would step in,” Mrs Horton says.

“Governments can’t coordinate the whole thing.

“They don’t understand or don’t have the resources to understand the whole story, so we’ve stepped in and plugged the gaps.

“We’ve done things last minute ... brought families to Australia, sent people to court cases.” Most recently, a victim had to be in court in Emerald, Queensland, by 10am the next morning – and, with Top Deck’s help, made it in time.

“One family came over from Africa for a funeral,” Mrs Horton says of another instance.

“They didn’t speak English, so it was us communicating with the airlines.”

They have also assisted vic-

tims of domestic violence. “Very recently in fact, we liaised with Norwood police to assist a women,” she says.

“They escorted her straight to the airport and we organised the ticket to be waiting as soon as she got there, sending her to family in Queensland.

“We were able to get her out of the state within the hour.”

Top Deck hopes to continue to work with the new Victims’ Rights Commissioner, Bronwyn Killmier.