Director of the Innocence Project and School of Law Associate Lecturer Lynne Weathered believes strongly that the Innocence Project will benefit the community.

Gold Coast lawyer Chris Nyst listens to facts of a case unearthed by Griffith university law students.

special report

in the pursuit of

truth and justice

Gold Coast lawyers Jason Murakami and Chris Nyst inspire Griffith University law students

story and photos Karen Kindt

imagine the horror of being incarcerated for a crime you didn't commit. The overwhelming devastation and trauma experienced by you, your family and friends would be life-changing. It seems unimaginable, but it can and does happen to a number of people, and it is the unfortunate reality of any criminal justice system, says Griffith University School of Law Associate Lecturer Lynne Weathered. "Australia has a very good criminal justice system, however, no system is perfect, and mistakes are made," she explains.

The launch of the Innocence Project in July 2001, the brainchild of Gold Coast Lawyers Jason Murakami and Chris Nyst, is about to tip the scales in balance of the innocent, the victims of a not so "perfect justice system". The Innocence Project, directed by Weathered, engages the help of an enthusiastic group of Griffith University law students working pro-bono with Murakami and Nyst.

Based on the United States Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law 1992 model, credited with 106 exonerated people – many saved from Death Row, the Australian counterpart is set to pave the way to assist members of our community where justice has not been served.

Griffith University law students work to examine suitable applications that have the capacity to reveal fresh evidence or forensic evidence in which DNA testing can be used to overturn a guilty verdict.
President of the Law Society Joe Tooma pledges his support for the Innocence Project

Griffith University law students Penny Dixon and Deborah Hubbard hard at work on a case

Innocence project the facts

• established by Griffith University Law School in conjunction with renowned Gold Coast lawyers Jason Murakami and Chris Nyst
• is operating on the Gold Coast and a first for Queensland
• has the support of the legal community including the President of the Queensland Law Society and Deputy Head of Public Prosecutions
• is a locally established project that is internationally recognised
• gives an edge to law students at Griffith University through hands-on experience.
• is a pro-bono project implemented to assist members of the community in their pursuit of justice.

“Australia has a very good justice system, however, no system is perfect, and mistakes are made”

Students wade through court transcripts, track down further evidence, research applicable laws, and prepare legal documents and files with instruction and assistance of Murakami, Nyst and Griffith University Law School academics.

According to law student Deborah Hubbard: “There is no greater privilege in this profession than to be able to assist someone in the pursuit of justice.

I want to help people, and this is the greatest way of seeing people get access to justice when all other avenues have been exhausted.” she says.

The Innocence Project has already had a successful outcome with a man who had an eight-year prison sentence, already having served 12 months, acquitted and released.

Weathered says, “there are numerous reasons why people are wrongly convicted. They include, faulty eyewitnesses identification, Police misconduct, community pressure for conviction, and false confessions.”

Law student Penny Dixon beams with enthusiasm, “this is exciting and a great opportunity to work on real cases and to be able to put our knowledge into practice. We are developing practical skills and professionalism, giving graduates from Griffith University the edge.” she says.

Gold Coast Lawyer Jason Murakami discusses a case issue