

**Submission
No 15**

**INQUIRY INTO FAMILY RESPONSE TO THE MURDERS IN
BOWRAVILLE**

Name: Dr Daniel Ryan

Date received: 28/02/2014

My name is Daniel Ryan and I have been living in the Nambucca Shire and working in the Bowraville community almost continually since late 1988. I am a medical practitioner, a rural GP, and from 1996 till January 2010 for two days a week I worked at the Aboriginal Health Clinic in Gumbaynggirr Rd, Bowraville, which is on the "mission." I returned to working at the Bowraville clinic at the beginning of 2011 but in August 2012 this health clinic was closed. I have continued to maintain contact with many Aboriginal patients from Bowraville by working at the Darrimba Maarra clinic in Nambucca Heads and at Macksville Hospital.

As a medical practitioner dealing with the health problems of individuals I have slowly learnt about some of the underlying problems that have contributed to the ill health, both physical and mental of many members of the Bowraville Aboriginal community.

The grief over the murder of their three young people for those families is real, ongoing and unresolved. It is extremely difficult to accept the way that the justice system has not brought resolution and I think there is a sense of shame that these families were not able to protect their young people at the time and then were powerless in the initial days, weeks and months when the institutional response was inadequate and/or negligent.

It is not easy for service providers to work in the Bowraville community but that does not excuse the way that providers have given up on this community. I particularly appreciate that it is difficult for the police to work with some people who are uncooperative until they need help. The perception is that other agencies have given up on this community as well. The Department of Community Services has been extremely reluctant to engage with families who need help. Durri Aboriginal Medical Service suddenly and without explanation closed the medical service in the community that I used to work in (this occurred in August 2012 and it has not reopened yet). Numerous young men and some women from this community seem to rotate in and out of gaol yet there seems no plan to get these young people into education or employment. The local schools genuinely try with limited resources but the perception is that services and particularly government services that you and I take for granted are not provided in Bowraville "mission" because it is too hard.

It is not easy to provide services to the Aboriginal community in Bowraville but I believe that this is no excuse. It is not easy because of the chaotic nature of life for many members of this community, dealing with chronic illness, poverty, overcrowding, drug and alcohol dependence and other issues. Traditional cultural disciplines and guidance are no longer present. Children have low expectations at school and do not anticipate entering the workforce. Alcohol, drugs and even gaol seem OK options. As already stated, going to gaol is a common experience.

Justice remains the goal for the families of the three murdered young people. They have not given up. I believe that the institutions that should serve this community have given up because of the difficulties. There has been very little

consultation with the community and almost no evidence of a longterm commitment to the Bowraville community.