

Submission
No 13

INQUIRY INTO FAMILY RESPONSE TO THE MURDERS IN BOWRAVILLE

Name: Mrs Michelle Jarrett

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Partially Confidential

My name is Michelle "LuLu" Jarrett (Stadhams).

I am Evelyn's aunt.

Evelyn's murder has ripped our family apart. It has had a big impact on my sisters but it has also affected everyone, even the children that weren't born when Evelyn was taken.

When we reported Evelyn's disappearance to the police, they kept asking us where she was. They thought we had sent her up to Queensland. They just wouldn't listen to us when we said she had disappeared. I don't understand why they didn't believe us. Instead, they treated us as though we were uneducated blackfellas who didn't know the behaviour of our own children. We had told the police that Evelyn was always with a family member and that she never wandered off. They never listened to us.

I don't understand why the police who were brought in were child welfare experts. Police who knew what they were doing and knew what to ask would have made a difference.

If the police had have listened to Colleen's family, Evelyn and Clinton might still be with us. The police should be held accountable for something in all of this because if they had done this properly in the first place, we wouldn't be sitting here all these years later.

Before Evelyn disappeared, Becca and Bill were really good parents but the impact really changed. You can see that it is too hard for them to come to terms with what happened.

We've got no support to deal with this grief. And the pain was overwhelming and it was hard on the kids.

It has also had an impact on my mother who also has a lot of guilt. She is still traumatised and has nightmares. There's been no support for her. I don't want her to die feeling guilty or that she didn't do the right thing for her granddaughter. She is sick and elderly. Mum has no one to talk to. We as a family can't sit down together and talk about it because we all have our own issues going on.

I carry a huge amount of guilt over Evelyn because I was working at the time and travelling so I couldn't take her with me. Having to look after Becca's kids didn't help my first marriage and puts pressure on my current marriage. I've never got any support or counselling.

We don't understand why someone isn't behind bars and why this isn't resolved. Why didn't they use the Norco corner evidence? Why should our children play for the mistake of the police? If homicide police had been called in, instead of child welfare experts, maybe the Norco corner evidence would have been properly investigated.

We also don't understand why the double jeopardy hasn't worked. It was changed with us in mind. Everything isn't black and white. It seems like we jumped through all the hoops but we are still jumping, just to get justice for kids.

Some things that could be done for the families and the Bowraville community are:

- There should be better cultural awareness with the police. They don't understand the dynamics and history of the mission. As soon as they seem to understand things, they move on.

- There should be in the schools they say they do Aboriginal studies but they don't. It should be based on the local areas. They generalise that all Aboriginal people are the same, not the culture and community they live in. There needs to be better education of the children because it makes people understand better.
- There is no drug and alcohol support service in Bowraville. That's what everyone has fallen on to ease the pain. There is one counsellor from Coffs Harbour and they are at Macksville but nothing in the town. They need something based in the town for kids, adults and families, for men, for women.
- We need better information about sexual assault and reporting. Kids don't realise the dangers. There should be programs for children in the town – boys and girls. What this town needs is education. Or it will happen again down the line with someone else who will see the dysfunction in the community and take advantage of it.
- To get services we have to travel to get good doctors, see specialists, get counselling. It didn't happen there, it happened here. We have to learn to live in this town, with this all around us.
- There is no support for men, like a men's group. I would like to see some more support come out of the inquiry for the community as result of the inquiry. Cost of travel between is high for kids and people on pensions.
- There has to be some kind of education on how to deal with it and the legal system – not just for going to court. Everyone is at a loss as to how it works. Go to court over and over again with no result. We have been trying to tell the story over and over again for years.
- There should be parenting programs were put in to our community. There are a lot of young women pregnant in this town.

The actual murders were not a black/white issue. The actual murder was just an evil person with a cold heart and no morals. But the way we were treated and the way it was investigated was a black/white issue.

We still cry every time we think of Evelyn. It takes us all back to the time Evelyn went missing. I could still see the look on the face of the policeman when I went to tell them she was missing. He wasn't interested. 'I'm just about to get off duty,' I was told.

This will not be finished just because we are finally being heard. It's not enough for us, its not enough for justice, its not enough for this town. Full justice is to have the full extent of the law.

When I asked for a review of Evelyn's case, went back to the Crown Prosecutor. He wasn't going to criticise himself. I have a similar concern about the Attorney General making a decision when he has been involved in the cases. I would like to see the question of whether the evidence is 'fresh and compelling' the given to someone independent.

I would be happy to provide evidence to the committee.

Michelle 'Lu Lu' Stadhams
20 February