

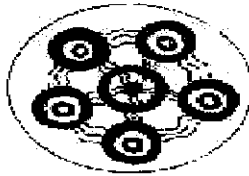
## INQUIRY INTO FAMILY RESPONSE TO THE MURDERS IN BOWRAVILLE

**Organisation:** Darrimba Maarra Aboriginal Health Clinic

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Partially Confidential



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The Director

Standing committee on Law and Justice

Parliament House

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### Inquiry into the Family response to the murders in Bowraville

My name is Barry Toohey, I am a Mental Health Clinical Nurse Consultant with 34 years of experience, currently employed at the Darrimba Maarra Aboriginal Medical Service as well as the Bowraville Outpost A.M.S.(auspiced by Durri Aboriginal Corporate Medical Service) in the Nambucca Valley for the past 7 years. I have a Post Graduate Diploma in Rural Mental Health and am a former Fellow of the College of Nursing.

Apart from working in mainstream Mental Health I have also worked in East Timor and Nauru which has given me a broad based understanding of trauma.

My primary role now is to provide the 3 Families of the murdered children and other Aboriginal people with grief and loss counselling, social and emotional well-being supports and any other activity that will serve to improve the health and well-being of this close knit Aboriginal Community. I have been employed in this position for the past 7 years

Prior to my employment at Darrimba Maarra very little Social and Emotional support was made available to the Families. There was an initial response when a team of Mental Health Workers worked with the Families briefly (funded by Victims Services) but there was no active follow up supports put in place from Victims Support or NSW Health. This left the families feeling that they had no support and had to fend for themselves.

Dr Tracy Westerman of Indigenous Psychological Services became involved with the Families after the coronial inquest into the death of Evelyn Greenup in 2004 when funds were made available to provide Social and Emotional Support to the Families.

After Evelyn's trial, Dr Westerman successfully applied for ongoing funding through O.A.T.S.I.H. and auspiced by Durri ACMS to employ full time Mental

Health workers based at the Bowraville Outpost AMS to assist the Families with their grief and loss as well as the rest of the Aboriginal Community as it was recognised that these murders had a significant impact throughout the Nambucca Valley and surrounds.

Although I am employed by Durri A.C.M.S. my job interview was conducted by representatives from the 3 Families as it was recognised that the Families should be empowered by having a major say in who was to assist them. I also had to complete a 'Cultural Competency Questionnaire' and Personality Profile Questionnaire. This was to ensure that apart from my professional qualifications as a Mental Health Clinician I was 'Culturally Competent' to work within the Aboriginal Community.

I have had prior contact with some family members whilst working in Mainstream Mental Health who had 'self-referred'.

However during my 7 years at Bowraville and Darrimba Maarra I have gained a much deeper understanding of the long term effects that these murders have had not only with the immediate Families but the wider Community.

There is widespread fear throughout the community that the killer is still free and as a result people, especially parents and grand-parents tend to be

overprotective of their young children. This causes undue anxiety and stress in households. Many people will not travel along the Congarinni Rd because that is where the remains of Clinton and Evelyn were found. However "mainstream" society tends to dismiss these reactions. I have often heard non indigenous people make comments like "it was a long time ago, they should just get over it."

When one of Clinton's nephews was staying in Victoria with another Uncle and decided to come back home to Bowraville without telling anyone, it not only caused excessive worry and anxiety within his family but also throughout the Community.

I recall getting countless phone calls from people asking if he was OK and whether or not anyone had heard from him.

His Grandfather (Clinton's father) although appeared to keep up a brave face admitted that his sleep was poor and he had increasing worry that his Grandson had met with the same fate as Clinton.

This highlights the fears and anxiety that the Families and Community continue to experience.

When Clinton's family decided to establish a 'memorial' (a wooden plaque on a timber pole) at the site where his body was found, the memorial sign was

vandalised within 1 week of it being placed there. I found it pulled out of the ground and thrown about 20meters away. The family then decided to concrete the sign into the ground. About a week later I found that the timber pole had been broken off at the base and the memorial sign was nowhere to be found.

A meeting with the local police inspector and the family ensued. I found the Inspectors demeanour to be quite patronising and unhelpful as he suggested that the vandalism had been provoked (by the Family) in that the wording on the memorial ('we want justice') would be offensive to some people.

A more permanent memorial was made from steel has since been erected.

This has not been vandalised. I believe that this is due to the fact that the local paper did a story on the vandalism and a 'smoking ceremony' was conducted when the more permanent structure was erected.

In my opinion not one of the 3 Families direct relatives has escaped psychological harm from the murders.

Major depression and anxiety are the prime mental health conditions.

However post-traumatic stress, agoraphobia, alcohol and drug abuse, poor academia, anger issues, self-blame, guilt, petty crime and distrust of the police and other figures in authority also play a significant part.

Because the Walker-Craig Family do not even have a body to grieve over their grief is particularly compounded. They are continually grasping at any hint there may be of finding the body of Colleen. They often get in touch with mystics/mediums' and other Indigenous 'Clever' people who make promises that haven't been delivered. Building up hopes and then dashing them.

One sister in particular suffers from "Complicated Grief" in that she sees Colleen as a 39 year old woman not the 16 year old girl who went missing. This implies that she has not been able to put Colleen to rest. She also has difficulty coping with the raising of hopes followed thereafter by disappointment.

This raising of hope is inherent within all the families. When the Double Jeopardy law was changed, all the Families believed that there was a chance to get justice where it had eluded them in the past. To find that the Attorney General chose to adhere to the strictest wording of the law again led to further disappointment for the Families.

The Families were also upset that the Attorney General referred to Clinton's father (Thomas Duroux) as (the prime suspect). This oversight from Mr Smith highlights the past problems that the Families had to contend with (police incompetence) and only serves to reinforce the belief that they are being treated differently.

Also Mr Smith's suggestion that: 'more grief counselling and put it behind you' also serves to reinforce the Families belief that they are being treated differently.

There are other direct family members who do not wish to have anything to do with the 'fight for justice'. The reason being is that that they have absolutely no faith at all in the Westminster System after their experience with how the initial investigation was conducted and subsequent failed trials. They believe that there will never be a time when they (or any other Indigenous person) will ever get fair and proper treatment from the powers that be.

It must be acknowledged that this pessimistic view of Government Institutions is inherent throughout most Aboriginal Communities as a result of Colonisation. However continued failure to address and correct weaknesses and failures of Institutions reinforces beliefs that Aboriginal people are second class citizens and will never be on an equal footing with white Australia.

People here (and elsewhere) are therefore restricted in their ability to move forward. They are 'stuck' in their grief.

I have often spent time with Evelyn's father (who blames himself for her death). He is a man who lives from day to day. He sees no reason or benefit in fighting for justice.



He is now naturally overly protective of his family and gets extremely upset at others who have in the past blamed his children for alleged misdemeanours, resulting in him now having AVOs against him.

Another cause of stress for the Families is that of people 'cashing in' on the murders. In particular a local Professional offered to help with 'the cause'. However it soon began to unfold that this person seemed more concerned with grabbing headlines for herself rather than adhering to Cultural Protocols. She was asked to refrain from commenting; however she continues to ignore the wishes of the Families and continues to make public statements about the murders claiming her right to free speech.

Although the Families want justice it could be construed that 'outside help' should be welcomed with open arms. However as I mentioned earlier the effects of colonisation run deeply through the psyche of all Aboriginal Communities and by acting without proper consultation with those directly affected is deeply disrespectful and serves to further disempower the Families and the wider Indigenous Community.

It is my opinion that unless the families get justice then the unresolved grief and concomitant stress related illnesses will continue to become intergenerational and entrenched (which to some extent has already started to occur).

Grief and loss are one of the most significant stressors that affect Aboriginal Communities. Mr Rudd in his Apology acknowledged that Government Policies were responsible for much of the angst within Aboriginal Communities today. By not acting or acting incompetently on a situation that could clearly be resolved only serves to reinforce the belief (that white people are more important than Aboriginal people) and compound psychological suffering for generations to come.

Finally there needs to be programmes put in place to assist Communities that have suffered from similar tragedies throughout Australia. However they need to be tailored to the specific needs of each Community (including the specific cultural needs). In order to do this each Community needs to be consulted with and have a part in the decision making process.

Yours Faithfully

Barry Toohey ;GDipSci(Mental Health)