

INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT PROVIDED TO VICTIMS OF CRIME

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The aftermath of homicide is a never ending journey. It is a journey that you wouldn't wish upon anyone. I liken it to being on a roller coaster ride that never stops! Our journey began with a phone call from a member of QPS Flying Squad who called me and said that my husband and I were needed straight away at the police station. My husband wasn't contactable until later that day which didn't appease this caller. When we arrived at the station we were greeted by a male officer who ordered that my husband go with him and I was to go with the female to be interviewed. My husband objected and said that he would like us to be interviewed together which he was told wasn't possible. At this stage we had no idea that our son was believed murdered. A local detective who had spoken to me the previous day wanting to know if I knew of our son's whereabouts asked the Flying Squad officer if he could please speak to us for a couple of minutes before the interview. This is when we were told that our son was suspected as murdered. This experience will haunt me forever. We felt like criminals ourselves and were treated so disrespectfully and without an ounce of compassion. I believe that members of QPS in such a position need to be trained how to treat family members with respect, compassion and empathy - learning that you have lost a loved one under such heinous circumstances deserves at least that! Our experience onwards with members of QPS has always been favourable and we have been well supported and I would go as far as saying that we have had a good relationship with them and we have been treated with respect as we have treated them. Today we have a great relationship with all forms of media and we treat all journalists respectfully as they treat us and they always portray our son's story with dignity and respect. This hasn't always been the case. In the very beginning we had media ringing us and knocking on our door before our son's name had even been made public. One such journalist knocked on our door early in the morning to say that he believed we were the parents of the missing person! This was extremely stressful and led me to leaving our home phone off the hook so that no one could contact me - only our family and police knew my mobile number at that stage.

Once our son's name was made public any media statements I made were at the CIB with the detectives on the case present. Journalists all came together and the police and I released statements and when the journalists interviewed me the police were able to intervene if they didn't want a question answered. This worked really well and kept the media updated. Until our son's case had been to court I never commented on his case without police being present in case I inadvertently jeopardised the case. Once we had established a good relationship with the media our only problem was that all significant information was delivered to us by the media before the police had contacted us. When the main organiser of our son's homicide was arrested we were notified by the media before the police had arrived at our house to tell us, when we weren't allowed in court we were notified about outcomes by the media first - the list is endless and always baffled the police, so much so that during one hearing they had me on speed dial to try and reach me before the media did. I am not sure how this could be rectified although perhaps some liaising between police and the media to avoid this situation. Our VAQ application was made possible by the help of the QHVSG staff - had it not been for their assistance, since our lives were in such turmoil we perhaps would have put it in the too hard basket. I haven't seen an application for many years so it could be more simplified by now. Our initial contact with VAQ was very straightforward and their assistance was appreciated immensely although several years later after having to travel frequently for court hearings we had amassed a considerable amount of receipts for travel and accommodation expenses and when I applied to VAQ for assistance I was told that our case had closed five weeks earlier. I realise that was my mistake by not keeping track of the date although I

do believe that perhaps to avoid this happening to other applicants that maybe VAQ could have in place some sort of reminder system so that applicants can be notified that their case will be closing in X amount of time. We have had very mixed dealings with The Parole Board Queensland. I do believe that when a prisoner applies for parole that it would have more impact on the members of the Parole Board if the victims were able to actually attend parole hearings and be allowed to express their concerns in person rather than just being able to submit a written statement. Throughout the whole process, victims never seem to have a voice - this needs to change! Queensland Corrective Services Victims Register has been invaluable in keeping us up to date with information about prisoners involved in our son's homicide. I know that if I have any concerns that I can always ring any of their friendly staff for answers. I do believe that family members should automatically be registered and then it is up to them if they don't want contact. After the loss of a loved one to homicide you are quite often not in the right head space to make decisions or have the energy to be bothered taking the initiative about filling out paperwork. I would always recommend that victims be registered as it is an invaluable source of information. The whole court process is extremely long and daunting. I have mixed dealings with the DPP. Our first and second prosecutors weren't particularly positive and we didn't feel necessarily included although I must say that our Victim Liaison Officer was amazingly helpful and friendly. We will never be able to thank our final prosecutor enough as while still being extremely professional he was empathetic and treated us and our son's case so respectfully and he included our whole family in all decision making. I believe that families need to be kept informed right throughout the whole legal process - from when the homicide takes place to sentencing. The unknown is hard to live with whereas a short regular phone call from either the QPS or the DPP to keep you updated means so much - even if there has been no changes. Within our family, I was constantly asked if I had heard anything about proceedings and I know waiting to hear can

sometimes be unbearable. Thank you!