

LAW ENFORCEMENT CONDUCT COMMISSION HEARING OPERATION TAMBORA - 26-28 MARCH 2018 - SYDNEY

Report prepared by Nicqui Yazdi

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This report has been written by local Byron Shire youth/AOD/mental health worker, Nicqui Yazdi, who attended the LECC hearing on behalf of the Byron Community. A separate report from James Wright, who also attended is also attached. James is a 22 year old local young person, who is very involved in local youth programs and AOD (alcohol & other drug) initiatives and has a very deep understanding of youth mental health issues and disabilities.

The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission investigation into this incident is still on-going and it is unclear when they will hand down a finding, but it should be soon.

INCIDENT FACTS -

A 16 year old boy with Aspergers was holidaying with his family in Byron Bay in January 2018. On the evening of January 10, the family went to dinner and afterwards the boy asked to go for a walk. His parents saw no reason for him not to, and he went off and was in constant mobile phone contact with them until around midnight, when he no longer answered his phone. At around 1am his mother called the police to say that her son was missing. During those few hours, this 16 year old boy has been given two tabs of acid by a group of young people who told him they were from the Gold Coast. He had no idea what acid was and became increasingly disoriented, distressed and has over-heated and eventually taken his clothes off. He was upset with god for doing this to him, so he paced up and down, loudly conversing and screaming to his god, asking why he had done this to him. This is witnessed by around a dozen people in a town-centre laneway of Byron Bay. At around 2am due to the noise this young man was making and his distressed state, various people called a local noise complaint hotline and police. Police attended within minutes, two cars, four officers, and just minutes later, a terrible scene had taken place and this young man was in police custody and was taken to the police station. He was later transported to the Tweed Heads Hospital and his parents were contacted by the hospital a little after 4am. No charges were laid against this young man by police. Those are the basic facts.

NATIONAL MEDIA ATTENTION - ACA -

A 2 minute 50 second video footage of this incident was supplied to A Current Affair, by a witness. This aired on Tuesday Feb 6, a month after the incident had taken place and it immediately went viral, with further national attention from media, social media and online sources. It needs to be stated straight away, that this was also the first time that the family of this boy had seen this footage and also the Superintendent of the Tweed/Byron LAC.

The media at that time, gave only a sensationalised account of what is seen in that video footage, which at the time, no other facts were known about. It appeared from all accounts to be simply a 'police bashing' video, made more sensational by the fact that it was a naked 16 year old boy and that obvious force is seen in those couple of minutes of grainy footage and that the incident took place in Byron Bay.

OTHER CCTV FOOTAGE OF THE INCIDENT -

It is unfortunate that this 'ACA' footage was not handed over through proper channels in the first instance, so that police could have started conducting their own investigation, and also, that they may have been able to access further CCTV footage from the area of the incident, if they had known closer to the event, as there are several businesses in that area, that may have had more footage. But it was too late, a month later, when this ACA

footage aired, as any business CCTV is usually wiped after a short period of time. When the LECC started their investigation some CCTV footage did come to light, that was able to tell them some facts, such as when the police vehicles arrived in the lane and how far apart, being 22 seconds. This does become important, in determining the initial first contact and actions of the police that evening.

INITIAL INVESTIGATION -

An initial investigation was instigated on a local level, immediately after the ACA story aired on Feb 6. This was the first time that other police, in particular the upper command for the area, had any real knowledge of this incident. Due to the high number of complaints being received by the Tweed/Byron Local Area Command, the NSW Police and in particular, the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC), it was almost immediately determined that this incident did indeed require a higher level of investigation and the LECC took over the investigation. They started going over what facts were available to them, contacting the officers involved, witnesses and those who had contacted them via complaints, who did have information to offer and within weeks, preliminary interviews had taken place, statements had been taken and the LECC website announced on Feb 21 that there would be a hearing in Sydney.

This was, by the way, the very first hearing of the newly formed Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC).

NOTIFICATION ON THE LECC HEARING TO HAPPEN IN SYDNEY -

The first notification regarding the LECC hearing was made via a first media release on March 14, which then led to various media stories across the country, however, this was not actually initially picked up by our local media here in Byron Shire, until after a story had been run in the Lismore-based Northern Star. The Northern Star article was published just one week before the hearing was to take place. A second 'Media Alert' and 'notice of public hearing' was published on the LECC website on March 21, five days before the hearing was due to start on Monday 26th March 2017.

But the national media attention to the hearing announcement also triggered an uproar from the Byron community, evidenced on social media, and I personally found this to be so abhorrently wrong, that I contacted the Mayor Simon Richardson to notify him about the hearing and at the same time proceeded to start a gofundme campaign to send Byron community representatives to the hearing, myself included.

I instigated a number of emails and calls to the LECC to air my own dissatisfaction that this hearing was to take place in Sydney and therefore felt it would not be a transparent process for the Byron community, as it would potentially exclude anyone from Byron to be in attendance. What I personally found to be most wrong about this initial process, was that even though I had personally written a complaint to the LECC in the first instance of viewing the ACA story and video, they had only acknowledged receipt of the complaint, but I was not actually notified about the hearing.

The LECC have since informed me that they will be making changes to this process, and that they will take on feedback from the public regarding public notification and hearings and they may take that feedback into account for future hearings. They will also endeavour to contact the proper authorities in the areas where incidents have taken place, such as local councils, and any interested parties that may need to be involved. Hearings may take

place in the communities where the incidents have occurred, in the future. However, this may not always be possible, for reasons that became very obvious to me from the first day of the hearing, which I will discuss in more detail further into the report.

WHAT IS THE LECC -

The primary role of the LECC is to detect, oversight, investigate and expose misconduct and maladministration within the NSW Police Force and the NSW Crime Commission. The LECC provides independent oversight and review (including where appropriate, real time monitoring and review) of investigations by the NSW Police of misconduct matters concerning the conduct of its members and the NSW Crime Commission concerning its officers. The LECC uses its investigative powers to identify and deal with cases of misconduct in both of these agencies. By being separate from and completely independent of both the NSW Police and the NSW Crime Commission the LECC is able to engage special powers to perform its investigative oversight functions.

FACTS ON LECC HEARING -

The LECC hearing process is a very formal and highly scrutinised process. These hearings are public and even transcripts are posted on-line on the LECC website. There may be instances where this might not be the case, but for the Byron incident, it was a very open, public and transparent process. Obviously there are some parts of evidence, that remain highly confidential, including identities of involved parties and in these instances, redacted copies of paperwork etc, removing any form of identification on them, are used. Witnesses, police and 'the boy' were all given codes to protect their identities. I will use the term 'the boy' instead of his code, being 'AO', throughout this, as I think it is important to keep remembering that this was just a 16 year old boy and even throughout the LECC hearing, the Chief Commissioner, Hon Michael F Adams QC, continually referred to AO as 'the boy', which had a very personal effect on the proceedings and was in no way disrespectful, but a constant reminder of this young man as being a real person, a young person and someone with real challenges in life, due to Aspergers.

LECC COURT AND PROCESS AND WHY THIS HEARING HAD TO HAPPEN IN SYDNEY AND NOT IN BYRON BAY

The LECC hearing 'court' is an extremely daunting place. The week prior to the hearing those of us attending went to a meeting with the Tweed/Byron LAC Superintendent Wayne Starling in Tweed Heads, and he attempted to orientate us to what would happen at the hearing and what the room itself was like, and he himself did use the word 'daunting' which was easy to see why when we arrived.

Firstly, two of the LECC staff did come to Byron, and they did search for an appropriate venue to hold the hearing here. However, there was just nothing and nowhere that would have sufficed for the high needs of this hearing.

In the first instance, I truly believed that the community of Byron should have had the opportunity to be at this hearing and that it should have been in Byron. But seeing how the hearing was conducted, it really would have not happened in the way it did, it would not have been a fair and just situation, if it had ended up with a full Byron-style lynch mob picketing the place and filling the gallery with hecklers and police haters. It would also have been ridiculously hard to transport over half a dozen lawyers, the Chief Commissioner and the Councillor, the family of the boy, the entire LECC team, including

their officers and investigators, the kinds of security that this sort of hearing requires, including scanners, x-ray machines, walk-through metal detectors etc. It is a very high level security style court that has to be that way in dealing with investigations against police. On top of this, the kind of high-tech equipment needed is extreme, linked tv monitors everywhere, linked computer systems with the full transcripts being sent to more than 20 monitors for all of these lawyers, officials, investigators etc in real time. It makes complete sense now that, as their offices are in Sydney, actually located at this court, and all of these legal people, along with all the paperwork, technology, equipment etc, it just could not have taken place in Byron, without extreme expense to all involved and also at a possible cost to the fairness of the process. Being an open-ended time frame for these hearings, this would also have added to the extreme potential costs, if the hearing had been in Byron Bay as these hearings start and then go on for as long as necessary and it is totally possible that some may go on for potentially weeks at a time.

No electronic devices, phones or recording devices are allowed in the hearing room either. All of this is given over before entering the court, bags are scanned and searched, bodies are scanned and any electronic devices are handed to the officers of the court, bagged and tickets issued. Media however are exempt and can take devices and computers in.

The LECC Hearing went for a full four days and in the following pages we will endeavour to cover the basic proceedings.

LECC OUTCOMES - FURTHER INVESTIGATION - REPORT

The LECC investigations into this incident are still continuing, however recent communication with the LECC has led me to believe they are now close to determinations. There was information that came to light during the hearing that led to more actions and investigations and the possibility that it could also have included a further hearing, if any information that had come to light since the hearing, warranted this becoming a necessity. This is not a fast process, but the hearing did have to happen fast, as the LECC did want to instigate proceedings as fast as they possibly could, being that this was a high level incident, with many implications, that triggered a lot of complaints to them. The LECC has stated that when the findings are released, they may deliver their final investigation report in Byron Bay.

THE LECC HEARING - OPERATION TAMBORA - Monday March 26 2018

Within the opening statements of the hearing from the Chief Commissioner Hon Michael Adams QC and Counsel assisting the LECC Mr Terence Rowles, we were informed of the provisions of section 176 (1) of the Act, and directed that there was to be no publication of any information evidence, photographs or representation that would enable any of the persons appearing as witnesses to be identified. Codes for each witness, were handed down for use throughout the proceedings.

We were informed that when the story aired on A Current Affair on February 6, the Superintendent of Tweed/Byron Local Area Command immediately instigated the convening of an extraordinary meeting to be held on February 8, (to open a local internal investigation) however before the NSW Police Force could commence its own internal investigation, the complaint was taken over by the LECC, on February 9. The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act of 2016 provides that when the Commission decides to investigate a matter, any police investigations must stop immediately.

Some legal information on the LECC Hearing process - Anyone called as a witness to an LECC hearing, including the officers involved, can legally decline, or refuse to assist, however they are legally bound to give evidence if examined by the Commission and no evidence given can be used against them in any criminal proceedings that may eventuate. This covers the civil rights of a citizen not to incriminate themselves. But this also means that they are compelled to speak and to tell the truth, without fear of consequence, which I think was hard for some to comprehend. There was definitely reticence, however once they realised that this was not to their detriment, they mostly gave in to the process.

DAY ONE OF THE HEARING - WITNESSES

On the first day of the hearing, four witnesses gave evidence to the hearing, three people who had witnessed the incident in the lane and the attending ambulance officer who took 'the boy' from the Byron Police Station to the Tweed Hospital.

While witness accounts of the incident in the lane did vary, due to their own locations, distances away from where the police actions were taking place, ability to hear and decipher what was being said etc, most accounts did overlap in their basic observations. One witness did film the segment seen on ACA. Another made a call to the police and the other made a call to a local noise complaint service. All were basically present for most of the incident, and one did witness the 20 minutes or so prior to police arriving. All backed the belief that the boy was distressed, pacing and making a lot of noise, some words coherent, some not, but it was clearly recognised that he was in an agitated and upset state, and was possibly affected by drugs and/or mental health problems.

One witness stated that when the boy had first entered the lane, he had still been clothed, but in the 20 mins before police were called, he did become more upset and was obviously overheating, so took his clothes off. This witness did attempt to converse with the boy, a number of times, advising him that there had been noise complaints and that he would have to call security if he did not calm down or leave, and he eventually did attempt to contact security, and when unsuccessful, he then called police at around 2am.

Another witness, located slightly away from the immediate scene, was also concerned about the state of the boy and his constantly calling for water, and had already put in a noise complaint call to a local hotline service, and was about to attempt to take him water, when the police entered the lane.

Two of the witnesses had at the initial time of the boy entering the lane, been in bed, but had been roused by the noise and eventually after 10-15 mins got up to investigate. Both also had their partners present who also witnessed what happened after that, when the police arrived. They were in separate places, but very close by each other, and could see each other.

All witnesses said that literally within seconds of the police arriving what happened became a very confused scene, with police actions happening very fast and this is where some of their accounts differed, which would not be unusual, considering the time that had elapsed since the incident took place. No statements were taken from any of these witnesses on the night, or until the LECC investigation was started. In fact two of these witnesses would have been completely unknown to police on that night, due to their locations. Police were visible to them, but they were not visible to police.

All of these witnesses were clearly shaken by the experience and all had concluded that they had witnessed something very bad, and quite possibly force that may not have been warranted.

All of these witnesses had already been interviewed and statements taken in private hearings and the record of those prior interviews was kept completely confidential and not shown to anyone other than the lawyers present at the hearing, however these statements were referred to throughout the proceedings, and in part some references were made to the content of some interviews, for clarification, or to assist the witnesses to recall events. This was also the case for the police involved. Most of these private hearing interviews had taken place within a week of the LECC taking over the investigation, as in, within days of the ACA story and video going public.

At the conclusion of their being primarily addressed and questioned by the LECC Counsel and the Chief Commissioner, the lawyers present, representing the police officers, and other witnesses were given opportunities to cross-examine on anything they required clarification on.

I won't at this stage, go too much into individual testimonies of the witnesses.

There are a few points I would like to make at this time though, in that one witness did clearly state that he believed the boy "looked unsettled, erratic and confused" and that he "marched" towards the police when they first arrived on the scene, he said "It was like a very brisk walk, a walk of confusion, a walk of - you know, at one point he had his hands up like this, the next point he is down like that and he is sort of, you know, rubbing his face." (this is clarified by the Counsel Mr Rowles and the witness that the boy had put his hands up to about head high) he also stated that the boy said to them "Just get me some fucking water, God help me, I need some help.". It was at this time that "some type of scuffle between the police and AO" occurred, as he believed the police had asked the boy to back away, but he kept on heading towards them. It was at this time that he also saw the second two police arrive and also the OC spray being used by the first officer to the scene, he heard coughing and also more screaming and the boy's hands went to his eyes.

Around this time the witness went inside for 15-20 seconds, as he was distressed by what he was seeing, as he himself has a 13 year old son and just couldn't stop thinking about him. He was also thinking to still get water for the boy, and he checked his own phone and realised the battery was dead, as he did consider filming what was happening. He then briefly went back outside. It is at this stage there is confusion, noise and the taser is used and he then witnesses the officers trying to get the boy to the ground, batons being used, and essentially what is then seen on the video.

His testimony did take a considerable time and was very detailed, much more detailed than the other witnesses and even the police accounts and he was clearly distressed by what he had witnessed. He at one point did turn around and looked straight at his wife, as he could not watch it any more and was starting to feel unwell, and so when the biggest number of baton strikes were occurring, he saw some and heard the others, as his wife was also in shock and so he was also trying to protect her from witnessing it too, by directly facing her and standing in between her vision of the event.

At that point they both went back inside for a brief moment, continuing to hear scuffles, then when he returned outside he believed he had seen a third police vehicle arrive, however this would actually have been one of the original two vehicles, which had been

moved forward to place the boy inside the vehicle. He then observed one of the police leaning on a fence near where he was, looking distressed and taking deep breaths and another officer approached him and asked him was he ok. He then also states that he heard somebody say "Has anybody taped this". This is also backed up by another witness.

The witness accounts took on average around two hours each. All of the transcripts are available on the LECC website and accessible to the public.

The last interview of the first day, was the ambulance officer who attended the police station and transported the boy to Tweed Heads Hospital.

There are a number of points regarding what happened to the boy at the station that I would like to address, even though these were not given much discussion during the hearing, I still believe there are some valid reasons to bring them into this report. Police stated they called for an ambulance during the time they were still in the lane. The ambulance took approximately an hour and a half to arrive at the Byron Police station. This seems an unreasonable amount of time. The second point is that we learned that police do not have even basic testing kits to determine what kind of drugs anyone in their custody may have in their system. When the ambulance did arrive, the boy was administered two doses of a sedative, which then in turn hindered the ability of the hospital to determine the substance the boy had been given, as the compounds of the sedatives confused these drug tests. The boy had been placed in an 'observation' cell at the police station, made of clear perspex, which we learned does not even have a hole to pass anything inside the cell, including water, which the boy constantly asked for, and was never given, as police believed he may try to charge from the cell if the door was opened for any reason. Water was also used to entice the boy from the back of the police vehicle at the station, yet he never received any. He was also kept completely naked for the duration, not even offered any kind of modesty covering or blanket. This cell is extremely small, not even large enough for someone to lay or even sit down, without having their legs up, with knees bent. What was also never addressed, was why the boy's parents were not contacted from the station, particularly considering this was a 16 year old boy, or why there was no connection made between the call the mother made to police regarding her son being missing, and the boy that was at the station, whose name police had already determined while still in the lane. I am unsure whether any of the points above may have been further addressed by the LECC in their investigations, but all of these points seem valid in how this boy was potentially mismanaged by police and also in the lack of training of police when it comes to how to attend to someone who is drug-affected and/or having a psychotic episode and also their lack of training regarding young people specifically. Some of this information was given to us by the family of the boy, in particular, the call made to alert police that the boy was missing, and this did not become a part of the hearing, as at no time was the family of the boy questioned as part of this hearing. I'm not sure whether not having any testimony from other involved parties, such as the family of this boy, would be normal for these sorts of proceedings, or whether it was an oversight.

OFFICERS INVOLVED IN THE INCIDENT - Days two to four of the hearing

Each of the officers involved in the incident were interviewed over the last three days of the hearing, along with the duty officer from that night. It is clear from their own testimonies that the officers that attended the scene felt that they were in a situation that needed to be contained quickly or someone was going to get hurt. Full copies of the testimonies of these officers are available on the LECC website.

FACTS ACCORDING TO THE ATTENDING POLICE

On January 11 at approximately 2am, a call was placed to police regarding a distressed naked person in the laneway and two cars, with four officers were sent to the scene.

The first two police arrived in the laneway, seeing a naked young man, initially laying on the road, who then upon seeing the police arrive, got up from the ground. He appeared to them to have been on drugs and was extremely agitated, pacing up and down, yelling to the sky and to them as they approached. This young man did not initially respond to the command of the first officer, who stated he said to the boy "calm down or you will get a gobful of this", or in fact mostly throughout the entire incident, the boy was, by all accounts, very distressed and although on closer listening to what he says in the video footage, it is decipherable in the most part, however in the moment, and to the officers attending, most of this would have seemed to be disjointed and incoherent ramblings.

The two police vehicles arrived in the laneway 22 seconds apart, this has been ascertained from CCTV footage taken in the lane. By the time the first officer from the second car alights the vehicle, one of the first two officers to the scene was administering capsicum spray. As the second officer from the second car tried to alight from the passenger side, he realised he could not get his own door to unlock (although he later changed this to state it did not happen) so he scrambled over the front seat and out through the drivers side door, as the taser is fired the first of three times within 10 seconds, at the maximum rate of five seconds each firing, with the third firing failing to be administered.

Both of the officers of the second car join the first two and they attempt to contain this young man, who is now screaming and speaking incoherently even more loudly having been sprayed and tasered. The officers of the second police car had no time to assess what had come before they had arrived, they just initially followed their instincts and any commands of the first two officers and tried to get this young man onto the ground, Knee and baton strikes are administered.. However, as police at the hearing explained over and over, this boy was sweating profusely, he was extremely slippery and therefore their efforts to contain him in any way were fruitless, and this boy kept standing, no matter what they did, he wasn't following commands to get down on the ground, he wasn't producing his hands so that they could cuff him, he wasn't able to follow even these simple commands in any way, so the horrific scene unfolds that we have all seen in the video footage.

The boy was OC sprayed, tasered for the maximum number of times and duration, and during the scuffles to contain him onto the ground, batons are brought down on him approximately 22 times, 17 of those baton strikes are administered by one officer, in one repetitive session, as seen in the video footage. The boy sustains a number of injuries during this incident, including severe bruising to various parts of his body, his legs and torso in particular and also a broken rib, all of this would have added to his agitated state and his inability to respond to commands, and to his moving constantly, even once he is on the ground, he still continues to writhe. To the officers, they saw this as the boy resisting, however from the LECC hearing proceedings and all testimonies heard, it did become apparent most likely to all in attendance, that the boy was moving in response to pain and discomfort and wanting to get away from what was happening to him.

This entire incident took less than five minutes from the police arriving at the scene, to having the boy in the back of the police van.

Each of the officers involved in the incident were interviewed, along with the duty officer for that evening throughout the final three days of the hearing. Each was questioned about their own actions, from the time of arrival, until the boy was contained in the police vehicle and also with regards to actions back at the police station and the written report on the incident. They were also subjected to painstakingly going over the video footage, repeatedly frame by frame, where they each had to discuss what they were doing, what actions were being taken by whom and why and also what their thoughts were on the actions of the other officers. There were many points that only became clear as the ending of the hearing neared, once all had been interviewed and a clearer overall picture of the incident became apparent. While all of the basic facts were backed up by each of their testimonies, their own individual actions and in particular their own thoughts that were occurring during the incident did differ considerably. The last of the officers to take the stand, was the officer who himself brought the baton down on the boy 17 times, seen in the video. While it was obviously difficult for all of the officers to recall facts of this incident, even though it was only a short incident, it was extremely chaotic and this was reflected in all of their individual testimonies.

What was clear though, was that none of these police understood that they were dealing with a 16 year old, all assumed this person to be in his early 20's. Nor did any of them realise that he had Aspergers or any form of disability or potentially a mental health disorder, they only assumed he was drug-effected. They also did not understand that the boy could not understand their commands, and in fact there were no real clear commands, that would not have been hampered by the pain and suffering the boy was enduring. He could not understand them in the most part and the police obviously did not understand the boy either. He was never asked his name until he was restrained and about to be placed in the back of the police vehicle. No one throughout the entire incident acknowledged or gave the boy the water that he had been consistently asking for, which he even asked the police for in the very first instance. In fact even back at the police station he was still not given water, with the duty officer for the evening explaining to the LECC hearing that from his own understanding, mainly learned from reading and also from conversations with festival drug police, he believed it to be detrimental to give water to someone potentially on amphetamines, as this could lead to their death from internal drowning of organs. This, once again, backs up the fact that police in NSW have no real substantial training that would be of any real benefit or advantage to them dealing with drug-induced incidents, or any clear understanding of how to manage people who may have a disability, such as this boy with his Aspergers, nor do they know how to respond to mental health issues. This lack of police education on drugs seriously needs addressing.

Various of the other police officers were asked about their own thoughts about what was happening when the baton was being brought down on the boy, blow after blow and whether they thought this was excessive. One of the officers stated that he himself thought that the baton strikes were "unnecessary" and that "there were too many" and that he had thought to himself that he had not felt the need to bring out his own baton and wondered why this other officer was using it to the extent that he was. However, not one of the other officers said anything while this was happening, even if they may have thought something, not one said one word to the officer who brought that baton down again and again, once again showing that there was no real clear chain of command in that incident, not one officer overseeing what the others were doing, no one in charge as such.

Was there excessive force used, maybe, but that is not our place to make that judgement, that has to be done under the guidance of the LECC, once they have all of the facts in front of them and have finalised their investigation.

PRIOR INCIDENTS THAT MAY HAVE EFFECTED THE LANE INCIDENT -

Here is where we need to take a step back and look at what has happened to Byron police recently. Byron Police have faced ever-increasing issues with drug-fuelled revellers, and in just the few weeks prior to this incident a number of similar incidents led Police to attempt to introduce new measures to protect themselves from the high number of injuries they are receiving attending these sorts of incidents. On Christmas Day at the lighthouse they had a scene unfold that must have been horrific for them, a naked drug-fuelled man violently dragged a police officer out of a police vehicle, beating this officer and others and then he hurled himself into the windscreen of the police car, smashing it. He was almost impossible to contain. This incident led to new measures including having to have four police attend such call-outs in the future, as the phenomenal strength of some people when on drugs, has meant that just two officers are not enough to contain these people and that they now also have to keep the doors of their police vehicles locked until they have been able to properly assess the scenes they go to. There was a second 'violent naked man' incident only a week later, and similarly, this person also assaulted police and damaged a police vehicle in the same manner as the Christmas Day incident. It was ascertained during the LECC hearing that one of the officers involved in the laneway incident, had also been one of the officers involved in the Christmas Day incident. This is the same officer that is seen in the video footage, bringing his baton down numerous times on the boy. These incidents were just weeks apart.

These new measures actually created difficulties on the evening of the lane incident, as even though the vehicles entered the lane only 22 seconds apart, by the time the second vehicle arrived, much had already happened, including the boy being OC sprayed and tasered as the second vehicle arrived, and before these officers had alighted from their vehicle, so they were unable to ascertain the scene properly, or what had already transpired. The second problem, was that we were initially told that the passenger side door of the second vehicle was unable to be unlocked and this officer stated he had to climb over the front seat to the drivers side to get out of the vehicle, also delaying his ability to respond as fast as he should have and also obscuring his vision while he tried to get out, not seeing what was going on with the boy and the other officers. However, this same officer the following day, changed his statement regarding the door being unable to be unlocked and stated that he did indeed alight from the passenger side and then went to the driver's side to retrieve another baton.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION OF NSW POLICE

While Police do of course receive training and education in various matters, one thing that has become very clear from the LECC hearing, is that they in no way receive adequate training in mental health, being their own, or that of the general public that they may be dealing with. Police in NSW receive just one day of mental health training. They are not trained to recognise and respond to mental health disorders even to the level of members of the general public who may have done the two-day Mental Health First Aid training that members of Qld and Vic police receive mandatory, as part of their training.

Nor do NSW police receive any training involving disabilities such as Aspergers or the disability level of those suffering mental health episodes from disorders or drugs, including anxiety or psychosis.

Weapons training is meant to be conducted annually, for just one day, however this is not always the case, as the officers being interviewed at the LECC hearing confirmed. Police

wear both a weapons belt and vest weighing more than 12 kilos carrying various weapons, including OC Spray (capsicum), taser, gun, handcuffs and batons and other weapons are also located in their vehicles including other styles of baton.

FAILURE OF WEAPONS TO CONTAIN SITUATION

The officers involved in this lane incident explained throughout the LECC hearing, their understanding of the use of the various weapons used against the boy that evening, in particular the taser, OC spray, handcuffs and the batons. However, one glaring issue was that in their training, they are trained to use the batons primarily to attract certain responses, essentially either distract an assailant to drop an arm, or drop a subject to their knees or the ground and from all of their testimonies, none of these tactics worked in this incident, being that instead of assisting to contain the boy, these weapons and their use actually had an opposite effect, they made him more agitated, he moved more due to pain and discomfort and the weapons were essentially ineffective against containing this boy. Even the use of the OC Spray hindered their ability to effectively cuff this boy, even when they had him on the ground, in the video footage, the fact that he was already sweating profusely from the drugs he had been given, and then on top of that he was slimy from the capsicum spray, which is an oil-based product, the first set of cuffs they attempted to place on him, locked, with one cuff not fully closed enough for him to not be able to slip his hand out, and the boy tried a number of times to get the cuff off his hand. This meant the police needed to use a second set of cuffs to properly secure his hands. So, by the time he is finally contained, he is wearing two sets of cuffs. Research states that the use of OC Spray and tasers are highly contentious and are not recommended to be used against adolescents. Multiple bursts of tasers are a health risk and police are trained to give reasonable time between taser bursts to allow for compliance. This did not happen.

COMMUNICATION/COMMANDS BY POLICE TO THE BOY

There was confusion as to what was initially said to the boy, and throughout the entire episode. Although one witness stated that he heard clear commands from the first officer attending, to the boy, this was not the recollection of the actual officer himself, who stated that when the boy first charged towards him (which was described in various ways from various witnesses as walking briskly to charging forward), his first command to this boy from his recollection was "Calm down or you'll get a gobful of this", being that he had a can of OC spray already out of his weapons belt and it was in his hand, by the side of his leg. It is hard to imagine how this 16 year old boy, with little life experience, would understand a command such as that, nor would he most likely have even known or seen that the officer had a can of capsicum spray in his hand. Police need training regarding clear communication and commands, particularly with young people.

Throughout the incident the police gave each other and the boy various commands, however due to the chaotic nature of the incident, the boy screamed from pain and not understanding what was happening to him, so none of these commands seemed effective either between police or from them to the boy. There was not one particular officer who was overseeing the incident and in fact for the most part, each is just doing their own part, not even having the other officers visible to them when they had the boy on the ground.

It also needs to be stated at this time, that this boy would initially have seen the arrival of the police as something that would 'save' him from the distress he was in, and this is also quite possibly why he immediately sat up and then stood from laying on the ground and then walked briskly towards the first officer. With the fact that he has Aspergers, and from

conversations with his family throughout the hearing, this boy sees himself as many young Aspergers people, he has an 'inner justice warrior' and sees himself as not dissimilar to police. So he would have believed that their arrival signified someone coming to his rescue. All this boy asked anyone for that night, was for help and a glass of water. I would like to take this moment to refer to one of the teachings from the Mental Health First Aid Australia training programs, a two-day course that NSW Police don't get, yet in other states it is mandatory for all police, in that, when assisting someone who may be suffering from psychosis, one helpful action is to try to comply with simple requests, such as for a glass of water. This simple action could have assisted that night. Police have very little training in mental health and therefore their ability to deal with anyone who was in a state like the boy was on this evening, disoriented, drugged, hot and in extreme discomfort to the point of becoming naked, having loudly-spoken deep discussions with god, on two tabs of acid, should absolutely be seen from both a health and mental health angle and this is very difficult for NSW Police, with the basic one-day mental health training they get.

It is fair to say that these police did not have enough training to adequately manage this situation. It is also fair to say that it was an extreme incident, where their state of mind would have been to have to react quickly to contain the situation, and that rational thinking is not always possible in such a fast escalating situation. It is also very clear to me that there was not enough clear communication between the officers themselves, or from them to this boy and that is very important as far as I am concerned and I am sure the commission will find this too, that one thing that must be impressed on police, is the need that very clear, concise, but also consequential information must be given to people in situations like this, if they are to ever de-escalate situations like this, in a much faster and less violent manner than this incident incurred. Also, the police use of language needs to be addressed, the boy was quite clearly called a "cunt" and referred to as "you fucking loser", both of these statements were decipherable from the video footage. This is a very common complaint from young people, the use of language against them by police, whereas, if they were to use the same language to police, they would be arrested.

There seems to be no real list of actions that Police should have taken on this night, that could have stopped the whole thing right from the start, that would have seen them detaining the boy, without injury, and that is the saddest part of this, as if they had been able to get him to understand that they wanted to help him, then none of what we now know happened, would have happened at all. I am talking about a list of actions to deal with drug-intoxicated people or those with mental health issues. These officers said again and again that they were all just working from their vision of what was happening and their own perceptions, but they did not communicate with each other properly, or with this boy, there was confusion over who was doing what with handcuffs, and at no time was one officer or any of them actually leading the actions happening, they were just following their own concepts, trying to personally judge who was where and who had what, hands, feet, etc, but not clearly talking to each other about it, or being directed by someone with a clear view of what each officer was doing. "Communication is the key" is a term we all use so often these days, yet for these officers, there was no real communication and that could have been the key to making this incident a far less violent and extreme experience for them all, the boy included obviously.

LONG WORK HOURS OF POLICE ATTENDING - 12.5 HOUR SHIFT

Another important point that came out at the LECC hearing was the extremely long shifts these officers have. They had been on duty since 6pm that evening and their shift was meant to finish at 6am, however finished at 6.30am, that would have been a very long

twelve and a half hours for these men. But when the lane incident took place, they had already been on duty for eight and a half hours. While police might see their long shifts as just part of their job, it seems that for the NSW Police service to concede that a 12 hour shift is an acceptable work shift for police, in this high stress job, to be carrying out their duties in any way properly, is a hard ask, particularly if they were to become impaired due to tiredness and exhaustion and a number of times, various officers mentioned that they did become exhausted during their interaction with this boy and the struggles that ensued in order to contain, cuff and detain him. I find it absolutely a failure of the NSW Police, to not give these officers shifts that are within an acceptable time period of normal working hours for anyone. Eight hours should be the maximum time of any police shift. Another thing to note is the complete lack of any formal exercise regime for NSW Police.

It is obvious that the Tweed/Byron Local Area Command have a lack of enough police numbers to effectively allow for reduced hours of police shifts in this region. This is also due to the numbers that can be injured and off work, or unable to work effectively due to involvement in high-level incidents. We would hope that there should be a recommendation for more police to be engaged for this area and that their shift hours be reduced, as an outcome of this hearing.

POLICE SUPPORTS - INJURIES MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES - PTSD

One thing to note, is that police are often injured in the process of containing scenes like this one. In fact, at the time of the LECC hearing Tweed/Byron Police put out a media story on the fact that in the previous 12 months, there had been more than 140 assaults against the 140 local police for this district and that there were 30 police here who were also unable to even strap on a gun, due to involvement in high-level incidents and therefore were limited in the duties they could perform.

The police officer seen in the video footage bringing the baton down on the boy in the lane, was himself effected in just the first few minutes of arrival at the scene, firstly by the OC spray 'over spray' which gave him immediate discomfort and he struggled to breathe, as he suffers from asthma and he coughed until he dry reached. This lasted a number of minutes and was witnessed by bystanders, who also evidenced this in their own testimonies. He then also accidentally touched the barbs of the taser after the first two times it was fired, which was still on, while trying to change the cartridge, essentially tasing himself. This officer had also been involved in the Christmas Day incident involving a violent naked man and the question needs to be asked, as to whether this prior incident, and any others, may have impacted on his ability to properly judge the scene and his own actions on the night of the lane incident.

It is a well-known fact that high numbers of Police struggle with mental health issues due to the high-level of stress of their work, the violence they witness and of course injuries from these incidents. PTSD is a common mental health issue with police who have attended horrific scenes and high-violence incidents. What is unclear though, is how their own mental health and well-being is supported, through professional supervision and/or psychological treatments and there seem to be no real clear guidelines for when or for how long police should be placed on restricted duties, or have enforced treatments and supports, after such incidents.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR POLICE AT THE LECC HEARING

The Tweed/Byron Superintendent Wayne Starling attended the LECC hearing for the entire duration and he also personally engaged a psychologist to support the police involved and their families, who was also present throughout the hearing. Mr Starling of course was there to make sure his officers were safe and supported through this process and he went above and beyond to watch over them and also to check on myself and James, to make sure we were also handling the intensive nature of this hearing. I have no doubt that this must have been one of the hardest things he has ever had to face in his many years in the police force. The police officers involved in this incident were not in good shape throughout the hearing, they were obviously devastated and clearly remorseful over what happened. They are not bad men, they are men who have chosen to give their work lives to protecting our community and trying to keep the peace in what is far from a peaceful place any longer.

Some of the officers had family members with them at the LECC hearing, a sister, a wife, a father, and this incident and the investigation and hearing was obviously distressing for their families as well. These are local men, with local families and the media attention and social media fall-out was also distressing for them, in particular the hatefulness of much of the local social media in particular towards these police.

REMORSE OF POLICE INVOLVED

It is important for the Byron community to understand that the police involved, and their supervisors, were all so incredibly remorseful for what happened in this incident. This was not 'remorse' from guilt, it was remorse over the fact that none of them would have ever wished for a situation like this to happen in the first place. And every single one of them throughout the LECC hearing had to go through this incident literally hundreds of times. They had to watch the video footages of their actions when the boy was being restrained and cuffed as well as the taser video, hundreds of times, these were played again and again and every second of video was examined at length, even frame by frame, who was where, where their feet were, their hands, their knees, where the boy was, what he was doing, saying, what was said by them, who said it, an entire transcript was made of those videos, and they had to pull it apart second by second and be questioned over it again and again and again. They had to give their reasonings for every step and every breath they took in that incident.

And while the Police involved were reticent when they first sat in the dock, and they did, as legally they should have, they all gave their objection to being there in the very first instance (this is a legal requirement) they mostly just gave into the process, and even fearing for themselves, their jobs, their reputations and obviously more, they mostly answered seemingly honestly and the truth did come out, a clear picture was given of the incident step by step. I believe everyone who was at the hearing would now understand that incident, the actions of the boy and the police actions, in a far better light than those who just saw the over-sensationalised media attention this incident was given.

THE BOY AND HIS FAMILY -

As I walked into the LECC hearing court on the first morning, the very first person to find me and make contact, was the father of the 16 year old boy and the boy's older brother. They told me straight away that they were grateful we were there on behalf of the

community of Byron and that this boy's Mum had actually contributed to our gofundme campaign, as they wanted to make sure we got there. We sat directly behind them or with them for the entire duration, and spent time with them outside of the hearing, on breaks, lunch and at the end of the days. They told us that Byron Bay is a place their family dearly loves and they hope to bring their boy back to Byron in the near future, so that he can heal from this incident, but more importantly they also want to help heal Byron too and plan that when he is ready, their son will come and speak with the community about what happened to him.

This boy and his family also want to see changes in the NSW Police, so that incidents like this are better managed in the future. They, as a family, at the time of the hearing, were still collecting their thoughts on the incident itself and what effects this has had on the entire family since, both as a collective, but also individually. At the time of the hearing this family had made no moves to instigate any proceedings against any of the officers involved, however they had by then retained a lawyer, who was at times present at the hearing, although no-one from the family was interviewed as part of the hearing, they were themselves also simply there to observe the process. The boy himself did not attend, nor did his Mother, as it would have been simply too distressing for her and she was still coming to terms with what had happened to her son.

MEDIA / SOCIAL MEDIA / COMMUNITY FRENZY OVER INCIDENT

The media, but particularly the social media frenzy over this incident when it was first aired on A Current Affair and also during the hearing itself, led to some extremely hateful 'police-bashing' and this was distressing to watch happen. During the hearing I wrote two updates on the proceedings, which were initially published on local Byron community social media pages and on my own facebook page, and these were shared far and wide, across Australia. Some media also published some of the contents of my updates and I did a number of interviews with local media from the Byron area, however refused any media interviews with national media, including TV news and also ACA, who were present throughout the hearing.

I was however, very relieved to see that my own updates were well received by the local Byron Community and that in the most part, the police-bashing and hateful comments immediately stopped, as people had an opportunity to become more informed of the actual factual circumstances of the incident and not just the over-the-top sensationalism of the media coverage as a whole, as they had mainly only reported on what was seen in just the less-than-three minutes of footage supplied to ACA. I have included copies of these two updates at the end of this report. I can tell you that from the official 'insights' of the 'Byron Bay Community News' facebook page, which I own and manage, these updates had a massive response, with the first one receiving more than 35,000 hits in just the first three days. And I believe the effectiveness of those updates, was in the very personal nature in which I wrote them, being that it was a very emotional journey for both James and myself to be witness to this LECC process and hearing and of course witnessing what effect this process also had on the witnesses, the police and the boy's family, as well as others present and these updates also gave this same information to the community.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

As already stated, the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission has as yet, not made a final determination or report over this incident. However, this is due very soon. This incident, while definitely a one of a kind incident, was also in many ways reminiscent of the sorts of

incidents that the Byron Police are seeing more and more often, involving high-levels of drug and alcohol-induced violent behaviour and while this may not have been the case with this boy, who even the officers attending stated never once was actually abusive or violent towards them, it was extremely difficult to contain him, with the level of drugs that were in his system.

Byron Bay Police have seen a far higher level of these sorts of incidents than in most other areas of NSW and their lack of police numbers for this region has led to a higher than normal incidence rate of assaults and injuries to local police and to them also having work shifts far longer than would be conducive to having alert police, capable of responding to situations without being tired, or exhausted. Of course then there is the fact that so many assaults against local police would also see way too many of these officers suffering from trauma and mental health issues as a result.

What was glaringly obvious throughout the hearing, was the lack of training and education for NSW police to be able to recognise and respond to the kinds of incidents they see, as far as those suffering from mental health disorders, disabilities, and dealing with alcohol and other drug-affected people. Police also need better training in how to speak with people in the first instance and throughout incidents such as this, with clear commands that would be understood by anyone. And finally, just one day a year of training in weaponry is also obviously not enough, they need far better training in how and when weapons are productive and not counter-productive, as they were in this instance.

While this incident was horrific, for the boy and his family, the police involved and our community as a whole, what needs to happen from here, is that we move on as a community, recognising the extremely difficult job that local police here have. We need to recommend that the NSW Police should be reviewing their use of weapons, their training and education of their officers in mental health, disabilities and AOD, and their responses to incidents like this. The NSW Police service seriously need to review the lack of numbers of police in this region and their ridiculously long working hours and make sure that these officers and others who experience incidences like this, are professionally supervised with regard to their own mental health and well-being and have the supports needed to deal with the kinds of high-level and often drug-induced violence that is so rife in Byron Bay. And one final observation is that police should also be looking towards quite specific training with regards to young people. Youth do not respond in the same way as adults and police need to seriously review the way in which they speak with young people and in particular, any actual commands given to them need to be precise, clear and in simple language that potentially even highly impaired young people would also understand. Not just those who may be intoxicated, but potentially also those who may turn out to have Aspergers like the young 16 year old boy in this incident. If all police spoke with everybody, with very clear, concise commands, possibly needing to be restated identically more than once, and if they treated everyone as if they may have a disability such as Aspergers, or a mental health disorder such as anxiety, that impaired their cognitive understanding or their ability to easily actually hear what is being said to them, then maybe incidents like this may not happen.

I would like to thank Byron Shire Mayor Simon Richardson and also the Councillors who supported assisting with funding to attend the LECC hearing and I hope this report assists to have both Council and the community understand the incident, the process of the LECC and the hearing itself. I am happy to make myself available to answer any questions that may arise from this report. It was an extraordinary experience, to witness this LECC hearing and I have the utmost faith in the LECC process and believe that the Chief

Commissioner Hon Michael Adams QC is a man of absolute integrity and the findings will reflect the entire process.

Nicqui Yazdi
Mob: 0402013177
Email: nicquiyazdi@yahoo.com.au

The LECC Hearing report from James Wright and further personal insights from Nicqui Yazdi are contained in the following pages (the updates which were written from the hearing and published on local social media pages).

Police incident - 11th Jan 2018 at Lateen Lane and subsequent LECC hearing: Report by James Wright

Sequence of events -

The understood sequence of events is as follows:

Around 1:00 am the victim (AO)'s mother makes a phone call to the Police to alert them that her 16 year old son is missing.

At around 2:00 am a phone call is made to the Byron Bay Police Station from a young man who works at Nomads Backpackers known as Witness 1 (W1) he tells police that there is a man who is naked, screaming and won't move on.

At roughly 2 am the first police car arrives at the lane from Johnson St and the police officers PO-D and PO-E alight, the officers are pointed down the lane to find AO laying on the ground some distance away.

The victim gets to his feet and walks toward the officers. It is debated what happens after that, but it is generally accepted that the first contact was not of a professional attitude. The first known words said to AO according to the officer himself, were "calm down or you'll get a gobful of this" (PO referring to OC (Capsicum) spray).

Shortly afterwards the OC spray was set off twice by PO-D. The administration of OC spray was unsuccessful to restrain AO.

Through the analysis of CCTV from the lane, the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC) determined that a second police car arrived 22 seconds after the first car.

PO-B and PO-C exit the car and PO-B immediately turned back to grab a long Baton from the Passenger side car door after seeing the OC spray.

Shortly after the Officers in the second car alight PO-E pulls the trigger on his taser, it has a brief immediate effect. At the end of the first taser round (5 sec) AO gets up from the

ground and the taser is set off again. In the Taser cam video it can be heard that the weapon is set off a third time, but it is alleged that the connections were broken and did not administer a shock to the victim.

After a series of strategic baton strikes AO is finally on the ground, PO-B is above the victim on the side path, PO-C is attempting to restrain AO's legs, PO-D is positioned at the victim's arms and PO-E is at the torso with one leg in-front of AO and the other on his abdomen.

While restrained by the 4 officers AO is hit with a baton in the legs, arms and abdomen a total of 19 times 17 of those are from PO-E. Those strikes are debated to be excessive force, which was the reasoning for the LECC hearing.

AO is finally restrained after a scuffle to place two sets of handcuffs on him, and is eventually picked up and placed in the back of the second car.

The victim arrives at the police station and is placed in the holding dock at approximately 2:42 am, he is coerced out of the car with water and is left in the dock until the ambulance arrives.

He was never given a blanket to cover himself or given water which he repeatedly asked for before and during the incident.

Points Of Interest

- a. The Police officers were 8.5 hours into a 12 hour shift at the time they attended the scene.
- b. The attending police officers were not aware that AO's mother had rung the Police around 1am. And this was never mentioned in the LECC hearing.
- c. The call to attend the scene never stated that AO was displaying aggressive behaviour.
- d. AO was never given water or a blanket at the police station because the Duty Sergeant determined that AO may become a. Water intoxicated and b. Strangle himself with the blanket. Additionally AO may charge if the holding cell door is opened
- e. The OC spray administered on AO was expired
- f. It is believed that AO received a total of 22 baton strikes 17 of which are being questioned as excessive force, to be determined by the LECC
- g. AO was 16 years old at the time considered under law to be a child.

The Use Of Taser

During the hearing the use of a Taser was questioned many times, I became quite interested with the training in the use of a taser. This became a focal point for me as it was suggested that a Taser should not have been used and that AO received multiple firings of the taser.

The NSW police force Use of Conducted Electrical Weapons (TASER) document gave

valuable insight although it was clear that some areas were vague. In section 8 (Criteria to discharge a Taser) of the manual it states:

“The Taser may be discharged at the discretion of the Taser User after Proper assessment of the situation and the environment to:

- Protect human life
- Protect yourself or others where violent confrontation or violent resistance is occurring or imminent
- Protect and officer(s) in danger of being overpowered or to protect themselves or another person from the risk of actual bodily harm
- Protection from animals

When considering the discharge of a Taser, officers should consider all tactical options available to them in the Tactical Options Model.”

The Taser had only been set off after the use of OC spray, it was determined that the OC spray had been ineffective because it had expired. Previous to the use of either weapon no baton use or clear efforts to verbally communicate with AO were made. Sections 8.2 (Taser Use Restrictions) says that a taser should not be used in any mode. Part v. “against passive non-compliant subjects who are exhibiting non-threatening behaviour which may include:

- a. Refusing to move or offering little or no physical resistance
- b. Refusing to comply and police instructions
- c. Acting as a dead weight or requiring an officer to lift, pull, drag or push them in order to maintain control”

Part xiv. “ on an elderly or disabled subject(s)”

Part xv. “On a child or subject(s) of particularly small body mass”

All witnesses never allege that AO was violent, the Police officers only took measures to establish the name of the victim at the end of the incident and never asked his age, while part xv. of the manual is unclear, AO was 16 and i considered a child under the eyes of the law.

As with all use of force the suspect should be given reasonable time to comply. In the Taser video we see that the time between the first and second firing was quite close and may not have been enough time for the Officers to allow AO to comply.

Questions arising

I heavily question the NSW Police Force around their lack of Clinical Supervision of Police officers in active general duty, Mental Health First Aid training, and Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) education. I also question design choices in the police station.

1. It seems clear to myself that additional training is needed. This would increase the skill of police officers that are in active general duty, and allow them to make more educated and conscious decisions, on how to approach suspects at a scene and also how to care for people that are detained. Why are they not getting this already?

2. It is a legal requirement for all staff working in the community sector directly with at risk people to undertake clinical supervision. This requirement is in place to reduce the risk of acquiring vicarious trauma in their workplace. To me it seems that there is not enough of a

system in place for police officers who would undoubtedly be acquiring trauma every time they attend a scene such as this one.

3. AO was potentially at risk of hyperthermia (elevated body temperature due to failed temperature regulation) in the police station, he had been sweating profusely and was clearly overheating as he had taken his clothes off, he was asking for water and remained naked in the holding dock of the police station for over an hour. The police officers would have been able to give AO a blanket and Water had the cell door been designed with a small service door. These holding cells are designed with clear perspex walls and doors to enable active supervision of someone while detained. Why no service door to pass through water and blankets?

Additionally to these I have some questions about the Incident and the Hearing as it seems there was some key failures from the police officers that night.

4. Why was it not recorded that a mother had called around 1am stating that her 16 year old son was missing, and why weren't the attending police officers aware of this?

5. Why didn't the police officers take any steps to try and calm AO with words, or to determine his name and age?

6. Why did none of the other 3 police officers question PO-E's actions while on the scene? Out of the 4 police officers PO-E has spent the most time in the police force, did the others not speak up because of his seniority?

Conclusion

In my own mind I believe this incident to have been one that was a ticking time bomb. There are many things that have played into this. The lack of training, the frequency of similar scenes and the high rates of police in the area being injured, the length of time that those officers had been on duty, the culture of the town, the lack of communication between the police officers while in that lane.

As a young person and a resident of Byron Bay for 18 years, I find it both shocking and un-surprising in regards to what happened that night. I hope that steps can be made to prevent this sort of occurrence in the future and better training for the police regarding their interactions with young people.

I would like to thank Council for their assistance to attend this important hearing.

James Wright
Email: jameswright2481@gmail.com

UPDATES/INSIGHTS from Nicqui Yazdi - PUBLISHED ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND/OR IN MEDIA DURING THE LECC HEARING - The following two articles were written during the hearing and published at that time to inform the Byron community of what was happening, with the hope that this would also assist to stop the ongoing hateful social media campaign that had been waged by the community against police.

March 27, 2018 - A PERSONAL INSIGHT INTO THE LAW ENFORCEMENT CONDUCT COMMISSION HEARING INTO THE JAN 11 INCIDENT INVOLVING A 16 YEAR OLD BOY AND POLICE IN BYRON BAY - from Nicqui Yazdi, who has been attending the hearing in Sydney this week on behalf of the Mayor and Byron Community ~

Like everyone else, when I saw the ACA footage of the incident between a 16 year old naked boy and police in Byron in January, I was shocked and I wanted answers to how this could happen in our community and why it was that it was a month after this had taken place, yet it was the first we were hearing about it. Well unlike everyone else, this week I have been at the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission hearing in Sydney into this incident and have been given many of those answers and they have not been what I might have expected.

As a long-term youth worker in Byron, and someone who personally has the task of looking after the largest numbers of young people in our town, the more than 10,000 schoolies who come each year, as well as working with our own youth all year round for more than 10 years now, I was so affronted by what I had seen in that video, that the first thing I wanted to do, was to form an opinion on what that incident had been, I wanted to protect all of our young people, locals and visitors alike, from an incident like this ever happening again. But as someone who also works closely with police, I am also acutely aware of the kind of high stress work that faces them daily, and in particular, nightly, the terrible fall-out from the high levels of alcohol and drug issues that exist in our tiny former-haven, as their jobs have become so much harder the last 10 years, as the tourist numbers way outweigh residents on an ever increasing number.

There is no doubting that police in Byron have probably the hardest job in all of NSW, with probably the least supports, being that our Tweed/Byron Local Area Command is the farthest from Sydney and so often, like so many other issues in our town, they are left out when it comes to serious supports for our local police. There are way too many who are on stress-leave which accounts for 30% of our police force at any time, and at the moment, there are also 30 police who cannot strap on a gun, due to having been involved in traumatic incidents, or having sustained injuries. This leaves our community vulnerable and it leaves our police far less protected themselves, than they should be. And let's face it, this also leads to low moral among our front line workers, who's job it is, to keep our community safe.

But as is often the case, what we see and hear from the national media is often not quite what the truth of a matter is, it's also always over-sensationalised if it has Byron Bay in the title, and I have learned over the years where I have had to deal with this sort of media coming straight at me at times like Schoolies, that you have to weed through the quagmire of dirt, to find the truth, and in this case, I've learned that my instincts on this were right. The truth of this incident is a lot different to what I might have at first thought.

This week has been one of the hardest emotionally of my whole life. I have sat in the most serious court room that I have ever seen, with the largest number of lawyers, each

representing the police involved, witnesses, the family of the boy, all being seen over by a former high court judge, an extraordinary man, whose only interest is the truth and nothing but the truth and I have witnessed the saddest of stories unfolding before my eyes, the truth as to what happened in Byron Bay in the early hours of January 11 this year, when 'a 16 year old drugged naked boy with Aspergers, had a terrible run in with four local police'. But that sentence could also be reversed, it could be said this way, 'the terrible run in that police had with a 16 year old naked boy on drugs'. What I have learned is that there is nothing black and white about this incident, and there will be no winners from this LECC hearing either, not the family of this boy or our local police, nor will the stain of this incident be removed from our community in a hurry, in fact, this incident will haunt us for many years to come, in so many ways.

Firstly, as is often the case, the initial media frenzy over this incident only told one side of this story, it was a police beat up, and as always a beat up on Byron Bay itself. It only contained the briefest fact, that a 2 minute 50 second video had been taken of what appears to be the police beating a totally out of it 16 year old on drugs with batons, when he appears for most of it, to be on the ground and therefore one might assume that he was passive and should easily have been contained without such use of excessive force. You might also assume from the noise he is making that this is purely from the batons coming down on him. I made that assumption immediately myself. But in the same moment, I also thought that this was a drug-induced incident and one that the police face nightly in Byron, that puts their own lives at risk too. The truth to this story lies somewhere in between as I have learned in the last few weeks.

When I read only just over a week ago, that there was going to be a hearing in Sydney into this incident, I was mad as hell. I had written both a complaint to police and also a complaint to the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission in the very first instance after seeing the ACA story. I was angry that this had happened in our town and I wanted answers. So I was very angry when the LECC put out their media release on the hearing, just over one week before it was to happen and that it wasn't happening in our community, as I believed we needed to be given answers as a whole community. I immediately contacted them and aired my dissatisfaction on behalf of our community, that this process was not transparent, as it had excluded our community as a whole, being in Sydney and with no real notice to have our community represented. But I have since realised that if this hearing had happened in Byron, because of the passionate and caring nature of our local people, it could have been a lynch mob, so in the end, I am actually glad it has taken place in Sydney without any real fan fare other than an initial media scramble on the first day, as I can't now see how this would have been as serious and fair a process, if there had been hundreds of angry locals storming and protesting, if a suitable venue had been found in Byron. Yes, it is sometimes good to have all the facts before passing judgement and I have more than had my eyes and mind opened through this process of the LECC hearing.

When notice of the hearing first came to light, I immediately contacted our Mayor Simon Richardson, as he and I had already had communications about this incident over the last month and had planned meet with the police to discuss it. I then started a gofundme campaign to at least send a few people to the hearing, so that our town could have some kind of representation to collect those answers that the community as a whole were screaming for. In a matter of days we raised enough money to send two people down, and others were offered to come, but when we learned that this hearing could go on for days, it meant that council couldn't shuffle a staff member around at such short notice, so Simon contributed to this attendance from the Mayoral Discretionary Funds and I contacted other youth workers and community workers who unfortunately couldn't take indefinite days off

work either, so in the end it came down to myself and a young man I mentor, a local 22 year old, and we both came to Sydney this week to sit in on this hearing and prepare a report for the community of Byron.

We went to Tweed the week before the hearing and had a long meeting with our local Tweed Byron LAC Commander Wayne Starling. Wayne is a very good man and someone I personally greatly admire both as a human and as a police officer, he too has a passion for young people and has personally run indigenous youth leadership programs for many, many years. He briefed us on what form the hearing would take and made it his personal mission to make sure that we were also looked out for while we were here, and on the very first morning, he took us for breakfast and prepared us even further for what was to come. He of course is here to make sure his men are safe and supported through this process and he has gone above and beyond to watch over them and has even brought a psychologist for them, who has been here the entire duration. I have no doubt that this must be the hardest thing he has ever had to face in his many years in the police force. The police officers involved in this incident are not in good shape, they are devastated and clearly remorseful over what happened. They are not bad men, they are men who have chosen to give their work lives to protecting our community and trying to keep the peace in what is far from a peaceful place any longer. I too feel deep distress for these men and their families, some of their wives are here, a sister, a father and they are all sitting through something I am sure they never thought would happen to them. No one is sitting here casting blame, even the family of this boy agree that what has happened in this incident is beyond any one person's blame, it is a situation that has arisen due to abnormal circumstances and all the family want to see, is that yes, justice is served, but that changes are made to ensure that police have better training, so that nothing like this happens to another child like their son. As yet, they have not instigated any charges against police, they too are just witnesses to the process of the LECC.

As we walked into the LECC hearing court on Monday morning, the very first person to find us and make contact, was the father and brother of the 16 year old boy. They told me straight away that they were grateful we were here and that this boy's Mum had actually contributed to our gofundme campaign as they wanted to make sure we got here. We have sat directly behind them the entire duration, spent time with them outside of the hearing, on breaks, lunch and at the end of the days and we have formed a bond with them on behalf of our community, a place they dearly love and they hope to bring their boy back to in the near future, so that he can heal from this incident, but more importantly they want to help heal Byron too and plan that when he is ready, their son will come and speak with the community about what happened to him.

But we are also here to support our local police, yes, that's right, these men are local people, with local families and we came with an open mind, no judgements and were prepared to let this hearing unfold in its natural course, as it was very obvious from the moment we all stepped into that daunting room, that we were all in this together, the family, the police, the lawyers, the witnesses, there are no winners or losers here, we are all just a part of a big tragedy that none of us want to see ever happen again.

Here are the basic facts in a nutshell. A 16 year old boy with Aspergers was holidaying with his family in Byron Bay. They went to dinner and afterwards he asked to go for a walk. His parents saw no reason for him not to, and he went off and was in constant contact with them until around midnight, when he no longer answered his phone, so at around 1am his mother called the police to say that her son was missing. During those few hours, this 16 year old has been given two tabs of acid by a group of young people who told him they

were from the Gold Coast. He had no idea what acid was and became increasingly disoriented, distressed and has over-heated and taken his clothes off. He was upset with god for doing this to him, so he paced up and down, screaming to his god, asking why he had done this to him. This is witnessed by around a dozen people in a back laneway of town. At around 2am due to the noise this young man was making and his distressed state, various people called the HLO hotline and police and police attended within minutes, two cars, four officers, and just minutes later, a terrible scene had taken place and this young man was in police custody and was taken to the police station. He was later transported to the Tweed Heads Hospital and his parents were contacted by the hospital a little after 4am. Those are the basic facts. But the truth is a much longer story and that is what has been unfolding through this hearing in Sydney this week.

Here is where we need to take a step back and look at what has happened to Byron police recently. They have faced ever-increasing issues with drug-fuelled revellers, and in just the last few months a few incidents have led them to attempt to introduce new measures to protect themselves from the high number of injuries they are receiving attending these sorts of incidents. On Christmas Day at the lighthouse they had a scene unfold that must have been horrific for them, a naked drug-fuelled man dragged a police officer out of a police vehicle and then he hurled himself into the windscreen of the car, smashing it. He was almost impossible to contain. This incident led to new measures including having to have four police attend such call-outs in the future, as the phenomenal strength of some people when on drugs, has meant that just two officers are not enough to contain these people and that they now also have to keep the doors of their police vehicles locked until they have been able to properly assess the scenes they go to. There have been a number of these sorts of incidents just in the last few months.

So, in the early hours of January 11, the police arrived in the laneway, seeing a naked young man, who appeared to them to have been on drugs and who was extremely agitated, pacing up and down, yelling to the sky and to them and did not initially respond to their commands and all they saw was the potential that someone was going to get hurt. The two police vehicles arrived in the laneway 22 seconds apart, this has been ascertained from CCTV footage taken in the lane. By the time the first officer from the second car alights the vehicle, one of the first two officers to the scene was administering capsicum spray and as the second officer, in the passenger side of the second car scrambled over through the drivers side door, as he could not get his own door to unlock, the taser is fired the first of three times within 10 seconds. Both of the officers of the second car join the first two and they attempt to contain this young man, who is now screaming even more having been sprayed and tasered. They had no time to assess what had come before they had arrived, they just followed the commands of the first two officers, tried to get this young man onto the ground, but as all four police have explained over and over, this boy was sweating profusely, he was extremely slippery and therefore their efforts to contain him in any way were fruitless, and this boy keeps standing, no matter what they do, he isn't following commands to get down on the ground, he isn't producing his hands so that they can cuff him, he isn't able to follow even these simple commands in any way, so the horrific scene unfolds that we have all seen in the video footage. Was there excessive force used, maybe, but that is not our place to make that judgement, that has to be done under the guidance of the LECC, once they have all of the facts in front of them.

This hearing has been horrendous for every single person in the room, but none more than the family and the officers involved. But one thing that is clear from what has been shown so far, is that NSW police are not adequately trained to deal with mental health and

high-level drug situations, nor would it be easy to determine between the two, at such short intervals as they have when they first arrive at a scene like this.

But what came after this, is just as terrible, once they got this boy back to the station and that too needs proper investigation and although the hearing will inevitably finish this week, it will be many more months of investigations by the LECC behind the scene, going over all the facts presented and more facts they will continue to gather, until there will be an outcome from this hearing. In the meantime, all we can do as a community is wait and try not to form judgements over this case. If anything we need to look at how to bring in changes that would see incidences like this reduce in our community, we need to look at better training for police, we need to look at the drug and alcohol issues in our town and we need to work together to make this tragic incident a catalyst for positive change on so many levels.

I took this on because I couldn't move past it. I have been asking for many years for better relationships between the police and our local youth and I am determined to make that happen, as are the local police. We do intend to work together to create a safer environment for police and the community as a whole, but this is something we all need to work together on. Byron Bay is drowning under the tide of increasing tourism numbers, increasing drug and alcohol problems, and increasing violence. This is not just a police problem, it is a community problem and the way forward is a long road, but one we must all travel together.

In the coming months we will hold a public forum in Byron to learn the outcomes of this LECC hearing, but we will also hold a forum to look at actions to take from here, to address all of the problems that Byron has. We need to make this community a safer place for our local youth and our local people, but also for the visitors who come here, even if they are a major part of the problem. Because among those visitors, are boys like this 16 year old and his family, who love Byron, but they are now scarred over a terrible and tragic incident that seems to be no one's fault, except the culture of the party-town image of Byron, where Gold Coast young people have given drugs to a boy with Aspergers, that led to one of the most terrible things that has ever befallen our community... and our local police and this holidaying family.

Please, stop the judgements and let's start to work together to make this incident matter. Byron Bay is a beautiful place and we can't let an incident like this leave a permanent scar, we need to heal our community and we need to do this as a collective.

The hearing continues today and possibly tomorrow. In the coming weeks, I will be preparing a report on the hearing for our Mayor and to be made public to our community, and also recommendations to go to the LECC, the Minister of Police and the NSW Government, on how to make sure that incidents like this never happen again here.

Nicqui Yazdi

March 29, 2018 - FINAL UPDATE FROM DAY FOUR OF THE LECC HEARING - from Nicqui Yazdi who was present at the hearing on behalf of the Byron community.

Unfortunately, I had to leave the hearing half way into the final day yesterday, to catch a plane back home. The hearing still continued for another two hours after I left, but I have

read the transcripts from the hours after I left and would like to update you on those final few days and also what now happens from here.

Firstly, although the initial hearing has finished, the investigation into this incident will be ongoing, for possibly a few more months, depending on what more information may come to light, also gathering of further documentation that came to light during the hearing, possibly any more witnesses, or video, records, statements etc. Plus it will also be important for the Commissioners to access information on procedures for training of officers in weapons, records of training of the officers involved, what training is available to them for alcohol and other drugs and also what they maybe should have that they don't already, and possibly mental health too. There will be many things they will be going over, before they make their final deliberation. This could also be further interviews with witnesses or others, the ambulance service, hospital, questions regarding drug testing need to be answered too, and actions at the station after the boy was taken there, and pulling apart all of the hearing testimonies, going over them to see what else may come from reflecting on what was said, or not said, addressed or not addressed. It is a very big task this commission has, to make sure that whatever recommendations come from this, will bring about the necessary changes to make sure that incidents like this in the future are handled in a far better way than happened to this boy. And it may still be necessary for another hearing to take place, and while they all hope this is not the case, it will depend on what they deem necessary through their on-going investigation of this incident.

It is fair to say that these police did not have enough training to adequately manage this situation. It is also fair to say that it was an extreme incident, where their state of mind would have been to have to react quickly to contain the situation, and that rational thinking is not always possible in such a fast escalating situation. It is also very clear to me that there was not enough clear communication between the officers themselves, or from them to this boy and that is very important as far as I am concerned and I am sure the commission will find this too, that one thing that must be impressed on police, is the need that very clear, concise, but also consequential information must be given to people in situations like this, if they are to ever de-escalate situations like this, in a much faster and less violent manner than this incident incurred. The very first thing that was said to this boy by police was "Calm down, or you'll get a gobfull of this" this is not a clear instruction, he would most likely not have even known what was being said to him, he would most likely not have known that this officer was holding a can of OC spray (capsicum spray), a 'gobfull of this' means nothing. Yet a statement such as "I am here to help you, but if you don't calm down, I will have to use capsicum spray and you don't want that, it is painful, so please calm down and listen to me so I can help you", would have been much better to possibly help this boy understand what the consequences could be and to also let him know that they were there to help him. In my mind, I also go back to those images of police we all remember from childhood, where they put a hand up, and not a can of capsicum spray, and I see that as a far less threatening image in my mind, that old "stop in the name of the law" type scene from cartoons. Just putting an open palm and straightened arm and saying simply 'STOP, I AM HERE TO HELP YOU' could have been enough to stop this whole thing from happening. Or it may have not, but we will never know.

What I have learned, is that there seems to be no real list of actions that they should have taken on this night, that could have stopped the whole thing right from the start, that would have seen them detaining the boy, without injury, and that is the saddest part of this, as if they had been able to get him to understand that they wanted to help him, then none of what we now know happened, would have happened at all. I am talking a list of actions to deal with drug-intoxicated people or those with mental health issues. Well at least if there

is, then that was not followed. These officers have said again and again that they were all just working from their vision of what was happening and their own perceptions, but they did not communicate with each other properly, or with this boy, there is confusion over who is doing what with handcuffs, and at no time is one officer or any of them actually leading the actions happening, they are just following their own concepts, trying to personally judge who is where and who has what, hands, feet, etc, but not clearly talking to each other about it, or being directed by someone with a clear view of what each officer is doing. "Communication is the key" is a term we all use so often these days, yet for these officers, there was no real communication and that could have been the key to making this incident a far less violent and extreme experience for them all, the boy included obviously.

Another thing that came out yesterday was the extremely long shifts these officers have. They had been on duty since 6pm and their shift that night was meant to finish at 6am, yes, that's right a 12 hour shift! They however finished at 6.30am, that would have been a very long twelve and a half hours for these men. But when the incident took place, they had already been on duty for eight and a half hours! I find that so wrong, and I cannot imagine doing a shift as a police officer for even that amount of time, let alone 12 hours as being an acceptable time for these men, in this high stress job, to be carrying out their duties in any way properly, if they were to become impaired due to tireless and exhaustion and a number of times, various officers mention that they became exhausted during their interaction with this boy and the struggles that ensued in order to contain, cuff and detain him. I find it absolutely a failure of the NSW Police, to not give these officers shifts that are within an acceptable time period of normal working hours for anyone. Eight hours should be the maximum time of any police shift. That did not come out in this hearing until yesterday afternoon, and I am sure it must have shocked many in the room to hear that.

The use of OC spray is also controversial, as is the use of tasers and one thing that we are doing ourselves (James and I) is looking at what the protocols are for use of both of these police weapons, because it is clear from what we have seen and what we have already been able to determine from our own research, is that there are many instances where the use of both of these items is not recommended and in fact can cause a situation to escalate, or put the people at risk who are being sprayed or tasered. Of course the guidelines for use are individual, so we will be looking at these separate issues as there is clearly some guidelines that even as lay-people we can see are clearly wrong, as they are not based on individual cases, and one thing I believe is clearly lacking, is the difference between adults and youth and in this case this was actually a child of 16, clearly not an adult, but these police said again and again that they could not determine his age but that he was young. I will be recommending that the police look at introducing specific guidelines for YOUTH, that is people under 25 years of age and I base this on my own many years of working with youth this age and my own personal study into the effects of all manner of things on young people of this age, including that they have a reduced response time and that even for them to understand commands, due to the fact that their pre-frontal cortex area is still forming and they cannot reason in ways that adults can, and that they have an inability to put the 'breaks on' like adults can, this of course will lead to far different actions and responses from them and it must be taken into consideration in police training. I have personally worried for years about the mounted police that come for Schoolies, as I know that if those horses took off in a hurry into a crowd of teens, rather than a crowd of adults, then the response times for teens to understand what is coming at them and move, is going to be delayed, especially if they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Was there excessive force used in this incident, yes, I believe there was, by just one officer, and this is backed up by at least one other officer who was there that night, who really did question why the baton was being used in the way it was and the number of times. But what also is clear, is that none of the other officers told him to stop, or communicated anything to him in any way that would have made him question what he was doing. But he also never told the boy what he was doing, in that, he never said anything to him in the way of "Please stop moving, or I will have to use the baton again" which could have made all the difference on this occasion, it could have helped this boy to stop, as he was absolutely trying to get away from all of the sources of pain that were inflicted on him that night, and each time the baton came down, that happened. Yet police are trained that baton use is meant to stop someone, bring them to the ground, or to make them drop an arm, or drop to their knees, so that they can be contained etc, but on some occasions baton strikes just don't get the reaction that the police want and in this case it was clear that they were trying to get him to stop moving, so they could cuff him properly, but the baton strikes just made him move more, react to the pain and scream, or try to move away from the source of the pain, so I think we also need to look closely at the use of these weapons and absolutely there must be better training on these, as the one officer who uses the baton again and again reasons that he felt he needed to, yet others argued it was not necessary. Yes, there are some major issues on this point.

Over the coming weeks, we will compile our report for Council and the community, and we will also be compiling a list of recommendations that we believe may assist police, from training, to communication commands, to some more specialised information on drug intoxicated persons, and also look at guidelines and packages that may already be available that could help them to make clearer judgements in the future.

We will also work on the idea that yes, it is time that there was a clear distinction between actions to adults and actions to YOUTH, as that is a major issue in our own community, how police interact with young people and particularly in a situation like this, as I personally believe this entire incident could have been contained in the first 10-30 seconds, yes that short of time, if this boy had been properly assessed and if he had been spoken to in a manner that he would have understood, even in the erratic condition he was in at the time. And while there may have been no way for these officers to ascertain that they were dealing with a 16 year old boy with aspergers, who if they had spoken to him properly in the first instance they may have got a much better reaction from him, they of course were not to know he had aspergers, but it makes me wonder if they did treat all young people in agitated, intoxicated, or distressed states, as if they were all a boy with aspergers, then they may realised that someone who is so clearly distressed would possibly be thinking in the first instance "they are here to help me" and I do think that this is exactly what this boy thought, as the officers all said that when they arrived, he had been laying down, but got up when he saw them, and he then seemed to 'charge' at them, but I personally think yes, he saw them arrive and probably thought "god thank you, the police will help me" as this young man was calling to his god to help, and being that he has aspergers, he is also an inner justice warrior himself and in his mind he is like a police officer himself, and even as irrational as he was under the influence of acid, he would have thought the police were there to help him. It is a pity that the police, fearing that he was charging at them and that they themselves may get hurt, did not immediately give and speak clear commands to him, like a hand in the air and not just a can of OC and the command to "calm down or you'll get a gobfull of this" which was a threat, not a helpful statement like 'I AM HERE TO HELP YOU, PLEASE STOP THERE AND TELL ME WHAT IS HAPPENING TO YOU or TELL ME WHAT IS WRONG" as he may very well have immediately said "thank you officer, I need help thank god you are there", who knows, but I

truly believe a different outcome could have come, with a different initial contact. But I definitely think we need to make some changes and they will come through this hearing.

I also think it is important for the community to understand that the police involved, and their supervisors, are all so incredibly remorseful for what happened in this incident. I am not talking about 'remorse' from guilt, I am talking about the fact that none of them would have ever wished for a situation like this to happen in the first place. And every single one of them has had to go through this incident now literally hundreds of times. They have had to watch the video footages of their actions when the boy was being restrained and cuffed as well as the taser video, hundreds of times, they were played again and again and every second of video was examined at length, who was where, where their feet were, their hands, their knees, where the boy was, what he was doing, saying, what was said by them, who said it, an entire transcript was made of those videos, and they have had to pull it apart second by second and be questioned over it again and again and again. They have had to give their reasonings for every step and every breath they took in that incident. And while they were reticent when they first sat in the dock, and they did, as legally they should have, they all gave their objection to being there in the very first instance (this is a legal requirement) they mostly just gave into the process, and even fearing for themselves, their jobs, their reputations and obviously more, they mostly answered honestly, yet there are a few bones of contention, but the truth did come out, a clear picture was given of the incident step by step, mostly, and I think everyone who was at the hearing now understand that incident, the actions of the boy and the police actions, in a far better light than just the sensationalised media attention it got.

I still stick to my belief that these police are not bad men, even if I question the actions of the one officer who used the baton so many times, I also now know that he was effected in just the first few minutes by the OC spray 'over spray' which gave him immediate discomfort and he struggled to breath as he has asthma and he coughed til he dry reached, which lasted a number of minutes and was witnessed by bystanders, he also accidentally touched the barbs of the taser which was still on, while trying to change the cartridge essentially tasing himself and he was already eight and a half hours into a 12 hour shift! And it does make me wonder that if he had been only on his second hour of an eight hour shift, if he may have been more aware, more alert, and more conscious to actions and reactions that night.

I can also tell you that this boy and his family also want to see changes, so that incidents like this are better managed in the future. They, as a family, are collecting their thoughts, on the incident itself and what effects this has had on the entire family since, both as a collective, but also individually, and I did speak with the Dad and brother about the powerful benefits of doing this, not only for themselves, but quite possibly for the police involved too and for the NSW police as a whole. I told them about my own experience at witnessing how powerful 'victim impact' sessions with young offenders and those who have been a victim to their actions, can be and how healing, so that maybe they can tell their story and that the officers can know too, what the impact this incident has had on this boy and his family, as it has been a terrible thing they have gone through and that could also be very beneficial for these police officers, in their own future lives and work, and for others to know too, as I truly believe that the sort of impacts incidents like these have on victims and their families, when given to those who they believe have wronged them, is incredibly insightful and educational, as heart wrenching as this process can be for both parties, as it adds much to their remorse and humanity and to making sure that they know and understand the consequences of their actions. And while we are talking about police who thought they were doing their job to the best of their ability under a totally abnormal

situation, I believe this would be a good process for them, as it may give them insights that may change their behaviours and understandings in the future. I actually think it could change all of their lives, the family and the boy too, but of course, only when they are ready. The road to recovery for all involved will be a very long one, but I truly hope that everyone can move forward from this, no matter how long it takes, and that life can go on again, and that they all heal from this terrible thing that happened to them.

I'd like to thank those who helped to get James and I to Sydney for this hearing, although it really was at times a horrendous thing to sit in the gallery and observe, it was also highly educational for me and for James and it has given us much food for thought in our own work with young people and how we will be able to better work with the local police on actions to create a safer community and a better relationship with local youth, who are always at risk from the massive drug availability here, and from being involved in an incident like this, and I can also tell you that already, prior to this hearing, the police have agreed to become a partner on our BUDDI Local Drug Action Team and the Youth Leadership Program we will be launching in a few months. We do have some very good police here, but they are understaffed, have way too many with injuries and the LECC told me yesterday morning that they have already recognised this from this hearing, and they will be making recommendations that Byron is given better police numbers that more accurately cover the needs of our little town, with such big tourism numbers, festivals and of course the every week influx which adds so much more work than is reasonable for a small residential population as Byron, so yes, good things are already coming from this bad thing that happened in our town.

Our report will be made public, as our community deserves to know where we should go from here. As will the LECC findings and they will be released publicly and to our community in a special meeting, in the next few months, in Byron Bay.

I hope that this has further added to my last report on the hearing, and that it gives the community a little more peace of mind that only good can come from bad in relation to this.

I wish you all a happy break the next few days... and I too will be taking some days off myself now, to recover from this very hard week, and to bring my mind back to where it needs to be to start to work on the positive actions that have already come and will continue to come, from this extraordinary LECC hearing. - Nicqui Yazdi

Nicqui Yazdi
Mob: 0402013177
Email: nicquiyazdi@yahoo.com.au