

LIFE OUT SA

Each year, on average, 133 people* die in workplace incidents across Australia and tens of thousands are injured.

Economically these translate into significant costs. But there are also hidden costs in terms of grief and loss and the long term effects for families, friends, workmates and the community.

These are the stories of just some of the families who have been impacted by workplace incidents in South Australia.

On the afternoon of 9 May 2006,

The explosion killed 3 men and could be heard as far away as Gladstone and Laura.

an explosion ripped through an explosives factory, Quin Investments, in a remote spot in Beetaloo Valley, 10 kms from Gladstone in the mid north of SA killing three men, Matthew Keeley, 22, Darren Millington, 45 and Damian Harris, 30, and injuring two more, Damien John and Cameron Edson. The explosion was so large that it could be heard as far away as Gladstone and Laura.

Since this day, life has been very difficult for the families of the victims as they have tried to piece together what happened on the day, to grieve and come to terms with living without their loved ones.

All of them can remember exactly what they were doing on that day and how they attempted to push through the protective silence that was put up while police and emergency services workers tried to establish what had happened and search for survivors. The waiting around was traumatic. So too was dealing with the media and their brazenness in chasing them for photos and information.

Families were initially told that the three victims were “missing” rather than “killed” and this made closure difficult, with family always hoping, however irrationally, that the victims would soon be “found” and life would return to normal.

The whole experience has highlighted the importance of safety at work. As a result of the accident, Jane Keely has become a Health and Safety representative at her workplace. “People don’t realise how important workplace safety is. They often think of safety in relation to things such as driving fast cars but in the workplace situation people have just gone out to make a living – they deserve to be safe.... People often complain about the paper work in OHS but just do it... and don’t complain about the protocols.”

Memories of Darren, Matthew, and Damian are strong and reading them puts the human face on workplace incidents and helps us to understand the grief and the pain that lingers on.

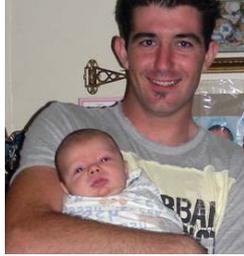
Funerals were difficult, as there were no bodies to see, to touch and there were delays. Although the funeral for Damian Harris was 2 weeks after the incident it was 4 weeks before the authorities confirmed that all the bodies were recovered and 6 weeks before they could have the other funerals. At August 2011, over 5 years from the incident, appeals are still before the Industrial Court as to who is ultimately responsible for the explosions and consequently the deaths and injuries. Until this occurs there is no final closure and this is very stressful for all concerned as there are jobs, fines and criminal charges that hinge on these decisions. It still doesn’t alter the ultimate outcome for the families: their men are still dead no matter what a court says.

But a tragedy like this in a small country town galvanises support with people coming with food so that according to Judith Millington, you didn’t have to cook for weeks!! Other people provided their personal support in many ways.

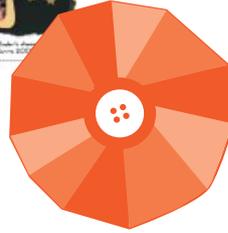
“We always felt at that time that we were surrounded by friends and people who had our welfare at heart. It is amazing how people express their support in different ways....Even the kids’ mates were great. At a time when it may have been easier to stay away, they’d come over after school and play football with the boys - sharing time and some of the food we’d been given, in essence giving them some reprieve from crying and thinking, just for the short time they were there.”

*“People don’t realize how important workplace safety is.”
Jane Keeley*

A tragedy like this in a small country town galvanizes support with people providing support in many ways.



Life for Mat was on “the up and up” at a time of the accident.



Matthew Keeley

Matthew Keeley was killed on 9 May 2006 in an explosion at Quin Investments, an explosives factory, situated in the Beetaloo Valley, 10 Kms from Gladstone in the mid north of SA.

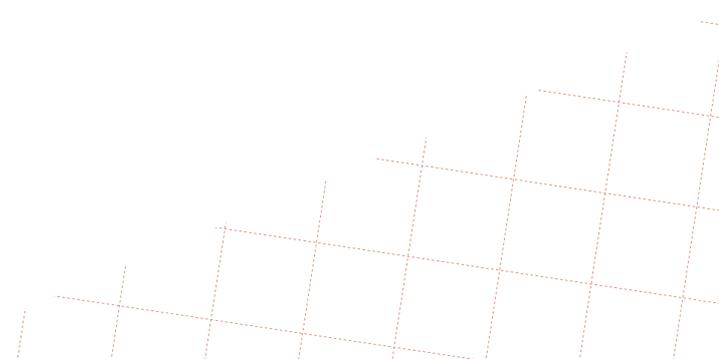
According to his mother Jane, life for Mat was on “the up and up” at the time of the accident. He and his partner Carly had just had Ethan whom he adored. Mat had been working with Quin Investments for only a few months having just moved from Roxby to Laura so that they could be closer to the extended family and have a more regular home life. Matthew was a talented footballer and followed Geelong in the AFL. He loved outdoor things like fishing, football and cricket. He was full of life and loved to socialise.

The family gave him a skydiving session for his 21st birthday and he loved it. Mat liked to be competitive, to be first to finish - something his mother Jane, now sees in young Ethan. Mat’s partner, Carly, remembers him as a loving, caring and fun loving person who lived for the moment.

Jane remembers the family holidays at Scales Bay when Mat was younger and how Mat, Carly and baby Ethan (only 5 days old) made the trip to join in again.

Jane Keeley has made scrapbooks of Matthew that highlight his interests and preserve the memories which are important for the family but especially for Ethan, Mat’s son who was only 4 months at the time of his death.

“Mat was a talented footballer and loved outdoor things like fishing and cricket. He was full of life and loved to socialise.”



He played every sport you can think of including tennis, football, and basketball. His hobbies included fishing- and more sport if he could find it.



Damian Harris, 30

Damian Harris was killed on 9 May 2006 in an explosion at Quin Investments, an explosives factory, situated in the Beetaloo Valley, 10 kms from Gladstone in the mid north of SA.

According to his mother Bev, Damian (also known as Butch) loved sport and it kept him going through the school years. He played every sport you can think of including tennis, football, and basketball. His hobbies included fishing - and more sport if he could find it.

***“My kids idolised him. His nephews idolised him, so from the very young to the very old knew Butchy Harris”.**
Brenton Prior*



Damian loved socialising but also enjoyed family gatherings and got on well with the extended family. He and his partner Leanne had just bought land and were building their first home.

Damian also got on well with members of the community particularly through the sporting clubs. He loved helping with young kids and coached cricket and football teams and encouraged his nephews too. At the time of his death he was the Football Club Captain.

“He was one of the best blokes you could ever wish to meet. He wasn’t scared to shed a tear if he had to and he would buy you a drink if you walked into the pub, and give you a ride somewhere, all you had to do was ask.”

Cameron Edson

<http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/sa/content/2006/51916116.htm>

Damian’s mother, Bev, remembers fondly the surprise party his mates organised for him the day after Christmas to celebrate his 30th birthday. He was chuffed that they would do such a thing but it was probably a testament as to how highly they thought of him. It was a fantastic day where everyone relaxed and enjoyed spending time together and acknowledging his special day.

Darren was a great conversationalist — he could “talk the leg off a chair”



Darren
Millington 45



We had so much together—we loved the river and sport, lazing around on a Saturday watching footy —simple memories.

Darren Millington was killed on 9 May 2006 in an explosion at Quin Investments, an explosives factory, situated in the Beetaloo Valley, 10 Kms from Gladstone in the mid north of SA. He was married to Judith and had two sons Rhys and Koby and a daughter Bailey. Darren and Judith had been together since they were at high school. Judith says that Darren, also known fondly as Milly, was a lovely person.

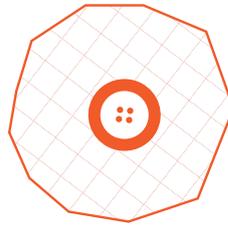
Sport and outdoor activities were a big part of Darren’s life and when he wasn’t playing, he enjoyed watching. He loved footy in particular, playing and being involved with his boys as an active member on the football club committee. He was also interested in cricket and in watching Bailey play netball. Darren always had time for things that the kids wanted. Darren had loved the river since he was a small child and he was a keen skier. The family had built a holiday shack on the river and spent a lot of time there. The kids loved it too.

According to Judith it’s been hard to bear her own grief and see your children grieving. Sadly Darren is going to miss out on seeing his kids grow up and share the big milestones with them - the girlfriends/boyfriends, the transitions to university or first job, marriages and grandchildren.

Some memories are “bitter sweet”; the boys played in two A grade football grand finals in 2009 and 2010 and they won - a victory that Milly and Butch had never experienced themselves and would have been very proud of. There have been so many exciting changes in the kids lives as they have grown into young adults but there is always a twinge of sadness as Darren has been robbed of the enjoyment and pride of this journey.



“He was everybody’s mate, always laughing, always smiling and out for a joke”.



Daniel's friends are now much more aware of safety issues. They realise that accidents can happen to them too.



Daniel Madeley, 18

Daniel Madeley was 18 and, according to his mother Andrea, “shining with confidence” when he lost his life in an horrific workplace accident on 5 June 2004. Danny was in his first year as an apprentice in the metal work industry. Andrea says he was in the right industry for his interests and skills. “He was gifted in making things out of steel and his number one hobby was doing up old cars, taking a wreck and making it look new again.” He’d been doing this sort of thing for some time, beginning with bicycles and then motor bikes before taking on the larger car projects.

On 5 June 2004 Daniel was working on a horizontal boring machine when his clothing got caught and he was dragged into the machine. He suffered massive injuries and died the next day. Daniel was Andrea Madeley’s only child and the grief is still with her. “I try to get on but it has scarred me. It hurts, everyday is hard; it’s like it happened yesterday.” Andrea is caught in a Catch 22: she works hard at remembering the things that she loved in Danny but this also drags her down.

Andrea remembers Danny as an adorable toddler who grew up to be a sensitive young man careful about what he said so that he did not hurt people’s feelings. He had dreams and aspirations and “the world was his oyster”. His self confidence was growing and he knew that hard work would get him where he wanted to go.

Daniel had a lot of good friends who still come over to see Andrea on the anniversary of his death. They are now much more aware of safety issues and Danny’s death has made them realise that they are not immortal: accidents can happen to them too. A few of these friends have since taken on safety roles in their own workplaces as has Danny’s uncle.

*“He was gifted in making things out of steel and his number one hobby was doing up old cars, taking a wreck and making it look new again.”
Andrea Madeley*



Max Logan 52

Max Logan was 52 years old when he lost his life in an horrific workplace accident in a sawmill in Kuitpo Forest. Max worked as a debarker operator where logs are stripped of their bark and turned into cleanskins. Part of the inlet to that work was a jack ladder and the loader loaded the logs on to this for the operators to manually feed the logs through. The in-feed had to be cleaned regularly and Max was doing this as he had done many times before when he overbalanced and was pulled into the machine and crushed.

***‘Max was hard but fair and “an all round good guy,” the rock of the family, a good mentor and the guy you went to if you needed advice’.
Keith Logan***

The impact on family, the community and workmates has been devastating. Max was an active outdoors man. He and his wife Edith owned a small farm and Max loved tending to the animals and the many chores around the property. He loved his 4WD and the trips they did like the one up the Birdsville track. He was a Level 1 football coach. According to his son Keith who played in this team, Max was hard but fair and “an all round good guy, the rock of the family, a good mentor and the guy you went to if you needed advice”.

For Edith the pain is ongoing and she believes will never go away. “You just have to learn to live with it... It’s lonely... life is not the same and never will be”.

For Max’s workmates it’s been 12 years now but some are still having ongoing problems due to what they saw on the day of the accident.

Edith’s message to all workers is to be careful and keep safe. Every workplace has its hazards so it’s important to be aware of these hazards. Think of the consequences on your family. It’s not good to have life taken away at any time let alone at work.

Every workplace has its hazards so it’s important to be aware of these.



Jack Salvemini 36



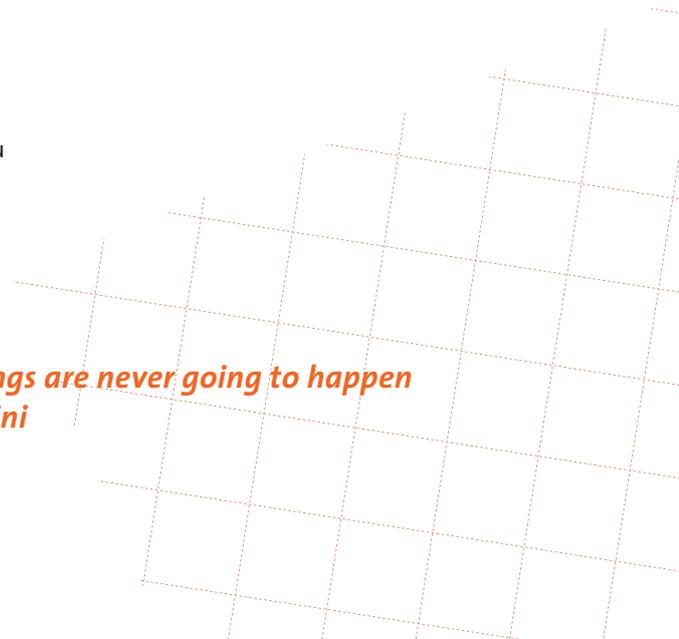
Jack Salvemini always wanted to work in the fishing industry despite the efforts of his father Lee to discourage him. So it was ironic that he died in 2005 doing the work he had actively chosen. Jack was on a shark boat in the Great Australian Bight when a rope flung out from a reel caught him around the neck and pulled him down over the spreader crushing him.

Jack was just a month short of his 37th birthday when he died. He is remembered fondly by his family including his 3 sisters and a brother – as loving his work and being happy. He dabbled in lots of different sports, and had lots of friends. “He loved the ladies too,” said his Mum Carol. She keeps a locket with a picture of Jack close to her heart. “It doesn’t come off,” she said.

“You think these things are never going to happen to you,” said his dad Lee. “I don’t think we’ll ever get over it. It’s nearly 6 years now and it (the grief) hasn’t changed. As you get older it gets worse... You take people for granted while they are with you, never expecting that you’d lose them. You don’t expect to lose your kids. When it happens you just can’t describe it.”

“A life cut short.”

“You think these things are never going to happen to you”. Lee Salvemini



Supporters



*** NOTIFIED FATALITIES STATISTICAL REPORT, 2009–10 (SafeWork Australia)**

<http://safeworkaustralia.gov.au/AboutSafeWorkAustralia/WhatWeDo/Publications/Documents/578/NotifiedFatalitiesStatisticalReport2009-10.pdf>