



QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE

STATEMENT OF WITNESS



Occurrence #: _____

Statement no.: _____

Date: **02/08/2022****Statement of**Name of witness: **COSTELLOE Matthew**Date of birth: [REDACTED] Age: [REDACTED] Occupation: **Police Officer****Police officer taking statement**Name: **COSTELLOE Matthew Edward**Rank: **Sergeant**

Reg. no.: [REDACTED]

Region/Command/Division: **Southern**Station: **Cunnamulla
Station****Statement:**

Matthew Costelloe states:

Current role and previous service history with the Queensland Police Service:

1. I was sworn into the Queensland Police Service ("QPS") in May 2009.
2. Prior to being sworn in, I began working in PoliceLink or Police Assistance Centre, as it was called at the time. I commenced there in June 2007.
3. I am currently a shift supervisor at the rank of Sergeant at Cunnamulla police station.
4. I have been at Cunnamulla since December 2020 and am coming to the end of my two-year tenure. At the end of my tenure, I'm not sure where my policing career will take me, I will definitely find it hard to leave, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in Cunnamulla, the relationships I've formed and the lifestyle I've built.
5. Prior to transferring to Cunnamulla, I worked as a shift supervisor Sergeant at Woorabinda and Rockhampton stations respectively. I was at Woorabinda from 2019 to July 2020 before transferring into Rockhampton to be with my partner and our two children. My partner was pregnant at the time and experiencing complications. If it was not for that I would not have left Woorabinda as I really enjoyed my time there.
6. From 2016 to 2019, I was a shift supervisor Sergeant at Mt Isa watch house, only leaving due my partner transferring to another police prosecutions office as there was no vacancy at Mt Isa after she completed her course.
7. From 2009 until my promotion in 2016, I worked in general duties in various locations such as Mt Isa, Doomadgee, Cairns, and brief deployments to other

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communities in the far north and western Queensland, including Yarrabah, Burketown and Normanton.

Observations and experiences as a QPS officer in Cunnamulla:

8. Historically, the relationship between the police and the community in Cunnamulla has not always been great, particularly with members of the First Nations community. In my experience, some First Nations community members have a level of distrust of police including and because of historical events of early colonial days as well as more recent events.
9. In particular, the First Nations community in Cunnamulla used to live at an area called 'the Yumba' which is approximately five kilometres to town. There was limited access to free/ running water or access to very basic facilities. The Yumba was surrounded by sewerage and those who lived on the Yumba were not allowed into certain parts of Cunnamulla. The last person moved off the Yumba and into Cunnamulla was in the early 1970s. The ABC produced a documentary about the experiences and times of those who lived on the Yumba. The documentary, I found was very confronting and upsetting, the documentary is called Out of Sight, Out of Mind.
10. There have also been more recent incidents that created poor relationships such as the Cunnamulla Riot on 1 January 2017. There was for example an incident of an off-duty police officer getting into a fight with a first nations community member.
11. More recently (in around December 2021) a video was released of a plain clothes police officer threatening to assault a First Nations male if he did not surrender to the police station which was filmed and released.
12. During my time here and working closely with our First Nations community I have found that the historical sentiment was one of distrust due to the events historical and recent as discussed above. There is also still a level of distrust due to the belief in the FN community that the police do not integrate with the community, that 'they're just blow ins,' and that they do not let the community see them as people. I believe this sentiment has changed more recently. This is due to the staff we have now are long term, they're invested in the community and regularly participate in community events and the community accept them not only as police officers but as part of the community.
13. Over the last eighteen months to two-years, the station has worked hard to bridge that cultural divide through implementing initiatives. Through these efforts and the relationships, they have created, I would now describe the relationship between the QPS and the community as exceptional.
14. Initiatives I've seen during my time include Blue Edge, Look to the Stars initiative, Blue light driving learner car, Blue light games trailer, Blue light discos, Blue light movie nights, community sport days and mentoring. Most of those initiatives target young people in the community.


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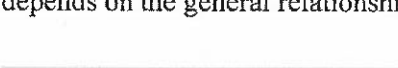
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15. We have also developed and participate in the Interagency Stakeholder Group, this group includes Paroo Shire Council, QPS, QAS, Cunnamulla Aboriginal Community of Health (CACH), Queensland Health, Education, Lifeline and Strong Families Strong Communities.
16. Strong Families Strong Communities is an initiative based off the Bourke Justice Reinvestment Program and involves a select group of stakeholders coming together either in meetings or on an adhoc basis when significant events occur to address incidents of domestic violence. The group aims to take a holistic approach to addressing incidents of DV to identify and address underlying factors contributing to DFV such as substance abuse, lack of accommodation etc. The group is led by QPS and Anita Wharton from Strong Families Strong Communities, without Anita I believe the group would struggle to function, her contribution and passion is second to none. We're hoping to revisit the Bourke Justice Reinvestment Program to capacity build. We're wanting to bring more stakeholders to the table and tackle issues outside of domestic violence that are creating issues in the community to work with all stakeholders to better the community. The biggest hurdle we've faced in trying to do this is the issues around sharing of information/confidentiality.
17. We are also implementing programs such as the cell-visitor program. We have currently identified a select number of volunteers from the community, mostly in stakeholder roles that are engaged in support services or diversion services. It is envisioned that they will attend the Cunnamulla Watchhouse to engage with persons in custody and act as a conduit between police and the First Nations community to better explain outcomes/investigations and to facilitate early intervention and provide support to those perpetrating domestic violence to achieve better outcomes, reducing domestic violence and reducing the over representation of first nations in the justice system.
18. We have several other initiatives for the wider community, including blue light shearing and other job initiatives, and blue light self defence programs for the women's group which again we're trying to implement to the entire community depending on the success/support for the program.
19. We also have an upcoming project that we have just received a grant for to deliver new artwork on a police vehicle which complements the Look to the Stars artwork which already wrapped one of our vehicles.
20. A local artist, Uncle Andrew Nelson is designing an artwork with input from the school that represents the many tribes surrounding Cunnamulla and their connection to the area.

Level of preparedness (culturally or otherwise) of QPS members who are newly posted to the community

21. In my experience, the level of preparedness is driven by individual officers, and it depends on the general relationship within each community.


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22. The QPS has and continues to do an excellent job on this front and has come a long way to improve cross cultural relationships. There are several programs through the internal training 'IGNITE' such as CAP books on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australian Society. There are also programs which have been tailored for specific communities. For example, there are specific programs that address discreet communities, such as Aurukun or Doomadgee etc.
23. There is a current cultural initiative program that is being delivered to the Charleville Patrol Group, which includes on country tours with Elders of Cunnamulla.
24. Our current patrol Inspector Tim Mowle has been working closely with myself and Constable Laurie Bateman to provide a more tailored introduction package. Part of this introduction will be new staff not only doing "on country tours" and meeting with elders and stakeholder groups but staff will be viewing two documentaries: one is called 'Incarceration Nation' and another called 'Out of Sight Out of Mind' which I discussed above and is produced by ABC.
25. Incarceration Nation looks at First Nations incarceration rates and the factors that contribute to that level of representation of First Nations persons in custody.
26. The station has obtained copies and they will be distributed to the OIC's in the patrol group, and they will be part of the induction package provided to new staff.
27. In my opinion, having individual members being introduced to the First Nations community members is the key to having contact with the community. It should be by the station leadership group, again this is very dependent on having the right people in those positions, I have seen when there are wrong people in these positions and the damage that can be done. These meetings should take place in settings that are comfortable for the community members/stakeholder group, for example it is more appropriate to reach out to First Nations elders and ask whether it would be okay to bring someone around for a cup of tea versus meeting with stakeholders at their place of business.

Challenges to policing in Cunnamulla

28. Whilst my experience has been positive in Cunnamulla, I am aware that this hasn't always been the case for all police who have served in Cunnamulla due to the historically poor relationship between the police and the community which would have made policing significantly more difficult.
29. I am aware that one of the complaints from members of the community, our First Nations community was that police are often transient in Cunnamulla


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and that provides limited opportunities for community members to build a good rapport with officers.

Challenges specifically relating to investigations involving DFV matters

30. My understanding of the Cunnamulla population breakdown is that twenty percent of community members are First Nations persons (ABS Statistics).
31. My experience is that those numbers may not reflect the true position of the population breakdown; however, our calls for service indicate that there is a higher percentage of engagement with First Nations community members.
32. One of the more significant barriers that I have experienced when interacting with First Nations community members is the distrust that those persons have with the QPS.
33. A particular example of this is when an aggrieved will see police arrest or remove the offender, to have him return shortly thereafter (whether he is placed on court bail, or the matter is finalised) and there no change in behaviour and the cycle continues, and the victims become reluctant to report.
34. I have also seen very good examples of where the above is opposite, as is the case in Cunnamulla. To try and alleviate this, the relationships we have built have encouraged and increased the reporting of DFV. I find the increase in reports to be encouraging as it means that we have built a level of trust that encourages victim survivors to actively report those matters to the police.
35. Another significant barrier that I have experienced when dealing with DFV matters with First Nations persons is that there is significant pressure put on aggrieved/complainant persons from other family members (be it their own family members or the family members of the respondent/defendant) to not engage in the DFV application process, or indeed, participating in pursuing a criminal complaint related to DFV.
36. There is also a significant issue between 'Lore' and 'law.' For example, what might be acceptable practice in Lore isn't in Law. Sometimes we as police have an obligation to act, but this can cause more detriment to the family dynamics, where things may have been handled internally amongst the first nations family groups, we've created an imbalance of power or destabilised family leaders by taking a course of action.
37. Further, another barrier to investigations is police officer perceptions towards DFV, particularly in First Nations communities. Some police, not all, do not understand the complexities of first nations relationships and may not know how to adequately investigate or ask the right questions around DFV in first nations communities.

Observations of DFV occurrences

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