
Teen's death sparks wave of violence in town torn by race, drugs and crime

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The Aboriginal boy whose death sparked violent race-fuelled protests in Kalgoorlie-Boulder had battled to overcome family problems in an outback town awash with drugs and crime, his grandfather said.

The Goldfields town was on edge last night after glass walls were smashed at the court where a 55-year-old man accused of the manslaughter of Elijah Doughty, 14, was due to appear, and police officers were pelted with bottles and rocks.

Officers in riot gear clashed with more than 200 people who gathered outside the courthouse, with some later carrying a banner reading "All Lives Matter", invoking the Black Lives Matter activist movement that arose in response to police killings of African-Americans in the US.

Elijah was found dead in bushland on Monday by police responding to an accident involving an allegedly stolen motorbike and a Nissan Navara utility in Boulder.

The motorbike had been reported stolen the previous day by the utility's owner. Elijah's paternal grandfather, Albert Doughty, last night recalled a sporty, happy child who stayed positive through difficult circumstances, including his unwell mother's frequent absences.

Mr Doughty, 68, said Elijah had lived with him since he was eight years old until he recently moved back with his father.

"Identifying my grandson's body was the hardest thing I've ever had to do - it broke my heart to see him there, mowed down from behind, lying there still with his little hat on." Mr Doughty said life for young indigenous people had "gotten worse" in the 16 years since he began working at the region's indigenous medical service. He blamed drugs including marijuana, speed and ice which he said children were buying with lunch money.

An aunt of the boy, who was a talented footballer, told the Kalgoorlie Miner his death was the third in the family in recent weeks and relatives were reeling from the tragedy. "(Elijah) survived all circumstances he found himself in and was a beautiful brother to the sisters he protected," the aunt said. "He was a very happy-go-lucky kid - he was never a bad kid." Angry protesters yesterday shook open the gate at the entrance to the courthouse on Kalgoorlie's main street and smashed windows, after being told they could not enter the court's public gallery.

They chanted "justice" and demanded the manslaughter charge be upgraded. In a statement last night, police said the charge was based on evidence available at the time and it would be a matter for the court to consider.

As Aboriginal elders attempted to calm the crowd, police used pepper spray to force angry protesters away from the court. About 12 officers suffered cuts and abrasions. One needed stitches after being hit in the head by a bottle.

Five police vehicles were -damaged by protesters jumping on them and breaking windows.

Police said "several" people were taken into custody over the violence. The crowd dispersed by afternoon but last night hundreds of people were expected at a vigil to mourn the dead boy at the scene of the fatal collision.

A total ban on takeaway -alcohol sales was implemented in Kalgoorlie-Boulder ahead of the vigil. Police acting superintendent Darryl Gaunt said some local residents had inflamed the situation by posting Facebook messages calling for vigilante action against local youths.

"The Facebook posts and some of the social media in relation to this has been disgusting and racist and targeted at certain elements of the community." Supt Gaunt said Elijah's family had tried to calm the crowd during the protest. "The victim's family have supported our decision making ... they were trying to move the mob on and speak to them and calm them down and it wasn't working," he said.

City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder acting mayor Allan Pental said he had seen nothing like yesterday's uproar during 28 years in the Goldfields town. He acknowledged racial tensions existed in Kalgoorlie, but said they had diminished over time.

The accused man will appear in court via video-link from Perth today after yesterday's hearing was adjourned. Kalgoorlie police have worked to build a rapport with indigenous people and indigenous pastor Geoffrey Stokes said officers' immediate response to the boys' death appeared prompt and appropriate.

But local Aboriginal mistrust of police goes back decades.

In 2005, after a local Aboriginal boy threw himself into the path of a moving car in an apparent -suicide attempt, police charged him with wilful damage of the -vehicle.

A year later local police used a new state race-hate law - brought in to deal with neo-Nazi activities in Perth - to charge a 16-year-old Aboriginal girl who called another girl "a white slut" and kicked her.

Magistrate Kaye Auty found the white girl had provoked the other girl and her companions. In 2008, a Goldfields Aboriginal leader man known as Mr Ward died from heatstroke after being transported from Laverton to Kalgoorlie in the back of a police without airconditioning.