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NATSILS MEDIA RELEASE: “Do our lives matter to police?” Instead of being given support, Joyce Clarke’s life was lost to police violence

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS) calls for answers and police accountability after the fatal shooting of 29-year-old Yamatji woman Joyce Clarke in Geraldton last Tuesday.

“Joyce Clarke’s violent killing is an absolute tragedy and arguably a preventable loss of life. If police had employed other de-escalation tactics, instead of shooting Joyce, she may still be with her son and family today. As Aboriginal women, we are left wondering – do our lives matter to police?” said Cheryl Axleby, co-chair of NATSILS.

“Her family deserve full and frank answers from an independent investigation exploring the excessive use of force by police. The police officers involved must be immediately suspended pending investigation. No police officer has ever been charged for an Aboriginal death in custody – it’s critical that police must not investigate police.”

On Tuesday, police were called to the home of Joyce Clarke where she was reported to have been holding a knife. She suffered from ongoing mental health issues. WA Police Commissioner Chris Dawson told media that eight police officers attended the scene, verbal communication took place between them and Ms Clarke, before a police officer shot her. She tragically died in hospital later that evening.

“Aboriginal women are the fastest growing prison population in Australia. We understand that Joyce Clarke had recently left prison without appropriate supports in place, despite concerns expressed by the sentencing judge,” said Nerita Waight, co-chair of NATSILS.

“Inquiries and Royal Commissions have recommended programs, law and policy reforms which could have helped her get out of the quicksand of the justice system. Instead of being given support, her life was lost to police violence. We support her family’s calls for police accountability.”

END OF RELEASE

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