



MAGISTRATES COURT of TASMANIA
CORONIAL DIVISION



Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11

I, Olivia McTaggart, Coroner, having investigated the death of Eden Jayde Westbrook

Find, pursuant to Section 28(1) of the Coroners Act 1995, that:

- a) The identity of the deceased is Eden Jayde Westbrook;
- b) Eden died as a result of asphyxia;
- c) Eden died as a result of hanging, an action taken voluntarily with the intention of ending her life;
- d) Eden died on 17 February 2015 at Fisherman's Memorial Park, Medea Cove Esplanade, St Helens in Tasmania; and
- e) Eden was born in Lismore, New South Wales on 11 August 1999; she was aged 15 years and was a high school student.

In making the above findings I have had regard to the evidence gained in the comprehensive investigation into Eden Jayde Westbrook's death. The evidence comprises an opinion of the forensic pathologist who conducted the autopsy; relevant police and witness affidavits; medical records and reports; and forensic evidence.

I make the following further findings as to how Eden's death occurred.

Eden Jayde Westbrook lived at St Helens [address not published] with her parents, Jason and Amanda Westbrook. Three of her siblings also lived in the family home, being her elder sister ("A"), younger sister ("B") and younger brother ("C") [names and ages not published]. She had three other older siblings who no longer lived in the family home, being sisters ("D") and ("E") and brother ("F") [names and ages not published].

At the time of her death, Eden was a student in year 10 at St Helens District High School. The school records indicate that she was a good student who consistently performed well in the majority of her subjects. The evidence indicates that she was a sensitive person who cared about others.

At around 8.30pm on 17 February 2015 Eden was at her home with her parents and siblings. Eden and her parents had a disagreement over Eden using her mobile telephone, resulting in the phone being taken from Eden. Eden was unhappy with the decision and went to sit in a vehicle outside. Her sister, A, followed and sat with her for a short period before going back inside and telling Mr Westbrook that Eden was angry and upset. Her parents advised A to give Eden some space to 'cool down'.

At around 8.45pm A went back outside to the car and noticed Eden was no longer there. She searched the property and couldn't locate Eden. A informed her father of the situation and together they searched the property for Eden. They were unable to locate her. They continued in a car, searching the surrounding streets, central business district of St Helens and the waterfront area with no success. They attended D's residence but she had not seen Eden. They returned home and, around 45 minutes later, searched for Eden again with no success.

At about 6.50am the following morning, being 18 February 2015, Kim Woodcock, a delivery driver, was driving along Medea Cove Esplanade and observed a body hanging from a tree by a rope in Fisherman's Memorial Park. Ms Woodcock attended the St Helens Police Station but it was closed. She made a phone call to police and then attended St Helens District Hospital and informed medical staff.

Eden was located by police officers in the park in a highly visible position hanging from a limb in a tree, with her feet approximately 20cm from the ground. She appeared lifeless. A green 10mm rope was wrapped several times around a limb and tied off. Whilst police were in attendance, both Mr and Mrs Westbrook attended the scene and identified Eden. A nurse who attended the scene checked Eden for signs of life but found that she was deceased.

There is no available evidence regarding the route taken by Eden to the location of her death or the origin of the rope.

Family and friends of Eden described her as being depressed for some time although no formal diagnosis had been made. She had previous history of self-harm and suicide attempts. Her family had been extremely concerned about the possibility that she would end her life. Her parents had arranged medical appointments for Eden but she did not attend.

In his affidavit for the investigation, Mr Westbrook stated that about six months before her death, Eden wrote a note signalling her intent to end her life. He stated that, in the note, Eden expressed anger in respect of a range of issues, including the community and her school.

About one month before her death, Eden sent a message to a close friend stating that she had decided to end her life in March if she did not feel better by that time. Mrs Westbrook stated that, in the three days before Eden passed away, Eden told her that she had forgiven "everyone and everything". This expression of resignation may have signalled her intention to imminently end her life.

Mrs Westbrook has consistently expressed concerns that bullying of Eden occurred at the high school which contributed to her daughter's death. Considerable time and effort has been spent by investigating officers on this issue. Affidavits from the principal and a key teacher at the school were obtained. Numerous additional enquiries were made with other school staff and Eden's friends and associates. I have also received a complete copy of Eden's school records. I am satisfied that there has been no specific evidence identified from these sources to suggest that Eden had been the victim of targeted or sustained bullying from any one person or group of persons. I note that Mrs Westbrook provided copies of text messages and Facebook messages from members of the public to herself which were said

to support the occurrence of bullying occurring at St Helens District High School. However, these allegations did not provide relevant evidence in this investigation.

I accept the evidence of family members and a friend that Eden did make complaints about school, stating that she did not enjoy school and that she was being teased. There is no evidence available as to the nature of the teasing or the identities of those involved. I readily accept that Eden may have felt distress from some experiences at school, just as she felt distress about other aspects of life. I further observe that Eden's school internet history showed that she had been visiting websites relating to pregnancy, unprotected sex, depression, suicide, family problems and drugs.

On the evidence, it appears that Eden suffered a depressive illness that required treatment. She experienced feelings of distress and anger. Her parents tried as best they could to help her and to arrange treatment. However, sadly, Eden refused to accept treatment and remained in great distress, with persistent thoughts of ending her life. I cannot attribute any particular event as instrumental in her decision.

I am satisfied that there are no suspicious circumstances surrounding Eden's death or that any other person was involved.

I am further satisfied that Eden acted with the express intention of ending her life. Most tragically, it appears she saw no other solution to end her mental anguish.

Comments and Recommendations:

Mrs Westbrook expressed some concerns surrounding the police investigation of Eden's death. Such concerns have been conveyed to me and I have considered them carefully. I am satisfied that Constable Clinton Porter conducted the investigation competently. His investigation was overseen and reviewed by Senior Sergeant Justin Bidgood. Senior Sergeant Paul Reynolds of the Launceston Coroner's Office also provided regular oversight and direction during the investigation period at my request.

I am satisfied that have received all available evidence that could reasonably assist me to determine the matters set out in section 28 (1) of the *Coroners Act 1995*.

I am appreciative of the efforts of the abovenamed officers for their thorough investigation and supervision, and for the comprehensive report provided to me.

The circumstances surrounding this matter do not require me to make any comments or recommendations pursuant to section 28 of *Coroners Act 1995*.

I convey my sincere condolences to family and loved ones of Eden Jayde Westbrook.

Dated: 30 September 2016 at Hobart in the state of Tasmania.

Olivia McTaggart
Coroner

Note these findings are the subject of an application under s 58 of the *Coroners Act 1995* which is currently being considered by the Chief Magistrate.