

- BLACK LIVES MATTER

'Sorry won't do. I'm so angry, I'm so hurt and I'm so let down'

By **Heather McNeill**
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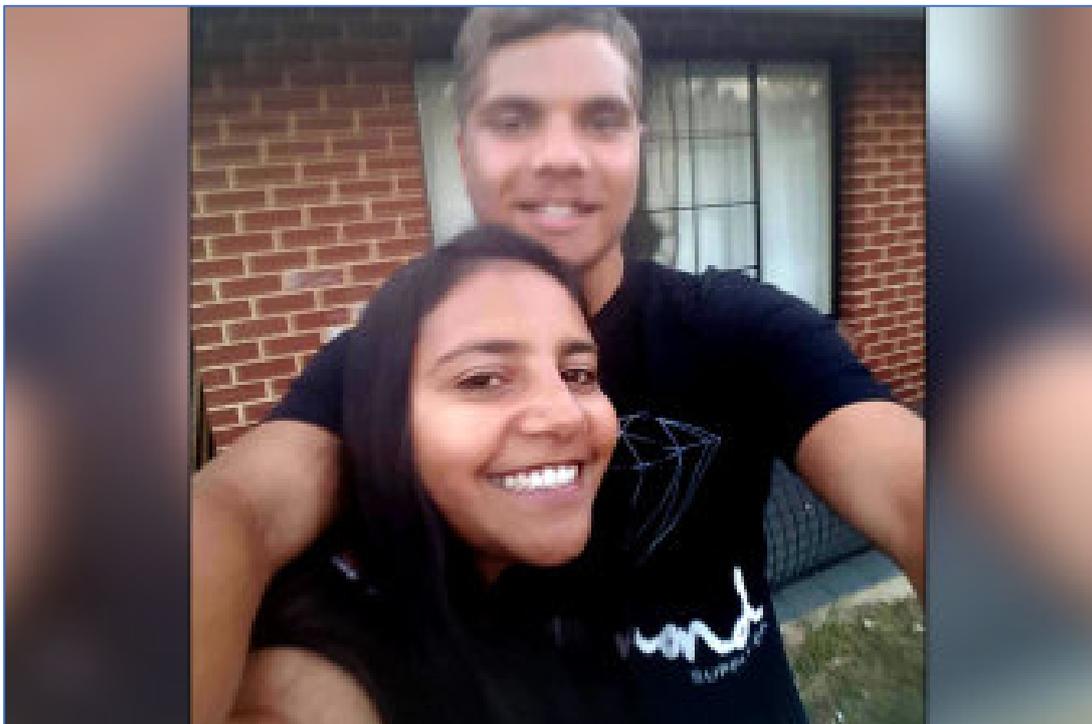
When Stanley was struggling to cope, he would paint.

The 19-year-old grew up in Perth's southern suburbs and was the youngest of six children. Barely an adult, he had been through more trauma in his formative years than most.

On July 13, his life was tragically cut short when he died by suicide five months into serving a jail term at Acacia Prison.

"When he passed away there was paint on his fingers so he was trying, he was trying to cope," his sister Jacinta Miller said.

"I always said to him, whenever you feel your world is crumbling, just go and paint, let it out in your painting."



Stanley and sister Jacinta Miller.

Ms Miller, 31, is speaking out on behalf of her family to honour Stanley's life and demand better support for young people in jail after her concerns about his mental health in the lead-up to his death were ignored.

Her brother is the 10th Aboriginal person to take their own life inside a WA prison in the past decade.

"I never imagined him going in there and me having to not see him ever again," she said.

"He was crying out for help, he should have been taken to a hospital to get the mental health support that he needed so that it didn't reach this point.

"If the prison knew he felt that way, why didn't they say to us, 'Hey, you need to come and see him', or 'We've made this time available', just so we could show him that love and support, I don't understand how it is you can feel like a human being doesn't deserve that.

"I'm so angry and I'm so hurt and I'm so let down. I can't go back to the days leading up to his death when they just neglected him. Sorry won't do, something has to change, a law has to change."

Stanley was described by Ms Miller as a budding Aboriginal artist who loved football and was a caring uncle to his nieces and nephews. The pair were planning his first art exhibition for after his release.

"He was so loving, his smile could light up a room and he had a cheeky little grin about him," she said.

"On my daughter's birthday in November he did a painting for her, he was so talented.

"On my son's 13th birthday, because he couldn't be here with him, he made sure to call and he sent him a card.

"This has changed my whole life and the lives of everyone who loved him." Stanley's upbringing was challenging at times. His father was in jail and his mother was a victim of the stolen generation.

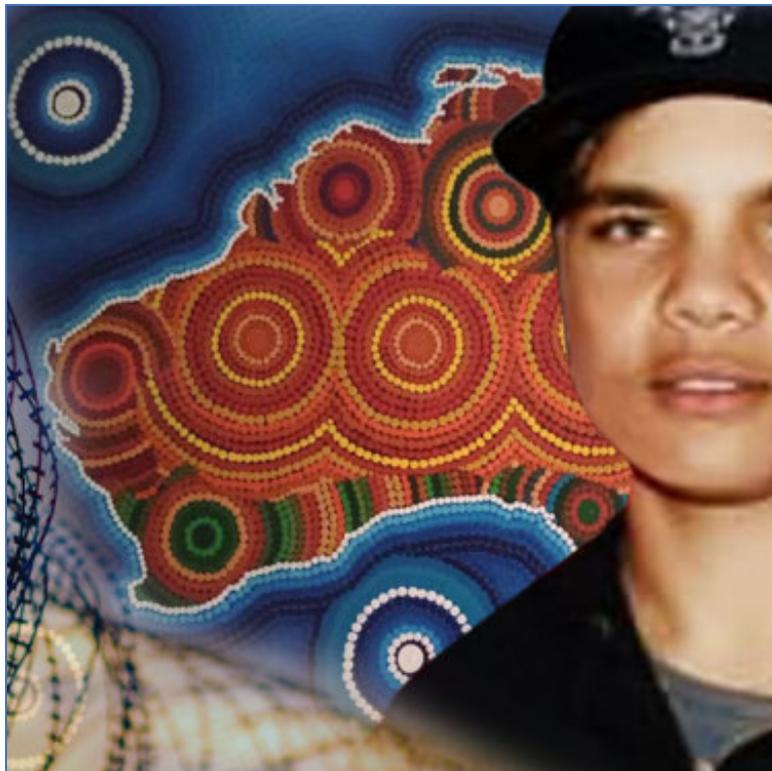
The 19-year-old was sentenced in Fremantle Magistrates Court to two years jail for burglary-related offences committed in February. With parole, he could have been released in six months.

“It was just for petty crimes, he never hurt anyone, he was never a violent person, he just fell in with the wrong crowd, and as a teenager and as a young man you just want to be with your mates,” Ms Miller said.

“I know he was scared to go to adult prison because they’re not supported in adult prison like they are in juvenile detention.

“It’s like Corrective Services – once they become adults – feel they don’t have a duty of care to prisoners. He was 19, he was still a baby.”

Stanley’s death comes a month after thousands of West Australians rallied in Perth CBD, protesting against Aboriginal deaths in custody as part of the global Black Lives Matter movement.



Stanley passed away on July 13. His family has given WAtoday special permission to publish these photos.

Ms Miller said the state government needed to do more to address the lack of care being offered to young people who were incarcerated.

“What are the government going to do moving forward to prevent this from happening anymore?” she said.

“They need to do something, they need to act now, they need to show First Nations people that we matter, our lives matter.”

The Department of Justice declined to comment on Stanley's death.

Every time a suspected suicide occurs at a Serco-run WA prison, the services contractor has \$207,000 deducted from its contract by the Department of Justice.

National Suicide Prevention and Trauma Recovery Project co-ordinator Gerry Georgatos is calling for that money to go to Stanley's grieving family.

"I beseech them to do the right thing here, like proceeds of crime go to the victim, this money – although it can never bring back the young life of their child – they should be giving every last cent to the family," he said.



Stanley and his sister had been planning an art exhibition for his release. A Serco Australia spokesman confirmed Stanley was found unresponsive in his cell last Saturday, and two days later died in hospital.

"The prisoner's death will be subject to a coronial inquest which will examine the circumstances of his death," he said.

Serco declined to comment on whether Stanley's family would receive the \$207,000, referring the matter to the department, who referred it back to Serco.

Serco also declined to comment on whether Stanley was receiving any mental health support at the time of his death.

Since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, 235 people have died in WA prisons, with 84 deemed unnatural deaths – mostly suicides – while 47 are still pending a coronial inquest.

Aboriginal people are heavily over-represented in the figures. The younger the person is, the more likely they are to be Aboriginal.

Mr Georgatos said prisoners losing their Medicare in jail was leading to their healthcare being compromised by the limited funding prisons received.

“Primary, secondary and allied health care is often denied in terms of an outhouse to a hospital because of the costs,” he said.

Stanley was farewelled by devastated inmates during a smoking ceremony at Acacia Prison on Thursday.

“Until it’s done to you, you don’t actually know what this feels like, I can tell you it’s changed our whole lives,” Ms Miller said.

“Australia can’t keep going like this.”

- *WAtoday has not published Stanley's surname at the request of his family.*