

Port Lincoln rallies over bin teen tragedy



Carlton AFL footballer Eddie Betts.

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Port Lincoln's most famous son and one of the AFL's most loved players, Eddie Betts, says the community is rallying together after the death of a 13-year-old sleeping in an industrial skip bin.

The veteran forward rejected suggestions the teenager was homeless, saying no child went unloved in the tight-knit community left reeling from the tragedy of Tuesday morning.

"The Port Lincoln community is devastated by the death of (the boy) in such tragic and devastating circumstances," he said.

"Being a big mob, we all know each other and care for each other and our kids' safety is always important to us uncles, aunties and elders. No kid in our mob goes without love and security."

The boy's family and local Aboriginal elders have requested he not be named.

The 13-year-old and two friends, aged 11 and 12, had been sleeping in an industrial skip bin in a carpark off Tennant Street in the Eyre Peninsula city on Monday night. He sustained fatal injuries when a garbage truck came to collect the rubbish about 5.20am on Tuesday.

One boy managed to escape as the truck lifted the bin and desperately tried to alert the driver to his sleeping friends.

While the other boy escaped, the 13-year-old fell into the back of the truck and died at the scene.

Betts, who has played 132 games for Adelaide and 205 for Carlton, said the members of the community were supporting each other in the wake of the boy's death. "Throughout times like this, our community will rally around each other, and our youth particularly, to support them through such unimaginable grief," he said. "It's important to know that in Aboriginal families, we always open the door to our kids no matter what, so reporting of (him) being homeless is false."

The Carlton star was born in Port Lincoln, and his father and grandfather played football on the Eyre Peninsula.

On Wednesday, the Aboriginal flag at Lincoln Gardens Primary school, in the town's outer south, flew at half-mast in a tribute to its former pupil.

Detectives and crime scene officers on Wednesday visited the family home a few streets away from the school as part of the coronial investigation.

Senior police say at least one boy was reported missing hours before the incident, but the inquiry is not investigating homelessness issues.

On Tuesday, Superintendent Paul Bahr, the officer in charge of the Port Lincoln area, said the three boys were not homeless and it was unclear why they had been sleeping in the bin on Monday night. "All three of them had places to stay," he said.

A large group of relatives and friends have rallied for the boy's family, while a makeshift shrine continued to grow at the Tennant Street scene.

His relatives issued a statement describing how the teenager, the eldest of five boys, had a "special bond" with his siblings and close relationship with wider family. He was not in state care.

"He was a cheeky young boy who had a very big imagination and loved to spin a good yarn and laugh with whomever was willing to listen," the family said.

Sandra Spencer, principal at Lincoln Gardens Primary, where the boy was in Year 7, said the school was concentrating on supporting students and staff "as they process this sad news".

"(He) was a well-liked, caring, friendly student at our school," she told parents in a community letter. "He also loved to share stories and spend time outside with nature. He will be greatly missed."

A GoFundMe page has been organised to pay for the boy's funeral costs.