

‘Shocked and appalled’: family of Indigenous man shot dead by NSW police demands answers

Ted and Helen Russell’s two birth sons both died in custody with 46-year-old Stanley fatally shot by officers in Sydney this week



Helen and Ted Russell whose son Stanley was fatally shot by NSW police in Seven Hills in Sydney this week.

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Ted and Helen Russell are devastated.

Their last surviving son was shot dead by police at his aunt’s home in north-western Sydney on Tuesday, and they want to know why.

“We are shocked and appalled by the shooting by New South Wales police of our second son Stanley Russell yesterday morning when he was inside his Auntie Pam’s house in Seven Hills,” his parents said.

“It is terribly painful for us to learn suddenly that we will never see Stanley’s smile again. His children will suffer from never seeing him again.

“There are many questions about the killing of our son Stanley by police that we will seek to have answered through the coronial inquest. We will keep going in our struggle for justice, to ensure that deaths in custody must stop.”

The magnitude of the Russells' grief is unimaginable. Stanley was their last surviving son. Their other biological son, Edward, died in prison custody in 1999.

Gomeri man Stanley Russell, 46, was a father and grandfather. NSW police officers shot him after what a police spokesperson described as a "physical confrontation" at the house, where they had gone to execute a warrant.

Police allege Stanley Russell had a knife and an axe and "confronted" the four officers, who "let out a number of shots".

The acting assistant police commissioner Julie Boon told reporters at the scene that Russell "collapsed" after being shot. A critical incident investigation team is investigating the incident.

Police have refused to give any further details about what happened, including how many shots were fired, which officer fired the shots and the nature of the "confrontation".

In a statement, Stanley's parents said they realised he'd been killed when news of the shooting flashed up on TV. They recognised the house – belonging to Helen's sister Pam – in the aerial footage of police in the front yard.

Now, they want to know why police fired shots. They have questioned police reports Stanley Russell was armed with a knife and an axe. They want to see the police body-worn camera footage of the incident.

"Neighbours say they heard four or five shots, all inside the house," the Russells said in the statement.

"We found out about the killing of our son Stanley when we were watching the news. Pam told us about hearing shots inside her house soon after police told her to go outside. Pam said that when the police arrived Stanley had only recently woken up.

"We have heard the police who went to Pam's house say they had an arrest warrant for Stanley. There is a very big difference between an arrest warrant and shooting a man."

Guardian Australia asked NSW police a series of questions about the incident but the force declined to comment as the shooting is now subject to a critical incident review.

NSW police were asked whether body-worn camera footage of the incident had been captured, whether all officers involved had activated body-worn cameras, and whether the Russells would be able to view it.

They were also asked whether the officers involved had attempted to use other "non-lethal" options prior to shooting Russell, such as OC spray or tasers.

In 2014, in sentencing Russell to jail, a NSW district court judge found he had a history of drug addiction and had been deeply affected by his brother's death.

NSW police did not respond to a question about whether they had considered any of these factors prior to the incident on Tuesday, or whether they had attempted any other contact with Russell regarding the outstanding warrant before visiting the Seven Hills home.

A spokesperson for the NSW police minister, David Elliott, said he would be unable to comment because of the critical incident review.

Family members who gathered outside the police tape on Tuesday were heard saying it was “only bullets for us, no taser”.

Justine, a neighbour, said she knew Stanley as a “nice and calm man”.

“I knew him for three years, he’d come and visit his aunty here every now and then. I spoke to him last night, and there didn’t seem to be anything wrong,” she said.

Dale McPherson, another neighbour who knew the family, told the ABC they were “lovely people”.

Helen and Ted Russell are respected members of their community in Walgett, in the state’s north-west, and have fostered Aboriginal children for years. For the past 22 years, they have spoken about Edward’s treatment in custody.

He’d been moved out of a safe cell, even though prison staff had known for weeks he was at very high risk of self-harm. He’d been allowed to keep a personal item which he used to take his own life, an item that the Long Bay property officer told the coronial inquest “should have been confiscated immediately”.

“Stanley’s older brother Edward died in Long Bay jail because the NSW prison system failed completely in its duty of care to Edward,” the Russells said on Wednesday.

“We have already been to hell and back during the investigation into Edward’s very avoidable death in custody.



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“Now we have to go through the same pain and trauma all over again. Given what we know currently about how Stanley died, we have questions about whether police failed in their duty of care to him too.

“For 30 years we have struggled to help stop Aboriginal deaths in custody. We have now lost both our sons in NSW custody. The royal commission’s key point about ensuring an active duty of care has been repeatedly ignored.”

The distress at Stanley Russell’s death by police shooting comes a week after marches to remember the 29-year-old Yamatji woman JC who was shot dead by police in Western Australia in 2019.

A first-class constable was charged with her murder – the first WA police officer to face a murder charge for a death in custody in 93 years. After a three-week trial the jury, which had no Aboriginal members, deliberated for three hours before finding the constable not guilty of murder or manslaughter.

JC’s sister, Bernie Clarke, said her death was another example of there being “no justice and no accountability”.

