



IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

COR 2020 003201

FINDING INTO DEATH WITHOUT INQUEST

Form 38 Rule 63(2)

*Section 67 of the **Coroners Act 2008***

Findings of:	Coroner Ingrid Giles
Deceased:	Solomone Kitone Charlie Taufe'ulungaki
Date of birth:	12 August 2004
Date of death:	16 June 2020
Cause of death:	1a: Stab injury to the chest
Place of death:	Deer Park Library, 4 Neale Road, Deer Park, Victoria, 3023
Keywords:	Manslaughter; knife crime; youth knife crime; youth gangs; youth gang-related offending; support for at-risk youth; whole-of-community approach.

INTRODUCTION

1. Solomone Kitone Charlie Taufe'ulungaki (**Solomone**)¹ was 15 years old when he died from a stab injury to the chest on 16 June 2020.
2. Solomone was born in Auckland, New Zealand on 12 August 2004. He was one of eleven children. The family moved to Australia in 2003.
3. Solomone was in year ten at the time of his death. He was described as a good student who helped others. He played on the school rugby team and played piano and trumpet in the school band. Solomone and his family were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Deer Park. Solomone would attend the Church every Sunday with his family, as well as on Tuesdays for youth night, and Monday and Thursday mornings for scripture study.
4. Solomone's mother described him as happy, kind, helpful, and cheerful. He loved his family and was loved by them in return.

CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

5. Solomone died in the context of so-called youth gang violence, perpetrated by a group of 10 young men who were associated with a youth gang in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The majority of the young people involved in the fatal incident were aged under 18 years at the relevant time.
6. The incident led to criminal charges against several persons involved, including one charge of manslaughter against ST (a pseudonym)² in relation to Solomone's death. Other persons involved in the incident were charged and convicted of violent disorder. A brief chronology of the criminal proceedings in relation to the homicide charge is set out below.
7. On 17 June 2020, ST was charged with violent disorder and affray and released on bail. On 22 October 2020, he was charged in relation to Solomone's death and remanded into custody. He was granted bail on 18 December 2020, which was later revoked on 29 June 2021. In January 2022, the Director of Public Prosecutions decided to proceed with a single manslaughter charge against ST.

¹ I will refer to the deceased as 'Solomone' throughout this finding, unless more formality is required.

² A pseudonym was applied in the criminal proceedings as the defendant was under 18 years at the time of the incident.

8. On 22 August 2022, ST appeared in the Supreme Court of Victoria before the Honourable Justice Fox. He pleaded ‘guilty’ to manslaughter.
9. At a hearing on 6 February 2023, ST was convicted and sentenced to detention in a Youth Justice Centre for two years, with 237 days as time already served.
10. The outcomes of this matter are summarised in the Sentencing Remarks of Justice Fox dated 10 February 2023,³ to which I have had regard, as discussed further below.

THE CORONIAL INVESTIGATION

11. Solomone’s death was reported to the coroner as it fell within the definition of a reportable death in the *Coroners Act 2008* (**the Act**). Reportable deaths include deaths that are unexpected, unnatural or violent or result from accident or injury.
12. The role of a coroner includes to independently investigate reportable deaths to establish, if possible, identity and medical cause of death. In some instances, a coroner may also make findings with regard to the circumstances of death, although in this instance, I have determined not to do so for reasons outlined below.
13. Under the Act, coroners also have the important functions of helping to prevent deaths and promoting public health and safety and the administration of justice through the making of comments or recommendations in appropriate cases about any matter connected to the death under investigation.
14. To assist in the coronial investigation, Detective Senior Constable Kallyn Gent of the Homicide Squad prepared a Coronal Brief, which included the Criminal Brief of Evidence in relation to the charge of manslaughter against ST, as well as other materials related to this matter and related criminal proceedings. These materials were provided to the Coroners Court on 31 March 2023.
15. Then-Deputy State Coroner Jacqui Hawkins initially held carriage of the investigation into Solomone’s death. I assumed carriage in October 2023 for the purposes of conducting additional investigative steps, finalising the case, and making findings.

³ See *DPP v ST* [2023] VSC 49, available [here](#).

Decision not to hold an inquest

16. In circumstances of homicide, the Act provides that a coroner must generally hold an inquest. However, under subsection 52(3)(b) of the Act, a coroner is not required to hold an inquest where a person has been charged with an indictable offence in respect of the death being investigated.
17. In this matter, I have determined that an inquest is not required in circumstances where ST pleaded guilty to manslaughter in relation to Solomone's death.

Decision not to make findings in regard to the circumstances of death

18. The Act also provides that a coroner must generally make findings with regard to circumstances of death. However, under section 67(2) of the Act, a coroner is not required to make findings with regard to circumstances if an inquest was not held, and the coroner finds that: (i) the deceased was not, immediately before the person died, a person placed in custody or care; and (ii) there is no public interest to be served in making a finding regarding those circumstances.
19. In this matter, I have determined that it is not required, or appropriate, for me to make findings with regard to the circumstances of Solomone's death. This is because, having reviewed the Coronal Brief, I am satisfied that Solomone was not in custody or care, and that there would be no public interest to be served in making findings with regard to his circumstances of death.
20. In making this decision, I have had regard to section 7 of the Act which requires me to avoid unnecessary duplication of inquiries and investigations. In this context, I am satisfied that the circumstances of Solomone's death have already been comprehensively addressed in criminal proceedings in a court of superior jurisdiction, as outlined in the Sentencing Remarks of Justice Fox, and that it would be inappropriate for me to re-traverse this same ground.

Further investigation of prevention opportunities

21. While I have determined that it is not necessary or appropriate to make findings in regard to the circumstances of Solomone's death, I consider that it remains appropriate to make other findings in this matter. This is because, upon reviewing the evidence available, I considered that it was appropriate to conduct further investigations in order to better understand the broader circumstances of Solomone's death in the context of youth offending (including knife

crime) in the western suburbs of Melbourne, and whether there may be any opportunities for prevention.

22. In this respect, I note that coroners are charged with a unique prevention mandate. While a criminal investigation is necessarily narrow in its focus, and considers only whether the elements of the criminal offence/s are met in relation to the accused, a coroner is permitted to make comments or recommendations about *any matter connected to the death* for the purpose of preventing future deaths and promoting public health and safety and the administration of justice.
23. In accordance with my prevention function, I determined to conduct further investigations in order to ascertain whether there may be any opportunities to reduce fatal incidents of youth knife crime in the western suburbs of Melbourne.
24. To achieve this purpose, I determined to request data from the Coroners Prevention Unit (CPU) in regard to the incidence of fatal youth knife crime.
25. I also determined to obtain a number of statements in order to assist me to understand current prevention initiatives, and to identify any additional opportunities, which included:
 - a) A statement from Commander Mark Galliot, on behalf of Victoria Police, to address strategies implemented by Victoria Police to manage youth gang violence and knife crime in the western suburbs of Melbourne;
 - b) A statement from Youth Justice Commissioner, Andrea Davidson, on behalf of Youth Justice, to address youth justice responses to knife-related crime among young people in Victoria; and
 - c) A statement from Ms Anoushka Jeronimus on behalf of the Western Community Legal Centre (**Westjustice**), to address community responses to youth offending and how these may relate to traditional criminal justice responses.
26. This finding draws on the totality of the coronial investigation into the death of Solomone, including the Coronial Brief, CPU data, and those additional statements listed above. Whilst I have reviewed all the material, I will only refer to that which is directly relevant to my findings or necessary for narrative clarity.

27. In the coronial jurisdiction, facts must be established on the balance of probabilities.⁴

SUMMARY OF CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH

28. While I do not intend to make findings with regard to the circumstances of Solomone's death for those reasons outlined above, I consider that it is relevant to repeat the circumstances as outlined in the Sentencing Remarks of Justice Fox, as context to my later discussion in relation to prevention opportunities.
29. On Tuesday, 16 June 2020, at approximately 3:10pm, Solomone was walking with some of his school friends towards a bus stop in Deer Park when they were confronted by a group of ten young males (**the group**). The group included ST.
30. ST was associated with two gangs operating in the Western suburbs of Melbourne known as 'BH' or 'Brotherhood' and '97'. The two gangs were apparently in conflict with a third youth gang known as 'VB'. The younger members of that group were known as 'VB Youngins'.⁵
31. Members of the group asked Solomone and his friends if they were part of a gang known as 'VB' or 'VB Youngins', and whether they had been involved in a fight the previous day. They said they had not been and began walking away. Some members of the group then attacked Solomone and his friends, punching them and waving weapons. Solomone and his friends managed to escape and fled the scene.
32. The group briefly gave chase, but could not catch them and gave up. The group then caught a bus to Brimbank Shopping Centre, where they spent some time at the shopping centre before moving to a nearby skate park. While there, the group discussed an incident where 'BH' or '97' members had been assaulted. The group was angry about this and blamed Solomone and his friends. One member of the group said he had been previously assaulted by Solomone. After some time, the group walked back towards the shopping centre.
33. Meanwhile, Solomone and his friend had been collected by his friend's mother. They were being driven home when, as a result of a telephone call, it was conveyed to the occupants of the car that the friend's younger brother was at the Brimbank Shopping Centre and being

⁴ Subject to the principles enunciated in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336. The effect of this and similar authorities is that coroners should not make adverse findings against, or comments about, individuals unless the evidence provides a comfortable level of satisfaction as to those matters taking into account the consequences of such findings or comments.

⁵ There is evidence that Solomone was friends with members of VB Youngins.

harassed by members of the group. As a result, the car carrying Solomone and his friend drove to the Brimbank Shopping Centre.

34. Solomone exited the car and walked through the Deer Park Library carpark, unaware that the group was across the road. One of the group saw him and yelled to the others, '*Look, there's Solo*'. Another group member yelled, '*Get him*'. That call triggered the group of ten to run towards Solomone. ST was brandishing a knife. Solomone turned and began running in the opposite direction, pursued by ST and the group.
35. ST was the second of the group to catch up to Solomone. Solomone was quickly knocked to the ground. The group attacked him as he lay curled on the ground, with his arms up trying to protect his head. Solomone was punched, kicked and struck with weapons, including a baseball bat and an extended baton. ST hit and kicked him as he lay on the ground. During this attack, ST was deliberately brandishing a knife. As a result, Solomone was stabbed once to the left-hand side of his chest. This stab wound pierced Solomone's heart and would prove fatal. Solomone's friends came to his aid and pushed some of the group away. As the confrontation ended, ST dropped the knife on the ground next to the wounded Solomone before walking away. Solomone attempted to get to his feet and walk, but quickly collapsed. His friends lifted his clothing and saw he was bleeding.
36. After the attack, ST and other members of the group ran across the road to the skate park, where ST regrouped with all ten members.
37. At 4:11pm, police attended and found the wounded Solomone lying on the ground in the carpark. He was unresponsive with a stab wound to the left-hand side of his chest. Police commenced CPR. Ambulance paramedics arrived eight minutes later and continued with CPR. Tragically, they were unable to revive Solomone, and he was declared deceased at 4:49pm. He was 15 years old.
38. Police collected the knife ST had left at the scene. It was a small, black-handled, nine-centimetre paring knife.
39. While police and paramedics were trying to save Solomone, ST and others from the group left the skate park and walked along a nearby street. At approximately 4:30pm, ST was arrested by police.

MATTERS IN RELATION TO WHICH A FINDING MUST, IF POSSIBLE, BE MADE

Identity of the deceased

40. On 19 June 2020, Solomone Kitone Charlie Taufe'ulungaki, born 12 August 2004, was visually identified by his father.
41. Identity is not in dispute and requires no further investigation.

Medical cause of death

42. On 17 June 2020, Forensic Pathologist Dr Melanie Archer from the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM), conducted an autopsy on the body of the deceased. Dr Archer reviewed the Victoria Police Report of Death Form 83, a post mortem computed tomography (CT) scan, the section 27 request for autopsy, and the contact log. Dr Archer provided a written report of her findings.
43. Dr Archer provided an opinion that the medical cause of death was '*stab injury to the chest*'.⁶
44. In providing this opinion, she noted that there was a single penetrating stab wound to the chest, which was approximately horizontal and 4cm long on the skin surface. The wound appeared to have one tapered and one squared end, although this was unclear. The wound passed through the 5th left rib and penetrated into the heart. There was incidental injury to the left lung as well. The wound resulted in haemothorax (blood in the left chest cavity), along with collapse of the left lung.
45. The remaining injuries were superficial bruises to the upper and lower limbs, mainly involving bony prominences. The main fresh bruise was to the left elbow and may have been sustained in the deceased's terminal collapse.
46. There were no defence or offence type injuries. Defence type injuries include injuries to the hands and forearms, which can be sustained in the act of attempting to ward off an attacker. Offence type injuries may be sustained by an active participant in an altercation, and examples include bruises to the knuckles or fractures to hand bones.

⁶ Stab wounds are a form of incised injury. Incised injuries are caused by the application of sharp force from edged implements or objects, such as knives, razors, swords, and glass. They result in clean division of the skin. Stab wounds usually penetrate deeper into the tissues than the length of the wound entrance on the skin.

47. Incisions to the upper chest bilaterally were confirmed in ambulance notes to be secondary to paramedic performed thoracostomy procedures for chest decompression. The right lung also showed collapse with air in the chest (pneumothorax) on the post-mortem CT, which was most likely due to paramedic intervention during attempts to decompress the chest. Dr Archer provided an opinion that paramedic intervention did not cause or contribute to death.
48. Post-mortem toxicology showed no ethanol (alcohol) and no detection of common drugs or poisons.
49. There was no natural disease that could have caused or contributed to death. However, there was severe steatohepatosis (fatty liver change) along with some fibrosis (the beginning for formation of scar tissue) in the liver. The change was particularly severe in light of the deceased's young age. Fatty liver disease is a well-described entity in the paediatric population, and the main risk factor is obesity with central adiposity (belly fat), as well as metabolic factors, including elevated fasting glucose, abnormalities of cholesterol metabolism, and insulin resistance (metabolic syndrome). Genetic factors could not be excluded, and referral was therefore made to the Family Genetic Health Service at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine.
50. Dr Archer ascribed the medical cause of death to be '*1 (a) Stab injury to the chest*'.

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS REGARDING PREVENTION OPPORTUNITIES IN RELATION TO YOUTH KNIFE CRIME

CPU data on prevalence of youth knife homicides

51. Following a review of the Coronial Brief, I determined to seek assistance from the Coroners Prevention Unit (CPU) in compiling relevant background information, including how many knife homicides occur annually in Victoria, and the ages of the victims and offenders (or alleged offenders) involved in these homicides.
52. The CPU was established in 2008 to strengthen the prevention role of the coroner. The CPU assists the coroner with research in matters related to public health and safety and in relation to the formulation of prevention recommendations. CPU staff include health professionals with training in a range of areas including medicine, nursing, and mental health; as well as staff who support coroners through research, data and policy analysis.

53. Following a detailed review of Victorian Homicide Register data, a register which contains information on all suspected and confirmed homicides reported to the coroner since 1 January 2000, the CPU identified 245 knife homicides⁷ between 1 January 2014 and 10 September 2025, and a further 35 homicides using sharp objects that were either knife-like but not knives,⁸ or were not recovered in the course of the investigation to confirm what they were.⁹
54. In relation to the narrower category of knife homicides, the CPU noted that the vast majority of the deaths involved adult deceased (227 of 245, 92.6%) and adult offenders (205 of 245, 83.6%). However, there were 18 child victims of knife homicide (18 of 245 or 7.3%) and 29 knife homicides involving a child offender (29 of 245 or 11.8%).¹⁰ No obvious trend over time was observed in relation to knife homicides where the child is a victim.
55. Of those 18 homicides which involved a child victim, the matters could be divided into two main themes: 11 could be broadly classified as ‘gang-related’,¹¹ and six were family violence-related.¹² Among the 11 gang-related child knife homicides:
- a) a child was identified as an offender or suspected offender¹³ in nine matters.
 - b) nine of the 11 children who died were members of migrant communities.
56. The CPU also noted there appears to be an increasing trend over time in the involvement of child offenders in knife homicides, with a notable peak of seven homicides in 2023, before dropping back to three homicides in 2024. In the year of Solomone’s death, 2020, there were a total of four homicides involving knives used by child offenders. On this point, it is likely that as offenders are identified in some more recent knife homicides (particularly in 2025 where suspected offenders in four homicides have not yet been identified) the number of child offenders will be revised up.

⁷ For purposes of data collation, the CPU defined a knife homicide as where a person intentionally inflicted injury on another person using a knife, and this injury caused or contributed to death. A knife was defined as an instrument comprising a blade fixed to a handle designed for cutting or stabbing (this definition encompasses machetes, cleavers, box cutters and other types of knives).

⁸ This includes cases where the offender used a bladed or sharpened object wielded in a knife-like way, such as a screwdriver, shard of glass, sharpened metal rod, hatchet, scissors or garden shears.

⁹ This includes cases where the weapon inflicted a stab injury but was not recovered and therefore could not be positively confirmed as a knife.

¹⁰ In cases where there were multiple offenders or suspected offenders, the CPU coded the case according to the age of the youngest identified offender or suspected offender.

¹¹ The term ‘gang-related’ is used very broadly here to refer to either the deceased or (suspected) offender being linked to a gang in police reports and/or media reports. The CPU does not suggest that the deceased were all gang members.

¹² The other homicide occurred in a setting of mental ill health and sexual assault.

¹³ Meaning that where multiple offenders or suspected offenders were identified, at least the youngest offender (or suspected offender) was a child. Please note that to date, offenders or suspected offenders have only been identified in nine of the 11 gang-related child homicide knife deaths.

Victoria Police responses to youth knife crime

57. In considering whether the circumstances of Solomone's death may raise any opportunities for prevention, the Court determined to seek a statement from Victoria Police in order to better understand strategies implemented to manage youth gang violence in the western suburbs of Melbourne.
58. A statement was provided by Commander Mark Galliot (**Commander Galliot**), a Commander of Victoria Police in the North West Metropolitan Region, dated 2 February 2024.
59. Commander Galliot provided a general overview of the incidence of youth gang-related offending, with a focus on the western suburbs of Melbourne. He summarised that:
- a) Within Melbourne, between 1 September 2022 and 1 August 2023, the North West Metropolitan Region had the largest proportion of total youth gang related offending (44%) and violent offending committed by youth gang members (51%), including abduction/kidnap, assault, aggravated burglary, homicide, robbery, violent weapons/explosive offences.
 - b) As of 31 August 2023, Victoria Police records indicate there were approximately 350 youth gang members in the North West Metropolitan Region. Of these, approximately 270 youth gang members were in the community and 80 were in custody.
 - c) Within the North West Metropolitan Region, the majority of youth gang related activity occurs within the Police Service Areas (**PSAs**) of Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay, Wyndham, Brimbank and Melton.
 - d) As of 31 August 2023, youth gang offending was most prevalent in young people in the 14-17 age range, before tapering off as offenders enter their late teens and early 20s.
60. Victoria Police's approach to youth gang offending is guided by its Youth Gang Strategy 2023-2026, which is operationalised by an Action Plan. The Strategy provides a state-wide response to youth gangs, and a local response which is intended to be adaptable to the unique issues facing each region. The strategy is based around four key pillars: utilising neighbourhood policing to build relationships within the *community*; strengthening *partnerships* across government agencies and community organisations; increasing and

sharing *intelligence* to better identify and target those involved in youth gangs; and building the capacity and capability of *people*, including Victoria Police staff, to identify at-risk youth and reduce the impact of youth gangs.

61. Commander Galliot noted that it is important to understand what motivates young people to join youth gangs in order to develop targeted policy and programs which are effective at providing alternative, positive pathways for young people at risk. In this context, Commander Galliot described that young people may be motivated to join a youth gang in order to seek:
- a) Social connection and purpose, where that person has been otherwise marginalised and/or socially disconnected;
 - b) Escape or association, where membership of a youth gang may offer a break from everyday routine that provides connections and a sense of purpose not fulfilled elsewhere;
 - c) The perceived social status of being involved in a gang; and/or
 - d) Protection from abusive family members or local bullies, noting youth gang members are more likely to have experienced family violence, come from fragmented family structures and/or live in socio-economically disadvantaged communities.
62. Commander Galliot explained that Victoria Police's response and prevention activities are intended to fulfil and/or disrupt these motivations by providing referrals and support programs, as well as education for young people.
63. Commander Galliot noted that to successfully identify and target the right young people, Victoria Police requires accurate intelligence. In this context, Commander Galliot explained that Victoria Police engages in intelligence gathering through traditional sources of intelligence, such as Crime Stoppers, as well as the sharing of information between government agencies including Youth Justice, Corrections Victoria, the Department of Justice and Community Safety and the Department of Education, and relevant community groups. This includes through programs such as Multi-Agency panels (**MAPs**),¹⁴ the Emergency

¹⁴ Commander Galliot explained that Multi-agency Panels (**MAPs**) bring together government departments and agencies, as well as non-government organisations to share information, coordinate services and take steps to resolve any systemic issues relating to services for young people. Attending organisations include Youth Justice, which is part of the Department of Justice and Community Safety (**DJCS**), the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (**DFFH**), the Department of Education (**DoE**), and OzChild. MAP meetings usually occur monthly, and a list of high-risk young people is presented and discussed. The primary focus of the MAP is to determine whether there are any service gaps,

Youth Issues in the West Network (EYIW),¹⁵ Community Support Groups (CSGs),¹⁶ Principals Network,¹⁷ the Local Site Executive Committees (LSEC)¹⁸ and the Gang Crime Squad.¹⁹

64. Building on intelligence gathered, Victoria Police has developed numerous programs intended to mitigate the risk of youth gang violence in the western suburbs through community engagement. Commander Galliot highlighted a selection of key programs, which included:

- a) The Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Project (YCPEIP): A post-arrest project delivered in partnership with Westjustice²⁰ where young people aged 10-17 years old in Wyndham and Brimbank are dealt with through a caution-first approach in preference to remand, summons or diversion for suitable offences, and provided with referrals to services intended to address the underlying causes of their offending and prevent them from becoming entrenched in the criminal justice system.
- b) Embedded Youth Outreach Program (EYOP): A partnership between Victoria Police and Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) youth workers to deliver joint after-hours (3pm – 11pm) outreach aimed at reducing youth offending in Werribee and Dandenong. This program aims to provide a targeted response for young people at high risk of offending by referring them to relevant support services, including in

particularly given the young people are often transient or are moved around the state. The MAP allows these young people to be tracked and treated across conventional boundaries to ensure a consistent care approach.

¹⁵ Commander Galliot explained that the Emerging Youth Issues in the West Network (EYIW) is a network of Victorian Government representatives, local government and government funded organisations which work collaboratively to identify emerging youth issues in the west and find appropriate response to those issues.

¹⁶ Commander Galliot explained that Community Support Groups (CSGs) were established in 2018 in the NWMR areas of Wyndham and Melton (the latter of which also services the area of Brimbank). The primary aim of CSGs is to connect young people and their families to existing and new activities to improve their health and wellbeing, education, training and employment outcomes, as well as community participation. They also support disengaged young people through outreach and individual support, including young people involved in the youth justice system and their families.

¹⁷ Commander Galliot explained that the Principals Network is a program chaired by Victoria Police and involves representatives from both Primary and Secondary schools. The program provides opportunities to talk about emerging issues and provide advice on what police can do to assist. Melton have been successful with linking other stakeholders into this meeting to address emerging issues. For example, the Principals Network has engagement with the Melton City Council regarding food relief programs and Neighbourhood Watch initiatives within the context of the Safe Schools Program.

¹⁸ Commander Galliot explained that Local Site Executive Committees (LSECs) focus on improving experiences for cohorts of people who typically access local services across multiple government departments or sectors organisations. By bringing these commonly accessed services together, LSECs aim to improve the outcomes of the system as a whole by making the services run by different organisations and departments more integrated and efficient.

¹⁹ Commander Galliot explained that the Gang Crime Squad has a fortnightly meeting with Youth Justice intelligence practitioners, sharing identified issues from within the youth and adult system and how that translates into the community.

²⁰ This project also involves participation from Victoria Legal Aid, Youth Support and Advocacy Services, the Youth Junction, the Centre of Multicultural Youth, YouthNow, Jesuit Social Services, and Headspace.

relation to breakdowns in family relationships, alcohol or drug use, mental health issues or disengagement from school.

- c) Parental engagement and referral support: This initiative operates where any young person from Wyndham PSA is taken into police custody and involves a Youth Specialist Officer (YSO) conducting a visit at the young person's home within 48 hours, with the intention of engaging in conversation with the young person and their family to provide information on the judicial process and referral options to assist in early intervention and reducing recidivism among young offenders.
- d) Neighbourhood Policing Forums: Previously known as Community Safety Forums, these forums provide an opportunity for Victoria Police to engage with the community on a local level to hear concerns and explain the work that is being done to address relevant issues, including in relation to crime, family violence, road policing, youth offending, drugs and emergency management.

- 65. In subsequent correspondence to the Court dated June 2024, Victoria Police also noted that it is currently in the process of developing a state-wide plan intended to address knife crime. This plan will reportedly include targeted and controlled interventions alongside localised prevention strategies. It is being developed in collaboration with key partners across government, community, academia and business, and is reportedly founded on an understanding that knife crime can only be addressed through reducing risk factors, focusing on early interventions, and supporting change through community awareness and culture. As at June 2024, Victoria Police advised that the plan was in its final stages of development.
- 66. In outlining Victoria Police's response to youth gang offending and knife crime, Commander Galliot also highlighted a number of relevant procedures and specialised response units. While I do not consider it necessary to repeat such details in this finding, I note that Commander Galliot made specific reference to the *Control of Weapons Act 1990*, which is discussed further below. This legislation allows Victoria Police to declare a public area to be a 'designated area' if the Chief Commissioner (or delegate) is satisfied that disorder or violence with a weapon has, or is likely, to occur within the designated area. During the period of designation, Victoria Police members have the power to stop and search persons within the designated area for weapons and may seize and detain any items reasonably considered to be a weapon. Police may search any person within the designated area and do not need a reason to suspect that person is carrying a weapon.

67. I note that these powers have recently been expanded through legislative reforms passed through the Victorian Parliament in March 2025.²¹
68. Commander Galliot opined that these ‘*stop and search*’ powers are an effective measure at reducing youth gang crime and tackling the prevalence of youth gang members carrying weapons in public.

Youth Justice responses to youth knife crime

69. To contextualise to the responses detailed above by Commander Galliot, I determined to seek a statement from Youth Justice in order to better understand youth justice responses to addressing knife-related crime amongst young people in Victoria. Youth Justice supervises and works with children and young people who are in the criminal justice system, in the community, or in custodial services, and is thus an integral part of addressing knife-crime-related issues for children and young people who are already known to the system.
70. A statement was provided by Youth Justice Commissioner, Andrea Davidson (**Commissioner Davidson**) dated 14 November 2024.
71. In this statement, Commissioner Davidson outlined a knife crime program operated by Youth Justice, which was launched across Victoria in 2021. It forms part of a broader crime prevention response embedded within Community Crime Prevention Victoria’s *Youth Crime Prevention Strategy* and the *Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020-2030*.
72. The program was developed in collaboration with government and community agencies and is intended to respond to the systemic and community-level drivers of knife crime. Specifically, it aims to equip front-line case managers who work directly with young people and their support systems (family, school, community etc) to deliver evidence-based interventions to young people, both sentenced and unsentenced, aimed to target both offence-specific²² and offence-related²³ needs. Commissioner Davidson described that the knife crime program is intended to “*[benefit] the young person, their family and community through the sustained and generalised behaviour changes associated with working with family, addressing responsivity needs more holistically, uncovering and intervening in the systemic*

²¹ See in this regard *Terrorism (Community Protection) And Control of Weapons Amendment Act 2025*.

²² “Offence-specific needs” refer to evidence based criminogenic factors that are directly involved in offending behaviours, for example, pro-offending attitudes.

²³ “Offence-related needs” are needs which can contribute towards offending behaviours, such as poor coping skills.

drivers of behaviour and building on strengths of the young person and their family to increase the likelihood of embedding sustained behavioural change.”

73. Commissioner Davidson also highlighted other targeted supports available to young people engaged with the criminal justice system, including Forensic Clinical Assessment, treatments available in youth justice (including clinical intervention, offence-related programs, and offence-specific programs), and rehabilitation services to assist young people as they transition from custody to community.
74. Finally, Commissioner Davidson described two area-specific, interagency projects which are being advanced by the Local Site Executive Committee covering the North and West regions of Melbourne, in an effort to prevent and respond to serious youth violence. These include:
 - a) The Stable Bases Project, which *“aims to develop an outcomes-oriented program design model to be used by community services to better focus on the evidence-based drivers of serious youth violence.”* At the time of provision of the statement in November 2024, Commissioner Davidson indicated that planning was underway to test the model in Youth Crime Prevention Programs.
 - b) The “Think Twice, Make Better Choices” project. According to Commissioner Davidson, this program ‘concentrates on restorative justice and conflict resolution strategies in schools, education on the effects of violence and the introduction of limiting access to edged weapons.

A whole-of-community response to youth knife crime

75. To complement those statements of Commander Galliot and Commissioner Davidson, and given that Solomone’s death occurred in the western suburbs of Melbourne, I determined to seek one final statement from the Western Community Legal Centre (**Westjustice**) to better understand community legal and other local responses to youth knife crime, and how these might interact with traditional criminal justice responses.
76. A statement was provided in response by Ms Anoushka Jeronimus (**Ms Jeronimus**), Director of the Youth Law Program at Westjustice, dated 15 April 2025.
77. In this statement, Westjustice advocates for a whole-of-community approach to addressing the root causes of youth knife crime and cautions against relying exclusively on police-centred and criminal justice responses, which she notes may address only the symptoms rather than

the root causes of knife crime, involve excessive costs and risk unnecessarily criminalising groups of young people already over-represented in the criminal justice system.

78. She has summarised the key points of her statement as follows:

- a) There are a number of knife crime reduction efforts and initiatives in Melbourne's west, some connected, some not.
- b) Knife-related harm is a complex problem and a whole of community approach is critical to address not just the symptoms of the problem, but its root causes.
- c) Knife crime reduction initiatives should be connected with and mutually reinforce broader crime prevention initiatives being delivered.
- d) Relying on police-centred and criminal justice responses alone to address knife crime treats the symptoms only, not the root causes.
- e) They must be aligned with, not separate to, a whole of community approach.

79. This approach is based on an understanding of knife-related harms as rooted in a broad range of socio-economic factors. As outlined by The Youth Junction Inc (a provider of holistic programs and services for young people with complex needs), which is referred to in the Westjustice statement, research demonstrates that weapon-carrying among young people is often motivated by fear of victimisation rather than intent to harm, and may be influenced by prior victimisation, environmental factors, and social contagion.

80. In this context, a whole-of-community approach aims to address the root causes of knife crime by empowering communities and working to address systemic and structural conditions which contribute more broadly to the criminalisation of young people, including education barriers, racial discrimination, exposure to family violence, exposure to trauma, abuse and neglect, over-policing and justice system involvement.²⁴

Programs in the western suburbs

81. Westjustice highlights a number of programs operating in the western suburbs of Melbourne which aim either to target knife-related crime specifically, or to reduce the criminalisation of young people more broadly, though as addressed further below, opines that these initiatives

²⁴ See for example Smart Justice For Young People, Working Together, October 2023, available [here](#).

require further coordination in order to be effective and to achieve a genuine whole-of-community approach.

82. Examples of knife crime specific programs include:

- a) The Youth Activating Youth (YAY) project, ‘Drop the Knife, Save a Life – Community Conversations’: A project designed to promote an early intervention approach, by facilitating community conversations in the Northwest of Melbourne in order to inform an educational campaign which aims to educate young people and the community about the risks of carrying a knife and the potential devastating consequences for themselves, their families and the community.
- b) The Think Village project, ‘The Ripple Effect’: A professional development workshop designed for stakeholders working with young people and children to strengthen practitioner understanding of knife crime, youth violence and emerging community safety issues, with a focus on working with young people from complex and diverse backgrounds.
- c) The Youth Junction Inc (TYJI) project, ‘Sharp Choices’: A targeted intervention designed to reduce youth weapon possession and offending in the western suburbs, by prioritising individualised support, education and community engagement to promote long-term behaviour change. The program integrates both individualised case management which serves to link young people to services that may address their specific risk factors, as well as structured group sessions focused on fostering group cohesion, enhancing legal awareness, developing empathy, and strengthening decision-making skills.

83. Examples of broader, whole-of-community approaches to youth crime prevention (which are not specifically targeted at but may inadvertently address knife crime) include:

- a) Village Response Collective Inc: A grassroots community approach aimed at reducing recidivism amongst Pasifika youth in the western suburbs of Melbourne, which emerged directly in response to the death of Solomone. The project initially focused on a 30-day emergency response aimed at supporting and healing the community, including the youth involved in the incident in which Solomone was killed. However, it has since expanded to encompass a wide range of initiatives aimed at empowering

Pasifika communities, bridging social divides, and addressing socio-economic inequities including in relation to housing, employment and education status.

- b) 16 yards: A program which aims to work alongside young people connected to, or at risk of entering, the justice system, supporting them to shift their focus to prosocial and entrepreneurial pathways through mentorship, education and personal development programs. It also aims to support professionals working with young people through practical tools, training and consultancy designed to “*bridge the gap between lived experience and best practice*”.
- c) Westjustice, ‘School Lawyer Program’: A program which involves embedding a lawyer within a school’s on-site wellbeing team, to provide students with free and confidential legal advice, case management, and legal education. The aims of this project include crime prevention and client empowerment.

84. Westjustice highlights that existing individual community responses to knife crime ought to be better coordinated, with measured outcomes and agreed goals, to be genuinely ‘whole-of-community’. In addition:

- a) Police-centred responses alone may treat only the symptoms, rather than the root causes of the problem. In this respect, Westjustice opines that a sustained media focus on youth offending has led to short-term and populist “*law and order*” reforms. Such approaches may undermine evidence-based community approaches.
- b) Police-centred and criminal justice system focused responses may involve excessive costs without clear, quantifiable benefits. In this respect, Westjustice highlights the ‘Target Zero’ approach, which emphasises that the cost to Victorians to detain a young person costs \$7,775 per day per young person, compared to the cost to educate young people at \$6000 per year per young person.
- c) Police-centred responses may unnecessarily criminalise marginalised groups of young people who are already over-represented in the criminal justice system and underserved by support systems, including health, education, child and family services and housing. In this respect, Westjustice highlights the Centre Against Racial Profiling’s report, ‘Hit Rate Analysis – The Racial Profiling Data Monitoring Project’, which indicates that certain racial and cultural groups experience significantly higher

rates of unreasonable police searches.²⁵ In particular, the research demonstrates that people of African, Asian, Middle Eastern and Indian appearance all face higher rates of ‘unreasonable searches’ than people perceived to be Caucasian.²⁶

85. Westjustice also highlights particular concerns in relation to recent legislative reforms which aimed to reduce knife-related harms through the expansion of police search powers. These reforms, passed in March 2025 as part of the *Terrorism (Community Protection) And Control of Weapons Amendment Act 2025*, served to expand police powers to declare designated areas for weapon searches.²⁷
86. When asked to highlight best practice initiatives to addressing youth crime in Victoria in ways that extend beyond a law and order approach, Westjustice outlined the following system-level initiatives:
 - a) Target Zero: A broad coalition of services, schools and community organisations²⁸ working collectively to end youth criminalisation and over-representation in the criminal justice system of First Nations, African and Pasifika young people, and those living in residential care in Brimbank, Melton and Wyndham.
 - b) Smart Justice for Young People (SJ4YP)’s ‘Working Together: Action Plan to end the Over-Representation of Particular Groups of People in the Criminal Justice System’: An Action Plan which aims to end the chronic over-representation of five core groups of children and young people in the criminal justice system, setting out 49 system-level, rights-based ‘asks,’ including 9 whole-of-government ‘asks’ and 40 domain-specific ‘asks’ across the domains of: (1) criminal and civil justice and correction

²⁵ This was analysed on the basis of the “find rate,” meaning the proportion of “reasonable grounds” searches conducted where police “find” a contraband item. The Centre Against Racial Profiling recognised that this approach is not an accurate method when analysing the reasonableness of an individual search, but notes that the “find rate” provides a widely accepted mechanism to assess the overall reasonableness of police searches when analysing a large number of searches.

²⁶ The rate for people perceived as Pacific Islander fluctuated over the relevant period, with higher rates of unreasonable searches recorded in 2018 and 2022, but lower rates in 2019 and 2023.

²⁷ Westjustice notes that a joint statement prepared by numerous community, legal and human rights groups raised significant opposition to this legislation, on the basis that the proposed reforms would not be effective at protecting communities (noting that police searches in designated areas make “finds” in only approximately 1% of cases), and would contribute to further over-policing of marginalised communities who already face disproportionate rates of “no reason” police searches, with lower “find” rates than their Caucasian peers.

²⁸ Including the Centre of Multicultural Youth (CMY), WestJustice, Western Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee, Kids First (Whitelion), Jesuit Social Services (JSS), Anglicare Victoria, Victoria University, Wyndham Community Education Centre, CommUnity Plus, Youth Support + Advocacy Service, Youthlaw, Youth Junction Inc, Youth and Family Support Network Inc, Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity (AAFRO), Charis, City of Brimbank, City of Melton, Cohealth, Foundation House, Junubi, Melbourne City Mission, Orygen Youth Mental Health, Nga Matai Purua Inc, Victoria Legal Aid, Wyndhem Central College, and Youth Junction.

systems; (2) policing; (3) children, families and their community; (4) health and wellbeing; (5) housing and material needs; and (6) education.

Conclusion

87. I am grateful to Commander Galliot, Commissioner Davidson and Westjustice for the provision of thoughtful statements addressing the various approaches to addressing youth knife crime and youth offending from, respectively, a policing, youth justice and community perspective. Having considered these responses in light of Solomone's circumstances, the CPU data and other evidence before me, I make comments below.

FINDINGS

88. Pursuant to section 67(1) of the *Coroners Act 2008* I make the following findings, which are consistent with the Sentencing Remarks of Justice Fox (and the basis therefor) in *DPP v ST*:

- a) the identity of the deceased was Solomone Kitone Charlie Taufe'ulungaki, born 12 August 2004; and
- b) the death occurred on 16 June 2020 at Deer Park Library, 4 Neale Road, Deer Park, Victoria, 3023, from *1(a) Stab injury to the chest*.

89. I do not make formal findings in relation to the circumstances of death, but note that the death occurred in the circumstances described by Justice Fox (outlined at paragraphs [28] – [39] above).

90. Having considered all of the circumstances, I am satisfied that Solomone died as the result of an act of homicide in relation to which criminal proceedings have been finalised.

91. It is self-evident, in circumstances of homicide, that Solomone's death was caused by the act of ST (a pseudonym) and was therefore, at an individual level, preventable.

92. However, in considering the broader opportunities for prevention, it is relevant also to look more expansively to the responsibility shouldered by society to prevent, and address, the issues of youth gang violence and knife crime more specifically. The evidence before me in the coronial proceedings into Solomone's death demonstrates that effectively addressing the incidence of youth knife crime requires not only appropriate responses from police and youth justice, but also community-based measures to address its root causes.

COMMENTS

Pursuant to section 67(3) of the Act, I make the following comments connected with the death:

93. I do not intend to make comments on any specific factors which may have influenced those young people involved in the incident in which Solomone was killed. His tragic death was now over five years ago. However, in 2025, the Victorian community is still grappling with the impacts of knife crime and youth offending.
94. The evidence before me demonstrates that youth knife crime (like all youth offending) represents a complex issue rooted in a broad range of socio-economic factors, affecting marginalised groups at a disproportionate rate. In this sense, the responsibility to prevent further fatalities from youth knife crime requires a whole-of-community response that addresses the reasons such crimes are being committed in the first place.
95. It is evident, after considering the statements of Commander Galliot and Commissioner Davidson, that there is a broad range of police and youth justice initiatives intended to reduce youth knife crime and youth criminalisation, including initiatives specific to the western suburbs of Melbourne. I consider the breadth of these initiatives to be commendable, and recognise the importance of appropriate police and justice responses to addressing these issues. Certain of the initiatives referred to in Commander Galliot and Commissioner Davidson's statements address not only direct responses to youth offending but also the reasons why young people are motivated to join gangs and/or commit knife crime in the first place, which is deeply important.
96. However, police and justice responses should not be pursued in isolation. The statement of Westjustice highlights the critical importance of a broader, whole-of-community approach, which goes beyond a "*law and order*" response, and which promotes early intervention and community reintegration initiatives, in an attempt to address the root causes of knife crime. This entails improved social cohesion, inclusion and community-based responses for at-risk youth. Such an approach is reflected in the community initiatives highlighted in this finding, many of which involve work being done within marginalised communities to reduce the levels of contact of young people from those communities with the criminal justice system.
97. I consider such initiatives to be of great importance, particularly when considered alongside data from the CPU which demonstrates that in nine of 11 gang-related child homicides, there was evidence that the victim was a member of a migrant community, members from which

may face greater hurdles to genuine inclusion across a number of key areas, including education, health, employment and housing.²⁹ There is also evidence, as outlined by Commander Galliot and Westjustice, that weapon-carrying among young people may be more common among socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

98. In recognising that both the offenders and victims of youth knife crime may be disproportionately affected by socio-economic vulnerabilities, I consider that there is a clear need to ensure that young people, particularly multicultural children and youth, are not marginalised in our community; that they have the same educational and vocational opportunities as other Victorian young people, and that their positive contributions to the broader Victorian community are recognised, valued and nurtured. Social cohesion and inclusion, as heralded by a whole-of-community response to youth offending – in which the voices of affected young people are amplified – is the clearest pathway to long-term safer outcomes for Victorian communities.
99. In this regard, it is worth commenting that the majority of people from migrant communities are not involved in crime or violence, and are simply focused on trying to make new lives for themselves in Australia.³⁰ This is by no means a small proportion of our community. In 2020, the year that Solomone died, around 30% of Australians were born overseas and an additional 20% had at least one parent who was born overseas, making Australia one of the most multicultural countries in the world.³¹
100. Having carefully considered the evidence before me in these proceedings, I urge the Victorian Government and relevant government agencies, including Victoria Police and Youth Justice, to continue to collaborate with community groups to ensure that any criminal justice responses to youth knife crime are coordinated and aligned with, and not counter-productive, to evidence-based community initiatives. In particular, the evidence I have received in these proceedings demonstrates that, while appropriate police and justice responses are critical, sole reliance on “*law and order*” responses to youth offending can risk further criminalising already marginalised groups of young people, and in doing so, produce further harm in both the short and the long-term.

²⁹ See for example Smart Justice For Young People, Working Together, October 2023, available [here](#), p. 22.

³⁰ See for example ‘Meeting needs and reducing offending: Youth justice review and strategy, Penny Armytage and Professor James Ogloff AM, p. 9, available [here](#).

³¹ See Adonteng-Kissi, Obed & Mabefam, Matthew & Meribe, Nnaemeka & Baffour, Frank & Archibong, Elizabeth. (2025). Social service inclusion of immigrants through the lens of human rights in Australia. Development Policy Review, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.70021>. This is consistent with current [ABS data](#) (with a slight increase).

101. By recognising the importance of a whole-of-community approach now, I am hopeful that Victoria may see a future reduction in youth offending and in doing so, prevent future deaths in similar circumstances.

I convey my sincere condolences to Solomone's loved ones and recognise the immense tragedy of losing Solomone at such a young age to an act of senseless and preventable violence. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to review those Victim Impact Statements prepared for the purpose of the criminal proceedings and consider that my investigation has been richer for having been provided with this small insight into who Solomone was in life.

DIRECTIONS AND ORDERS

Pursuant to section 73(1A) of the Act, I order that this finding be published on the Coroners Court of Victoria website in accordance with the rules. I direct that a copy of this finding be provided to the following:

- (i) Senior Next of Kin
- (ii) Premier of Victoria, The Honourable Jacinta Allan, MP
- (iii) Detective Senior Constable Kallyn Gent, Coroner's Investigator
- (iv) Chief Commissioner of Police, c/o Benjamin Knight, Minter Ellison
- (v) Liana Buchanan, Commissioner for Children and Young People
- (vi) Andrea Davidson, Commissioner for Youth Justice, c/o VGSO
- (vii) Anoushka Jeronimus, Director of Youth Law Program, Westjustice
- (viii) Amie Herdman, Ambulance Victoria

Signature:



INGRID GILES
CORONER



Date: 23 October 2025

NOTE: Under section 83 of the *Coroners Act 2008* ('the Act'), a person with sufficient interest in an investigation may appeal to the Trial Division of the Supreme Court against the findings of a coroner in respect of a death after an investigation. An appeal must be made within 6 months after the day on which the determination is made, unless the Supreme Court grants leave to appeal out of time under section 86 of the Act.
