

## What to do when someone goes missing

**Jared Beaman**

An associate of bestselling author Melissa Jane Pouliot, Loren O’Keeffe, was in town on August 2 to attend the ‘Picnic for Ursulla’ event at Bell Park.

Loren is the founder of Missing Persons Advocacy Network (MPAN), an organisation which aims to assist families of missing persons to be able to generate the necessary awareness to locate their missing loved ones.

MPAN was founded in 2013; two years after Loren’s brother Daniel James O’Keeffe disappeared in mid 2011. In response to her brother’s disappearance, Loren started the campaign ‘Dan Come Home’ which gained significant attention via social networking sites and traditional media.

“Dan went missing about three years ago and it was very clear that the police had limited resources to search for him given that he was an adult male who went missing seemingly of his own volitions,” explained Loren.

“We reached out to the public via means of social media on about the third day after he disappeared and it just spread like wild fire. The Facebook page, in its first month, had about 10,000 followers. The following

year it had about 35,000 and now it has 52,000 followers and it’s not slowing down.

“It has been so encouraging to think that an adult male, who went missing a number of years ago, still has so much public support. It’s what has kept my family going and is the kind of hope that I want to be able to give to other families who find themselves in a similar predicament.”

Over a year ago, Loren began receiving emails and phone calls from people who had suffered from comparable situation. They were asking for advice on how to set up a media campaign for their own missing friend or family member, just as Loren had done for Dan.

According to Loren, “I thought, well okay, there’s a gap here in Australia. We don’t have access to any kind of practical assistance to support families in this kind of dilemma.”

Around 18 months ago, Loren founded MPAN. She has since worked to gain assistance from ongoing corporate partners in order to support the goals of the organisation.

“The first grant I applied for was through Vodafone and it was for \$85,000,” said Loren. “I applied for the grant with the idea of creating a really user friendly website to

help guide people to find their missing person.

“The first 24 hours after someone goes missing leaves you with no idea of where to begin. It’s completely overwhelming and it’s a huge task,” she continued. “Australia is a massive country so you need to get the message out there to the public as quickly as humanly possible. This website idea was backed by Vodafone and has since developed into ‘Missing Persons Guide’.

MPAN has received incredibly support from businesses throughout the country. One such company, a communications firm based in Melbourne, has even provided the charity organisation with office space and access to their human resources department.

Loren has been focused on getting assistance from many different types of industry leaders in order to build an efficient support network for those using MPAN’s services in times of difficulty.

“At this stage, it’s now just a matter of trying to get partnerships with Qantas and some sort of accommodation brand so that the families who are travelling to search for a missing loved one don’t have that financial obstacle.”

Melissa Pouliot, a former Quirindi resident, has been working with Loren and MPAN for the past 8 months to help the organisation reach its ambitious goals.

“About a year ago Melissa reached out to me, telling me about the book she had written ‘Write About Me’,” commented Loren. “It was really encouraging to come across someone else who had been personally affected by the issue of missing persons and who was driven to do something about it.

“Melissa has a lot of contacts in radio and newspaper. She has been making some enquires and has since been able to gather plenty of support. We have now got free advertising space in a number of important media publications.

“Melissa and I are constantly thinking up fresh ideas, new places to have missing people advertised and ways to really humanise our missing loved ones to the general public.”

Spread the word about MPAN and its services so that people know where to go if a family member or friend disappears. Visit [mpan.com.au](http://mpan.com.au) for more information and check out some of their services such as [www.missingpersonsguide.com](http://www.missingpersonsguide.com)