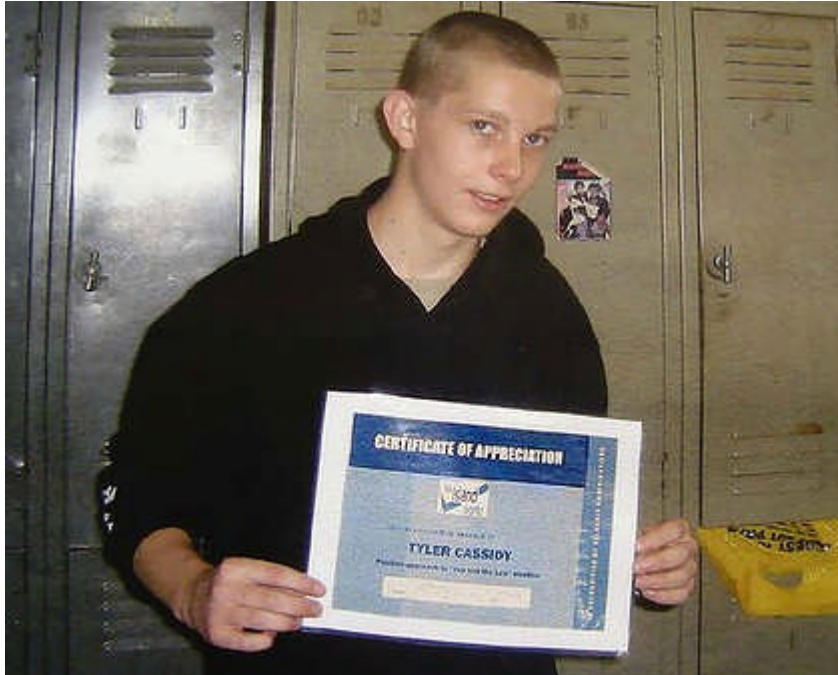


# A mother prepares to take the stand in fight for her boy

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October 19, 2010



**Tyler Cassidy, who was shot dead by police in a Northcote skate park almost two years ago.**

THE day after Tyler Cassidy, 15, was shot dead by police after a stand-off in a Northcote skate park, his mother issued a statement amid a media frenzy.

Her words were as much a vow as encapsulation of parental pain. "I promise you, my darling, I will fight for you as you were taken from me under the most horrific circumstances," Shani Cassidy said.

Today the conduct of the police who confronted a highly agitated Tyler, who was armed with two stolen knives and allegedly issuing threats to kill on the night of December 11, 2008, will come under scrutiny at the Coroners Court. Mrs Cassidy, who is expected to take the stand this week, will be the first of more than 80 witnesses.



Shani Cassidy, Tyler's mother. *Photo: Joe Armao*

*The Age* can reveal the names of the four police involved in the stand-off in which 10 bullets, including a warning shot, were fired at Tyler after capsicum spray failed to quell him.

The officers, Sergeant Colin Dodds, Senior Constable Richard Blundell, Senior Constable Nicole De Propertis and Senior Constable Antonia Ferrante have all provided statements to the inquest. Constable Ferrante was the only one who did not fire that night. In total, six bullets fired by the other officers hit the teenager. The fatal shot hit Tyler's collarbone.

Tyler is believed to be the youngest person shot dead by police in Australia. Due to policy issues the case has raised, Coroner Jennifer Coate has granted permission for the Human Rights Law Resource Centre and Victoria Legal Aid, which is also the state's largest mental health law practice, to participate.

Psychiatrist Patrick McGorry, who will be an expert witness, said that while he would not comment on Tyler's possible mental state, it was in the public interest to help the coroner make an informed decision about what should be an appropriate response in such tense confrontations.

"It's not uncommon for distressed and behaviourally disturbed people - often aggression is part of that - to be in a situation where police are called," Professor McGorry, who specialises in youth mental health, said.

"Police are placed in this situation much more frequently - they are placed in a situation for which they might not have sufficient skill or training to deal with it. What can we learn from this tragedy that is going to reduce the risk of this happening to someone else?"

Mrs Cassidy's lawyer Jane Dixon, SC, has told previous hearings that a critical issue would be whether Tyler could have been contained by other methods. Mrs Cassidy has been a strong advocate of Taser stun guns being made available to all frontline police in the state.

Ms Dixon has indicated that a "burning issue" for the family was also how they were treated by police in the aftermath, particularly in the 24 hours following the shooting.

Police sources have confirmed that an investigating officer who went to the family's home secretly recorded conversations with Mrs Cassidy. Another bone of contention is that Tyler's older brother, Blake, who went to search for him at the Northcote Plaza on the night of the shooting, was handcuffed under a tree by police for a time.

The case which will be heard over five weeks.