**Workplace Health and Safety Queensland**

## Transcript: Jason’s story – a young life lost

MICHAEL GARRELS:

You know, imagine being at work, hearing someone’s been injured and going to help…because you’re a senior educator… and to find it’s your son.

LEE GARRELS:

You know, you’re never gonna see his grandchildren, you’re never gonna meet his wife. I really miss being a Mum to Jason.

LEE GARRELS:

He’s just an easy going, fun loving kid and he was just 20 years old which isn’t…you’re kind of just coming into your own straps, you’re own confidence, what you really want out of life I think.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

He was a loving big brother but he was always a leader in something they shouldn’t have been doing.

ROBERT WILLIAMS:

He was a larrikin, no doubt about it.

BEN BRECKON:

He used to love his car, the Commodore. He used to lap around in it, drive real slow at 30 km/h down town.

PAUL SEIULI:

The memories…

ROBERT WILLIAMS: He’d get himself into trouble but it was all harmless fun, you know? He was just a good kid to have around.

LEE GARRELS:

He umm, probably was too trusting.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

He was definitely too trusting. Unfortunately I think that, you know, aided things to happen around him that lead to his death.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

He was looking for work. Looking around and he managed to come upon this job. Christ, I wish he hadn’t taken it.

LEE GARRELS:

He never even got his first pay cheque, he was only there for 9 days.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

It was 81 townhouses. I think at the time of Jason’s death they probably had around 40 built at that stage.

ROBERT WILLIAMS:

The electrical on that site was very, very ordinary.

LEE GARRELS:

I had said to him, “Do you know, mate? If it’s dodgy it is not worth your life”. He said “It’s going to be ok, Mum. They’re gonna fix it up”. But they never did.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

It had been a wet year as well which didn’t help. The site had just water on it everywhere. There was open trenches left, right and centre. They were ankle deep in mud in the good areas.

JASON KERSHAW:

I was on the excavator and yeah, I think Jason and a couple of labourers, they were on the ground. We’ll just clean up for the moment to make the site look responsible for when WorkPlace Health and Safety turn up but things went wrong there.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

And the machine operator said “Could you boys just take the board out from underneath that frame so I can backfill up to it please?”

JASON KERSHAW:

Yeah. I just asked Clayton to move the board out of – out of the road. Jason was just hanging on to the box. And then the cables come out. Like they should be locked in the box, and – but they weren’t. They just come out and they just lighted the whole – the whole box up mate.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

Jason had about three to five seconds of full electricity in him.

JASON KERSHAW:

He walked away – like walked away from it, fell to the ground after about 10 m.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

The ambulance could only get to within 100 metres of Jason. This is a four wheel drive ambulance designed for that country. So - Jason was basically left for a while. Then, the ambulance officer having to walk so far, and because of the state of the site, she couldn’t really use the best of her equipment. So they had to get him on a stretcher and then carry him all the way back to the bloody ambulance.

LEE GARRELS:

So on that day I was in Claremont. Part of my role as the senior nurse educator is to keep up my clinical skills, and also make sure that I can also aid in any kind of scenario. Bec had actually answered her phone, and she said “Oh my God, someone’s been electrocuted,” So, um, drove there, hopped out, and as I’m walking into the hospital I get another phone call from Rebecca, and she said “Lee, it’s Jason”.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

You know, I – I’m Jason’s father, I’m meant to be the protector. I didn’t do a good job here did I?

ROBERT WILLIAMS:

It was just like a black cloud had covered Clermont that day. I think a lot of people wanted answers, how and why this happened to one of our young people and nobody really knew.

BEN BRECKON:

It's hard. You grow up with him your whole life and then one day you wake up and he's gone, hey. You've lost a best mate. You've lost a brother.

LEE GARRELS:

Your normalisation for your family goes.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

Every time we sit at the table, that’s, um – you know, when you – all’s you can do is light a candle for a person to represent them.

LEE GARRELS:

I experienced severe PTS. I used to get these adrenalin rushes that were just like – my hands would just shake. I have no control over them. If I started getting flashbacks about with Jason in the resus room, I’d – it’s like I was drowning.

JASON KERSHAW:

I have been trying to put the blame on myself, and everyone tells me it’s – it wasn’t, “It was an accident Jason”. You know what I mean? “It wasn’t your fault.” Yeah I was pretty messed up for about 12 months. I was seeing a psychiatrist and I used to be on medication, trying to keep my anxiety down and trying to sleep. I did turn to – turn to the bottle, and did drink a lot to get the images out of my head. I lost my marriage over it.

WARWICK HOLMES

The workers that I’m aware of that witness the incidents themselves generally are never the same. Quite often they can’t return to that industry if they can return to work at all. And they have ongoing psychological issues re-living it - thinking “What if?”, “What could I have done to prevent it?” and feeling responsible for it. So it has a life-long consequence.

LEE GARRELS:

It’s just been quite shattering and have to find some normality.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

Jason has never been shown a worth by the people who were instrumental in his death. So the only – the only real people that can portray that worth and make sure that that worth is at least exposed is the family, you know. And it’s not an easy thing to do, but for me you have a duty to do it, that’s it. Something funny happens, you always think of him. Something – there’s a million things – a million times a day that – that you think – yeah. Like to tell him this, like to see that, da, da, da, da. That’s just – that won’t stop. It’s so stupid. It could have all been easily avoided.

LEE GARRELS:

Preventable. Absolutely.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

You don’t get killed doing what Jason was doing so I knew someone had done something badly wrong.

JASON KERSHAW:

The whole site was a safety issue - eh. You couldn’t tell the boss that. You’re there to do your job, mate.

ROBERT WILLIAMS:

And what should have happened is, the earth leakage should have tripped within 30 milliseconds and that would have saved Jason. But all that was there was this main switch and the only thing that blew were two transformer fuses.

JASON KERSHAW:

And once I got on site - yeah - she’s pretty wet. They should have shut the site down. A lot of people didn’t know how to do CPR onsite, that’s the worst thing about it. But there was one bloke there that tried to help him, he got a bit of water out of him but then his eyes started rolling back and yeah – it wasn’t good, mate. But people out there going to the big jobsites like that, it’s just have your conscience and look around and – yeah, there’s something – something wrong. Speak up and – and tell someone and – if no one won’t listen, go to the next person and – and get the matters dealt with. If we don’t fix it this is what happens - yeah - someone can die like Jason.

WARWICK HOLMES

Fatalities and incidents are generally not one thing. They’re generally a series of contributing factors that lead to an incident. And in this case those contributing factors were extremely preventable. A lot of young people don’t feel comfortable speaking up about safety issues whether they’re intimidated by the culture in the workplace or whether they feel by speaking up they may potentially lose their job. They should be empowered by their workplace - by their employer - for there to be a safety net and supervision and for other people to identify the risks with them and teach them about hazard identification and risk management.

WARWICK HOLMES

Well, housekeeping is key. If you’ve got your housekeeping sorted out it can remove a lot of other risks. Mainly slips, trips and falls. But in the event of an emergency and we have to evacuate people or we have to get emergency services in - if your housekeeping is substandard it’ll affect your ability to do that in a timely manner. And also, following all the rest of their duties - carrying out due diligence, insuring there’s safe access, insuring power is isolated when it’s being located. One of the keys to having good safety when you’ve got multiple contractors on site - and let’s face it, that’s every construction project - is clearly defined roles and responsibilities for persons entering that workplace – so everyone’s aware of what those expectations are. I’d say a young worker starting in our industry - there should be no time limit on educating and making sure they feel comfortable doing the tasks that we ask of them.

LEE GARRELS:

The older and wiser should be looking after the new and inexperienced. But really, those people that are older and wiser, should be going to their top employer and – and putting in a complaint, or bringing up a toolbox, or ringing up Workplace Health and Safety. There’s basically pathways,you go there to solve things, whether it’s a supervisor, manager or you know, your government bodies. But for these younger guys who are doing a job, if you don’t know, ask. Simple as that. And don’t assume, and if you’re being left unsupervised and you don’t know how to do it, ask them to supervise. Be an advocate for your own safety too. We need people’s behaviours to change, because that’s how the Universe operates. Actions, behaviours, consequences. So if we can teach these people to have an awareness of what they’re doing, be good in their role - it’s much better being proactive and being able to prevent. Because that’s what we want to do, we want to prevent this happening out there. And so I think that’s why that anger and frustration comes from, is most of these deaths are preventable.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

You don’t have to make a big stand to make sure something like this doesn’t happen. All’s you need to do is talk to one another just quietly. You know, it doesn’t – it doesn’t have to be we’ll all rally at the gate, just quietly say “Do you realise that’s not right?” Make sure everyone that you work with is aware if there’s a danger present.

LEE GARRELS:

I would have never dreamt I would have this life, and I never wanted ever. It’s been a real just nightmare.

MICHAEL GARRELS:

I feel a duty to do what I can to make sure a stupid thing like this that, you know, takes someone’s life, doesn’t happen again.