

# Loss drives aid for bereaved

**Gabrielle Knowles**  
Chief Crime Reporter

When Donna Lee Powell's fit and healthy 39-year-old husband Brett died while swimming in the Busselton Ironman two years ago, her life fell apart.

"I became a widow and single mother in an instant," the mother of two said.

"I felt abandoned, terrified and was completely broken.

"I had gathered photos for Brett's 40th birthday the following month and instead they were used for his funeral. It was heart-breaking."

Her grief at the loss of her childhood sweetheart and partner of 22 years in May 2015 was compounded by not knowing why he died.

Mr Powell, a paramedic, regularly swam and ran and had expected the 1.9km swim in the event he was doing with two mates to be easy.

But as his wife, children and friends watched, he veered off-course and sank. He was quickly brought to shore but could not be revived. Medical tests could not explain why he collapsed and his cause of death was officially declared "undetermined".

"That's really difficult, especially for the kids," Ms Powell said. As she and relatives prepare to mark two years without the happy-go-lucky man, Ms Powell wants to use her experiences to help other women going through similar tragedies.

She had been prepared for the emotional trauma of losing her husband and of supporting their children, then aged 12 and 10.

"But what knocked me, which I hadn't planned for and hadn't expected, was the administrative burden when someone dies," she said.



Photo available at [westpix.com.au](http://westpix.com.au)

Donna Lee Powell, whose husband Brett died in the Busselton Ironman, hopes to use her experiences to help others. Picture: Daniel Wilkins

"While there are compassionate people, there are others who aren't — we got a letter on Christmas Eve from an insurance company saying they were refusing to pay out an accidental death policy.

"I remember sitting on the phone crying when I was trying to get Brett's life insurance paid out and they were telling me they couldn't pay it until they were satisfied I wasn't involved in his death, even though they knew he'd died in public, swim-

ming a race." Ms Powell had been involved in the finance industry for more than 20 years so she was aware of procedure.

But she thought about how traumatic it would be for grieving people who had no understanding of the industry and her experiences have reignited her passion for financial planning.

"No one wants to talk about wills and estate planning but having a will in place, having some life insurance ... it's so important," she said.

"His pay just stopped and I was self-employed and couldn't work, so we had no income. We were fortunate we had savings."

She is building a financial advocacy and coaching business to help grieving people handle administrative tasks after a death or divorce.

Ms Powell is also planning to write a book that she hopes will inspire others going through similar tragedies and provide advice for how to support relatives or friends through grief.



Brett Powell

## Hunt for detention centre escapee

Australian Border Force officers are hunting a man who escaped from immigration detention while at a medical appointment in Mt Lawley.

Khaled El Ali, aged in his mid-20s, fled from guards while he was at a psychologist's appointment on Beau-

fort Street about 11am on Wednesday. He fled out the back of the building to a lane then raced around the front to a waiting vehicle.

A Department of Immigration and Border Protection spokesman said a male detainee escaped while on

an escorted medical trip but refused to confirm his identity.

"The Department is working with WA Police to locate the man and has asked for a full report from its detention services provider," he said.

Rourke Walsh and Chris Meldrum

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