

RELEASED: Tuesday 4 July, 2017

Australian Story – Monday July 10 & 17 at 8pm on ABC and ABC iview.

Long Way From Home – Rosie Ayliffe

I now understand that there's a dark side to the backpacker culture; that people can find themselves at risk just like my daughter did.

Rosie Ayliffe, mother of Mia Ayliffe-Chung

Rosie wants a change in the system. She wants to protect these people. She doesn't want Mia's death to be futile.

Stewart Cormack, Rosie's partner

Rosie's been a friend of mine for a long time. She's seeking to ensure this type of thing doesn't happen to some other mother's daughter.

Billy Bragg, friend

When Mia Ayliffe-Chung was murdered at a backpacker hostel in August last year it made headlines around the world.

The 20-year-old childcare graduate had set off from her home in Derbyshire the year before to travel the world. It was a long-held dream cut tragically short. After a stint working in a bar in Surfers Paradise, Mia decided to extend her 417 visa for a second year. But to get that extension she was required to do farm work for 88 days.

She travelled to Home Hill, 100 kilometres south of Townsville, checking into a local hostel. A week later she was dead.

French national Smail Ayad, who shared a dorm with Mia, is alleged to have attacked her in a stabbing frenzy before fatally attacking the man who came to her rescue, fellow Briton Tom Jackson.

When British police knocked on Rosie's door that night with news of her daughter's death she was inconsolable. "Losing a child in any circumstances is difficult," says Rosie's partner, Stewart Cormack, "but when it is your only child and you're a single parent, it's your entire world that's gone."

After a trip to Australia to bury her daughter, Rosie returned to the UK where she struggled to come to terms with Mia's death. Although she felt unable to return to her teaching position in a local school she quickly found another purpose.

She had been hearing stories from distraught backpackers of exploitation and abuse under the 88-day farm work scheme and began to campaign for reform. She wrote articles and letters and reached out to politicians, including the Australian Prime Minister, seeking greater government oversight of a system that she says is broken.

“I want to see reform of the system,” Rosie says. “I want to see regulation of the 88 days. I want a central body which distributes backpackers among farms that are certified.”

“If she’s successful there’ll be less people going through what we’ve gone through and Rosie herself has gone through,” says Tom Jackson’s father, Les.

Galvanised by this cause, Rosie recently returned to Australia to find out more about the 88-day farm work scheme and lobby for change. *Australian Story* accompanied her on this journey.

During the trip she also made an emotional visit to the place where Mia died and recorded her thoughts. Extracts of this raw and powerful recording feature in part two of the story.

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