

When people go
MISSING
THE EMPTY SPACES LEFT BEHIND



Daniel James O'Keeffe: missing since 15 July, 2011

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"In the 14 months since Dan went missing [from his family home in Highton, Victoria, on 15 July, 2011] we've only had one confirmed sighting, and that was in Ipswich and he said that his name was James, and that he was from



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Seven years on, she still runs the venture on her own, without any financial support. "As a community we should all be looking out for each other, and it shouldn't cost anything," she says. Meanwhile, new cases are recorded. And old ones remain unresolved.

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"In the 14 months since Dan went missing [from his family home in Highton, Victoria, on 15 July, 2011] we've only had one confirmed sighting, and that was in Ipswich and he said that his name was James, and that he was from Melbourne." O'Keeffe says. "And that's why the first sighting from ten weeks ago, from Southfield just outside of Cairns, sort of got us a little excited, so I've been looking into that."

Now another woman has come forward with a similar story - about a man calling himself James, matching Daniel's description. But as much as the latest sighting reignites hope, it also adds to the strain O'Keeffe is consistently under.

"We're looking into it as much as we can," O'Keeffe explains, now clearly spent. "It's just that I get one phone call in the morning and then my whole day is dedicated to calling the local police in all these different towns. The next day try

to gauge the credibility of any new reports, and be on standby for one other." It's getting pretty tiring," she concludes.

Looking for Daniel is now O'Keeffe's full-time job. She gave up paid employment the day he went missing and - with the support of her partner - has committed herself to searching for him. Day and night.

For a while last year, O'Keeffe's efforts finally seemed to be paying off. The family announced it had raised a \$20,000 reward for information leading to Daniel's discovery, which led to a lot of media interest. O'Keeffe was invited to appear on Channel 10's *The Project*, a TV show with national reach. For the first time, Daniel's story was broadcast outside his home state of Victoria. The televised segment caught the attention of a woman in Ipswich, who linked it with a man who had come into her medical centre two weeks earlier, asking for a glass of water.

The woman told O'Keeffe of a man calling himself James: well-mannered, polite, intelligent, friendly and handsome. She and a colleague had offered him money, which he'd refused. To O'Keeffe, the description "sounded Dan" and she flew up to Queensland and viewed the CCTV footage from the clinic. It looked like her brother, albeit a painfully thin version. He had clearly been roughed up. O'Keeffe spent the next two months in Ipswich, where she searched parks and soup kitchens, handed out business cards with Daniel's picture to Big Issue vendors, and also visited humanitarian service homes with her brother.

She'd felt sure she would come home with her brother. But she now believes he'd already moved on. It had been five weeks since the sighting, and the information - which the woman had initially given to Crime Stoppers - had taken a while to reach the family. "Yeah, it was pretty deflating," she says. "But I'm still confident he's still alive, and that's why I'm still doing what I'm doing."

Before Daniel went missing, O'Keeffe had looked forward to a career in international trade, perhaps living overseas. Now, of course, her entire focus is on missing people. And mental illness. Her brother suffered from depression and anxiety, and O'Keeffe now knows that mental illness is a factor in more than a third of all missing persons cases.

She says: "I can't be 100% positive that Dan is purposefully doing this. I don't know what his current mental state is. I do know if he's gone into some sort of dissociative state whereby doesn't really know who he is or what's going on, and he's just somehow managing to survive."

"But then... If he is aware, if he does know his family are searching for him, the only reason I could come up with for his not wanting to get in touch with us is that he must feel so terrible. He's always been very sensitive and caring and thoughtful, and I think that even trying to comprehend what he has done to my family would be too overwhelming for him to even make a call."

Daniel O'Keeffe's family is offering a reward for information. Call the hotline on 02 9664 0901, email danieloakeeffe@gmail.com or message [facebook.com/danieloakeeffe](https://www.facebook.com/danieloakeeffe). To find out more visit danieloakeeffe.com. Also see missingpersons.gov.au.

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