

# Woman's search for missing mum inspires new project for Australia's lost



Sally Leydon launched the Green Seat Project in 2025. Dedicated to missing Australians, the green seat overlooking the Gold Coast broadwater is the first of many she hopes to launch. Photo: Russell Shakespeare

CELESTE MÜLLER

A Queensland woman's almost 30-year search for her missing mother has become a national movement – but without a body or grave, Sally Leydon had to find another way to grieve.

Her mother Marion Barter, a beloved Gold Coast educator who was once named Queensland's best teacher, vanished in mysterious and perplexing circumstances 29 years ago after setting off on the "trip of a lifetime".

The "troubling" case was marred by police inaction, with a 2024 coronial inquest finding very little was done to investigate Marion's whereabouts until about ten years after she was last seen by friends or family members.

Her latest initiative, the Green Seat Project, came about following the coroner's findings being released, which officially declared her mother had likely died in October 1997, leaving Mrs Leydon feeling lost and unsupported.

“I kind of felt like I was on an island,” she said.

“I’d had all this media and podcasts and everything happening around me, and the inquest was massive ... then I got told she had died and you go about your merry way.

“You don’t get any guide book on how to manage any of that and I was in a position where I had to work out what I was going to do with my own story.”

Without having a body to bury and a final resting place to visit, Mrs Leydon came up with the concept of installing bright green bench seats, green being her mother’s favourite colour, in visible areas that would encourage reflection and bring attention to the stories of the long-term missing.

“I just felt that I wanted somewhere to go and sit and think about my mum, and wonder where she is and what’s happened to her.”

Each seat has a plaque on it promoting the Missing Matter website, which links to the accompanying podcast as well as “personal” profiles of missing people that have been put together with participating families and the organisation’s team of volunteers.

“Rather than just their hair colour, their eye colour, it talks about who they were as a person,” she said.

The first green seat was installed at The Southport Spit on the Gold Coast in October, 2025, in a location close to where Marion lived and worked before her disappearance.