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Ayla Reynold's father attends Waterville vigil in honor of missing toddler

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Christopher Cousins | BDN

Justin DiPietro, father of Ayla Reynolds, embraces Danielle Bartz, who organized a candlelight vigil for Ayla on Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2012.



By Christopher Cousins, BDN Staff
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Posted Jan. 17, 2012, at 8:25 p.m.
Last modified Jan. 27, 2012, at 1:56 p.m.

WATERVILLE, Maine — No amount of attention is too much attention when it comes to Ayla Reynolds, the missing toddler whose blue eyes, smiling face and

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blond hair are recognized throughout Maine and far beyond.

That's the theory under which members of the Waterville community gathered Tuesday night for a candlelight vigil at the First Congregational Church. As the intense search by investigators and nationwide media frenzy with Ayla at its center reached the one-month point Tuesday, there are some who are worried that the public's attention is waning. Danielle Bartz, who organized Tuesday's vigil, won't let that happen.

"It's not the first thing people talk about anymore," said Bartz, who is a chaplain for MaineGeneral Medical Center. "She's not on the news as much anymore, or on the front page. We want to keep Ayla out there. That's how we're going to find her."

Among the approximately 35 people who held vigil was Justin DiPietro, Ayla's father, who reported her missing Dec. 17 from his home on Violette Avenue. He sat in the front row with friends and family members, focused on the candle in his hands while friends and strangers prayed for Ayla's safe return. When the ceremony ended, he was among the last to leave, walking through a gathering of reporters without a word.

Bartz, who opened the ceremony, prayed to God for Ayla's safe return.

"Our community, it feels empty," she said. "There's a hole, and we look to you to fill it."

Some cried and others sat in somber silence as the ceremony wove through song, sentiments and quiet reflection. One woman, who declined to provide her name to the Bangor Daily News, summed up the ripple effects of Ayla's disappearance this way:

"I don't have a personal connection, but every day when I see her picture in the newspaper, on the news and on Facebook, it reminds me that we don't have to know someone to feel a connection," she said. "It doesn't matter. I'm here. My thoughts are here. And my prayers are here."

Others recounted times in their lives when their own children went missing, including a Winslow woman whose 3-year-old son once walked out the front door and was missing for an hour. Another person, Bob Vear of Waterville, described a few terrifying seconds when he couldn't find his grandson. Though crisis was averted a few moments later when the child was found, the experience created a wound that has been reopened with Ayla's disappearance.

"Tonight, if you have a small child at home, hold, hug and caress them," said Vear. "One never knows."

Vear, who is a friend of Justin DiPietro's brother Lance, said he decided about a week ago to do whatever he can to find Ayla. That has included printing fliers and T-shirts and going door-to-door asking for support from businesses and individuals. He said he and others also are planning fundraisers to pay for more fliers and T-shirts.

"The outpouring of support from the community has just been tremendous," he said. "Nobody has refused anything."

Vear said he's in contact with hundreds of people who are yearning to do something to help and that events such as benefit concerts and dances are in the works. He invited anyone who wants to be involved to email him at robertvear@hotmail.com.

Dana Hernandez, founder of a group called Mainely Moms and Dads, a social parenting network, said everyone affected by Ayla's disappearance can find



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l-class NYT correction

tion: March 17, 2017

(er version of this column misstated Bow Wow's relationship)

public editor on Twitter @spayd and reach her by email at public@ny

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comfort in one another.

“Whether we know each other or not, we come together,” she said. “This is a vigil of hope and a vigil of comfort. We’re keeping the hope that there is going to be some great news very, very soon.”

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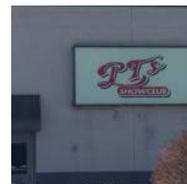
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