

## EXCLUSIVE

CHRISTINE MIDDAP

"No, no, no. Let me go!" The cries of the 11-year-old Indigenous boy pierce the Northern Territory neighbourhood as two uniformed police officers force the struggling, sobbing child into the cage of a police wagon.

He's done nothing wrong. A child protection worker assures him of this – "you haven't done anything wrong" – as she calmly observes police manhandle the screaming child out of his home, carry him by his hands and feet, whatever limb they can grasp,

before bundling him, alone and distraught, into the back of the police van.

His "crime"? He'd run away from a foster care placement and didn't want to return. He wants to be here, with \*Tom and \*Marie, the couple he calls Mum and Dad, the people who raised him from just seven weeks old until he was removed by Territory Families two years ago and cycled through more than seven foster homes. He wants to be with his biological sisters and the odd assortment of family pets that mingle underfoot in a home adorned with family photos.

Video obtained by The Australian shows the highly distressing removal of the boy known as

Benny. Forceful tactics and use of the secure cage of the police wagon raise questions over the treatment of the traumatised boy – questions that NT Police and Territory Families refused to address on Monday.

In the video Benny tries to explain, be heard, stand up for himself. Resist. The police wave their court order at Tom. Benny is not authorised to be here because Tom and Marie are no longer certified foster carers. They require Benny to come with them but he will not leave voluntarily and Tom has told police he'll let him go, but he will not force the boy to leave.

There's only one way this will end.

The video shows three armed uniformed officers wrestling the child out of the house and down the long driveway late on Friday afternoon.

"I'm not moving," Benny tells police when they finally get him to the police van parked on the road. "No thank you," he tells them again, struggling to regain his composure. "You have no right to touch me." He's yelling now, panicked. "I said no thank you. I want to stay here. It's not up to you, it's up to me. I don't want to f..king go!"

He's offered the choice to get into the NT government vehicle or the police van but to Benny it's a false dilemma. He's already told them he's not moving.

He struggles against the police restraining his arms either side, tries to stamp on one officer's toes, swears at them.

Three Territory Families' staffers watch on as he's forced into the cage of the police wagon, screaming "no no no, I'm not going back". He bangs on the locked door as he's driven away.

It's a deeply troubling scene. Any hope of forging trusting relationships with authority figures have likely been burned in this moment.

Benny's older sister, Jess\*, who has endured her own trauma in a birth family wracked with inter-generational trauma, is crying.

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