

Barrister-turned-filmmaker Darren Mort has used his experience in law and the entertainment industry to create a powerful short film that all family lawyers should see. Ahead of its Sydney premiere, he explains his motivation to **AMY DALE**.

Doing it for the  
**kids**

**F**or a man juggling two full-time jobs, Darren Mort has an unorthodox trick for staying punctual.

"I don't have a diary. It would cause me much more anxiety and it works for me to not have everything mapped out in writing in advance" he says.

"That being said, this year has been crazy."

Without pushing pause on his work at the bar, Mort has also finished producing *Tommy*, a short film that spotlights the often-forgotten victims of the family court – children at the centre of painful and ferocious custody disputes.

With a suite of appearances on high-profile Australian television series like *Blue Heelers*, *Neighbours* and *Utopia*, as well as frequent court work as a specialist family law barrister, Mort saw this film as, perhaps ironically, a perfect marriage of his two careers.

The film will debut in Sydney on 22 October at the Safe Children Conference, bringing together child protection experts and practitioners to examine links between child abuse and domestic violence in later life, new approaches to preventing violence, and the ongoing response of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

*Tommy* is also scheduled for the international film festival circuit, with

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screenings confirmed in Cape Town and Singapore.

Mort asked some of his family law colleagues to watch the film and provide early reviews ahead of public release.

"One of my colleagues was moved to tears and was very emotional watching it," he says.

"Not that it's good to make someone cry at work, but I was proud to see the impact it had on her."

*Tommy* was based on a family court case Mort was involved in more than a decade ago, where a young boy was left distressed and conflicted by the war between his parents.

The boy had a blue kangaroo toy named Joey, and Mort said the child "would talk to Joey and unload all of his anxiety and this would take him to a magical place".

For the screenplay, Mort changed his name and replaced the kangaroo with a tiger, because "tigers are very protective beasts and yet they can also be cuddly for kids".

Tommy is a nine-year-old boy whose parents are separating; one is in a new relationship and the other is struggling with drug abuse. The film is set during a weekend at his father's place.

The film was shot over five days with 30 cast and crew members, including a long filming day in a submarine, which served as a "solid place to [portray] Tommy's sense of isolation, and those images feature throughout the film".

Mort and his team made a deliberate "and courageous choice" to make the character of Tommy silent in the film, representing the voicelessness of children in the family court system.

He hopes this film will be viewed by parents, lawyers, social workers and the judiciary as an educational tool.

"Kids are precious gifts and this process can intimidate and hurt them," he says.

"Those involved in this system need to understand how their own behaviour can impact both directly and indirectly on children and young people."

When asked how he has balanced dual careers for more than a year, Mort says, "I have an amazingly supportive family."

"The solicitors who have supported me [in his legal work] are exceedingly generous, and the production team behind *Tommy* was a very talented one."

The film has been recommended by Screen Australia to turn into a feature-length film.

"Making this has been an absolute highlight [of my career]," Mort says.

"I have been able to harness my family law experience into a project that is informed and has authenticity. There are nuances to this that I would not have known without working in the jurisdiction day-in and day-out." **LSJ**

[www.safechildrenconference.org](http://www.safechildrenconference.org)

