

## **Call for a Public Inquiry into the Death of 16-Year-Old Joseph Scholes**

**This press release is embargoed until 10.30 am on Tuesday November 11<sup>th</sup> 2003. Please ignore any information you may have received prior to this from sources other than INQUEST or Nacro.**

INQUEST and Nacro are holding a meeting in the Jubilee Room at the House of Commons at 10.30 am 11<sup>th</sup> November 2003 to launch a call for a public inquiry into the death of 16-year-old Joseph Scholes, who died on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2002 whilst in Stoke Heath Young Offender Institution.

Joseph Scholes hanged himself from the bars of his cell a month after his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, just nine days into a two-year sentence for street robbery. He had lived an unsettled childhood and became a disturbed young boy. He exhibited clear signs of depression, periodic suicidal thoughts and had begun to self-harm at one point taking a knife to his face and slashing at it 30 times.

We feel that Joseph's death raises serious concerns about the way in which vulnerable children are treated in the criminal justice system. Since 1990, 25 young people aged 15-17 years old have killed themselves in prison custody.

Deborah Coles, Co-director of INQUEST said, "Joseph is 1 of 25 children to have taken their own lives in prison since 1990. INQUEST has worked with families of those who have died over the years and identified a pattern of deaths and the failure to learn lessons. The systemic and wide ranging issues highlighted in this case cannot be adequately addressed within the limitations of the present inquest system. The call for a public inquiry is motivated by the urgent need to address what is a serious human rights issue – the deaths and suffering of children at the hands of the state."

Paul Cavadino, chief executive of crime reduction charity Nacro said, "This shocking case clearly demonstrates why a vulnerable child like Joseph should never have been held in prison service accommodation. Many children in custody are vulnerable young people who have a combination of deep-seated personal problems. The prison system is no place for them. Most juvenile offenders should be dealt with by supervision in the community. The small minority who need to be detained should be in Local Authority Secure Units, which have higher staffing ratios and regimes more suitable for vulnerable and disturbed young people"

This call is being backed by a range of established organisations including Barnardo's, Sir David Ramsbotham, The Prison Reform Trust, Alan Levy QC, The Howard League for Penal Reform, The Children's Society, Baroness Stern.