

THURSDAY 10th FEBRUARY 2005

CRITICAL VERDICT RETURNED IN JOLENE WILLIS INQUEST – DEATH IN HMP STYAL

The jury at the inquest into the death of 25-year-old Jolene Willis has returned a damning verdict on the treatment and care of vulnerable women in HMP Styal.

Jolene died on 20th April 2003 and was the fourth of six women in HMP Styal to die in a twelve month period between August 2002 and August 2003. Jolene was serving a four month sentence following a conviction for shoplifting.

The key findings in yesterday's verdict were:

- The perceptions of Jolene's behaviour were inappropriate, leading to inadequate treatment.
- There was insufficient and inadequate management of the F2052SH (self-harm / suicide monitoring form).
- Low levels of staffing and staff training in relation to suicide-awareness led to no additional steps being taken to support Jolene.

Deborah Coles, co-director of INQUEST, said: "Jolene's death is a harrowing example of institutional neglect and systemic failings. Styal prison and the prison service should hang their heads in shame at their failure to act on previous warnings. Just over two weeks ago an equally damning verdict was returned into the death of Sarah Campbell who also died in HMP Styal. The juries' detailed and critical analyses show that there must be fundamental changes in the way vulnerable women are cared for in prison. Jolene was left to suffer by this system and it was this that fundamentally caused her to hang herself."

John Willis, father of Jolene, said: "I keep asking myself - Is the prison service equipped to care for someone as vulnerable as Jolene? Based on the evidence heard throughout Jolene's inquest, I don't think they are. The way to deal with people who have a history of minor offences as a result of drug-use, is not to keep locking them up. They need to be given real professional and medical help."

Notes to Editors

The family of Jolene Willis were represented by INQUEST Lawyers Group members Colin Hutchinson, 2 Garden Court Chambers, instructed by Joanne Kearsley, Farley's Solicitors. The inquest lasted for 2 weeks.

Jolene had a history of drug and alcohol problems and was placed on detox on entry to the prison. She was on an open F2052SH when she died. Jolene had been moved to two different prisons in 21 days.

INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families of those who die in custody. It provides an independent free legal and advice service to bereaved people on inquest procedures and their rights in the coroner's courts.

Deaths of Women in HMP Styal August 2002 - August 2003							
Name	Classification	Establishment	Ethnicity	Age	Status	Cause	Date Of Death
Julie Bernadette Walsh	Self-Inflicted	HMP Styal	UK White	39	Convicted	Overdose	12/08/2003
Hayley Williams	Self-Inflicted	HMP Styal	UK White	41	Convicted	Hanging	04/06/2003
Jolene Willis	Self-Inflicted	HMP Styal	UK White	25	Convicted	Hanging	20/04/2003
Sarah Campbell	Self-Inflicted	HMP Styal	UK White	18	Convicted	Overdose	18/01/2003
Anna Baker	Self-Inflicted	HMP Styal	UK Black	29	Remanded	Hanging	26/11/2002
Nissa Ann Smith	Self-Inflicted	HMP Styal	UK White	20	Remanded	Hanging	10/08/2002

Source: INQUEST Casework and monitoring