

PRESS RELEASE 27 JUNE 2005
DAMNING INQUEST VERDICTS FOR THE DEATHS OF TWO WOMEN
IN PRISON

Within the last few days there have been two important inquest verdicts returned into the deaths of Tina Bromley at HMP Edmunds Hill, who died aged 37 on 4 January 2004 and Sue Stevens who died in HMP Durham on 21 February 2003, aged 48.

Both juries found significant failings in the prison service in relation to the care of these two vulnerable women. In the case of Tina Bromley the lack of communication regarding her detoxification regime was criticised as was moving her from a shared cell to a single cell. The jury at the Sue Stevens inquest criticised the prison for unsatisfactory planning of her move from HMP Holloway to HMP Durham resulting in an inadequate assessment of her self-harming tendencies.

Deborah Coles, Co-Director of the organisation INQUEST, said:

“Women will continue to die while prison is still used inappropriately as a place to house those with mental health and drug problems. This does not negate the duty of care that prison owes to those in its custody. It continues to be very alarming that they fail in this duty when responsible for society's most vulnerable women. Tina and Sue were vulnerable women who needed care and medical attention. Prison was an inappropriate place for both of them. Their inquests raise the same issues that have arisen time and again, issues that are not being addressed, illustrated by the fact that women keep dying in prison.”

Jo Opie, who travelled from London to Durham daily to attend the Sue Stevens inquest, commented at the conclusion:

“I was horrified at the appalling and unnecessary suffering Sue underwent in the last few days of her life due to bureaucratic incompetence, an appalling breakdown in communication within the prison system and grossly inadequate application of self-harm procedures at HMP Durham. I'm disappointed that the jury did not consider the catalogue of failings had contributed to her death particularly given that Holloway had kept her alive for the previous 4 years and 2 months.”

Paul Bromley, Tina's brother said:

“Tina was no angel but she was a loving human being who was in an extremely vulnerable mental and physical state. Whatever the rights and wrongs of Tina's circumstances all people have the right to health care and any institution has a duty of care to its inmates. It is obvious that Tina's state of mind deteriorated so far within a very short time upon admittance to Edmund's Hill that it led her to taking her own life. Whilst we recognise that the blame cannot be placed with any individual, there is clear evidence of institutional neglect by the prison service that led to the tragedy.”

n q u e s t

INQUEST Lawyers Group members Sarah Ricca of Hickman and Rose Solicitors and barrister Colin Hutchinson of 2 Garden Court Chambers represented the family of Tina Bromley and Harriet Wistrich of Birnberg Peirce and Jonathan Glasson of Doughty Street Chambers represented the long time friend of Sue Stevens.

Notes to editors:

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.