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JURY RETURN VERDICT AT INQUEST INTO THE DEATH IN CUSTODY OF 14 YEAR OLD ADAM RICKWOOD

Before HM Coroner for County Durham Andrew Tweddle
Sitting at Chester-le-street Magistrates Court, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-street,
Co. Durham DH3 3UA

The jury at the three week inquest into the death of 14 year old Adam Rickwood in Hassockfield Secure Training Centre in August 2004 today returned a verdict saying that he intended to take his own life.

Adam was found hanging in his room in Hassockfield Secure Training Centre (STC) in County Durham on 9 August 2004 whilst on remand. He was 150 miles away from his home. The inquest has heard evidence about how Adam had been identified as a vulnerable child with a history of self harm and suicide attempts. On the day of his death he had been forcibly restrained by four male staff for refusing to go to his room. A painful restraint technique called 'nose distraction' was used against him. Hours later he was found hanging.

Deborah Coles, Co-Director of INQUEST said

"The state failed appallingly to protect a damaged and vulnerable boy with a long history of self harm and disturbed behaviour. We can only imagine the despair Adam felt at his imprisonment so far away from home and the impact of being painfully restrained by four men for refusing to go to his room.

INQUEST is deeply concerned about the appropriateness and legality of the force used against Adam which included the nose distraction technique designed to inflict pain. It is a matter of serious public concern which became clear at the inquest that vulnerable children in STC's are not afforded the protection of the law and are routinely forcibly restrained for non compliance. The government must review this dangerous practice that amounts to institutional child abuse to ensure it is never used again."

Carole Pounder, Adam's mother said:

"I am disgusted by what I have heard at the inquest. Not once has anyone contacted me or my family to apologise about my son's death. I am disgusted that there was no consideration of the lawfulness of the restraint used on Adam. My question is how many more children have been treated like this today?"

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Mark Scott, family solicitor said:

“Given the clear failures in the past, Mrs Pounder urges the Youth Justice Board and the government to ensure that the private companies that run STC’s for profit are properly monitored to ensure that children in their custody are treated in accordance with the law.”

The family were represented by INQUEST Lawyers Group members Richard Hermer from Doughty Street chambers and Mark Scott from Bhatt Murphy solicitors.

A detailed press briefing is available on INQUEST’s website.

Further information	www.inquest.org.uk
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