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JURY RETURN OPEN VERIDICT AT INQUEST INTO DEATH OF VULNERABLE TEENAGER DANIEL NELSON

Inquest before HM Coroner for Doncaster Mr S Hooper, sitting at Doncaster Law Courts
College Road, Doncaster DN1 3HT

The family of 18 year old Daniel Nelson are bitterly disappointed with the open verdict returned today by the jury at the inquest into his death. Daniel died in Doncaster Young Offender Institution on 20 September 2005 while a remand prisoner there. It was his first time in custody.

Speaking after the eight day inquest on behalf of the family, solicitor Ruth Bunday said:

“The family bitterly regret the jury’s failure to make any findings whatsoever other than what was already known from the moment of Daniel’s death. The family remain heartbroken that they were never informed, after Daniel had given permission for this, that he had been moved to healthcare, or on a suicide watch, or exhibiting paranoia and bizarre behaviour, constantly calling for them, and scarcely sleeping.

Before Daniel placed his neck in a ligature attached to his cell door on the 20 September 05, resulting in his death, he had made three previous ligatures from bedding or clothing, and attempted to cut his wrists with a plastic knife. He had managed to attach two of the three ligatures to the door of Doncaster’s reduced risk and ‘safest’ cell – something believed impossible until he did it. Daniel was nevertheless left in that clearly dangerous cell, and checked every 15 minutes. The cell door was covered in Perspex which appears to have been marked and tinted and which impaired visibility and communication. The family know that if Daniel’s watch had been raised to constant observation at least until the dangerous cell door could be replaced; he would be alive to day.

This was the conclusion of the Prisons Ombudsman’s report into this tragedy. The jury were not permitted to know of the contents of that report.”

Helen Shaw, Co-director of INQUEST said:

“This is a tragic case which highlights our concerns about the use of imprisonment for vulnerable young people. It is outrageous that the jury were not allowed to consider the content of the PPO’s report and therefore understand the serious issues raised by Daniel’s time in the Health Care Centre at Doncaster YOI in detail. It is yet another indication of the need for fundamental reform of the inquest system so that lessons can be learned to prevent similar deaths in the future.”

Lisa Clarke was represented at the inquest by INQUEST Lawyers Group member Ruth Bunday of Harrison Bunday Solicitors.

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.

There have been 186 deaths of young people aged 21 and under in prisons and YOIs from January 1995 to date. Two children aged 14 and 15 also died in the custody of the Youth Justice Board in 2004.

Deaths of young people in prison in England & Wales 1995-2007														
Classification	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Self-Inflicted	11	14	16	15	19	18	15	16	13	6	13	3	5	164
Non-Self-Inflicted	0	3	1	3	1	0	0	2	2	1	1	0	2	16
Homicide	1	0	2	1		2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6

Source: INQUEST Casework and monitoring

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