

PRESS RELEASE

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INQUEST INTO DEATH OF PETRA BLANKSBY IN HMP NEW HALL EXPECTED TO CONCLUDE ON WEDNESDAY

10am 30 January 2008

Sitting before HM Coroner for West Yorkshire (Eastern District), David Hinchliff
Wakefield Coroner's Court, 71 Northgate, Wakefield WF1 3BS

The coroner's summing up at the inquest into the death of Petra Blanksby in HMP New Hall is expected to take place on Wednesday 30 January.

Petra died on 24 November 2003, following an incident at New Hall on 19 November when she was found in her cell having tied a ligature around her neck.

At the time of her death Petra was on remand having been charged with the offence of arson with intent to endanger life. The evidence revealed that the offence with which Petra was charged was an act of self-harm and the only life endangered was her own.

Petra had an alarmingly long history of serious attempts at self-harm and had been under the care of the mental health services for many years. She had previously been diagnosed with a personality disorder. Throughout her time in New Hall, Petra was subject to an open F2052SH, the form used to record details of those identified as being at risk of suicide and self harm. During the 130 days Petra spent in New Hall she was involved in at least 90 incidents of serious self harm, some resulting in hospital admission. While Petra was in the prison, her son was placed for adoption. Witnesses gave evidence that there was a "blatantly obvious" increase in Petra's pattern of self harm linked to her son's adoption.

A range of concerns have emerged in the evidence heard at the inquest which the family hope will be considered in the jury's verdict, including:

- The acknowledged unsuitability of prison for someone with Petra's mental health problems.
- The lack of provision in the community for women who self harm.
- Whether there were failings by Derbyshire Social Services in relation both to Petra's own care and the arrangements for the adoption of her son.
- The collective failure of various authorities to understand the impact of adoption proceedings on Petra's mental health and self harm.

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Inquest

- Whether there were failings in the care provided by the Pennine Health Care Trust in not admitting Petra to hospital on the day she committed the offence which led to her remand in custody, despite her specific attempts to seek help.
- Whether there were failings in procedures, staff training and access to resources at HMP New Hall on 19 November 2003.

The family and INQUEST will make a statement at the conclusion of the inquest.

Notes to editors:

1. 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.
2. The coroner has made an order preventing any identification of Petra Blanksby's son.

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