

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release 21 February 2008

INQUEST TO OPEN INTO DEATH OF WOMAN IN STYAL PRISON

9.15am Monday 25 February 2008

Sitting before HM Coroner Nicholas Rheinberg

Macclesfield Town Hall, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK10 1DP

The inquest into the death Valerie Hayes opens on 25 February 2008 and is expected to last for two weeks. Valerie was found hanging in the segregation unit of HMP Styal on 10 May 2006. She was 42 years old.

Valerie had a long history of mental health problems and drug misuse which escalated when her two children were taken into care in 1998. Following an incident in January 2004 she was convicted of arson and sentenced to 2 years and 3 months in prison. She was released on licence but was recalled to HMP Styal for breach of her licence conditions on 1 April 2006.

In the last few days of her life Valerie made a number of serious self-harm attempts. Despite being on suicide watch and subject to an ACCT (Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork) form, Valerie was restrained and moved to the segregation unit on 10 May where she was found hanging at 4.15pm.

The family hopes the inquest will examine:

- whether there was a failure to provide Valerie with the appropriate psychiatric assistance or timely assessment by the Mental Health Inreach Team;
- the quality of the care provided to Valerie following her decision to come off the methadone detox programme and whether there was a failure to ensure all staff members involved in her care were aware of the effect this may have had on her mental health;
- what communication there was about the details of the medication Valerie was receiving prior to her return to prison;
- the management of Valerie's suicide and self-harming risk, including the entries in the ACCT notes;
- the decision to place Valerie in segregation.

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Deborah Coles, Co-director of INQUEST, said:

“Despite the high level scrutiny of Styal prison, serious concerns remain about the safety and quality of life for women held there. INQUEST has repeatedly highlighted the failure of the Prison Service to act on previous recommendations made as a result of inspections and investigations into women’s deaths. Urgent action is needed to divert mentally ill women out of prisons which are incapable of meeting their complex needs.”

Janet Brough, Valerie Hayes’ sister said:

“Valerie was outgoing, chatty and well liked by everyone that met her. She was talented, had a lovely singing voice and played the guitar. Valerie was a loving sister and a bridesmaid to two of her sisters, a duty which she enjoyed very much. The same way Valerie loved us, we loved her back. All I want is that lessons are learnt from this tragedy and that her untimely death was not in vain, but has helped to change the circumstances for women in prison for the better.”

Valerie Hayes’ family is represented by barrister Alison Gerry of Doughty Street Chambers, instructed by INQUEST Lawyers Group member Nancy Collins of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors.

Further Information	www.inquest.org.uk
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Notes to Editors:

1. Six women died at HMP Styal in a twelve month period in 2002 to 2003. This caused the then Prisons’ Minister Paul Goggins to commission an investigation to be overseen by the Prisons Ombudsman to consider the circumstances surrounding the six deaths at HMP Styal. The report expressed grave concerns about the quality of care and treatment being provided at Styal, particularly to women who are vulnerable to drug use and/or mental illness.
2. In response to the publication of the PPO report, the government announced that it would undertake a review of vulnerable women in the criminal justice system. Baroness Jean Corston was responsible for this review, which reported its findings and recommendations in March 2007. The government responded to the review in November 2007 and has failed to allocate any resources to its implementation.
3. 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.

Inquest

Deaths of women at HMP Styal 2002 to date						
Name	Date Of Death	Establishment	Age	Status	Cause	Classification
Lisa Marley	23/01/2008	HMP Styal	32	Remanded	Hanging	Self-Inflicted
Helen Cole	03/06/2007	HMP Styal	48	Remanded	Hanging	Self-Inflicted
Valerie Hayes	10/05/2006	HMP Styal	42	Convicted	Hanging	Self-Inflicted
Julie Walsh	12/08/2003	HMP Styal	39	Convicted	Overdose	Self-Inflicted
Hayley Williams	04/06/2003	HMP Styal	41	Convicted	Hanging	Self-Inflicted
Jolene Willis	20/04/2003	HMP Styal	25	Convicted	Hanging	Self-Inflicted
Sarah Campbell	18/01/2003	HMP Styal	18	Convicted	Overdose	Self-Inflicted
Anna Baker	26/11/2002	HMP Styal	29	Remanded	Hanging	Self-Inflicted
Nissa Smith	10/08/2002	HMP Styal	20	Remanded	Hanging	Self-Inflicted

Source: INQUEST monitoring