

PRESS RELEASE

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JURY DELIVER CRITICAL VERDICT AT INQUEST INTO DEATH OF WOMAN IN HMP STYAL

The jury in the inquest into the death of Valerie Hayes today returned a verdict of accidental death following a two week inquest.

Valerie was found hanging in the Care, Support and Reintegration Unit (CSRU) - the renamed Segregation Unit - of HMP Styal on 10 May 2006. She was 42 years old and had a long history of mental health problems and drug misuse.

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 CSRU on 10 May where she was found hanging at 4.15pm

The jury found in their narrative that there was:

- Insufficient health care resources specifically within the mental health teams.
- Inadequate completion of key documentation.
- Insufficient inter-departmental communication brought about by a fragmented approach to service provision..

During the two week inquest the jury heard that mental health services in the prison were seriously under-resourced, resulting in health staff feeling unable to do their jobs properly. They heard of confusion as to the role of the CSRU, which was being used to segregate for disciplinary reasons as well as for those who required higher levels of support due to their vulnerability.

The jury were also told that despite Valerie's evident vulnerabilities, the assessment required to ascertain whether it was safe for her to remain in the CSRU either did not take place or if it did was not done properly. Shortly before her death Valerie was seen ripping up a mattress cover, yet no attempt was made to enter the cell and remove it from her. Valerie was discovered hanging by a ligature fashioned from this mattress cover.

Deborah Coles, Co-director of INQUEST, said:

"What this verdict demonstrates yet again is that the prison system is neither adequately resourced nor adequately managed in order to ensure the safety of the women in its care. 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:

"I am pleased with the jury's verdict because it has highlighted issues which need to be addressed, and hopefully will help towards ensuring a similar tragedy doesn't happen again. I would like to thank everyone for their hard work and compassion in looking into the circumstances surrounding Valerie's death."

Valerie Hayes' family was represented by barrister Alison Gerry of Doughty Street Chambers, instructed by INQUEST Lawyers Group members Nancy Collins and Michael Oswald of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors.

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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 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.

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