

## **Inquest into the death of Adam Rickwood 31 May 2007**

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The jury in this case have today returned a narrative verdict. Unfortunately the jury, Mrs Pounder, her family and the public have been denied the opportunity to have a full investigation into the facts surrounding Adam's death. Evidence emerged during the course of the inquest that suggested in the hours preceding his death that Adam was unlawfully restrained by four male custody officers at Hassockfield STC. They used a technique called "nose distraction" that was specifically designed to inflict pain. The evidence at the inquest was that this technique not uncommonly caused injury, as indeed was the case with Adam who suffered a bloody nose. What is more, the evidence suggested that far from being a rare one-off incident, children were regularly unlawfully restrained at Hassockfield and that this continued to be the case during the course of the inquest.

What is worse is that the Youth Justice Board, the statutory body charged with responsibility for overseeing the operation by SERCO, the private company that runs Hassockfield, has been complicit in allowing the use of force outside the law. It was accepted by the YJB through their lawyers at the inquest that the use of force in circumstances such as those applying to Adam was unlawful. In denying the jury the opportunity to properly consider this vital issue the Coroner failed to give Mrs Pounder her right to a full investigation of how her 14 year old child died and further denied the public the opportunity to expose what evidence strongly suggests is the systemic use of unlawful force on very vulnerable children. Given the clear failures in the past Mrs Pounder would urge the YJB and the government to ensure that the actions of the private companies that run STCs for profit are properly monitored to ensure that vulnerable children are treated in accordance with the law.

Given the disturbing evidence that came out of the inquest this also strengthens the call for a full public inquiry into how children are treated in the criminal justice system.

**For further information please contact Mark Scott at Bhatt Murphy Solicitors on: 020 7729 1115 or INQUEST on: 020 7263 1111.**