

Mother's fight for prison changes

Sarah Campbell, formerly heroin dependent, who suffered from clinical depression, was jailed for manslaughter in January 2003 - a day later she was dead.



Sarah Campbell died the day after being jailed

An inquest has yet to be held, but the 18-year-old apparently died after taking an overdose of prescription drugs at Styal Prison in Cheshire.

Her mother, Pauline, has been calling for Prison Service changes ever since.

She has welcomed the chief inspector of prisons' report calling for women such as Sarah to be sent to secure units.

"My daughter should have been sent to a secure hospital, not to a jail - and if that had happened, I think it's very likely she would still be alive," Mrs Campbell, a 56-year-old retired teacher, said.

Sarah fell into two of the categories which prisons inspector Anne Owers believes put prisoners most at risk of self harm and suicide.

“ Sarah was in a state of terror about going back to Styal Prison. I think it was a cry for help ”

Pauline Campbell

It was the start of her sentence and she suffered from a mental illness. Her mother says she had been drug-free for eight months.

But she was sent to Styal Prison for three years after being convicted of the manslaughter of ex-serviceman Amrit Bhandari in Chester city centre.

Mr Bhandari suffered a heart attack and died after Sarah and another woman, Kim Woolley, 31, from Fazakerley in Liverpool, accosted him in Chester city centre.

The court heard Mr Bhandari, who had a heart condition, died of fright after Woolley accused him of rape.

'Marked deterioration'

Mrs Campbell, of Malpas, Cheshire, said: "Sarah had spent six months on remand at Styal, and was in a state of terror about going back there."

During Sarah's time on remand at Styal from May to November 2002, Mrs Campbell says she visited her daughter every other day and also received letters from her. Sarah was her only child.

"Every time I visited I saw a marked deterioration in her mental and physical state. She didn't receive the care she needed to treat her addiction and she was kept locked in her cell for 23 hours a day," Mrs Campbell recalled.



Sarah spent six months on remand at Styal Prison

She blames the overcrowding, understaffing and underfunding of the prison service.

"I am appalled by what I have found out about the Prison Service since Sarah's death.

"I can never be a grandmother now and I will be fighting for changes for the rest of my days," Mrs Campbell added.

The Prison Service said an investigation was under way into deaths at Styal Prison and that it could not comment on individual cases or allegations while the inquiry was ongoing.

The jail was in the process of redesigning the remand wing and was getting £200,000 extra funding to recruit more staff for it, a spokesman added.

Sarah's mother says her daughter was in the segregation block of the prison for her own protection at the time of her death, not on the remand wing.

Women inmates at a Cheshire prison are being put at risk by a lack of support during drug withdrawal and with mental health problems, a top report says.

Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers said more must be done at Styal Prison to ensure vulnerable inmates' safety.

Although there were some improvements, a system to dispense methadone after five drug users' suspected suicides was "inadequate", she said.

Penal reform group the Howard League branded Styal "unsafe for women".

It urged the courts to consider using alternatives to custody.

The methadone programme was set up at the Wilmslow jail after six inmates were believed to have killed themselves in a single year.

All died within their first month in custody and five of them had a serious drug habit.

Ms Owers said an earlier inspection had stressed the urgent

need for a proper detoxification regime in Styal's Waite wing in particular.

But the programme was set up "only after the sixth death" and "in great haste", she said.

'No support'

She said a regime "focused around methadone dispensing" and lacked proper systems to make sure women could access the detoxification programme.

She told BBC News Online: "Clearly it (Styal) has improved safety but nothing was put around it - there was nothing put in support.

"A lot of women were spending up to 19 hours or more in cells and there was nothing for them to do.

"Obviously coming down from drugs that's very important. In terms of things like support and care plans there was an awful lot more to do."

One woman was subjected to formal punishment after being cut down from trying to hang herself.

She added that more must be done to help women with mental health problems.

Styal was unique in having a psychiatric unit, she said, but "we have to ask whether a prison is or ever can be the right place to treat acute mental illness".

But she praised "supportive and open relationships" between staff and inmates and said progress had been made in resettling prisoners after release.

'Substantial progress'

Education provision had improved and race relations were "among the best" she had seen.

Director General of the Prison Service Phil Wheatley said substantial progress had been made in detoxification provision, suicide and self-harm policies, making Styal a safer place.

A longer term review of mental health needs was under way, he said.

The Howard League for Penal Reform said courts must make greater use of community sentences.

Styal is being used as a dumping ground for the mentally ill and drug addicts who have been failed by society ”
"The prison is failing to provide a service to the public, the

courts, the women and the victims."

Juliet Lyon, director of the Prison Reform Trust, described the situation as "one of the most shocking examples of institutional failure in a public service".

She said: "Styal is being used as a dumping ground for the mentally ill and drug addicts who have been failed by society."