

Press release  
Tuesday 25 February 2014

## **Charities continue fight for justice as young man dies in NHS care**

The death of 18-year-old Connor Sparrowhawk on 4 July 2013 was preventable, according to the publication of an independent inquiry into his death, published yesterday by Verita\*.

Connor was a young man with a learning disability and epilepsy who tragically died in a specialist NHS Assessment and Treatment Unit, Slade House, run by Southern Health NHS Care. He was found submerged in a bath following an epileptic seizure.

Mencap and The Challenging Behaviour Foundation along with others have been working to ensure that a fair investigation into the reason for his untimely and tragic death was conducted. His family have had to face a long and distressing battle to get to this point as originally his death was written off as natural causes.

The inquiry report found that the overall care provided to Connor by the unit had 'failed significantly'. It also found that staff did not engage with the family in order to gain a full picture of Connor's care and support needs.

Following the abuse scandal at Winterbourne View assessment and treatment unit, the government has said that people with a learning disability and behaviour that challenges should be getting the right care and support in their local areas by 2014.

To make this a reality, local areas must develop a robust range of support and services to ensure this vulnerable group of people can get the right support, in the right place, at the right time. Both the Government's final report on Winterbourne and the inquiry into Connor's death have highlighted the importance of fully involving families in planning and delivering care.

**Jan Tregelles, Chief Executive of Mencap, and Vivien Cooper, Chief Executive of The Challenging Behaviour Foundation, said:**

"Since Winterbourne View, a spotlight has been shone on assessment and treatment units, placing an urgent need to radically transform care and support for people with a learning disability and behaviour that challenges. It is shocking that a preventable death has happened in these circumstances.

"Sadly we know that Connor's death is not the only tragedy. We are currently working with families in similar, dreadful situations. Our fight for justice will not stop until every person with a learning disability and behaviour that challenges receives high quality care in their local community."

**-ENDS-**

### **Notes to editors**

For further information, please contact Lisa Gilbert, PR Officer at Mencap on 020 7696 6950 or email [lisa.gilbert@mencap.org.uk](mailto:lisa.gilbert@mencap.org.uk)

\* Investigation report into the death of Connor Sparrowhawk:  
[www.southernhealth.nhs.uk/news/report-into-death-sparrowhawk](http://www.southernhealth.nhs.uk/news/report-into-death-sparrowhawk)

### **About Mencap**

There are 1.4 million people with a learning disability in the UK. Mencap works to support people with a learning disability, their families and carers by fighting to change laws, improve services and access to education, employment and leisure facilities. Mencap supports thousands of people with a learning disability to live their lives the way they want.

[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

For advice and information about learning disability and Mencap services in your area, contact Mencap Direct on 0808 808 1111 (9am-5pm, Monday-Friday) or email [help@mencap.org.uk](mailto:help@mencap.org.uk)

### **About The Challenging Behaviour Foundation**

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation provides information, support and training around challenging behaviour associated with severe learning disabilities, and leads the 'Challenging Behaviour National Strategy Group' which seeks to influence policy and practice nationally on behalf of individuals who challenge and their families.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation was founded in 1997 by Vivien Cooper, parent of a son with severe learning disabilities and behaviour described as challenging. Today the Challenging Behaviour Foundation is in regular contact with over 5000 families and professionals across the UK. There are an estimated 30,000 individuals in England with severe learning disabilities and behaviour described as challenging.

[www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk](http://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk)