

Training For Foster Carers of Paramount Importance – Sheriff

Fostering Agency Sued in £700,000 negligence case.

The death of a foster carer who was killed by a boy she was looking after was avoidable, an inquiry has found. Dawn McKenzie, 34, was stabbed by the 13-year-old at her home in Hamilton in 2011. He was later detained for seven years after admitting culpable homicide due to diminished responsibility.

A fatal accident inquiry found that Mrs McKenzie's death was not foreseeable. It may have been avoided, however, had her fostering agency taken proper account of her inexperience.

“With the benefit of hindsight ... it is now known that tragedies such as that which befell Mrs McKenzie can occur in foster placements, and there is no doubt from the evidence which I heard that lesser attacks on foster carers can and occasionally do take place.

The area of training of foster carers is clearly an important one. Whereas I am prepared to accept given the evidence which I heard, that [conflict communications and physical intervention training] is more effectively given after foster carers have commenced their caring ... felt strongly that it ought to be offered to new carers at the outset of their fostering career because that was when they were at their most inexperienced or vulnerable. I find no fault with that argument.

I can see no reason why such training cannot be given at the outset of a foster carer's fostering career and repeated perhaps to more effect after a year or two years when they have more experience.

The Care Inspectorate feel that training is of paramount importance in relation to all placements to equip foster carers with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the children placed with them.”

SHERIFF DAVID M BICKET
Sheriff of South Strathclyde
Fatal Accidents Inquiry into the Death of Dawn McKenzie

The family of Dawn McKenzie, a foster carer killed by a teenager she was looking after, have launched a £700,000 legal action against the company which housed the boy with them.

The action at Hamilton Sheriff Court had originally included a claim against Glasgow City Council, but that has now been dropped by the family.

The family are seeking £500,000 for Mr McKenzie in compensation for Dawn's death and £200,000 for her mother, Ray Byrne. Both claims seek damages for loss and injury as a result of alleged negligence.

Mr McKenzie told a fatal accident inquiry into the killing that they had not been given enough - information about the boy and had been let down by social workers. Sheriff David Bicket ruled that the carer's death could not have been predicted, but might have been avoided had the firm taken proper account of her inexperience.