

**Impact statement**

**regarding the death of my only child**

**Matthew James Leahy**




**20 yrs who died**

**on the**

**15<sup>th</sup> November 2012**

**whilst an inpatient at the Linden Centre**

“Matthew” ...his name  chosen due to its meaning, “Gift of God”.

That he truly was.

His loss has been felt by many people, all around the world.

Not only have I been robbed of my son, I have also been robbed of my dreams. My world has become a much darker place without the light of Matthew. How can it be possible? I won't see my son again.

I am Matthew's mum. I bear witness for him. He cannot speak for himself or explain what happened.

My son was dead within eight days of entering a so-called place of safety, the Linden Centre in Chelmsford.

Matthew was a beautiful soul. He understood compassion and he cared for others. He was generous, he was kind. He excelled at school, and he was smart. He was funny and in his younger years he wanted to be a comedian. He was quite shy in large groups and was a loyal friend. He was never one to encourage a fight, but he would stand up for himself and the ones he loved. He would put himself in harm's way before someone he loved.

He loved the outdoors. He loved the water. He had a natural talent for swimming and was a fantastic skier.

In his late teens he saved two ladies from drowning...he didn't think twice. It was a pitch-dark winters evening and Matthew was walking home. He heard their screams and he jumped into the water and saved them both. Yet, he himself wasn't afforded the luxury of rescue when he so desperately needed it. This makes me so very, very angry and sad.

When Matthew became poorly, we had turned to so called professionals for help. To help us understand what was happening and to help us find a way of helping our son.

I was the parent. My duty was to protect my child. I worked hard throughout my life to give him a solid upbringing and teach him morals. I loved him, supported him, encouraged him, guided him, and nurtured him into his adulthood. Yet eight days in the 'care of the state' and my son died. I will never come to terms with that.

The last eight days of his life in a place he called, 'hell'. And I now believe it truly was, “hell on earth.” Alone, malnourished, over medicated, scared, bleeding, bruised, [personal/sensitive] injected multiple times, ignored and frightened. No records of any staff in those last days of his life, offering him any comfort. I had been advised not to visit and to give him time to settle on the ward. I will live with the guilt, for the rest of my life, that I listened to so called professionals and I was not there when my son needed me the most.

An inquest into my son's death was held in January 2015

The jury concluded: -

on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2012 at 12.52 pm Matthew James Leahy was pronounced dead at

Broomfield

Hospital in Chelmsford having been found hanging in his room at the Linden Centre on the Galleywood ward.



The coroner could not rule Suicide and so gave an “open” narrative verdict which concluded that my son:-

***‘Matthew James Leahy was subject to a series of multiple failings and missed opportunities over a prolonged period of time by those entrusted with his care. The jury found that relevant policies and procedures were not adhered to, impacting on Matthew’s overall care and wellbeing leading up to his death.’***

I sat in that Inquest court room amongst Directors and managerial staff from the North Essex Partnership University Trust, for five brutal days. Not one of the Directors or managerial staff present, offered apologies or even spoke to me. And after the verdict was delivered, they [personal/sensitive] all left from the rear of the building.

Writing this statement has been very difficult. Memories I had laid to rest have been flooding back. My understanding of events repeatedly having to be explained to each organisation that has failed, not only Matthew, but my entire family and circle of friends. Life will never be the same for any of us.

Matthew taught me so much in life and continues to teach me so much in death. I sit here today not just representing my son but representing the multitude of lives that have been affected by the inadequate care offered by mental health services. Although I cannot address every person’s life that has been affected due to the failings made, I want to express the effects that I have personally witnessed and felt in my own life.

There is no way that I was prepared for my sons' death. I sit before you, a broken person, who has lost every sense of normality. A person who needs to grieve the loss of Matthew, not only for myself, but for his unborn children, my unborn grandchildren, and for the world that has no idea what a wonderful person they are missing.

Since I first held my son in my arms, as a baby, I always expected to live my entire life with Matthew. Now every day and every night I cannot escape the reality and accompanying sadness that my beautiful, handsome boy is gone. The fact he never lived long enough to enjoy and celebrate his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday has added to my emotional stress and devastation. The pain that comes each time his birthday arrives. The pain at watching his friends celebrate their birthdays. Celebrating the birth of their children. His past girlfriends having babies with new boyfriends. Each birth reminding me that the little girl or boy born might have been my grandchild, had Matthew survived. Never seeing him married or helping decorate his new house.

I have a book of photos now, to look at to remember, all our happy memories. A book I never expected or wanted on my bookshelf. I cannot find the words (if there are any) to explain the devastation and mixture of feelings that I felt when the Doctor called to say , ‘Matthews’ been found hanging it doesn’t look good’. Or the feelings I felt when I found that that was a lie. My son had been dead for over an hour when that call was made . The impact of this, a doctor lying and at such a crucial time, has absolutely devastated my trust in the profession. I have only been to a doctor once since Matthew died and I dread the day I get so ill that I might have to visit one again.



The trauma of Matthews death was made even worse by the suddenness of his loss and the knowledge of the circumstances in which it occurred. The immediate aftermath of his death was only the beginning.

When the Doctor called to deliver his lie. I fell to my knees, unable to breathe. My later partner took over the call. He then helped me up off the floor, panic now ensued. I needed to get to the hospital and fast. I wanted to see my son, I needed to do whatever I could to save him.

“It didn’t look good”, that’s what the doctor said!

“Quick we need to get to the hospital”. The only and automatic response.

I was in no fit state to drive, neither was my poorly late partner. As luck would have it my parents were nearby. I remember calling my dad. I was in a total panic;

“Dad, drop what you’re doing. Matts been found hanging. I need you to drive us to the hospital please”.

The ten or so minutes it took my dad to get round to pick us up seemed like hours. He drove so carefully and during the drive, my head repeatedly saying,

“Dad, put your foot down.” Willing him to drive faster.

How he must have felt during that drive, I really don’t know. But knowledge his grandson could die before we arrive and it could be because he was stuck in traffic, must have been going through his mind. A realisation came over me...Matthew was dead. I sat back in that car in silence. Turned out, I was right.

On arrival I overheard, (who I know now to be a senior director of the trust,) say to the other officials at the Linden Centre, “oh she’s here”.

The lack of any compassion or empathy whatsoever that I experienced that day will stay with me for the rest of my life.

I wanted to see my son! to go immediately to him. They wanted to talk about what had happened! Then it turned out he wasn’t even at the Linden Centre, where I had been told to go. He was at Broomfield hospital!

I was made to wait a good half hour before I was even allowed to go to see him at hospital. I was told he was a crime scene; I was only allowed to see him for a few minutes and told not to touch him in any way. I wasn’t even given a chance to say a proper goodbye.

When I walked into that room and saw him lying flat out on a trolley, wearing only socks, boxers and a hospital gown, his eyes open and not breathing, I just wanted to gather him up in my arms. Make him breathe. Hold him and hug him.

The police officer stood right beside me, said, ‘You must not touch. He’s a crime scene!’

I retaliated, “He’s, my son!”

I leant over and kissed  him gently on his forehead;

“ ‘My baby, my baby’ .

The police officer shouted, “ You touch him again you will be arrested.”

Then directed an orderly to stand in the corner of the room to watch me, to report if I touched my son again. I was silent. What was happening? The shock was overwhelming. That memory, like many others, still haunts me. I spent about ten minutes, if that, talking to my motionless, dead beautiful boy and was called by said police officer into a side room to fill in some forms. These were name, date of death forms etc. One question I was asked will always be in my mind.

“Which undertaker do you have planned?” I couldn’t believe my ears!

My response was, I have his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party planned, not an undertaker!

At this point I apologised. God only knows why I apologised!!! I had to leave the room.

Not only had this man refused me any contact with my son, had offered no chance of his last rights being read, but also completely ignored my requests for donation of organs or even skin for burns. I recall offering Matthews eyes. I know how my son would want to help others. All the police officer wanted to do was complete his paperwork. At the time I was in a completely confused state. I couldn’t think clearly. Everything was happening so fast. Shunted from one place to the next.

Now I sit and think about it, I went into an almost remote-control mode. I operated like that for days. Being visited by police, social workers, questioned as to what I knew or understood. Having to go through organising an undertaker, sorting a coffin, sorting Matt’s belongings from the hospital, which had literally just been thrown into his bags.

[details to be considered during the substantive stages of the Inquiry's investigations]

Matthew’s mobile phone and computer were missing. To this day, his computer has never been seen again. How can items go missing on a secure ward? I not only lost my son, I lost all his friends contact details and access to any of his online accounts, in one go. All his photos, communications gone. So much taken from me in one fell swoop, heart-breaking is not the word.

My thought process smashed. Then, minimal sleep, realisation and boom. It hit like a ton of bricks. On my knees I fell, and a scream emanated from somewhere deep within and out it came. A moment in life no person in this world should ever have to experience.

At a time of trauma and of deep emotion, just as I was taking in the loss of my son, the justice system started its move into action. I lost all control of my son. He was deemed a crime scene. The Crown took his body and made me wait before returning him. Not all the body parts had been returned as requested and I then had to fight for them. Seven months of fighting, only to

be informed Matthew's body parts had been found in three separate filing cabinets and in three different police stations.

Did I want his boxer shorts and socks? Oh my God! The insensitivity was breathtaking.

The next weeks, months and years, Matthew's death and who was responsible for it, became and still is the focus of my life. Yet I have not been able to determine or control any of this. Investigations, reviews, reports, etc. All processes that have all happened around me, with me being entitled to some information and some explanation but little voice, little influence and little power.

I organised an independent pathologist to come with me to view photographs Essex police held of Matthew. the memory of seeing my son's body cut to pieces and seeing the skin

pulled back over his skull is still haunting. I beg any of you here to imagine the sight of your loved one in that state and it not haunt you for ever more.

My life has been totally destroyed, I miss my son so much it hurts every second of the day..

I may appear normal enough, for the most part, but I will never be 'normal' again. My life will forever exist in a dual reality, - before Matthew died and after Matthew died. I have suppressed strong emotions like anger, hurt, and anxiety and these have in turn manifest into physical symptoms of angina, sleeplessness, headaches, food issues, and irritability. Extreme feelings that get triggered in unexpected situations. Every day that I wish I had told him more often how much I loved him, how I wish I had spent more time chatting, how I wish I hadn't arrived too late that day, how I wish I hadn't trusted others with his life.

Why aren't I just waiting now for my son to come in to have his dinner?

Why aren't I moaning at him for walking his muddy trainers on the recently cleaned carpet?


In order to move on at all, I must have the truth. I need to understand the specifics of Matthew's death. I need a clear picture of exactly what happened and to this day I do not have one.

I have to live now without my son, with my anger, unable to get the release that forgiving brings, as that only comes after the feeling justice has been done and some remorse has been shown.

I ask this inquiry to do the most thorough investigation possible and set an example to the rest of the Mental Health providers across our nation to get their establishments up to standard or I fear many many families will suffer the same losses.

My journey thus far has been a long and arduous one. Each stage along this path has taken many months and over the 12 years, to date, I have gradually lost all faith, trust and respect, as I have faced such intense pain from callous incompetence, systemic failure, antagonism, hypocrisy, and prejudice. I have faced death threats. I have been ridiculed.

Only recently it came to light that a top government official tried to silence my pursuit of justice. what's app messages sent in 2020...between the then junior minister for mental health Nadine Dorris and the then health secretary Matthew Hancock leaked to the Daily Telegraph showing a deliberate effort to undermine my campaign for a statutory public inquiry and isolate me from

other bereaved families.  It sickens me to think an elected politician would turn grieving families against each other. This has only served to raise even more serious concerns, but this time about my own governments transparency. This felt like nothing less than a full frontal stab in the heart.

It devastates me every time I think of the additional lives which have been lost (my late partner being one of them– you will hear about him at tomorrows hearings) and the other patients who have been harmed in the three years of delay, which her decision to grant only an independent inquiry will have caused. This delay was foreseeable and something I, and ministers in the government, raised at the time. This revelation has shaken me to the core once again , because it impacts not just me, but all the families failed in the last three years.

I hope my determination serves as a powerful reminder that the truth will find its way, no matter what the obstacles.

On a more positive note my journey has been shared by individuals who have helped enormously in giving of their time, support above and beyond the call of duty. I am truly thankful for all their help and hope that I can return it, by using this horrendous experience to speak out for change and to help those families faced with starting down this same terrible road. In this way I will feel that at least my son's death was not totally pointless.

A journey I would never had needed to be taking, had I been given the truth at the outset. So far, not once has Matthews's death or my family been given the respect deserved. All the investigations to date have been piecemeal and flawed.

I pray that this investigation will be different and will be through and will give answers. Leading to meaningful change and accountability.

Matthew didn't deserve to die. He had so many plans for his future. In time, I hope his death, will have a positive impact on the world and that I will be afforded the truth as to how and why he died, whilst he was meant to be safe. Through that knowledge I hope justice and accountability are afforded and that necessary change is made for others, who like I did, look to services when they need safe, compassionate care for their loved ones. I hope then that I can start to grieve the loss of my son and Matthew, will be able to then, rest in peace.

Video to be played

[redacted]

Mrs Melanie Leahy #matthewscampaign