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# Coroner highlights solvent abuse concern after death

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Norfolk coroner William Armstrong has voiced his concerns about the widening problem of solvent abuse amongst teenagers as he brought an inquest into a 15-year-old's death to a close.

Family and friends of Levi-Harry Maxwell, from Hopton-on-Sea near Great Yarmouth, listened on as the coroner delivered a verdict of accidental death at Norwich Coroner's Court yesterday.

Mr Armstrong said the youngster died accidentally due to the use of butane gas, while under a care order.

He died at James Paget University Hospital, in Gorleston, on July 24 last year, after attempts by his brother and paramedics to resuscitate him proved unsuccessful.

Sergeant John Wilkins, from Gorleston police station, said a half-empty canister of butane gas had been found alongside the teenager's body, in the grounds of the ruins of St Margaret's Church in Hopton, along with another used can in a nearby bush.

In his closing speech, Mr Armstrong said he had discussed his solvent abuse worries with Norfolk drug and alcohol charity The Matthew Project, saying: "I want to say that solvent abuse is clearly a significant problem, especially among teenagers. We all must realise the effects of solvent abuse and be aware of the signs that youngsters may be using dangerous solvents.

"I am unashamedly using this hearing to highlight the dangers and that help, guidance and support are available from The Matthew Project."

During the hearing it was said that Levi-Harry had been in care since he was six years old and had been living with his current foster parents, Ian and Keri



Tragedy: Hopton church and, above, coroner William Armstrong.

Brunning, of Coast Road, Hopton, since February 2011.

It was also explained that sometime during the autumn of 2011 the youngster had stayed round a friend's house and been caught sniffing from a butane canister.

Lewis Maxwell, 19, told how his younger brother had taken his wallet and used his identification to purchase the cans.

Mr Armstrong said post-mortem examinations had also found traces of cannabis in his body saying: "The most likely cause of death was as a result of butane gas.

"This cannot be absolutely proved but there were no natural diseases."

## Charity shop appeals for volunteers

A Norfolk animal charity is looking for volunteers to work in its new shop which is due to open next weekend.

The new PACT animal charity shop will open in Dove Street on Saturday, January 26.

The shop will specialise in vintage, retro and designer clothing and antiques.

George Rockingham, the charity's administrator, said: "At the moment we have got five charity shops. It's going to be quite fun – I think people will be surprised.

"It is a very innovative idea."

Mr Rockingham said that the charity, which cares for more than 1,000 animals, needed more support than ever.

"We have 16,000 people in Norfolk who support our charity and we are hoping some will come forward to help with the shop," he added.

→ **Anyone who is interested in volunteering should call Jo or Sue on 01362 820775 or call into the shop.**

## Matthew Project gives advice to coroner

The coroner's call for more people to be aware of the dangers of solvent abuse come after he spoke with Norfolk drug and alcohol charity The Matthew Project.

In his closing remarks of the inquest into the death of 15-year-old Levi-Harry Maxwell, Mr Armstrong took the opportunity to read a statement from Naomi Selim, pictured, The Matthew Project's under-18 service manager for Norfolk.

Ms Selim said: "The Under-18 service works with young people who are using a range of substances. In several cases they have been referred to us for their use of alcohol or cannabis and solvent use is only disclosed at a later stage once the young person has built up a relationship with a worker.

"It is very difficult to estimate the prevalence of solvent use among young



people in Norfolk, however, during 2012 The Matthew Project Under-18 Service undertook a survey with over 1,000 young people, looking at their knowledge and experience of drugs and alcohol.

"Of the young people who responded, 5pc reported that they had tried nitrous oxide (common inhalant), with the average age of first use being 14 years old.

"In addition our universal workers have reported an increase over the last year in young people raising questions about solvents during drug education sessions."

Legally, the Consumer Protection Act bans retailers from selling cigarette lighter refill canisters containing butane to anyone under the age of 18.

→ For more information, advice or details of the services offered, go to [www.matthewproject.co.uk](http://www.matthewproject.co.uk)

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