

NATIONAL VICTORIA CRIME

Foster carer admits drugging disabled teenager with morphine

By [Cameron Houston](#)

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A profoundly handicapped teenager was drugged with morphine by her foster carer who has pleaded guilty in the County Court in Ballarat to one count of recklessly causing serious injury.

Susan Melinda Lizzul, 54, admitted on Wednesday that she gave the powerful opioid to the then 13-year-old girl in 2016, when the child lived at a Sebastopol home and required 24-hour care for a significant cognitive impairment and several other medical conditions.

However, Ms Lizzul did not reveal to the court why she administered the drug to the teenager, who has been in a constant vegetative state since birth and suffers up to 50 seizures a day.

The victim was taken by ambulance to the Ballarat Base Hospital on November 16, 2016, after being found in a "fluctuating conscious state".

Dr Mark Nethercote from Ballarat Base Hospital said the girl would have died without urgent medical attention, according to a summary statement by the Office of Public Prosecutions.

She was later rushed to the Royal Children's Hospital, where a urine sample returned positive results for morphine and codeine.

Ballarat police were notified on November 24, 2016, and executed search warrants on Ms Lizzul's home, where they discovered two packets of morphine sulphate in the garage.

The court was told the drugs had been prescribed to Ms Lizzul's children, Mathew and Caitlin Lizzul, who had both died after suffering from genetic disorders.

During an interview with police, Ms Lizzul denied giving the girl morphine, but rather a strong analgesic called Painstop.

In a victim impact statement read out to the court, the girl's biological mother said the tragic incident had shattered their faith in Victoria's disability care system. The family recently relocated to the United Kingdom after living in Australia for 27 years.

They had been forced to place their daughter in the care of Ms Lizzul in 2015, when the child's father was injured in an accident and the family was under severe mental and financial strain.

"To a vulnerable family like ours, Sue Lizzul was someone we could trust. We believe Sue Lizzul betrayed us all," said the child's mother in a statement.

It would not be the first time their daughter was betrayed by a disability service.

In August 2013, she was placed into a pilot program at a Ballarat facility in which four children in need of 24-hour care would live together under the care of disability services provider.

The program was terminated amid allegations of abuse and neglect, and was later the subject of multiple investigations by Victoria Police, the Department of Human Services and the state's Disability Services Commissioner.

Ms Lizzul will face sentencing on March 3.

Crown Prosecutor Andrew Moore requested that Judge Meryl Sexton not impose a custodial sentence on Ms Lizzul, who was assessed for a community corrections order on Wednesday afternoon.



Cameron Houston



Senior Crime Reporter
