

Daniel Pelka: Case Study

Daniel Pelka died tragically on 3rd March, 2012. He was just 4 years and 8 months old.

He lived with his mother, Magdalena Luczak; an older sister, Anna, 7 years old; a younger brother, Adam, 6 months old and mother's partner, Mariusz Krezolek (Adam's father). The cause of his death was subsequently found to be a head injury, "almost certainly the result of a direct blow to the head" and, on 31st July, 2013, Ms Luczak and Mr Krezolek were found guilty of his murder and both sentenced to 30 years imprisonment.

In September 2011, Daniel started at the same school where his sister, Anna, had attended since September 2010. Although the school had received information from Anna's previous school no-one had looked at it. However, Anna had settled well, spoke good English and made friends and the only concerns recorded were about her occasionally poor attendance. Daniel, on the other hand, spoke very little English and school staff appeared to have relied on his gesticulations as the main form of communication and when possible upon Anna and Ms Luczak to provide insights into what Daniel was saying or experiencing. He was generally seen as isolated though he was well dressed, well behaved and joined in activities.

During October and November 2011 there were several occasions when both children arrived late for school and were absent because of illness.

During November 2011, the school spoke to Ms Luczak about his obsession with food and that he was taking food from other children's lunch boxes. Ms Luczak presented as concerned but said that he must not eat more than what was in his lunchbox as he had a medical problem and so the school locked the food away. Ms Luczak was generally viewed as a caring mother although one teaching assistant recalled that she always seemed cross with Daniel and that he always walked home twenty paces behind her.

The education welfare officer (EWO), accompanied by a translator, made a home visit in mid-December 2011 when Ms Luczak said that the children were not well enough to go to school although the EWO considered that they were. Ms Luczak however refused to send them to school. At this time, a letter was sent to Ms Luczak by the school head teacher and the learning mentor regarding Daniel's attendance which was below 64%.

After Christmas 2011, the deputy head teacher became concerned that Daniel was not growing despite his obsession with food. School staff spoke of how Daniel "looked for food everywhere" and that he "would eat whatever he could get his hands on". On one occasion he found and ate half of a large cake meant to be given to all the children as it was the teacher's birthday. Despite his poor engagement with peers, he was nevertheless said to take or persuade other children to give him food and eat it in the toilets. On some occasions he had taken food from bins and had tried to eat discarded food. He also tried to eat beans being planted in soil and raw jelly taken from a sandpit. Daniel had a lunch box everyday which school staff said contained the bare minimum, and that he would always eat this. School staff believed that his medical problems were being investigated.

On two occasions the Deputy Headteacher spoke with Ms Luczak who reminded the deputy head that Daniel had a medical problem and reported that he was taking food at home and getting up in the night to raid the fridge. She said that Daniel got diarrhoea as a result.

Between December 2011 and February 2012 there were occasions when Daniel was seen at school with facial injuries.

The injuries on Daniel were stated as follows:

- **16th January 2012** "approximately four spot bruises down the neck from the ear to the shoulder" - seen by the class teacher and recorded in the concerns' book (for the reception class)
- **sometime before the 10th February 2012** "fresh blue/black bruises on the eyes and a scratch across the nose" – seen by the class teacher and she stated that she told the head teacher (not recorded).
- **January or February** - "severe mark on his nose,(almost like a dent), a black eye and blood spots on his face" seen by one of the teaching assistants and that the head teacher had been told (not recorded).
- **around Christmas 2011** "a bruise to the centre of the forehead" – seen by a teaching assistant (not recorded).
- **Another teaching assistant** referred to "a large bump on the left hand side of his forehead about the size of a 2p piece" and that she told the class teacher of this (not recorded).
- **mid February** "a graze to the top/front of his forehead" – seen by the head teacher who ascertained what had happened from Anna who said that her brother had been pushed over by another child outside of school (not recorded).

Daniel was asked by one of the teaching assistants about how two of the injuries were caused. He was reported not to give any explanation but just looked down and would not say anything.

None of these injuries was referred to Children's Social Care or the Police.

During January 2012 the learning mentor discussed the possibility with the new EWO of completing a Common Assessment although it was noted that the deputy head teacher was working closely with Ms Luczak in respect of Daniel and that this would be sufficient. Also, because of improved school attendance for both Daniel and Anna, a letter of congratulations was sent to Ms Luczak on the 9th February 2012.

However, the concerns about Daniel increased. He was described as looking normal when he first started school but that his appearance had changed, with one teaching assistant saying that she was "very, very concerned" and that he had become a "bag of bones" (not recorded).

Because of these concerns the deputy head contacted the GP by telephone on the 25th January 2012 and the GP advised that she should ask Ms Luczak to bring Daniel into the surgery. The deputy head told Ms Luczak the next day that she needed to make an appointment and believed that Ms Luczak understood the need to do this. The detail of the conversation was not recorded by the Deputy Head and, when the mother did not make an appointment, the GP did not inform the school. The school then wrote a "to whom it may concern letter" which included concerns about Daniel's continual consumption of food and that the school had to manage this by locking food away. Concern was also expressed that he nevertheless appeared to be losing weight. The letter was given to Ms Luczak who took it to her appointment with the community paediatrician.

This appointment took place on the 10th February 2012, and the paediatrician was given the letter written by the school. The outcome of the appointment was that the paediatrician requested further investigations because of Daniel's excessive appetite and poor weight gain. Medication was prescribed because of the possibility of thread worms.

Daniel attended school for the week 27th February to 1st March 2012 during which time the deputy head explained to the head teacher that Daniel had been prescribed treatment for worms. The school sought the help of a teacher from a neighbouring school who could speak Polish, and asked her to speak with Daniel. This teacher spoke to Daniel about him taking food, but later reported that he was not communicative and she was unsure how much Daniel understood what was being said to him.

On the 1st March 2012, Daniel was seen to take a piece of half eaten fruit from a bin in school although he was prevented from eating it.

On Friday the 2nd March 2012 Daniel was logged as having an unauthorised absence from school. The school made a telephone call to the home but there was no reply.

On Saturday the 3rd March 2012 Daniel was admitted to hospital after having suffered a cardiac arrest and he could not be resuscitated. The cause of death was found to be a head injury but Daniel was also found to be grossly malnourished and dehydrated with bruising over his body for which no natural cause could be identified. (A total of forty injuries were noted). Daniel also had a very high sodium level. The forensic pathologist concluded that these findings reflected longstanding neglect. It was considered that, for a period of at least six months prior to his death, he had been starved, assaulted, neglected and abused.

