

## My son died from solvent abuse

In 1988, Barbara Skinner's son Darren died aged 16, after sniffing solvent from a can of deodorant. She tells Stuart Jeffries about her 20-year campaign to warn others about the dangers of substance abuse from products sold over the counter



Barbara Skinner, mother of Darren who died aged 16 after inhaling solvents. She teaches parents and children about solvent danger

Barbara Skinner wondered what her 16-year-old son was up to. Darren had been in the bathroom for ages and was very quiet. She thought of nothing unusual..

*"I'd just been ironing downstairs. It was Saturday evening and I remember I had been watching Prisoner: Cell Block H. Darren had been redecorating his bedroom with a friend and then had some toast. Looking back, everything up to the moment I opened the door seemed so everyday so normal."*

She called him in the bathroom but when she pushed open the door, Darren was lying dead next to a can of deodorant. She found out later that he had been sniffing it in order to get high on the butane. People sniff through the deodorant to get to the propellant, which is what gets them high.

She says that all her years of training as a nurse did not prepare her for this. She called the ambulance but it was too late. Darren had needed emergency resuscitation within 10 minutes of his collapsing.

Barbara found out all she could about her son's death. She learned that this is known as **VSA – volatile substance abuse** and it kills more children aged 10 to 15 than all illegal drugs put together. Her research did not stop there. After a distressing period following Darren's death, she set up a charity, [Solve It](#), to raise awareness of this problem. She set up the charity to educate parents and children about the dangers of VSA and in 2000 received an MBE for her work.

Although the charity so far did not manage to obtain a high media profile, it benefits from funds collected from the [UK National Lottery Good Causes](#).

### Adapted from:

Jeffries S. (2009), *My son died from solvent abuse* [Online] Available: [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk) (03 Oct 2012)