

## 4 fired, 13 held in probe of care center

Lei Wenfeng, a 15-year-old with autism, was found dead after staying at a squalid care center three months after he wandered away from his father. [Photo/boyangcongpeople]

The investigation of the death of an autistic teenager at a care center in Guangdong province has led to the dismissal of four local officials and criminal detention of 13 people, and the central government called on Monday for better care of homeless people.

A joint investigation group formed by various authorities of Guangdong has found that some officials in the city of Shaoguan and its Xinfeng county failed to perform their duties.

The joint group decided to sack Chen Jinghui, Party chief of Xinfeng where the care center is located, and Lai Qixin, deputy director of Shaoguan's civil affairs bureau, which is supposed to review applications from such care agencies and supervise their operations.

The other two who were removed are Long Yongwen, former civil affairs bureau chief of Shaoguan and now head of the city's water bureau, and Liu Xiangtie, chief of Xinfeng's civil affairs bureau, Xinhua reported on Monday.

The probe was triggered by the death of Lei Wenfeng, a 15-year-old autistic boy who got lost and stayed more than a month in the Lianxi care center before dying in December. The center, which is privately operated under contract with local civil affairs authorities, cares for people of all ages.

Investigators have also found that some local officials gave irresponsible approval to the Lianxi care center project and earned money illegally from its operation.

Four officials, including former head of the Xinfeng civil affairs bureau Li Cuiqiong and former deputy head Pan Zhong'ai, are being investigated for abuse of power. Five other officials, including Yi Biheng, another former head of the county's civil affairs bureau, are being investigated for dereliction of duty.

All nine are under criminal coercive measures, a judicial term for restriction or denial of personal rights. Of them, Li, Pan and Yi have also been put in criminal detention, according to the release.

In addition, local police have put in criminal detention two executives and eight staff members of the care center. Investigators found that those who ran the care center misused government funds that were supposed to have been used to help the homeless and maltreated some of those being cared for in the center.

Also on Monday, the Ministry of Civil Affairs held a nationwide teleconference to strengthen inspection of all aid stations for the homeless across the country. Such stations, usually government-run, provide care to a person for three months, after which time the person is transferred to a care center.

The ministry required that those who need from 10 to 90 days' care should be cared for at the aid stations, rather than being transferred to a care center operated by a third party.

Local civil affairs officers should make serious efforts to help these people search for family members.