



Press Statement

Advocate for Children and Youth Releases Investigative Report

A Stolen Life

November 30, 2016

Good Morning:

I will be giving a prepared statement, after which I will be happy to take questions; however, at this time, it is important to remind you that I will not provide information which violates confidentiality.

On May 26, 2014, I called an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the services provided to two (2) children living in Labrador. The purpose of this investigation was to determine whether the services provided by the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development (formerly the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services); the Department of Health and Community Services; the Department of Justice and Public Safety (formerly the Department of Justice); the Labrador-Grenfell Regional Health Authority; and the Royal Canadian Mounted

Police met the needs of these children and whether their right to services was upheld.

The investigative process undertaken in this case was comprehensive and involved the review of case files and documents provided by the five (5) relevant departments and agencies. Interviews were conducted with professionals of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development as well as relatives of the children. A review of applicable policies, procedures and legislation was also completed. In addition, an out-of-province physician was consulted to provide an expert medical opinion on the case.

A Stolen Life is the story of two (2) vulnerable children and how government services failed to meet their needs. Over a period of four (4) years, these children had numerous encounters with many professionals, yet they continued to live in an unacceptable, unsafe environment detrimental to their safety and wellbeing. In that four (4) year period, these children received government services; however, continued to live in harmful conditions until 2013, when the youngest child died suddenly at the age of four (4) months as a result of trauma, and his father was charged with second degree murder. The charge was later withdrawn due to lack of evidence. I extend my deepest condolences to his family and friends.

The deficiencies identified throughout this investigation reflect the four (4) year timeframe from 2010 to 2014. Through information gathered during interviews completed in early 2016 of the service providers and relatives involved with this case, and through our daily advocacy work, it is evident that these deficiencies still remain today. Once again, the Labrador region is highlighted as one with many challenges, where factors such as environment, workload, and human resource issues have not permitted the necessary changes to occur. Every child and youth in the Province has a right to receive services provided by the provincial government, and this right to services must be upheld regardless of where in the Province they live. Contextual issues can no longer be used by service providers as justification for acceptance of a lower standard of service provision for the children and youth living in the Labrador region.

Issues identified specific to each department and agency investigated are as follows:

- **Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development:**
 - lack of collaboration, communication and information sharing;
 - documentation deficiencies;
 - lack of comprehensive assessment, intervention and followup;
 - and

- challenges to service provision.
- **Department of Health and Community Services and Labrador-Grenfell Regional Health Authority:**
 - lack of collaboration, communication and information sharing.
- **Department of Justice and Public Safety and Royal Canadian Mounted Police:**
 - failure to report child protection concerns; and
 - lack of collaboration, communication and information sharing.

There are six (6) recommendations previously made in investigative reports by my office that are applicable to this case and highlighted throughout this report. I have determined that these recommendations are implemented or partially implemented based on the responses from relevant government departments and agencies. However, despite actions taken by departments and agencies to address the previous recommendations, it is evident in this investigation that they continue to be an issue in practice. In addition, there are seven (7) new recommendations resulting from the completion of this investigation; one of which is the joint responsibility of two (2) departments.

Overall for:

- Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development:
6 recommendations
- Department of Justice and Public Safety: 2 recommendations

In keeping with the public release of any report from this office, my hope is that people will take the time to read this report and see for themselves just what went wrong. I hope it will also help people understand the responsibility we all have to ensure that our most vulnerable, our children and youth, are protected and receive the services they rightfully deserve.

While this is a public report, every effort has been made to ensure that the identities of those involved are kept confidential. I strongly request that members of the public and the media not focus on identifying the specific location of this case or the identity of the people involved. Rather, I ask that you focus on the lessons that can be learned from this stolen life.

I will be providing each of you present today with a copy of the report. As well, printed copies are available to the public upon request by contacting our office. The report can also be viewed on our website: www.childandyouthadvocate.nl.ca

Thank you for your time today and I welcome any general questions.