

Inquest into Seven Youths Deaths Delivers Jury Recommendations

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THUNDER BAY – Courtroom 206 at the Thunder Bay Courthouse was packed this morning as the Inquest into the deaths of seven Indigenous youth gathered to hear the Jury Recommendations. “As the verdict is delivered today, I draw attention to the *1999 Selena Sakanee Inquest* and the *2013 Bruce Moonias Inquest* in my community of Neskantaga First Nation and how the recommendations from the Juries in those Inquests did not produce the needed action on the ground. In order to honour the seven youth in this Inquest, action on the recommendations in this Jury’s verdict is needed immediately,” stated Chief Wayne Moonias, Neskantaga First Nation.

The journey to the Jury’s Inquest has been a long and painful one for the families. It has brought the pain and suffering forward once again.

First Nation leaders are expressing both hope and concern that the Jury Recommendations will lead to solutions moving forward.

“To the students who may have attended high school with any of the seven youth named in this Inquest—we acknowledge you today. We hope that the outcome of this Inquest will ensure the safety and wellbeing of all First Nation students seeking education in Thunder Bay. As First Nation leaders, we provide our assurance that we will continue to demand the fulsome investigation into the harm or death of any of our youth,” shared Chief Celia Echum, Ginoogaming First Nation.

For the seven young people who died in Thunder Bay while attending high school in the city, the jury determined that three of the deaths were accidental, while four of the student’s deaths led to causes of “undetermined” as the cause.

- Paul Panacheese, 21, Mishkeegogamang First Nation: Collapsed at home: Undetermined
- Robyn Harper, 18, Keewaywin First Nation: Died at boarding home: Accident
- Jethro Anderson, 15, Kasabonika Lake First Nation: Drowning, alcohol involved: Undetermined
- Curran Strang, 18, Pikangikum First Nation: Drowning, alcohol involved: Accident
- Reggie Bushie, 15, Poplar Hill First Nation: Drowning, alcohol involved: Accident
- Kyle Morrisseau, 17, Keewaywin First Nation; Drowning, alcohol involved: Undetermined
- Jordan Wabasse, 15, Webequie First Nation: Drowning: Undetermined

Matawa First Nations and Matawa Learning Centre (MLC) have welcomed the Jury’s verdict in the Inquest into the death of seven Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) youth. In January 2016, the MLC was called to testify as Jordan Wabasse was a student at the MLC when he went missing in February of 2011. All of the other subjects of the Inquest were students at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High

School. MLC was not an official party to the Inquest when it began on October 5, 2015 but was granted fully party standing after applying in January 2016.

During the February to April 2016 phase of the Inquest, Matawa Education Manager Sharon Nate and MLC Principal Brad Battiston gave testimony regarding the business of the Matawa First Nations Management, when and why the MLC was created along with the challenges that Matawa community schools face. In addition, testimony was given on the students who typically attend the MLC and the types of supports MLC and its students require. By the conclusion of the Inquest, the Jury had heard from over 145 witnesses and seen over 185 exhibits.

MLC collaborated with the other parties involved in the Inquest in providing a joint slate of recommendations for final submissions. They also provided independent recommendations for MLC and Matawa communities.

“On this day, we are thinking of the families involved in the Inquest. We are behind and support them in every way. The experience of losing a child is one of the hardest things for a family to endure and this is why having the Inquest was necessary—so that they can have answers and some form of closure,” commented Chief Dorothy Towedo, Aroland First Nation.

“To the students who may have attended high school with any of the seven youth named in this Inquest—we acknowledge you today. We hope that the outcome of this Inquest will ensure the safety and wellbeing of all First Nation students seeking education in Thunder Bay. As First Nation leaders, we provide our assurance that we will continue to demand the fulsome investigation into the harm or death of any of our youth,” shared Chief Celia Echum, Ginoogaming First Nation.