

First Nations student deaths inquest: family member speaks out

'They look to us aboriginal people as just like drunks,' Kyle Morrisseau's brother says

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The brother of one of the First Nations students whose deaths are the subject of an inquest in Thunder Bay, Ont., says he's disappointed with the focus of the proceedings so far.

Josh Kakegamic's brother Kyle Morrisseau is one of seven students whose deaths are the subject of the inquest that started Oct. 5. The family is from Keewaywin First Nation, about 600 kilometres northwest of Thunder Bay.

The inquest is looking into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the young people, aged 15 through 21, who travelled from their remote First Nations to attend high school in Thunder Bay. All seven died between 2000 and 2011.

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"I'm hoping for more details actually," Josh Kakegamic said halfway through the first week of what is expected to be six months of proceedings. "I just feel there could have been more time and dedication taken to the matter."

The first day of testimony was taken up with autopsy results and the toxicology reports on the students who died. Morrisseau was among five students whose deaths the experts attributed, at least in part, to intoxication.

Kakegamic said that focus ignores the fact that his brother came to the city for an education and a brighter future, but ended up dead.

"I kind of look at it as they look to us aboriginal people as just like drunks, just to get a drink, but they don't know our backgrounds," he said.

Morrisseau was "an easy going guy" talented at hunting, trapping and painting," his brother said.

"He's always with me in my heart all the time," Kakegamic said. "Like I always think about him everyday when I wake up, especially coming out here for this inquest."

There's another brother Kakegamic is also thinking about.

"My younger brother is in grade 8 right now, knowing that next year he wants to come out here...to attend high school," Kakegamic said. "I don't feel too comfortable being okay with that but I think his education is more important because I want him to have a future and to experience being out here in the city as well."

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