

First Nation student deaths inquest: 5 things revealed so far

Testimony so far shows lack of communication with families, and challenges faced by students

By Jody Porter, [CBC News](#) Posted: Nov 16, 2015 7:00 AM ET Last Updated: Nov 16, 2015 7:00 AM ET

The inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations students in Thunder Bay, Ont., begins its fifth week of testimony on Monday with a continued focus on students whose bodies were found in waterways in the city.

Pathologists testified during the first week of the inquest that five of the students — Jethro Anderson, Curran Strang, Reggie Bushie, Kyle Morrisseau and Jordan Wabasse — died by drowning, but questions remain about how the teens ended up in the water.

Evidence about Jethro Anderson's death is expected to wrap up on Monday with the inquest turning its attention to Curran Strang's death for the remainder of the week.

- [Full Coverage: First Nations Student Deaths Inquest](#)
- [Indigenous cases treated by police as 'less than worthy victims,' lawyer says](#)
- [Families 'reliving the past' through First Nations student death inquest](#)

The first weeks of testimony dealt with the deaths of [Paul Panacheese, who mysteriously collapsed](#) as a 21-year-old student in 2006 and [Robyn Harper, 18, who died in 2007 of alcohol poisoning in her boarding home.](#)

Here are five things revealed at the inquest so far:

1. Mothers received no official information about the deaths of their children

All three mothers who have testified so far — Maryanne Panacheese, Tina Harper and Stella Anderson — told the inquest that neither police nor the coroner talked to them about how their children died.

Harper and Panacheese said it was only through the inquest that they learned what officials knew about the deaths.

Ontario's Chief Coroner, Dr. Dirk Huyer, testified on Oct. 30, that communication with families is "something we're striving to overcome" as a death investigation service.

2. First Nations students struggle with racism in the city

Several former students have testified about the incidents of racism they experienced while attending high school in Thunder Bay.

Skye Kakekagumick, from Keewaywin First Nation, testified that several times, food was thrown at her from passing vehicles and people made a war-whooping noise and yelled things such as "stupid savage, go back home."

3. Teens' alcohol use fuelled by loneliness

Friends of both Robyn Harper and Jethro Anderson testified the teens were drinking before they died.

Kakekagumick told inquest jurors that she used alcohol to cope with the racism and loneliness she experienced in the city.

"I made friends like that too, and everyone around me," she testified. "I guess we were just taking the easy way. We didn't know any other way. We were just kids."

4. Police response questioned

Dora Morris, the aunt and boarding home parent of Jethro Anderson testified that she was told by police that the boy was "just out there partying like any native kid", when she reported him missing.

The inquest heard that police issued a news release saying no foul play was suspected in Anderson's death before a post-mortem was complete.

A police officer testified Thunder Bay police did not launch a criminal investigation into Anderson's disappearance until six days after he was reported missing.

"The police have a tendency to default to a drowning and liquor scenario, literally, almost automatically," said Nishnawbe Aski Nation lawyer Julian Falconer.

5. Families may not get all the answers they're seeking from the inquest

Jethro Anderson's mother, Stella, fled the court room in tears when a police officer testified about a tip he received that Anderson had been murdered.

The officer later testified that he deemed the tip not credible and an investigation was not pursued, but the information came as a shock to family members.

Anderson's lawyer, Christa Big Canoe, says the inquest process is not designed to provide exact details about the deaths.

"You're never going to get a perfect answer but learning all the components and different parts of the story will help the family understand more," Big Canoe said.

The inquest is scheduled to resume at 10 a.m. on Monday. Click [here](#) to watch the live stream or follow [@cbcreporter](#) for on-going coverage.

Explore CBC

CBC Home

TV

Radio

News

Sports

Music

Arts

Kids

- [Local](#)
 - [Documentaries](#)
 - [Comedy](#)
 - [Books](#)
 - [Parents](#)
 - [Aboriginal](#)
 - [Weather](#)
 - [CBC Connects](#)
 - [Digital Archives](#)
 - [Games](#)
 - [Contests](#)
 - [Site Map](#)
-

Stay Connected

- [Mobile](#)
 - [RSS](#)
 - [Podcasts](#)
 - [Newsletters & Alerts](#)
-

Services and Information

- [Corporate Info](#)
 - [Public Appearances](#)
 - [Commercial Services](#)
 - [Reuse & Permission](#)
 - [Terms of Use](#)
 - [Privacy Policy](#)
 - [CBC Shop](#)
 - [Help](#)
 - [Contact Us](#)
 - [Jobs](#)
 - [Doing Business with Us](#)
 - [Renting Facilities](#)
-