

## Jury makes 28 recommendations in Lena Anderson inquest

Anderson died by suicide in back of police truck in Kasabonika Lake First Nation

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The inquest into the death of a Kasabonika Lake First Nation woman while in police custody has come to a close, with the jury making 28 recommendations around police funding and community grief counseling and suicide prevention.

Lena Anderson hung herself in February 2013, using a draw string she removed from her pants while being held in the back of a Nishnawbe Aski Police Service (NAPS) vehicle.

She had been left in the back of the vehicle as Kasabonika Lake didn't have any holding cells.

"It was very hard," said Mary Ann Shewaybick, Anderson's mother, after the inquest had concluded on Thursday afternoon in Thunder Bay. "I couldn't stay the whole session; I found it very hard."

## 28 recommendations

The jury's 28 recommendations included:

- That police services in indigenous communities use the Police Services Act (PSA) as their governing legislation
- That Canada, Ontario and Indigenous communities work together to ensure policing standards and service levels in Indigenous communities are equivalent to those in non-Indigenous communities
- That Indigenous police services are provided with enough funding to ensure an adequate complement of backup officers, and that they have access to a central communications and dispatch centre that meets PSA requirements
- That Indigenous police services have adequate detachment buildings, proper training, and that officers review policies on prisoner care and identification of individuals at risk of self-harm
- To ensure that prisoners are not held in police vehicles for any longer than needed to transport them to a proper holding cell
- That communities get adequate funding to to deliver grief recovery and suicide prevention training programs
- That an age-appropriate suicide prevention program be developed, which would be delivered to students at Kasabonika Lake's school
- And that Kasabonika Lake's band security officer program be reviewed to include defined duties and responsibilities, and to ensure security officers aren't performing duties normally assigned to a police/peace officer

Shewaybick said the recommendations around how prisoners are handled were very important to her.

"I want them to look after them," she said. "Not the way they looked after my daughter, but I want them to be more careful what they're doing."

- [First Nations woman died by suicide in back of police car, inquest hears](#)
- ['No one was coming to help me': Police officer recalls night woman died by suicide in his truck](#)
- [Smudging ban at inquest 'deeply troubling' for Indigenous families, lawyers say](#)

[Testimony given earlier in the inquest](#) revealed that Anderson had been taken into custody after "community leaders became concerned," about a get-together at Anderson's home, as her 3-year-old daughter was present at the time.

Alcohol is prohibited at Kasabonika Lake by a First Nations by-law.

A child welfare worker went to Anderson's home, accompanied by First Nations security officers and a NAPS officer.

When the child welfare worker took her daughter, Anderson pushed a security officer.

The NAPS officer then took her into custody, but with no holding cells in the community, Anderson was kept in the back of a police vehicle while the arresting officer went to get the community's only other police officer, who was off-duty.

Anderson was alone in the vehicle for 16 minutes, during which time she freed one of her hands from her handcuffs, removed the drawstring from her pants, and hung herself.

She was then taken to the nursing station where she was pronounced dead.

## **Grief counseling, suicide prevention critical**

Christa Big Canoe, the legal counsel for Anderson's family, said the recommendations around grief counseling and suicide prevention are critical.

"When someone dies by suicide in the community, if they don't have the proper resources to stop having the unresolved grief, often that leads to other suicides and it has a bad, bad impact in the community," she said. "And communities can't get well if they don't have what they need on the ground to help them."

"Suicide is one of the most preventable deaths, and so the loss of Lena to her family, and to the community, was substantial, and that happens far too often."

Inquest jury recommendations aren't binding, however, and Big Canoe noted that many made on Thursday echoed recommendations proposed in other, earlier inquests into the deaths of Indigenous people.

"When is it enough?" she said. "How often do we have to do this, how often do we need to hear this kind of evidence, before governments are willing to act?"

Big Canoe said she continues to follow up on recommendations after inquests end.

"We continue to write letters to ... whoever the recommendation was directed to," she said. "We keep pushing the issues, like 'have you done this yet? What is happening now?'"

"We continue to talk .. about these really substantially important issues in First Nation communities, and to these families, because it's the same story, and it's time things changed."

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