



Nishnawbe Aski Nation
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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NAN CALLS FOR INQUEST & LEGISLATIVE CHANGE AFTER LOSS OF TWO YOUTH IN GROUP HOMES

GATINEAU, QB: Following the deaths of two Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) youth last month, Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum is calling on the Coroner's Office to order an inquest into the deaths of Amy Owen and Courtney Scott, and for the Government of Ontario to make legislative change so inquests are mandatory for all youth who die in group home settings.

"We are dismayed to learn that an inquest in these cases is not mandatory under the *Coroners Act*. We are calling for the Office of the Chief Coroner to exercise discretion and call an inquest as quickly as possible to fully address the issues behind these tragedies," said Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum. "This inquest must encompass the full range of systemic issues that led to the tragic deaths of these youth. We are calling for legislative change to the *Coroner's Act* so that any death of a youth in a group home setting will result in a mandatory inquest."

Courtney Scott, a 16-year-old from Fort Albany First Nation, died in a house fire at her foster home in Orléans on April 21. Courtney is remembered as a 'loving' and 'wonderful girl' by family and friends.

Amy Owen, a 13-year-old from Poplar Hill First Nation, died while in care in a group home near Ottawa on April 17. Her father, Jeffery Owen, was told she took her own life, but is still waiting for an official report into her death. He buried his daughter in her community on April 25 – something he says no parent should have to do.

"Amy was supposed to have one-on-one care with 24-hour supervision. How could she take her own life if she was under constant supervision?" asks Owen, who remembers his daughter as a smart young girl who didn't have thoughts of suicide until after she was removed from her community. "Amy wasn't suicidal until she entered care. She was crying out for help. Her spirit was broken. I felt so helpless, I wish I could have done something."

NAN supports four points of immediate action called for by the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, who urges all levels of government to work with Indigenous partners to fundamentally change residential care.

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