

SUMMARY: COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW Of the Death of a Youth Known to the Ministry

A. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (the ministry) conducted the Comprehensive Review (CR) to examine case practice regarding the subject youth (the youth).

For the purpose of the CR, ministry records and BC Coroners Service documents were reviewed, as well as information obtained through interviews with the involved ministry staff. The CR focused on a specific period of ministry involvement prior to the death of the youth.

B. TERM OF REFERENCE

1. Was the ministry's assessment and planning, with regard to concerns for the youth's safety and well-being, consistent with the relevant legislation, policy, and practice guidelines?

C. BACKGROUND SUMMARY

The ministry had brief involvements with the family previously, which did not result in ongoing protection services. During the period of review, the ministry became involved due to concerns the youth was engaging in high risk behavior, and was at risk in the home environment due to parenting ability. The parents were cooperative with the ministry and had already developed a plan to address the concerns, which involved their participation in relevant, and culturally safe, services. The youth, who was Indigenous, was in the parents' care during the period of review.

D. FINDINGS

1. The ministry's assessment and planning was partially supported by legislation, policy, and guidelines. The initial steps to assess the youth's safety appropriately supported the decision for the youth to remain in the home while the family engaged in voluntary, culturally safe support services. However, the next steps of assessment, which included interviews with the youth and youth's siblings, did

not occur; and, the family's participation in services was not confirmed, monitored, or evaluated. The involved staff cited staffing vacancies restricted their ability to complete these outstanding steps. After the initial assessment that the youth was less vulnerable (due to age and the parents' cooperation and commitment to engage in services), the social worker redirected efforts to other children and youth in the community determined to be more vulnerable, and had no further contact with the family until the day of the youth's death.

During the period following the initial assessment and prior to the youth's death, another ministry program learned the youth had a specific high risk issue. The ministry program collaborated with the parent and a community agency with regard to this need; however, participation with the ministry program was voluntary and the youth did not consent to services. The social worker was not alerted to this new information, which included details about a possible new child protection concern, resulting in no opportunity for the social worker to reassess the youth's vulnerability.

Maintaining contact with the family and collaborating among ministry programs and community service partners could have resulted in a plan to encourage the youths' participation in services to address the specific high risk issue, and facilitated the parents follow through with services.

E. ACTIONS TAKEN TO DATE

1. A health network in the community formed a sub-committee to engage community members (including the Indigenous community to ensure culturally appropriate planning) to improve the health of residents.
2. A senior social worker was placed in the community temporarily to provide mentorship to newly hired social workers.
3. Two social worker vacancies were filled, and a third was imminent. In addition, the office now had access to a new team of four experienced social workers who provide short term coverage within the SDA to offices experiencing staffing vacancies.
4. The involved social worker organized a meeting among community professionals to discuss concerns for high risk youth in the community, and strategies needed to mitigate this. The social worker proposed the group meet once per month and invite other youth-serving professionals in the community.
5. A change in leadership within the other ministry program, unrelated to this report, resulted in renewed collaboration between the two ministry programs.
6. The ministry's Service Delivery *Divisional Plan* prioritizes recruitment and retention, and the development of a province-wide strategy to respond to offices with staffing crises.

F. ACTION PLAN

An action plan was not required.

The review was completed in April 2018.