

# 14-year-old Lee: An Investigative review

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Ministry of Children's Services response to the Office of the Child  
and Youth Advocate

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Alberta 

# Table of Contents

<b>Background</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Referenced Recommendations</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Update Summary: Referenced Recommendations</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>7</b>

# Background

On October 30, 2018, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) released a report entitled, *14-Year-Old Lee Serious Injury: An Investigative Review*. The report is a review of a serious injury sustained by a youth who was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order at the time of the injury. As described in the OCYA's report, Lee is a sensitive, well-spoken First Nation youth who enjoys video games and spending time with his family. It was acknowledged that Lee is an insightful and resilient young man who was open to telling his story. Lee was also described as a young man with multiple impairments, complex mental health issues, and severe behavioural concerns.

The OCYA did not make any new recommendations as a result of this report; however, it did reference five previous recommendations related to providing services for children and youth with complex needs. As the work on these is already underway, the OCYA's most recent public assessment of progress on those recommendations, as of this writing, will be used to speak to actions already taken by Children's Services.

Two of the previous recommendations referenced in relation to Lee's story are considered as implemented by the OCYA. One recommendation involved enhancing the continuum of placement options for children and youth in care, specifically related to those with unique placement needs. The other recommendation was not directed at Children's Services but at Alberta Health Services. That recommendation involved the accessibility of service coordinators for children with complex mental health needs and their families.

The other three past recommendations referenced by the OCYA are in varying stages of implementation. All three recommendations are aimed at bolstering the collective response and support for children with substantial medical and/or behavioural needs, and ensuring the children and families receive comprehensive services across the spectrum of government supports.

Children's Services' response includes information gathered from the following sources:

- a review of existing policies in comparison to issues identified in the report;
- a review of current ministry initiatives, practice, and program directions related to issues identified in the report; and
- engagement with our ministry partners, including other divisions, regional service delivery partners, and other ministries.

We welcome the OCYA's input, and thank him and his office for their ongoing commitment to strengthening supports for vulnerable children, youth, and families in Alberta.

# Referenced Recommendations

The following reflects the most recent public adjudication on the past recommendations referenced in *14-Year-Old Lee: An Investigative Review*. Children's Services publicly responds to every recommendation directed towards it and tracks the progress on its website. The OCYA also publicly assesses the progress on recommendations every six months. Transparent public reporting allows recommending bodies and Albertans to keep informed of ongoing systemic improvement to the child intervention system.

## 8-Year-Old Ella: An Investigative Review (July 2015):

The Ministry of Human Services should identify a continuum of placement options for children in care with disabilities and/or complex needs and ensure that adequate placement options and supports are available.

Most recent adjudication from the OCYA: This recommendation has been met.

## 17-Year-Old Catherine: An Investigative Review (September 2015):

Alberta Health Services should provide service coordinators for children with complex mental health needs and their families, who are accessing mental health services across multiple programs.

Most recent adjudication from the OCYA: This recommendation was not for Children's Services. It has been met.

## 17-Year-Old Catherine: An Investigative Review (September 2015):

The Ministry of Human Services and Alberta Health Services should enter into a formal provincial agreement identifying how they will work collaboratively to serve young people with complex mental health needs when their safety is in jeopardy.

Most recent adjudication from the OCYA: This recommendation has had significant progress.

## *Two-Year-Old Teanna: An Investigative Review (November 2015):*

The Ministry of Human Services should ensure:

a) That when a child has substantial medical and/or behavioural needs, the specific needs of the child are identified and documented, then matched to a care provider's capacity and potential support requirements, which is also documented, before the child is placed.

b) That there is regular and ongoing assessment of a care provider's capacity to meet a child's needs. If there are indicators that the child's placement is in jeopardy, a timely re-assessment of the child's needs and their care provider's capacities must be completed and appropriate action taken.

Most recent adjudication from the OCYA: This recommendation has had significant progress.

## *16-Year-Old Dillon: An Investigative Review (October 2017):*

The ministries of Children's Services, Health, Education, and Community and Social Services should establish or strengthen policies and protocols so information is shared and used to coordinate service plans for young people with complex needs.

Most recent adjudication from the OCYA: This recommendation has been publicly responded to but not adjudicated on progress at this time.

# Update Summary: Referenced Recommendations

Of the five past recommendations referenced by the OCYA as pertinent to Lee's circumstance, two have been met. Work is already underway by Children's Services on the three other recommendations, which are focused mainly on:

- ensuring the totality of a child's need are being met through comprehensive support plans and appropriate matching of caregivers; and
- creating and sustaining a collaborative environment to best support children with complex needs.

To help address these recommendations, Children's Services continues to move forward with two key initiatives that support front-line staff with case planning that helps support children and youth's attachment and relationship needs. These initiatives are Practice Strategies for Lifelong Connections and Practice Strategies for Lifelong Connections.

Practice Strategies for Lifelong Connections focuses on keeping children and youth connected to family, community, and culture, reconnecting them where ties have been severed, and ensuring thoughtful, well-planned transitions. This approach recognizes the importance of identifying meaningful connections and working collaboratively with children, youth, and families. Province-wide implementation of Practice Strategies for Lifelong Connections has now been completed and formal policy updates were released to the field in December 2018.

Additionally, Children's Services continues to roll out Foundations of Caregiver Support, which provides new training for all staff and caregivers. This training helps staff and caregivers recognize the signs that a child is having difficulty with grief and loss, understand how this has affected the child, and how to help the child build resiliency. Developing case plans and negotiating services and supports based on an understanding of trauma, grief, and loss is vital to supporting each children's health and well-being. It also helps support better outcomes in placement and caregiver matching.

Children's Services also continues to work diligently with our ministry partners to improve information-sharing practices. This is being done through governance that builds accountability into service delivery models, policy, training, and information management. These strategies will help staff and systems better interpret legislation and use existing tools to address perceived information-sharing barriers. These improvements will help improve the coordination and delivery of services to children and youth with complex needs.

A number of other initiatives are also underway to strengthen Children's Services' ability to meet the needs of young people with complex needs:

- The Supports for Adults with Complex Service Needs: Cross Ministry Policy Framework, which is being expanded to include youth with complex needs aged 16 and 17.
- A Disabilities Protocol between Children's Services and Community and Social Services, which supports practitioners to better co-ordinate and collaborate in their shared work with children, youth, parents, and caregivers with disabilities.

Children's Services remains committed to continually improving supports for children and youth, and addressing all issues identified by the OCYA.

# Conclusion

Children's Services would like to thank the Child and Youth Advocate for this report. The review of Lee's story highlights the continued need for collaborative, enhanced, multi-service processes to support young people with multifaceted needs. We are taking the steps need to better support young people like Lee.

Children and youth with complex needs are among the most vulnerable in society. We will continue to launch and implement important initiatives, including new practice approaches and training, aimed at strengthening connections for children and ensuring access to the wrap-around services they need. We also continue to work diligently to further match children who need to be in care with the appropriate caregivers and support networks, ensuring that careful consideration is being given to ongoing changes to the child's needs.

Children's Services has made it a priority to improve the coordination and sharing of information. Work is underway to help eliminate barriers and improve information-sharing to enable more collaborative problem-solving and the development of comprehensive support plans for children and families across ministries. We are committed to continually strengthening the child intervention system so that all children, youth, and families receive the services they need, when they need them.