

# Jury recommends changes after death at youth home

A 14-year-old girl who had hung herself at a young offender facility here might be alive today if more communication was relayed by staff, a coroner's inquest concluded Friday.

The five-member jury came up with 32 recommendations designed to prevent the kind of communication breakdowns they felt led to her death.

Paola Rosales, who suffered from depression, hanged herself at the MacMillan Youth Centre on Boston Church Road July 2, 2001, a few days after ending up in custody for a minor assault.

She succumbed to her injuries the following day at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.

She had made two previous attempts on her own life, but nobody at the centre realized she was a suicide risk, the inquest heard.

Paola was taken into the care of the Catholic Children's Aid Society after her first suicide attempt and was placed in a foster home in Brampton. She cut her wrists after a squabble with her foster parents.

In May 2001, she was charged with assault. She ran away and missed her court appearance. On June 29, she was taken into custody

and placed at the MacMillan centre.

Jurors sitting on the five-week inquest, held in Ontario Court (superior division) in Milton, recommended better training for those who work with children.

They also recommended the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services (MCFCS) develop a one or two page "passport" to be sent immediately for each child in the care of a Children's Aid Society (CAS) worker and that no child be accepted into a placement without a passport. It should be sent as well to appropriate medical practitioners. The passport will include information pertaining to the child's past history of suicide attempts.

In addition, they recommended to the ministry that the CAS worker assigned to a child be accountable for all flow of information to all caregivers and community services in contact with the child while in the care of CAS. This includes any facility, detention centre or jail.

They recommended the ministry implement a policy requiring all CAS workers, foster parents and staff employed in youth correctional facilities to participate in intensive training in the areas of suicide risk identification, assessment and prevention, behaviour management and prevention, Young

Offenders Act and Mental Health Act.

The jury wants the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to direct all provincial community colleges offering the diploma programs of Child and Youth Worker and Correctional Worker to amend the curriculum to include substantial course work on identifying, assessing, managing and preventing suicide risks in adolescents.

The jury recommended the MCFCS and the CAS worker are required to speak frequently enough with a child within the first 72 hours of placement to ensure that their needs are being met and their concerns are addressed.

Following the recommendations, Eric Lewis, who represents Paola's mother Vilma Hernandez, said the recommendations, at a minimum, ensure the rights of children in custody to have some input into where they are kept and how they are cared for.


"That was the most important thing that came out this inquest. We're hopeful these recommendations collectively will prevent communication breakdowns that led to Paola's death. The jury agreed it was a preventable death and very unnecessary."

Mr. Lewis said there will be civil action against the MacMillan Youth Centre.

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