

Inquiry of First Nations student deaths concludes

By Nahnda Garlow

THUNDER BAY — The inquiry into the sudden deaths of seven northern Ontario First Nations high school students concluded Tuesday, ruling that four of the student deaths were undetermined.

Jethro Anderson, 15, Curran Strang, 18, Robyn Harper, 19, Paul Panacheese, 21, Reggie Bushie, 15, Kyle Morrisseau, 17 and Jordan Wabasse all left their home reserves and travelled to Thunder Bay for high-school. All seven died while in Thunder Bay.

The deaths of Anderson, Panacheese, Morrisseau and Wabasse were deemed "undetermined".

"Undetermined" in respect of three of five of the drowning deaths sends a clear message that the police investigations were deeply flawed," said lawyer for the Nishnawbe Askie Nation Julian Falconer.

The jury submitted a total of 145 recommendations - specifically surrounding the police investigation following the death of indigenous youth — calling for an increased use of social media and training for Thunder Bay police in dealing with similar situations.

A number of the recommendations were aimed at provincial and federal governments to increase funding for high school education on reserves in the remote north.

The inquest examined the circumstances surrounding the indigenous student's deaths from 2000-2011.

All students came to Thunder Bay for school and stayed with host families during their stay. All students had to travel from their home reserve communities that had no formal high schools for the students to attend, forcing them to leave their families.

Lawyers for the 11 parties represented at the inquest submitted a joint slate of 118 suggested recommendations to the jury last month, including creating high schools in all First Nations communities so teens wouldn't have to leave their families and homes to get an education.

Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day said the recommendations will inform the relationship between First Nation families and municipalities across the province.

"The findings are crucial to understanding the underlying issues that our youth are faced with when attending school in urban centres," said Day. "One of the key recommendations is the importance of maintaining culture and familial ties which is the same recommendation that we heard in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls To Action."

The Ontario First Na-



The jury made 145 recommendations after the inquiry concluded. Some of the recommendations include: more funding for high schools on remote northern First Nation reserves and training for police. FILE PHOTO

tions Young Peoples Council has been participating in the inquest and has worked closely with the Nishnawbe Askie Nation, representatives for the families of the seven youth, and other parties relevant to the inquest.

"We hope by listening and taking part in this phase of the Inquest we

will be further ahead in not only understanding this issue but repairing it," said Quinn Meawasige of the OFNYPC. "The government has neglected on-reserve education for decades and so students leave the reserve unprepared and vulnerable - it is so unfair. As outlined in article 14 of the UN-

DRIP, First Nations youth deserve opportunities to all levels of education without any discrimination from the state. First Nations youth deserve the same opportunities as other Canadian children."