



News Release

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For Immediate Release

RCY REPORT REPEATS CALL FOR PROVINCE TO CREATE COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES

VICTORIA – The provincial government should develop and fund a comprehensive system of substance use services capable of consistently meeting the diverse needs of youth and their families across British Columbia, says a report released today by the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth.

That is the main recommendation from *Last Resort: One family's tragic struggle to find help for their son*, an RCY investigative report on the circumstances leading up to the death of Nick, a Métis teenager who was in a full-time attendance program on Vancouver Island as a condition of a youth justice sentence. This is the second time in less than five months that RCY has made this recommendation, which first appeared in *A Review of Youth Substance Use Services in B.C.* (May 2016).

The Representative's investigation found that Nick's parents were unable to access suitable, culturally specific services to help address their youngest son's escalating substance use problem. It also found that Nick's parents turned to the youth justice system because they felt it was their last resort to obtain the timely help their son desperately needed.

"In many ways, Nick's story is different from those we have told in past reports," said Deputy Representative Dawn Thomas-Wightman. "He was not in government care and he came from a well-functioning, middle-class family with whom he lived near a major urban B.C. centre.

"But in one key respect, Nick was like so many other youth the RCY has profiled. He was a teen in serious distress who did not receive the specific supports he needed when he needed them – and neither did his family."

The biggest issue for Nick was his increasing use of methamphetamine, for which he was hesitant to accept voluntary treatment. This report recommends that government create a system that includes community-based and residential treatment services up to and including the prudent and selective use of secure care when it is necessary to keep a youth safe. This recommendation echoes those in previous RCY reports, and expands on analysis in the Representative's report

Approach with Caution: Why the story of one vulnerable B.C. youth can't be told, released this past May.

The Representative's investigators found that there were a number of points along the way when Nick's path might have been significantly altered had the proper supports been available or proactively offered to him and his family, including the potential option of secure care and the Intensive Support and Supervision Program worker the court had ordered for him. The Representative cannot say with certainty that receiving more appropriate services could have ultimately saved the 15-year-old's life, but they would have given Nick a better chance.

The Representative also recommends that the province, in partnership with Métis leadership, develop and implement a strategic plan to deliver culturally responsive services for Métis children and youth in the areas of youth justice, substance use, mental health, child and family supports and education supports.

The Representative also calls on MCFD, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health to co-locate mental health and substance use supports in B.C. schools to increase the ability of youth to engage with services and to help support early identification and intervention for mental health and substance use problems.

“We've heard about and reported on too many cases where youth did not receive substance use services that matched their needs, some with tragic consequences,” Thomas-Wightman said. “It is time for B.C. to develop a true system of services that is comprehensive and able to match the needs of youth and their families.”

The full report can be found here: <http://www.rcybc.ca/lastresort>

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