



News Release

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Skye's Legacy: Representative urges MCFD to focus on 'belonging' for Indigenous children

VICTORIA – The life and death of Skye, a bright, young First Nations girl who “bubbled with energy” as a child, illustrates just how critical it is for children in government care to feel connected to family, culture and community, says an investigative report released today by British Columbia’s Representative for Children and Youth.

Skye's Legacy: A Focus on Belonging urges the B.C. government to focus on better helping First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children to realize the kind of deep and valuable connections that are too often damaged by the historic and ongoing effects of colonialism, ranging from residential schools and the Sixties Scoop, to the current child welfare system.

Skye died in August 2017, on her 17th birthday and less than a year after her mother passed away. She had spent nearly 12 years in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), was moved 15 times and never realized the sense of belonging that all humans seek and need to thrive, said Representative Jennifer Charlesworth.

“Skye and her mother deserved much, much better,” Charlesworth said. “It’s heart-breaking that neither of them received the kind of foundational supports that might have enabled them to deal with the trauma they had experienced and, at the very least, to have a relationship with each other.”

Skye was removed from her mother’s care when she was five and, rather than support a potential return or nurture some form of mother-daughter relationship, MCFD focused on adoption for Skye while preventing contact between the two. That focus resulted in three failed adoption plans and subsequent turmoil and emotional harm for Skye, who lived in eight different foster homes, attended eight schools and had 18 social workers during her time in care. She wasn’t provided with any consistent opportunity to connect to her Dene culture and didn’t get the opportunity to visit her home territory in Fort McPherson, N.W.T., even though she requested both.

RCY sought to conduct this investigation and produce the subsequent report in a different way. The investigation team that researched and presented Skye’s story was led by Indigenous RCY staff members. The research methodology used by the team was significantly influenced by an Indigenous worldview, in which it is understood that there are multiple stories, perspectives and truths that are relevant to any situation being considered. While Skye’s story is uniquely hers, RCY investigated this case because it is also representative of the experiences of too many Indigenous children and youth.

“I chose Skye’s story to investigate because it reflects the stories of many First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children that my Office sees in our day-to-day advocacy and reviews and investigations work,” Charlesworth said. “Too often, young Indigenous people experience this lack of

connection and belonging to people, place, culture and a positive sense of self. As a consequence, they experience pain, sadness, distress, risk and poorer life outcomes.”

RCY strongly supports the resumption of jurisdiction by Indigenous Nations and communities over their own child welfare services that has been enabled by the passage of the federal *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families*. However, while that transformation process unfolds, it is important for MCFD to take steps now to ensure that Indigenous children currently in its care can achieve the sense of belonging that they need and deserve. This report makes three recommendations toward that end.

First, the Representative recommends that MCFD conduct a systemic needs analysis of cultural and family support resources required to ensure that social workers are better supported to promote a sense of belonging and identity for First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous children and youth in care. This process should include a substantive initial investment of new resources by April 2022.

The Representative also recommends that MCFD review and revise all relevant care-planning and case management standards, policies, practice guidelines and training materials with the goal of aligning those materials with the dimensions of belonging, as described in this report.

Finally, the Representative recommends that, in the interest of improving practice, MCFD distribute this report to all staff who work with and plan for children and youth who are in care or who may come into care, and then meaningfully engage in discussions with those staff about belonging for children and youth in the context of case planning, decision-making and the development and implementation of care plans.

“Skye’s story offers us some valuable teachings about the importance of belonging,” Charlesworth said. “It is my sincere hope that those lessons will be put to good use for the sake of all children and youth in care.”

The full report is available here <https://rcybc.ca/reports-and-publications/skye/>

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