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May 6, 2015

THE CHANGING FACE OF YOUTH SUICIDE IN MANITOBA AND THE NARROW WINDOW FOR INTERVENTION: MANITOBA CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE RELEASES FIRST OF THREE-PHASE REPORT

WINNIPEG – The nature of youth suicide in Manitoba is changing and is seeing deaths of more girls than boys, an average age of 15, and nearly all youth suicide deaths are from hanging, according to a report issued today by the Children's Advocate, Darlene MacDonald. Many of the youth who died by suicide experienced multiple residence changes and the instability may have compounded other traumas in their lives.

The report issued today, the first of a three-phase project, examined the histories of 50 youth who died by suicide in Manitoba between 2009 and 2013 and whose deaths were reviewable under legislation by the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA). The study was inspired by what the OCA has been seeing over the last number of years with respect to the changing nature of suicide in Manitoba and the known gaps in reaching youth who may be a highest risk.

For this first phase of the study, the OCA examined several known risk factors, then coded and aggregated the data in order to look for themes common between the youth. Six major themes emerged, including: poor school attendance, a history of hospitalization for suspicious injuries or mental health crises, criminal justice involvement, suicidal ideation, a history of substance misuse by parents or the youth, and a significant history of residence changes, including one youth who experienced 53 placement changes before their death.

The OCA collaborated with an adolescent psychhealth research group from the University of Manitoba in developing the structure of the file examination.

Phase II of the study is currently underway and will compare the 50 youth to a group of their peers who were also involved with CFS but who did not die by suicide. In the final stage of the study, Phase III, the OCA will develop evidence-informed suicide prevention resources to promote public understanding of youth suicide and practical strategies for supporting youth who may be most keenly at risk. The Phase III resources will be widely shared with youth, caregivers, and professionals who work on the front lines of assessing and responding to youth. Phase II is targeted to be released in early 2016, with Phase III resources available in mid-2016. The Phase I report can be accessed online: http://www.childrensadvocate.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/The-Changing-Face-of-Youth-Suicide-in-Manitoba_FINAL_web.pdf.

The Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. The OCA represents the rights, interests and viewpoints of children and youth throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or should be receiving, services under The Child and Family Services Act and The Adoption Act. This includes advocating directly with children and youth and by reviewing public services after the death of any young person who received child welfare services in the year preceding their death.

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