

Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth Calls for Increased Oversight to its Group Home System

SASKATOON– The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth releases investigation urging government to address oversight deficiencies in group homes.

In a new report released today, entitled *Someone to Watch Over Us*, the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Lisa Broda, said the case of Elijah, a seven-year-old non-verbal boy with autism who ran from his group home in June 2020, “reveals systemic oversight issues the Ministry of Social Services must address immediately to uphold children’s rights to quality service.”

In the early hours of June 2, 2020, Elijah was located over one kilometer away from the group home, in a Tim Horton’s parking lot, naked, scared, and confused. In her report, Broda outlines the circumstances that existed prior to Elijah running from his group home stating, “I was deeply concerned to learn that prior to this incident, the group home had been struggling with maintaining staffing levels, internal discord, and that the Ministry had been aware of numerous incidents involving Elijah’s destructive behaviours, attempts to run away, and questionable interventions by group home staff,” said Broda.

Significant challenges were revealed despite the company previously self-declaring its specialized resources and experience in caring for children with complex care needs. The company had been contracted by the Ministry to operate a group home for four children, including Elijah, all of whom had well known developmental, intellectual, and cognitive disabilities.

Shortly after Elijah ran away, further concerns about neglectful care and abuse gave rise to another child in the group home being hospitalized, children being removed from the home, and the provider relinquishing its operation of the group home. Broda stated, “this case compelled me to investigate the circumstances, particularly given the long standing concerns my office has had pertaining to the group home system.”

After having fielded numerous complaints about group home care and oversight over several years, the Advocate sought to understand what the findings might reveal about Ministry oversight of group homes. “What we learned, essentially, is that although the Ministry has many staff engaged in the group home system, it does not have a coordinated oversight or properly resourced scheme that proactively monitors well-defined, measurable quality-of-care indicators,” said Broda.

The Advocate’s investigation findings led her office to make three recommendations, with the objective of ensuring the Ministry improves its upfront planning of, and provides greater ongoing support to, group home resources and redesigns its oversight structure and practices. Broda stated, “Without robust stewardship of its growing group home system, we will see the most vulnerable children in our society suffer and be denied their right to thrive in care.”

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. She leads a team of professionals who work on behalf of the province's young people. Our vision is that the rights, well-being and voice of children and youth are respected and valued.

For a full copy of *Someone to Watch Over Us*, visit www.saskadvocate.ca.

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