



17-YEAR-OLD TRISTAN

AN INVESTIGATIVE REVIEW

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Alberta
May 2026

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Under my authority and duty as identified in Section 9.1 of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act (CYAA)*, the following is an individual investigative review regarding Tristan. His circumstances meet the criteria for a **mandatory review**. Tristan was receiving Child Intervention through a Permanent Guardianship Order at the time of his passing.

Investigative reviews are designed to improve the lives of young people by identifying ways to enhance services and supports, leading to system improvements and better outcomes for young people and their families.

The investigation process includes:

- Examination of critical issues
- Review of documentation and reports
- Review of policy and casework practice
- Personal interviews
- Other factors that may arise for consideration
- Notification and involvement of the young person's family, Band, Delegated First Nation Agency, community or cultural group, relevant Ministry, law enforcement agency, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Alberta Health Services, and any other person the Advocate considers appropriate.

In accordance with the *CYAA*, investigative reviews must be non-identifying. Therefore, the names used in these reports are pseudonyms (false names). Great care has been taken to protect their privacy; however, there is no guarantee that interested parties will be unable to identify them. Accordingly, readers and interested parties, including the media, should respect this privacy and not focus on identifying the individuals and locations involved in these matters.

Investigative reviews do not contain findings of legal responsibility or conclusions of law nor replace other processes that may occur, such as investigations or prosecutions under the *Criminal Code* of Canada. The intent of a review is not to find fault with specific individuals but to identify key issues and meaningful findings.

Tristan's experiences were unique, and he left a lasting impression on those who knew and loved him. My heartfelt condolences go out to his family and those who cared about Tristan.

Respectfully,

[Original signed by Terri Pelton]

Terri Pelton

Child and Youth Advocate (Alberta)

ABOUT TRISTAN AND HIS FAMILY

Tristan¹ was 17 years old when he was found deceased at his mother's home. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner concluded that he died from carfentanil toxicity. Tristan was receiving Child Intervention through a **Permanent Guardianship Order (PGO)** at the time of his passing.

Tristan was full of curiosity and was eager to learn and explore. He loved animals and mechanics, especially building and working on bikes. He was part of a blended family and had two siblings, Sam and Rory, who were much older than him, along with a younger brother, Fitz. After his parents, Jackson and Emily, separated, he lived between them.

SUMMARY OF TRISTAN'S EXPERIENCES WITH GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS

Tristan from Birth to 10 Years Old

Tristan had minimal involvement with systems in his first five years. He was born healthy and received regular medical, dental, and optical care. Tristan started Kindergarten at four years old and attended the same school for five years.

Tristan's parents separated and co-parented their children. When he was six years old, Child Intervention received a report about neglect related to a lack of supervision. Emily denied the concerns and told caseworkers that they were in conflict with a neighbour; intervention involvement ended.

Tristan and his brother, Fitz, were living with their father when Child Intervention received two reports about neglect and emotional injury. Concerns were related to Jackson's parenting and alcohol use, lack of food, and housing instability. Involvements ended after caseworkers spoke with both parents, who agreed to ensure their children's needs were met while they co-parented.

Tristan had a psycho-educational assessment in Grade 2 and was diagnosed with a learning disorder and adjustment disorder. His grades were low and he struggled with peer interactions. Recommendations included an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) that provided extra classroom supports, counselling, and his vision being assessed. The following year, he was moved to a specialized classroom where his IPP supports continued. By the end of the school year, he had improved two grade levels but continued to have difficulty with peer interactions.

When Tristan was seven years old, Child Intervention received two reports about emotional injury related to inappropriate physical discipline and family violence. Tristan and Fitz were back in Emily's care, and she had frequent arguments with her new partner, Doyle. School staff did not identify concerns, and the children denied the allegations. Emily was connected to community-based counselling services. It was noted that Jackson lived close by and could provide support when needed. Intervention involvement ended.

At nine years old, Tristan was assessed and diagnosed with a mood disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Recommendations included medication, extra classroom support, and consistent use of strategies at home and at school to help manage his physical outbursts. His IPP remained in place, but the other recommendations were not implemented.

That same year, Child Intervention received a report about emotional injury related to family violence and Emily and Doyle's substance use. Tristan and Fitz disclosed that they were afraid of Doyle. Emily had limited engagement with the case team, and caseworkers applied for a **Supervision Order (SO)**; Tristan and Fitz moved to their father's home. Weeks later, Jackson was hospitalized for complications related to alcohol use. His partner, Sherry, cared for the children for two months until Jackson was discharged home. The SO application was withdrawn, noting that Tristan and Fitz had an appropriate caregiver. Jackson's alcohol use was not addressed before involvement ended.

In Grade 5, Tristan transferred to a new school where his IPP continued. By the end of the school year, he was at grade level in math and language arts and passed his other subjects with adaptations.

That same year, Child Intervention received a report about physical and emotional injury related to Jackson's alcohol use. A safety plan was developed that included him and Sherry not drinking alcohol at home, and members of their safety network doing daily check-ins. Jackson entered into an **Enhancement Agreement**. Weeks later, caseworkers received two concerns about family violence and alcohol use. Emily's circumstances had also not changed, so Tristan and Fitz were **apprehended**; they became the subjects of a **Temporary Guardianship Order**.

Ten-year-old Tristan and Fitz had a few brief placements before they were moved to Julien and Madeline's foster home. They lived on a farm where Tristan thrived. He learned mechanics, rode horses, helped with the cattle, and was responsible for his own calf. He started counselling to help him work through his trauma, grief and loss. Months later, Fitz had emotional and physical outbursts that exceeded his caregivers' capacity to manage, and he was moved, while Tristan remained there.

1. All names in the report are pseudonyms.
2. Bolded terms are defined in Appendix A.

Tristan had two school moves as a result of his earlier placement changes, and his IPP continued. He was an average student in Grade 6, but was distracted in class, and concerns were noted about his attendance. It is unknown how this was addressed.

Tristan from 11 to 14 Years Old

Jackson's and Emily's circumstances did not change. Visits were arranged with Tristan's parents and siblings, but at times, he refused to go. At 11 years old, Tristan was suspended from school after he arrived intoxicated. Caseworkers, caregivers and his counsellor were informed. They developed a plan with school staff to address the concerns and his counsellor agreed to provide additional support.

Tristan had two farm-related accidents, and caseworkers asked that he not participate in farming activities. He disagreed with the decision and voiced that he felt like all the good things in his life were being taken away. His mental health declined, and he was taken to the hospital, where he was treated and discharged. He began working with a psychiatrist who prescribed medication for depression, but Tristan would not take it.

When he was 12 years old, Tristan went into respite care and refused to return to his foster home. He said that he wanted to live with either his mother, his father, or his adult sister, Rory. He learned that Jackson was terminally ill, and arrangements were made for him to visit his father. Tristan began to have longer visits with his mother with the goal of moving back into her care, but she relapsed, so he was moved to a new foster home. At 13 years old, Tristan became the subject of a PGO.

Tristan struggled to settle into his new foster home and had physical and emotional outbursts. His caregivers said that they did not have the capacity to meet his needs, and after three months, he was moved to group care. His circumstances did not improve. Soon after, Jackson passed away. Tristan and Fitz were placed with their adult sister, Rory, under kinship care, and she received funding to meet their basic needs, respite care, and additional transportation costs. She declined parenting supports indicating that Emily was working on addressing her substance use and would help with day-to-day care.

Tristan received routine medical care for illnesses and injuries. In junior high school, the COVID-19 public health measures were put in place, and his attendance declined. By Grade 8, his attendance was sporadic, and he could not be evaluated to receive marks. He said that he found school boring, and Rory encouraged him to attend. By the end of junior high school, he had passing grades.

At 14 years old, Tristan was charged with theft, and he was given alternative measures, which he did not complete. His alcohol use escalated to include more potent substances, and he often left home without permission. He did not receive additional supports.

Tristan from 15 to 17 Years Old

Tristan refused to go to counselling, and after a physical outburst towards Rory and Fitz, she asked that he be moved. He did not have a stable placement and disengaged from his family and case team. Tristan declined placement options and told caseworkers that he was staying with friends. He was given bus tickets and gift cards for his basic needs. His behaviours escalated, and he received several criminal charges. He missed many court appearances, and once, was arrested on outstanding warrants.

Tristan was registered for Grade 10, but he rarely attended school; he was referred to an outreach program. His circumstances briefly improved during which time, he re-engaged with his case team, his substance use declined, and he worked on school modules. He said that he wanted to explore semi-independent living (SIL) and post-18 supports. Tristan returned to live with Rory, and Emily was often there to support her children.

As his behaviours escalated, Tristan frequently stayed with Emily. His substance use increased and he overdosed on fentanyl. He refused medical treatment and was taken to a shelter. Confinement under the *Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act* was not explored. The following day, Tristan was arrested for theft, firearms, and concealed weapons charges and held in police custody. While there, he began suboxone therapy, but following his release, he had limited follow-through and was discharged from the program. He overdosed twice but refused medical treatment.

Caseworker attempted to arrange placements, but Tristan refused. He stayed in a shelter or with Emily and was given bus tickets and gift cards for his basic needs. He used substances, was arrested for assault, and was assigned a probation officer. His case team met and expressed concerns with his presentation; he was slow to respond during conversations and had scattered thoughts, but he denied using substances.

Tristan missed court, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. Days later, caseworkers met with him to discuss post-18 supports through the **Transition to Adulthood Program**. He appeared to be under the influence of substances, which he denied. He was given a cellular phone to maintain contact with his family and case team.

At 17 years old, Tristan was transported to the hospital by emergency medical services after he fell while intoxicated. He was treated and discharged to Emily's care with a referral for X-rays. Two days later, he was found deceased in his mother's home. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner concluded that he died from carfentanil toxicity. A celebration of life was held for him, and Tristan is deeply missed by those who knew and loved him.

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Birth to 10 Years Old	11 to 14 Years Old	15 to 17 Years Old
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born healthy • 4 Years Old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Kindergarten • 6 Years Old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Child Intervention involvement • 7 – 8 Years Old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Assessed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Diagnosed with a learning disorder and adjustment disorder · Individualized Program Plan that continued throughout elementary school · Specialized classroom · Child Intervention involved 2 times • 9 – 10 Years Old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Assessed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Diagnosed with a mood disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder · Child Intervention involved 2 times <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Supervision Order (SO) application · Moved to father’s home · SO application withdrawn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Enhancement Agreement · Apprehended · Foster care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Temporary Guardianship Order · School moves coincided with placement changes · Counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 Years Old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Alcohol use began · School suspension • 12 – 13 Years Old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Injuries in foster placement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Farm-related activities restricted · Hospital visit for mental health concerns · Multiple placement moves <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Moved to sister’s home under kinship care · Permanent Guardianship Order · Father passed away · Multiple school moves <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Attendance declined • 14 Years Old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Justice involvement began · Alcohol use escalated to include more potent substances · Placement with sister ended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 Years Old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Did not have stable placement, stayed with mother and sister · Received multiple criminal charges • 16 - 17 Years Old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 3 overdoses · Suboxone therapy · Multiple criminal charges · Hospital visit for substance use-related injury <p>17-year-old Tristan passed away</p>

FINDINGS

Children and Family Services

Child Intervention was involved with Tristan and his family 7 times for neglect, and emotional and physical injury before he was 10 years old. Although supports were provided, the concerns persisted. Interventions appropriately became more intrusive to address their escalating nature, and he became the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order at 13 years old.

After a few brief placements, Tristan was moved to Julien and Madeline's foster home. They lived on a farm where he helped with the animals and was involved in all aspects of farming. He thrived in this environment. After he was injured, he was restricted from taking part in farm-related activities. He disagreed with this decision, his mental health declined, and he was provided with counselling and psychiatric support. Tristan would have benefited from planning that not only considered his physical safety but also his psychological well-being and reflected his voice in decision-making.

After leaving Julien and Madeline's foster home, attempts were made to find Tristan an appropriate placement. He was moved to his sister's home under kinship care at his request, but he refused to engage with services. Rory received funding to meet his basic needs, but declined parenting supports. Tristan's behaviours escalated, and she said that she was unable to provide the level of care he required.

By adolescence, Tristan's substance use increased and mental health declined. He was offered therapeutic services, but refused. Addiction services were not explored. Tristan would have benefited from planning that considered not only his basic needs but also addressed his substance use.

Health and Mental Health and Addiction

Tristan was born healthy and received regular medical, dental and optical care throughout childhood. When his mental health declined, he had timely referrals to therapeutic and pharmaceutical supports, which he at times, accessed. In his adolescence, his alcohol use escalated to include more potent substances, and his mental health deteriorated. Tristan denied using substances and refused treatment supports.

Education

In elementary school, Tristan had timely assessments to identify his specific needs. He received targeted supports through Individualized Program Plans (IPP) that remained in place each time he moved schools.

In junior high school, Tristan's engagement with his education was poor, and he said that he was bored. Efforts to encourage him to go to school were unsuccessful. As

his circumstances deteriorated, his attendance lessened, and in Grade 10, he was transitioned to an outreach school that he seldom attended.

Justice

Tristan became involved with the youth justice system at 14 years old and accumulated several charges before his passing. He received alternative measure but refused to participate, and had difficulty complying with his probation conditions. His probation officer and caseworkers shared information to inform planning, but Tristan refused supports. His legal matters were not resolved before his passing.

THEMES TO TRACK

1. Case planning

Twelve-year-old Tristan required Child Intervention planning that not only considered his physical safety but also his psychological well-being and reflected his voice in decision-making.

In his adolescence, Tristan required case planning that considered not only his basic needs but also addressed his substance use.

2. Educational supports

In elementary school, Tristan benefited from IPP supports that followed him through multiple school moves.

3. Toxic drug supply

Tristan was 11 years old when he started using alcohol, and died from drug toxicity at 17 years old. The Advocate is deeply concerned about the number of young people dying from drug toxicity.

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

Apprehended

The court grants the “Director” as defined in the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act (CYFEA)* temporary custody of the child on reasonable and probable grounds that the child needs intervention in accordance with *CYFEA*.

Enhancement Agreement (EA)

A voluntary agreement under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* to provide services and support to a family or a young person who is 16 or 17 years old. It is intended to address protection concerns while the child remains with a guardian or lives independently.

Mandatory Review

Under the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the Advocate must conduct a mandatory review when a young person dies who had an agreement or order under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* at the time of or within two years of their death. A public report must be released within one year of being notified of the young person’s death.

Permanent Guardianship Order (PGO)

Under this order, the “Director” as defined in the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* becomes the sole guardian of a child. The order is sought when it is believed that the child cannot be safely returned to their guardian within a specified time frame.

Supervision Order (SO)

A court order granting the “Director” as defined in the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* mandatory supervision of a young person. Guardians retain custody.

Temporary Guardianship Order (TGO)

The court grants the “Director” as defined in the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* custody and guardianship of a child for a specific period. The child is in the care of Child Intervention Services, and guardianship is shared with the parent/ legal guardian.

Transition to Adulthood Program (TAP)

A provincial program that provides financial supports and skill development for young adults transitioning to independence.

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