



# **9-YEAR-OLD RIYA**

## **AN INVESTIGATIVE REVIEW**

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Alberta  
**June 2026**

# LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Under my authority and duty as identified in Section 9(2)(d) of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act (CYAA)*, the following is an individual investigative review regarding Riya. Her circumstances meet the criteria for a **systemic review**. Riya and her family had received Child Intervention through an Assessment within two years of her 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. Releasing individual reviews ensures that each young person's circumstance is reported in a consistent manner and provides increased transparency and public accountability. I believe that this is in the public interest. I will review and report annually on themes identified across the investigative reviews and include recommendations.

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.

Riya's experiences were unique, and she left a lasting impression on those who knew and loved her. My heartfelt condolences go out to her family and those who cared about Riya.

Respectfully,

[Original signed by Terri Pelton]

**Terri Pelton**

Child and Youth Advocate (Alberta)

# ABOUT RIYA AND HER FAMILY

Riya<sup>1</sup> was nine years old when she passed away from accidental causes.<sup>2</sup> The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner continues to investigate her death. Riya and her family had received Child Intervention through an Assessment<sup>3</sup> within two years of her passing.

Riya was a kind and responsible young girl who liked to be organized. She was Meera and Anup's youngest child and had an older brother, Dev. She loved her family and was always finding ways to help around the family home. Riya liked dogs, drawing, and watching TV.

## SUMMARY OF RIYA'S EXPERIENCES WITH GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS

### Riya from Birth to 4 Years Old

Riya was born healthy. Doctors were concerned about her feeding, and she was monitored in the hospital prior to being discharged to her parents' care. She was subsequently followed by a pediatrician.

When Riya was nine months old, she was taken to the hospital for possible seizures. She was referred to a pediatric brain clinic, and although test results were normal, a diagnosis of epilepsy could not be ruled out. Medical professionals educated her parents about epilepsy and advised them to return if Riya's symptoms persisted. Her pediatrician was advised of her results.

During this time, Child Intervention received a report about Meera and Anup's inability to protect their children from sexual abuse following an allegation about a family member who lived in the home. Although the concerns were not substantiated, safety and supervision were discussed and involvement ended.

### Riya from 5 to 9 Years Old

When Riya was five years old, she was taken to the doctor for swelling and tenderness in her fingers and was prescribed antibiotics. By the next day, her symptoms had worsened, and she was taken to the hospital. She had x-rays and bloodwork, and specialists were involved in her care. Riya was diagnosed with an infection, prescribed antibiotics and pain medication, and was referred to a specialized pediatric clinic. She was discharged to her parents' care, who were advised to bring her back to the hospital if her pain or symptoms increased.

Days later, Riya was admitted to the hospital due to worsening symptoms. A pediatric specialist developed a treatment plan that included surgery. After the surgery, she was prescribed antibiotics and discharged home; her doctor was updated on her medical condition. Weeks later, Riya met with the specialist for follow-up care; her fingers had healed well.

In Kindergarten, Riya began receiving speech and language services to improve her reading and writing skills. In Grade 1, her schoolwork was below grade level. Teachers provided extra one-to-one support, which she responded well to.

When Riya was six and seven years old, Child Intervention was notified twice that police responded to concerns about family violence and Anup's alcohol use. Meera reported she and her adolescent son, Dev, had been physically injured. Anup was arrested and charged following the second incident. Meera declined medical assistance and an Emergency Protection Order but was provided with family violence resources. In both instances, Child Intervention determined there was insufficient information to complete an **Intake**.

The following year, Child Intervention received a report about emotional injury related to family violence and Anup's alcohol use. The police responded, but Meera refused to press charges. During the **Assessment**, caseworkers spoke to Riya, Dev, and their parents. Meera and Anup acknowledged disagreements related to finances and denied the reported concerns; the children shared that they felt safe in their parents' care. They were connected to a cultural support worker to help them access community-based resources. A safety plan was developed that included Meera and Anup not fighting or yelling in front of their children, and, if needed, they would contact relatives to pick up the children; the safety plan was not shared with their relatives. Intervention involvement ended.

Riya continued to receive speech and language services in Grade 2, and her reading and writing abilities improved. By Grade 3, Riya was achieving average grades. Her teachers shared that she was a cooperative, polite and kind student.

Weeks after Riya's ninth birthday, she was taken to the hospital, where she passed away from accidental causes. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner continues to investigate her death. Riya is deeply missed by those who knew and loved her.

1. All names in the report are pseudonyms.  
2. Details about Riya's death are not provided to protect her privacy.  
3. Bolded terms are defined in Appendix A.

# TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Birth to 4 Years Old	5 to 9 Years Old
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>1 Week Old</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Pediatrician</li></ul></li><li>• <b>9 Months Old</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Child Intervention involvement</li><li>· Pediatric brain clinic</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>5 Years Old</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Surgery on fingers</li><li>· Kindergarten<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Speech and language support</li></ul></li></ul></li><li>• <b>6 – 8 Years Old</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Grade 1 to 2<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Speech and language support</li></ul></li><li>· Child Intervention received two concerns – Intakes not completed</li><li>· Child Intervention involvement</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>9-year-old Riya passed away</b></p>

# FINDINGS

## Children and Family Services

In her first year, Child Intervention was involved with Riya and her family because of concerns about her parents' ability to protect their children from sexual abuse. The family received timely supports through a safety plan before involvement ended.

Child Intervention was notified twice about family violence and Anup's alcohol use, which required police responses. Intakes were not completed, indicating that the concerns did not meet the legislated threshold for Child Intervention involvement. The Enhancement Policy Manual (EPM) outlines considerations for determining if a concern meets the legislative requirement for an Intake. It provides practice guidance for determining if a child is in need of intervention, based on the nature of the safety concerns, the child's well-being, and existing strengths and safety within the family, which were not followed. The Ministry of Children and Family Services has adjusted how the threshold for an Intake is applied and amended policy to reflect this guidance.

The following year, Child Intervention received a report about similar concerns. Involvement ended after the family was connected to a support worker and a safety plan was developed that included connecting with extended family members to care for Riya and her brother during periods of parental conflict. Relatives were not involved in planning and were unaware of their roles and responsibilities. Riya and her family required confirmation that the support network was aware of the family's circumstances and everyone's roles and responsibilities. Adherence to the practice guidance related to safety planning in the EPM was required.

## Health

Riya received routine health care for childhood illnesses. When she was five years old, she had surgery for an infection. Health professionals shared information with her parents and collaborated with other professionals to meet her medical needs in a timely, coordinated manner.

## Education

Riya attended the same elementary school until her passing. Education staff provided responsive and timely services to meet her academic needs.

# THEMES TO TRACK

## 1. Collaboration and information sharing

Health professionals shared information and collaborated to coordinate services to meet Riya's needs in a timely manner.

## 2. Intake process in Child Intervention Services

Intakes were not completed despite unaddressed concerns of family violence and the impact on her well-being.

## 3. Safety planning

Riya required safety planning that adhered to the practice guidance in the EPM to confirm that the support network was aware of the family's circumstances and everyone's roles and responsibilities.

# APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

## **Assessment**

The gathering and analysis of information to determine whether a child is in need of intervention under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*.

## **Intake**

A report completed when Child Intervention Services receives a community or professional concern about possible risk to a child as per the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*.

## **Systemic Review**

Under the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the Advocate may conduct a public review when a young person is seriously injured or dies while (or within two years of) receiving designated services (*Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* intakes, assessments, post-18 supports, was in open or closed custody under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, and/or involvement under the *Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act*) to determine if systemic issues are present.

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### **NORTH OFFICE**

600, 9925 109 Street NW  
Edmonton AB T5K 2J8

### **SOUTH OFFICE**

2420, 801 6 Avenue SW  
Calgary AB T2P 3W3



ocya.alberta.ca · 1-800-661-3446