



11-YEAR-OLD SACHA

AN INVESTIGATIVE REVIEW

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Alberta
August 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 Sacha. His circumstances meet the criteria for a **systemic review**. Sacha and his family had received Child Intervention through an Assessment within two years 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.

Sacha'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 Sacha.

Respectfully,

[Original signed by Terri Pelton]

Terri Pelton

Child and Youth Advocate (Alberta)

ABOUT SACHA AND HIS FAMILY

Sacha¹ was 11 years old when he passed away after a traumatic accident.² The police investigated and laid charges; and, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner continues to investigate his death. Sacha and his family had received Child Intervention through an **Assessment**³ within two years of his passing.

Sacha was a kind, loving, and curious boy who enjoyed playing with Lego, drawing, and playing games. He was Celina and Julian's only child. They used substances and separated when he was one year old. Sacha often moved between his parents' and his maternal grandmother, Moira's, homes.

SUMMARY OF SACHA'S EXPERIENCES WITH GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS

Sacha from Birth to 11 Years Old

When Sacha was born, Celina told medical staff that she used substances during her pregnancy. The following day, she left the hospital with Sacha against medical advice.

One month later, Child Intervention received a report about emotional injury. Concerns were related to Celina and Julian's substance use and her declining mental health. During the Assessment, caseworkers spoke with health care providers who informed them that Sacha had been prenatally exposed to substances. Sacha's grandmother, Moira, cared for him until his parents completed drug testing and programming. After negative test results, Sacha returned to his parents' care, and they accessed health services for their son. They were cautioned that future reports about similar concerns would result in more intrusive interventions; involvement ended.

Sacha received routine medical care for childhood illnesses and injuries. Shortly after his first birthday, he was taken to the hospital after he ingested medication not prescribed to him. He was monitored and discharged home.

Five months later, Child Intervention received a report about neglect related to Celina and Julian's substance use. They separated and agreed to co-parent their son, but custody issues persisted during the Assessment. A safety plan was developed, and Celina and Julian each completed an intake for addiction programming. A Parenting Order was granted that gave Julian primary care of Sacha, with Celina having access at her discretion. Julian was given information about counselling and parenting supports; Celina

refused additional services. It was not confirmed that Julian was accessing services before involvement ended.

When Sacha was three years old, Child Intervention received two reports about neglect; Celina was charged with drug trafficking. It was noted that her living situation was often unstable and custody issues remained between Sacha's parents. Julian amended the Parenting Order so that he could have police help bring Sacha home if Celina refused to return him, and Celina had scheduled visitation with her son. It is not known how the substance use concerns were addressed before involvements ended. Sacha continued to move between his parents' homes as their circumstances changed.

At four years old, Sacha's family noted concerns with his speech. He was assessed and diagnosed with severe language delays. Recommendations included follow-up with an audiologist and an ear, nose, and throat specialist, which was not completed. It was also recommended that Sacha attend an early intervention program, which he began soon after. He had an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) that included an educational assistant, occupational therapy (OT), and speech and language (SLP) supports.

Custody issues persisted, and Sacha frequently moved between his parents' homes. Child Intervention received a report about emotional injury. Concerns were related to Celina and Julian's substance use and her drug trafficking. They returned to court to amend the Parenting Order, and Sacha was returned to his father's care. Attempts by caseworkers to engage Celina in planning were unsuccessful. It is not known how Julian's substance use was addressed before involvement ended.

When Sacha was five years old, Child Intervention received a report about emotional injury. Concerns were related to him witnessing an argument between Julian and a friend. Additional concerns arose about Julian's substance use and housing instability, so Celina obtained an Interim Parenting Order. Soon after, she was arrested, with the possibility of being incarcerated. A safety plan was developed, and a family friend agreed to care for Sacha, with his parents and grandmother having regular visits. Involvement ended.

Soon after, Celina moved to a different province with her son. While visiting his father in Alberta, Child Intervention received a report about neglect related to inappropriate discipline. Caseworkers met with six-year-old Sacha, who did not disclose concerns. Intervention involvement ended as it was determined that the allegations were not substantiated.

Months later, Sacha moved to live with his grandmother in Alberta while Celina sought addiction treatment. Soon after, Moira was granted guardianship. The following year, Sacha was referred to a pediatric clinic because of congestion, dizziness, and headaches.

1. All names in the report are pseudonyms.

2. Details about Sacha's death are not provided to protect his privacy.

3. Bolded terms are defined in Appendix A.

Their engagement with supports was poor, and efforts by medical staff to engage them were unsuccessful.

Over the next two years, Sacha often moved between his parents' and grandmother's homes. Although his elementary school years were disrupted by significant school moves in both Alberta and another province, his IPP supports continued and included educational assistants, OT, and SLP supports.

The following year, Child Intervention received two reports about emotional injury related to Celina's substance use, lack of food, and Sacha's poor hygiene. Celina and Julian became roommates, and Sacha lived between them and his grandmother's home. Caseworkers met with Sacha, who did not express concerns. Involvements ended, indicating that Julian was able to protect Sacha, and Moira had guardianship and agreed to resume caring for Sacha if he was at risk. It is not known how the concerns related to a lack of food and his hygiene were addressed before involvement ended.

Little is known about Sacha's circumstances over the next 14 months. When he was 11 years old, Sacha passed away after a traumatic accident. The police investigated and laid charges; and, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner continues to investigate his death. A funeral was held in his honour, and Sacha is deeply missed by those who knew and loved him.

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Birth to 11 Years Old

• 1 Month Old

- Child Intervention involvement

• 1 – 2 Years Old

- Hospital visit
- Child Intervention involvement
 - Parents separated
- Father obtained a Parenting Order

• 3 Years Old

- Child Intervention involved 2 times
- Mother arrested
- Father amended Parenting Order

• 4 Years Old

- Assessed
 - Diagnosed with severe language delays
 - Early intervention programming
 - Individualized Program Plan (IPP)
 - Educational assistant, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy
- Child Intervention involvement

• 5 Years Old

- Child Intervention involvement
 - Mother obtained Interim Parenting Order
 - Mother arrested
 - Sacha sent to live with family friend

• 6 Years Old

- Moved out of province with mother
- Child Intervention involvement while visiting father in Alberta
- Sacha sent to Alberta to live with grandmother
 - Grandmother obtained guardianship

• 7 – 11 Years Old

- Referred to pediatric clinic
- Lived between parents' and grandmothers' homes
 - Numerous school moves
- Child Intervention involved 2 times

11-year-old Sacha passed away

FINDINGS

Children and Family Services

Sacha's family moved often, and Child Intervention from various jurisdictions across Alberta were involved with them nine times. Concerns included his parents' substance use, drug trafficking, his poor hygiene and lack of food. Involvements often ended after Sacha was moved between his parents', grandmother's, or a family friend's homes to ensure his physical safety. The protection concerns remained unaddressed, and interventions remained unchanged. The Enhancement Policy Manual provides guidance on fostering a child's safety and well-being through assessing information to determine whether they require intervention services. This includes analyzing historical information to identify potential themes or patterns of behaviours, particularly as they relate to the current concerns, that were not followed. The Ministry of Children and Family Services has been notified that an internal review may be beneficial in Sacha's circumstances to determine if further system improvements are required to strengthen adherence to policy requirements related to the above-noted concerns.

Health

Sacha received routine medical care for minor illnesses and injuries. At four years old, his family noted concerns about his speech; he was promptly assessed, and services were implemented to address his needs. Three years later, Sacha was referred to a pediatric clinic for concerns about congestion, dizziness, and headaches; however, efforts to engage his family to access supports were unsuccessful.

Education

At four years old, Sacha began an early education program after he was diagnosed with a speech delay. Recommendations, including speech and language therapy and occupational therapy, were promptly implemented through Individualized Program Plans.

Sacha's education was disrupted following multiple school moves, at times between provinces, which coincided with changes in caregivers. School staff shared information and collaborated to ensure he did not have disruptions in his educational supports when he moved. The Ministry of Education has been informed about the exceptional services Sacha received to ensure he had continuity of supports.

THEMES TO TRACK

1. Implementation and consistency of policy and practice expectations

Policy and practice standards outlined in the Enhancement Policy Manual related to Assessment were not followed.

2. Educational supports

Despite frequent school moves due to caregiver changes, Sacha's educational supports were not disrupted.

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*.

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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