

6-YEAR-OLD ASTRID

Serious Injury

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(2)(d) of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act (CYAA)*, the following is an individual investigative review regarding Astrid. Her circumstances meet the criteria for a **systemic review**. Astrid and her family were receiving Child Intervention through an Assessment at the time of her serious injury.

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.

Astrid's experiences were unique, and her injury has left a lasting impact on her and her family's lives. My thoughts are with Astrid, her family, and those who care about Astrid.

Respectfully,

[Original signed by Terri Pelton]

Terri Pelton

Child and Youth Advocate (Alberta)

ABOUT ASTRID AND HER FAMILY

Astrid¹ was six years old when she was hospitalized for non-accidental physical injuries and malnutrition. The police continue to investigate. Astrid and her family were receiving Child Intervention through an **Assessment**² at the time of her serious injury.

Astrid is an energetic First Nation child with a beautiful smile. She is the youngest of Diana's two children; little is known about her father. Astrid was born in another province, and at four years old, she moved to Alberta with her maternal aunt and uncle, Helena and Bennett, and their five children. They later obtained private guardianship.

SUMMARY OF ASTRID'S EXPERIENCES WITH GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS

Astrid from Birth to Six Years Old

Child Intervention in another province was involved with Astrid and her family several times before her first birthday. She was in foster care before being placed with Helena and Bennett, who applied for guardianship. When Astrid was four years old, she relocated to Alberta with her caregivers. Shortly after, Astrid's case team requested Alberta Child Intervention check on her well-being when concerns about neglect related to her weight loss were received. Caseworkers had met with Astrid, who appeared slender but not underweight. They did not note concerns with her care and provided their findings to Astrid's case team. Guardianship was granted and involvement in the other province ended.

Astrid started Kindergarten, and concerns were noted for her speech. She had an assessment and was diagnosed with severe expressive and receptive language delays and a mild speech delay. Astrid received speech therapy, and after she was reassessed, it was determined that she was meeting her language development milestones and did not require further services.

During this time, Child Intervention was notified three times about concerns related to Astrid's weight and changes in her physical appearance. An **Intake** was opened after the third concern was received. Helena and Bennett reported that there was adequate food at home, and Astrid often ate until she became sick. School staff shared that she displayed extreme food-seeking behaviours. Astrid was seen at a public health center and referred to a dietitian because she was small for her age. She had a scheduled appointment with a doctor. Intervention involvement ended without follow-up with health professionals nor confirming that she was receiving health services.

The family met with the dietitian three times and received education to support Astrid's healthy eating practices. Helena reported that Astrid was eating well and she was taken to the doctor once before her caregivers disengaged from services. Dietitian services concluded after several unsuccessful attempts to contact the family.

Several months later, school staff shared concerns about Astrid's excessive eating, drinking, and frequent washroom use and advised her caregivers to seek help. Astrid was taken to the hospital and assessed. Recommendations included follow-up with a doctor for further monitoring, and a referral to a pediatrician. She was discharged to Helena's care; however, the recommendations were not implemented.

Before Astrid's sixth birthday, her teachers noted concerns for her cognitive functioning and her focus on food. She had a psychoeducational assessment that found she had average cognitive functioning, and she was diagnosed with a mild binge-eating disorder. Recommendations included follow-up with health professionals to rule out medical concerns. Helena and Bennett were unaware of the recommendations. An Individualized Program Plan (IPP) was developed that included visual aids and a small group to support Astrid's engagement.

Days later, Child Intervention received a report about neglect related to Astrid's food seeking behaviours, and physical injury. An Assessment was initiated, and caseworkers met with Astrid alone, who shared a past incident involving physical discipline; however, she did not disclose further concerns. Helena and Bennett denied using inappropriate discipline and said Astrid was connected to a pediatrician. An initial safety plan was not developed, and confirmation that Astrid was connected to health services was not obtained.

Two weeks later, six-year-old Astrid was seriously injured and taken to the hospital with multiple non-accidental physical injuries and malnutrition. She was apprehended and, after her discharge, was placed in foster care. She continues to receive child intervention services under a **Custody Order** and is followed by a multidisciplinary health team. The police continue to investigate.

1. All names in the report are pseudonyms.

2. Bolded terms are defined in Appendix A.

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Birth to 6 Years Old

• Birth – 4 Years Old

- Born in another province
 - Child Intervention involvement
 - Foster care
 - Placed with aunt and uncle
- Moved to Alberta
 - Interprovincial request to Alberta Child Intervention to check on Astrid's well-being
 - Private guardianship granted from another province
- Child Intervention involvement in Alberta

• 5 Years Old

- Food-seeking behaviours noted at school
- Dietitian appointments and 1 appointment with doctor
- Hospital visit
- Assessed twice in Kindergarten
 - Speech and language assessment
 - Diagnosed with severe expressive and receptive delays and mild speech delay, and low to average cognitive functioning.
 - Speech therapy
- Psychoeducation assessment
 - Diagnosed with mild-binge eating disorder
 - Individualized Program Plan
- Child Intervention involvement

Six-year-old Astrid was seriously injured

FINDINGS

Children and Family Services

When Astrid was four years old, Child Intervention received multiple concerns about neglect related to her weight loss and an allegation of physical injury. Despite repeated involvements for similar concerns, the interventions remained unchanged, and involvements concluded without adequate information to inform the assessment nor confirm Astrid was receiving the services she required. The Enhancement Policy Manual states that collateral calls may be conducted to obtain information from any other person or agency familiar with the situation to fully assess concerns about the child's safety, which was not met.

The Ministry of Children and Family Services has been notified that an internal review of Astrid's circumstances may be beneficial to determine if improvements are required to strengthen adherence to policy and practice standards related to Assessment.

Health

Little is known about the health services Astrid received before moving to Alberta. When she was five years old, public health connected her to a dietitian to address her weight issues; however, services ended when her caregivers disengaged from services. She received a health assessment at the hospital and recommendations for medical follow up and pediatric care were not implemented. Astrid may have benefitted from a warm hand off to these services.

Education

In Kindergarten, concerns were noted for Astrid's speech, and she had a timely assessment that indicated delays in her expressive and receptive language skills. She received appropriate supports to address the concerns, and after she was reassessed, it was determined that she did not require further services.

Concerns for Astrid's cognitive functioning and food seeking behaviours were identified and she had a timely assessment that found she had average cognitive functioning, and she was diagnosed with a mild binge-eating disorder. Additional recommendations included follow-up with health professionals to explore potential medical causes.

Although an appropriate Individualized Program Plan was implemented that provided accommodations to support her learning needs, her caregivers were unaware of recommendations requiring follow-up with health professionals. It is essential that assessment recommendations and outcomes are shared with guardians and caregivers in a timely manner, which may have benefited Astrid receiving the services she required.

THEMES TO TRACK

1. Implementation and consistency of policy and practice expectations

Policy and practice standards outlined in the Enhancement Policy Manual related to Assessments were not met.

2. Information Sharing

Astrid required timely information-sharing between educators and her caregivers to ensure the necessary medical follow-up occurred.

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.

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*.

Custody Order (CO)

The court grants the “Director” as defined in the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* temporary custody of the child until legal status can be determined. The child is placed in an approved placement.

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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