

## **Thunder Bay police under fire over handling of death and missing First Nations youth**

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**(The parents of Josiah Begg make another plea for his return Wednesday at a media conference in Thunder Bay. “Please come home,” said his mom Sunshine Winters. Photo: Willow Fiddler.)**

### **APTNationalNews**

The conduct of Thunder Bay police and its handling of its investigations into a missing youth and the death of another came under fire Wednesday as chiefs said they have no confidence in police to conduct thorough investigations.

Police ruled there was no foul play in the death of Tammy Keeash, 17, May 7. And police haven’t been able to locate Josiah Begg, 14, who has been missing since May 6.

“All available resources should have been deployed on a 24/7 basis since the day Josiah disappeared and the city should be turned upside down until he is found,” said Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. “Police have done no better investigating Tammy’s death, accepting drowning as the cause but failing to determine how she ended up in the water.”



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Pearl Slipperjack says not enough counselling for kids like her daughter #TammyKeeash + shld be more resources "Tammy was a troubled kid".

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According to the chief of North Caribou Lake First Nation, where Keeash was from but living in a Thunder Bay group home, Keeash was trained to survive in difficult environments.

"Tammy lived in community surrounded by water. As a member of the Junior Canadian Rangers she was trained to survive in harsh conditions. We are skeptical about how she died and where her body was found," said Chief Dinah Kanate. "We have many questions and look to the police and appropriate agencies for answers."

Begg, from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, was in Thunder Bay with his father for a medical appointment when he was last seen around 10 p.m. near the Vale Community Centre.

"It is a stressful time for the family and our community as we await word of our missing youth, Josiah Begg," said Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Chief James Cutfeet.

Police said May 12 that a post-mortem examination indicated Keeash's death was consistent with drowning.

NAN has pushed police to treat Keeash's death as a suspicious death after her body was found in the Neebing McIntyre floodway.



**Willow Fiddler @WillowBlasizzo**

#TammyKeeash was a trained Canadian Ranger, she knew water safety  
says #NAN @gcfiddler abt Coroner's drowning conclusion #tbay  
10:54 AM - 17 May 2017

“Our communities do not have confidence in the police to conduct thorough investigations. Our leaders are now forced to pool their resources to coordinate their own searches and – potentially – fund their own private investigations. If the police won’t act, we will,” said Fiddler.

NAN said the missing persons investigations have been questioned before, which led to the inquest into the deaths of seven NAN youth since 2000 while living in Thunder Bay.

In November 2016, the Office of the Independent Police Review Director announced a systemic review of the Thunder Bay Police Service's practices for policing Indigenous peoples.

The review is looking at policies, practices and attitudes regarding missing persons and death investigations said NAN.

NAN has established a command centre at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School to lead the search for Begg.

"We are heartbroken over Tammy's tragic loss and our hearts and prayers are with her family and the Weagamow community, who laid her body to rest (Tuesday)," said Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum. "We appreciate the efforts of everyone searching for Josiah and we will not give up hope for his safe return. His family and community desperately want him back, and we will do everything possible to find him."

[news@aptn.ca](mailto:news@aptn.ca)