



*“Dedicated to Justice” • «Au service de la justice»*

June 20, 2018

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett  
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) is a national agency committed to providing support, advocacy, and information resources to victims and survivors of serious crime in Canada.

As you know, in January 2016, the small, remote town of La Loche in Northwestern Saskatchewan was rocked by a mass shooting that claimed the lives of four young people and wounded seven more. The tragedy of the shooting compounds a lifetime of trauma for this small community, which suffers from inter-generational trauma, the legacies of colonialism, and chronically inadequate access to housing, education, medical and other services.

We wrote you in February 2017, when, one year after the tragic incident, promises of support by both provincial and federal governments had failed to materialize. Many members of the community expressed despair at the lack of resources available to them to deal with the trauma, including much-needed access to mental health services.

Nearly two and a half years after the tragedy, the disconnect between official pledges of support and the situation on the ground remains. The lack of resources and mental health counselling available to victims and the community at large is deplorable. Local services are inconsistent, long distance travel is required to access victims' services, and long-term planning to address the situation is insufficient. When services are available, residents often lack the awareness, information, and support to access them. La Loche has historically been affected by rampant poverty, addiction and violence, and has seen an increase in suicides and substance abuse since the tragedy. It is worth noting that the Keewatin Yatthe health region, which La Loche belongs to, already has one of the worst suicide rates in the country (an average annual of 43.4 suicides per 100,000 in the 2008-2012 time period). Meanwhile, it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit teachers and health practitioners to work in the community.

In the wake of the shooter's sentencing in May 2018, condemnation over the lack of support has been unanimous. As noted by La Loche Mayor Robert St. Pierre, “the community still [awaits] the support we were promised years ago”. As Judge McIvor handed down a federal penitentiary sentence to the killer, the result of a lengthy legal process during which 52 victim impact statements were submitted, she strongly condemned the lack of support to the community,



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saying “this [support] has not happened. It’s a travesty, another victimization of all involved”. She mentioned that, through her interactions with members of the community, she had learned that “counselling services [were not] available”, that “people [were not] having counselling anymore because they [could not] afford counselling”. She added that certain victim impact statements mentioned that disability was not covering physiotherapy or treatment for long-lasting mental trauma such as PTSD. The Saskatchewan Premier acknowledged that the province “[needed] to work hard to do better in areas such as La Loche”. The shooter’s lawyer, Aaron Fox, called the lack of services available to his client and the victims “astounding”.

Victims have also been speaking out. Substitute teacher Charlene Klyne, who was shot in the face, denounced the fact that none of the injured victims had received so much as a letter, let alone an official visit as they lay in hospital after the tragedy. Klyne speaks of having to “fight with the government over the past 27 months” in order to receive some kind of compensation. Another victim, Assistant Principal Phyllis Longobardi, who was photographed shaking Prime Minister Trudeau’s hand after the tragedy, did not mince words after the sentencing hearing, saying “the government has done nothing – absolutely nothing – for the community. It’s done nothing for the victims.”

Perhaps the best-placed to formulate an opinion is Dr. Sara Dungavell, believed to be the only psychiatrist in the province to be flown to La Loche on a regular basis to counsel patients (Dr. Dungavell has stopped flying up North due to her late pregnancy, and is not scheduled to return before December 2018). Other psychiatric support is available in Prince Albert and Saskatoon, which are a 5- and 6-hour drive, respectively. In a recent interview with Global News, Dr. Dungavell mentioned that, over the past two years, she had learned “just how difficult it can be to make a difference in a community that is still left to fend for itself”. Dr. Dungavell mentions that victims of the shooting started reaching out to her about a year after the tragedy. Meanwhile, she had been busy dealing with a “backlog of patients with a multitude of mental-health needs waiting to be seen”.

We would respectfully urge the Ministry of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs expediently review the current situation and long-term support plans for residents of La Loche. There needs to be an immediate and coordinated effort to support the community, so that essential victim services such as mental health counselling and support in claiming compensation are readily available to all those in need. Information on how to access these services should also be centralized and transparent. Long-term, consistent counselling with a specialized professional, and support at the community level including access to educational and professional opportunities, are key to recovering from trauma.

In particular, urgent funding is required for the following local amenities:

- The Crisis Centre for the La Loche community, located at Ducharme Elementary School



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- The La Loche Health Centre and Hospital, particularly in mental health
- The La Loche RCMP, particularly the Victim Services unit
- The La Loche Friendship Centre, particularly in the areas of trauma counselling, ongoing mental health services, and child and youth psychology services
- The La Loche Income Assistance office
- The Northern Lights School Division No. 113, to provide permanent and ongoing counselling to students on site at Ducharme Elementary School and Dene High School
- Traditional Indigenous healing options

Services should also be made available to La Loche residents at the following amenities:

- Keewatin Yatthe Regional Health Authority in Buffalo Narrows (approximately 1 hour from La Loche), including for their “Children exposed to Violence” program
- Meadow Lake Tribal Council programs for children, youth and family (via Health Canada)

As a first step in the review, we recommend that a local government representative be invited to speak to the current situation in La Loche at an upcoming Health Canada or Department of Justice meeting to engage all parties in mobilizing efforts to help the community heal after this tragedy. We at the CRCVC are prepared to assist you with our victim support expertise and are available to discuss the situation at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Heidi Illingworth  
Executive Director