



STATEMENT

Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation statement on the Coroner's Inquest into deaths of Cassandra Warville, Myranda Tizya-Charlie, Josephine Hager and Darla Skookum at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

April 8, 2024

Old Crow, Yukon

The Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of Cassandra Warville, Myranda Tizya-Charlie, Josephine Hager and Darla Skookum at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter will begin on Monday, April 8, 2024 and is scheduled to end by April 25, 2024.

Cassandra Warville and Myranda Tizya-Charlie were Citizens of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (VGFN) and beloved members of our families and our community who passed away on January 19, 2022. Josephine Hager, a Citizen of Selkirk First Nation, passed away on February 1, 2023 and Darla Skookum, a Citizen of Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, passed away on April 16, 2023.

The Inquest is a public inquiry that is focused on:

- determining the facts related to a death;
- making recommendations to prevent deaths in similar circumstances; and
- ensuring public confidence that the circumstances surrounding the death of an individual will not be overlooked, concealed or ignored.

The Inquest is not about finding blame or fault.

This will be a difficult time for our community and our families as we gain a greater understanding of what happened to our loved ones through the Inquest. This process may reignite the pain and grief that so many of us feel and we encourage everyone to take advantage of the supports that are available throughout the course of the Inquest. We do not have to face this alone.

The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, represented by legal counsel Kris Statnyk and Elin Sigurdson, is participating in the process to seek to:

- Advocate for a trauma-informed process that respects the dignity of the deceased and their family and community members.
- Assure VGFN family members, friends and our community that the circumstances surrounding their deaths will be fully and appropriately scrutinized. This is important given their possible vulnerability as VGFN citizens and women, and the adequacy of services they may have received at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter prior to their deaths.
- Identify evidence-based recommendations to prevent future similar deaths.

The Inquest will take place in Whitehorse at the Gold Rush Inn in the Town Hall Room. It is open to the public and will also be livestreamed online for the duration on the Yukon Coroners Service website at https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_a00dnWRT0GJ_2iZIpDUCw#/registration. The Inquest is currently

scheduled to hear statements from Cassandra and Myranda's families on the afternoon of Monday, April 8 followed by an examination of the facts and circumstances surrounding their deaths on Tuesday, April 9 and Wednesday, April 10.

As a community, we need to continue to support each other, to hold each other up, and to seek help when we need it.

Chief Pauline Frost on behalf of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

Supports including grief and trauma counsellors are available and we will be holding space to gather as a community in Old Crow and in Whitehorse throughout the Inquest:

April 8 - 12

Old Crow

- VGFN will be live streaming the Inquest at the Elders Complex. This provides a small, intimate space for loved ones to come together, and a place where the kids don't frequent or drop in (due to the nature and seriousness of the information discussed in a Coroner's Inquest). There will be snacks and refreshments.
- There will be a room at the Elders complex to get away, relax, have tea or seek comfort and supports. Snacks will be provided.
- Counsellors Kevin Mellis and Adam Wicke will be available at the Elders Complex to offer their services and support.
- Elder and Traditional Knowledge Keeper, Randall Tetlichich will have a wall tent set up out front of the Elders complex to offer prayer, counselling, support, a sacred fire, smudging and anything needed to be of support.

Whitehorse

- VGFN has a suite booked and a room booked at the Gold Rush Inn so that the families can get away from the Inquest as needed to have food, tea and supports.
- Counsellors Rebecca Hansen and Chantal Blysak will be available at the Gold Rush Inn to offer their services and support.
- Dorothy Frost will be available at the Hanson Street office and snacks provided there as well. There will be a room available for privacy. All are welcome if space is needed.
- Councillor Reti, Ellen Kyikavichik and Linda Netro will be supporting in Whitehorse.

April 15 - 29

- April 15-19 - Counsellors Rebecca Hansen and Chantal Blysak will be available to support citizens
- April 22-29 - Counsellors Adam Wicke and Wendy Burgess will be available to support citizens.

CAIRS worker Susie Firth will be coming up to Old Crow - dates to be confirmed.

CYFN, Selkirk First Nation and Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation will also have supports available throughout the Inquest. There will also be supports available at the Shelter: Donna Smith and the Cultural Lead Ron McIntosh.

Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services (MWSU) will notify their counsellors about the Inquest so that they can reach out to their clients to support them. They will be booking extra Rapid Access Counselling Appointments to support a possible influx of need for counselling and increasing the outreach workers time at the shelter to be available during this time.