

“This is not acceptable in a country like Canada”

Across the country, human rights commissions, including Manitoba are calling for action into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. This call has gone out before but the death of Tina Fontaine, the young Aboriginal woman murdered in Winnipeg, has renewed that call.

A motion, unanimously passed by Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies (CASHRA) members earlier this year called on the Government of Canada to establish an independent and inclusive inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is a member of CASHRA and added its voice.

On August 19, 2014, David Langtry, acting chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission released the following statement on the death of Tina Fontaine.



David Langtry is once again calling for a full public inquiry into the root causes of so many deaths and disappearances of Aboriginal women and girls.

“Once again our hearts are filled with grief and sadness as we mourn the brutal and senseless murder of an Aboriginal girl. In a pattern that has tragically become commonplace, the body of Tina Fontaine was pulled from the Red River in Winnipeg last Sunday, after being reported missing earlier this month.

Barely 15, Tina was reportedly in the care of Child and Family Services.

Tina must not disappear into the oblivion of statistics: almost 1,200 missing and murdered aboriginal women over the past three decades.

We have a duty to ensure she leaves a legacy, and that her legacy is to bring an end to the chronic cycle of violence that rips Aboriginal women and girls from the fabric of family and community at this alarming rate.

This is not acceptable in a country like Canada. It is time for a full public inquiry into the root causes of so many deaths and disappearances of Aboriginal women and girls. It is time for a national action plan to confront this issue.”

Hundreds of people including the public, an alliance of community members and leaders walked Tuesday August 19, 2014 to peacefully honour the memory of Tina Fontaine the young Sagkeeng woman. Faron Hall, a Dakota Tipi member of the Winnipeg Aboriginal community was also honoured. He was best known for rescuing two people, on separate occasions, from the Red River. He is a hero to many and was given awards for his courage. His remains were also found on Monday August 18, 2014.



Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission Yvonne Peters with “Hope.”

When is an animal a Service animal?

A best friend; a comfort animal; a service animal; Does anyone really understand the difference; and more importantly is there a difference?

The definition of a service animal is evolving in Canada. Currently the Manitoba Human Rights Commission considers a service animal to be a dog or other animal that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability that relates to that individual’s disability.

Examples of work or tasks are: guiding an individual who is blind; alerting an individual who is deaf; retrieving dropped objects; opening doors and retrieving the phone for those requiring physical assistance; warning and protecting an individual who is having a seizure; and reminding an individual with a mental health disability to take prescribed medication. Service animals are sometimes identified by a specific type of harness or vest.

Dogs and other animals whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support are not considered to be service animals.

Like many other provinces and territories, our human rights laws (*The Human Rights Code*) prevent discrimination against service animal users. In most situations landlords, employers or service providers realize they have an obligation to accommodate a service animal user.

Unlike some other provinces, however, Manitoba does not have any laws which provides for certification or identification of animals deemed to be service animals. In both B.C. and Alberta a person can apply to the government for a certificate/identification indicating the dog is a service animal, if it has been trained by an approved school.

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is considering what, if anything, it can do to increase awareness of rights and responsibilities regarding the use of service animals and to re-visit what is considered a service animal. Its new policy and guideline will reflect decisions made after the discussion and the subsequent recommendations.

To help with this work, the Commission needs input and will be holding public discussion on service animals. Discussions will be held on Wednesday September 24 from 9:30am – 11:30 am and a second session at 2:00pm- 4:00 pm, in Winnipeg. There will also be a discussion in Brandon Manitoba on Thursday, October 2, 2014, 1:00 – 3:00. The location will be confirmed once registered.

To take part in this meeting, and ensure your input is counted, you can register for any of these discussions by emailing hrc@gov.mb.ca. In the subject line please write service animal discussion and what time and city best suits you. You will be contacted once registered. Also visit the Commission’s website www.manitobahumanrights.ca to read the consultation paper.