

Ashley Smith inquest broadened

Friday, November 12, 2010



Ashley Smith, 19, of Moncton, N.B., strangled herself in an Ontario prison in 2007 as guards watched. (Smith family photo)

An Ontario coroner has decided to expand the inquest into the final months of Ashley Smith's life and look into how her state of mind may have contributed to the New Brunswick teen's death at a federal prison for women.

"The expanded scope may assist the jury in making a determination about the manner of Ms. Smith's death," coroner Bonita Porter wrote in her decision released on Friday. "Her state of mind is part of the circumstances of the death and will be relevant to the issue of 'by what means' the death occurred."

Porter said the expanded inquest will include "an examination of factors that may have impacted Ms. Smith's state of mind on Oct. 19, 2007."

She said information presented to the jury "will not necessarily be restricted by her age, geography, date or nature of the institution that was tasked with her care."

The inquest was initially going to be restricted to Smith's experience in Ontario from May 12, 2007 up to her death on Oct. 19, 2007, and not her entire 11½ months and 17 transfers within federal correctional facilities.

Smith, while in isolation, choked herself to death with a piece of cloth while guards at the Grand Valley Institution in Kitchener, Ont., looked on. They had been ordered not to intervene.

Exclusive footage

The Fifth Estate has obtained exclusive prison footage of Ashley Smith's final months in a federal prison in Kitchener, Ont. The footage will air as part of a documentary called *Behind the Wall* at 9 p.m. Friday on CBC-TV (9:30 p.m. in Newfoundland and Labrador).

A preview of the episode is available on [The Fifth Estate webpage](#). The full *Behind the Wall* documentary will be available online after *The Fifth Estate* airs in Atlantic Canada at 9 p.m. ET.

Earlier this month, Julian Falconer, a lawyer for Smith's family, argued before Porter that the inquest should be broadened to understand the 19-year-old's "barbaric" living conditions and learn fully what led to her death.

A report to the Correctional Service of Canada by independent psychologist Margo Rivera concluded that prison officials' repeated transfers of Smith, against doctor's orders, interfered with her mental health therapy and escalated her spiral toward her death.

Rivera also concluded that Smith believed guards would intervene and that her self-choking behaviour was not an attempt to kill herself, but rather "met her need for increasing the level of stimulation" by provoking guards, forcing them to enter her isolation cell to save her.