

**SPIRIT LAKE HEALTH CENTER
MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

P. O. BOX 309, FORT TOTTEN, ND 58335

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August 28, 2008

Myra Pearson, Tribal Chairwomen
Spirit Lake Nation
Fort Totten, North Dakota 58335

Dear Myra

As a tribal member and skilled counselor with 35 years of mental health experience I need to express my deep concern and disappointment in Tribal Social Service, Mr. Dauphanias. On August 25, 2008 I learned that all the work that several Master level social workers and staff of Tribal Social Service did in preparation to protect two young ladies from harming themselves from suicide were dismissed by Mr. Dauphanias. He overturned the decisions of his workers and returned the two girls to their parents in spite of two 960 (child abuse/neglect)(that I am aware of) reports filed since June 2008, giving facts of the girls attempts at suicide and the parents refusal to allow their girls to participate in any kind of counseling.

He cries and complains that none of the professional people help him protect our children from abuse and suicide, but he turns on us when we have worked hard to see that our children are protected and are recommended for follow up counseling/treatment, and dismisses our professional judgment with out contacting the players to get some feed back on why we recommended what we saw as necessary for the girls and the entire family.

Mental Health, Lake Region Human Service Center, Tribal Social Service workers, Tribal Health youth counselor, school counselors and the staff of Trinity Hospital psych unit all recommended intense follow up for these two girls. Kevin snubs his nose at all of us, who are much more qualified to make these professional judgments than he is, yet he dismisses our work and returns the girls to their parents. I have personally worked with the 13 year old girl, who has attempted suicide 4 times since June and has had thoughts of suicide on an ongoing basis. The parents dismiss the girls cry for help as 'she only wants attention'. Why would a youngster attempt to hang herself 3 times and want to jump out in front of a moving vehicle if she only wanted attention? She is screaming for help not just attention. We as a community should be giving her the help she needs especially when the parents are unable or unwilling to give their children needed services. By my count 6 master level social workers, 2 TSS foster care workers, inpatient case manager and psychiatrist have all recommended intense treatment for this family and particularly the two girls in question.

If this is not enough Myra what is it going to take? And why should we work so hard to protect our children and have someone who should be working to protect vulnerable individuals, especially our children dismiss what we put in place, without even contacting us to learn why we were recommending what we did?

You called us together to ask for cooperation, and communication as community of professionals and agencies. Does one individual have the right or power to go against the majority opinion? Would it not be reasonable for him to at least contact the players for feed back and reasons for our recommendations?

Where do we go from here? I have tried to get in touch with Mr. Dauphanias by going to the office twice and called the office 2 times and asked for a return call. He did respond late on Wednesday afternoon. I am still not convinced that he made a fair judgment when he decided to put the girls back with parents who have not in the last 3 months complied with the previous conditions and recommendations made for this family. His response to me was we need to give them another chance.

As a professional I have several major concerns for Mr. Daughanias given his position as the director of Social Services:

1. The loss of confidence in his ability to be in charge of this very important department for the Tribe.
2. Grave concern for the ongoing mental and physical health of our children given the clear lack of professional judgment and his capricious and arbitrary decision making abilities.

With this in mind several actions might be considered as a remedy for these concerns:

1. In my professional opinion, I recommend this case be re-opened for professional consultation on the mutual agreed upon goals of the multiple mental health providers to place these girls in a safe, appropriate, environment where they can be begin therapy for themselves free from fear of what their parents might or might not do.
2. In my professional opinion I recommend the Tribal council and Chairperson evaluate the effectiveness of Mr. Dauphanias in performing his duties, his ability and his capacity to function in his current position, and the gross violations, misjudgments, and lack of professional competence.
3. It is my professional opinion, that the Tribe would be best served, and our children protected, if we had a truly qualified, trained, and competent mental health professional or Master level Social Worker with experience in Foster care as the Director of Tribal Social Services.

I respectfully submit this document for consideration and remain a faithful and hopeful Tribal member.

Sincerely,

Sister Joanne Streifel, LICSW
Clinical Social Worker
Mental Health office – Spirit Lake Health Center

Addendum

I am attaching this addendum as a way of follow up to the letter that I sent to Myra Pearson back in August of 2008.

I have not heard a word from Myra, or any of the council acknowledging the letter had been received. I am aware that the letter did reach her office as it had reached other members of the tribal council. This was a major disappointment to me as a member of the tribe and as an elder. I wrote the letter because of my deep concern for what was happening to our children and their safety. I was not out to make trouble for anyone but I felt the great need to express my concern for our community and the children of our community. The professional personnel working on the reservation had been called together by Myra because of this very concern and we were asked to be responsible in our respective positions to see that our children's safety was always protected first and foremost. I took this counsel seriously, but to what avail?

There have been reports of other concerns just as grave as the one mentioned in the above letter to Myra that have come to the attention of both Dr. Tilus, PsyD and myself during the past two years. We have felt very frustrated in our attempts to know where or how to go about doing something about the continued inactivity to protect our youth. We have heard of instances where abused children have been place back into the abusers homes with out any charges filed against the abusers or making certain that recommended services are followed up on.

Example: The situation expressed in the above letter. The girls had been referred to LRHSC by the attending psychiatrist from Minot for continued counseling. The appointments for the girls were cancelled by the mother and the girls have gone with out any kind of counseling since. The parents had also been recommended to receive counseling but have refused.

The case worker assigned to this family had made significant arrangements for these girls but as soon as Mr. Duphantias returned from a trip he reversed the plans and placed the girls back into the home without regard to the facts that the parents would not listen to the girls and therefore they were attempting suicide or had plans to complete suicide.

Two of the former social workers that had been employed by TSS told me that they left the department because their decisions to help their assigned clients were reversed by the director and their work was dismissed as not being adequate. Both of these individuals had their degrees in social work and had significant experience in handling child welfare situations. Does this not say something significant enough to be investigated?

Sister Jeanne Straigh

4/23/10