

Ashley Smith's treatment was 'barbaric,' lawyer says



This undated family handout photo shows Ashley Smith.

CTV.ca News Staff
Monday Nov. 1, 2010

A young woman who choked herself to death in an Ontario prison was treated in a "barbaric" way by the system, according to her family's lawyer.

Ashley Smith died in a Kitchener, Ont., prison in October 2007, when she was only 19 years old.

Smith suffered from mental health problems and had been repeatedly moved through prisons and other facilities during her time in custody.

Ontario's deputy chief coroner is hearing pre-inquest arguments in Toronto on Monday on whether the scope of an inquiry into the New Brunswick teenager's death should be expanded.

On Monday morning lawyer Julian Falconer said Smith's transfers and segregation were tantamount to "barbaric" abuse of a mentally ill person.

Her family believes prison staff kept transferring Smith to ensure that she could be kept in solitary confinement.

Inmates are not supposed to be kept in solitary confinement for longer than 60 days. However, the clock is reset on that rule each time a transfer occurs.

Ontario's deputy chief coroner, Dr. Bonita Porter, has ruled that the inquest should be restricted to the time Smith spent in Ontario.

But Smith's family wants the inquest to probe the entire period that the teenager was in custody.

Smith's family is expected to provide the coroner with copies of an internal report showing that Correctional Services believes Smith did not intend to kill herself when she fatally choked herself three years ago.

The report quotes psychiatrist Margo Rivera, who said that "no one intended Ashley Smith to die, least of all Ashley Smith herself."

Smith's family is also suing the federal government over the teenager's death.

With files from The Canadian Press