

## NEWS

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## TOMORROW



# Native family demands answers

## Jordan Wabasse among 7 teens who died in Thunder Bay since 2000

**TANYA TALAGA**  
QUEEN'S PARK BUREAU

THUNDER BAY, ONT.—The family of First Nations Grade 9 student Jordan Wabasse are demanding a broader investigation into the death of the young hockey player.

Wabasse, 15, went missing on Feb. 7, after getting off a city bus just a block away from his boarding house, but hundreds of kilometres away from home.

He was the seventh aboriginal teen to have died while away at school in Thunder Bay. The youths have no choice but to leave their remote First Nations communities if they want to pursue an education.

"I don't think they (police) have really looked into this," said Derek Jacob, Wabasse's father.

"At times it makes me angry," he said, adding the circumstances around Wabasse's disappearance are strange.

"I think there are things they don't want to tell us," Jacob said.

Thunder Bay police say preliminary reports indicate Wabasse drowned in the Kaministiquia River and that foul play is not suspected.

Police found tracks down by the river where Jordan's body was found late Tuesday night. His running shoe was discovered months ago by First Nations searchers along the muddy river bank and his Toronto Maple Leafs baseball cap was found hundreds of metres away.



TANYA TALAGA/TORONTO STAR

Derek Jacob, left, and Bernice Jacob, right, look at son Jordan Wabasse's school work with a friend Thursday.

The night Wabasse vanished it was a Monday and -30C outside. His family said it doesn't make sense that the shy teen would be hanging around the river bank alone.

Wabasse, a talented goalie, came to Thunder Bay for a chance to play hockey in an organized league, said his mother Bernice Jacob.

"He was a skater," said Jacob, who added she kept in daily contact with him through texts or emails.

Nearly 100 people gathered at the Airline TraveLodge Hotel on Thursday evening to comfort the family, mourn and remember Wa-

basse. Ojibway prayers were said and the family planned funeral arrangements for Wabasse on Saturday.

First Nations leaders are questioning the bizarre, similar circumstances around the boys' deaths.

The first to die was Jethro Anderson in 2000. All six have been found drowned in the waterways that drain into Lake Superior. The only girl to perish, Robyn Harper, asphyxiated in an allegedly alcohol related death. She was the only one not found in water.

Wabasse was from Webequie First Nations, a fly-in-only reserve nearly

600 kilometres north of Thunder Bay.

A search effort led by the Webequie community lasted 92 days.

Deputy Chief Terry Waboose of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, a political organization representing 49 First Nations, said it is time these cases were seriously investigated.

"It's time to start questioning," he told the *Star*. "How can they say no foul play right away?"

Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn Atleo said sadly, Wabasse's story is proof of the inadequate education system available for aboriginal children.