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School Girl Dies

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Thunder Bay, Ontario Canada

The Thunder Bay coroner's office is investigating the death of a four-year-old girl who was hit by a horse-drawn carriage at Fort William Historical Park on Monday.

Willow Scott-Hannam was on a field trip with her Hyde Park School kindergarten class when the incident happened at 11:35 a.m.

It was reported that the children stopped to pet a couple of horses tied to a wagon.

"The horses got startled and, I guess, started running or whatever and the wheel went over Willow's body," a friend of the family, Judy Suseklis, said on Tuesday.

Willow was taken to hospital with serious injuries.

Two four-year-old boys were taken to hospital with non-life threatening injuries.

Willow was flown to the Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre for further treatment on Monday.

Cathi Siemieniuk, Lakehead Public Schools director of education, said the girl died early Tuesday morning.

Siemieniuk said students and staff are "in shock" over the accident.

The school board is providing support to students, staff and parents, she said.

"We have a tragic events team made up of administrators and staff that" are helping students and teachers, said Siemieniuk.

"In the event we need additional support, we will connect with our community partners."

On Thursday, Hyde Park School will have a counsellor in the library at 3:30 p.m. helping parents and guardians deal with grief.

Medical assistance was provided at the park to three other children who suffered minor injuries in the incident.

Willow's family is looking for answers, Suseklis said.

“How were these children on a school outing – how were they supervised? What happened?” she asked.

“What happened to cause this?”

The school board will do an internal investigation, Siemieniuk said.

Thunder Bay Habitat for Humanity CEO Diane Mitchell said Willow recently put her footprints in concrete at the site of a home being built by volunteers. She was at the site daily with her grandfather who was helping to build the home, said Mitchell.

“She would stand at the fence on the sidewalk and make everyone laugh by twirling around and talking about her day and what she was wearing,” Mitchell said.

“We would call her our little volunteer,” she said.

“We’ll have those footprints forever,” Mitchell said.

Fort William Historical Park was closed Tuesday out of respect for the girl’s family.

General manager Sergio Buonocore said the Ministry of Labour, the coroner’s office and fort officials are investigating the incident.

“Our hearts go out to the families that have been affected by this tragedy. This is extremely saddening for all of the staff at Fort William Historical Park,” Buonocore said.

Counsellors have been brought to the park to help workers deal with their grief.

Fort William Historical Park will reopen today, but its public farm programs have been suspended indefinitely.

Buonocore couldn’t provide any details about how the accident occurred. He directed questions to the coroner’s office.

Cheryl Mahyr, spokeswoman for the office of the chief coroner, said an inquest could be called when the investigation concludes.