

Former Calgary foster parent of the year charged with sex offences

By Sherri Zickefoose and Jason Fekete

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CALGARY — The provincial minister promising a sweeping review of a Calgary foster home said she was “devastated” to learn a Calgary man who opened his home to dozens of troubled boys is now charged with sex crimes against three of them.

Garry Prokopishin — once named foster parent of the year at his association, where he was also a director — is accused of offering the teens money in exchange for sexual acts.

Police said Thursday that Prokopishin, 51, was the primary caregiver for the alleged victims he hosted in the northwest Calgary home he shares with his wife.



Garry Prokopishin, once honoured as foster parent of the year, is charged with one count of luring a child via a data device, three counts each of obtaining or attempting to obtain sex from a person under 18 years-of-age, and sexual contact with a youth by a person in authority.

Photograph by: Calgary Herald

Calgary police, who are now scouring the country for other former foster teens who lived with the couple, said Prokopishin took in 55 kids over the past 20 years.

“I was very saddened, it’s a terrible situation,” said Children and Youth Services Minister Yvonne Fritz, speaking Thursday in Edmonton.

“I’ve ordered an immediate review and when that review is completed, then I will be acting on those recommendations as quickly as possible if there’s any recommendations made for change.”

Prokopishin is charged with luring a child by cellphone, three counts each of obtaining or attempting to obtain sex from a person under 18 years of age and sexual contact with a youth by a person in authority.

The allegations have not been proven in court.

Police say all of the boys who lived in the home were high-risk teens between 14 and 17 who had histories of legal troubles for drug and alcohol problems. Up to a five teens lived at the home at a time.

Investigators are scouring the country to locate former foster children who lived with the man and his wife over the past two decades. Police say some are in jail, and others have slipped off the radar. So far, they have interviewed 13 of the 55 kids who lived with Prokopishin.

The abuse is believed to have occurred over a span of several months to several years, between January 2006 and April 2008.

Doreen White has known the couple for more than 20 years and was a director with the foster association at the same time as Prokopishin. She had no idea Prokopishin was under investigation.

“I am shocked. I am totally shocked. They’re the nicest people. They’re foster parents and I liked them,” said White. “That’s too hard to believe.”

White, 70, said the couple always referred to their foster children as their own and would frequently take them to events such as roller-skating or the annual Christmas party.

“Gosh, some of them have come to the banquets and . . . talked very highly of them. They said how they loved them as parents.”

Several neighbours said Thursday the man mostly kept to himself, and was generally only seen heading to and from work at odd hours of the day and late into the night.

A neighbour who lives across the street from the home said for the past six or seven years there have been up to five young boys living in the house at any given time.

“Every six months or so new kids would come and some would leave,” he said. “There were always kids coming and going. No girls, just boys, usually ages 12 and up.”

Police say a tip from an agency sparked their investigation last June after they received information that a man was allegedly engaging in sexual acts with underage boys. No children were staying in the home when the investigation began.

Police would not confirm if Alberta

Children and Youth Services reported the allegations.

Fritz only learned of the seven-month-long investigation and criminal charges Thursday.

“I will make changes quickly. Our responsibility is to protect our children and our youth in care,” she said.

Fritz says she’s confident the serious criminal charges won’t taint the program’s reputation.

“Youth and children in foster care are very loved and very much a part of the families for the homes they are in. This situation is highly unusual,” she said. “We have over 4,000 youth in care. This is very rare to have this type of situation. We have excellent foster care.”

Provincial regulations require anyone applying for a foster home licence to undergo rigorous screening, including criminal record checks and provide medical and personal references.

Prokopishin was released on \$800 bail Thursday. He is banned from alcohol and contact with his alleged victims. He is to appear in provincial court Feb. 19.

With files from Deborah Tetley and Stephane Massinon