

Social worker stabbed to death in assisted living home; 18-year-old in custody

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Pictured is the scene which Police is investigating after a woman was fatally stabbed last night in the Marda Loop-Bankview area on Friday, October 25, 2019. Azin Ghaffari/Postmedia Calgary Photo by Azin Ghaffari /Azin Ghaffari/Postmedia Calgary

A youth social worker employed by Wood's Homes was fatally stabbed early Friday morning while she was on the job caring for a man, police say.

Deborah Onwu, 47, of Calgary, was identified by police as the victim found at a residence in the 1800 block of 27th Avenue S.W. around 2:45 a.m. Police say an 18-year-old at the assisted living facility was arrested about two hours later. Wood's Homes is a children's mental health centre that provides treatment to children, youth and families.



Police say 47-year-old Deborah Onwu, a professional case worker, was the victim in Friday's stabbing. Photo by Facebook

"Everyone at Wood's Homes is deeply impacted by this recent tragedy. Our thoughts and prayers are with all involved including the victim's family and our many staff," said Wood's Homes spokeswoman Sylvia Maclver.

"Debbie was a well-liked and well-respected colleague. She was hard-working and devoted to a career of helping. There are no words to describe the sadness our work family is feeling today."

When police arrived at the scene, efforts were immediately provided to Onwu, but she later succumbed to her injuries. While an initial search of the residence didn't turn up the suspect, one person was located and arrested downtown around 5 a.m.

Brandon Jacob Spencer Newman, 18, of Calgary, is charged with second-degree murder in Onwu's death. Police said late Friday that he remains in custody and is to appear in court on Nov. 1.

Staff Sgt. Martin Schiavetta said the accused had been living at the facility for several weeks.

"She was providing assisted living care to the suspect," Schiavetta told reporters Friday afternoon. "This was her place of employment."

Wood's Homes is working with the Calgary police and occupational health and safety during this investigation as well as providing counselling support for all those affected in their organization, Maclver said.



The victim was found in this home in the area of Marda Loop-Bankview early Friday. Photo by Azin Ghaffari/Postmedia

Because the death happened at a workplace, Alberta Occupational Health and Safety is also investigating.

In 2017, Onwu was recognized by the Calgary Society for Persons with Disabilities for her five-year anniversary as a relief residential support worker.

“She can always be counted on to help out in a pinch. Debbie has great relationships with everyone she interacts with and is known for being a pleasure to work with,” it read. “When it comes to embodying CPD’s values and what it means to be an outstanding staff member, Debbie is undoubtedly a role model.”

Information from neighbours initially suggested the home was associated with the Seven Steps recovery program, however, that is not believed to be the case.

The death is Calgary’s 16th homicide of 2019.

With files from Alanna Smith