



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Elaine Bobick
Director
Western Region

11 Stanwix Street, Suite 260
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

(412) 565-5728
Fax: (412) 565-7808

REPORT ON THE FATALITY OF:

KIDONN POLLARD-FORD

BORN: 12-23-2003

DIED: 06-30-2011

FAMILY KNOWN TO:

ALLEGHENY COUNTY CHILDREN YOUTH AND
FAMILY SERVICES [ACCYFS]

REPORT FINALIZED ON:

03/26/2012

This report is confidential under the provisions of the Child Protective Services Law and cannot be released.

(23 Pa. C.S. Section 6340)

Unauthorized release is prohibited under penalty of law.

(23 Pa. C.S. 6349 (b))

Reason for Review:

Senate Bill 1147, Printer's Number 2159 was signed into law on July 3, 2008 [REDACTED]. The bill became effective on December 30, 2008 and is known as Act 33 of 2008. As part of Act 33 of 2008, DPW must conduct a review and provide a written report of all cases of suspected child abuse that result in a child fatality or near fatality. This written report must be completed as soon as possible but no later than six months after the date the report was registered with ChildLine for investigation.

Act 33 of 2008 also requires that county children and youth agencies convene a review when a report of child abuse involving a child fatality or near fatality is indicated or when a status determination has not been made regarding the report within 30 days of the oral report to ChildLine. Allegheny County has convened a review team in accordance with Act 33 of 2008 related to this report.

Family Constellation:

<u>Name:</u>	<u>Relationship:</u>	<u>Date of Birth:</u>
KiDonn Pollard-Ford	Victim Child	12-23-2003

**Notification of Child(ren) Fatality:**

The date of the incident was June 30, 2011, with the report to Allegheny County Children, Youth and Families being made on July 01, 2011. Allegheny County Homicide Detectives reported at 10:41am that the North Versailles Police were dispatched to a fire at the family's home address. The victim child and his sibling were found in the apartment with no adult present. [REDACTED] died in the fire and the other child, [REDACTED] was hospitalized at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh in critical, unstable condition and was not expected to survive. The mother had stated that the children were left in the care of a babysitter. The cause of the fire was unknown.

Summary of DPW Child Fatality Review Activities:

The Western Region Office of Children, Youth and Families, Department of Public Welfare obtained and reviewed the current and past record of activity pertaining to the [REDACTED] family provided by Allegheny County Children, Youth and Families (ACCYF). The records revealed there had been 7 previous referrals between 2008 and 2011. The reports to ACCYF were that the children were being left alone and/or were [REDACTED]. The allegations were investigated, but could not be substantiated. None of the

referrals were opened for services. Field screens were done and the referrals were screened out.

The Western Regional Office of Children, Youth and Families attended the child fatality internal Review scheduled meeting at the Lexington office of ACCYF on September 01, 2011. The ACCYF caseworker, supervisor, law enforcement, & medical staff from Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh were case presenters. The medical examiner's report was subsequently available for review as well.

Summary of Services to Family:

ACCYF was not involved with the family at the time of the fatal incident. There had been prior reports to Intake that were screened out. The most recent intake referral had been on 4-12-11 involving an allegation of [REDACTED].

Children and Youth Involvement prior to Incident:

On November 4, 2008, the County received allegations that the Mother leaves her children home alone, and that the mother's friend hits the children. A field screen was completed, and it was determined that the report should be screened out. The mother denied leaving the children alone or that anyone was hitting her children. Additionally, the children denied being left alone and did not present with any injuries.

On August 11, 2009, the County received allegation that the Mother and her friend were hitting the children, [REDACTED] in the presence of the children and that the Mother's friend watches the children while the mother is out at night working (7 days a week as a stripper). The reporting source also had suspicion that the mother was [REDACTED]. ACCYF responded to the family home on the same date, within 2 hours of the report. A field screen was completed and the referral was screened out. In the interview, the mother denied hitting the children and stated she only smoked cigarettes; the mother denied domestic violence, [REDACTED], prostitution or a [REDACTED] for members of the household. The mother did confirm that she works as an exotic dancer and has her friend watch the children when she is at work. The child [REDACTED] presented with no current injuries, but had knee scars from falls. The other child, [REDACTED] was not seen. The caseworker was told child was at football practice. CYS assessment was that the children were safe.

On October 3, 2009, the agency again received allegations, where the reporting source suspected domestic violence. Also, the reporting source heard a rumor that the mother is [REDACTED] and the mother's paramour is [REDACTED]. Additionally, the apartment they live in is not clean. It was reported that the paramour is controlling and is unemployed. The reporting source stated that since the mother began her involvement with the paramour, the mother's care of the children had changed; that mother neglects them. The reporting source is [REDACTED].

The mother filed for child support on January 21, 2004 from victim child's father and she filed for a PFA against her other child's father in 2007. According to the ACCYF field screen on 10-3-09, the mother, paramour and children were seen. Children had no visible injuries, ample food was in the home and there did not appear to be a safety hazard or concerns. The mother denied any domestic violence [REDACTED]. This referral was screened out.

On October 30, 2009, ACCYF received a report that the mother was [REDACTED]; the children's clothing was inappropriate and that the mother was neglectful. ACCYF assigned a 0-2 hour response time for the assessment to occur. The caseworker went to the home, where there was no response. The caseworker returned to the home on November 4, 2009, (second attempt) again no answer and the caseworker attempted a call to the phone number provided for the mother. The phone had been temporarily disconnected. On November 6, 2009 the caseworker met with the mother, paramour and the children. The Housing Authority and rental agent were present conducting an inspection of the home at the time of the caseworker's arrival. The home passed the inspection. Mother stated she had to go to mediation on November 7, 2009 because the maternal grandmother wanted visitation with the children. The mother again denied the allegations of the report. She confirmed her place of employment, and it appeared that both children were cared for. The home was clean and there was food. This referral was screened out.

On December 24, 2009, 2 referrals were made on the family. The first report was from a reporting source who called stating that the Rankin Police questioned her concerning [REDACTED]. The children's mother alleged that the reporting source had attempted to take her son. The reporting source had gone to child's school, on the child's birthday. The child was not there so the reporting source went to the father's residence who allowed the reporting source to take [REDACTED]. The reporting source stated that the child told the police that the mother's paramour punches him in his chest and leaves him in the home by himself. The reporting source alleged that the mother is [REDACTED] and has lots of traffic in and out of the home. The second referral was made by the same reporting source who called claiming that a call was made to the North Versailles Police who went to mother's home last night but no one was home. The reporting source wanted to know what was going on with the case, and the reporting source was severely concerned regarding the children's care. A field screen was conducted by ACCYF. The caseworker went to mother's home, where the mother, her paramour and [REDACTED] the younger sibling, were present. The mother reported that [REDACTED] was with his father for the holidays. [REDACTED] appeared healthy, well and happy, and no concerns were noted. The apartment was clean and appropriate, there was sufficient food and the utilities were working. The mother and paramour denied allegations of [REDACTED] and denied people in & out of the home. They denied that [REDACTED] had been hit by anyone. From the visit to the mother's residence, ACCYF caseworker went to the father's residence to see the other child.

The father explained that [REDACTED] was returned to his house around 11:00pm only after police had intervened. The maternal grandmother had not brought the child back and was only to have kept him a few hours as promised. The caseworker talked to the child who expressed that he likes school, is in kindergarten and feels safe at father's and mother's homes. The referral was screened out.

On the evening of January 19, 2010, an anonymous source reported that the children are left alone, occurring on every Wednesday. It was reported that the mother was seen leaving the home with her female partner on Wednesday's around 9:00pm, and was not returning until early in the morning. It was reported by the anonymous reporting source that the mother was an exotic dancer. Additionally, the reporting source recently witnessed [REDACTED] outside wearing shorts in 7 degree weather. Also in the referral, the reporting source stated there is a lot of traffic in and out of the home, [REDACTED] was suspected at the residence. The ACCYF field screen occurred on January 20, 2010 in the morning. The ACCYF caseworker went to the mother's home, and interviewed the children and mother. The mother presented the caseworker with the Protection from Abuse Court Order she had obtained against maternal grandmother, and stated that the police had been called to the home the night before for a report that the children were alone. The children denied that the children had been left alone, reporting that a cousin named [REDACTED] usually babysat the children when the mother goes out. Neither child reported any maltreatment. The Mother stated that her paramour/partner often stays the night, but does not reside there, and has a home on Homewood Ave. in Pittsburgh, PA. The mother stated she works part-time as an exotic dancer to earn extra money. The utilities were on, the home was clean and adequately furnished and there was ample food. CW had no concerns, and observed no evidence [REDACTED]. The children stated they felt safe in the mother's care. The mother explained to the caseworker that she had an adversarial relationship with the maternal grandmother, and allowed the caseworker to hear 3 phone messages from the maternal grandmother, where she was yelling threats to beat up or kill the mother. This referral was screened out.

The last referral was received on April 12, 2011, when ACCYF received a report that [REDACTED] had written in his journal that his mother had hit him over the weekend specifically that the mother had punched the child in the stomach and on his back because she became angry after tripping over a toy. The reporting source did not observe the child to have any visible marks or bruises. The reporting source stated that the child's left flank area and side was tender to the touch. In response, the caseworker completed an unannounced home visit. The children, mother, & the paramour were present. In separate interviews regarding the allegation, both boys denied fear of their caretakers and denied being punched by the mother. The subject child said it was make believe and there was no injury. The children reported that they are disciplined by being spanked on the "bum" open handed. This was consistent with the mother's statement.

The mother denied domestic violence [REDACTED]. She admitted to having an ACCYF history & criminal history related to charges involving a physical altercation in 2002 with her sister. There was no evidence to support the allegations and the referral was screened out.

Circumstances of Child Fatality and Related Case Activity:

On July 1, 2011, it was reported to ACCYF that on June 30, 2011, the North Versailles Police were dispatched to a fire at the home of this family. The children were found in the apartment and there were no adults present. [REDACTED] died in the fire. The sibling, [REDACTED], had been hospitalized at Children's Hospital Pittsburgh and was in critical, unstable condition. The mother was uncooperative and refused to talk to police.

It was reported that the mother stated the children were left in the care of a babysitter named [REDACTED] and the cause of the fire was unknown. The North Versailles Police were unable to locate anyone who fit the description of [REDACTED] and it appeared that the children were left alone while the mother's paramour was picking her up from a club where she worked on Wednesday nights.

ACCYF was given permission to attempt to interview the mother by Allegheny County Homicide detectives. In the interim of law enforcement and /or ACCYF attempting to interview the mother at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, the sibling, [REDACTED] died as well. A supplemental report to [REDACTED] was made of [REDACTED] near fatality status and subsequent fatality.

ACCYF attempted to contact family members by phone and by mail at last known addresses and numbers of the mother, maternal grandmother, and the fathers of the 2 children, but were unsuccessful.

A warrant was obtained July 12, 2011 for the mother's arrest, and on July 13, 2011 the mother surrendered to police and was committed to the Allegheny County Jail. The mother was charged with 2 counts criminal homicide, 2 counts endangering the welfare of a child, and injuring or tampering with fire apparatus. The mother was later released after posting non-monetary bail and meeting court ordered release conditions.

[REDACTED] determinations were submitted pending criminal court proceedings. The scheduled trial date is 3-26-12.

Current Case Status:

The law enforcement investigation concluded that both children were alone in the apartment with no adult supervision at the time of the fire and noted that the fire alarm system in the apartment had been dismantled, which the landlord had cautioned the mother about on a previous occasion.

The County Medical Examiner determined that [REDACTED] died as a result of carbon monoxide and cyanide poisoning due to smoke inhalation sustained in the fire. [REDACTED] died as a result of anoxic brain injury due to smoke inhalation.

The parents failed to cooperate with ACCYF. There were no surviving children. The CYF case was closed 8-5-11. The mother is awaiting trial on the aforementioned charges. ACCYF investigation of the [REDACTED] allegations was submitted to [REDACTED] as [REDACTED]

County Strengths and Deficiencies and Recommendations for Change as Identified by the County's Child Fatality Report:

Act 33 of 2008 also requires that county children and youth agencies convene a review when a report of [REDACTED] involving a child fatality or near fatality is [REDACTED] or when a status determination has not been made regarding the report within 30 days of the oral report to [REDACTED]. Allegheny County has convened a review team in accordance with Act 33 of 2008 related to this report.

Strengths:

- Previous systems involvement search (Data Vue & Mainframe) was performed regarding the mother, mother's friend, the fathers, both children and the maternal grandmother.
- Allegheny County sent the mother information on [REDACTED] even though she refused to cooperate with any agency intervention.
- The existing policy related to response times was followed.
- The County ensured the policy memorandum was reissued and staff trained in the importance of thorough assessments at intake.

Deficiencies:

- None identified

Recommendations for Change at the Local Level:

- Immediate response by casework staff when reports indicate that children are home alone. If the child(ren) are not home alone when the caseworker goes to the home, the caseworker should make future home visits at the times the report indicates that the children are reported to be home unsupervised.

Recommendations for Change at the State Level:

- The county did not include recommendations for changes.

Department Review of County Internal Report:

The Department is in agreement with the agency's findings regarding the July 1, 2011 fatality [REDACTED] reports

Department of Public Welfare Findings:

- County Strengths:
[REDACTED] investigation and response time policy compliance to referrals.
- County Opportunity for Improvement:
The County could benefit from an immediate response by casework staff when reports indicate that children are home alone. If the child(ren) are not home alone when the caseworker goes to the home, the caseworker should make future home visits at the times the report indicates that the children are reported to be home unsupervised.
- Statutory and Regulatory Areas of Non-Compliance:
None

Department of Public Welfare Recommendations:

It is recommended that the County implement action steps to ensure follow-up contact is made at the times the report indicates that the child is being left home alone, and the appropriate safety and/or risk assessments are completed.