



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

REPORT ON THE FATALITY OF:

Ja-Zirah Rodgers

Date of Birth: 02/01/2013
Date of Death: 1/2/2015
Date of Oral Report: 01/09/2015

FAMILY KNOWN TO:

Lancaster County Children and Youth Services Agency

REPORT FINALIZED ON:
August 20, 2015

Unredacted reports are confidential under the provisions of the Child Protective Services Law and cannot be released to the public.
(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. 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. Lancaster 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>
Ja-Zirah Rodgers	victim child	02/01/2013
██████████	biological mother	██████████ 1991
██████████	half sibling	██████████ 2011
██████████	sibling	██████████ 2014
██████████	biological father	██████████ 1995

* ██████████ was not living in the home at time of incident.

Notification of Child (Near) Fatality:

On January 8, 2015 ██████████ contacted Lancaster County Children and Youth Services Agency (county) looking for ██████████. He ██████████ that on morning of January 2, 2015 he witnessed ██████████ beating her with a plastic cord which resembled a jump rope in her home. He reported that he observed the victim child bleeding from her nose and mouth. He reported he intervened by lifting the child away from ██████████ thus stopping the act. However ██████████ became angry with ██████████; an argument ensued and she kicked him out of the home. ██████████ reported he would requested to see ██████████, but ██████████ stated she did not know where the child was as she gave the child to Lancaster County Children and Youth Services, which is why he was calling the agency. The county submitted a report ██████████ on January 9, 2015. County staff made two unsuccessful attempts on that day to locate the child and family

The victim child's mother was evasive to the county staff and provided multiple false reports of the whereabouts (location) of the victim child. ██████████ tracked down ██████████ in another county on January 23, 2015 at which time she admitted to killing the victim child and throwing her body in the garbage. The victim child's body has never

been found. The exact date of death is not certain however [REDACTED] admitted to beating the child to death on January 3, or January 4, 2015. The report was [REDACTED] on January 24, 2015 following her admission.

Summary of DHS Child Fatality Review Activities:

The Central Region Office of Children, Youth and Families (CROCYF) obtained and reviewed all current cases records, and prior case records pertaining to the family. Follow up interviews were conducted with the county caseworker [REDACTED], supervisor [REDACTED], intake director, [REDACTED] and agency administrator [REDACTED] on January 26, 28, February 13, and March 9, 2015. CROCYF participated in the County Internal Fatality Review Team meeting held on January 28, 2015. There are no medical records or autopsy to review as the victim child's body has never been recovered.

Children and Youth Involvement prior to Incident:

Lancaster County Children and Youth Services did have history with this family. The family was never opened for services. The county received two [REDACTED] on the family in August and October of 2014. The referral on August 27, 2014 [REDACTED] that the mother was using and distributing drugs while her children were present in the home. The report [REDACTED] had purchased drugs from people at the home. [REDACTED] placement of the children may need to occur. [REDACTED] it was reported that police confiscated a significant amount of marijuana and synthetic marijuana along with prescription medication. Two males in the home were arrested. The children's mother was going to be charged with a summons for possession. The children's mother was not detained by law enforcement. The assigned county caseworker conducted an unannounced home visit on August 29, 2014 which was within the assigned response time to assess the safety of the children and circumstances surrounding the [REDACTED]. Upon arrival to the home the worker saw a condemned notice on the window and padlock on the door. The county would have additional follow up with law enforcement regarding a possible location for the mother and children. The agency made additional attempts to locate the family but were unsuccessful. This [REDACTED] was closed without any further assessment on September 23, 2014.

[REDACTED] to the agency was made on October 2, 2014. On that date [REDACTED] contacted the agency as they were responding to a call at a restaurant in the community. A male, identified as the victim child's father, had passed out at a table inside the restaurant and the victim child was present with him at the restaurant when this happened. It was believed the father was not under the influence but rather consumed some type of [REDACTED]; police were eventually able to wake the father. Law enforcement released the child to her paternal grandparents. The father was arrested for public drunkenness and endangering the welfare of a child. The county received a call but was not asked to respond, [REDACTED] located a relative to

care for the child. The county contacted the police the next day after not receiving any additional information or instructions regarding the situation. The agency never received response from law enforcement. The county agency [REDACTED] on October 10, 2015.

Circumstances of Child Fatality and Related Case Activity:

The Lancaster County Children and Youth Services Agency was [REDACTED] on January 8, 2015 by the [REDACTED] requesting a better understanding of where [REDACTED] was. [REDACTED] proceeded to inform the county that the last time he saw the victim child on January 2, 2015 he witnessed the child being hit with a plastic type of cord and the child was bleeding from her nose and mouth. [REDACTED] reported he intervened, but that he and [REDACTED] proceeded to get into an argument and [REDACTED] kicked him out of the home. [REDACTED] was asked whether he informed police of the incident and his concerns regarding the whereabouts of [REDACTED]. The father stated he did not and the county encouraged him to contact the police. The county informed [REDACTED] that [REDACTED] had not called the agency for assistance nor had she brought the child to them. [REDACTED], a referral was made by the county to [REDACTED] which was [REDACTED] as a report of [REDACTED]. On January 9, 2015 the assigned county caseworker made two unannounced home visits, both of which were unsuccessful in locating the child or family. The county contacted [REDACTED] on January 12, 2015 requesting additional information. At this time he reported that no one had spoken to [REDACTED] in over a week and he again referenced he had not seen the victim child since the incident on January 2, 2015.

The county contacted several relatives on the maternal and paternal side of the family regarding [REDACTED] and location of her children. The caseworker eventually got in touch with a maternal grandmother on January 12, 2015 via phone and she reported that she had not seen the victim child since [REDACTED] brought the baby (victim child's sibling) to her house. The grandmother was not clear regarding the exact date this occurred but thought it was approximately a week prior to January 9, 2015. The county requested the maternal grandmother attempt to contact [REDACTED] to arrange a visit at her home as [REDACTED] had not been returning agency calls. A visit was able to be arranged on January 12, 2015 at the maternal grandmother's home. The victim child was absent from the arranged visit. When questioned, [REDACTED] reported the victim child was staying with a friend out of county and would not be coming home until closer to her birthday. [REDACTED] was informed that the agency needed to see and assess the safety of the [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] was vague about who the child was with, as well as the address and telephone number. The county was eventually able to get a name of the person from [REDACTED], but [REDACTED] reported that she did not have this person's phone number or exact address as she contacts her via Facebook. The county was able to run the individual's name through an electronic search engine which found several phone numbers and addresses for the person. The addresses were in Luzerne County.

Lancaster County Children and Youth Services requested a courtesy contact by Luzerne County Children and Youth Services on January 12, 2015. In addition, the county reached out to [REDACTED]. The individual residing in Luzerne was discovered to have a criminal history [REDACTED] was contacted. Luzerne County Children and Youth

Services had difficulty finding the friend of [REDACTED] as the addresses were not current. Lancaster County Children and Youth Services were able to get in touch with the said individual through information from [REDACTED]. The contact was via phone on January 22, 2015. She mentioned that she does not have the child nor has she had contact with [REDACTED] in over four years. She mentioned she has her own stressors to deal with and she is not interested in taking care of any additional children. During this time the county had difficulty getting [REDACTED] to return calls. On January 22, 2015 Lancaster County Children and Youth Services Agency decided that if [REDACTED] does not bring all of the children (including the victim child) to the county by 4:00 pm on this date (January 22, 2015) the county would [REDACTED] as they still had concerns regarding the children, especially the victim child. The county was able to get ahold of [REDACTED] via telephone. In order to reach her via phone the county staff made calls to [REDACTED] and other relatives, during the phone call she would report she was not honest the first time however she claimed that all of her children were staying in York County with another individual. [REDACTED] claimed she is being evicted from her apartment.

Lancaster County Children and Youth Services Agency would make a referral to [REDACTED] on January 22, 2015. The county agency would also contact [REDACTED] and York County Children and Youth Services to help assist in locating the person [REDACTED] alleged was caring for the children. The county was informed that the address provided does not exist in the [REDACTED]. During this time multiple additional family members and known acquaintances of [REDACTED] were contacted either by police or the county. The person in [REDACTED] was found however, she reported she did not have recent contact with [REDACTED] either. On January 23, 2015 Lancaster County Children and Youth Services were contact by [REDACTED] that they found [REDACTED] and the two siblings in the [REDACTED] area. [REDACTED] were transporting the children back to the county and will be questioning [REDACTED]. After several hours of questioning [REDACTED] confessed to killing the victim child. She stated that she killed the child as she has "always struggled with her". [REDACTED] stated the victim child reminds her too much of [REDACTED] would not provide an exact date of the homicide and reported it occurred either January 3 or 4, 2015. [REDACTED] reported she beat the child to death and then proceeded to wrap her in an air mattress, then zipped the mattress in the air mattress' zipper bag. The zipper bag was then thrown out along with additional bulk trash. Law enforcement searched for the victim child's body, however during this time of year a lot of trash in the city is incinerated and it is believed that this is most likely what happened to the victim child's body. [REDACTED] is currently incarcerated awaiting trial without bail. She is charged with criminal homicide, abuse of a corpse, intimidation, retaliation or obstruction in a child abuse case along with simple assault and endangering the welfare of a child. The county placed the victim child's siblings in foster care upon arrival back from [REDACTED] on January 23, 2015. The county [REDACTED] and ChildLine received the status report on March 9, 2015.

Current Case Status:

The family remains [REDACTED] with the county for the two surviving siblings. The siblings are currently in foster care and they have remained in the same setting since their initial

placement. The youngest sibling was a baby at time of the incident so the incident has not had the same impact as the older sibling who has [REDACTED] from the ordeal. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The county will be revisiting possible [REDACTED] or options for the child. Currently the children are having visitation with the biological father. He has only recently decided to begin visitation on a regular basis. The county is also exploring relative resources for possible kinship however some of the applicants have been denied during the home study approval process. It appears that the children's current placement setting could be a permanency resource should the children's goal be changed to adoption.

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

Strengths:

The county report referenced strengths as their ability to work with outside county children and youth agencies requesting courtesy contact for Lancaster County Children and Youth Services. The report mentioned additional strengths as probation departments and law enforcement assisted in a timely manner. The report referenced that the law enforcement searched tirelessly until mother and the surviving siblings were located.

Deficiencies:

The county report referenced a few areas one of which was the county agency's need to explore a new internal policy or protocol for length of time to notify police when the county cannot locate a child or family.

Recommendations for Change at the Local / State Level:

The county report referenced the county bolstering and implementing a new protocol for making reports to local law enforcement when their office is unable to locate a child or family.

Department Review of County Internal Report:

The Department reviewed the submission of Lancaster County Children and Youth Agency's report regarding this case on June 19, 2015. Due to the circumstances of this particular case there are no areas to dispute with the identified report. The county was provided written feedback via correspondence on July 6, 2015 regarding receipt and review of the content of their report.

Department of Human Services (Department) Findings:

County Strengths:

Both the county and law enforcement worked tirelessly to locate the child and family once the agency received the [REDACTED] on January 9, 2015.

County Weaknesses:

The county could have attempted additional outreach on the prior [REDACTED] when received to make contact with the family for assessment rather than close out the referral. The county case record did document the few county attempts to locate the family. The prior [REDACTED] were situations in which law enforcement were in the process of following up on calls or investigations their office was conducting. Enhanced communication between both agencies could have helped to determine if agency involvement was required at time of police involvement.

Statutory and Regulatory Areas of Non-Compliance:

The Department review did not find any areas of non-compliance for this particular case.

Department of Public Welfare Recommendations:

This case is somewhat unusual as the victim child was already deceased when Lancaster County Children and Youth Services received the [REDACTED] however this information was not learned until later in the investigation. Lancaster County Children and Youth Services Agency followed up on the referral as any other case received [REDACTED]. Due to the difficulty of being able to locate the victim child, Lancaster County Children and Youth Services has revisited and implemented a new protocol for referrals to law enforcement when children cannot be located. This protocol went into effect March 2015. The Department supports the bolstered agency protocol. The county collaborated with the District Attorney's Office and local law enforcement in the development of the protocol.