



REPORT ON THE FATALITY OF:

Ella Foster

Date of Birth: 10/30/2014
Date of Death: 11/08/2016
Date of Report to ChildLine: 01/18/2017
CWIS Referral ID: [REDACTED]

FAMILY NOT KNOWN TO COUNTY CHILDREN AND YOUTH AGENCY AT TIME OF INCIDENT OR WITHIN THE PRECEDING 16 MONTHS:

Berks County Children and Youth Services

REPORT FINALIZED ON:
08/31/2017

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. Section 6349 (b))

Reason for Review:

Pursuant to the Child Protective Services Law, the Department, through OCYF, must conduct a review and provide a written report of all cases of suspected child abuse that result in a 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.

The Child Protective Services Law also requires that county children and youth agencies convene a review when a report of child abuse involving a fatality or near fatality is substantiated or when a status determination has not been made regarding the report within 30 days of the report to ChildLine.

Berks County has convened a review team in accordance with the Child Protective Services Law related to this report. The county review team was convened on 03/07/2017.

Family Constellation:

<u>First and Last Name:</u>	<u>Relationship:</u>	<u>Date of Birth</u>
Ella Foster	Victim Child	10/30/2014
[REDACTED]	Mother	[REDACTED] 1982
[REDACTED]	Father	[REDACTED] 1984
[REDACTED]	Sibling	[REDACTED] 2006
[REDACTED]	Sibling	[REDACTED] 2007
[REDACTED]	Sibling	[REDACTED] 2009
[REDACTED]	Sibling	[REDACTED] 2011
[REDACTED]	Sibling	[REDACTED] 2013
[REDACTED]	Sibling	[REDACTED] 2016
[REDACTED]	Paternal Grandfather/ [REDACTED]	[REDACTED] 1945

Summary of OCYF Child Fatality Review Activities:

The Southeast Region Office of Children, Youth and Families (SERO) obtained and reviewed all current records pertaining to the [REDACTED] family. SERO interviewed the county caseworker. SERO attended the county review team meeting on 03/7/2017.

Summary of circumstances prior to Incident:

The family had no prior involvement with any children and youth agency.

Circumstances of Child Fatality and Related Case Activity:

On 11/08/2016, the [REDACTED] family came to the attention of Berks County Children and Youth Services (BCCYS) when it was reported that the victim child had become sick on 11/06/2016 and passed away on 11/08/2016. When BCCYS responded to the family home on 11/08/2016, the County Coroner and PA State Police were present at the home. The parents reported that the victim child had become sick with what they thought was just a common cold. The parents stated that on 11/07/2016, the victim child was still not feeling well and described her breathing

as raspy. The mother stayed up with the victim child all night and into the next morning. On the morning of 11/08/2016, the mother called the father and asked him to come home from work because the victim child wasn't doing well. The father came home around 12:00pm and was holding the victim child in his arms when she passed away.

The parents explained that the family is of the Faith Tabernacle religion which does not believe in the use of medical treatment of any kind. Neither parent nor any of their seven children have ever seen a doctor or taken any type of medications or immunizations. While BCCYS was in the home, the oldest sibling was sick and the parents agreed to take that child to be seen by a medical professional that evening. The father took the oldest sibling to a nearby Urgent Care location shortly after BCCYS left the home. BCCYS continued to monitor the condition of the oldest sibling along with the other three siblings in the home.

An autopsy was completed on 11/10/2016 at Reading Hospital. At that time, it was believed that the victim child had pneumonia and a toxicology report was requested. On 12/09/2016, BCCYS received information from the doctor who completed the victim child's autopsy that stated that the cause of death was pneumonia and had the victim child received medical care, she would have had a 95 percent or greater chance of survival.

On 01/09/2017, a meeting attended by BCCYS, PA State Police, Berks County District Attorney's Office, and the doctor who completed the victim child's autopsy was held to discuss the case and the severity of the victim child's illness. [REDACTED]

On 01/18/2017, BCCYS and State Police interviewed the mother and father separately. The mother described the victim child's death as peaceful. The mother stated she would not have sought medical attention for the victim child even if it would have saved her. The mother believed that God would take care of everything. She said she called the pastor, who is [REDACTED], to anoint the victim child on the evening of 11/07/2016. The mother denied the victim child had labored breathing and was at all uncomfortable. The father stated that the victim child died while he was holding her and her breathing was not labored. He explained that his religion does not believe in medical treatment. The father was asked if he would have given the victim child medication to help her survive and he stated he couldn't answer because it would depend on the situation.

On 01/23/2017, the pastor, who is [REDACTED], was interviewed. The pastor shared the same beliefs as the family regarding medical care. The pastor said he had contact with the victim child on the day she passed away. He stated it looked like the victim child had a cold and he didn't have any idea that she could have passed away that day.

On 01/18/2017, [REDACTED] report was filed citing [REDACTED] for causing the death of a child [REDACTED] BCCYS arranged for supportive services for the family that included weekly visits to the home. On 02/27/2017, the [REDACTED] report was [REDACTED], naming [REDACTED] as perpetrators in the victim child's death.

On 02/01/2017, [REDACTED] turned themselves into police and were arrested for involuntary manslaughter. A bail hearing was held on 02/15/2017.

[REDACTED] The children were placed with a kinship family and are now receiving routine medical treatment. [REDACTED]

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

- Strengths in compliance with statutes, regulations and services to children and families;

The family was cooperative with both the Children and Youth investigation and the criminal investigation.

- Deficiencies in compliance with statutes, regulations and services to children and families;

The family does not allow their children to have access to medical care.

- Recommendations for changes at the state and local levels on reducing the likelihood of future child fatalities and near fatalities directly related to abuse;

The County did not make any recommendations.

- Recommendations for changes at the state and local levels on monitoring and inspection of county agencies;

The County did not make any recommendations.

- Recommendations for changes at the state and local levels on collaboration of community agencies and service providers to prevent child abuse.

The County did not make any recommendations.

Department Review of County Internal Report:

The Southeast Region Office received the Berks County Fatality Team Report on 04/28/2017 and is in agreement with the report.

Department of Human Services Findings:

- County Strengths: The County conducted a thorough investigation in cooperation with the State Police and other county agencies.
- County Weaknesses: and
None noted
- Statutory and Regulatory Areas of Non-Compliance by the County Agency.
None noted

Department of Human Services Recommendations:

The Department recommends that the county could benefit from training on the faith and beliefs of the Faith Tabernacle religion and other religions that share similar views regarding the use of medical care.