



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

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REPORT ON THE FATALITY OF:

Essence Savoy

Date of Birth: 12/2/2010
Date of Fatality: 6/6/2011

FAMILY KNOWN TO:
Philadelphia Department of Human Services

REPORT FINALIZED ON: 9/27/2011

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. 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. Philadelphia County has convened a review team on 7/1/2011 in accordance with Act 33 of 2008 related to this report

Family Constellation:

| <u>Name:</u> | <u>Relationship:</u> | <u>Date of Birth:</u> |
|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Essence Savoy | victim child | 12/2/2010 |
| ██████████ | brother | ██████████ 2007 |
| ██████████ | brother | ██████████ 2004 |
| ██████████ | brother | ██████████ 2005 |
| ██████████ | mother | ██████████ 1987 |
| ██████████ | father | ██████████ 1985 |

Notification of Child Fatality:

On 6/6/2011, the Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) received a call concerning six month old Essence Savoy. Essence was brought to St. Christopher's Hospital in cardio pulmonary arrest. After being ██████████ and given ██████████ by the paramedics, she was ██████████ to the hospital in a coma. Child was found to have ██████████ changes and ██████████ ██████████. Essence was certified by the physicians to be in serious and critical condition. She had no ██████████ functioning. This was determined to be a Near Fatality.

Child was determined to have no ██████████ functioning. She was removed from ██████████ ██████████ on 6/10/2011, and died immediately afterwards.

Summary of DPW Child Fatality Review Activities:

The Southeast Regional Office of Children, Youth and Families obtained and reviewed all current and past case records pertaining to the ██████████ family. Follow up interviews were conducted with the ██████████ investigator and ongoing

caseworker. The regional office also participated in the Act 33 Review meeting on July 1, 2011.

Summary of Services to Family:

Children and Youth Involvement prior to Incident:

Mother's Dependent/Delinquent History

12/8/1995 to 9/30/1996 [REDACTED] services

The mother's family received [REDACTED] services from the [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

6/1/1998 to 7/6/1998 Delinquent [REDACTED] services

[REDACTED] were provided by Lower Kensington.

The mother's siblings had histories of delinquent services, delinquent detentions, and delinquent aftercare services. The mother had no history of placement or detentions.

3/1/2002 to 4/30/2002

The mother was adjudicated delinquent for charges of aggravated assault and simple assault. This matter was discharged from Court on 4/30/2002.

Father's Dependent/Delinquent History

Between 1998 and 2002, the father was arrested three times related to assault (aggravated assault, simple assault, recklessly endangering another person, terroristic threats and harassment and/or stalking), and once for drug related charges (manufacturing, delivering, and possessing a controlled substance with intent to manufacture or deliver a controlled substance). For the assault-related charges, the matters were either withdrawn without prejudice or discharged from court. He was adjudicated delinquent on the drug-related charges.

Mother's Adult Criminal History

In December 2009, the mother was arrested for retail theft. There is an active bench warrant for her arrest.

Father's Adult Criminal History

In 2005, the father was arrested and pled guilty to several counts of burglary, theft by unlawful taking, and criminal conspiracy engaging - burglary.

In 2010, he was found guilty of careless driving and failure to carry a license.

Current History

2007 24-Hour [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

This report concerned the mother's birth family. The [REDACTED] was the maternal grandmother. The mother was not the subject of this report. This case was closed in 2007.

Circumstances of Child Fatality and Related Case Activity:

On 6/6/2011, [REDACTED] received a call concerning six month old Essence. The father had been caring for her while the mother was at work. The father stated that the child was lying next to him on the couch. When she began crying, he first gave her a pacifier, which she spit out. He then gave her a bottle by propping it on a pillow next to her. Essence began choking and spitting up. The father called the mother, who reportedly told him to press on her belly. The father contacted 911, who advised him to sweep the mouth and perform CPR. The father reportedly found a penny in the child's mouth. Child was choking for about 8 minutes. When the EMS arrived, the child was unresponsive for about 10 minutes. Essence was given [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

Upon arrival at St. Christopher's Hospital, Essence was determined to be in a coma. Child was found to have [REDACTED]. Physician certified the child to be in serious and critical condition.

Essence was transferred from St. Christopher's to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) on 6/6/2011 at the parents' request. Hospital staff believed that the parents were in denial about the seriousness of their daughter's condition and questioned how a six month old would be able to pick up a penny and place it in her mouth.

The mother reported that on 5/29/2011 she had taken Essence to Temple University Hospital because she was vomiting everything that she ate. Essence was reportedly diagnosed with [REDACTED] and given a prescription for [REDACTED]. The mother stated that after a couple of days of treatment that Essence was able to resume normal eating.

An interview was completed by DHS with the mother. The mother described Essence as acting "normal" when the mother left the house. The mother remembered placing Essence on the sectional couch, and placed pillows on the floor beneath the couch in case Essence fell off. The mother reported carrying a small change purse while she was moving Essence; the mother wondered if the change purse had been open. Essence may have had access to coins if the coins had fallen out of the change purse. As the mother was leaving with her three other children, the father was giving Essence a bottle by propping it on pillows. The father was playing games on his Xbox when the mother left.

The mother stated that Essence could not crawl, but was able to roll over. The mother stated that Essence was able to pick things up with her fingers, and disputed the doctor at St. Christopher's who stated that Essence would not be developmentally able to place objects in her mouth.

DHS interviewed the maternal aunt and maternal grandmother. Both acknowledged that they did not know the father very well. The aunt frequently observed Essence and the other children, and never had any concerns about abuse. Her brothers were not allowed to pick her up or carry her. If they wanted to help their mother care for Essence, they would get bottles or diapers.

The DHS worker went to the home of the maternal grandmother to interview the children and complete a safety assessment. The boys each reported having previously seen Essence fall off both the bed and the couch, and had seen her cry afterwards. The safety plan established for the siblings was that the maternal grandmother would be caring for them and that Essence's father would not be allowed unsupervised contact. The mother was initially hesitant to sign the plan because she did not believe that the father had caused the injuries. The maternal grandmother could not become a formal kinship caregiver because she has an [REDACTED] report against her from 1995 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] are being provided to her and the child's siblings. Maternal grandmother plans to seek legal custody of the children.

Dr. [REDACTED] from CHOP reported to the DHS worker that Essence suffered from [REDACTED] which was indicative of [REDACTED]. The doctor added that further tests could not be completed until Essence's condition became more stable.

The DHS worker interviewed the father on 6/7/2011. The father reported that he did not drop Essence or hit her head while carrying her down the stairs to get her medical assistance. He did state that he had shaken her a couple of times when he noticed her gasping for air. He stated that when he put his mouth to hers to attempt to blow in air, he observed her stomach swelling and then deflating when he stopped blowing in air. He stated that when her stomach deflated, she vomited milk through her nose and mouth. He described her lips and tongue as turning blue. The father reported that when he heard the ambulance, he attempted to take the elevator. Since the elevator was slow, he decided to walk down the stairs (eight flights). He talked about the boys- [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. He stated that the two older boys would occasionally pick up Essence but were always supervised by him or their mother when they were holding her. He left the discipline of the boys to their mother, but would occasionally send them to their rooms. He reported that Essence was never physically disciplined. He stated that when Essence had been diagnosed with [REDACTED] that she had taken the medicine for six days before she showed improvement.

The worker completed a home visit to the parents' home on 6/8/2011; the maternal grandmother was present for the visit. The maternal grandmother reported that the father had only been living in the home for about three weeks.

The worker spoke with the Special Victims Unit (SVU) police detective on 6/8/2011, who indicated there was a warrant for the father's arrest: he had

attempted to use his car to run over his ex-paramour and a friend when the ex-paramour found out about his involvement with the mother.

Essence was removed from life support on 6/10/2011 and died afterward.

On 6/15/2011, the Medical Examiner's Office reported that Essence had suffered from a [REDACTED] to her [REDACTED] between the [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]. The manner of death was determined to be homicide.

On 7/5/2011, this case was [REDACTED] against the [REDACTED] for [REDACTED]. His account was not consistent with the injuries of the victim child.

Current Case Status:

- Children continue to reside with the maternal grandmother. [REDACTED] are being provided in this home. The [REDACTED] provider is Presbyterian Children's Village. Services include: therapy for children at [REDACTED], parenting for mother at Parent Action Network, monitoring the children's school attendance, and safety assessment. The mother reports that she is not ready for [REDACTED] worker sees the children and maternal grandmother twice per week. The mother is seen biweekly.
- The mother would not disclose the father's current address to the DHS worker.
- The mother's visitation is liberal and unsupervised.
- The mother was referred to Parents Action Network for parenting classes.
- The siblings are participating in [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] with their mother.
- The mother reports to the [REDACTED] worker that the father is not currently living in the home with her, and that Essence's father never lived there, that he just stayed over occasionally.
- Father was arrested on 10/17/2011 and charged with murder and endangering the welfare of children. His court hearing is scheduled for some time in 2012.

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

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Strengths:

- DHS worker provided detailed notes.

- Safety assessments were completed according to policy.
- Good documentation of supervision.

Deficiencies:

- None identified.

Recommendations for Change at the Local Level:

- The team recommended that the Philadelphia police department develop protocols about the transfer of cases from SVU to Homicide to prevent miscommunication and delays in the investigations.

Recommendations for Change at the State Level:

- None identified.

Department Review of County Internal Report:

The Southeast Regional Office has received the county's review and is in agreement with the findings.

Department of Public Welfare Findings:

County Strengths:

- Thorough and timely investigation
- DHS has made a good case decision for the children to continue to reside in the maternal grandmother's care since the mother has not been consistent with her information about the father's whereabouts, and expressed disbelief that the father could have harmed their child.

County Weaknesses:

- None identified.

Statutory and Regulatory Areas of Non-Compliance:

None identified.

Department of Public Welfare Recommendations:

When this case transferred from SVU to the Homicide division, the communication between DHS and the Homicide division was not as open as when DHS works with the SVU. The homicide detectives were not accustomed to working with DHS and did not communicate with them. The Department recommends that DHS work with the police department and the District Attorney's Office to develop some protocols for their communication.