

**Child Fatality Review #08-24**  
**Region 6**  
**Thurston County**

This nine-year-old Caucasian male drowned following a boating accident.

**Case Overview**

On June 12, 2008, the Thurston County Sheriff's Office reported a boating accident had occurred on the Nisqually River. Two children, the deceased child, age nine and his five-year-old brother drowned. There were five occupants in the boat. The deceased child's mother and the driver of the boat made it to shore safely. The boyfriend of the deceased child's mother also drowned.

The five and nine year old boys and their mother along with her boyfriend were at the river when a man, unknown to the family, asked if they would like to go on a boat ride. The mother observed the man driving the boat had a beer in his hand and more beer in the boat. Despite this, they agreed to a ride in the boat. No one in the boat wore a personal flotation device. The driver of the boat drove the boat in reverse down the river. At some point the boat struck a log jam causing the boat to capsize. All of the passengers in the boat were thrown overboard. The body of the younger brother was found later that evening. The body of this nine-year-old was found in the river on June 30, 2008. The boat driver's blood alcohol level was .193. The coroner has ruled this death an accident; however, law enforcement charged the driver of the boat with homicide by watercraft. The driver later pled guilty to three counts of homicide by watercraft.

The fatality review was conducted as an executive child fatality review. Executive child fatality reviews are conducted whenever a child dies of apparent abuse or neglect and the family has an open case with the department or there has been services provided to the family in the previous 12 months. In this case, there was an information only referral called in on the deceased child's mother approximately six weeks prior to the children's deaths.

**Referral History**

On April 28, 2008, law enforcement reported to Child Protective Service (CPS) intake an incident between the deceased child's mother and her boyfriend. The mother disclosed to law enforcement that she threw herself from her boyfriend's car and was bleeding from her head. The mother was intoxicated and had an argument with her boyfriend. The car was reportedly moving forty-five miles an hour when the incident occurred. The mother requested medics to treat her injuries. The police officer determined the boyfriend did not assault the mother or cause the alleged incident. None of her children were present during this incident. This referral was screened as Information Only.

On June 12, 2008, CPS intake received a report from law enforcement about the death of this nine-year-old child and his brother. Law enforcement reported the family was involved in a boating accident on the Nisqually River. The person operating the boat was intoxicated. The boat capsized. This nine-year-old, his younger brother, and their mother's boyfriend all drowned. The operator of the boat was charged in their deaths. The children were not wearing life preservers. This referral was screened in for investigation by CPS of negligent treatment or maltreatment and closed with a founded finding.

### **Issues and Recommendations**

**Issue:** The social worker assigned to this case did an excellent job investigating this case. She investigated the death of two children and provided support services to the mother, father and sister of the deceased children.

**Recommendation:** During the review the worker was commended for exceptional work on this case.

### **Committee Members**

- Kris Tweet-Goheen, Social Worker, Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Region 6
- Frank Odell, Supervisor, Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Region 6
- Edith Hitchings, Regional CPS Program Manager, Children's Administration Region 6 Headquarters
- Steve Fretts, Sergeant, Hoquiam Police Department