

**Child Fatality Review #08-52**  
**Region 6**  
**Lewis County**

This 16-month-old Caucasian female died after being run over by a car.

**Case Overview**

On September 13, 2008, the parents of this child purchased a treadmill and had it delivered to their home. The driver of the delivery truck backed out of the driveway, did not see the child, and ran over her. The mother reported the family was loading the treadmill into the home when the driver backed up suddenly striking the child. The child was airlifted to Harborview from Centralia Providence Hospital. She was pronounced dead due to a blunt force injury to the head, ruled accidental by the Medical Examiner.

The Washington State Patrol, in addition to Child Protective Services (CPS), conducted an investigation in this fatality. The child was run over approximately 15 feet from the house. The driveway was considered part of the yard. It was deemed not unreasonable to allow a child to play in this area with an open door. CPS and law enforcement determined the fatality was an accidental death. The child appeared to be in a common play area and was run over. The door of the home was open and the mother was in the doorway.

The mother has a lengthy CPS history with findings of neglect. While concerning, and a risk factor, this history did not contribute to the accidental death of the child.

**Referral History**

This family has an extensive history with Children's Administration (CA). The deceased child is the third child born to this mother. In December 2003, the department filed a dependency petition on the two older children (siblings of the deceased child). The children were placed in foster care where they remained until October 2004 at which time they returned to their parents' care on an in-home dependency. The dependency was dismissed in April 2005 after the parents successfully completed the recommendations of the department and court.

There were 18 referrals to Child Protective Services (CPS) Intake prior to the older children returning to their parents' care. Three referrals called in to CPS intake in 2003 were closed with a founded finding. One resulted in the assigned social worker filing a dependency petition and the children being placed in foster care. These referrals alleged the mother was suicidal and threatened to harm herself and her children. One referral alleged sexual abuse of the older daughter by the mother's former boyfriend. CPS and law enforcement investigated and no charges were filed and the referral closed with an inconclusive finding. Another referral was closed founded for negligent treatment or maltreatment as the mother knowingly left her daughter with the man the mother accused of molesting her. There were three prior referrals from 1999 to 2002 that alleged negligent supervision of the children by the mother. Each of these referrals were closed with an unfounded finding.

On July 12, 2005, a relative called CPS intake to report the mother was neglecting her two children, then ages four and six. The mother took the children to homes where illicit drugs were used. The mother's boyfriend was an active addict/alcoholic and the mother allowed the children to spend the night with him. The mother left the youngest child alone in the car. This referral was screened in for investigation and closed with an unfounded finding for negligent treatment or maltreatment.

On April 3, 2007, a relative called CPS intake and reported the mother had a long history of mental health issues. The referrer stated the mother displayed manic behavior and was not taking care of the children. The mother was pregnant with the deceased child. It was alleged the house was cluttered. This referral was screened out for investigation.

On July 12, 2007, a therapist called CPS intake and reported the six-year-old brother of the deceased child said his mother hit and kicked him in the stomach and the back. He said he was slapped on the face on a daily basis. The child said his mother picked him up and threw him to the floor. He had no bruising. The brother said he and his sister lock themselves in the sister's bedroom to get away from their mother. The child alleged his mother kicked him in the stomach and he was taken to a doctor after this incident. He said he had a bruise on his stomach but the doctor did not ask him about it. The child said his mother lies in bed all day. This referral was screened as an Alternate Response System (ARS) referral. The child was interviewed by a CPS social worker and law enforcement. No criminal charges were filed against the mother.

On August 16, 2007, a neighbor called CPS intake to report the mother did not have her six-year-old son in a car seat or seat belt. The referrer mentioned this to the mother and she responded that her son was safe without being in a seat belt. The deceased child, then three-months-old, smelled of feces and needed a diaper change. The mother responded her eight-year-old daughter was the one who regularly cared for the baby. The older daughter was away visiting relatives at that time. The referrer said the baby received less attention to her daily needs with the sister gone. The referrer added the deceased child seemed listless and appeared to have lost weight. The referrer was told the mother and kids were homeless living in a van. The infant's doctor was contacted and had no concerns. The infant appeared healthy. This referral was screened in for investigation and closed with an unfounded finding for negligent treatment or maltreatment.

On August 31, 2007, a relative called CPS intake to report the eight-year-old sister of the deceased child had a rash on her face and her eyes were swollen. This child was taken to a hospital emergency room and was diagnosed with impetigo. The referrer reported this child had pink eye, flea bites, and visible bruises. The child said the bruises were caused by her younger brother. This referral was screened in for investigation and closed with an unfounded finding for negligent treatment or maltreatment.

On May 9, 2008, a police officer called CPS intake and requested a social worker meet him at a local elementary school to interview the seven-year-old brother of the deceased child. The brother wrote a note to his mother disclosing sexual abuse by his father. The mother knew of this information but did not report this to law enforcement. The child

lived with his father. This referral was screened in for investigation and closed with an unfounded finding for negligent treatment or maltreatment and sexual abuse.

On September 13, 2008, law enforcement called CPS intake to report the death of the deceased child. This referral was screened in for investigation and closed with an unfounded finding for negligent treatment or maltreatment.

### **Issues and Recommendations**

**Issue:** Screening of new referrals at intake.

**Recommendation:** The review team felt that the department had provided this family with appropriate resources prior to the death of this child and during the dependency of the two older siblings. The team reviewed and discussed the decision making on the referral dated July 12, 2007 which was screened in with a low risk standard. While the team agreed with the screen in decision they did not agree with the standard of investigation and felt that a high standard of investigation was warranted. It should be noted however, that the assigned worker did have face-to-face contact with the child and parents, which is beyond the policy requirements for a low standard investigation. In essence, the assigned worker completed some of the high standard requirements for an investigation on a referral that was screened for a low standard investigation.