

Cincinnati Enquirer: Child was bait in scam, police say

By Jennifer Baker

August 3, 2009

SYCAMORE TWP. – A 29-year-old woman is accused of using her 7-year-old nephew to try to scam motorists Sunday, according to the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office.

Janet Allen of Price Hill pretended her car had engine trouble three separate times in an effort to get money from passing drivers, court records show. She had her nephew stand outside her vehicle with her.

She was spotted twice at Interstate 71 and Kenwood Road in Sycamore Township. Deputies told her to leave after the second incident.

An hour later, she was caught doing the same thing in Anderson Township at I-275 and Five Mile Road, they said.

She was taken into custody and faces charges of child endangerment and possession of drug paraphernalia.

The drug charge was filed after a burnt spoon was found in her purse.

The child was turned over to his grandmother, who also is Allen's mother, said Steve Barnett, spokesman for the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office.

Cincinnati Enquirer: Dad charged in son's accidental death

By Janice Morse and Sheila McLaughlin

July 31, 2009

HAMILTON - A Butler County father has been charged with negligent homicide for leaving a gun accessible to his 5-year-old son, who accidentally shot himself to death July 18, police said today.

Butler County Prosecutor Robin Piper said his office recommended a misdemeanor charge of negligent homicide after reviewing facts surrounding the death of Zacharia Nesbitt.

"The firearm was kept in a closet, loaded, with one round in the chamber...it's just extremely dangerous to keep a loaded firearm accessible with little children around," Piper said.

"It's terrible to add to the already existing tragedy of a young child's death by the filing of a criminal offense, but there's no excuse for having a firearm loaded, with one round in the chamber, with little kids around," Piper said.

"That negligence is the proximate cause of this death. Adults need to quit leaving these dangerous weapons around where little kids can get hurt."

The child's father, David Nesbitt, faces a jail sentence of up to six months and a \$2,500 fine if convicted.

Officer Rich Burkhardt said Nesbitt, 35, is expected to turn himself in. David Nesbitt has a concealed carry permit for the gun, Burkhardt said.

The local police give out gun locks for free, Piper said, so "this just shouldn't happen."

Zachariah died at Fort Hamilton Hospital after the incident at his home on Gordon Smith Boulevard in Hamilton.

After an autopsy, Butler County Coroner Richard Burkhardt classified the death as an accident.

The child died after a 9mm Glock handgun discharged and fired a round into the lower lobe of his right lung, investigators said.

Dayton Daily News: Man who operated meth lab near baby sentenced

By Denise G. Callahan

August 3, 2009

A Warren County man convicted of operating a meth lab with his 8-month-old

baby near was sentenced today, Aug. 3, to 15 years in prison.

A jury found Joseph Wiggins, 44, of Deerfield Twp. guilty on 17 counts involving drugs, guns and child endangering charges in June. Warren County Common Pleas Judge Neal Bronson imposed the sentence.

Sheriff's deputies responded to a domestic violence complaint at the Wiggins residence on Davis Road at around 10 a.m. March 14. According to court testimony, Wiggins answered the door, holding his 8-month-old daughter in his arms.

After searching the home and a shed, police found a meth lab, heroin, marijuana, illegal prescription drugs and 21 fire arms. Wiggins did time in prison a few years ago on similar charges and is not allowed to have firearms.

Wiggins' attorney Kevin Thornton told the jury his client was set up by his former live-in girlfriend and a former friend. The girlfriend, Denise a.k.a. Dora Cook, made the domestic violence report the day before the bust. Thornton said Wiggins had been very ill for a while and was trying to kick his drug habit.

Thornton said Cook threatened Wiggins she would set him up and get his children taken from him if he got out of the drug business. He said Wiggins begged police to look for his friend, because he was the one cooking meth in the shed. But both Cook and the friend are now on the run, Thornton said.

Sandusky Register: Budget jeopardizes abuse investigations.

BY: Sarah Weber

August 3, 2009nds

SANDUSKY, Ohio - A.J. Lill broke into a grin as he squatted down to greet a 2-month-old girl.

Like most people with an affinity for children, Lill tickled her tummy and spoke warmly to the infant, who reclined contentedly in her baby swing.

But for Lill, this was more than a social visit. He is one of four child abuse and neglect investigators at Erie County Job and Family Services. He is part of a

thinning line of professionals doing everything they can to combat a growing number of child abuse cases while dealing with budget problems that jeopardize their mission.

Lill's eyes moved keenly across the sleepy baby's face, pausing over a faded bruise circling one of her big brown eyes.

The baby yawns, oblivious to the inspection, after Lill gets up to speak to her temporary guardian.

Little more than a week ago, Lill answered a middle-of-the-night phone call from nurses at Firelands Regional Medical Center. They had a baby with skull fractures and bleeding in her brain. The baby had to be flown to Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital in Cleveland for treatment.

The baby's mother told investigators the little girl rolled off a bed, but the story just doesn't add up. It would be difficult if not impossible, Lill knows, for the infant to sustain such severe injuries by rolling off a bed onto carpet.

Until investigators can determine what happened and set up a safety plan for the infant, she will stay with a relative. Lill frequently and randomly drops by her temporary home to make sure the baby is happy, healthy, and most importantly, safe.

Bigger Burdens

The 2-month-old "broken baby" is just one in a growing number of cases Lill and other investigators have seen this year.

Lill said he's witnessed an uptick in all kinds of cases, especially neglect and sexual abuse. The number of cases jumped 39 percent from 477 (involving 988 children) in 2007 to 661 cases (involving 1,316 children) in 2008, and the agency is on track to match that number this year.

Lill struggles to answer why. "It's easy to blame the economy," he said. Job loss, foreclosure, or other stresses at home sometimes cause parents to cross the line from discipline to abuse. Often, he said, the agency gets called in when parents turn to drugs or alcohol to numb their sorrows.

The same day he visited the baby with a skull fracture, he looked in on another family who's caring for a tiny 10-day-old girl who tested positive for cocaine.

He discussed with her caregivers how to look for signs of drug withdrawal in an infant who might have been addicted before she was even born.

Back at the agency office on West Parish Street, a mother who has struggled for years with alcohol abuse tried to bond with her son and daughter during an hour-long visitation. This was the third or fourth time the children found themselves bounced into a foster home. They have little knowledge of or control over the next turn their lives might take.

Staff at other area agencies deal with similar situations daily. If not an increase, directors say, the cases seem to be getting worse.

"The abuse is more severe," said Huron County Job and Family Services director, Theresa Alt. "We're seeing a lot of small children with broken bones."

The same seems to be reflected at state and national levels. While it's hard to find scientific data linking the poor economy with abuse and neglect cases, anecdotal evidence abounds.

"I think there are a couple of primary impacts that put children at great risk," said Chris Newlin, director of the National Children's Advocacy Center. "One, as families are struggling, they are undoubtedly more frustrated. Parents are dealing with all sorts of issues and they may be more liable to snap.

"And two, as families struggle they may not have the same resources. Parents may have to take on a second job, and might not be able to afford quality child care."

He said with agencies around the country swamped with cases, and states pinching every penny in thinning budgets, community churches and non-profit agencies are helping with things like meals and free child care.

"We can't sacrifice the well-being of children just because we know families are under a lot of stress," Newlin said.

Cut Centsless

Sacrificing the well-being of children is something Erie County Job and Family Services director Judy Englehart said she refuses to do, regardless of what devastation is visited upon the agency in Ohio's new budget.

She said if she has to, she'll pull the plug on preventive services -- even mandated ones -- to maintain basic needs such as food, shelter and safety.

State cuts to Job and Family Services include a 76 percent reduction in funding for child protection, which would carve a massive gap in child welfare investigations and monitoring.

State lawmakers plan to plug most of the hole with \$42 million in tobacco settlement dollars. But approval for the state's use of the funds must go through the court system, and nobody knows how long that might take.

"We really don't know how it's going to filter down at this point," said Judi Simon, administrator of children's services in Sandusky County.

She said 14 caseworkers do a good job of handling abuse and neglect cases in the county, but Simon is concerned about what might happen if the budget trickle-down forces her to reduce staff.

"Kids should come first," Simon said. "I don't understand how anybody could put roads and bridges before a human life."

She said the local agencies will do what they must to keep up -- but knows with fewer people it will be impossible to maintain the same level of service the agency now provides.

"It's every day of the week, we have babies testing positive for drugs," Lill said. "They need us now more than ever. ...If (lawmakers) eliminate 76 percent of our staff, who's going out and checking on (these children)? That's what is really scary."

Bleak financial outlooks in recent years have forced the Erie County department to reduce the number of investigators from six to four, at the same time the department's case load has increased.

Crystal Ward Allen, director of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio, said she is encouraging agencies to react to the reductions by providing more services up front.

"Our greatest cost is in placement," she said, referring to foster care and other situations in which children are placed in another person's care. "What I'm afraid is going to happen is we have a greater number of cases coming in with a higher severity and the caseworkers are overloaded and more kids will have to be placed."

She said if county agencies can spend more money initially by working with

families on providing food, shelter, supervision and safety to children, they might be able to avoid expensive placement costs in the future. In less severe cases, it also helps families avoid the trauma of being separated.

Englehart said that's an effort her staff already makes. "We're working very intensively with families to keep children in the home and keep them in the home safely," Englehart said.

Most of the child welfare agents said too many people assume severe abuse cases don't happen in their small communities, and when there is a problem, they take for granted that help is available.

"It's kind of like going out your door, getting in your car and driving down the road to the grocery store. You expect the road to be there," she said. "The services we deliver are kind of like that road."

Yet, like the highway system, child welfare safety nets have to be maintained. Like agency staff across the state, Englehart said she's holding her breath, hoping no lives are lost because dollars were.

"This is a real tough budget," she said. "I just hope somebody doesn't get hurt before we realize how important children are."

Suspect abuse?

Neighbors, friends and relatives who suspect a child may be abused or neglected are encouraged to report their concerns to their local Department of Job and Family Services. Hotlines are staffed 24 hours a day.

Akron Beacon Journal: Police remove 6 children, methamphetamine chemicals and gun found in Akron home

BY Donna J. Miller

August 3, 2009

AKRON — Ronald Copeland and Sasha Archer, both 37, face multiple drug and child endangering charges after officers found the makings of a methamphetamine laboratory in their West Waterloo Road home.

Officers went to their house after getting a tip. Copeland gave them permission to

search Friday. They confiscated chemicals, glassware, tubing and other paraphernalia used to make methamphetamines and a .45-caliber pistol.

Six children -- ages 17, 11, 7, 5, 4 and 2 -- were taken by Summit County Children's Services.

The couple is charged with manufacturing methamphetamines, assembly of chemicals and possession of methamphetamines, marijuana, criminal tools and paraphernalia. They are also charged with six counts of felony child endangering. Copeland was also charged with having the gun after a felony conviction. They are at the County Jail.