

DCYF intervention policy aired

Infant death, abuse cases: The facts behind three investigations

Kassidy Bortner

Kassidy Bortner, 21 months old, died Nov. 9, 2000, after suffering a blunt force injury to her head and abdomen, according to Patricia Greenwald, Maine's chief medical examiner.

According to statements from court documents, Kassidy had displayed signs of dizziness and disorientation the night before and the morning of her death — including not being able to concentrate, not keeping her balance, experiencing periods of unconsciousness, bobbing her head and having her eyes roll back in her head.

On the morning of her death, Kassidy was taken by her mother, Amanda Bortner, 19, to her aunt's house in Kittery, Maine.

According to court documents, Bortner made a derogatory remark about the bruised appearance of her daughter then left for work. Kassidy was then put in a bedroom around 8 a.m.

Four hours later at around 12:40, Kassidy was found to be unresponsive and was taken by ambulance to York Hospital, where she was pronounced dead.

Chad E. Evans, 30, has been charged with second degree murder and multiple assault charges for allegedly causing the toddler's death.

Evans was living at 191 Milton Road, Rochester, with Kassidy and her mother at the time.

Evans is also facing a count of probation violation for a previous March 2000 conviction of assault on his ex-wife, because he was supposed to have remained arrest free for one year. Recently, Evans was found innocent of another probation violation for possessing ammunition.

Evans is currently being held at the Strafford County House of Corrections, where he has been since August. His bail was revoked for allegedly having contact with Bortner. Both had mailing addresses in Keene at the time.

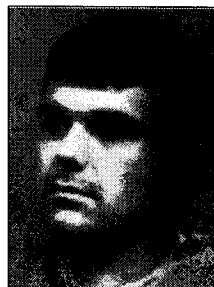
Jury selection in his trial began Nov. 27 in Strafford County Superior Court. If convicted, Evans could face life in prison.

Up until recently, Bortner had not been charged with any crime in connection with her daughter's death. But on Nov. 15, Bortner was arraigned on child endangerment charges. The charges allege she didn't take steps to protect the child between Aug. 1 and Nov. 8 last year, and again between Nov. 8 and Nov. 9, the attorney general's office said.

Last week, Bortner was granted



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immunity from self-incrimination and is expected to testify against Evans. She has posted bond on her charges and is free pending an expected March trial.

According to a court documents, Bortner told police Evans abused Kassidy during an approximate 4-6 week period by pushing her into walls, squeezing her face and head, and by choking her.

Bortner also stated in affidavits that Evans fractured Kassidy's leg and arm on two separate occasions. Once, she said, he picked her up by the head.

The affidavit also stated that Bortner told police she and Evans agreed not to seek medical attention for Kassidy's injuries and to lie about their cause if questioned.

Jeffrey D. Trudeau Jr.

Jeffrey D. Trudeau Jr., 3½ months old, died Dec. 7, 2000.

On the day of the infant's death, an ambulance was called to the Dover Housing Authority's Seymour Osman Community Center.

The boy's mother, Christine Turcotte, 24, had found her son in an unresponsive state at their apartment at 15 Hampshire Circle. He was pronounced dead at Wentworth-Douglass Hospital in Dover.

The infant had lived with his mother and his 1½-year-old sister. His father, Jeffrey Sr., 24, was living elsewhere at the time.

After a nine-month investigation, State Medical Examiner Dr. Thomas Andrew ruled the cause of death was "fatal child abuse syndrome" because the examiner found no single fatal injury — rather various injuries inflicted over time which led to the boy's death.

It is reported to be the first diagnosis of this kind in the state.

According to DCYF documents, the division had received reports of abuse at the home in the week before his death.

On Nov. 28, a doctor at Dover

Pediatrics called the agency to report that Jeffrey Jr. had a lesion on his neck that looked like an old cigarette burn. The doctor also noted abrasions on the back of the boy's neck, right hand, right forearm and left thigh.

He had been rushed to the hospital the day before (the 27th) with a high fever and vomiting what looked like blood. The doctor discovered the burn scar and scratches on a follow-up visit.

The Nov. 28 report was labeled by DCYF as "high risk."

According to the report, the family had been reported to DCYF a month earlier, after the state received a complaint that an adult in the home had allegedly given the sister an inappropriate amount of medication.

Around the time of the DCYF investigation, Turcotte applied for a restraining order against the father and a temporary order was given on the 29th with the official order being granted on Dec. 4 — three days before the toddler's death.

On Dec. 7, the day of Jeffrey Jr.'s death, DCYF filed a court petition to remove the 1½-year-old sister from Turcotte's custody. She was taken into foster care, according to a relative.

To date, no arrests have been made, according to Dover Police Chief William Fenniman.

Child abuse suspect

In another severe child abuse case, a Somersworth man was arraigned in October on nine counts of first-degree assault on an infant.

Ley Choeupp, 36, whose last known address was 10 Bartlett Ave., pled innocent.

He stands accused of assaulting a girl who is now 2. The assaults are alleged to have been inflicted starting on the day of her birth, which was Oct. 1, 1999, through Feb. 16, 2000.

An indictment is not an indication of guilt; rather it means a grand jury has found sufficient evidence to warrant a trial.

Each of the nine charges is a Class A felony punishable by 7½ to 15 years in prison.

Court records allege that Choeupp shook or threw the baby, causing her to suffer a brain hemorrhage and eye injuries. The child also suffered fractured forearms, ribs and upper and lower leg fractures.

According to Somersworth Police, it was last known the toddler was in the custody of a relative.

Reporting Child Abuse

In New Hampshire: A suspected child abuse incident can be reported to the Division of Children, Youth and Families, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The number is (800) 894-5533. On weekends, holidays or after business hours the local police can be called.

In Maine: A person can call a 24-hour hot-line: (800) 3492 or (800) 963-9

Child abuse: DCYF interven

Continued from Page 2A

caller's report," Rollins said. "If the medical community is in doubt over injuries — for example, if they feel an injury could've been caused accidentally and if there seems to be a reasonable explanation from the family, such as the child having fallen down the stairs — that makes our job tougher."

Rollins emphasized the importance of information from others connected to the family.

"We look at the big picture. Have we been able to determine if there is a history of domestic violence in the family? Substance abuse?" Rollins said. "A key factor in any case is that we have credible, quality reporting from medical, school and law enforcement personnel."

Rollins was asked if a toddler with injuries similar to Bortner's would have been removed from the home. At the time of death, the toddler had bruises and visible injuries on her head and body and there was evidence of previously fractured bones.

"If there is no reasonable explanation that either a doctor or DCYF feels is plausible, then we, along with law enforcement would consider removing that child from the home," Rollins said.

Rollins added that if the worker saw a child in a seriously bruised condition, first they would try and get a parent to take the child to the doctor themselves before getting a court order so the child could be seen by a doctor.

"If a parent is refusing to take their child to the doctors, we would want to know why — is it for religious reasons? Does the parent have no medical insurance? Or is the parent just flat-out refusing?" Rollins said.

If all else fails, Rollins said a worker would file a court order to have a child seen by a doctor.

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DCYF has definitions for what it considers child abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect.

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On the morning of her death, Kassidy was taken by her mother, Amanda Bortner, 19, to her aunt's house in Kittery, Maine.

According to court documents, Bortner made a derogatory remark about the bruised appearance of her daughter then left for work. Kassidy was then put in a bedroom around 8 a.m.

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Evans is also facing a count of probation violation for a previous March 2000 conviction of assault on his ex-wife, because he was supposed to have remained arrest free for one year. Recently, Evans was found innocent of another probation violation for possessing ammunition.

Evans is currently being held at the Strafford County House of Corrections, where he has been since August. His bail was revoked for allegedly having contact with Bortner. Both had mailing addresses in Keene at the time.

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immunity expected has posted free pending. According to Bortner's attorney, Kassidy died a week prior to her death, squeezing her head and choking her.

Bortner's attorney, Chad Evans, said, he was not a doctor. The affidavit told police to seek medical attention for injuries and questioned

Jeffrey

Jeffrey, 30, died Nov. 9, 2000.

On the day of the ambulance ride to York Hospital, Housing and Community Development

The body of Jeffrey was found at 15 Harborside, pronounced dead at York Hospital.

The infant and his mother, Jeffrey's mother, were found at the time.

After a State Medical Examiner, Andrew R. "fatal child" the examination injury — died over the death.

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"If a parent is refusing to take their child to the doctors, we would want to know why — is it for religious reasons? Does the parent have no medical insurance? Or is the parent just flat-out refusing?" Rollins said.

If all else fails, Rollins said a worker would file a court order to have a child seen by a doctor.

In Trudeau's case, a doctor reported signs of abuse several days before his death, according to DCYF documents. Also, the family had been investigated a month earlier because of a report that Jeffrey's 1½-year-old sister was given an improper dose of medication.

Rollins said a child can be removed from a dangerous situation through an ex-parte order that can be obtained anytime regardless if it is after court hours, on a weekend or a holiday.

However, in obtaining such an order, Rollins said DCYF has to have sufficient evidence of abuse for the court to grant custody of the child to the state, evidence which can sometimes be hard to obtain.

Rollins also said that there are sometimes obstacles to making initial contact with a family.

The most common problem assessment workers run into is the family not being home when the worker shows up, Rollins said. If the family is not home,

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Rollins said another thing that compromises DCYF's ability to assess cases is insufficient staffing.

The department has been trying to get accreditation from the National Council on the accreditation for Children and Family Services. One of the standards is an appropriate caseworker-to-case ratio.

The standard is one assessment worker for every 15 cases; and one caseworker for every 25 cases that have been through the court process and need follow-up services.

The state has about 140 case workers, but while the number of cases is climbing, the department does not have the funding to hire more workers. "We have seen a steady increase in assessment cases in every office," Rollins noted.

DCYF caseloads presently average 25 to 30 cases per

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Jeffrey D. Trudeau

Jeffrey D. Trudeau Jr., 30, died Dec. 7, 2000.

On the day of the infant's death, an ambulance was called to the Housing Authority's Seymour Community Center.

The boy's mother, Chris Turcotte, 24, had found her son unresponsive state at their home at 15 Hampshire Circle. He was pronounced dead at Wentworth Hospital in Dover.

The infant had lived with his mother and his 1½-year-old sister, Jeffrey Sr., 24, was living with his mother at the time.

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assessment worker, and 30 to 40 cases per family services worker.

Rollins noted that because of the department's limitations, some cases — usually ones that

the department feels are based on unfounded allegations — are never fully completed. For instance, they may have field work done within the specified 60 days but the paperwork is not completed.

When deciding whether to remove a child from the home, Rollins said there are two main considerations — the first being

to determine what the present threat is to a child's safety and the second being to determine what is the potential future threat.

"We're always trying to find that fine line between good parenting, normal discipline and child abuse and we only have one point in time to make our determination," Rollins said.

Child abuse: DCYF intervention

Continued from Page 2A

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