

CHILD WELFARE IN PHILADELPHIA

LATEST STORY

Report on DHS hits return rate

Children discharged from foster care are "highly likely" to reenter. But there is success for those placed with relatives.

Posted 09/11/2008

A new, wide-ranging report that delivers both discouraging and hopeful news on child welfare in the city found that children discharged from Philadelphia's foster-care system reenter it at "extremely high rates."

DANIEAL KELLY, A CHILD LEFT TO DIE

THE STORIES



Danieal Kelly, a 14-year-old with cerebral palsy, wasted away in a Mantua apartment in 2006. Two years later, a grand jury found that

nine people, including her parents and social workers, were responsible for her death.

TIMELINE



Follow the events that lead to the indictments of nine people in Danieal Kelly's death.

GRAND JURY REPORT



Read the grand jury report, which includes graphic images.

First Independent Review



The Department of Human Services has made significant headway in rethinking how it protects children in Philadelphia but has far to go before its reforms find their way to the streets, a panel of experts reported Thursday in the first outside review of the agency since a shake-up in 2006.

Recommended changes

Report shows how DHS failed

The remedy: A new dedication to children and oversight. Children have died needlessly because of "significant system failures" that plague the city Department of Human Services, a panel of experts said in a wrenching report made public today.



Suggested Reforms

To fix the systemic problems, the panel recommended a series of reforms, ranging from a rethinking of its core mission to the development of a new DHS document. Among other steps, it said the agency must:

INQUIRER INVESTIGATION

Inquirer Investigation: 'Bury Your Mistakes'

Three years after a string of blunders by DHS was widely blamed for failing to prevent the torture-murder of toddler Porchia Bennett, an Inquirer investigation has found that young children are still regularly abused to death after coming to the attention of DHS.



CHILD WELFARE FROM THE INSIDE

On the DHS front lines

Caseworkers cope with poverty, abuse - and the fallout from children's deaths.

Paula Soloman parallel-parked her hulking city-issued van into a tight space in front of the weathered white house. Finally, she thought, she was going to meet the elusive Nakesha Bridges.

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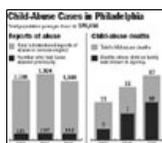
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- Concert: Ben Folds
- Concert: Jonas Brothers
- Concert: Rascal Flatts
- Concert: Smash Mouth

How You Can Help

If you have suspicions that a child is being abused or neglected, there are several hotlines to call to report the information.

Child-abuse cases in Phila.



This graphic shows statistics on reports of child abuse, child-abuse deaths, cases of neglect and youths placed in out-of-home care.

RECENT STORIES

- **Apologies sought in Danieal Kelly civil suit** - 08/19/2008
Lawyers for Danieal Kelly's estate yesterday called for apologies from Mayor Nutter and District Attorney Lynne M. Abraham for criticisms about the civil-rights lawsuit they filed.
- **Lawyer for Danieal Kelly estate hires lawyer** - 08/15/2008
After four days of public vilification in which his professional ethics have been challenged, a lawyer for Danieal Kelly's estate has hired his own attorney to try to "set the record straight."
- **Social worker in Danieal Kelly case faces deportation** - 08/14/2008
A privately employed social worker charged with eight others in the starvation death of 14-year-old Danieal Kelly was in federal custody yesterday facing deportation, accused of lying on his application for U.S. citizenship.
- **First steps to fixing the DHS** - 08/08/2008
To change how the agency serves children, begin with a foundation.
Debra Schilling Wolfe and Richard J. Gelles work at the University of Pennsylvania. The release last week of the grand jury's report on the tragic death of 14-year-old Danieal Kelly could be subtitled, "How not to protect a child."
- **A Timeline of Neglect** - 08/01/2008
- **Girl wasted away under DHS care** - 07/31/2008
City review of teen's neglect was key to ouster of leadership.
Fourteen-year-old Danieal Kelly, bedridden and nearly paralyzed with cerebral palsy, wasted away in her stifling Mantua apartment, gaping bedsores exposing her bones. When she died, she weighed just 46 pounds.
- **From Pennsylvania to Oklahoma - and the end of the line at age 15** - 01/27/2008
Jerry Trivett was a tough kid to take care of. The boy had a disease that caused tumors to grow around his spinal cord and brain. The tumors had spread into his lungs, turning the pink elastic tissue into a hard, fibrous mass. The disease also affected his mind, making Jerry hyperactive and unable to control his anger.
- **Struggling with kids' safety out of state** - 01/27/2008
Philadelphia's child-welfare agency still has a ways to go.
Last spring, Philadelphia sent a veteran inspector to check out a Connecticut facility that cared for some of the city's most severely mentally handicapped children. The inspector, Haiying Xi, wrote a report with a candid disclosure: The Department of Human Services, he said, had given him no clear standards to assess whether kids were safe in out-of-state centers. Still, he gave Lake Grove at Durham a passing grade. On the very same day, May 9, Connecticut announced it would begin pulling its own children out.
- **City stays course at Tenn. child center** - 10/11/2007
Though a teen's death there was ruled a homicide, DHS said the rest of its youths couldn't be removed any faster.
City officials said yesterday that they would not immediately remove children from a Tennessee juvenile facility despite a ruling this week that the death of a Philadelphia teen in June was a homicide.
- **Homicide ruled at youth center** - 10/10/2007
A 17-year-old boy sent by DHS to a Tennessee facility died after a fight and "restraint" by staffers.
Omega Leach, the Philadelphia teen killed in June after the city sent him to a Tennessee treatment center, died of strangulation after a fight with a staff member there, according to the Tennessee medical examiner.
- **Youth center license is downgraded** - 08/22/2007
Abuse cases and other failings have led state officials to downgrade the Youth Study Center's operating license until improvements are made.
- **Center's abuses didn't deter DHS** - 08/05/2007
Despite a drumbeat of warnings that children were being violently subdued and injured, the city continued to send emotionally troubled youth to a Tennessee facility.
- **Pa. gives DHS only provisional license** - 07/11/2007
The troubled agency is officially out of compliance with state regulations. The department will now be inspected twice a year.
The state yesterday downgraded the city child-welfare agency's license, citing problems with its investigations of abuse reports, risk assessments, and documentation of its own actions.
- **Another life lost on DHS's watch** - 06/24/2007
The agency sent Omega Leach, a troubled 17-year-old, to a Tenn. youth facility in May. A month later, he was dead.
The City of Philadelphia decided a trip south was best for Omega Leach, an angry teenager who got in trouble for stealing a car.
- **Ex-DHS staffer now at N.J. child agency** - 06/28/2007
TRENTON - John McGee, who was fired from his high-ranking post at the Philadelphia Department of Human Services amid the uproar over the deaths of children under its watch, has landed a job at the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.
- **Report shows how DHS failed** - 06/01/2007
The remedy: A new dedication to children and oversight.
Children have died needlessly because of "significant system failures" that plague the city Department of Human Services, a panel of experts said in a wrenching report made public today.
- **Suggested Reforms** - 06/01/2007
To fix the systemic problems, the panel recommended a series of reforms, ranging from a rethinking of its core mission to the development of a new DHS document. Among other steps, it said the agency must:

- **Serious questions about DHS care** - 05/30/2007
SPECIAL REPORT: Private contractors that provide services to children get little oversight by the agency, a review finds.
 For decades, Philadelphia's Department of Human Services paid private contractors tens of millions of dollars to check on vulnerable children but did little to make sure those checks were actually happening.
- **Statement of Arthur C. Evans Jr.** - 05/30/2007
 DHS has significantly improved its provider oversight and monitoring over the past several months and continues to take steps to further enhance oversight. DHS has implemented a monitoring program which provides oversight for contracted services on a regular basis; this is an improvement over the current system, which evaluates only on an annual basis. The more frequent monitoring will allow the department to identify problems sooner and undertake any needed corrective actions more quickly. This new monitoring process will be fully implemented within the next few weeks as additional staff is hired.
- **Asociaci3n De Puertorrique2os En Marcha** - 05/30/2007
- **Friendship House** - 05/30/2007
- **Germantown Settlement** - 05/30/2007
- **Women's Christian Alliance** - 05/30/2007
- **Youth Service Inc.** - 05/30/2007
 1526 Fairmount Ave. Responsible for providing services to 118 children. DHS contracts in 2006: \$8.2 million. The company provides services to children in their homes and runs a temporary shelter for 20 teens awaiting permanent placement. Children typically spend a few weeks there.
- **DHS pace of change is slammed** - 05/08/2007
A report called for reform by June. A "sense of urgency" is needed, Pa.'s welfare chief says.
 Three months after a state report faulted the city's Department of Human Services for failing to meet federal standards for protecting children, Pennsylvania's secretary of public welfare said the agency had not moved fast enough to reform.
- **At DHS, all eyes are on change** - 05/04/2007
New nurses. Quick response to the youngest clients. Phila. child-welfare officials say they are shaping up.
 Arthur C. Evans offers the following story as evidence of how far the city agency responsible for abused and neglected children has come in just a few months.
- **Review faults inaction by DHS** - 05/01/2007
Of 36 recommendations after child deaths, no progress was made on 17. Others were only discussed, the agency said.
 When a child dies under the care of the city's Department of Human Services, a team of experts within the agency investigates, pinpointing failings in the system and suggesting improvements.
- **Private agencies, public role** - 05/01/2007
 Bernadette M. Bianchi is executive director of the Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services No one should ever make excuses for the deaths of children in the child-welfare system. Whether it is due to bad public policy or inadequate interventions, the death of even one child calls for accountability and concrete remedies.
- **Even a DHS overhaul failed to save this life** - 03/04/2007
An addicted mother. A new policy. A baby still lost.
 Two weeks after her granddaughter was born, Vanessa Hargrove called Philadelphia child-welfare officials and warned them: The baby's mother was high during labor.
- **DHS dilemma: Doing right by a child** - 01/21/2007
A foster couple battles a mandate to keep families together.
 Pat White first met Ronnie when he was 6, a child so neglected that the instinct to feed him, wash his clothes, and give him a hug was overwhelming.
- **DHS mustn't blink** - 01/03/2007
Experience shows that fixing the complicated child-welfare system requires constant attention to details. A new panel has all it needs.
 By Paul DiLorenzo Twenty years ago, I was a member of a team appointed by then-Secretary of Public Welfare John F. White to review the deaths of 21 children known to the Philadelphia child-welfare system.
- **A tragedy that money can't fix** - 12/22/2006
Special report: A young girl placed in the hands of danger gets one of the city government's biggest civil-rights awards in memory. Her mother awaits an apology.
 It was a victory, but to Vanessa, not a satisfying one. Sitting in a windowless federal courtroom at Sixth and Market Streets, the 41-year-old librarian quietly absorbed the news. The City of Philadelphia had agreed to pay her adopted daughter \$1 million for the harm she'd suffered while under the supervision of the Department of Human Services.
- **DHS is studying its failures, says acting chief** - 12/14/2006
 Arthur C. Evans Jr., the man charged with revamping the city's troubled Department of Human Services, assured City Council members yesterday that he was moving swiftly to fix the agency's problems.
- **A daunting fight in DHS trenches** - 12/03/2006
Caseworkers cope with poverty, abuse and the fallout from children's deaths.
- **Public reporting of abuse debated** - 10/18/2006
Pa. is struggling to meet federal standards for disclosure of child-abuse deaths and injury.
 Gov. Rendell and Pennsylvania lawmakers were moving yesterday toward legislation that would for the first time require the state to tell the public details about each child-abuse death - but only the bare minimum needed to comply with a federal law.
- **Father charged with killing baby son** - 10/17/2006
 The father of a year-old North Philadelphia boy has been charged with beating the child to death. Authorities said yesterday there was evidence that the boy might have been abused in the past.
- **Hearings urged on DHS conduct** - 10/17/2006
Lawmakers said secrecy is the wrong policy. Ten children died after contact with the agency last year.
 State and local elected officials called yesterday for hearings into the conduct of Philadelphia's Department of Human Services (DHS), the \$600 million agency that investigates child abuse.

DHS 'death reviews' are kept confidential - 10/15/2006

Critics say agency avoids accountability to public.

When a child on the Department of Human Services' watch is killed by a caregiver, city and state officials comb through case files and interview social workers to find out what went wrong.

▪ **Details of Porchia case's failures emerge** - 10/15/2006

DHS officials knew more about what had gone wrong, but did not reveal it publicly - because they weren't asked, they said.

In the months after the torture-murder of 3-year-old Porchia Bennett, top officials at the Department of Human Services spoke of the 2003 case as a shattering event that would change the culture at the agency.

▪ **Inquirer Investigation: 'Bury Your Mistakes'** - 10/15/2006

In September, five months shy of her second birthday, Alayah Turman was pummeled to death after she interrupted a video game. Marrieon Currie, 11 weeks old in January, took his final breaths as he was being doused in hot water, thrown down stairs, and beaten with a mop handle. Bryanna Redmond, a skinny 2-year-old known as "Princess," died last year from a punch that split her spine. Before they were killed - each by a parent, police say - all three children had come under the scrutiny of the city's child-protection agency, the Department of Human Services, which has the power to remove children from abusive homes.

▪ **AGENCY FAULTED IN GIRL'S DEATH** - 07/31/2008

A REPORT SAYS THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES FAILED CHARNAE WISE, WHO DIED IN 1997.

▪ **When a mother's care turns deadly** - 07/31/2008

Special Report: How Charlene Wise, who killed her child, lives with herself.

As soon as he entered the house at 3017 W. Harper St., Sgt. William Kelly was certain he would not find a body. There was no smell of decomposing flesh.

▪ **How a child died in her mother's basement** - 07/31/2008

Charlene Wise was sitting at a kitchen table in Norristown when her water broke. It was just after midnight and her sixth child was about to be born.

▪ **Pa. aide demoted in fallout at DHS** - 07/31/2008

Amid an inquiry into child deaths in Phila., the aide, in the job

The state official in charge of regulating Philadelphia's child-welfare system has been removed from his post amid questions about why the city agency received passing grades while child-abuse deaths were increasing.

▪ **Mounting Failures Left Girl to Die** - 07/31/2008

Danieal Kelly's family shunned stability. It says social workers dodged visits. And DHS missed chances.

Almost from the day she was born - three months premature, suffering from cerebral palsy, weighing just 1 pound, 4 ounces - the adults in her life kept letting Danieal Kelly down.

▪ **Firm with ties to DHS investigated** - 07/31/2008

Authorities want to know if a social-service agency fraudulently got millions in federal cash.

A federal grand jury is investigating whether a social-services contractor defrauded taxpayers when it charged millions of dollars to monitor hundreds of vulnerable children - including a 14-year-old girl who died of neglect during an August heat wave.

▪ **Teen under DHS care: A fugitive** - 07/31/2008

A caseworker told the agency she saw the youth regularly. Police said he was on the run part of that time, sought in two slayings.

Throughout the summer, a city-paid caseworker visited the home of a troubled 17-year-old named Braheem Burke to make sure he was OK. The worker's employer, MultiEthnic Behavioral Health, assured the city Department of Human Services that nothing unusual had happened to him. But police tell a different story: During part of the time MultiEthnic claimed to be checking on the teen, Burke was a fugitive, wanted in a double slaying.

▪ **DHS moves swiftly on review** - 07/31/2008

The new leader said a probe in-house would review dozens of contractors being paid to monitor children.

In what he calls an effort to "begin to reestablish the credibility of this agency," Philadelphia's new child welfare commissioner has launched a plan to step up the monitoring of millions of dollars in contracts and revisit each child under the city's care.

▪ **City won't release DHS data** - 07/31/2008

The city solicitor denied an Inquirer request for internal reviews of child-abuse deaths.

Despite a recent promise of openness by Philadelphia's new child-welfare commissioner, the Street administration is refusing to make public the city's internal reviews of child-abuse deaths.

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