



## TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES

COMMISSIONER  
John J. Specia, Jr.

### **A Review of Department of Family and Protective Services Involvement Child Fatality**

On March 1, 2015, during an open Child Protective Services (CPS) case, Codrick McCall died of a single gunshot wound. CPS was involved with the family due to concerns of abuse and neglect received on August 29, 2014. The allegations were investigated and the case was transferred on October 27, 2014 to the CPS' Family Based Safety Services program where it remains open to provide ongoing services to the family.

The Office of Child Safety (OCS) completed a review of the current CPS investigation concerning Codrick's family. This report presents the Office of Child Safety's findings, summary of CPS investigations and actions taken, assessment of strengths in casework practice, and areas for improvement.

#### **Family Composition**

Region 6 - Harris County

<b>Name or Relationship to Codrick</b>	<b>Age at time of incident</b>
Codrick McCall	4 years old
Mother	26 Years old
Father	29 years old
Half-sibling	10 years old
Voluntary Caregiver	28 years old

#### **Summary of CPS History on Codrick / Family of Codrick McCall**

- On August 29, 2014, CPS received a report alleging physical abuse of Codrick's 10 year-old half sibling by Codrick's mother and father. The allegations for physical abuse were found reason to believe and the investigation was closed on October 27, 2014 with the case then transferred to Family Based Safety Services.
- On March 1, 2015, CPS received a report alleging neglectful supervision and physical abuse by a caretaker involving the death of Codrick. A subsequent report was received on the same date involving the two surviving children visiting the caretaker's home at the time of the fatality. Both reports were received during the open Family Based Safety Services case and the investigations remain open.

## **Detailed Account of CPS History on Family of Codrick McCall**

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On **August 29, 2014**, CPS received a report alleging physical abuse of Codrick's 10 year-old sibling by Codrick's mother and father. (The sibling is the biological child of the father and the stepchild of Codrick's mother.) The allegations stated that the sibling got in trouble at school for lying, and when the sibling apologized to Codrick's mother, she proceeded to punch the sibling in the stomach and head. The child reportedly had carpet burns on her elbows, back, and leg from being dragged on the carpet and a knot on the head from being punched.

During the investigation, the sibling made outcries regarding physical abuse in the home, active domestic violence, and allegations of substance abuse. It was reported that Codrick's mother dragged the child by her hair across the carpet, kicked her in the stomach, threw her against the wall, and banged her head against the wall. The child also had a hairline fracture that burst her sinus which required medical attention. Codrick's mother was arrested and charged with injury to a child. The child was placed in a parental child safety placement with her paternal grandmother and the father agreed to move out of his mother's home where he resided. Codrick stayed with a cousin while the mother was in jail. Once released from jail approximately a week later, Codrick returned to the care of his mother. The mother then reported that Codrick was in the care of his maternal grandmother for a couple weeks. Codrick's mother initially agreed to a parental child safety placement for Codrick with a friend and to participate with services through Family-Based Safety Services; however, she later declined both. On October 21, 2014, the caseworker was given guidance by the County Attorney's office to seek DFPS custody of the children due to the mother not being willing to engage in services. The following day, the County Attorney's office instead requested attempts to engage mother in services again and would only consider filing for DFPS custody if she refused services again. A formal parental child safety placement with a family friend was secured on October 22, 2014 after CPS staff informed Codrick's mother that removing the child into foster care was discussed with the County Attorney's office. The allegation of physical abuse of Codrick's sibling by Codrick's mother was determined reason to believe. The allegation of physical abuse of the sibling by the father was found unable to determine as he had admitted to previous physical discipline just days prior to the injuries sustained from the physical abuse caused by Codrick's mother and it could not be ruled out if any of the injuries were from this event. The case was transferred to Family Based Safety Services.

### **OCS Assessment:**

- Codrick's sibling had a forensic interview and was examined at the hospital.
- The caseworker regularly staffed the details of the case with the supervisor.
- At the time Codrick's mother was arrested (August 29, 2014), legal intervention for both children was not considered despite the seriousness of the injuries to Codrick's sibling.
- There is no documentation that medical staff were contacted to obtain information after Codrick's sibling was examined.
- Staff reported that Codrick's mother allowed her friend to take Codrick home with her when Codrick's mother was arrested. While Codrick was visibly seen on August 29, 2014, he was not interviewed and no assessment was made of the caregiver's home to ensure his safety. Codrick was then in the care of his maternal grandmother and no information is documented that an assessment was completed on this caregiver. Documentation of a visit with Codrick starts on October 22, 2014.
- Caseworker documents the supervisor "approved placement" for Codrick with the friend on August 29, 2014; however, a formal PCSP was not completed until October 22, 2014.

The friend's home was also not observed prior to placement on August 29, 2014 as required.

- Caseworker contacted Codrick's mother on September 5, 2014 at which time she stated Codrick was with her mother out of town and would be gone for another week. There is no documented discussion as to how Codrick went from the friend's home to being in the care of his maternal grandmother or when this change in placement occurred.
- Caseworker did not obtain contact information for the maternal grandmother in order to confirm Codrick was with her or request an courtesy interview to ensure Codrick's safety.
- The case was staffed with the County Attorney's office on September 9, 2014, and was not approved for removal as Codrick was deemed by the attorney to be safe with his maternal grandmother. Codrick's safety was based solely on what Codrick's mother reported since the caseworker had not made contact with the child or caregiver at the time.
- Although it was determined on October 6, 2014, that Codrick was in fact in the care of his mother CPS staff did not seek legal intervention until October 19, 2014.
- Once the parental child safety placement was formalized on October 22, 2014, the caseworker documented that the friend's home (placement) was visited and photos were taken. However, there is no documentation of the assessment of the friend's ability to meet the needs of the child, ensure safety, or who else might reside in the home.

On **October 27, 2014**, the case was transferred to Family Based Safety Services, where staff were working with the family until the child fatality report involving Codrick was received. Codrick's father and mother completed counseling and psychosocial assessments, the father completed parenting classes, and the mother was in the process of completing parenting classes. Codrick's mother submitted to a drug test which was negative. Codrick's sibling was participating in individual counseling and seeing a psychiatrist weekly.

#### **OCS Assessment:**

- Services to address child safety were being provided to the family.
- The initial family plan of service was documented in IMPACT (CPS database) in November 2014; however, there is no indication that the caseworker met with the family to include them on the development of the plan as required. When the subsequent caseworker was assigned, Codrick's mother stated she had never seen the plan of service.
- CPS did not have contact with the family during the month of January 2015 as the case was transferred to another unit due to caseworker vacancy.
- Documentation in IMPACT by the initial Family Based Safety Services caseworker and the subsequent caseworker does not include any information that other adults resided in the home of the parental child safety placement caregiver (which was later learned during the child fatality investigation.)
- The caseworker requested assessment and progress notes be sent to her, but did not speak with the parent's counselor/therapist to inquire about treatment issues, progress made, or concerns. Additionally there are no documented contacts with Codrick's sibling's therapist and psychiatrist, or the parenting instructor.

Prior to case closure, on March 1, 2015, Codrick died of a single gunshot wound to the head while residing with the parental child safety placement caregiver. The manner of death is pending and the investigation is ongoing.

## **Overall Case Review Findings and Recommendations**

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Child Protective Services (CPS) was in the process of providing ongoing services to Codrick's family due to concerns of physical abuse of Codrick's older half-sibling. During the investigation, a parental child safety placement was implemented to ensure the safety of Codrick's sister. Codrick's mother arranged for Codrick to stay with a family friend when she was arrested. Codrick's sibling was examined by medical professionals, a forensic interview was conducted and services were offered to mitigate identified risk in the family. However, staff did not seek legal intervention at the onset of the investigation although the mother had been arrested for the physical abuse to the child. Although staff documented that placement for Codrick was approved on August 29, 2014, a formal parental child safety placement was not completed until October 22, 2014. Although staff completed required caregiver and home assessments for parental child safety placement, these assessments were not completed prior to Codrick being placed in a parental child safety placement.

During the review of a child fatality, certain areas of improvement may be identified including individual training needs, statewide trainings, policy revisions, updates to best practice guidance, and/or revisions to state statutes.

CPS completed safety checks for children age five and under in Parental Child Safety Placements (PCSP) statewide to ensure safety of the children in the voluntary caregiver's home. The Office of Child Safety and CPS produced a child safety handout for all PCSPs that provides safety information on a variety of topics including safe sleep, water safety, firearm safety, and help when selecting a caregiver.

Additionally, OCS recommends the following areas for further analysis by CPS:

- Training needs: Overview of parental child safety placements to include when a removal into DFPS conservatorship is more appropriate than a parental child safety placement. Additionally, guidance should be given to staff on completing thorough assessments of the caregiver(s) and the home environment.
- Training needs: Review purpose and importance of professional collateral contacts and service providers in assessing ongoing child safety.