

Child Fatality Summary

Child's Name: Begidu Morris

County: Lee

Date of Birth: 10/14/2011

Date of Death: 3/23/2022

Report Number: 2022-084517

Family Composition Chart

Name	Age at Time of the Incident	Relationship with Deceased Child
Begidu Morris	10 years	Decedent
[REDACTED]	14 years	Surviving Sibling
Consuela Morris	42 years	Mother
Jack Morris	42 years	Father

Circumstances Surrounding Death

An initial report was received on March 19, 2022, following the hospitalization of this 10-year-old child two days prior, after he was reportedly discovered unresponsive in his home. An additional report was received on March 25, 2022, indicating that the child had been declared deceased. The household included the child, his teenage sibling, and the parents; however, the father was at work at the time of the initial incident.

Information obtained during the investigation reflects that the child was adopted from Ethiopia by this family, along with a biological sister, when he was approximately 2-years-old. Of note, his biological sibling was re-adopted/adopted by another family in early 2019. That child resides in another state and has no contact with the decedent's family.

Law enforcement and paramedics responded to a 911 call on the evening of March 17, 2022, concerning a 10-year-old male who was reportedly discovered in distress on the family's bathroom floor. The mother initially advised that the child went to shower, and she rushed into the bathroom after hearing a thud and discovered him unresponsive on the ground. In a second account, she advised that she witnessed the child experience seizure-like activity (clench his fist and growl), then he fell to the floor and gasped for air. Upon arrival at the home, paramedics rendered aid to the child and transported him to Golisano Children's Hospital, where he was diagnosed with a subdural hematoma, hypothermia, cardiac arrest, acute respiratory failure, retinal hemorrhages, and metabolic acidosis, all of which presented concerns for non-accidental trauma. The child was placed on life support due to the extent of his condition and he subsequently passed away on March 23, 2022. The family obtained legal counsel and was minimally cooperative with both the criminal and the Child Protective investigation.

The Child Protection Team (CPT) was consulted, and they examined the child during his hospitalization (prior to his passing), as well as completed a medical records review. In addition to the above-mentioned injuries and concerns, CPT noted bruising to the child's

head and significant scarring to his buttocks consistent with a burn injury with a patterned object (resembling a chain link fence). CPT also noted that the child had not seen a medical provider in three years, and he only weighed 44 pounds, indicating that he had lost weight since his last pediatric visit years prior. At the time of his death, his weight was in the 0.1 percentile for his age and CPT noted that medical records indicated that he had the ability to gain weight in a healthy way. CPT's impressions indicate severe physical abuse resulting in death and medical neglect (severe malnutrition).

The family resides in a single-family home which was described as "pristine". There are three bedrooms, which include the parents' master bedroom, the teenage sibling's bedroom, and a third bedroom which is shared by the child's adult siblings when they visit from college. The youngest child did not have a designated bedroom; instead, he occupied a small closet near the laundry room, and he slept on a rollaway bed which contained a pile of urine-soaked clothing. Documentation reflects that the closet had a camera facing the entry and the door to the closet was locked from the outside, "for his safety". Additionally, the closet had no ventilation and there were no personal effects, toys, or anything else indicating that a child occupied that space.

Dr. C. Appleford with the District 21 (Lee, Hendry, and Glades County) Medical Examiner's Office conducted the autopsy on the child. The cause of death is listed as complications of hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy due to craniocerebral trauma and the manner of death was deemed a homicide.

The Lee County Sheriff's Office conducted the criminal investigation concerning the child's death. The facts of the case were reviewed with the State Attorney's Office and ultimately, no action was taken as the perpetrator of the abuse could not be determined at that time.

Documentation in the Child Protective Investigation noted that "There were two individuals (the mother and the teenage sibling) in the home capable of causing the head trauma to the child; the individual responsible for the abuse could not be determined. Although it was not able to be determined with certainty who inflicted the injury/injuries that led to this child's death, it can be concluded that the parents either participated in the abuse that led to the child's injuries and subsequent death, or they participated in concealing the horrific abuse and neglect that he suffered."

Based on the interviews and evidence gathered during the course of the investigation, Child Protective Investigations in Lee County closed their investigation with the following findings:

Child	Identified Maltreatment	Findings	Caregiver Responsible
Begidu Morris	Death	Verified	Mother/Father
	Bizarre Punishment	Verified	Mother/Father
	Internal Injuries	Verified	Mother/Father
	Physical Injury	Verified	Mother/Father
	Medical Neglect	Verified	Mother/Father
	Failure to Thrive/Malnutrition/Dehydration	Verified	Mother/Father
	Failure to Protect	Verified	Mother/Father
	Inadequate Supervision	Verified	Mother/Father
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	M [REDACTED]

Other Children in the Family

The teenage sibling is the Morris's biological child. Unlike the decedent, he appeared physically healthy, was enrolled in virtual school, and he was visible in the community, including attending a Mixed Martial Arts program several times weekly. He had his own fully furnished bedroom, and he was allowed to have relationships with others outside the home, including his adult siblings who were away at college. The teenager was interviewed by the Child Protective Investigator Supervisor in the presence of the family's attorney (not regarding the death incident as this was prohibited by the attorney) and reported feeling safe in the home. Additionally, interviews were conducted with sources familiar with the child and no concerns were expressed for his safety. Upon closure of the investigation the sibling remained in the home. Documentation reflects that multiple staffings were held throughout the duration of this investigation and "While it is concerning that the sibling remains in the home where his brother's abuse occurred, it should be noted that he does not share the same vulnerabilities that were present with his younger sibling."

Summary of Prior Agency Involvement with Family

The family has no child welfare history.



Mechell Young-Williams
Child Fatality Prevention Specialist
SunCoast Region

3/11/2024

Date



Robert Wilson
Operations & Management Consultant Manager
SunCoast Region

03-11-2024

Date