Child Fatality Summary

Child's Name: Dakota Wilcox

County: Charlotte

Date of Birth: 01/03/2021

Date of Death: 03/13/2024

Report Number: 2024-088921

Family Composition Chart

Name	Age at Time of the Incident	Relationship with Deceased Child
Dakota Wilcox	3 years	Deceased
[redacted]	8 months	Sibling
[redacted]	7 years	Sibling
Star Zimmerman	19 years	Paternal Aunt
Vanessa Sankey	32 years	Mother
Michael Wilcox	29 years	Father

Circumstances Surrounding Death

An investigation was received on March 10, 2024, concerning the hospitalization of the 3-year-old toddler after she was discovered unresponsive in a swimming pool. She was unable to recover, and she was pronounced deceased three days later. At the time of the incident, the toddler resided in a recreational vehicle (RV) on the paternal grandparents' property with her two siblings and the parents. However, the incident occurred in the pool at the main home, where the paternal aunt resides with the grandparents and another adult sibling.

According to the family, the father woke and tended to the children around 7:00 a.m. on March 10, 2024. The mother worked nights, so she slept in until 11:30 a.m. that day. The family spent a large portion of the day outside playing with the children. The mother left for work around 4:00 p.m. Around that time, the father brought the children to the main home and asked the aunt, Star, to watch the children for a while. Then, approximately 30 minutes later, the aunt brought the infant back to the father so the infant could be changed and fed; the two older children remained with the aunt in the main home. The father advised that he tended to the infant, then they took a nap in the family's RV. The aunt confirmed that she was aware she was tasked with caring for both the 3-year-old and 7-year-old on the afternoon of the incident. She advised that the children were jumping all over her and being rowdy, so she left them in the living room and went to her bedroom as she was "annoyed." She could hear the children playing in the living room and a short time later the 7-year-old became bored, so the aunt gave her cell phone to the child, who returned to the living room, while she remained in her bedroom and played on her computer. Sometime later she noticed that it was quiet, so she checked on the children and discovered that the toddler was no longer in the living

room. She asked where the toddler was, and the 7-year-old advised that that toddler had walked to the family's RV. The aunt then stepped outside onto the lanai and discovered the toddler unresponsive in the swimming pool. She immediately pulled the toddler from the water and began screaming for help. Once the toddler was out of the water, the aunt initiated cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and called 911. The father responded to the aunt's screams and assisted with CPR until first responders arrived on scene. Paramedics later transported the toddler to Shorepoint Port Charlotte Hospital and once she was stabilized, she was transported to Golisano's Children's Hospital for a higher level of care. She was unable to recover, and she was pronounced deceased three days later.

As previously mentioned, the parents and children live in an RV that is parked in the rear of the paternal grandparents' residence. Regarding the main home, records note that the grandparents have an open living room (where the children were playing on the day of the incident) which leads to an open dining room. There is a set of French doors, with only one door having a round doorknob, leading from the dining room to the screened lanai and inground pool. Of note, there were no alarms or other child safety mechanisms present on the door. There is a screen door on the grandparents' lanai that leads to their backyard and to the parents' RV.

During the investigation law enforcement discovered Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) gummies, THC brownies, and narcotic paraphernalia, to include a grinder and various smoking pipes in the grandparents' garage, on the lanai, and in the parents' RV. Additionally, some of the items were within the children's reach. None of the adults had a medical marijuana card at that time and the above mentioned items were confiscated.

A presumptive drug screen was conducted on the parents. The father [redacted] admitted that he used THC oil around 10:00 a.m. on the morning of the incident. He advised that he used to have a medical marijuana card, but it was expired. The mother admitted that she occasionally uses THC and cocaine, and she advised that she used cocaine as recent as five days prior to the drowning incident. None of the adults appeared visibly impaired at the onset of the investigation.

Dr. K. Kenerson with the District 21 (Lee, Hendry Glades Counties) Medical Examiner's Office conducted an autopsy on the toddler. The cause of death is listed as drowning and the manner of death was deemed an accident.

The Charlotte County Sheriff's Office conducted the criminal investigation concerning the toddler's death. Law enforcement noted the aunt did not provide the toddler with proper supervision, which resulted in great bodily harm. Law enforcement submitted a warrant request to the State Attorney's Office for a charge of aggravated child neglect; however, prosecution was declined, and the criminal case was subsequently closed.

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

Child	Identified Maltreatment	Findings	Caregiver Responsible
Decedent	Death	Verified	Paternal Aunt
	Inadequate Supervision	Verified	Paternal Aunt
	Environmental Hazards	Verified	Mother/Father
	Substance Misuse - Illicit	Not Substantiated	N/A
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

Other Children in the Family

[redacted]

The parents subsequently separated after the incident. Grief counseling resources were provided to the family. The parents did not engage with any providers; however, they enrolled the oldest sibling in counseling services through Valarie's House and at case closure, that child continued to engage with the program.

Summary of Prior Agency Involvement with Family

There is no child welfare history concerning the children nor the parents, and there is no history involving the aunt as an adult or caregiver.

1/12/2026

Mechell Young-Williams
Child Fatality Prevention Specialist
SunCoast Region

Date

Robert W. Wilson

01-12-2026

Robert Wilson
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Date