

Critical Incident Rapid Response Team

Preliminary Report

Northeast Region Circuit 8

October 1, 2014



**Critical Incident Rapid Response Team
Preliminary Report**

**Spirit, Stewart, Kuhlmann Family
Northeast Region
Circuit 8**

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Executive Summary

The Department of Children and Families' (DCF) top priority is to protect vulnerable children. DCF investigates approximately 200,000 allegations of abuse and neglect each year and currently provides protective services to more than 31,000 children in Florida. The work is complex, the stakes are high, and the level of uncertainty in the work is challenging. Families served through the child welfare system more often than not present with complicated family dynamics and longstanding chronic issues, which are sometimes generational. Working in this field requires a passion for improving the lives of children and their families.

The events that unfolded in Bell, Florida, on September 18, 2014, were an incredible tragedy that cuts to the heart of DCF's mission. The senseless murder of these innocent children and their mother is an extreme outlier. There is no evidence to suggest that anyone, at any time, could have known that Don Spirit was capable of the premeditated and intentional massacre of his six grandchildren, his daughter, and then himself. However, there will never be one child who dies without DCF working to determine what changes can be made or processes improved to prevent future tragedy.

In response to the tragedy in Bell, DCF deployed a Critical Incident Rapid Response Team (CIRRT) to discern the nature and efficacy of DCF's involvement with this family and to assess potential systemic issues within the local system of care in Gilchrist County. The legislation requiring CIRRT's does not take effect until January 2015. However, DCF initiated this response to ensure a thorough review by key stakeholders in the child welfare system.

The CIRRT completed its preliminary review of case records and interviews with staff involved with the Kuhlmann and Stewart children. While the assessment of the local system of care and specific system interactions with this family continues, the team's initial findings shed some light on the child welfare system's involvement with the family. Those findings are as follows:

- **Practice Assessment** -- In a 2013 case staffing, it was determined that there was no reason to seek judicial intervention for compulsory services or, ultimately, removal from the mother's care. When the department and the Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office visited the home on September 2, 2014, the case note indicates the children were not in imminent danger of illness or injury from abuse, neglect or abandonment. The investigations conducted were incident-based and, as a result, did not sufficiently identify the chronic issues faced by this family and the array of services and interventions necessary to address the family's needs. However, there is no evidence to suggest that anyone, at any time, could have predicted that Don Spirit was capable of murdering his six grandchildren, his daughter and then taking his own life.
- **Service Array** -- A lack of an array of services was not identified as a concern regarding the Spirit, Kuhlmann, Stewart case. There was no gap in the continuum of traditional child welfare services.
- **Organizational Assessment** -- In looking at the unit responsible for the investigations on this family, the review found that the supervisor-to-child protective investigator ratio, experience of staff and workload assignments are within desired industry standards. A comparison of the unit's performance to statewide performance on departmental key indicators also finds the unit in good standing. This unit also has the lowest recidivism rate in the state for "no reoccurrence of maltreatment within six months of an investigation." Since 2009, there have been four child fatalities in Gilchrist County. Two

of the fatalities had no prior department involvement and two had no verified maltreatment within 12 months of the death.

This family was well known to staff, law enforcement, the school system and everybody who resided in this small community. This level of familiarity played a role in ongoing assessments of the family. Staff thought they knew and understood the dynamics and child safety risks within this family and their view of the family appeared not to change over time. Staff essentially became conditioned to emerging factors that should have more fully informed their assessment.

This case calls for a thorough examination of investigative practices and improvements to be made wherever possible. Notwithstanding the staff's familiarity with the family, it is still expected that staff at all levels be held to a high level of accountability with respect to assessing child safety through the Safety Methodology.

We now shift our focus to ensuring effective implementation of the Safety Methodology and we will use this tragic case to take system-wide action to enhance our practices, improve our training, and increase accountability.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Carroll", with a long, sweeping underline.

Mike Carroll

Interim Secretary

Florida Department of Children and Families

Introduction

On September 18, 2014, 51-year-old Don Spirit murdered his 28-year-old daughter, Sarah Spirit, and her six children, 11-year-old Kaleb Kuhlmann, 9-year-old Kylie Kuhlmann, 8-year-old Johnathan Kuhlmann, 5-year-old Destiny Stewart, 4-year-old Brandon Stewart, and 2½-month-old Alanna Stewart with a .45 caliber handgun at his home in Bell, Florida - Gilchrist County. Mr. Spirit then called 911 to report the shootings, and waited for law enforcement to arrive before taking his own life.

Later that evening, Interim Secretary Mike Carroll of the Florida Department of Children and Families deployed a Critical Incident Rapid Response Team (CIRRT) to the Northeast Region, Circuit 8. This review was triggered as a result of the agency's current and prior involvement with the Spirit family.

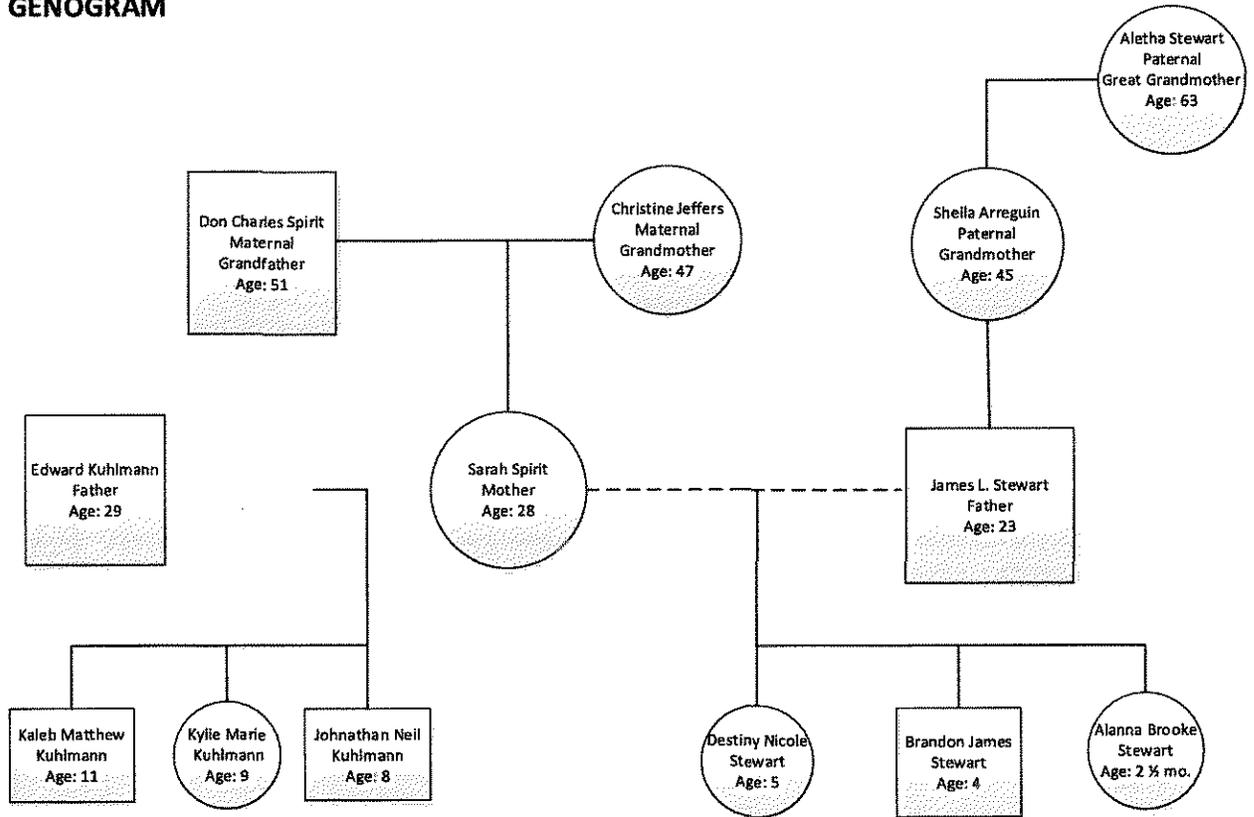
The intent of the CIRRT, per Florida Statute, 39.2015 is to *provide an immediate multiagency investigation of certain child deaths or other serious incidents.*¹ The preliminary report must be provided to the secretary no later than 30 days after the investigation begins. Broad policy recommendations are not a part of the CIRRT investigation. Instead, annually, all CIRRT reports are to be reviewed for the purposes of recommending improvements in practices and policy.

The CIRRT initiated an onsite response to the Florida Department of Children and Families office in Chiefland, Florida, on September 19, 2014. The team began a review of non-redacted electronic and paper copy files, conducting interviews, and gathering pertinent information to assess the system's involvement with this family to inform child welfare policy and practice.

Family Member (Age)	Role
Sarah Spirit (28)	Mother of all children
Edward Kuhlmann (29)	Father of the Kuhlmann children
James Stewart (23)	Father of the Stewart children
Kaleb Kuhlmann (11)	Child
Kylie Kuhlmann (9)	Child
Johnathan Kuhlmann (8)	Child
Destiny Stewart (5)	Child
Brandon Stewart (4)	Child
Alanna Brooke Stewart (2.5 months)	Child
Don Spirit (51)	Maternal Grandfather
Christine Jeffers (47)	Maternal Grandmother
Sheila Arreguin (45)	Paternal Grandmother (James Stewart)
Aletha Stewart (63)	Paternal Great Grandmother (James Stewart)

¹ Legislation mandating the Critical Incident Rapid Response Team does not take effect until January 2015. Formal review templates and protocols for the Review were not finalized at the time of this report.

GENOGRAM



System of Care Review

This review is designed to provide a comprehensive assessment of the child welfare system's interactions with the Spirit family and to identify issues that may have impacted the system's response and the quality of decision-making. The review includes an analysis of the investigative practice, an organizational review and an evaluation of the local service array.

Practice Assessment

Purpose: To examine the documented observations and assessments of the child welfare professionals involved with the Spirit family to determine whether they were consistent with Department policies and protocols.

Findings: In a 2013 case staffing with representatives from Children's Legal Services, the local Community-based Care Lead Agency (Partnership for Strong Families), the case management agency (Devereux), and the DCF Child Protective Investigator Supervisor, it was determined there was no reason to seek judicial intervention for compulsory services or, ultimately, removal from the mother's care. When the department and the Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office visited the home on September 2, 2014, the case note indicates the children were not in imminent danger of illness or injury from abuse, neglect or abandonment. The investigations conducted in 2013 and 2014 were incident-based and, as a result, did not sufficiently identify the chronic issues faced by this family and the array of services and interventions necessary to address the family's needs. However, there is no evidence to suggest that anyone, at any time, could have predicted that Don Spirit was capable of murdering his six grandchildren, his daughter and then taking his own life.

Detail: Florida's child welfare practice uses a safety-focused, family-centered and trauma-informed approach. This practice is based on several core required activities that include:

- engaging the family;
- partnering with all involved;
- gathering sufficient information;
- assessing and understanding information gathered;
- planning and adapting in response to child safety and family change

Child Protective Investigations

Records Reviews

Policy – "For each report received from the central abuse hotline and accepted for investigation, the department or the sheriff providing child protective investigative services under s. 39.3065, shall perform the following child protective investigation activities to determine child safety:

1. *Conduct a review of all relevant, available information specific to the child and family and alleged maltreatment; family child welfare history; local, state, and federal criminal records checks; and requests for law enforcement assistance provided by the abuse hotline." (Ch. 39.301(9)(a), Florida Statute.)*

February 2014 investigation

- The child protective investigator's case note contained an incomplete listing of the family's prior involvement with child protective investigations.
- Case notes provided did not include a full assessment of background screening results.

July 2014 Investigation

- The case note stated, "Family has extensive history and dependency as well as voluntary services in 2013 that was unsuccessful. History has impact to safety and risk."
- The child protective investigator summarized Sarah Spirit and James Stewart's criminal history, but did not include an assessment of the impact of their criminal history on the safety of the children.

September 2014 Investigation

- No documented review or analysis of prior history from commencement on September 2, 2014 to September 18, 2014.

Interviews

Policy – "For each report received from the central abuse hotline and accepted for investigation, the department or the sheriff providing child protective investigative services under s. 39.3065, shall perform the following child protective investigation activities to determine child safety:

2. Conduct face-to-face interviews with the child; other siblings, if any; and the parents, legal custodians, or caregivers." (Ch. 39.301(9)(a), Florida Statute.)

In February 2014, the household composition as documented in the Family Functioning Assessment in the electronic record consisted of Sarah Spirit, James Stewart, Destiny Stewart, and Brandon Stewart. Records show that Destiny was interviewed; however, Brandon would not answer questions. Johnathan, Kylie, and Kaleb were living with Sarah's mother in Gainesville at the time.

In July 2014, the household composition as documented in the Family Functioning Assessment in the electronic record consisted of Sarah Spirit, James Stewart, Kaleb Kuhlmann, Kylie Kuhlmann, Johnathan Kuhlmann, Destiny Stewart, Brandon Stewart, and Alanna Stewart. The case documents interviews with Brandon Stewart, Destiny Stewart and Kylie Kuhlmann. The quality of the interviews and information documented regarding the interviews was limited.

In September 2014, the household composition under investigation consisted of Sarah Spirit, Don Spirit, Kaleb Kuhlmann, Kylie Kuhlmann, Johnathan Kuhlmann, Destiny Stewart, Brandon Stewart, and Alanna Stewart. The case review and interviews with the child protective investigator revealed the children were seen, but no child interviews were conducted with any of the age appropriate children in the household to assess present or impending danger.

Assessment of Household Members

Policy - For each report received from the central abuse hotline and accepted for investigation, the department or the sheriff providing child protective investigative services under s. 39.3065, shall perform the following child protective investigation activities to determine child safety:

3. *Assess the child's residence, including a determination of the composition of the family and household, including the name, address, date of birth, social security number, sex, and race of each child named in the report; any siblings or other children in the same household or in the care of the same adults; the parents, legal custodians, or caregivers; and any other adults in the same household.*

4. *Determine whether there is any indication that any child in the family or household has been abused, abandoned, or neglected; the nature and extent of present or prior injuries, abuse, or neglect, and any evidence thereof; and a determination as to the person or persons apparently responsible for the abuse, abandonment, or neglect, including the name, address, date of birth, social security number, sex, and race of each such person.*

5. *Complete assessment of immediate child safety for each child based on available records, interviews, and observations with all persons named in subparagraph 2. and appropriate collateral contacts, which may include other professionals. (Ch. 39.301(9)(a), Florida statute.)*

A complete assessment of child safety for each child was not documented in the case file. Although the investigators in the February and July 2014 investigations completed the family functioning assessment to reach a safety determination, the sufficiency of the information documented was incomplete and incident focused.

In the September 2014 investigation, the investigator did not accurately determine the composition of the household under investigation. The present and impending danger assessments completed / initiated in the September 2014 investigation did not document Don Spirit's extensive criminal history, prior child welfare involvement and verified abuse of his grandchildren. Don Spirit was only consulted as a family support despite his designation as an alleged perpetrator of the substance abuse in the September 2014 investigation.

The investigator's interview, observations and records review should provide a complete assessment of how a child's household functions. This assessment includes the development of an understanding as to who provides care, parenting, and/or discipline for the child. When a complete assessment is not conducted, the accuracy in which the investigator can identify danger threats that children in the household are exposed to, how the children are vulnerable to those threats, and whether the parent/legal guardian and other significant caregiver(s) in the household have sufficient protective capacities to manage the danger threats, is negatively impacted.

The supervisor and second tier reviewer play an important role in the assessment process. Their role is to provide consultation to frontline staff at critical points during the investigation to affirm the investigator has collected sufficient information and accurately assessed present and impending danger. When present or impending danger is identified, the supervisor affirms that safety plans/actions are effective in managing the danger threats necessary to assure the protection of the child. During the 2014 investigations, initial consultations and second tier reviews were conducted timely but were more directives in nature and not focused on affirming sufficiency of information collection or accuracy of decision making.

Community Based Care (CBC) / Case Management Agency (CMA)

Services Closure of In Home Supervision Case

Policy – "The parents or legal custodians shall be informed of the right to refuse services, as well as the responsibility of the department to protect the child regardless of the acceptance or refusal of services. If the services are refused, a collateral contact shall include a relative, if the

protective investigator has knowledge of and the ability to contact a relative. If the services are refused and the department deems that the child's need for protection requires services, the department shall take the child into protective custody or petition the court as provided in this chapter." (ch. 39.301(14)(b), Florida Statute.)

The CBC, Partnership for Strong Families, and Case Management Agency, Devereux, provided in-home supervision from January 2013 until its official closure in May 2013. The family's initial engagement is documented with the family receiving services beginning in February 2013, completing an in-home clinical intake, one clinical counseling session and five paraprofessional visits completed with two no-shows with Sarah Spirit. The case was staffed for closure with the CBC, CMA, DCF Child Protective Supervisor and Child Legal Services on April 30, 2013, where all parties agreed to close the case unsuccessful stating "After discussing – no one seems to see that we can move higher with the case." An assigned task from the staffing was for the case manager to complete the termination summary and "to talk to the family about how future involvement would result in court intervention due to history." The termination summary and staffing was completed on May 1, 2013, where the rationale for termination was that "the mother and the father, James Stewart, failed to fully engaged in services" and references that the case was staffed on April 30, 2013, and "all decided ok to close." When documenting potential safety and risk factors that pose or potentially pose a threat to a child it was stated that "the parents do not understand the seriousness of how agency became involved. The parent's inadequate supervision could pose a threat of harm to the children."

Within 27 days of the ongoing services case closure, two additional reports were received. A new report was received on May 28, 2013, alleging inadequate supervision, substance misuse and medical neglect. The investigator verified findings for medical neglect to Destiny and Brandon. No additional formal action was taken. An additional report was received on May 31, 2013, with allegations of physical injury, substance misuse and environmental hazards, resulting in verified findings for physical injury to Kylie Kuhlmann by Don Spirit. No formal additional action was taken.

Service Array

Purpose: To assess the inventory of services within the child welfare system of care in Gilchrist, Dixie and Levy Counties.

Findings: A lack of an array of services was not identified as a concern regarding the Spirit, Kuhlmann, Stewart case. There was no gap in the continuum of traditional child welfare services.

Detail: Partnership for Strong Families has established a unique process called a Family Support Team staffing to identify services for families using a Safety Management Resource Guide specific to Dixie, Gilchrist, and Levy counties. This process was developed to align with the Safety Methodology to assist staff on how to utilize their already existing provider network while safety planning with families. The result is a matrix of services in the community complete with contact information, what each service agency provides, program requirements and hours of operations. It also includes which provider safety management category for which each service can be utilized.

Dixie and Gilchrist counties have an array of services for children and families including assistance with food, housing and rent, utilities, clothing, medical care, transportation, employment, legal services, domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health, child sexual abuse services, crisis intervention, behavior analysis, parenting, family planning, respite care, finances, etc. These counties have engaged their local churches, Health Departments and other service provider agencies to determine the services they can offer to children and families in need of assistance.

Organizational Assessment

Purpose: To examine the level of staffing, experience, caseload, training and performance as potential factors in the management of this case.

Findings: In looking at the unit responsible for the investigations on this family, the organizational review found that the supervisor to child protective investigator ratio, experience of staff and workload assignments are within desired industry standards. A comparison of the unit's performance to statewide performance on departmental key indicators also finds the unit in good standing. This unit also has the lowest recidivism rate in the state for "no reoccurrence of maltreatment within six months of an investigation." Since 2009, there have been four child fatalities in Gilchrist County. Two of the fatalities had no prior department involvement and two had no verified maltreatment within 12 months of the death.

Detail: – The unit responsible for child protective investigations is housed in Chiefland, Florida. The unit is comprised of a unit supervisor with more than 10 years' experience in child welfare, one Senior Child Protective Investigator with 10 years' experience, and three Child Protective Investigators with at least three years or more experience, and an administrative support position. Management oversight is provided by a Program Administrator with 17 years of experience who is housed in Gainesville, Florida, but works in the Chiefland office at least once a week.

Since January 2014, this unit has been assigned an average of 40.1 investigations with individual assignments per child protective investigators ranging from 11.6 to 7.8 per month. Of these investigations, 29.9 percent have been referred to a higher-level manager, usually the Program Administrator, for a Second Tier Consultation. Seven of these cases have also had a Rapid Safety Feedback review. This review is completed on a sample of cases which have characteristics identified as high risk and are completed while the case is still open. This review focuses on the quality of the work and safety of the children. Although the analysis from the Rapid Safety Feedback reviews indicate that most areas need improvement, no cases were identified as needing immediate action related to safety concerns.

This unit's performance on key performance indicators is depicted below in the scorecard measures chart. Review indicates a need for improvement in immediate priority responses which measures if a child protective investigator responds to an investigation within four hours. However, this unit has done well on other indicators and has outperformed the statewide average in response time within 24 hours, timely completion of investigations within 60 days, and no recurrence of maltreatment within 6 months.

2014	Response Time: Immediate Priority	Response Time: 24 Hours	Alleged Victims Seen in 24 Hours	Completion of Investigation	No Recurrence of Maltreatment in 6 Months
January	100%	100%	79.37%	100%	100%
February	83.3%	100%	97.44%	100%	100%
March	64.3%	100%	87.50%	100%	100%
April	72.70%	100%	94.37%	97.14%	100%
May	90%	100%	87.84%	100%	100%
June	60%	100%	90%	100%	100%
July	71.4%	100%	88.24%	100%	N/A
August	50%	100%	84.48%	100%	100%

The chart below depicts that there have been no child fatality cases called into the Hotline in an open investigation since 2009 in Gilchrist County. Record research before 2009 has not been conducted.

Year	Gilchrist	
	Child Fatalities	Description
2009	1	4-year-old: Blunt force trauma, bio father. Priors but none verified within 12 months.
2010	2	13-yearold: Accidental. No priors.
		1.5-year-old: Drowning. No priors.
2011	0	
2012	1	1-month-old: Unsafe sleep. Priors but none verified within 12 months.
2013	0	

The Department of Children and Families is deploying a new investigative practice known as the Safety Methodology, which requires a more comprehensive assessment of the family. This unit, along with their sister unit, also located in the Chiefland office, was the first to deploy the Safety Methodology in the Northeast Region in November 2013. This unit was selected due to manageable workload and community commitment.

This unit's training on the Safety Methodology included online courses to prepare staff for eight days of classroom training. In addition, supervisors, program administrators, and others in leadership roles received additional trainings, attended consultation trainings, safety plan trainings, and weekly case reviews. When the units were ready to begin implementation, the region sent in onsite support to ensure quality practice under the new methodology. The unit Supervisor and Senior CPI were required to complete the 8-day classroom training on two occasions to assist them in learning the new methodology. Early onsite support recognized additional support was needed for this area, which was provided.

Partnership for Strong Families is the Community-Based Care Lead Agency in the area. Their main office in this area is in Trenton, Florida. Child protective investigation and community based care staff are not collocated. However, there is one community based care staff member located in the Chiefland office. It is approximately 12 miles between offices.

The workload among community based care staff is comparable to that of DCF investigators. The Trenton office houses two units with a total of eight workers. The average caseload is 13.9 children per worker.

Partnership for Strong Families has taken a lead role in the training and implementation of the Safety Methodology. They have co-trained with the Department of Children and Families to ensure a consistent message was sent to all child welfare staff and community partners. Like those actions taken to train and support the child protective investigation staff, Partnership for Strong Families has done the same for their staff and provided routine support to child protective investigators.

Family Description

Sarah Spirit was 17 years old when she had her first child. She completed the 11th grade of school and held brief employment at a local grocery store and a fast food restaurant. Her health was an ongoing issue for her since birth. She was born with one kidney and self-reported suffering a long history of discomfort and hospitalization over the years. In 2012, Sarah reportedly had a seizure and was having stress and anxiety attacks but refused services to address these conditions. That same year she reported being diagnosed with Pelvic Inflammatory Disease. There is no record of a mental health diagnosis in the case file. She has been described as having difficulty learning or applying concepts of learning. Sarah depended on her family for support with housing and taking care of her children. She received public assistance for her and her children when they were in her care. When the children were residing with other relatives the public assistance was in their names. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Sarah had sporadic interactions with law enforcement resulting in charges related to petty theft, illegal substances, and violation of probation for use of illegal substance.

Edward Kuhlmann, father of the three oldest children, has been in and out of the Florida Department of Corrections four times since 2006 for a variety of property crimes, theft, and firearm charges. He returned to the Florida Department of Corrections in July of 2014 and has a current release date of October 14, 2038.

James Stewart, father of the three youngest children, has an extensive criminal history related to charges of theft, stolen property, violence, and violation of probation for use of illegal substances. James was a part of his children's life when he was not incarcerated in the county jail.

Don Spirit, maternal grandfather, was intermittently involved in the lives of Sarah and children. Don Spirit's criminal history spanned more than three decades with charges of violence, illegal substances, theft, and weapons. In the fall of 2001, Don Spirit shot his minor son in what was ruled a hunting accident. In 2003, he was sentenced to three years in prison for illegal possession of a firearm. His last arrest was in 2008 for a domestic violence incident involving his daughter Sarah. In 2009, Don Spirit was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

The children, Kaleb, Kylie, Johnathan, Destiny, Brandon, and Alanna lived intermittently with their mother, their fathers, maternal grandfather, maternal grandmother, paternal grandmother, and paternal great grandmother throughout their lives. Kylie struggled in school. The public school system was working with the three oldest children to address absenteeism and academic progress. The children were reported to be up to date on physicals and immunizations in 2012.

Child Welfare Summary

From February 2006 to September 2014 the family was involved in 18 child protective investigations alleging abandonment, abuse and/or neglect. The maltreatments included inadequate food, inadequate clothing, abandonment, failure to thrive, family violence threatens child, burns, inadequate supervision, medical neglect, bone fractures, substance misuse, environmental hazards, and physical injury. The alleged perpetrators throughout the investigations were Don Spirit, Edward Kuhlmann, James Stewart, and Sarah Spirit.

Sarah was involved in 17 of the 18 child protective investigations and was the alleged perpetrator in 12 cases. The investigators confirmed Sarah was a perpetrator in two of the investigations. In 2007, Sarah would leave her children with relatives and not return or contact the family for days and weeks at a time. In 2013, Destiny and Brandon had dental needs that were not addressed and rose to the level of medical neglect. Sarah was involved with in-home non-judicial services on three occasions: April 2007, March 2012, and January 2013. The first services case was due to Sarah leaving her children with relatives and not returning for days and weeks at a time. Sarah was unwilling to engage in services and the case was closed. Her second involvement with in-home, non-judicial services was due to the children having chronic head lice and the lack of follow through on cleaning and caring for a cut on Kaleb's foot as directed by medical professionals. Sarah was engaged sporadically with services for eight months and the case closed with minimal progress. Her third and final involvement with in home non-judicial services was initiated after Brandon fractured his arm and X-rays showed the child had a healing fracture in the same arm. The family disclosure for both injuries was not consistent with the injury per the Child Protection Team Medical Director. Sarah participated minimally with services and the case was closed unsuccessful.

Edward was involved in two of the 18 child protective investigations involving this family and was the alleged perpetrator in one case. The investigator confirmed Edward as a perpetrator in 2006 for physically abusing Sarah in the presence of their children. He was not involved in any in-home non-judicial services case.

James was involved in eight of the 18 child protective investigations and was the alleged perpetrator in four cases. The investigators confirmed James was a perpetrator in one of the investigations in which Destiny and Brandon had dental needs that were not addressed and rose to the level of medical neglect. James was involved in two in-home non-judicial services cases. His first involvement in a services case was due to the children having chronic head lice and the lack of follow through on cleaning and caring for a cut on Kaleb's foot as directed by medical professionals. James was engaged sporadically with services for eight months and the case closed with minimal progress. His second and final involvement with in home non-judicial services was initiated after Brandon's bone fracture. James participated minimally with services and the case was closed unsuccessful.

Don Spirit was involved in six of the 18 child protective investigations and was the alleged perpetrator in three cases. The investigators confirmed Don Spirit was a perpetrator in one investigation when he physically abused Sarah while she was pregnant. The physical abuse was observed by at least one of her children. Don Spirit was arrested and Sarah filed a temporary injunction against her father. Although he was not identified as a perpetrator in other investigations, the family either resided with Don Spirit or he was visiting the home when other critical incidents occurred. He was supervising the children on one occasion when one of the children was burned by the space heater in the home. Don Spirit was outside with Brandon when he fractured his arm in January 2013. During a Child Protection Team forensic interview in May 2013, several of the children expressed fear of their grandfather. In their final report, the Child Protection Team recommended that Don Spirit "have no unsupervised contact" with his grandchildren. The recommendation was never incorporated into a formal safety plan and Don Spirit was not involved in services. However, he did reside in the home on at least one occasion when Sarah and James were involved with in-home, non-judicial services.

Immediate Operational Response

Immediately following the report of the murder/suicide, department leadership developed an operational response to provide support and guidance as well as ensure quality operations to the Chiefland Department of Children and Families office and other areas within the Northeast Region. The actions that were undertaken, beginning on September 19, 2014, were as follows:

- A team of child protection professionals from outside Circuit 8 was reassigned to the Chiefland office to respond to all new child protective investigations called into and accepted for investigation by the Florida Abuse Hotline specific to Dixie and Gilchrist counties. This team has also been reassigned to work all open investigations in Dixie and Gilchrist Counties with children age 0 to 3 years of age.
- A child protection specialist was reassigned to the Chiefland office to focus on case consultation, coaching, mentoring, and ensuring child protection professionals are practicing with fidelity to the Safety Methodology model.

Critical Incident Rapid Response Team Next Steps

The CIRRT will continue reviewing and gathering relevant information related to the Spirit, Kuhlmann, and Stewart family and the system of care in the Northeast Region, Circuit 8 area.

A multidisciplinary team will work with the Florida Department of Children and Families executive leadership and partner agencies to make operational recommendations regarding policy and practice.

Prior History for Kuhlmann and Stewart Children

Date	Report Number 1	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition	
02/27/06	2006-333735						
Date	Report Number 2	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition	
8/21/06	2006-436983	Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann	Alleged Victims	NA	No Indicators of Bone Fracture or Environmental Hazards, and Some Indicators of Inadequate Supervision to ██████████ No Indicators of Environmental Hazards, and Verified findings of Family Violence Threatens the Child to Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan.	No Ongoing Services	
		██████████	Alleged Victim	NA			
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in the Home			
		Edward Kuhlmann	Alleged Perpetrator	Caregiver Responsible			
		██████████	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in the Home			
		Syrl Ford	Significant Other	Significant Other			
		Dequita Cook	Significant Other	Significant Other			

Date	Report Number 3	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
12/19/06	2006-509282	[REDACTED]	Alleged Victim	NA	No Indicators of Physical Injury or Family Violence Threatens Child to [REDACTED]	No Ongoing Services. [REDACTED]
		Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann	Non-Victim Child Participants	NA		
		Don Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		
		Sarah Spirit	Parent/Caregiver	Significant Other		
Date	Report Number 4	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
02/12/07	2007-325788	Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann	Alleged Victims	NA	No Indicators of Inadequate Supervision and Verified findings of Abandonment to Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan	No ongoing services. Sarah Spirit signed a Power of Attorney relegating the children's care as follows: Kaleb - Christine Jeffers; Kylie - Linda Dickenson; and Johnathan - Tammy Sassany.
		[REDACTED]	Non-Victim Child Participant	NA		
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Caregiver Responsible		
		Don Spirit	Significant Other	Significant Other		
		Christine Jeffers	Significant Other	Significant Other		
		Tammy Sassany	Significant Other	Significant Other		
		Linda Dickenson	Significant Other	Significant Other		
Jerry Dickenson	Significant Other	Significant Other				
Date	Report	Name	Initial Role	Final Role –	Findings of	Disposition

Number 5				Adult(s)	Maltreatment	
03/20/07	2007-349195	Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann	Alleged Victims	NA	No Indicators of Substance Misuse and Some Indicators of Inadequate Supervision to Kaleb; Some Indicators of Threatened Harm to Johnathan; and No Indicators of Physical Injury to Kylie and Johnathan.	Non-judicial, in-home services with Partnership for Strong Families (PSF).
		Don Spirit	Significant Other	Significant Other		
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		
		Tammy Sassany	Significant Other	Significant Other		
Date	Report Number 6	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
03/20/07	2007-349207	Kylie Kuhlmann	Alleged Victim	NA	NA - Closed as Duplicate Report to 2007-349195, which was received the same day (See Above).	NA - Closed as Duplicate Report to 2007-349195, which was received the same day (See Above).
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		
		Linda Dickenson	Significant Other	Significant Other		
Date	Report Number 7	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
03/21/07	2007-350049	Kaleb Kuhlmann	Alleged Victim	NA	NA - Closed as Duplicate Report to 2007-349195, which was received the previous day (See Above).	NA - Closed as Duplicate Report to 2007-349195, which was received the previous day (See Above).
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		

Date	Report Number 8	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
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06/14/07	2007-403859	Johnathan Kuhlmann	Alleged Victims	NA	No Indicators of Failure to Thrive to Johnathan.	No ongoing services
		Kaleb and Kylie Kuhlmann	Non-Victim Child Participants	NA		
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		
Date	Report Number 9	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
02/24/08	2008-337993	[REDACTED]	Alleged Victim	NA	Some Indicators or Substance Misuse to [REDACTED]	No ongoing services. [REDACTED] was to enter residential substance abuse treatment and provided a Power of Attorney to [REDACTED] grandmother, [REDACTED]
		Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann	Non-Victim Child Participants	NA		
		[REDACTED]	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		
		Sarah Spirit	Household Member	Parent in Home		
		Sarah Russell	Significant Other	Significant Other		
		Joyce Clark	Significant Other	Significant Other		
		Aletha Stewart	Significant Other	Significant Other		
Date	Report Number 10	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
08/27/08	2008-461697	Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann	Alleged Victims	NA	No Indicators of Family Violence Threatens the Child to Kaleb; Verified Finding of Family Violence Threatens the Child to Kylie and Johnathan.	No ongoing services. Sarah Spirit worked with a local Domestic Violence provider to obtain an injunction against Don Spirit which was still in place at the time of Investigative closure.
		Destiny Stewart	Non-Victim Child Participant	NA		
		Don Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Caregiver Responsible		
		Sarah Spirit	Parent/Caregiver	Parent in Home		
		Aletha Stewart	Significant Other	Significant Other		

Date	Report Number 11	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
11/05/10	2010-230888	Kaleb Kuhlmann	Alleged Victims	NA	Not Substantiated findings of Burns to Kaleb.	Non-judicial, in-home services with Partnership for Strong Families (PSF).
		Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann, and Destiny and Brandon Stewart	Non-Victim Child Participants	NA		
		Sarah Spirit	Parent/Caregiver	Parent/Caregiver		
		James Stewart	Parent/Caregiver	Parent/Caregiver		
		Unknown, Unknown	Alleged Perpetrator	Non-Household Member		
Date	Report Number 12	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
01/23/12	2012-016651	NA – Screened Out Intake	NA	NA	NA	NA
Date	Report Number 13	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
02/28/12	2012-048282	Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann	Alleged Victims	NA	Not Substantiated Findings of Medical Neglect to Kaleb, and No Indicators of Inadequate Supervision to Kaleb, Kylie, Johnathan, Destiny and Brandon.	Non-judicial, in-home services with PSF.
		Destiny and Brandon Stewart	Alleged Victims	NA		
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		
		James Stewart	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		
		Edward Kuhlmann	Parent/Caregiver	Parent Not in Home		

Date	Report	Name	Initial Role	Final Role –	Findings of	Disposition
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Number 14				Adult(s)	Maltreatment	
01/23/13	2013-022039	Brandon Stewart	Alleged Victim	NA	Verified Bone Fracture to Brandon Stewart.	Non-judicial, in-home services with PSF.
		Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann, and Destiny Stewart	Non-Victim Child Participants	NA		
		Sarah Spirit	Parent/Caregiver	Parent in Home		
		James Stewart	Parent/Caregiver	Parent in Home		
		Unknown, Unknown	Alleged Perpetrator	Caregiver Responsible		
Date	Report Number 15	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
05/28/13	2013-149969	Destiny and Brandon Stewart	Alleged Victims	NA	No Indicators of Inadequate Supervision, Not Substantiated findings of Substance Misuse, and Verified findings of Medical Neglect to Destiny and Brandon Stewart.	No ongoing services. Sarah Spirit and James Stewart provided a Power of Attorney and relegated Destiny and Brandon Stewart's care to their Paternal Great-Grandmother, Aletha Stewart.
		[REDACTED]	Non-Victim Child Participants	NA		
		[REDACTED]	Non-Victim Child Participants	NA		
		[REDACTED]	Non-Victim Child Participants	NA		
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Caregiver Responsible		
		James Stewart	Alleged Perpetrator	Caregiver Responsible		
		Collene Stewart	Household Member	Household Member		

Date	Report Number 16	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
05/31/13	2013-153996	Kaleb, Kylie and	Alleged Victims	NA	Not Substantiated	No ongoing

		Johnathan Kuhlmann			findings of Environmental Hazards and Substance Misuse to Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan; Not Substantiated findings of Physical Injury to Kaleb; and Verified findings of Physical Injury to Kylie.	services. Sarah Spirit relegated Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan's care to their maternal grandmother, Christine Jeffers.
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent Not in Home		
		James Stewart	Alleged Perpetrator	Significant Other		
		Frank Forgue	Household Member			
Date	Report Number 17	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
02/13/14	2014-040224	Destiny Stewart	Alleged Victim	NA	Not Substantiated findings of Inadequate Supervision and Physical Injury to Destiny.	No ongoing services.
		Brandon Stewart	Non-Victim Child Participants	NA		
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		
		James Stewart	Parent/Caregiver	Parent in Home		
Date	Report Number 18	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
07/24/14	2014-185065	Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann	Alleged Victims	NA	No Indicators of Inadequate Supervision to all six children; No Indicators of Substance Misuse- Illicit Drugs to Kaleb, Kylie, Destiny, Brandon and Alanna, and No Indicators of Physical Injury to Destiny.	No ongoing services.
		Destiny, Brandon and Alanna Stewart	Alleged Victims	NA		
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		
		James Stewart	Alleged Perpetrator	Parent in Home		

Date	Report Number 19	Name	Initial Role	Final Role – Adult(s)	Findings of Maltreatment	Disposition
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09/01/14	2014-230215	Kaleb, Kylie and Johnathan Kuhlmann	Alleged Victims	NA	NA - Investigation remains open. Alleged Maltreatment is Substance Misuse-Illicit Drugs in reference to all six children.	NA - Investigation remains open.
		Destiny, Brandon and Alanna Stewart	Alleged Victims	NA		
		Sarah Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	NA		
		Don Spirit	Alleged Perpetrator	NA		

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