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**Office of the Inspector General**  
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**REDACTED REPORT**

*This report is being released by the Office of the Inspector General for teaching/training purposes. To ensure the confidentiality of all persons and service providers involved in the case, identifying information has been changed. All names, except those of professional references, are fictitious.*

**File No:** 021508  
**Minor:** Caden Sandall, DOB 4/99; DOD 4/02  
**Subject:** Death Investigation

**SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT**

Caden Sandall died in April 2002 in a house fire. His death was reported as an “T” sequence. An intact family case was open at the time of his death. An intact case originally opened with this family October 24, 1995, and closed June 30, 1997. The case was reopened May 4, 1999, and remained open at the time of Caden’s death.

**INVESTIGATION**

**Background**

Lena Eldrich (DOB 9/70) gave birth to four children: Tamara Duckett (DOB 12/92); Marcia Quinn (DOB 10/95); Jarrett Quinn (DOB 1/97); and the deceased minor, Caden Sandall (DOB 4/99). The father of her last child was Caden Sandall, Sr. (DOB unknown). His involvement with the family was limited because he was married to another woman.<sup>1</sup> Tamara’s father was identified. Father of the other children is unknown.

*First Intact Family Case 10/95 – 6/97*

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<sup>1</sup> Although Mr. Sandall was married, it was reported that he was very jealous and controlling. Domestic violence may have been an issue.

This family came to the attention of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in October 1995 when Ms. Eldrich's second child, Marcia, was born drug exposed. According to CANTS, Ms. Eldrich and Marcia tested positive for cocaine and Ms. Eldrich also tested positive for marijuana. Lena Eldrich was indicated for Substance Misuse (A sequence). An intact family case was opened in October 1995, and closed two years later on June 30, 1997. The assigned caseworker was Dora Robbins.

Following case opening, the hotline was called a second time in late October 1995 (B sequence) when Lena Eldrich took her almost 3-year-old daughter Tamara to the hospital after she complained of vaginal pain and it was discovered she had gonorrhea. CPI Alexia Scholtes was the assigned investigator. Ms. Eldrich alleged that a 15-year-old cousin, Carl Joelson, had touched Tamara.

According to the reporter, mother arrived at the emergency room at approximately noon and left at 2:35 p.m., without discharge papers or follow-up instructions. It was reported that Ms. Eldrich was edgy the whole time at the hospital. A physician at the hospital told CPI Scholtes that Ms. Eldrich became upset after being told tentatively that the smear results appeared to be gonorrhea and she left the emergency room with her daughter before being given discharge instructions. He called Ms. Eldrich at home and advised her to follow up with a doctor.

At the time of this report, Ms. Eldrich and her two children, Tamara and Marcia, did not have permanent housing and had been living from place to place with relatives, including the Joelson family. After two unsuccessful attempts to locate Ms. Eldrich, CPI Scholtes interviewed Agnes Joelson on October 27, 1995, by telephone. Ms. Agnes Joelson told CPI Scholtes that Ms. Eldrich and her children had been staying at her residence for the past two months, however earlier in the week, Ms. Eldrich and her children spent the night with maternal grandparents. Her son Carl used to baby-sit for Ms. Eldrich. Ms. Joelson observed Tamara with a discharge when Ms. Eldrich called her into the bathroom while bathing Tamara. Ms. Eldrich said she thought Ms. Joelson's son Carl touched Tamara. Ms. Joelson did not believe her son had a disease, and she was willing to take Carl to the doctor to be tested and cooperate in any way.

CPI Scholtes interviewed Ms. Eldrich on October 30, 1995. Ms. Eldrich said she took Tamara to the emergency room after Tamara said her vaginal area hurt and she observed Tamara with a "grown woman discharge." While Ms. Eldrich was bathing Tamara, she pointed to her "stuff" (vagina) and stated, "ooh it hurt, Carl did that." She asked Tamara what did Carl do and Tamara said, "Carl did that." According to Ms. Eldrich, Carl has babysat Tamara 3-4 times total. A week prior to the hospital visit, Ms. Eldrich noticed that Tamara would not go around Carl. Ms. Eldrich reported that Tamara's natural father is Evan Duckett and his last contact with her was 2-3 months ago. She further reported that her boyfriend Matt Quinn is never alone with Tamara. Ms. Eldrich admitted that a week before the report she stayed at her grandmother's house for a week. Ms. Eldrich stated her brother, age 21, lived with her grandmother but he was never left alone with her children. Ms. Eldrich admitted to having trichomonas one-month prior, at the end of September 1995 and testing positive for chlamydia during mid-September 1995. She was willing to be tested for gonorrhea. Ms. Eldrich agreed to an informal

alternative living arrangement for herself and the minors, pending the outcome of the investigation. Ms. Eldrich and the children temporarily moved to her sister's home.

The intact family caseworker, Dora Robbins, informed CPI Scholtes that in the three weeks that the case had been opened Lena Eldrich had not yet obtained a drug assessment and Ms. Robbins had been attempting to contact her on a daily basis with no response.

CPI Scholtes interviewed Agnes Joelson in person on October 30, 1995. She refused to take a gonorrhea test. She was willing to take Carl to the hospital to take a test for gonorrhea. A woman, who lived with the Joelson family, was also interviewed. She reported that she had been residing at Ms. Joelson's residence for about two weeks. She was willing to be tested for gonorrhea. She had not observed anything unusual between Tamara and Carl. Ms. Joelson's other son, age 17, was interviewed on this same date. He also lived at the residence. He reported that he did not attend school because he dropped out. He had babysat Tamara a few times for Ms. Eldrich. He denied having gonorrhea and was willing to be tested. He later stated that he was unwilling to be tested. He said he had never done anything sexual to Tamara. He said that Ms. Eldrich takes Tamara around a lot of people from house to house.

Carl Joelson, Ms. Eldrich's cousin, was interviewed. He reported he had babysat Tamara on occasion for Ms. Eldrich. He denied touching Tamara in a sexual way and said he did not have gonorrhea. He was willing to be tested for gonorrhea. He reported he last babysat Tamara two weeks ago. Carl also said that Ms. Eldrich takes Tamara around a lot of different people's houses.<sup>2</sup>

The CPI attempted to interview Tamara. Tamara would not respond to her questions.

On October 31, 1995, Ms. Joelson informed the CPI by phone that she took Carl to the emergency room and was told it cost \$500 for him to have a gonorrhea test, which she could not afford. She was referred to a health clinic and agreed to take Carl there for the test. She did so the next day. On October 31, 1995, Ms. Eldrich reported by phone that Tamara was given an antibiotic injection in the ER last week and was seen by a doctor on Friday. Ms. Eldrich went to a clinic and was tested for gonorrhea. Referrals were made for assessments of the alleged sexual abuse. Ms. Eldrich missed two clinic appointments for Tamara and Marcia and the assessments were never completed. Ms. Robbins, the follow up worker, told CPI Scholtes that as of November 28, 1995, Ms. Eldrich had failed to undergo a substance abuse assessment and obtain housing for her family. Ms. Robbins stated she would probably pursue petitioning the court due to Ms. Eldrich's uncooperativeness. On December 1, 1995, the CPI obtained a copy of Carl Joelson's gonorrhea test results, which were negative. There is a case note that Ms. Eldrich's gonorrhea test results were available on December 1, 1995, and could be picked up. No results are in the case record.

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<sup>2</sup> Lena Eldrich's sister reported to the OIG that Lena lived with her and her family from March 1995-September 1995. She stated that Lena came in at all hours of the night and morning and Lena was not given a key to their home because they did not want her there when they were not at home.

In a Family Assessment Factor Worksheet (FAFW), the CPI noted, “Family interaction appears chaotic; lack of boundaries result in sexual victimization. Minor, Tamara, attends daycare during the day – day care provider is a relative. Extended family support is available most of the time. Natural mother, Ms. Eldrich experiencing difficulty in locating permanent housing for her children and has been living from place to place with relatives. Ms. Eldrich has a prior indicated CA/N report for substance misuse to minor, Marcia (9/95). Joelson family residence observed adequate. Ms. Eldrich believes her cousin Carl Joelson gave Tamara gonorrhea because Carl babysat for her. Per STD testing, Carl has a negative culture result for gonorrhea. DCFS determined that Carl Joelson was not responsible for the sexually transmitted disease to Tamara because he had a negative gonorrhea culture. The report was indicated for allegations #18 (Sexually Transmitted Diseases), #21 (Sexual Molestation) and #22 (Substantial Risk of Sexual Injury) against an unknown perpetrator.”

During the time this intact family case was open, housing and substance abuse were determined to be the main issues. The records indicate that when this case first opened, the family was residing with several different relatives. An October 1996, case note states that Ms. Eldrich and her children were being evicted from an apartment because she didn’t pay the rent. In March 1997, Ms. Eldrich informed her caseworker, Ms. Robbins, that she had located housing. (This was ultimately the residence that had the deadly fire.) The worker gave Ms. Eldrich Norman funds for the apartment.

While Lena Eldrich did attend an outpatient drug treatment program, she never successfully completed the program prior to her case closing. Her family case was closed June 30, 1997. Ms. Robbins noted that Ms. Eldrich had been attending AA/NA meetings and had given birth to her son, Jarrett Quinn, in January 1997, who was not born with a positive toxicology.<sup>3</sup> Ms. Robbins also noted that Ms. Eldrich provided the minors with food, shelter and clothing. Her rationale for closing the case was that Lena Eldrich gave birth to her son and there were no indications that she was using drugs/alcohol during her pregnancy, and Ms. Eldrich managed to meet the minors’ basic needs.

### Sequence C Investigation

On December 24, 1997, six months after the intact family case was closed, there was a third hotline report concerning this family (C sequence). It was alleged that Ms. Eldrich left her two youngest children, Marcia and Jarrett, then ages two years and eleven months, in the car while she and her oldest child, five-year-old Tamara, went in the mall to shop. A witness saw Marcia hanging out of the car window and called the police. The police were there for twenty minutes before Ms. Eldrich returned to her car. The police estimated that the children were left alone for at least thirty minutes. They observed that a rear door was unlocked and a rear window was rolled down. Ms. Eldrich reported to the CPI that investigated that Marcia and Jarrett were asleep when she arrived at the mall, and she did not want to wake them. She admitted she was wrong to leave them in the car and stated she would not let it

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<sup>3</sup>The hospital records were not found in the case record. The OIG subpoenaed Jarrett’s birth records and discovered that the hospital did not perform a toxicology screen on Jarrett at the time of his birth. It appears the caseworker simply assumed Jarrett was tested and the results were negative because no hotline report was made.

happen again. Ms. Eldrich was indicated for Inadequate Supervision. A service assessment was requested.

On December 30, 1997, Trudy Fairfax was assigned to complete the service assessment. On January 5, 1998, having already met with the Eldrich family and completed a CERAP, Ms. Fairfax reviewed the old case file and conferred with the previous caseworker, Dora Robbins. Ms. Robbins reported that Ms. Eldrich was consistent in providing an adequate care plan for her children (her aunt provided daycare)<sup>4</sup> and that Ms. Eldrich had gone to an intensive outpatient program. Both Ms. Robbins and Ms. Eldrich felt Ms. Eldrich was hassled by not only her counselor, but by other personnel and other clients.<sup>5</sup> Ms. Robbins reported that Ms. Eldrich left treatment and found employment, which she kept until Jarrett was born, drug free. Ms. Robbins also reported that Ms. Eldrich was part of a housing family unification program<sup>6</sup> and received Section 8 totally subsidized rent.

Rather than re-opening the case, Trudy Fairfax and her supervisor agreed that Trudy would make weekly unannounced visits for a month and Ms. Eldrich would be required to provide Ms. Fairfax with the names of three different people who could verify that Ms. Eldrich was not using drugs. If it appeared that leaving the children in the car was an isolated incident and Ms. Eldrich was not using drugs, a case would not be opened. Ms. Eldrich did provide the names of three individuals. None of these individuals were family members. Ms. Eldrich refused to give the names of any family members because she stated that she did not want them to know she was involved with the Department again, even at this level. Trudy Fairfax contacted the three individuals, all of whom denied any knowledge of current drug use by Lena Eldrich. Ms. Fairfax and her supervisor never attempted to contact paternal relative, Paula Galley, who had been a caretaker for Ms. Eldrich's children during a prior open case. The case was not re-opened.

### Second Intact Family Case 5/99

In April 1999, Lena Eldrich gave birth to her second cocaine-exposed infant, Caden Sandall (D sequence). CPI Neil Porter, the assigned investigator, indicated the case for Substance Misuse and Ms. Eldrich's case was re-opened for intact family services. A petition was also filed with the court

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<sup>4</sup> Ms. Robbins reported that prior to the aunt, Paula Galley, becoming the daycare provider, Ms. Eldrich's sister cared for Tamara. She said it was during that time that Tamara was taken to the doctor and it was discovered that she had gonorrhea. Everyone in the sister's home was tested, but no one had the disease. At that time, alternative childcare arrangements were made with Ms. Eldrich's aunt. According to the DCP report, only Lena Eldrich and her cousin, Carl, were tested for gonorrhea.

<sup>5</sup> Ms. Robbins told Ms. Fairfax that the focus was always on Ms. Eldrich's good grooming, which included frequent hairstyling and clothing. There were rumors that the funds came from Ms. Eldrich's boyfriend who was a suspected drug dealer.

<sup>6</sup> In a telephone interview with the OIG a supervisor with the Housing Authority explained that the family unification program is a program that allows a family involved with the Department of Children and Family Services to access Section 8 benefits before others not involved with the Department who are waiting for assistance. DCFS fills out the application and the Housing Authority conducts a one time "police check" on all applicants. According to the supervisor, if the "police check" reveals a criminal history, the applicant is no longer considered eligible for the program and will be denied. Families involved with the Department can only benefit from this program once.

because this was Ms. Eldrich's second child born drug exposed.<sup>7</sup> The Department was awarded guardianship of Caden Sandall, Jr. on June 29, 1999. Neither Ms. Eldrich nor the father, Caden Sandall, Sr. was present at the court hearing and as a result both were defaulted. Caden remained at home with mother.

Gwen O'Hara received the case May 4, 1999. In July 1999, Ms. Eldrich was told to contact an outpatient drug treatment program. Ms. Eldrich was to successfully complete a drug treatment program and was informed that the consequence of not doing so could result in the removal of her children. Ms. Eldrich agreed to enter drug treatment. According to the case record, as of October 1999, Ms. Eldrich still had not entered drug treatment.

In November 1999, Howard Tackitt, Ms. Eldrich's older brother, contacted the caseworker, Ms. O'Hara. Mr. Tackitt reported that Lena Eldrich had an abusive childhood. He reported being raised in a very neglectful environment, frequently being without sufficient food, clothing or shelter. According to Mr. Tackitt, there were times when there were no operable utilities due to his mother using the money on drugs (mostly marijuana and alcohol). His mother died of an overdose and there was concern among family members that Lena would end up the same way. When their mother died, the maternal grandmother, Lena Tackitt, tried to take all four siblings into her home. However, Lena Eldrich's father fought this matter in court and won custody of Lena.<sup>8</sup> He then left the area and moved Lena away from her siblings and other family members. Mr. Tackitt reported that Lena was physically and emotionally abused and possibly sexually abused.

In reference to her drug use, Mr. Tackitt reported that Lena was using drugs a lot more than she admitted and that she had recently been arrested, once for trying to steal medication and once for trying to steal school clothes.<sup>9</sup> Mr. Tackitt reported that their grandmother, Lena Tackitt, paid \$700 to get Lena out of jail. Mr. Tackitt also stated that on a couple of occasions, Lena was not available to get Tamara from school due to her drug problem.<sup>10</sup> He stated that the teachers had threatened to call the police if it happened again. Mr. Tackitt further reported that Lena went to the hospital last year following a reaction to drugs. He informed the worker that Lena has a grandmother, a sister, a younger brother and a maternal aunt in the area. He stated that all these family members had attempted to help Lena, but she refused to do what she needed to do to address her drug addiction. He said family members would be willing to care for the children if the need arose.

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<sup>7</sup> In his interview with the OIG, CPI Porter explained that the practice was that a petition for supervision automatically be filed when dealing with a second drug-exposed infant.

<sup>8</sup> The four siblings all had different biological fathers.

<sup>9</sup> A LEADS conducted by the OIG indicated that Lena Eldrich was arrested two times for retail theft, her last arrest being November 11, 1999. This seems to confirm the information provided by Mr. Tackitt. While the arrests are referred to in a service plan, there is no case note indicating that the caseworker ever discussed the arrests with Ms. Eldrich.

<sup>10</sup> The OIG subpoenaed records on Tamara and Marcia from a particular school. A response was sent indicating that after a search of their records, no records were found showing that Tamara and Marcia attended this school. The OIG investigator also spoke with the principal by phone. He stated that they searched for these students at other schools with the same name in their area and were unable to locate any records.

In November and December 1999, Ms. Eldrich sporadically attended an intensive outpatient drug treatment program. She was ultimately unsuccessfully discharged from this program on January 11, 2000, due to repeated unexcused absences from counseling, her repeated use of drugs and positive urine drops. According to the discharge summary, Ms. Eldrich's last date of treatment attendance was December 13, 1999. She tested positive for marijuana and cocaine on December 6, 1999, and tested positive for cocaine on December 13, 1999.

At a January 2000 court hearing, the caseworker recommended to the court that guardianship of Caden Sandall be maintained because Ms. Eldrich was not attending intensive outpatient drug treatment on a regular basis. Residential placement was being discussed, as intensive outpatient did not seem to be helping Ms. Eldrich remain drug-free. Ms. Eldrich never entered inpatient treatment.

Ms. Eldrich was given "one last opportunity" to address her problem through intensive outpatient treatment and was referred back to an intensive outpatient program. According to a 2/29/00 Progress Report from the intensive outpatient program, Ms. Eldrich was assessed for the program on February 9, 2000. During that month, she attended 2 out of 4 individual sessions and 9 out of 13 group sessions and had 2 out of 2 positive drops for cocaine on February 9, 2000, and February 25, 2000. In June 2000, after four months in treatment, the caseworker received a telephone call from a counselor at the program who reported that Ms. Eldrich continued to drop dirty and would be referred for residential treatment if she had one more dirty drop. According to the case entry, a contract was entered into between Lena Eldrich and the counselor, agreeing that Ms. Eldrich would be more compliant in treatment.<sup>11</sup>

According to a progress report dated 7/11/00, Ms. Eldrich was dropped two times, with one clean and one dirty drop. The last drop collected on July 5, 2000, was clean.

On July 18, 2000, the court discharged Caden Sandall from the guardianship of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services' Guardianship Administrator at the request of the caseworker and her supervisor.<sup>12</sup> In her progress report to the court, the caseworker said that Ms. Eldrich had maintained adequate housing and appropriate childcare and supervision of all of her children and that she was now consistently attending drug treatment and was committed to addressing her addiction. The family case was kept open.

According to a 8/3/00 progress report from the intensive outpatient program, 5 out of 5 of Ms. Eldrich's urine drops were clean. However, Ms. Eldrich's attendance dropped and she tended to be

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<sup>11</sup> Also around this period of time, as noted in the service plan dated 5/30/00, staff from Ms. Eldrich's treatment facility voiced concern that at times her interaction with her children was harsh and intimidating. There had also been signs at times of a decline in the children's physical appearance as it related to their hair being combed.

<sup>12</sup> According to CYCIS, Zoe Maple began supervising Ms. O'Hara on this case 7/1/00 when Ms. O'Hara transferred to her team.

absent the day before and the day after a weekend. According to an 8/31/00 progress report, only 2 out of 4 urine drops were clean.

On Friday, August 18, 2000, the hotline was contacted again (E sequence). Lena Eldrich left her seven-year-old, four-year-old, three-year-old, and one-year-old children unsupervised. Ms. Eldrich's drug treatment counselor went to the home to check on Ms. Eldrich because she had missed an appointment that morning at the treatment center. The counselor found the children alone and called the police. The police responded to the scene. Ms. Eldrich returned home one hour and forty-five minutes after the counselor got to her home. Ms. Eldrich and the children were transported to the police department and Ms. Eldrich was charged with Endangering the Life of a Child and released. The police contacted the DCFS hotline and a child protection investigator took the children into protective custody.<sup>13</sup> CPI Neil Porter was assigned the investigation. Both Ms. Eldrich's caseworker and drug counselor told CPI Porter they did not believe the children were in imminent risk. Ms. Eldrich reported to the CPI that she had left the house to look for her house keys, which were dropped out of a car window by one of her children, when getting a ride home from the dentist by Caden Sandall, Sr. (biological father of Caden Sandall). When they got to their residence, the keys could not be found. They entered the residence through a rear door that was unlocked. Ms. Eldrich admitted to relapsing the previous day and smoking crack cocaine. She reported that her counselor was aware of this.

When the on-call worker interviewed the oldest child, Tamara, she stated that her mother was only gone for a minute looking around the block for her keys. Tamara reported that her mother sometimes leaves the children home alone during the day, but never at night. Tamara said that she took good care of her brothers and sister; sometimes she cooked noodles for them and made them take naps in the afternoon. Mother was indicated for inadequate supervision.

Protective custody was allowed to lapse and the children were returned to their mother. Lena Eldrich, her intact worker, Gwen O'Hara, CPI Neil Porter and his supervisor signed a Safety Protection Plan, dated 8/21/00. It provided that mother agreed not to leave the minors unsupervised; the worker would assist mother with arranging daycare services for the minors and mother agreed to continue her participation in substance abuse treatment. During an interview with the OIG, Mr. Porter explained that he and his supervisor decided to allow the children to remain at home because the mother's story appeared credible - the children reported the same story - and there was an intact family caseworker servicing the family.

A progress report from the outpatient program, dated 10/5/00, indicated that Ms. Eldrich attended 4 out of 4 individual sessions and 36 out of 40 group sessions. All three urine drops for the period of time covered were clean. It was also noted that Ms. Eldrich did not attend any support groups and did not have a support system. The next progress report dated 12/29/00 indicated that Lena Eldrich missed

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<sup>13</sup> The Captain informed the DCP investigator meeting the mandate that he was not aware that the people from the outpatient program were out to do a drug urine test at the time he sent the family home. He agreed to send an officer out with the worker to take protective custody.



fifty percent of her treatment days during two weeks in December.<sup>14</sup> According to the report, numerous attempts were made over those two weeks to engage the client in treatment.

The intact family case was transferred to Dinah Irvine on February 2, 2001. In her interview with the OIG, Ms. Irvine reported that she received the case when the assigned worker became ill.<sup>15</sup> According to Ms. Irvine, the previous worker had only recently transferred to her team (8 months prior, according to CYCIS). It was practice for the previous worker to staff the case with the new worker, however that did not occur in this case. Ms. Irvine reported that she did not recall reading the whole case file because she was required to visit the family within three days of receiving the case.

On February 16, 2001, Ms. Irvine was informed that Ms. Eldrich had missed several drug treatment sessions and her urine drop collected on 2/15 tested positive for cannabinoids and cocaine. Ms. Irvine conducted an in-person visit with Ms. Eldrich on that day. Ms. Eldrich explained that she had been house hunting because her house no longer met Section 8 standards, and she needed to move if the housing authority was to continue paying her rent. According to Ms. Irvine's case note, "this was verified by a housing inspector who came while the worker was present. According to the inspector a door needed repair and a hole in a wall needed repairing. Housing records subpoenaed by the OIG indicated that an inspection occurred on 1/17/01 at which time the following defects existed: window broke out in the living room; storm door needed repair – replace screen; air coming in the back door, frame missing and no key; tile around tub in bathroom and knobs on tub need repair; wash basin replace and repair; a hallway light globe missing; repair holes in hallway walls; smoke detector missing; replace lock on right window in rear bedroom; door off hinge and knob; switch plate needs replacing; and replace siding on house. An inspector was to come out on 2/19/01 to determine if these conditions had been corrected. These were the defects causing the house to fail inspection.

In March 2001 the caseworker received a report stating that Ms. Eldrich was going to be terminated from the intensive outpatient program due to her lack of attendance and positive drops. Based on the case record, this was Ms. Eldrich's last attempt to engage in drug treatment. From this point until April 2002, when Caden died in the house fire, Ms. Eldrich refused drug treatment services.

In April 2001, Ms. Eldrich asked Ms. Irvine, caseworker, whether she could get assistance from the Department to help her move to another house. Ms. Irvine informed her that after community resources had been exhausted there was a possibility she could get some assistance with her deposit. The worker gave her the names of community resources to contact. In May 2001, Lena Eldrich reported that she was not in drug treatment because she had to get a job in order to pay her rent because she didn't move within the time frame given to her by the housing authority, and they were no longer paying her rent until she moved. A case entry dated 9/12/01 indicates that Ms. Eldrich came to the office saying that she

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<sup>14</sup> Ms. Eldrich missed 2 out of 5 treatment days during the week of 12/4 to 12/8 and missed 3 out of 5 sessions during the week of 12/11 to 12/15.

<sup>15</sup> A case note indicates that this case was transferred to a new worker due to the "extended absence of the assigned caseworker." Zoe Maple stated in her interview with the OIG that Gwen O'Hara had medical problems and was off of work quite a bit. She also felt stress on the job and ultimately took medical leave.

may have to move because the Section 8 inspectors did not approve the house for Section 8. She again wanted to know if the Department would financially assist her. Ms. Irvine advised Ms. Eldrich to let her know when she found a house and Ms. Irvine would see what could be done. Ms. Eldrich stated that her landlord had another house, and she could get it. On September 19, 2001, Ms. Eldrich requested that Ms. Irvine talk with an employee at the Housing Authority because she was threatening to terminate her Section 8. Ms. Irvine called the Housing Authority employee to inquire about the situation and the employee informed her that she had given Lena Eldrich a six month extension to bring in a new lease and she never did, so at this point the only thing Ms. Eldrich could do was reapply.<sup>16</sup> In October, Ms. Eldrich asked Ms. Irvine about assistance with first and last month rent. Ms. Irvine told her as soon as she found housing she would write a request for assistance.

On October 10, 2001, the hotline was contacted for the eighth time regarding the Eldrich family (H sequence). According to CANTS, Ms. Eldrich's childcare provider reported that she began caring for Ms. Eldrich's children on 9/15/01 and that on 10/3, Ms. Eldrich failed to pick up the children when she got off work at 11:00 p.m. The reporter said she brought the children home at midnight, but their mother was not there. She returned with the children at 5:00 a.m. and the mother said she went out to get some food, but gave no reason for not picking up the children or calling her. The reporter further said that Marcia had ringworm and the reporter took her to the doctor on 10/4 and got a prescription, but mother had not filled it. The following day, 10/11/01, the reporter called back stating that Caden sustained a serious burn on his hand on 10/10 and that mother said she was not going to work so she could take him to the doctor. Later, Ms. Eldrich told the reporter that the doctor's office was closed, so Caden was not treated. Ms. Eldrich said that Caden was burned on an iron. The reporter said it appeared to be a third degree burn. CPI Bridget Cossart was assigned to investigate. Ms. Cossart spoke with the caseworker, Dinah Irvine, who informed her that while Ms. Eldrich was not complying with her service plan, particularly drug treatment, she maintained housing and had taken care of the children's basic needs.

Ms. Eldrich was interviewed on October 11, 2001, and stated that she went right home after work and waited for the childcare provider to bring the children home, which she usually did around 11:30. She said she never went back out, but laid down at about 11:45. She said she would never leave the children with the babysitter without asking first. Mother said the babysitter called the hotline because mother didn't have the money she owed her for keeping the kids on another day.<sup>17</sup> Ms. Eldrich showed the investigator medicine for Marcia's ringworm and said she didn't take her to the doctor or get the prescription filled because she already had medicine. Ms. Cossart observed the medication and Marcia, who appeared free from ringworm. Ms. Eldrich said Caden burned himself on an iron she left on a dresser. CPI Cossart told the OIG that she questioned Caden's ability to reach the iron so she

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<sup>16</sup> In a telephone interview with the OIG, the Housing Authority employee verified that as of 9/13/01, Lena Eldrich was off of Section 8. She also reported that Ms. Eldrich had reapplied for Section 8 on 9/27/02, following the fire and Caden's death, using the family unification program. On 10/29/02 she was denied because a family is only allowed to use the family unification program, which moves them ahead of other applicants, one time.

<sup>17</sup> In her interview with the OIG, CPI Cossart stated that this is what she believed had happened. However, she never discussed this with the caretaker to verify whether Lena Eldrich owed her money.

had Caden demonstrate how he climbed on the dresser, and he was able to reach it. Ms. Eldrich reported that she took Caden to the doctor, but the office was closed (10/10/01), so she took him the next morning. Ms. Cossart confirmed with the doctor's office that Caden was seen there on October 11<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Eldrich was indicated for burns by neglect to Caden because she left a hot iron within Caden's reach while she went to take a shower, and she failed to seek immediate medical attention for the burn. The Department unfounded the allegation of inadequate supervision, finding that there was a miscommunication between Ms. Eldrich and the childcare provider. The allegation of medical neglect was also unfounded as the CPI observed the medication used by mother to treat the ringworm and observed no visible signs of ringworm on Marcia.

Following this last hotline call, contact between Ms. Eldrich and her caseworker, Dinah Irvine, was minimal. Ms. Irvine did follow-up with the injuries to Caden and verified that Caden received medical treatment. Her case notes indicate that there were monthly visits from October to March 2002. In January 2002, Ms. Eldrich asked Ms. Irvine for assistance in finding a new job. She was given employment leads and told to contact the worker if she was successful. In February 2002, Ms. Eldrich stated that she was going to try to get into the Certified Nurses Assistance class at the local area College Center. Ms. Eldrich also asked when her case would be closed. She was informed that as long as there was a pending investigation, her case could not be closed. A case entry dated 2/6/02, indicated that Lena Eldrich continued to live at her apartment, even though she was no longer getting Section 8, and that all utilities were operable. In her interview with the OIG, Ms. Irvine reported that she believed all utilities to be operable because during her visits the house was always warm and the lights were always on. Subsequent to the fire, Ms. Irvine discovered that Ms. Eldrich's gas had been cut off prior to the fire and she attempted to find out why by calling the gas company.<sup>18</sup> Ms. Irvine insisted that she never saw any space heaters, despite the fact that mother was using space heaters to warm the house. (See p. 13). She also reported to the OIG investigator that she saw a smoke detector in the house. However, the fire marshal report and the housing report cited no smoke detector. (See p. 14)

### *Sequence I Investigation – Death of Caden Sandall*

On April 17, 2002, the police contacted the hotline to report that 3 year-old Caden Sandall had died in a house fire (I sequence). The fire occurred in the middle of the afternoon. The allegations were death and substantial risk of physical injury/environment injurious to health and welfare. According to the Coroner's report, Caden Sandall's cause of death was smoke inhalation due to a house fire. CPI Greta Vonstein was assigned to investigate. Her supervisor is Zoe Maple.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ms. Irvine was unable to get information from the gas company stating that without an account number, they would not give out information. However, Ms. Eldrich reported to the fire investigator that the furnace had not worked for a year and the fire investigator said the gas had been shut off several months before the fire. (See p. 13)

<sup>19</sup> Ms. Maple supervised both Dinah Irvine and Greta Vonstein because the East St. Louis Field Office uses the paired team model.

CPI Greta Vonstein met with the intact family caseworker, Dinah Irvine and the family on April 18, 2002. Dinah Irvine reported that Ms. Eldrich had not been cooperative with the Service Plan objectives related to substance abuse treatment. However, she had no other issues/concerns identified as ongoing issues related to abuse/neglect. Ms. Eldrich reported that she had been suffering with a toothache for which she had been taking Tylenol PMs. She reported that she and Caden went back to sleep after Jarrett left for school. She stated that she put a tape in for Caden to watch and took two more Tylenols. She reported that she woke up at noon and Caden was still asleep. She stayed up because Jarrett's bus was due to return home from school. Jarrett returned at 12:30 p.m. Ms. Eldrich reported that her tooth was still hurting and she took more Tylenol. Ms. Eldrich allowed five-year-old Jarrett to go outside and made Caden come lay back down with her in her bedroom. Ms. Eldrich reported that she dozed off and Caden must have gotten up. When she woke up, it was hot and she saw smoke. She went to Caden's room and it was in flames. She stated that she heard screaming, but she could not get into the room. She ran outside and saw Jarrett and a neighbor. She tried to go back in, but was unable to do so. Ms. Eldrich denied being under the influence. Ms. Eldrich admitted that she smoked marijuana the night before and crack cocaine 3-4 days prior. Ms. Eldrich admitted past substance abuse treatment and her refusal to cooperate with treatment. She reported that her last attempt was with the intensive outpatient program in December 2000-January 2001, which she did not successfully complete. She admitted that she does continue to use periodically but denied that she gets "high" in the children's presence. The surviving children were taken into protective custody and placed with relative caretakers by the child protection investigator.<sup>20</sup>

CPI Vonstein spoke with the Fire Marshal on April 18, 2002. Mr. Smith reported several concerns regarding the circumstances in which the child was found as well as the living conditions. The Fire Marshal reported that the child's body was located under approximately 1-½ feet of clothing. The child was lying on his back and this is not typical. Mr. Smith reported that the child was alive at the time of the fire. He had concern regarding a space heater that did not have a plug and was used by putting bare, exposed wires directly into the wall outlet. He did not believe the space heater was the cause of the fire. Gas was not the source of fire either as it had been shut off.<sup>21</sup> His concern regarding the conditions of the residence included an extreme amount of clutter, clothing littered throughout and the kitchen was in deplorable condition with little to no food present in the cabinets or refrigerator. The Fire Marshal reported that during his investigation he discovered evidence of a previous fire in the home. He stated that Ms. Eldrich said the fire took place approximately 6-7 months prior and was the result of an ashtray being dumped into the trash. The fire caught in the kitchen, where the refrigerator was moved to cover up the damage.

On April 22, 2002, CPI Greta Vonstein and her supervisor, Zoe Maple, met with Ms. Eldrich. Ms. Eldrich informed them that until Caden's death, she thought her case had been closed. She reported

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<sup>20</sup> The children were initially placed with Lena Eldrich's paternal aunt, Paula Galley. Since that time they've been in several placements, relative and non-relative, but they are currently with maternal relatives.

<sup>21</sup> During an interview with the Fire Marshal, Ms. Eldrich reported that the gas had been shut off for non-payment several months before the fire.

that Ms. Irvine was no longer coming to her home and had advised her that she intended to close her case.<sup>22</sup> Ms. Eldrich stated that she did not want her case closed. As to the problems in her home, Ms. Eldrich reported that the furnace (blower) went out approximately one year ago, doorframes were not intact, the bathroom sink was leaning and the faucets leaked. She stayed in the home for six to seven months rent-free.<sup>23</sup> She reported that she knew the house was not “right” and the landlord was not fixing things, as he should. He had made a few repairs such as putting in some new screens and fixing a crack in the living room window, however other things needed to be fixed and he was not doing it. Ms. Eldrich lost her Section 8 because the home no longer passed their inspections and according to Ms. Eldrich, a worker from the City Hall, advised her that the home should be condemned, but she denied that it ever was. Ms. Eldrich reported that she was using space heaters in the bedroom for heat because the furnace was not working. Ms. Eldrich reported that she did relate her need for housing to her caseworker, Ms. Irvine, who tried to get her Norman funds, but was not successful. Ms. Eldrich admitted that she had piles of clothes in the kitchen. She stated that the clothes were to be given away. She also admitted that she had clothing piled in the children’s bedroom closet across from the space heater.

Five-year-old Jarrett was interviewed by a worker from a fire setters intervention program. The report dated June 26, 2002, states that he met with Jarrett Quinn at the doctor’s office on June 26, 2002.<sup>24</sup> Jarrett reported that on the day of the fire, he was playing with a blue lighter that he got from his mother’s room.<sup>25</sup> While he was playing with the lighter, the bed caught on fire, starting with the cover. He said he tried to blow the fire out and could not get it out. He then said he got scared and ran in the bathroom and got a cup of water and tried to put the fire out but said he couldn’t because it was hot. Jarrett said he then began screaming and yelling for his mom to wake up, but she did not. He then ran down the hall and ran outside and hid.

In the report from the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal, Division of Arson Investigation/Incident Initiation Report, a box is checked indicating that there were no smoke detectors in the home. In the Fire Department Scene Report, completed by the chief, the number of detectors listed in the residence is “unknown.” The OIG investigator contacted the chief for clarification and was informed that he did not remember seeing any smoke detectors.<sup>26</sup> He further recalled that while the children’s room had a lot of fire damage, the front of the house did not and therefore if there had been smoke detectors he would have been able to see them. He described the home as filthy and “ram shackled” with clothes in the kitchen up to three feet high.

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<sup>22</sup> Ms. Irvine’s last documented contact with Ms. Eldrich was 3/13/02.

<sup>23</sup> In an interview with the Fire Marshal, Ms. Eldrich stated that her landlord let her stay in the house until she found another place to live. When asked why her landlord would allow her to stay rent-free, Ms. Eldrich stated that they have known each other since she was nine years old and they had an “arrangement.” When asked what type of arrangement, Ms. Eldrich stated, “We had a sexual relationship, he’s not my boyfriend but we get along together if that’s what you mean.”

<sup>24</sup> Jarrett was receiving counseling, which began following the fire.

<sup>25</sup> Caseworker, Dinah Irvine, denied ever seeing lighters in the Eldrich household, as according to her, mother was not a smoker.

<sup>26</sup> During an inspection by the Housing Authority, in January 2001, missing smoke detectors were noted.

In May 2002, the Fire Marshal advised CPI Vonstein that while at this point he could not determine definitively if the fire was accidental, he did not feel strongly that there was a criminal case. However, evidence was sent to the lab as part of his investigation to determine if an accelerant was present that would suggest that the fire was intentionally set. The Fire Marshal's Report completed July 1, 2002, concluded that the fire was accidental, caused by a child playing with a flame-producing device.<sup>27</sup>

Ms. Eldrich was indicated for Death by Neglect due to her failure to provide adequate supervision of her children. Ms. Vonstein summarized the investigation and finding, stating that,

Ms. Eldrich demonstrated blatant disregard of her parental responsibilities, which resulted in her son's death. In April 2002, Ms. Eldrich was home alone with her two-year-old son Caden and five-year-old son, Jarrett. She allowed Jarrett to go outside to play, while she lay down in bed, taking Caden with her. Ms. Eldrich explained that she had a toothache and was not feeling well. Ms. Eldrich reported that she fell asleep and was awakened by a fire in her home. Ms. Eldrich reported the use of crack cocaine 3-4 days prior to the fire, marijuana the night before the fire and taking Tylenol PM's the previous night, earlier that morning and approximately one hour prior to the fire. Ms. Eldrich was seen at the hospital on the day of the fire and blood was taken. The results showed that Ms. Eldrich had cannabis, cocaine and opiates in her system. It was later determined that Jarrett was playing with a lighter in his and Caden's bedroom and a bed sheet caught fire, which subsequently caught Caden and the home on fire. Jarrett reported that he attempted to put out the fire and to awaken his mother but despite his screaming and yelling, she did not wake up. Jarrett had a reported history of playing with lighters and matches. Ms. Eldrich had a long history of indicated DCFS involvement for neglect to her children and chronic substance abuse. Ms. Eldrich had been non-compliant in that she never addressed her substance abuse problem despite an open case.

Allegations #60 (Substantial Risk of Physical Injury/Environment Injurious to Health and Welfare) and #74 (Inadequate Supervision) were also indicated for the same reasons. Allegation #77 (Inadequate Shelter) was added and indicated as Ms. Eldrich admitted that her home had no working furnace and that she was utilizing space heaters throughout the residence as a heat source. Ms. Eldrich admitted that one such space heater, used in the children's bedroom, did not have a plug and she used that heater by putting bare, exposed wires directly into the wall outlet.

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<sup>27</sup> In October 2002, CPI Vonstein and her supervisor were apprised that the fire investigation had been reopened by the fire marshal as the state police had submitted a report documenting that clothing worn by the client, Lena Eldrich, had been tested to have combustible liquid. In November 2002, supervisor Zoe Maple telephoned an Illinois State Trooper to discuss any criminal investigation regarding this case. He stated that the investigation had remained open since the fire. He conducted a polygraph on Lena Eldrich, which she passed on October 16, 2002. He said he would present a report to the State's Attorney who would make the determination regarding any criminal proceedings. He reported that he interviewed Lena Eldrich on several different occasions and her account of the incident remained consistent. He was in possession of the report that documented gasoline on her clothing, however, he could not explain how it was applied to the clothing as it was documented that Ms. Eldrich was on the ground outside of her home at the time of the fire. He could not prove that Ms. Eldrich started the fire. She had been cooperative, did not have a motive and did not gain anything by the death of her child.

The DCP investigation of Caden's death took almost eight months.<sup>28</sup> During the investigation, there was disagreement between CPI Greta Vonstein and Intact Family Worker Dinah Irvine about what should happen with the case. Such disagreement was reflected in an investigation note dated 7/3/02. Ms. Vonstein documented that the Assistant State's Attorney had concerns because following his contact with the follow-up worker, Ms. Irvine, he was under the impression that DCFS wanted the petition dismissed and the children returned. Ms. Vonstein advised him that this was not her position. She wanted the petition pursued and, at minimum an order of protection if the children went home. Ms. Vonstein wanted the children to remain in DCFS custody for a period of time to see if Ms. Eldrich could maintain sobriety, given her long history and her refusal to get treatment.

The OIG contacted Lena's sister and her paternal aunt, Paula Galley, by phone. Ms. Galley reported that she had been the caretaker for the older three children for a period of time. She never cared for Caden. Ms. Galley stated that the only contact she had with any DCFS caseworker was following the house fire and Caden's death at which time the children were placed with her. The children have since been moved. They are currently placed with Lena's sister. The sister also reported that her only contact with a DCFS caseworker was following the fatal fire. She often called the caseworker to check on the children prior to them being placed with her. The children were placed with her in December 2002. Both relatives reported that family members had attempted to help Lena, however, Lena was in and out of their lives. Of the two relatives, the sister reported more consistent contact with her sister and her sister's children. She also reported that Ms. Eldrich continues to be involved with Caden Sandall, Sr. who is a suspected drug dealer. While both Ms. Galley and Lena's sister reported that Lena kept her home decent and her children well groomed, the sister did report that there were times that the lights or the water would be turned off and Ms. Eldrich would ask for money. Her hesitation with assisting her sister financially was she did not know whether the money was being used for drugs or towards the bills. According to the sister, in the end she and her husband helped because of the kids. The sister also mentioned the gas being turned off and the use of space heaters to warm the house.

On January 13, 2003, the court found that it was not in the best interests of the minors that the caseworker, Dinah Irvine, and her supervisor, Zoe Maple, continue to monitor the case. The Department was ordered to reassign the case.

## **ANALYSIS**

Nationally, children under age 5 are twice as likely to die from fire than the rest of the population (U.S. Fire Administration, 2003). Young children's less acute perception of danger, less control over their environment, and their limited ability to react promptly and properly to a fire contribute to this increased risk (National Safe Kids Campaign, 2003). Fire is the number one leading cause of unintentional death for children under age 5 in Illinois (the third leading cause in the United States as a whole) (U.S. Fire

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<sup>28</sup> The CPI was given extensions for completing the investigation to wait for the lab results from the fire marshal's investigation.

Administration, 2003). In Illinois, children under the age of 5 are more than three times as likely to die in a residential fire than the rest of the state's population (U.S. Fire Administration, 2003).

Caden's death may have been prevented if his home had a functioning smoke detector. Risk of death from fire is cut in half with the presence of a working smoke detector (National Fire Protection Association, 2001). In two-thirds of the residential fires in which a child is injured or killed a working smoke detector is not present (National Safe Kids). While a child playing with fire accounts for only 5% of residential fires, it causes 40% of residential fire-related deaths among children. More than 60% of all child-play home fires begin in a bedroom or living room where children are often left alone to play and more than three quarters of these fires are started by the children playing with matches or lighters. As many as two-thirds of child fire play victims are not the children who were playing with the fire (National Safe Kids). Caden's death was an illustrative case study of all of these statistics. Investigation revealed that Caden and his brother, Jarrett, were left unsupervised by their mother. Jarrett started the fire in his bedroom playing with a lighter he found in his mother's room. Caden perished in the fire, while Jarrett, the child who started the fire, was able to escape.

Although the worker characterized the mother as a non-cigarette smoker, the mother's smoking of crack cocaine and marijuana increased the likelihood that she kept a lighter or matches in her home. A parent with a drug problem also is likely to be less capable to provide supervision to young children when the parent is under the influence of drugs or recovering from recent drug use; a high or sleepy parent creates an increased risk to child safety. Caden's mother tested positive for drugs on the day of the fire. Extra precautions to counter the potential for increased environmental risk to children while their parents attempt recovery from addictions would appear to be a prudent course of child welfare intervention. Parents whose main focus has been on obtaining drugs are likely to be less aware of environmental hazards and not as attentive to safety issues within the home. It is therefore important for child welfare workers to assess home safety in a way that will alert the parent to potential safety hazards in the home. Currently, the Department does not have a policy requiring workers to routinely check for safety hazards. However, DCFS' Intact Family Recovery (IFR) Program, an intact family project for families with substance abuse problems built into its programming increased attention to home safety through the use of the substance abuse recovery guide and home safety checklists used by the parents and workers. Seventy-three percent of the families served (375 families were served) were able to remain in a safe and healthy home with no fires. The parents' average length of drug use before intervention was seven to nine years.

The Department first became involved with the Eldrich family in October 1995 when Ms. Eldrich gave birth to a substance-exposed infant. At the time of Caden's death six-and-a-half years later, Ms. Eldrich was still using drugs. There is no evidence in the case records that Ms. Eldrich ever maintained sobriety during this time. All evidence was to the contrary: multiple subsequent hotline reports including inadequate supervision and birth of another substance-exposed infant, reports by Ms. Eldrich's brother that his sister was using drugs, a report by then seven-year-old Tamara that she cared for her siblings when her mother left them alone, and a failure to pay rent (raising the question of where her disposable income was going).



None of the involved child welfare professionals seemed to recognize the risks posed to Ms. Eldrich's children by her continued drug use and drug lifestyle. Hotline reports made after the Department's initial involvement with Ms. Eldrich were treated as isolated incidents. In the same month that an intact family case was first opened (October 1995) following the birth of her first substance-exposed infant, the hotline was contacted with an allegation of sexual abuse to then two-year-old Tamara who was found to have contracted gonorrhea.

Gonorrhea in childhood is almost always due to abuse. (Hobbs, Hanks & Wynne, 1999). The focus of the investigation into the sexual abuse allegation was on a fifteen-year-old cousin framed solely on mother's accusation. After the cousin tested negative for gonorrhea, the case was indicated to an unknown perpetrator. While the mother admitted to contracting two sexually transmitted diseases during her pregnancy, there was no serious investigation into her male partners as possible perpetrators. Family members stated that the mother lived a transient lifestyle creating an increased risk of exposing her daughter to the men in her life. Yet, the intact family caseworker, supervisor, and investigator never considered the mother's drug lifestyle as having any bearing on how a two-year-old child contracted a sexually transmitted disease.

Subsequent reports of inadequate supervision in December 1997, August 2000, and October 2001 were also treated as isolated incidents rather than seen as a pattern of behavior that often accompanies a substance-abusing parent's lifestyle. During the August 2000 investigation seven-year-old Tamara told investigators that her mother left them home alone during the day, but never at night. She also reported cooking for her siblings and making them take naps – indicators that mother was leaving the children at times to fend for themselves either because she was not adequately supervising them or because she was out of the home.

Ms. Irvine's statements that the house was heated, there was a smoke detector, and the mother was providing care belie the realities that the mother was not paying rent, the gas had been shut off several months before the fire, and there was no smoke detector found in the home by either the housing authority or arson investigators. Ms. Irvine appeared to view the case through rose-colored glasses. Because Ms. Eldrich was well-groomed and did not look like a drug addict, Ms. Irvine believed she was well-functioning. Thus, Ms. Eldrich was allowed to continue her drug use without repercussion. Despite positive toxicology reports, Caden's guardianship with DCFS was terminated at the request of Ms. Irvine ending any leverage the court may have had in Ms. Eldrich's recovery. Even though Ms. Eldrich never completed substance abuse treatment, continued to use, and was indicated for inadequate supervision, her case was never re-screened with the court for non-compliance and risk of harm.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The OIG reiterates the following recommendations previously made in another investigation (OIG report #020161):
  - a) Mothers with substance exposed infants who are referred to intact family services must receive intensive specialized intact families services that are designed to safeguard children from harm while providing effective substance abuse treatment.
  - b) The Department should review all intact cases where a mother has more than one substance exposed infant. These cases should be reviewed to determine whether workers should obtain orders of protection for the parents to ensure that they are complying with treatment.
2. This report should be shared and discussed as a training tool with Child Welfare Specialist Dinah Irvine and her supervisor Zoe Maple.

## REFERENCES

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