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The Australian (Australia)

January 24, 2008 Thursday
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Raped girl couldn't be found

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SECTION: LOCAL; Pg. 1

LENGTH: 1035 words

QUEENSLAND welfare workers were unable to find a 13-year-old multiple rape indigenous victim, a profoundly deaf cerebral palsy sufferer whose behaviour had exhausted 43 foster carers and who had been known to the system almost her entire life.

Doctors at Cairns Base Hospital had rung the Department of Child Safety crisis line in an urgent bid to find the girl to treat her for three sexually transmitted infections -- chlamydia, gonorrhoea and trichomoniasis -- contracted when she was allegedly raped by her 19-year-old cousin at Weipa on Cape York in December. Crisis line staff on December 28 were "unaware" the child was under the care of DCS and had no contact details for her, say case notes provided to the Cape York Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect office obtained by The Australian.

"A 13-year old girl who is profoundly deaf, has (fetal alcohol syndrome), cerebral palsy, a learning disability and who has recently been raped," says a doctor in the file. "The best they could do was to give me names of carers. I contacted the Child Protection Investigation Unit (police) and they commenced trying to locate her."

The case of the 13-year-old, who has been supervised by the DSC almost since the day she was born to a 14-year-old alcoholic mother, follows the disclosure in The Australian yesterday of the rapes of very young boys by teenage and pre-teen victims of rape in Kowanyama, to the south of Weipa.

It also follows the disclosure in The Australian in December that nine males who pleaded guilty to the rape of a 10-year-old girl in Aurukun had escaped jail time.

The most foreboding file in the case notes of the 13-year-old Weipa victim is the recommendation made on September 3, 2004, when the then 10-year-old

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was examined by highly-respected paediatrician, Richard Heazlewood.

"(The girl) has been in care since November 2003 and has been having access visits to her natural mother in Napranum (near Weipa) and while in Cairns has been attending the Cairns West School," he wrote.

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``The first stages of puberty are advancing and, according to her carer, she does not mind who she shows this to, which will obviously make her very much at risk back in her home community.

``(The child) will be best served by remaining in Cairns at the West Cairns Special Impaired Hearing Unit, and also remaining in a stable foster care situation."

That care situation continued until July 2005 when Dr Heazlewood again noted: ``(The child) is still attending the Special Education Hearing Impaired unit at West Cairns school. She is demonstrating significant sexualised behaviour, is defiant, has massive tantrums and is quite abusive.

``However, her carer is slowly working on these behavioural patterns, with some improvement."

However in December last year the child was in Bamaga Aboriginal community on the tip of Cape York ``on a trial placement as 43 foster placements in Cairns have failed. (the child) sexually abusing other children. She is not attending school, her grandmother claims that her mother is drinking and has a new boyfriend, and the child is wandering the streets at night.

``The mother is not sticking to the plan of attending school with the child."

The file records that on September 7, 2006 mother had taken her daughter to a drinking party. The following morning she walked into the lounge room where the child was lying naked on the couch engaged in sexual intercourse with a 18-year-old youth. ``The mother hit the youth on the back with a piece of wood to chase him away, and the youth said to the mother: `What's wrong? All the other boys in the community do the same thing with her.'"

The notes following that incident are: ``Child is inadequately supervised and cared for; mother is drinking and lacks basic parenting ability; child has been moving from house to house with no one specific caring for her; child has intellectual disability, behavioural difficulties and limited communication means; mother is pregnant; child's protection order has been allowed to lapse".

The November 1, 2006, SCAN meeting was told that the girl was put back in the care of an Aboriginal woman from whom she had absconded for the weekend on which she was raped. It was reported that her carer drops her off at school but she often left the school and came home late at night, staying in house with lots of boys ``and there is a concern she could get pregnant". Her mother convinced doctors to give the girl, then 12, contraceptive injections.

SCAN was told last May that the child was no longer under the care of the DCS and was living with her grandmother in Weipa.

Then, the file states, in December, the child was raped while in Weipa. She had been living in the nearby community of Napranum and roaming the streets at night. The assault only came to light because a man arrested for drunk driving told police that the girl had revealed the rape to him.

``Dec 2007. Child raped while in Weipa. Living in Napranum, roaming streets at night under `care' of appointed non-relative. Rape incidentally discovered when police arrested a guy for DUI and he informed them that the girl told him about the assault.

``DCS reluctant to bring the child to Cairns -- only reason she was brought to Cairns was due to her deafness -- to allow an interview with an interpreter. DCS had not initiated a plan for health assessment." A DCS officer from Cairns yesterday told The Australian it was unwritten policy to avoid taking Aboriginal children from communities ``because it is considered to be just a repeat of the Stolen Generations".

``A favourite tactic when all else has failed is to get the parent of a severely neglected or abused child to sign a voluntary 30-day order giving custody to another family member, and that delays moving the child, giving a month's

grace in the hope that everybody will forget about it," she said.

``The family members they are put with do not exercise control. In many cases they are perpetrators or victims themselves, and invariably they have drug or alcohol or gambling addictions.

``This is not the way such reports of substantiated abuse are treated in towns and cities, so why should it be the norm for Aboriginal children?"

LOAD-DATE: January 24, 2008

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

JOURNAL-CODE: AUS

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