

## Health + Science

### Child Advocates to examine beating death of Jamarr

**Cruz**

Tuesday, April 14th, 2009

Child advocates are examining what went wrong in the case of Jamarr Cruz, the nine-year-old Camden boy who was beaten to death last month. The man police have charged with Jamarr's murder, Vincent Williams, is his mother's boyfriend and was convicted of abusing the boy two years ago. That had the family under supervision from New Jersey's Division of Youth and Family Services until November of 2008.

#### Listen:

After admitting to beating his girlfriend's son with a belt in 2007, Vincent Williams completed parenting classes and family therapy. Mary Coogan of the Association for Children of New Jersey, a non-profit organization that monitors Youth and Family Services, says what happens after therapy ends is crucial:

**Coogan:** The main thing to focus on is that it's not about the parent or caretaker taking the parenting classes. It's about a case worker making sure that the behavior has changed.

Professor Richard Gelles is the dean of the school of social policy and practice at the University of Pennsylvania. He says welfare agencies are not doing enough to make sure their therapy programs are working, and some perpetrators are beyond help:

**Gelles:** No amount of parenting classes and no amount of therapy will change some offenders. And child welfare systems, in general are not yet capable and have not invested a lot of time in doing danger assessment and risk assessment

Gelles says more than 1200 children are killed by their parents or caretakers each year, and half of them have received services from child welfare agencies prior to their death.

Mary Coogan says child advocates are now investigating whether the right protocol was followed after Williams completed the court-mandated therapy. The agency closed the case in November of last year, two months after Williams had been accused of abusing the boy again. Coogan says there has to be an investigation into how this case was handled to prevent future tragedies:

**Coogan:** to me the most critical question is whether or not case workers are routinely following regulations that DYFS is supposed to implement in both investigating allegations of abuse and neglect and in following up with families they are supervising.

New Jersey has invested close to a billion dollars over the past six years to improve child welfare services in the state.