

Gun accident kills toddler

Teens handling pistol when it fired, cops say

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A 2-year-old boy who had "a hug and a kiss for everyone" was accidentally shot and killed in his Bellwood home by a teenager handling a gun that had been left under a bed, police said Thursday.

The boy's uncle and a friend, both 16, found the pistol Wednesday evening and were handling it when it discharged, sending a bullet through the door and into Deshawn Robinson, who was in a hallway, said the boy's grandmother, Caroline Powell-Adair.

"My 13-year-old was about to pick Deshawn up to bring him downstairs," she said. "Just when he reached down to pick him up, the gun went off."

Bellwood police said Powell-Adair rushed the boy to Westlake Hospital in Melrose Park, where he was pronounced dead at 6:30 p.m.

Bellwood police were still investigating the incident late Thursday, and no decision had been reached on whether any criminal charges would be filed, said Bellwood Public Safety Director Wilson Pierce.

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services also is investigating, according to a spokeswoman, who also said DCFS has had no previous contact with the family.

On Thursday, neighbors and friends left flowers and stuffed animals next to a tree as a makeshift memorial outside Deshawn's home in the 400 block of Granville Avenue.

"He was a wonderful, wonderful little boy," said Powell-Adair. "He was just ... just sunshine. It's impossible to express our grief."

Deshawn's mother, Tionne Powell, a 2004 graduate of Proviso West High School, was home at the time of the shooting, but she was staying at the home of another relative Thursday, said Powell-Adair.

The grandmother and police said the pistol belongs to another of Powell-Adair's children, who uses the gun in a security job.

Powell-Adair and police declined to identify other family members, including the boys who found the gun.

Illinois law requires gun owners to prevent minors younger than 14 from gaining access to guns, but it provides for prosecution only if a minor causes death or severe injury with a gun, according to legal authorities reached Thursday.

That law would not apply to Deshawn's shooting because the boys who found the gun were older than 14, they said.

The law was used in March to file a misdemeanor charge against Thomas Paine, 35, of Stickney, whose son Thomas, 3, found his father's pistol and fatally shot himself. But prosecutors dropped the charge last month, saying it would needlessly compound the tragedy, a spokesman said.

In May, the Illinois General Assembly passed a bill requiring gun locks to be provided with every gun sold in the state, but in a concession to gun-rights advocates, it does not require the locks to actually be used. One of the sponsors, state Rep. Deborah Graham (D-Chicago), said Thursday she has asked Gov. Rod Blagojevich to hold a public signing of the bill to call attention to the need to keep guns secured.

On Deshawn's block Thursday, residents expressed shock at his death and concern for the family, especially the emotional toll the incident will take on the boy who held the gun when it fired.

"This is messed up," said Eric Estes, a resident of the block whose 1- and 3-year-old children sometimes played with Deshawn. "He won't grow up and have a chance to get high on life because of an accident."

"I don't know how that family can rebuild," said Latreat Richardson, another neighbor. "My heart really goes out to [the teen]. I hope he comes out of this not scarred."

Some neighbors were surprised that the pistol was not locked up and that teenagers were able to get their hands on it so easily.

"This is a tragedy that didn't have to happen," said a neighbor who asked not to be identified.

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