

March 18, 2022

Following is Saint Francis' response to the question the Task Force had during the 3-14-2022 meeting.

When would Saint Francis/DCCCA recommend calling WPD instead of making arrangements to pick a youth up from the foster family? What policies does Saint Francis Ministries have when it comes to youth/children whose behaviors are out of control when they are in a foster home placement? Is it policy to call police as well?

Cedric Lofton's death was a tragedy. His life mattered. He was loved and well cared for by his foster father. He was in a stable, long-term foster placement of over two years with an African American foster parent and case manager. He had a long-term consistent team of dedicated professionals at St. Francis and other community organizations working on his behalf to support his physical and mental health.

When a child in our care has demonstrated that he or she is a danger to themselves or to others, the foster parent may seek help from community partners to assist in transporting the youth to a facility to receive immediate mental health treatment.

Calling law enforcement is a last resort measure, used only when safety is a serious concern.

Saint Francis Ministries provides ongoing and extensive training and support to foster parents to give them the tools they need to manage all manner of crises that could arise with their foster children. Additionally, Saint Francis provides a case manager and supervisor for each foster family. We have policies in place to assess the situation and provide support to both the foster family and foster youth. Each situation is assessed and addressed individually, based upon the level of crisis and the safety needs of all involved.

We counsel and train foster parents to use reasonable and prudent parenting to manage situations that may arise. On occasion, some foster parents may request professional assistance that goes beyond prudent parenting, which could include, but is not limited to:

- If a youth is missing (i.e., a runaway, etc.) or has returned home from a runaway situation. We are required to contact law enforcement immediately;
- If we cannot safely transport a youth to a mental health screening; and
- If a criminal act has been committed.

In long-term placement situations, when possible, we request that the foster family or foster parent accompany the youth, to ensure the continuity of services and to be sure the youth has an advocate. The foster family knows the child well and can share details of new or unusual behaviors.

Our experience is that law enforcement officers have historically helped de-escalate. Often, the safety concern can be resolved without removing a child from their environment.

Our recommendation is that trained mental health professionals and/or integrated care teams that include law enforcement be available 24/7 to be dispatched to respond to mental health related crises where safety is a serious concern.