

Too drunk to care?

Written by Gallupsun Staff

Friday, 08 November 2019 09:57



People choose booze, drugs over kids

Staff Reports

Although it's only a misdemeanor, abandonment of a child is one of those charges that could have a profound effect on the lives of children in this area.

The actual charge is abandonment or abuse of a child and it usually is given when a child or even a young teenager is found being taken care of by a parent, relative, or caregiver who is too intoxicated to watch over the safety of that child.

It's also a crime that seems to be on the rise as many families in this area deal with the effects of alcohol abuse.

As can be seen in the cases we reported this week, it can be a parent who is charged with DWI or one who is at home with no other sober adults around to care for the children. There have even been cases where parents allow their young children to take care of themselves while they go to Fire Rock Navajo Casino to gamble and drink.

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Gallup Police Lt. Erin Toadlena--Pablo, spokeswoman for the Gallup Police Department, said when officers arrest someone for DWI, they ask the person if there is someone at their home, either a child or an elderly person, who depends on them for their care, and is currently without someone to care for them.

If the answer is yes, officers will be dispatched to that location to make sure there is a responsible adult around to supervise. The same thing happens when someone is arrested for DWI and there is no one in the car sober enough to care for the child.

In these kinds of cases, she said, the intoxicated person is asked if there is a relative they would like police to call who would be willing to care for the child while that person is being detained.

She said that before the child is turned over to someone else, police check to make sure that person has not been convicted of a felony and is not on the sex offender registry.

If no one is available, the Children, Youth and Family Department is notified and a social worker is dispatched to pick up the child, who is then taken care of by the state, until a responsible adult can be found to take over his or her care.

Here are the most recent cases handled by the police department:

On Sept. 22, police were dispatched to the Holiday Inn in reference to a fighting couple.

When they arrived, they found Brian Laughing, 30, of Navajo, N.M. and Gabrielle Whitney, 23, of Ganado, Ariz. They also found a two-month old baby in the room.

Both adults showed signs of being intoxicated and police were preparing to arrest both of them. Laughing told police he would accept all the responsibility for the fight if they would agree not to

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charge his girlfriend.

Police considered the proposal but went ahead with arresting both of them when Whitney posted a .11 on a portable breath alcohol machine. Police were able to make contact with Laughing's mother to pick up the baby.

On the same day, police were dispatched to Miyamura Park in connection with a possible domestic dispute.

When they got there, they found Miguel Yazzie, no age or hometown listed, and Monica Nachin, 38, of Gallup. Both were intoxicated. Nachin was found hiding behind a large metal fence. With her was her five-month old baby in a car seat.

Yazzie was taken to the Gallup Detox Center and Nachin was taken to county jail and charged with abandonment of a child. In this case, police transported the child to Gamerco to be taken care of by family members.

Again, on Sept. 22, police were called to the Red Rock movie theatre by employees who said there was an intoxicated female there with her two children who were 10 and 12 years old.

Ivy Sandy, 34, of Zuni denied he had been drinking, but police said she showed signs of being intoxicated and smelled of alcohol. She refused to take a breath alcohol test.

When police reached the theatre, Sandy was on her phone talking to her mother, asking her to pick the children up. She was asked to give the phone to police and an officer spoke to her mother to make sure she would pick up the children. Sandy was transported to the county jail.

On Sept. 21, police were dispatched to the 300 block of Maloney Avenue, where Melanie Sam, 28, of Gallup, was found asleep behind the wheel of her car. Also in the vehicle with her was a two-year-old child in a child restraining seat.

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Sam admitted she had been drinking and officers asked her for names of relatives who would be willing to take care of the child. She gave police two names, but efforts to contact them were unsuccessful.

Police advised through public service and previous encounters with Sam, that she had another child and asked her if that child was being taken care of. She said the child was safe and refused to say anything else.

The report did not say what eventually happened to the two-year-old or the other child. Sam was booked on child abandonment at McKinley County Detention Center.

On the same day, police found a 13-year-old boy in an abandoned van in the parking lot of the Coca-Cola plant. He said he had found a break in the chain link fence and had stayed in the van overnight.

He was asked where his mother was, and the boy said he had seen her walking around earlier in the day. Police were able to find Tanya Lee, 36, of Gallup, and asked her if she knew where her son was.

She admitted she did not, but did not seem concerned. She told police that she thought her son was with another woman who she later admitted she did not know. It turned out that Lee had two other children who were 15 and 16 years old and were at a local motel. Police found them in the parking lot of the motel.

None of the three looked as if they had had a bath in several days and Lee said they did not attend school. She said she was in the process of enrolling them.

She was asked if she had any relatives in town and said she did, but she did not keep in touch with them, so police called CYFD to pick up the children. Lee was transported to the county jail and charged with abandonment of children.

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