

PAINFUL SEARCH WAS IN VAIN - FAMILY SCOURED DETROIT'S STREETS LOOKING FOR MISSING TEEN

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For three weeks, 40 family members and friends combed the streets of Detroit, east side to west side, looking for their beloved 15-year-old **Bryona Williams**.

They took shifts round the clock, posting hundreds of flyers. They interviewed people on the streets. They learned she may have been kidnapped by a man nicknamed Showman, who had her dancing at after-hours clubs.

They checked houses and clubs on the east side.

"Sometimes, I felt like we were so close," said **Bryona's** uncle, Chris Tatum. Tatum even walked by the house Saturday on Longview where **Bryon's** body was found Tuesday afternoon.

"I hate to think she was in there," he said.

The girl's frozen body was found in a partially boarded-up east-side home by two men who had broken into the home to take drywall, Detroit police said.

As soon as her grandmother, Nadine Whigham, learned that a teenage girl's body had been discovered, she rushed to the home.

"We all had this horrible feeling that it was her," Whigham said. "We knew **Bryona** would have called us if she wasn't being held against her will."

The Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office is scheduled to perform an autopsy today. Family members said they learned that **Bryona** had been beaten and sexually assaulted.

Detroit Police Homicide Inspector Craig Schwartz said the death won't be classified as a homicide until the autopsy is done.

Meanwhile, the girl's mother, Sophia **Williams**, accused police officers of ignoring her when she first reported her daughter missing March 20.

"I spoke with several precincts and they all tried to convince me that my daughter had run away," **Williams**, 32, said Wednesday. "If those officers deny that, they're lying."

Officer Bernadette Najor, a police spokeswoman, said the case has been thoroughly investigated since the girl's disappearance.

Williams said friends and family members went to several illegal after-hours clubs on the east side, acting on tips, and witnessed girls younger than her daughter dancing for men and smoking marijuana.

"If the police would have believed me and gotten on this case right away, maybe this could have been avoided," she said.

Students at Northern High School gathered for a memorial in the cafeteria to remember their freshman friend who loved playing basketball and listening to rap artist Nelly.

"Everyone cried," said sophomore Jessica Coleman, 15. "It hurts. I still don't believe this."

Family members said they contacted area media immediately after **Bryona** disappeared. Only one TV station aired a report about the missing 15-year old, they said. WXYZ-TV (Channel 7) reported **Bryona** missing March 23.

Bryona's grandmother said she wonders whether the case would have received more attention if it occurred in the suburbs.

"They would have had her on the news, but because she comes from the city we couldn't get any attention," Whigham said.

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Caption: Photo

Bryona Williams was found dead Tuesday on the east side.

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