

6 SIBLINGS DIE WHILE MOTHER IS IN HOSPITAL NUMBER OF KIDS KILLED IN FIRES HAS MORE THAN DOUBLED IN DETROIT

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Frameka O'Steen was the mother of eight children after the birth of a boy on Christmas Day.

But early Sunday, she found out that six of her children perished in a house fire on Detroit's southwest side.

Lying in her hospital bed, she learned of the fire on TV.

Then she fainted.

According to a Free Press tally, O'Steen's children are among 16 people age 17 and younger who have been killed in Detroit fires since Thanksgiving, 13 in December alone.

This year, 35 youths have died in fires in the city, more than double the number killed in 1997, officials said.

On Sunday, recovering from childbirth at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, O'Steen learned her children died in the fire that ravaged the home they shared with their grandmother and two aunts.

"She was flipping through the television," said relative Terrence O'Steen. "After she realized that it was her mother's house, in her hospital bed she passed out."

Later, a relative called Frameka O'Steen and confirmed what had happened.

"She's not doing very well," her cousin Ann O'Steen said. "Those were her children."

The **O'Steen children** who died were daughters Ashonte, 3; Dezare, 5; Nuna, 6; Shaniqua, 8, and Shameka, 12, and a son, Anthony, 7. Shacoya, a 10-year-old daughter, survived.

The 6:51 a.m. fire started in a closet beneath the stairway of the aluminum-clad two-story home on 30th and Horatio and was fully involved when firefighters arrived, said Arson Chief Jon Bozich.

"I'm quite sure the children were dead before firefighters arrived," Bozich said.

With the stairway engulfed in flames, the children's only escape was out of a second-story window, Bozich said.

"Children, when trapped in fires, will try to hide" and do not jump, said Bozich, standing outside as investigators combed the wreckage for clues. The fire does not appear suspicious, and no cause has been determined.

Bozich said children must be trained to help save themselves. "Fire drills will definitely work because kids automatically remember what they've been trained to do," he said.

The seven children were living with their grandmother, Hanna O'Steen, and her two daughters, LaToya O'Steen, 15, and Makeba O'Steen, 20, said relatives Dennis Fields and Andria O'Steen, 13.

Hanna and Shacoya were on the first floor when the fire broke out and escaped out the front door, Fields said.

LaToya and Makeba jumped from a second-story window. Makeba, who was pregnant, miscarried as a result of the fall and is in serious condition at Detroit Receiving Hospital, a spokeswoman said. LaToya is in good condition at Henry Ford Hospital, a spokeswoman said.

Hanna O'Steen was treated and released, relatives said.

Fields also said Frameka O'Steen, her baby boy and Shacoya will stay with relatives, some of whom live across the street. The family plans to establish an account with a local bank today to accept donations. Funeral plans were incomplete.

Outside the home, Terrence O'Steen gazed at the wreckage and tried to imagine instead the summer days when the children could be seen playing in the yard.

"I would come by and see them out here," he said, standing against a bone-chilling wind. "You remember their faces."

Relatives and friends created a memorial to the children out of dozens of stuffed animals.

"That's a memorial just to show our love," said Kim Bolden, 27, whose own three children, ages 8, 9, and 10, knew the O'Steen kids.

Quentella Regular, a neighbor, said the tragedy should be a wake-up call to stop fire fatalities.

"Every holiday, there's too many kids dying in house fires," said Regular, who has two children.

"We're hoping this is the end of it," Bozich said.

Newberry Elementary School at 29th and Buchanan, where four of the victims were students, will be open 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. today to offer grief counseling. The Detroit Public Schools has designated 1-313-596-4966 as a phone number to offer aid.

Staff writer Jennifer Dixon contributed to this report. Jeffrey Ghannam can be reached at 1-313-223-4286.

Caption: Photo RICHARD SHEINWALD/Associated Press; Photo RICHARD LEE/Detroit Free Press; Map Detroit Free Press

Bystanders watch workers from the medical examiner's office take the bodies of the six children from the burned house.

The fire started Sunday morning in a closet beneath the stairway of the Detroit home. Once the staircase became engulfed in flames, the children were trapped on the second floor.

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