

The Gazette

gazette.com

Police: Person Who ‘Found’ Baby Turns Out to be Mom

The teenager who reportedly found a newborn baby in a Dumpster on Wednesday afternoon was actually the child’s mother and had given birth earlier that day in her home, Colorado Springs police said Thursday.

The baby was never inside the trash container and has been turned over to the custody of the Department of Human Services, police said. The 17-year-old mother faces possible charges of influencing a public official, a felony, or false reporting, a misdemeanor.

According to police, the baby girl was between six and 12 hours old when her mother reportedly told someone that she had found her in a Dumpster at the Rosemont at Shadow Mountain apartment complex, near the intersection of Garden of the Gods Road and North Nevada Avenue. That person called police, said Barbara Miller, a police spokeswoman.

The way the case is unfolding paints a fairly common picture of a pregnant teen who is unsure what to do with an unwanted baby, said Kathy Thayer, vice president of Life Connections, the adoption program for Catholic Charities of Central Colorado.

The young mother probably was frightened, she may have hidden her pregnancy from her parents and she had no idea where to go or who to talk to.

“Usually they deliver on their own,” Thayer said. “Can you imagine? I think fear drives people to do irrational things.”

Her youth was likely a factor in her actions, she added.

“You’re young and you don’t know what to do, your options seem really limited because you don’t know what those options are,” Thayer said. “There are a lot of resources in this community. This could have been different if she had known what her resources were.”

The absence of a father is not particularly surprising, she said. The mother may not have told him, or he may have known but wasn’t aware of the timing of the birth.

If there is anything positive, it would be that the mother wanted the baby to be found.

“She could have ended the life of the child in some way and didn’t,” Thayer said.

Nonetheless, the mother is likely to carry scars. There’s the trauma of going through the birth, possibly alone, and the emotional trauma.

“Even if they are in denial about it now, or are in shock about it now, I would suspect that as time goes on, it will be a very troubling experience that will stay with them,” Thayer said.

There was no indication that the baby in this case had been harmed or had been outside of the care of her mother when police arrived, Miller said. That means the mother is not likely to face child abuse charges.

The name of the mother is not being released because she is a juvenile, Miller said.

Police say the mother could have taken advantage of Colorado’s Safe Haven law, which allows parents to leave a baby, less than 72 hours old, with an employee at a fire station or hospital. There are no questions asked and parents do not face any charges.

The Colorado law was passed in 2000 and since then there have been 36 known cases of a baby being left safely.

Unfortunately many women don’t know about the law, said Linda Prudhomme, executive director of Colorado Safe Haven for Newborns, a non-profit that works to get the word out about the law.

“The Safe Haven law can be such a life-saving opportunity. It can save that mother from a lifetime of guilt and a lifetime in jail,” she said. “If people would just talk about the law, and help us get the word out, it would be an important thing for our community.”

As troubling as this case might be, teen pregnancy in Colorado and nationwide is on the decline.

Between 1988 and 2008, the pregnancy rate in the United States for teens aged 15-19 fell from 111 pregnancies per 1,000 teen girls to 68 per 1,000, according to The National

Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. In Colorado, the latest numbers show a similar slide, from 102 per 1,000 teens in 1988 to 69 per 1,000 in 2005.

Teen birth rates also fell. Between 1991 and 2010, the U.S. birth rate for teens aged 15-19 fell 45 percent to 34.2 births per 1,000 teens in 2010. In Colorado, the birth rate fell from 58 per 1,000 in 1991 to 33 per 1,000 in 2010.

“These cases are exceedingly rare and exceedingly tragic,” said Bill Albert, chief program officer for the campaign.

“As horrifying as this particular case is, we do need to recognize the extraordinary progress the nation has made in preventing too-early pregnancy and parenthood,” he said. “Because of teens making more responsible decisions, teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined more than 40 percent nationwide.