

Did Trevyan get support he needed?

Trevyan

The city teen’s history should have raised flags

Justin Murphy and Steve Orr

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

On the evening of March 9, as hundreds of people swarmed over the city looking for 14-year-old Trevyan Rowe, Patrick Denney arrived at his South Wedge home and found a flyer on the door.

It came from the Monroe Crime Analysis Center, a law enforcement support agency, and included some details deemed pertinent to the search.

“I figured they probably put them on everyone’s door,” Denney said. “I was surprised by it because they didn’t mention anything about it on TV. I figured maybe they thought it wasn’t TV-appropriate.”

The flyer read, in part: “Trevyan Rowe has made suicidal threats in the past and is on the autism spectrum. He

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Trevyan Rowe points toward MeChele Markajani, a consultant teacher at School 12, in a special education class in February 2015. MAX SCHULTE/ @MAXROCPHOTO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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was placed under (mental health arrest) in 2016 for disclosing suicidal thoughts about hanging himself.”

It is one piece of evidence among many that shows how, compared to the frantic volunteer searchers, Rochester law enforcement agencies and the Rochester City School District early on had a very different sense of what might have happened.

In particular, they had reason to believe it wasn’t the first time Trevyan had gotten away from School 12 and walked west toward Mount Hope Cemetery and the Genesee River. They knew he had talked before about wanting to harm himself, and even had been hospitalized over it. And they knew that the last thing anyone heard him say that day reflected a sensitive young teenager in very deep distress. What he said was he wanted to kill himself.

That appears to be corroborated by the flyer; it would have taken place when he was 12 years old.

It is not known how often Trevyan had sneaked away from his school in the past or how often he had gone to the cemetery.

Trevyan lived with his mother off Norton Street in northeast Rochester,

La’Ron Singletary

Deputy police chief

far from School 12 and Mount Hope Cemetery; if he had escaped to the cemetery in the past, it surely would have been from school rather than from home.

A lost cellphone

The precipitating event in a tragedy that eventually engulfed the entire community, Trevyan’s aunt said, was piercingly commonplace: the boy lost his cellphone on the school bus Wednesday afternoon.

Those revelations, confirmed last week by law enforcement communications, interviews with police and with Trevyan's aunt, shed new light on the way police directed the search and raise new questions about the multiple ways in which the young man may have been let down by those around him.

The *Democrat and Chronicle* typically does not report on suicides, least of all those involving children. It has not been determined whether Trevyan jumped off the Frederick Douglass-Susan B. Anthony Memorial Bridge on purpose or fell off accidentally. A motorist who drove past a person now believed to be Trevyan who was perched on the edge of the bridge Thursday morning said he looked scared.

Regardless, it is now clear that Rochester City School District officials, among others, knew Trevyan sometimes had thoughts of harming himself. That would add to the urgency of keeping track of him, something the district admitted on Tuesday it had failed to do.

If Trevyan had run away from school previously, why wasn't he under closer supervision as he got off the bus? If Rochester police quickly learned important details about his state of mind on the school bus Thursday morning, how did it impact their investigation? And, the most sensitive question of all — along with the district and various social service agencies, did Trevyan's family give him the support he needed?

Richard Kaul, a Pittsford lawyer who represents Trevyan's mother, declined to comment Friday about his client or her late son. The school district also declined to answer questions about Trevyan.

County spokesman Jesse Sleezer said the Department of Human Services could not say whether there is or was a child protective case concerning Trevyan or his family.

The cemetery

The flyer was among several instances where authorities raised Trevyan's mental health and history as relevant as one of the largest search operations in the city's history unfolded.

Put together by the Monroe Crime Analysis Center, the explicitly worded flier was intended for police use, not public consumption, though it clearly found its way into civilian hands by some means. It was posted on Facebook and handed out widely by some volunteers.

That was the conclusion drawn from an account of Trevyan's actions Thursday morning that his 11-year-old sister shared Thursday evening in the initial meeting at School 12 with police, school officials, Handy and Trevyan's mother, Carrie Houston.

"Trevyan got on the bus and he was trying to get back there to find his phone," Handy said, repeating what the girl told those at the meeting. "He couldn't find his phone, he got mad and he started beating the back of the seat. She (the sister) was ... saying, 'It's OK,' and that's when he said he was going to kill himself. And she said, 'You know you're not supposed to talk like that.'" He was afraid he would be in trouble over losing the phone, Handy said, and hadn't told his mother it was gone.

Trevyan climbed off the bus and walked away from School 12, according to his sister's account and surveillance video captured at the school.

Police acted upon this story. "We knew there was a conversation between Trevyan and his sister that morning that led him to want to hurt himself," Singletary said. "That was part of the investigation."

He could not say with certainty that Trevyan had lost his phone or if police had ever found it but said they had tried to "ping" it, a way of determining what cell tower, if any, it was near. But they got no response, meaning it was turned off or out of power.

Just as they withheld information about the reason searchers were directed to the cemetery, the police also did not publicly share the young man's alleged suicide threat that Thursday morning.

Singletary said he was not aware of police making a calculated decision to withhold that information, but said there was always "a delicate balance" between providing useful information and invading someone's privacy.

And he noted that "no matter what kind of capacity a person has, our job is to find that person."

Still, Trevyan's developmental challenges and fraught emotional state "heightened the situation.

"Anytime we receive information in regards a missing person who is suicidal, we're going to do everything we can," said Singletary. "If someone's calling saying there is a threat they're going to harm themselves, it's extenuating. It becomes around the clock."

Police learned Trevyan was missing around 5 p.m. Thursday when they were summoned to School 12 by his family and school staff.

A few minutes later, a 911 dispatcher described Trevyan over the police radio as a “14-year-old black male, last seen this morning by his mother ... (and) known to be suicidal.”

Local media and most citizens in Rochester were unaware of the 911 and crime center flyer suicide references through the course of the search that ensued.

Trevyan’s aunt, Velma Handy, confirmed his mental-health background in two lengthy interviews Tuesday.

“If Tre is unhappy with things, I think, he seems to talk about suicide,” she said. “But I could never really see what was going on, because when Tre shut down, Tre shut down.”

She said Trevyan had run away from School 12 one day during the 2016-17 school year and gone toward Mount Hope Cemetery with the intention of hanging himself there. He became frightened and made his way back to the school, she said.

“I don’t know why he ran to the graveyard. But he was saying he was going to hang himself then,” she said.

City police learned of the Mount Hope suicide threat from Trevyan’s family that Thursday evening, said Deputy Police Chief La’Ron Singletary.

Beginning that night and continuing through the weekend, police and civilians repeatedly searched Mount Hope for some trace of Trevyan. The 196-acre cemetery is a third of a mile from School 12 .

Searchers looked in many parts of the city, and police responded to Trevyan sightings in disparate locations. But the cemetery got a great deal of attention.

That attentiveness was driven by the inside knowledge of Trevyan’s history, police said. “His going to the cemetery in the past, that was what led us to to the cemetery this time,” Singletary said.

This information was not shared with the public.

But a story circulated widely and was aired in the local media that did serve to explain the extra scrutiny given to the historic cemetery: That a child had placed a phone call to 911 late Thursday afternoon, saying he

Autistic or not?

Beginning the morning of March 9, on the first full day of searching, local media reported that Trevyan was autistic. That information came from his family.

It was portrayed as relevant to understanding Trevyan’s state of mind and potential behavior.

Some people with autism have a habit of unexpectedly running away, some avoid contact with strangers, some have an attraction to water that makes it unsafe for them to be around rivers and lakes.

But in a curious twist, it now seems possible that Trevyan had never been diagnosed with autism, the term for a spectrum of disorders that can affect behavior, social interaction and communication.

Singletary said police had no medical records showing Trevyan was autistic and were careful not to use that term to describe him. The crime-analysis flyer said he was “on the autism spectrum,” a looser term.

Trevyan did have some type of learning disability and was a special-education student at School 12.

Students with autism are provided an array of additional educational and support services, and sometimes are subject to much closer supervision.

But Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams said Tuesday that Trevyan was not classified by the district as autistic. Autism, she said, is a medical diagnosis that is not generated by the school district.

An evaluation by health-care professionals that can lead to a diagnosis of autism is typically arranged by the student’s family. It is not uncommon for school officials to recommend a family get such an evaluation.

It is not clear if any such recommendation was made in Trevyan’s case or if his family followed through. A review now underway by the school district will seek an answer to those questions, officials said.

“We do want to know whether he was diagnosed as being autistic and was that diagnosis provided to someone,” school board president Van Henri White said.

“Was it provided to a district person and, if so, did they fail to include it (in his record)? Were we provided that diagnosis? Should we have known about that diagnosis?”

was lost in Mount Hope but attempts to call him back were unavailing.

This story was not true. It appears to have grown from an actual incident Thursday in which someone, probably an adult, called 911 because he was stuck inside the cemetery after the gates were locked at 6 p.m., Singletary said. That call had nothing to do with Trevyan or the search, he said.

Handy recounted a separate incident in 2016 in which Trevyan was hospitalized for his mental state.

JMURPHY7@Gannett.com SORR@Gannett.com
Includes reporting by staff writers Meaghan M. McDermott, Brian D. Sharp and Sean Lahman.



Trevyan Rowe's aunt, Velma Handy, fights back tears as she talks about his death. JAMIE GERMANO/[@JGERMANO1](https://twitter.com/JGERMANO1)/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER