

Records show neglect of Florida school gunman's mental health

Trévon Austin
19 February 2018

School and government records on Nikolas Cruz, the 19-year-old gunman in the Parkland, Florida school massacre, show that he has evinced serious mental and emotional problems since middle school. Cruz used an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle to kill 17 people—14 students and three teachers—at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School near Fort Lauderdale last Wednesday.

According to documents obtained from the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), Cruz was constantly in trouble for disruptive behavior and unexcused absences. Cruz's adoptive mother, who died in November 2017, was called in for more than a dozen parent-teacher conferences and Cruz was frequently sent to counseling.

Indications of Cruz's mental illness included expulsions from school, fighting with classmates, a fascination with weapons, inflicting pain on animals, posting disturbing images and comments on social media, and a history of mental health treatment.

In one instance, Florida's child agency launched an investigation into Cruz's domestic life after he was seen cutting both of his arms on the social media network Snapchat in 2016. At the time of the investigation, Cruz was listed as an "alleged victim" of medical neglect and inadequate supervision. His mother, 68-year-old Lynda Cruz, was the "alleged perpetrator."

"Mr. Cruz was on Snapchat cutting both of his arms," the Florida DCF abuse hotline was told in August 2016. "Mr. Cruz stated he plans to go out and buy a gun," the statement added.

The DCF's investigation came to a close in November 2016. The agency determined that Cruz had not been mistreated by his mother, was receiving adequate mental health care and was attending school.

"Henderson came out and assessed the [victim and] found him to be stable enough not to be hospitalized," the report said. More detailed chronological notes of the investigation show that the case ended with a notation that "no services are recommended."

A further examination of the report reveals that the investigation was not thorough. According to the documents, a student education specialist who worked with Cruz did not return phone calls from the DCF's protective services investigator. The school's resource officer "refused to share any information" at all except confirming a mobile crisis unit had been sent to assess Cruz at his school.

Cruz was uncooperative during the investigation, saying that "he talked about the situation enough." The investigator also appeared to have made little effort to confirm whether Cruz had indeed been cutting himself. The investigator, the report said, "was not able to see any scars or cuts on the [victim's] arms because he was wearing long sleeves." The investigator's report to the DCF concluded that Cruz "was not at risk to harm himself or others."

Cruz's counselor told the DCF that he was reported to have "an emotional behavioral disability" and was diagnosed with autism, a neurological disorder that often leads to social awkwardness and isolation. He was also reported to suffer from attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD.

Cruz's history underscores the lack of a social support system and proper treatment for mental and emotional problems in capitalist America, the richest country on Earth. Under conditions where a vast portion of the national wealth is diverted to satisfy the greed of the US financial oligarchy, it is impossible to address social problems, including the provision of treatment and support for the large number of

psychologically damaged people produced by a society dominated by militarism, repression and inequality.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact