

Four children killed in early morning mobile home fire in Fort Wayne, Indiana

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Four children died when their mobile home caught fire early Thursday morning in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Rosalynn Goff, 2; Jefferson Goff, 3; Johnnie Mann-Goff, 5; and Matthew Damron, 10 were killed by smoke inhalation and thermal burns.

Four adults were able to escape the fire, Jessica Mann, mother of the four children; Audrey Kistler; her boyfriend Samuel Barnett and Travis Garrison.

According to reports, Garrison awoke to the blaze and attempted to exit through the front door, but the deadlock was not working. Garrison screamed fire as he attempted to help the family escape. While he ran out the back door, Barnett and Kistler escaped through the window and Mann in a separate room pushed out an air conditioning unit to escape.

However, trapped in a separate room were the four children. Garrison attempted to rescue them. "I was running to the front door to try and break it open and it wouldn't open," Garrison told WTHR. "I kept hearing the kids screaming. Screaming and I couldn't do anything about it. We tried our best to get the kids out. We did everything we could."

Neighbors joined the family in the rescue effort while calling emergency services. Shelby Wright, a neighbor across the street, attempted to break through the window and direct the children towards her. She was unable to rescue them as the flames and smoke engulfed the mobile home.

"I heard the kids screaming and then after a second, I couldn't see anything else. The flames got bigger, and I finally had to back up because the gust of smoke just came and I couldn't breathe. All I heard was, 'Help, mom!' and just the babies crying, and the dog was crying. That's all I heard," Wright explained to WPTA21.

Another neighbor, Wesley Desjardins, attempted to

pull the air conditioner out when the flames turned in his direction, injuring his hand and ankle in the process.

The four adults were sent to an area hospital with Mann sent to the Indianapolis burn unit suffering internal and external burns. The cause of the fire has not been determined by firefighters.

This marked the second fire within a week at the Dupont Estates Mobile Home Park located on the city's far-northeast side. On April 16 the Fort Wayne Fire Department responded to another fire and was able to evacuate an adult and child. There has been an outpouring of support by neighbors and those in the surrounding area towards the family and their four children.

Reviews left on Google Maps give a sense of the state of the conditions which prevail in Dupont Estates and are not uncommon in neighborhoods across the US where working class residents seek to make do on meager wages. "Not a great place to live unless u can't afford much more," wrote Amal Waggoner. "Kind of rundown but easy to own a home there," noted James Solliday.

Local media attempted to hold the adults in the home responsible for the children trapped inside. Garrison countered this, telling Fox 55, "We all were trying to get back in there. We couldn't get into the house. The fire was too high. The smoke was too thick. We could not get back into that house." He told the local news outlet that he heard the propane tank making a whistling noise before the fire became worse.

The US Fire Administration reports that there have been 922 people killed in house fires across the US so far this year. There are no requirements for local authorities to report fire deaths. The US Fire Administration, part of FEMA, collects information based on media reports which means the data is

undercounted.

Last month, Dawn Michelle East Bottoms, 33, and her 4-year-old daughter died in a fire that consumed their mobile home in Madison, North Carolina.

On April 2, 20-year-old twin brothers died in a house fire in the predominately working class city of Trenton, New Jersey. Five teenagers, ages 14 to 17, died on April 11 when their home was engulfed in flames in an early Monday morning fire in Genesee Township, Pennsylvania, on the north-central border with New York.

Housing fires are an issue which confronts workers around world.

Most infamously, in London, the UK's wealthiest city, the 2017 Grenfell Tower block building fire killed 72 people as the flammable aluminum cladding panels caught fire engulfing the 24-story building. The building stood in the richest borough in London providing social housing for workers. For cosmetic purposes the building was coated in flammable cladding despite warnings of the dangers.

The phenomenon of house fires cannot be understood outside of the context of the decades-long assault on working class living standards. Between 1979 and 2019 the bottom 90 percent of workers in the US saw their income increase less than \$9,000, forcing families to crowd together and seek out cheap, unsafe living conditions. Poorer families squeezed by rising costs confront utility shutoffs which force them to rely on alternative sources of heating in cold weather, increasing the likelihood of fires.

The median wage in Fort Wayne is just above \$51,000 according to US Census data while more than 15 percent of the population lives below the meager official poverty line.

The role of the trade unions in the dismantling of working class living standards has been on display recently in Fort Wayne at auto parts manufacturer Dana Inc. The company and the union bureaucracy of the United Steelworkers (USW) and United Autoworkers (UAW) work to continue sweatshop conditions despite a rejection of a sellout contract by a rebellion of the rank and file.

At GM Fort Wayne Assembly, while outbreaks of COVID-19 cases continued, the UAW peddled the lie that there was no workplace transmission to keep the factory running and profits flowing into the corporate

coffers. Workers at the assembly plant make starting wages just above \$16 an hour building trucks which sell for close to \$50,000.



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