

# Girl, 4, caring for baby sister

The Department of Social Development has stepped in after Law Enforcement officers found a four-year-old girl looking after her baby sister in a dilapidated shack in Hanover Park. MEC for Social Development, Albert Fritz, has assigned a team of social workers to investigate whether the little girl and her four-month-old sibling were being abused and neglected after an officer found the children alone at home.

While a team from the City of Cape Town's Metal and Theft Unit were escorting electricians to Lansry Walk, Hanover Park, for repairs on Monday, an officer noticed the child standing outside in the sun, holding her tiny sister in her arms. The children were outside a patched shack which was filthy inside, and the girl told the officer that she had been told by her mother to look after the baby.

The officer, who asked not to be identified, says he immediately contacted social workers to intervene. "We escorted Council electricians into Hanover Park when I saw this tiny girl, approximately four or five years old, with a baby on her hip," the officer says.

"The baby is approximately four to five months old. This girl stood with that baby in the heat of the sun. I couldn't take it and asked for assistance from social workers. The child lives in the shack with her mother and said she had been told by her mother to care for the baby." The officer says he asked a neighbour to look after the children.

Fritz says he immediately assigned a team to investigate the conditions the children are living in and to assess their situation. The children will remain with their mother until the assessment is completed.

"The Department of Social Development is aware of the incident and is currently in the process of deploying a social worker who will provide a needs assessment of the children. Once the assessment has been concluded, the social worker will determine the most appropriate child protection measure for these children."

Fritz also called on residents to report suspected cases of child abuse as soon as possible.

"It should be noted that these matters are assessed on a case-by-case basis," he says. "I call on anyone with any information regarding such situations to please approach their local DSD office and the SAPS for help."

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