

Mother says police should have gone public sooner

By STEPHANIE THIESSEN
The Champion

The mother of a 15-year-old girl who went missing from Milton District High School more than a month ago said she's upset with the way police are handling the case.

Hamilton resident Sarah Cruickshanks said she thinks the September 21 disappearance of her daughter Courtney Gale with two other 15 year olds from Milton — Melissa Arseneault, and another girl who can't be named — should've been made public right away rather than almost a month later.

She said she believes this wasn't done because the two girls presumed to be with her daughter have histories of running away — a fact confirmed by police last week.

"Had lots of people been aware, was there a chance she could've been seen on the highway the next day? Was there a chance? She could've been. Now that chance is gone," she said angrily.

Ms Cruickshanks said she doesn't think the disappearances are being treated with the necessary urgency.

But Halton Regional Police Det. Mike Brown said the case has been under investigation since day one. He said there's no reason to suspect foul play as police believe the girls left on their own accord.

Ms Cruickshanks said she doesn't buy it. Her daughter hasn't run away before and she said she does-



Courtney Gale

n't believe she ran away last month.

"I think she's in harm," she said, adding a conversation between Courtney and

the two girls was overheard by another student the day she disappeared.

In this conversation the girls talked of visiting someone in Hamilton, but Courtney was apparently assured they'd be home by that evening — so she could phone her mom and go to the movie theatre.

"The only person who could tell me she did this (run away) is her. That's the only person I'll believe."

Despite putting posters up with her daughter's photo for the past month, Ms Cruickshanks said there's been no word from Courtney since her disappearance.

Courtney had been living with her best friend's family in Milton since the beginning of last month so she could attend Milton District High School, which Ms Cruickshanks said was a better fit for her than a Hamilton school.

Det. Brown said he couldn't comment on exactly why the disappearances weren't released to the press sooner, but said police were follow-

ing up various leads in the first month. "There's no indication at all that there's any foul play."

He said there's no truth to Ms Cruickshanks' concern that the urgency of her daughter's disappearance has been lessened because of the pasts of the other two girls. "I'm in a no-win situation. She has concerns and I don't want to undermine them. I understand why she's upset. But myself and the other investigator... I don't feel we've attached less significance to the investigation because Courtney's with the other girls."

Police are asking for the public's help in locating the girls.

Courtney is described as five-foot-six, 120 pounds, with shoulder-length blond hair, blue eyes and a tanned complexion. She was last seen wearing black pants, a Nike t-shirt, white and pink running shoes and a backpack.

Melissa is five-foot-six, 131 pounds, with her brown hair in a ponytail and hair extensions past her shoulders. She has hazel eyes and a medium complexion and was last seen wearing a black tank top, black capri pants and white Nike running shoes with black laces.

Anyone with information is asked to contact police at (905) 878-5511, ext. 2415.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

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