



**Rick Staly, Sheriff**

## **FLAGLER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

*"An honor to serve, a duty to protect."*

# **NEWS RELEASE**

**Date:** February 17, 2021  
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## **Toddler Found Wandering the Streets of the B-section, Mother Arrested for Child Neglect**

On February 16, 2021 at 1:13 p.m., a concerned citizen called 9-1-1 after seeing an unsupervised toddler with a dog in the area of Belleaire Drive and Beechwood Lane in Palm Coast. The concerned citizen stood by with the child until Flagler County Sheriff's Office (FCSO) deputies arrived. The witness told deputies that the child was seen walking alone with the dog for approximately 30 minutes before law enforcement was called.

Deputies met with the child and the witness at the above intersection which is dangerously close to the intersection of Belle Terre Parkway and Belleaire Drive, a high traffic area. The child's guardian could not be located and there were no reports of a missing child. Deputies began canvassing the area by going door to door in attempt to locate a guardian responsible for the child. While searching the neighborhood, 28-year-old Tessie Clark (DOB 3/12/1992) was seen walking down Beechwood Lane. She approached law enforcement and told them that her 3-year-old son was missing.



Left: Tessie Clark at the time of arrest.



Right: Tessie Clark's booking photo.

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Deputies spoke with Clark and determined that the missing child belonged to her. Clark told deputies that she was cleaning her home and let her child play in the backyard, as she always does, and didn't notice that he was gone. Deputies responded to her residence during the investigation and found that it smelled of freshly burnt marijuana and was extremely messy and dirty with old food on the floors and being in complete disarray. There was no indication of anything being cleaned in the home and the disarray appeared to be how the house was kept.

Upon examining the back yard, deputies saw that it was fenced in, however the fence appeared very unstable as it was leaning in areas and had a panel missing. The back yard did not appear suitable for a 3-year-old due to having holes in the ground, loose concrete blocks, an adult trampoline and other debris and child hazards.

"We're very thankful to the witnesses who came forward and called us when they saw this small child alone in the street," Sheriff Rick Staly said. "Luckily the child did not wander onto Belle Terre Parkway or we could have had a much more tragic outcome. I hope DCF is able to teach the parents proper parenting skills and how to be responsible parents to their children."

The investigation revealed that the child was in the streets alone for a minimum of 1 hour and the total time unsupervised is unknown. Clark was placed under arrest for Child Neglect and was booked at the Sheriff Perry Hall Inmate Detention Facility. The Department of Children and Families was contacted and responded to the residence immediately.

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