

Toddler disfigured after pit bull attack

BY ANDREW DUFFY, POSTMEDIA NEWS APRIL 28, 2014 11:33 AM



Christine Leclair and daughter Cali.

Photograph by: Facebook image

OTTAWA — A 14-month-old girl is recovering in hospital after a pit bull terrier attacked her inside an Ottawa home and had to be pried from her face.

Cali Leclair was rushed to the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in serious but stable condition Sunday morning at 9:30 a.m. after being freed from the dog's grip.

Neighbours said the toddler's father, Tanner Longworth, had to wedge the animal's jaws open with his hands.

The girl's desperate mother, Christine Leclair, had been unable to free her daughter, who was attacked after moving to pet the black pit bull named Boss.

The dog had just joined the family.

Neighbour Vicky Gibson, 30, said Leclair took the pit bull into her Draffin Court home on Saturday in an attempt to rehabilitate the animal, which had a history of biting.

The dog, she said, was fine on the first day, but lashed out at Cali Sunday morning.

"The baby went to pet the dog — the dog was laying down — and the dog snapped; it bit her right on the face," said Gibson, a neighbour and close family friend.

Gibson rushed across the street when she heard the ambulance and was confronted by a scene of blood and tears inside the house. The dog had torn off much of the child's nose. "The sight made me nauseous," Gibson said.

Leclair owns two large dogs of her own, including a German shepherd, and is known as being generous to a fault.

"Christine was so kind, she thought she'd take the pit bull for a week or so to help out the owner's family," said another neighbour, Beatrice Mushanga.

Boss, the pit bull, had bitten the owner's own child in the mouth, she said. But that unnamed owner didn't want to put the dog down so Leclair agreed to look after it for a week despite its history.

"But the dog was still vicious," said Mushanga. "I didn't like it from the beginning ... It's so sad."

According to initial reports from paramedics on scene, the pit bull had torn the girl's nose from her face and had inflicted deep puncture wounds, some of which had exposed the bone beneath.

In a news release, the Ottawa Paramedic Service described the wounds as "multiple, severe lacerations to the face."

Ottawa police secured the animal and are investigating the incident, which occurred just after 9 a.m. in Nepean's Centrepointhe neighbourhood.

In Ontario, it's illegal to own, import or breed an American pit bull terrier, American Staffordshire terrier, Staffordshire bull terrier or any similar breed.

The provincial government announced it would ban pit bulls in early 2005, shortly after Ottawa's Jayden Clairoux, a two-year-old boy, was mauled by three pit bull-type dogs near his home.

Under terms of the ban, which took effect in August 2005, people who already owned pit bulls were allowed to keep their animals, but had to ensure they were neutered or spayed. The dogs are supposed to be muzzled and leashed in public.

What's not clear is the extent to which the province's pit bull ban is policed by the city's bylaw enforcement officers.

One dog owner, Eric Perron, told the Citizen that he has complained about unleashed pit bulls at Bruce pit, only to be told by bylaw services that it does not deal with that legislation.

Mayor Jim Watson, speaking to reporters at the launch of his re-election campaign, said he supported the pit bull ban at Queen's Park and wants it enforced.

"We know that these dogs are bred for attacking and they have the strong clenching jaw. Sadly, these events teach us each and every time why we need a law like we do," he said.

"If there are ways to improve that law, I'm certainly open to suggestions, and I'm sure the province would be as well."

Watson said the city does enforce the ban, which often puts bylaw officers in the difficult position of trying to ascertain the precise breed of an animal.

Some dog owners also circumvent the law by registering their pit bulls as a different breed or by not registering them at all.

With files from Michael Woods

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