

## Black-Smith Case History

**Sept 15:** Six-year-old Tammy made a call to 911 due to domestic violence in the home. Police found two children on the scene (Tammy, age six; Grace, four months) and removed the children from the home based on concerns for the children's safety. The parents appeared to be too inebriated to provide a safe home for their children and the mother, Frances Smith, was bruised and bleeding as a result of a fight between her and her husband. The father, Alan Smith, was arrested on DV charges. CPS was notified and the children were placed together in emergency foster care.

**Sept 22:** Tammy and Grace were moved from the emergency foster care placement and placed with licensed foster parents Linda and Dave Gilbert. Foster parents reported that upon arrival Tammy cried inconsolably for the first six hours.

**Sept 25:** Due to where the new foster home is located, Tammy moved to a new school. Linda reported this change has been very difficult for Tammy.

**Sept 29:** Following an initial hearing, parents were ordered to receive drug/alcohol screenings, attend any recommended substance abuse treatment programs and provide random urinalysis. The biological father of Tammy is deceased. Mr. Smith, Grace's biological father, was ordered to attend a Batterer's Intervention and Prevention Program. The mother, Frances Smith, was ordered to attend a domestic violence survivor's program.

**Nov 29:** Parents stipulated to adjudication, thereby acknowledging the issues are substance abuse, physical abuse and domestic violence.

## **Court-Ordered Services**

*For the Children:*

Educational and developmental needs met as appropriate

*For the Father:*

Drug/alcohol screening and substance abuse treatment

Batterer's Intervention and Prevention Program

*For the Mother:*

Domestic violence survivor's program

**Who do you want to interview first?**

## The Questioner's List

### Questions to consider periodically:

- Where else could we get information that would be useful?
- What are the barriers to reunification?
- Have we checked all relatives?

### Questions to consider before finalizing court recommendations:

- Are our court recommendations child-focused?
- Have we covered every need of the child(ren) in this case?
- Did we appropriately consider the minimum sufficient level of care (MSL) standard in forming our recommendations for this case?
- Do our recommendations ask for what is appropriate, whether or not it is readily available?
- Is our work clear, diplomatic and non-judgmental?

## CASA/GAL Program Coordinator: Jessica Clarkson

### ***Setting: CASA/GAL Program Office***

Thank you for taking this case! I'm so glad your training class just finished. I need you on this case because I need someone with the luxury of focus. As you will find out, this family has a history of trauma and we need to make sure these girls get the services they need. Mom is Frances Smith. She has been through a lot with the step-dad, and the girls have witnessed a lot of DV. His name is Alan Smith.

Our next hearing will be the status hearing, and we'll need to give our recommendations regarding placement and services. Right now the two girls are with Dave and Linda Gilbert. I don't think they are relatives. But you'll be able to find out. Even though we hope for reunification, we need to be making a concurrent plan for permanency from day one.

Becky Howard is a new CPS worker and she has been on top of things. Do you know what information you'd like to get from her?

Let's meet again in a few weeks so you can start planning for the hearing. Remember, you will need to write a report, so document all of your contacts and please send me summaries of whomever you speak to so I know what is going on. Email is best for me. Let me know if you have any questions! Oh, and remember to track your time so you can submit your hours next month.

Here's your case file. Again, thank you so much for being a CASA/GAL volunteer. You are going to do great on this case!

- How will you approach this case?
- Who do you want to interview next?

## CPS Caseworker: Becky Howard

### ***Setting: Phone Call***

Hello! Yes, we've been playing phone-tag. I only have about five minutes, as I'm preparing for court.

The current plan is reunification, but these parents have long-established patterns of domestic violence and drinking. I'm not too hopeful they can stop using. But, since they stipulated to adjudication, maybe that's the first step that they want to make a change.

You won't be able to get ahold of Mom for awhile. I just found out she entered herself into treatment. The program she entered doesn't allow outside contact for the first several weeks. Step-dad is in jail on charges related to the domestic violence episode. He has quite a bit of assault history.

Placement? The girls have really settled in at the Gilbert's. No, Linda and Dave are not relatives, but they have expressed interest in keeping them long term. I know it's early, but it's good to know. They love having the girls there and can provide an amazing placement. Linda has been great about taking Tammy and Grace to all of their appointments.

Tammy is a great little girl. But, poor thing--she had to change schools when she was placed with Linda and Dave. She's also repeating first grade, but I think it's for her own good.

Ok, got to go.

- What are the issues in this case?
- Do you have follow-up questions for the caseworker?

# Tammy Black

***Setting: Howard Elementary School, Counselor's Office***

Hi, I'm Tammy.

I used to live in a different house. But now I don't need to be scared of my step-dad like before. Sometimes he gets mad and breaks things.

My real dad died in a car wreck when I was 3.

I miss Mrs. Gallego. She was so nice. Can I go back to my old school?

I also miss my Auntie Anne. This is a picture I drew of her and me and my cousin and her puppy.

Right now I'm living with Linda and Dave. They are funny and make me laugh. Guess what? Linda is going to paint my room purple if I get to stay with her longer. Can I stay with her longer? Purple is my favorite color!

- How will you introduce yourself to Tammy?
- What are some open-ended questions you'd like to ask Tammy?

## Tammy's First Grade Teacher: Mrs. Gallego

**Setting:** *First Grade Classroom, Lincoln Elementary School*

Hi, yes, I have heard about the CASA/GAL program. You're a volunteer, right?

This was my second year as Tammy's teacher. I miss her so much! We all miss her. How is she doing at her new school?

Well, she had very poor attendance last year and, as a result, we requested she repeat first grade. Before she changed schools, she was doing much better this year! Tammy seemed to be catching on this year much quicker than last year. She has done a great job with her letters, numbers and early reading.

I made multiple reports to CPS last year. When Tammy did come to school, she was often dirty, tired and hungry. Her parents never attempted to come to parent-teacher conferences. I made another CPS report when Tammy's mom smelled like alcohol when she came to pick her up one day and she was nine months pregnant. I was pretty concerned.

Sometimes Tammy comes to school feeling down. From what I gather, she's witnessed serious violence between her mother and step-father. She drew me a very sad picture earlier in the school year—it had a bottle of alcohol in her step-father's hand, a broken table, and mom crying with what appeared to be bruises on her arms. I saved it. Do you want to see it? The trauma this child has experienced has broken my heart—the whole situation is so painful and heartbreaking.

You know, our school just had an in-service day on trauma-informed classrooms. They talked about the importance of understanding a child's personal history. They talked about chronic trauma and acute trauma. I remember the importance of building resilience in children; one factor is school connectedness. Do you think she will ever come back to our classroom? I can imagine the change must be tough for her.

Friends? Oh, she got along with all of the students. She is a very kind child. She is sometimes withdrawn, but is always kind. She seemed worried about her mother. Tammy was quite thrilled to have a new little sister. Is her name Grace? Tammy talked about her all the time.

## **Tammy's First Grade Teacher: Mrs. Gallego, Cont'd.**

- What difference does this interview make to the case?
- What are your follow-up questions and to whom do you wish to address them?



## Foster Parents: Linda and Dave Gilbert

**Setting:** *The Gilbert Home, Saturday morning*

Linda: It's nice to meet you. Tell me what your role is again?

The girls are so wonderful to have around. It's nice to hear children's voices again.

Well, Tammy has changed schools and is having a tough time adjusting. I'm trying to offer as much consistency as I can. We read every night. Tammy looks forward to it. She brings me a stack of books. Her favorite? Dr. Seuss, since she can read some of the words.

Since their mom hasn't been available for visits, Tammy has been asking about her and gets quite sad. Do you know where Mom is? Is she in treatment? I hope she is doing well. Have you heard if she is making progress?

Dave: Linda, you know we can't ask those questions.

Linda: Sorry, but I'm curious.

Oh, also I wanted to ask. Do you know of an Aunt Anne? Tammy has mentioned her. I guess she is Frances' sister and lives out of state. If the kids go to the aunt, would we ever see them again? I don't know how we'd manage.

- How do you answer Linda's questions about Frances?
- What are your follow-up questions and to whom do you wish to address them?

## Maternal Aunt: Anne Black

### *Setting: Long-Distance Phone Call*

Life growing up? Well, we grew up very poor, our parents drank a lot, and you know how it goes. We had two other siblings, an older brother and younger sister. Our older brother passed away when we were young, and our sister committed suicide when she was in high school. We did not have it easy. I think Frances never got over everything that happened when we were growing up; she never let go of her anger.

I'm different. I don't stay angry. I'm a calm person. I don't drink either. Nothing good can come from drinking or being angry. I do hope she can move on and heal so her girls don't have to grow up like this.

I would love for the girls to come and live with me. Do you think that can happen? I have three children of my own, a son and two daughters. Family is important. Currently, in our home my cousin is also living with us. He has a bit of a criminal history. I'm currently his third-party custodian. Do you think that will be an issue?

I really wish Frances would leave that man. His drinking has always been a problem. We've talked. She won't leave him. It's like she thinks he is more important than her girls.

Do you think the girls can come live with me? What has the caseworker told you about why they can't come live with me?

- What difference does this interview make to the case?
- How will you answer Anne's final question?

## Black-Smith Debrief Questions

- What traumatic events have Tammy and Grace experienced?
- Did you feel prepared to make recommendations regarding placement? Services? If not, what additional information would you have liked to have?
- What is an open-ended question you'd like to ask Tammy? Linda? Aunt Anne?
- What are some resiliency characteristics that Tammy already has? How can you help to reinforce these?
- What are the implications of the mother's high ACE score for her future well-being?