

Brown Case Study Materials

CPS Case File					
Last Name of Case:			Brown		
Legal Number:			11-7-012345-5		
Child(ren)'s Name	DOB	Age	Ethnicity	Sex	Current Location
Jessica Brown	February 20	15 years	White	F	Kinship Placement Candice Clark

Current Caretaker	Address	Phone
Paternal Cousin (Kinship): Candice Clark (not married)	19004 Coltfeld Court	361-555-1018

Attorneys for:		
Mother	Dawn Schute	361-555-6542
Father	Nancy Andrews	361-555-9870
CPS	Chris Johnson	361-555-5428
Jessica	Tuesday Garza	361-555-2283

Case History

August 7 (last year): Urgent Care Center called CPS regarding 14-year-old Jessica Brown, who had been treated for broken ribs. Jessica told CPS caseworker (CW) that she had run away from home the night before after being beaten “for the last time” by her mother’s live-in boyfriend, Wayne Pender. According to police records, there is a history of violence between Mr. Pender and the youth’s mother, Helen Brown.

August 8 (last year): Child released from hospital and placed by CPS into emergency foster care.

August 19 (last year): Jessica was removed from her foster home after a series of arguments with the foster family. Jessica explained to the CW that the arguments originated because she attempted to confide in her foster mother that she is gay and has a girlfriend. The foster mother said she didn’t feel comfortable with Jessica sharing a room with her 13-year-old daughter. Jessica has been placed in Abigail Barton Home for Girls.

November 8 (last year): Abigail Barton Home for Girls notified the CW that Jessica Brown did not return to the group home after school.

December 21 (last year): CW received call from Jessica asking for assistance. Jessica had been living on the street since running away from the group home. Jessica stated she had been harassed and bullied by other girls in the group home, who threw things at her and called her derogatory names such as “Jessie the Lezzie” and “dyke.” The CW located emergency foster care for Jessica.

December 29 (last year): Jessica was placed with paternal cousin, Candice Clark (age 30).

CASA History:		Date Assigned:	8/14 (last year)
Case Initially Assigned to:	June Miller	Date terminated:	Four months ago
Current CASA:	You and your team	Date assigned:	Today
Initial CPS Caseworker:	Angela Rodriguez	Danielle Mancuso	
Current CPS Caseworker:	Angela Rodriguez		

Court-Ordered Services

For the Child:

Psychological evaluation and any services recommended therein

Educational needs met as appropriate

For the Father:

N/A

For the Mother:

Domestic violence survivor's classes

Parenting classes

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 engaged all relatives?

Questions to consider before finalizing court recommendations:

- Are our court recommendations child focused?
- Have we covered every need of the youth in this case?
- Did we appropriately consider the minimum sufficient level of care (MSL) 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, culturally informed and non-judgmental?

Jessica Brown and School Guidance Counselor: Kenya Scott

Setting: High school guidance office

Kenya: We have a couple of openly lesbian and gay students in this school. We have a GSA, a Gay-Straight Alliance club, and I'm recommending that Jessica join it. I talked with the LGBTQ Center at the U. There's an amazing amount of information on the web, and Lambda Legal has some great materials they give away for free.

I'm worried about Jessica graduating. I just hope I can keep her in school. Of my three lesbian and gay kids, none of them are seniors. I can think back and remember some kids who probably were gay, but I wasn't aware of it at the time. If they get kicked out of home—they can end up living on the street. Even if they escape that fate, the economy and world we live in isn't kind to those without a high school diploma.

Jessica is waiting outside. This was her study-hall period and she wanted to be included. Jessica, would you please come in?

Kenya: Jessica, I'd like to talk about how sad you've been feeling, and how much we care about you and want to help you feel better. I think it's important for your CASA/GAL volunteer to know that you've been struggling with depression and a lot of traumatic experiences, which could be causing PTSD.

Jessica: I have been seeing Dr. Felix.

Kenya: How do you like him?

Jessica: I like Dr. Felix. He understands me. He didn't say anything about PTSD though. That's your thing.

Kenya: What else do you want your CASA/GAL volunteer to know?

Jessica: I really want to be adopted by Candice. I can't go back to living with my mom. It's really bad. We always fight. I can never be the daughter she wants to be. I don't think she really loves me; she's just too proud to give me up. That wouldn't look good.

- What difference does this interview make to the case?
- What are your follow-up questions?

CPS Caseworker: Angela Rodriguez

Setting: Phone call with CPS worker, who is talking with you while in between court hearings that she is attending today

I have been with the agency for five years and have been Jessica's caseworker from the beginning. For a long time, I thought Helen would never kick Wayne out. But now he's been gone for two months and Helen is standing firm on that decision. Helen has joined a group for survivors of domestic violence and it seems like she's doing ok.

From where I sit, Wayne being gone changes everything about the case. CPS no longer has justification to terminate this mother's rights if she is willing to provide a safe place for her daughter. Now that Wayne is out for good, Helen can do that. Therefore, we can't terminate and we can't have Candice adopt her. I am changing my permanency plan recommendation from TPR and adoption to reunification.

I support this reunification. Helen wants her daughter back. They have started having visits in her home. I know it will take Jessica some time to feel safe there, but as long as Wayne is gone for good she'll be ok. I know that Jessica and her mother still have arguments. I think it's normal for teenagers and parents to disagree and sometimes get loud about it.

This teenager brings a lot of negative attention to herself. This lesbian thing honestly seems more like a phase to me. I don't have a problem with gay people; I have gay and lesbian friends. This feels more like a teenage experimental phase. You'd be surprised how many teens experiment with their sexuality like this.

I think Jessica will benefit from the therapy, which has finally started. Dr. Felix knows what the issues are and that we need to reunify this family. They have only met a few times so I haven't checked in yet but I bet it's going well. Dr. Felix is really good.

Candice has done a great job caring for Jessica, but she's very young to be parenting a 15-year-old. They're still in the honeymoon phase. Wait and see what will happen when Jessica starts to really rebel. Plus, she encourages behavior that's only going to make things harder for her in the end. Candice should be discouraging this type of behavior.

CPS Caseworker: Angela Rodriguez, Cont'd.

- Have the issues that brought the child into care been addressed by the CPS agency?
- What factors do you think the CPS agency is weighing in deciding a permanency plan for Jessica?

Former CASA/GAL Volunteer: June Miller

Setting: Cell phone conversation

It's great to see a volunteer back on this case. There was a four-month gap and it didn't seem like anyone was in Jessica's corner. I'm the one who found Candice for Jessica. I knew we should find some family for her because the foster family wasn't working out and I knew a group home wasn't going to be good either, after all the trauma Jessica experienced at the Barton Home. Has she come out to you? If not, just give her some time and don't press her on the issue. Wait until she's ready to let you in.

I was working with the caseworker, Angela, to try to find other placement options. I talked to Helen's sister, May, but she couldn't take Jessica. May also said Wayne was really abusive and that May was concerned for Jessica's safety in that home.

Anyway, May lives halfway across the country, and Angela said Jessica shouldn't have to move during high school. Well, in any case, May couldn't take Jessica; she's got medical issues and family issues of her own. Then I started doing a family genogram with May on the phone. That's how I found out more about Jessica's dad's side of the family. He passed away, you know, but he had a married sister and I got her name, Marylou Clark. So I did a civil records search and then I checked a few phone books online. She lives a couple towns over and her number is listed under her husband's name.

When I called Mrs. Clark, she was super friendly. She mentioned her daughter Candice, who lives right here in town! Candice turned out to be perfect for Jessica. I'm so glad we found her before I had to move away. Thank goodness Jessica felt safe enough to go there. She was so scared—literally living on the street all that time—and felt betrayed by everybody.

She told me that she felt rejected by her mom. She said she had begged Helen to leave Wayne, but Helen didn't. Abusive relationships are obviously incredibly complicated, but that doesn't change the way it made Jessica feel—like her mother was choosing Wayne over her.

Then foster family rejected her, and after that she was placed in a group home where they made her room with another girl who constantly bullied her. She confided in me that she was terrified to sleep at night. Even some of the counselors gave her a hard time because she's gay. It's unbelievable what this young woman has endured.

Former CASA/GAL Volunteer: June Miller, Cont'd.

- Will you want to maintain contact with June and possibly interview her again? Why or why not?
- What are your follow-up questions?

Cousin: Candice Clark (First Contact)

Setting: Home of Candice Clark

I'm a cousin on Jessica's dad's side. I remember seeing Jessica at our annual family reunion picnics. She was always such a cute kid, real sweet, you know, and a little shy. When her dad died several years ago, our families lost touch. Mom used to call Helen, but it seemed like hearing from our side of the family always re-opened the wound, and finally mom just stopped calling. Honestly, I hadn't thought about them a lot in the last few years.

One day about seven months ago I was on the phone with my mom, and she told me that a lady named June phoned her asking about Helen. June was the last CASA volunteer. Mom told me Helen had been living with a really abusive guy—well, he was living with her actually—and that Jessica ran away. And that now she was in foster care somewhere. I was shocked!

That same week, June called me and said that Jessica's group home wasn't working out for her. June asked me if I knew of a relative who could take her in and I just said, "Me! Let her live with me. I can look after her." I think I was as surprised as anybody was, but I'm glad I said it because I love having her here with me. She's a really cool young woman. And she's been through a lot.

Then Jessica ran from the group home and was gone for six weeks before she finally called June and June talked to her about the option of staying with me. I was already in touch with Angela and my kinship home study had been approved, although I just started the classes to become a licensed foster parent. And I think Helen said it was okay with her too, though I don't think she would say that today. Now Helen wants Jessica to move back with her.

I'm not married and I never really wanted to have kids, but I really love caring for Jessica. We've become so close—I feel like Jessica and I are family now and I want to be her legal parent. My life has a deeper purpose because she's with me, and I know that she trusts me and feels fully at home with me. Angela and I have talked about this. She knows how committed I am and she said we would work toward adoption. We've been talking about adoption here at home too, and Jessica says that's what she wants. But lately Angela hasn't said anything about it, which makes me nervous. Now they're making Jessica go see her mom so I don't know what's up. Do you where things stand?

Cousin: Candice Clark (First Contact), Cont'd.

This whole sexual orientation thing is pretty special. I love Jessica for who she is and I think she's incredibly brave for being herself, despite the cruelty she's faced. I'm going to support her in doing whatever she needs to, to feel comfortable with her life. Why does anyone care if she dates girls? I know that sounds naïve given how close-minded people can be this world, but seriously, who cares?

- What are the mother's thoughts and wishes in reference to this relative?
- How will you respond when Candice asks if you know what's going on with Jessica's permanency plan?

Jessica Brown and Candice Clark (Second Contact)

Setting: Cell phone conversation—first with Candice, then with Jessica

Candice: Yeah, we do have a unique relationship. At times, Jessica may think we're more best friends than anything else. And we do keep it pretty friendly, but I know how to be firm when it comes to boundaries. I set a curfew for her, but the first week she was here she climbed out the window and stayed out until midnight. That got her grounded for a week, and we had a long talk about what can happen when you stay out late and no one knows where you are. Jessica hasn't broken curfew again. I'm not super strict or anything but I'm definitely not a pushover and, well, I think she trusts and respects me. I'm her parent; that's my role in her life.

Sometimes she even calls me "mom." I know she wants her real mom to love and accept her as she is, and that includes being gay. Helen won't do that, or maybe she can't, and I know that's really painful for Jessica, that sense of rejection. But I do love her just as she is. I don't need her to be different—I accept her. I adore her if you want to know the truth! Not that she doesn't drive me crazy sometimes, but I worry about her too. I know she has some work to do to sort all this out, the trauma that she's been put through, and who can blame her. I'm really glad she's seeing Dr. Felix.

Here, talk to Jessica, she's right here.

Jessica: Mom was nothing like Candice. With Candice I always know where the lines are. I may sometimes choose to cross those lines (giggles), but I already know what will happen if I do. Mom was all over the place.

Is my mom supportive of me? Are you kidding? I mean, she fed me and all, but she doesn't support me, like, emotionally. She's not nurturing and loving to me like Candice. Doesn't that matter? And what about if she meets some new guy who beats her up? Am I going to end up in the hospital again because I tried to stick up for her? I mean I really hope that she's changed after Wayne, but I'm done.

What do I want? I want to feel safe. It's been years since I felt safe at home and I love feeling like that now. I didn't know what I was missing.

- What are your follow-up questions?

Mother: Helen Brown

Setting: Home of Helen Brown

Thanks for coming over. I really appreciated Ms. Miller's input and I'm glad there's another CASA volunteer working on this now. I was sad to see Ms. Miller go. I'm about to run out to Group, but I wanted to be sure we had time to meet and talk.

Honestly, I really don't know what I would do without my DV group. We meet for an hour twice a week, and there's a few women I've really connected with who I call for support if I'm having a hard time. I joined the group two months before I finally had the courage to tell Wayne he had to get out. They helped me make a plan to stay safe. This group has been pretty empowering.

Wayne was a good provider; he made really good money and was generous with it at first. He fixed a lot of things when he moved in and looked after the house like my husband used to. Wayne was a good dad to Jessica for the first few years. Things would have been fine if Jessica hadn't decided that she needed to be. . . different. She can be so stubborn! I don't know what she thinks she's doing with all this lesbian nonsense.

Wayne started to get rough with me after we were together about a year. It wasn't that bad the first couple years. I tried to kick him out a couple times before, but he always convinced me to take him back. This is pretty personal, but I want to give you the whole story. A few months ago I discovered that his Internet porn addiction had gotten way out of hand. He started to spend a lot of time in the basement looking at really disturbing stuff. I mean stuff that made me feel genuinely scared for my safety. Long story short, he's gone for good now.

He and Jessica had that fight when Jessica ran away, and I guess he broke her ribs. Even with Jessica in foster care, I let Wayne stay here for another year before I finally was able to shake him. I don't know what I was thinking! Angela said I can get Jessica back now that I kicked Wayne out. I think Jessica should be with me—I'm her mother. I know she's confused, but she's in therapy now so I'm hopeful.

Mother: Helen Brown, Cont'd.

I'm telling you this lesbian stuff is getting on my last nerve! It's just attention-seeking, and I'm really tired of it. That's not how we were raised to be in my family and she knows I don't approve.

- What are your thoughts about Helen's attitude toward her daughter?
- What strengths have you uncovered in this family that you can work with if the primary plan is reunification?
- What difference does this interview make to the case?

Brown Case Debrief Questions

- Who is in Jessica's circle of support?
- How is the lack of support from Helen affecting Jessica's academics and her mental, psychological and social well-being?
- If reunification is accepted by the court, what is the likelihood that Helen will play a more supportive and nurturing role in Jessica's life?
- What impact did the previous CASA/GAL volunteer have on this case (accomplishments, insight, resources)?
- What resources would you use to expand your knowledge of the needs of LGBTQ youth and inspire others to educate themselves?
- What are some benefits of including Jessica in the service-planning process on this case?