

Western New England University

Case Study

Jeremiah Oliver Case

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Introduction To Social Work SW 100

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My case study is about the community I used to live in, the Worcester County. In the Worcester County there was a lack of communication between the Department of Children and Families, NCAO (North Central Office Area) and Jeremiah Oliver's family. The Oliver family consisted of the mother Elsa Oliver, 28 years old, Elsa's boyfriend Alberto Sierra, 23 years old, and Elsa's husband Jose Oliver, his age at the time of the incident is unknown. Elsa and Jose had three children together, Jeremiah Oliver age 5, Jeremiah's older sister, age seven, and Jeremiah's older brother, age nine. The Oliver family was involved with two different social workers and still managed to fall through the cracks of the social work system. Did the family fall through the cracks due to lack of effort, or by the caseload and workload being too large? Social Policy is various areas of policy, usually within a government or political setting. It can refer to guidelines, principles, legislation or activities that affect the living conditions, conducive to human welfare, such as a person's quality of life. (Spicker, Paul, 2015)

In September 2011 the Oliver family became involved with DCF also known as the Department of Children and Families. At this time the Oliver family lived in Florida. Elsa Oliver was reported of 51A; 51A is a report of neglect or abuse. Elsa Oliver was reported by a mandated reporter for neglecting her children who were, at the time ages two, five, and seven. The family was given a social worker and they had monthly meetings with the family. The social worker also connected the family with other services for 15 months.

In January of 2013, the Oliver case was transferred from the NCAO to DCF in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. DCF workers in Massachusetts were aware of the history and they requested information from the prior department but were unable to receive a response. The new social worker made visits to the household in February and April in 2013. But we later learn those were

there last monthly visits that were made. After this the new social worker didn't make the monthly visits, nor did she refer the family to any addition service. Like the prior social worker.

Department of Children and Families policy requires social workers and supervisors to review the case record when a case transfers to a new social worker. The caseworker from NCAO and DCF were supposed to have a transfer phone call. The transfer phone call between the former social worker allows the current social worker to understand all aspects of the client's file. DCF reported that there wasn't a transfer meeting or phone call made between social workers or managers. It was also reported that the worker only read the transfer summary and the supervisor didn't read the entire case file.

The last home visit was made on April 30, 2013, to the Oliver household. In May 2013, a 51A was filed again against Elsa Oliver. The report of abuse of the oldest child was filed, investigated, and supported; Elsa physically abused her oldest child. For the third time, Elsa Oliver faced three 51A accusation in one incident. This incident raised concerns for the three children in the household and concerns for the mother. When this incident was filed investigators had just completed a prior investigation on Elsa Oliver. Managers expected the social worker assigned to the family to follow up on the new concerns, but the social worker failed to do so. After the accusations in late June, Elsa Oliver moved the family to a different household in Fitchburg. When contacted by phone from the social worker, Elsa refused to give to the social worker a updated housing address. On November 5, 2013 the social worker appeared at Elsa's oldest two children's school. When speaking, the children gave different whereabouts for Jeremiah Oliver. After the meeting with the children, the social worker attempted a home visit

but no one responded to the door when they arrived. The social worker has not had a family meeting or house visit with the entire Oliver family since April.

On December 3, 2013 a mandated reporter reported a 51A against Jeremiah's mother, Elsa Oliver. Elsa told social workers Jeremiah had relocated to Florida with relatives. The 51A investigation led to discover Jeremiah had not been seen since mid-September by any non family related sources. Elsa was then given time to present Jeremiah to the social worker, but she failed to do so. On December 13, 2013 Jeremiah's disappearance was now being treated as a homicide investigation. Then on December 16, 2013 Alberto Sierra was arraigned on three counts of assault and battery with a dangerous weapon, two counts of assault and battery on a child causing bodily injury. Judge Richard Tucker from the Worcester Superior Court determined Alberto Sierra was a danger to the public. The following day, Elsa was arraigned on two counts reckless endangerment, two counts of accessory after the fact, and one count of assault and battery with a dangerous weapon. In December 2013 Jose Oliver, Elsa Oliver's husband, announced he wanted to gain custody of his two oldest children. Jose Oliver made this announcement after his youngest son Jeremiah Oliver was missing. Jose Oliver had history of drug use but pursued getting his children back into his custody. He was due in court on January 10, 2014. But he Jose ruined the opportunity to get his children back on December 30 when was arrested on drug charges. Jose attempted to sell heroin to an undercover officer in New Britain, Connecticut. He was arrested with 30 bags of heroin on him.

On January 11, 2014 Jose Oliver organized a search group to begin looking for his son. The group searched for countless hours, all across Fitchburg. But unfortunately, the search parties came up empty handed. April 18, 2014 Jeremiah Oliver was found on the side of

interstate 190 in Sterling, Massachusetts. Jeremiah was found, he was wrapped in a blanket and stuff inside a suitcase. Homicide investigators were lead to Jeremiah's body by notes written by Alberto Sierra to Erik Perez. Erik Perez is a former inmate who spoke to Alberto Sierra through a vent while they were incarcerated. They continuously sent notes to one another, and in the notes, Alberto Sierra described when and where Jeremiah's body was placed. Alberto Sierra wrote an apology note apologizing for the case and for abusing Jeremiah's siblings. Alberto went into details describing how he made the children kneel in cold showers, hit the children with a belt, struck Jeremiah's sister and split her lip, and threatened the children with being taken away for telling the truth. The note goes into details, on October 30, 2013 Alberto drove Elsa to Interstate 90 in Sterling. She dumped Jeremiah's lifeless body on the side of the highway right before a large snow storm. Prosecutors plan on indicting Elsa and Alberto on murder charges of five year old Jeremiah Oliver. Jose Oliver was presented with the new on April 20, 2013 when the positively identified the body found as Jeremiah. Jose Oliver had to arrange the funeral, and he buried his son on May 3, 2013.

In result, DCF fired three employees and disciplined another after reviewing their job performance. Governor Deval Patrick contacted CWLA "Child Welfare League of America" to conduct immediate quality improvement review of DCF practices. The social worker had four screened reports. The supervisor entered misleading notes in the case records. That did not reflect the current status of the case work. This undermined a crucial opportunity to identify the Oliver children as needing immediate attention. The reports represented missed opportunities for re-evaluation and intervention with the Oliver family. Intake APM who made the screening decision was disciplined, and given a three day suspension and change of job responsibilities.

When a new report 51A is filed on a parent that already has an open investigation the responsibility of the Intake APM is to decide whether the report will be screened for assessment or investigated . The Intake APM failed at their job, and allowed the Oliver children to fall through the system, along with the social worker and the manager.

Social Policy objectives are to promote safety, dignity, and mutual help. Safety ensures the city residents basic economic security, it protects them from fear and want. Safety guards the client's personal safety, safety is used to prevent abuse, abandonment, neglect, violence, and deprivation. The social worker in this case from NCAO prevented safety for Jeremiah and his siblings. They prevented this by having monthly visits with the family and connected them with other sources. The social worker the family received when they moved to Fitchburg did not create safety for the children by not checking in monthly. The new social worker allowed abuse, violence, everything safety goes against. Dignity protects residents social rights, to remove any service access obstacles. Dignity provides client centered services to respect residents, it promotes self determination. If the social worker removed the obstacles and Elsa Oliver's life they would of gotten other services to help her drug addiction. Mutual help encourages mutual help and cooperation, it also facilitates supportive services to all families. Mutual help should build hospitable and supportive communities. The first social worker in Florida used mutual help to their advantage. The first social worker knew Elsa Oliver had a drug problem, the social worker provided supportive services for her to become stable.

If I was a social worker dealing with this case I would follow what the protocol is for children that move while they have an open investigation. I would have made it a point to read thoroughly the case so I knew the correct preventative methods I should take. As a social worker

I personally would not allow this situation to become so devastating because once I realized that the I could no longer handle the case I would find a social worker who could. I believe a social worker's job is to give 110 percent to client's at all times and if they can't do so then social worker may not be the correct job for them. The Oliver family needed a dedicated worker and if I were the social worker assigned to the case I would do everything possible for the children to live in a healthy living environment.

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