

Keeping Families Together

Guiding Principles: Service staff must be viewed at “system neutral” advocates for family

Rhonda, Mike and their son were referred to a scattered-site supportive housing program after living in a family homeless shelter for five weeks. During the family’s stay in the shelter, her son developed an upper-respiratory infection, which prompted Rhonda and Mike to take him to the emergency room where their involvement with child protection services began. Medical staff noticed that Rhonda and Mike seemed significantly fatigued to the extent that the child’s safety was in question. Rhonda describes the ER visit as being early in the morning after having been up all night trying to calm her sick son, adding to their fatigue resulting from weeks of little to no sleep while living in the shelter. Additionally, both Rhonda and Mike had been experiencing their own health challenges that made them drowsy.

At first, Rhonda hesitantly disclosed her family’s involvement with child protection services to her supportive housing case worker. Not familiar with the initial intake process or how the disclosure would be handled, Rhonda was concerned her supportive housing services could be impacted. Rhonda began to share more openly when her case manager assured her that other than communicating with child protection staff, and only then with Rhonda’s permission to do so, the supportive housing services for Rhonda and her family would be separate and apart from children protection services.

After Rhonda and her family obtained supportive housing, her case manager highlighted the separation by inviting Rhonda to attend peer-support and parenting education classes available through the supportive housing program.

Rhonda and her case manager also discussed other services related to housing and family stability, including home-based case management and child development assessments; budgeting and landlord communication tips; and other supports for helping the family achieve their unique goals of self-sufficiency.

In this instance, Rhonda’s case manager made a point of demonstrating that service staff are system neutral advocates for families.

