

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASE CONSULTATION NOTES:¹

Case name: Samantha Whitehead

LINK #: 00000

Initial Consultation:

Date: 9/16/06

Participants: John Eston, SW; Elena Gilbert, paralegal

Reason for referral for consultation:

Social Worker requested consultation for direction in engaging batterer and finding appropriate services / resources for the family.

Source:

Interview with Social Worker; review of the record.

Status of Case:

This case is open in treatment.

Presenting information:

This family consists of mother, Samantha Whitehead, d.o.b. 4/21/67; father, Paul Whitehead, d.o.b. 12/21/60; and their two children, Harmony, d.o.b. 2/28/89; and Jesse, d.o.b. 2/12/98.

This family has been referred to DCF on three separate occasions, 1/05, 2/06, and 7/06. Reports have included allegations of father demonstrating extremely controlling and manipulative behaviors towards mother, father physically assaulting mother, and mother being hospitalized due to overdose on alcohol and anxiety medications.

Batterer's pattern of coercive control and behaviors that create harm for the child and family:

Based on the information provided in the consultation, Mr. Whitehead has engaged in a pattern of coercive control. These behaviors have been witnessed by both children, as well as by the DCF social workers assigned to the case.

Mr. Whitehead's controlling behaviors have included:

¹ The names and identifying facts in this note have been changed to protect confidentiality.

- Calling mother upwards of 40 times per day to track her whereabouts;
- Making note of mother's car mileage and providing only enough gas money for local travel;
- Following mother, engaging in high speed pursuits, running mother and Jesse off the road;
- Going through mother's belongings;
- Blocking mother from leaving the home, including jumping out of a moving car and laying in front of it threatening suicide, jumping on top of mother's car as mother attempted to attend a support group, stealing and hiding mother's keys, blocking mother physically prohibiting her from leaving the home;
- Accusing mother of cheating;
- Physically assaulting mother, including pushing, punching, and pinning mother down; resulting in direct injuries including bruises to hips, thighs, and face;
- Interrogating the children about mother's movements, whereabouts, and interactions with other persons;
- Withholding financial support, and controlling how family resources are allocated, including giving money to Harmony and thus forcing mother to go to her daughter to request the money and causing tension between mother and daughter;
- Locking up the family's important paperwork and the telephone.

Non-offending parent's strengths and full range of efforts to support and provide for the safety and well-being of the child:

Despite Mr. Whitehead's abusive behavior and pattern of coercive control, Mrs. Whitehead has provided for the safety and well-being of the children in the following ways:

- Engaging in a battered women's support group since April 2005;
- Frequenting food pantries to obtain groceries for the children;
- Applying for DSS benefits in order to provide financially for the children;
- Filing a report with the State Police subsequent to being assaulted by father, leading to father's arrest;
- Filing for a Temporary Restraining Order on behalf of self and the children;
- Obtaining counseling services for Jesse;
- Engaging in trauma therapy and medication management to address symptoms of PTSD;
- Attending AA Meetings and working with a sponsor to address use of alcohol in response to feelings resulting from victimization;
- Proceeding with divorce and obtaining lawyer for self through Legal Aide;
- Engaging in substance abuse evaluation and demonstrating willingness to follow treatment recommendations;
- Demonstrating a willingness to engage in in-home parenting support services in order to respond to Jesse's needs.

Adverse impact of batterer's behavior on each child/family functioning:

Mr. Whitehead's behaviors have impacted the family functioning in that:

Jesse:

Jesse has witnessed his father abuse and berate his mother. Jesse continues to be used by father as a tool to control mother, in that father will call the home incessantly under the guise that he wishes to speak to his son; father pumps Jesse for information on mother's movements; and father fails to return Jesse home in a timely manner following visits. The calls and visits have kept Jesse up until late into the night. Father has been overheard telling Jesse his mother is not fit to parent. Jesse comes home from visits wound up, as demonstrated by tantrums and verbal abuse towards mother. Jesse has reported feeling fearful of his father's treatment of mother when father was in the home. Jesse has been observed by the social worker answering his father's repeated phone calls to the home. The social worker has witnessed Jesse tell his father not to call, and slam the phone down, causing the phone to be thrown to the floor. The social worker reports that Jesse has expressed distress over Mr. Whitehead's repeated phone calls to the home and Mr. Whitehead's repeated calls to the police to conduct "well-child checks."

Harmony:

Although Harmony has been vague in reporting father's physical abuse of mother, Harmony has described in detail her father's controlling behaviors towards mother, including his withholding of financial resources and access to the telephone. Harmony has voiced that she will "never get married" after witnessing her parent's relationship. Harmony no longer lives in the home, preferring to live with her maternal uncle. Harmony is described as a hard-working student, who also works multiple part-time jobs. There is some indication in the record that Harmony has also had an overdose of alcohol mixed with her ADHD medications.

Mrs. Whitehead:

Mrs. Whitehead is being treated for significant traumatic stress as a result of Mr. Whitehead's behaviors. Mrs. Whitehead has also used alcohol to dull her feelings of anxiety and stress. Mrs. Whitehead's parenting relationship with her children has been undermined repeatedly and significantly by Mr. Whitehead, and his continued efforts to control her via the children continues to effect the positive development of the children.

Other factors/issues impacting risk/vulnerability:

Mrs. Whitehead has limited financial resources. Mr. Whitehead has been advised during the pending divorce proceedings to continue to financially support the family; however, he continues to use financial resources to control the family. Mr. Whitehead also continues to control Mrs. Whitehead through visitation with Jesse.

Jesse appears to be developmentally or educationally delayed. Jesse was home-schooled until this year, but is currently receiving educational services through Smithtown Elementary School where he is enrolled in the second grade. Jesse is on a waiting list for counseling services.

Assessment:

Mr. Whitehead has engaged in a pattern of persistent, severe, and escalating violence and control of Mrs. Whitehead. Mr. Whitehead has repeatedly denied his behaviors, blaming Mrs. Whitehead's injuries on her clumsiness or drunkenness. Mr. Whitehead demonstrates extremely limited insight into his own patterns of behavior, and their impact on his children's safety and well-being. In fact, despite interventions by the police, courts, and DCF, Mr. Whitehead continues to engage in controlling behaviors and has enlisted Harmony and Jesse to participate in the behaviors. Mr. Whitehead's willingness to continue the behaviors poses a continued risk to the children and the family's overall functioning.

Mrs. Whitehead appears to have accessed all of the resources available to her to contend with Mr. Whitehead's behaviors. Despite her exhaustive attempts to better her family's safety and well-being, Mr. Whitehead continues to have a negative impact on the family.

Recommendation:

Based on the information obtained in this consultation, the following recommendations are suggested:

- During meetings with Mr. Whitehead, Social Worker will:
 - Identify the Department's concerns regarding his behavior and pattern of coercive control.
 - Re-direct him to discussions of his violence and behaviors when he attempts to steer the interview towards discussion of Mrs. Whitehead (i.e., I am here to speak with you regarding your behaviors and DCF's expectations concerning you).
 - Continue to engage Mr. Whitehead in discussing his violence, behaviors, and pattern of coercive control including behaviors witnessed by DCF (i.e., frequent phone calls to the home; withheld financial resources; police calls; et cetera).
 - Determine his level of understanding of the impact of his behaviors on each of his children:
 - What do you feel is your role as father?
 - What are your hopes and goals for your children?
 - Does your behavior support or interfere with these hopes and goals?

- How do you think Jesse feels when you tell him his mother is unfit? (et cetera)
 - Do you understand that Jesse is frightened/upset when you call the house repeatedly/call the police to conduct well-child checks?
 - Determine his willingness to take steps to address these behaviors:
 - Are you willing to refrain from calling the house more than two times per day? (set hours, timeframe, duration of calls)
 - Are you willing to refrain from calling the police to conduct well-child checks?
 - Are you willing to engage in services to change the problem behaviors?
 - Based upon Mr. Whitehead's response, the Social Worker will develop a Service Agreement with Mr. Whitehead, specifically outlining the steps Mr. Whitehead will take in the best interests of the children.
- Social Worker will document all attempts to engage Mr. Whitehead for further case planning.
- Consultant will review the investigation protocol and case record.
- Consultant will support the Social Worker in identifying resources available for Mrs. Whitehead and her children.

Follow up plan:

- Consultant will follow up with the Social Worker in two weeks to assess the utility of the above-mentioned recommendations.
- Consultant will be available for further consults.

Matthew Peterson, Domestic Violence Consultant