

## Torres Family Vignette Introduction

The social worker received a referral on the Torres family as an immediate (24 hour) response. Officers were waiting for the social worker at the house. The social worker noted that the agency had recently closed a case with the family one month earlier. When the social worker responded to the home, the officer said he had responded to the scene due to a report that Maria Torres (Caucasian), the mother, was under the influence and that she had left two of her children in the care of homeless “drug addicts.” Maria and the father, Greg (Native American), had gotten into a physical altercation because of this and the neighbors had called the police. There were reports that Greg had punched Maria twice and threatened to kill her.

The officer had interviewed Maria, prior to the social worker arriving, and she admitted to a “slip up” and had relapsed using methamphetamine. She said she had smoked sometime over the past weekend. The officer noted that Maria was moving her fingers as if closing her hand into a fist and fidgeting. She was also perspiring and her eyelids were fluttering rapidly. Based on this and other symptoms of a person under the influence, the officer placed Maria under arrest. She said she didn’t leave her kids with unsafe people and blamed Greg for the problems and said he pushed her during the argument. She said Greg has bipolar and stopped taking his meds after their CPS case closed. Maria did not appear to have any injuries.

The officer and the social worker interviewed Greg. Greg was sweaty and upset. He said he returned home from work to find two of his children left home with two friends of the mother. Greg thinks these friends are involved in drug use with Maria. When Maria returned with the three older children, they got into a fight. Greg said he thinks Maria is using drugs again and was upset because they had worked really hard to get their kids back from CPS. Greg said he is still sober, but noted that he has not been taking his bi-polar medication. He denies that he punched Maria. However, as is protocol in domestic violence cases, the police detained him in the police car for further questioning.

The social worker entered the home and found it to be in deplorable conditions. There were five children in the home and two adults in the garage. They were identified as Sue Smith and Frank George and found to have extensive police records for drug use. They shared they were there to help Maria clean up the house. As the social worker toured the home, she found the front room had plaster hanging from the ceiling, exposed wires surrounding the electric sockets, a pile of dirty clothing that smelled of urine, the couches were visibly soiled, there was garbage strewn throughout the home and there was rotting food on the floor. In the kitchen, there were dishes and pots in the sink with dried rotting food on them and the inside of the refrigerator contained old rotting meat, dried food on the shelves, spilled liquids that are unidentifiable with very little edible food. The bedrooms were also unkempt and contained beds with no sheets. There were four cats in the home and the litter box was full, with feces on the floor all around it.

Based on the social worker’s assessment of the parents, the home and the mother’s arrest; the social worker placed a protective hold on all five children. The decision was based upon the unsafe condition of the home which both parents were aware of, the mother’s current drug use which contributed to her arrest, the father’s discontinued use of his bi-polar medication and the suspected continued domestic violence between the parents.

The social worker met with all five children. Randy, age 4, was sleeping on the couch during the duration of the situation. Monica, age 10, was crying uncontrollably, and the other three children were sitting silently in the corner of the living room. The social worker asked the children when they last ate and they said they last ate at school the day

before and were hungry. The social worker gathered the children with assistance of a colleague and transported the children to the shelter.

Once the children were situated, the social worker reviewed the previous case file. In addition to Monica and Randy, there was Danny, age 8, Amy, age 6, and Cindy, age 3. There were a total of 15 referrals over the past 10 years, all for neglect. The previous case had been opened two years prior with Maria and the children's father, Greg. They had received one year of Family Reunification services and one year of Family Maintenance services prior to closing. The issues present in that case were substance abuse by the parents, domestic violence, and Greg's mental health condition (he is diagnosed with bipolar disorder). It appears both Maria and Greg had attained and maintained sobriety for the last 18 months of the case. Greg had sought mental health treatment for bipolar disorder and had not had any new domestic violence issues. It was noted by the previous ongoing social worker that there were ongoing issues regarding the home's cleanliness. As recently as four months before closure, the ongoing social worker had conducted an unannounced home visit and found the home in disarray. He worked with the family to get the home clean. Additionally, they struggled with keeping food in the home and the social worker regularly brought food boxes to the home. Maria and Greg are in contact with the paternal family, including paternal grandmother Bethany and Greg's sister Jenny. The relationship has been strained over the years, but Jenny was the caregiver for the kids when they were in care.

## Interviews with the children

Interviews with the children later in the afternoon

Monica was very worried about being in foster care again and begged the social worker to live with her Aunt Jenny. When the social worker asked Monica what happened today, Monica said her mother was arrested. Monica said everything was okay until the police came. She then became emotional. She said she was in school, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and everything was going well there. When asked about the condition of the home, Monica said they try to clean the house but it gets dirty fast. The social worker asked Monica if she had any relatives in the area. Monica said that her Aunt Jenny lived close but that was the only relative she felt safe with. The social worker asked if Monica had any Native American Ancestry and Monica said that her father was Native American but she didn't know what tribe.

Danny appeared tired and sad when the social worker met with him. Danny said the reason the police came was because their father thought their mother was using drugs. He said he didn't think his mother was using drugs. He said his mother and father got into a fight the night before because of this. When asked, he said he saw his dad punch his mom on the back of her head and on her stomach. She fell down and his dad said he wanted to kill her. The social worker asked Danny if he had any relatives that lived close by that he felt safe with? Danny said no. The social worker asked if he had any Native American Ancestry. Danny said no.

When meeting with Amy, she also said her father thought her mother was using drugs, methamphetamine specifically. She said sometimes her father also gets mad at her mom because there are always people coming in and out of the home. Sometimes people sleep in the garage. She said sometimes the people look scary.

Randy had slept through all the commotion at the house. At the shelter, he complained of a stomach ache. The nurse checked him and he had a slight fever. He was tired and did not say much to the social worker.

Cindy was quiet and would not speak with the social worker.

## Interviews with the Parents

The social worker went to the home the next morning. Maria had been released from jail and was home alone. When asked what happened the day before, Maria said she had gone to pick up her three older children from school and when she returned, Greg was home and upset she had left the two younger children with strangers. Maria tried to explain that Randy was sick and she just went quickly to the school. Greg began accusing her of using methamphetamine and they began arguing on the street in front of the house. The social worker asked Maria about her drug use. Maria said she had been clean for two years and she used on her birthday over the weekend. When asked why, she said she didn't know. When asked how she managed her sobriety in the past, she said she went to a support group at her church regularly. The social worker asked Maria about the domestic violence reported between her and Mr. Torres. Maria was not responsive to the questions and tried to change the subject. The social worker followed up by letting Maria know that Danny had shared with her that he witnessed his day punch his mom on the back of her head and on her stomach and he heard him say he wanted to kill her. Maria confirmed this did happen, but that it hasn't happened in a long time and she knows it was a onetime recurrence. The social worker asked Maria about the condition of the house. Maria said she had just started cleaning up this morning. Maria said the day she used methamphetamine was her "cleaning" day. She said the reason there was little food was that she has no car (she borrowed a car the day before) and walks to the corner market to get food as needed. They usually run out of food stamps the second week of the month and have to go to the food bank each week. The older children get free lunches at school. The social worker asked if she or the father have Native American Ancestry and the mother said yes the father has Native American Ancestry. The mother did not know from what tribe.

The social worker interviewed Greg at this mother's house. He was not arrested the previous day for domestic violence but did say that was a problem in the past. He said he was very angry when he came home to find his two younger children alone with the strangers. He did not know them and disputed Maria's explanation they were there to help clean the house. He thinks Maria was using with them in the garage. He said he was at work at the auto body shop across town. He takes the bus to get there. He said he has been sober for 18 months and goes to NA twice a week. He is so upset that Maria is using again. They worked so hard to get the children back. He said that he learned during the case that he has bipolar and saw a psychiatrist at county mental health for medication. He hasn't been taking the medication lately as money has been tight and he can't miss work to go to the doctor. He struggles with his mood, but is doing better than before. When asked about the condition of the house, Greg said he knew it was dirty but felt it was Maria's job to keep it clean since she was home all day. He said he did not know there was little food and that the kitchen sink was not working. He said he would fix that. He said that they do run out of food stamps each month early and he tries to get help from his parents or picks up food from the food bank. He did not think the kids were hungry. The social worker asked if the he or the mother have Native American Ancestry and he said yes he is Cherokee.

### Complete the SDM Safety Assessment

## Torres Family Vignette - continued

The children were placed into foster care with Aunt Jenny. Maria entered residential treatment and Greg continued to work on his sobriety and mental health and worked on finding housing. Unfortunately, after the removal of the children, the parents could no longer afford the rent and were evicted.

While in foster care, Danny (age 8), was exhibiting challenging behaviors at home and in the classroom. Aunt Jenny reported to the social worker that Randy was having nightmares, where he woke up sweaty and crying. He was jumpy whenever Jenny's boyfriend came into a room. At school, his teacher reported that Danny was not able to concentrate well and was getting into daily fights with his peers on the playground.

**Complete the SDM Family Risk Assessment**