CBEVSS:
Casework and Evaluation:
Learning From My Success Story

[00:00:00 silent]

[Introduction Graphic – Child Welfare Evaluation Virtual Summit Series]

[Introduction Graphic – Children's Bureau Logo]

[01:00:18 - Fast music plays].

[Graphic – White background, filled in by a hand drawing on screen with pencil. The hand appears and draws a woman sitting at a desk as the narrator begins to speak. Narrator is a female Child Welfare Caseworker.]

Caseworker: [01:00:25] I'll never forget Jacinta. Every caseworker has that case that she'll never forget and Jacinta was that case for me. [Graphic – Hand holding a polaroid style picture of a woman and her family.] Despite several challenges, I know that for Jacinta and her family, what I did made a real difference and the child welfare system worked like it's supposed to. Jacinta is my success story.

[Graphic – Hand draws two girls, looking down on their luck.]

Caseworker: [01:00:45] By the time I met the family, the girls were both teenagers and their life's journey had taken its toll. They had been in and out of foster care, Jacinta had been hospitalized numerous times for an eating disorder, her sister Priscilla was placed into a group home and struggled with severe anxiety, and their mom had her own serious mental health challenges.

[Graphic – Rocks stand in the way of the family, and as the graphic moves over the rocks, words related to their difficulties appear.]

Caseworker: [01:01:03] This family had it rough. Jacinta had been through multiple placements, including a congregate care facility. Her individual needs were so unique that finding a family placement, much less maintaining one, was difficult at best. The one bright spot in Jacinta's life was her school.

[Graphic – Light shines through rocks, revealing a red school building.]

She was a brilliant young woman, naturally smart in virtually every subject, creative, really a force.

[Graphic – Hand draws a new scene, showing a small home with driveway and garage.]

Caseworker: [01:01:27] But there was only one, one foster home that would accept this child and it was 20 miles from her school, which might as well have been in another city taking over an hour's travel time each way in city traffic. [Graphic – Hand draws a map and shows the difficult route to her school.] But the school was her one bright spot. I heard about a new program in the county that Jacinta and her family might benefit from.

[Graphic – Hand draws a woman sitting at a desk. She holds important paperwork, and on her desk is a pile of lots of paperwork.]

Caseworker: [01:01:46] It involved a team approach with specialists from multiple disciplines - school, mental health and Medicaid that provided intensive services and had additional flexible funding for other expenses to help support Jacinta. There was a lot of paperwork to fill out and I had to pull together every piece of medical and social history I could find and then cross my fingers that this would be the thing that worked.

[Graphic – Drawings of people and things appear, showing how much effort and help went into helping Jacinta and her foster family.]

Caseworker: [01:02:09] Jacinta was assigned a team of specialists, one who worked with the school to pay for Jacinta to have daily transportation, a therapist who visited both her and her mother weekly and a psychiatrist to see her monthly, there was a stipend for the foster parents to buy the food that Jacinta could eat, there was a parent mentor to help her mom get the support she needed to work toward reunification and a coordinator to make all this happen.

[Graphic – Hand draws woman sitting at a table with some kids, looking happy and confident.]

Caseworker: [01:02:32] They even froze my own case load at a low of 17 kids so I could manage weekly home visits with Jacinta, Priscilla and her mom as well as keep

up with the frequent court hearings and reports that the judge was requiring of this very special case. [Graphic – Hand draws images of Jacinta, now excelling in school, sports, and at home.] I could tell that all of these things worked. Jacinta was able to continue in her school where she continued to make high marks and even participated in extracurricular activities.

[Graphic – Hand draws Jacinta and her mother and sister, now back together at home, happy and together.]

Caseworker: [01:02:55] Her mom's symptoms and behavior stabilized and Jacinta and Priscilla were eventually able to return home. The family remained resilient and learned how to seek help earlier and how to recognize when they needed more help and how to get that help.

[Graphic – Hand draws family baking cookies, they came out burnt, but it demonstrates that the family is spending time together and enjoying learning how to be functional again.]

Things weren't perfect, but there weren't any more hospitalizations and they didn't re-enter the child welfare system.

[Graphic – Shows Jacinta's family on the bus, happy and smiling.]

Caseworker: [01:03:14] I even ran into Jacinta's family on the bus one day a few years later. Everyone actually looked happy to see me and Jacinta looked physically healthy and even smiled – something I almost never saw when I worked with her. What I didn't know at the time was that the program that I referred this family to was a pilot program being tested in our county office.

[Graphic – Extra paperwork revealed to be part of the pilot program, pages flip through on screen showing different paperwork.]

Caseworker: [01:03:33] That's why there was so much extra paperwork. I had to keep track of how I spent my time so my supervisor could justify my lower case load and constant surveys and reports had to be completed by everyone involved. [Graphic – Shows caseworker team and different paperwork that each must fill out.] The therapist and psychiatrist had to provide monthly written progress reports, the coordinator needed documentation and receipts for virtually every interaction or concrete service, and the family was so overburdened that this was more than they could manage even with the extra support.

Caseworker: [01:04:00] Truth be told, after a few months of this, pretty much everyone stopped completing the paperwork despite the coordinator trying everything she could to help us turn in what she needed. [Graphic – Text reads - Pilot Program Aspects of Program. Blocks of wood stack to make up each aspect as the narrator continues.] Of course this was all part of the evaluation of the pilot, and whether or not those services were going to be continued or expanded completely depended upon the

evaluation findings, which completely depended upon finishing the surveys, the receipts for concrete services, the multiple progress reports, all of those things that I chalked up to typical bureaucratic tasks that no one would notice in the sea of cases and paperwork.

Caseworker: [01:04:31] But I didn't get it at the time. I don't think any of us understood that. So although I knew that the program gave Jacinta, Priscilla and their mom the support they needed, even though I knew it was the reason they were able to reunify, the story of my bright spot was not captured. [Graphic – Flipping through paperwork examples for the program.] And shortly after Jacinta and her family's case was closed, [Graphic – Case closed stamp, fades out to black.] these services were discontinued in our office for a very long time.

[Graphic – Against black background, hand appears and draws the following text – I wish I knew then what I know now]

Caseworker: [01:04:55] I wish I knew then what I know now about how all of these things connect [Graphic – Illustrations of previous images, but with changes drawn in by a hand, showing what could have been done to improve the program.] and that might have allowed us to build a better program for other kids and families. If I had only known who the evaluators were or who in my office was responsible for the evaluation, I might have asked a lot more questions and maybe I could have been more helpful or useful.

Caseworker: [01:05:16] I might have shared my thoughts about the kinds of programs my families needed and what seemed to be working. I could have said something about what information was most important for us to collect. I might have shared my thoughts about how the evaluation activities could have fit better with my casework practices.

Caseworker: [01:05:33] I could have helped to make sure that the information the evaluators got was good information. I would have been more committed to understanding and completing all of that paperwork and to helping the family complete theirs and to do whatever I could to get all the providers to complete theirs too. I could have suggested how we could ask questions on surveys and forms so that everyone involved could actually understand and complete them.

[Graphic – Hand draws a classroom with a whiteboard containing lessons based on the experiences of previous programs].

Caseworker: [01:05:56] Luckily, someone somewhere must have understood the importance of these things because we now know today that the approach my office took proves highly effective. We see fewer mental health challenges, improvements in school performance and fewer kids placed in congregate care settings to name just a few positive things.

[Graphic – Caseworkers in office helping people and working together.]

Caseworker: [01:06:13] This was all possible because lots of caseworkers, service providers and families came together to craft evaluations that everyone could understand, everyone valued and everyone completed yielding a wealth of useable data. [Music starts playing]. I now know that if evaluation is really going to work and help make a difference, it relies on people like me.

[Graphic – Shows woman caseworker in her office on the computer. Screen shows different program aspects and demonstrates knowledge learned from past experiences.]

Caseworker: [01:06:32] Our agencies have to communicate and explain how and why we're collecting information and we have to ask questions and understand the importance of our participation. What I say and do as a caseworker is important not just to the kids and families I work with, but it can also impact future services for other children and families and it can affect what other child welfare professionals across the country learn too.

[Graphic – Poloroid of Jacinta and family on the bus returns, text reads - My Success Story.]

Caseworker: [01:06:58] Jacinta and her family are one success story and I want to be a part of so many more.

[On Screen Text – Special Thanks; Bethany D Miller, Brian Deakins, Tammy White, Dori Snedon, Melinda Baldwin - Children's Bureau]

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END OF TRANSCRIPT