

## Select Illustrative Case Studies

### Trey's Case Study Good Outcomes: Parents as Key

Trey is an African American young man who entered the EXCEL program in during the summer of 2000 when he was almost nine years old. Earlier that month Trey had gotten into a fight with a 14 year-old boy. They started with name-calling and escalated to the point where Trey called the boy a racist and hit the boy and the boy's bike with a stick. The older boy ended up with a scrape on his arm. The bike's mirror was broken off.

When the boy was riding his bike home, a car pulled up next to him and Trey's parents got out. Trey's mother began to hit the boy on the head with her shoe. The boy ran home. He left his bike. When he returned for it later it was gone. The next day Trey and several friends stood outside the boy's home, teasing him that they had his bike. The boy's father approached the group. Trey called him psycho and refused to leave, stating that he could do whatever he damn well wanted.

When The EXCEL case manager asked Trey about the incident, he admitted fighting with the boy but said that he did not hit him with a stick. The boy who was assaulted had a scrape on his arm from the stick and a red mark on his head from the shoe. Trey's father said that he took Trey to the hospital for treatment of his injuries. Trey's offenses fit the criteria for criminal damage to property and disorderly conduct, both misdemeanors, but he was too young to be charged.

A couple weeks later Trey was accused of taking another child's games and school supplies. Trey denied that he took them but did admit to stealing two fifty dollar bills from his father's wallet. The mother of the child whose games were taken stated that Trey had taken things from them before and that he had assaulted her son and other children in the neighborhood. She stated that Trey is out of control and she couldn't speak with his parents about his behavior because she feared she would be assaulted.

#### **The Family**

Trey's family consists of his mother, his father, and an older brother. Trey's mother was 31 years old at the time of referral, his father was 67, and his brother was 18. The family owned their home. The mother was employed as a home health aide and also received welfare for Trey.

There had been 41 police calls to the home for various reasons such as aggravated assault, runaway child, and drugs. Both of Trey's parents have criminal histories. A few years earlier, his mother and father were in a car that the police stopped and a passenger possessed crack and was arrested. Later that year, his parents were kicked out of a bar and threatened to kill the bouncer. In August of that year woman accused the father of sexually assaulting her several years prior.

In October the mother assaulted the father with a weapon and was charged with felony level assault. She was ordered to serve 60 days and placed on probation for ten years. In March of the next year, the father called the police to ask that the mother be removed from the home because she was arguing with him. In front of the police the

father told his wife that he'd blow her head off with a sawed off shotgun he kept under the bed.

Trey's mother used to be a prostitute and his father was his mother's pimp. She has had domestic abuse charges, assault, and drug charges filed against her. She had been in detox multiple times. At one time she attacked her husband with a screwdriver and was on probation for five years. Police reports say she is violent and lies.

Trey's father (or stepfather) had several police charges related to domestic abuse and served time at the workhouse. Little else was known about him. He said he is retired after a long work life.

At the time of the referring incident Trey's brother was not living in the home; he was serving time in prison for carjacking with a gun and aggravated assault. Trey's brother had been in conflict with the law since he was fourteen.

### **Parental Change: Parents as Key**

Once Trey became involved in EXCEL, both parents changed. They made the decision that Trey's life was going to be different than his brother's. They started being appropriate parents to him, gave him structure and taught him values. The case manager reported that Trey could talk to his parents about anything.

Trey's mother believes that Trey 'isn't like those other kids'. She cares deeply for Trey, sees his potential, and wants him to have a better life than his older brother has had. She supports Trey in many of his school activities. For instance, he came to a school concert wearing a tuxedo she had rented, she attended his football games, and she came to school conferences. For his birthdays, she brought cupcakes to school.

### **Description of Child**

At the time of Trey's referral to EXCEL, he was doing well in school. He was an honor student, very bright, a good reader, and scored in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile on standardized tests. His teachers described Trey as courteous, handsome and an ideal student. If he was challenged he performed; he was diligent, self-controlled, and not a behavior problem. Football was his passion. He wanted to be a professional player.

When Trey was younger he would lie about things he had taken. His stealing appeared to have been part of a pattern that went back several years before the referral incident. One of the concerns that EXCEL case manager had about Trey is that he had witnessed domestic violence throughout his life and that he would shut down when that occurred.

School has always been an important part of Trey's life and a source of positive feedback to him because of his natural intelligence and athletic ability. Unlike his older brother, Trey had no involvement by social services or other agencies prior to his referral to EXCEL.

### **EXCEL'S Involvement**

Trey's case manager noted that he had many strengths. He could control his temper, he had self-discipline, he was involved in football, and he was doing well in school. He was having no academic or behavior problems and he was being rewarded for his good performance with new books. He was appreciative of people and their actions.

His teacher had offered him the opportunity to tutor younger kids in reading at school and he enjoyed doing it. One of the biggest concerns of Trey's case manager at this time was his chronic stealing of things from friends and others. Trey did not appear to know why he stole.

In the second year of Trey's involvement with EXCEL, Trey's mother was being investigated for fraud. In April of that same year the case manager noted that the domestic violence had been reduced by both the mother and the father and there had been strong progress with obedience at home. Trey's older brother counseled Trey, "Don't follow my path." By then Trey's stealing had stopped in school although he did make the mistake of hiding something a friend had stolen. Trey admitted to his case manager that he didn't like writing letters of apology, which he had to do when he did things wrong or stole. Trey also attended anger management classes.

Trey's case manager was able to get funds for Trey to attend the Vikings summer football camp program. Football was the reward system for Trey. He did all his duties at home and didn't steal in order to play football. In the fall he had football every day after school.

In the fall of Trey's second year in the program, Trey's mother began attending school to get an RN. She later dropped out but she returned the next year and finished the program. She has been employed at an area hospital for several years as a pediatric nurse.

After a few years after Trey entered the program, Trey's brother was released from prison after serving time for aggravated assault. He was soon back in for another crime. Trey's brother was released from prison the next year. He violated his probation and went back to prison once again. Trey shoplifted trading cards and had to do 24 hours of community service.

The following fall, Trey was diagnosed with epilepsy. This forced Trey to give up playing football. He took up golf instead. He excelled in that sport. Later in the fall he made the good choice of walking away from a conflict at school. Several other students were suspended because of the incident. He continued to do well in school.

By the spring of the following year, Trey's own medical problems began to worsen. He started having seizures. Medical test showed swelling on his brain. He was on medication and hospitalized several times for testing. He had surgery on an elbow he injured playing football. Then his father had a heart attack. Trey was afraid his father was going to die. He doesn't know if he's going to have seizures for the rest of his life. He didn't know if he could play football or any contact sport again. No one knew the causes of the swelling on his brain.

In September of that year, Trey committed third degree burglary by stealing money from a friend's house. It was a friend whose parents allowed a lot of teenage boys to come in and out of their house. Trey's mother had warned him about the situation and had told him "to keep his butt from over there" but didn't. Trey never got the money out of the house. He was trying to take it when the family returned home. He dropped it and ran. When the police came to his house, he said, "Yes, it was me." They only saw the back of him. He could've lied and said it wasn't him. He went to juvenile detention because he had a previous record. The judge let him go the next day. He was on probation for 90 days and had to do community service. On his own, he wrote a letter to the woman and apologized.

Trey's case manager noted that when Trey has a slip he was harder on himself than anybody else could ever be. He cried about it and apologized. The case manager told him, "Trey, remember what I told you, I don't expect perfection. I'm not perfect. Nobody's perfect. What makes a young man become an appropriate man and a responsible man is how he handles his problems and his mistakes now."

In January of the following year, Trey was suspended from school for fighting. He told his case manager that he felt like things changed for him when his father had a heart attack in the fall and he became worried about losing him. When the case manager met with Trey in February she noticed his flat affect.

In May he was scheduled to have another MRI to see if there were any changes in his brain injury. The MRI came back negative, but the doctors told Trey he should avoid contact sports for several years.

According to the case manager, Trey's parents are wonderful people who are being good parents to their son. They have an open, honest, and caring relationship with Trey. The case manager mentioned that when she goes to their house, "I sit and talk to them. They never want me to leave. I have to tell them when I walk in the door, 'Look I only got like thirty minutes.'"

Later that year, Trey's case manager said that she had been talking to Trey about protective sex, because he had a girlfriend now. The case manager described her relationship with Trey had changed: "He was just a little bitty thing when I first met him. Now he's way taller than me. Every time I see him, he gives me a hug. When we leave he gives me a hug. And I don't initiate it, he does. He's just a good kid who's made some mistakes."

Trey graduated from EXCEL one year ago. He is in his first year of college. He is a star on the golf team. He has had no further seizures. His father recovered from his heart attack and is in good health. His brother is enrolled in college after completing chemical dependency treatment. His mother began taking courses for a bachelor's degree in nursing.

### **Sorenta Reasons to be Optimistic but Cautious**

When Sorenta was seven years old, she and her 12 year old sister committed second degree burglary. They took a chair from home and broke a window to gain entry into a neighbor's home. They stole cash from the freezer and a laptop computer. Their older male cousin offered the sisters money to go back in the house to get an bluerey player. Sorenta's older sister took the offer, reentered, and tripped the burglar alarm. Officers responded and neighbor boys told the officers they had seen the two girls in the home.

When police questioned her about the incident, Sorenta claimed she had gone into the home to look for her friend, but couldn't remember her friend's name. Her sister claimed they had been convinced by their brother and cousin to steal the items and the boys had served as look outs. Meanwhile the cousin told the police that he had tried to talk the girls out of the burglary. The brother told the police that the cousin had offered the girls money to do the burglary. The girls' father stated that his older daughter had stolen smaller items like candy from stores in the past.

In August of that year, when Sorenta entered the EXCEL program she lived with her mother and four of her eight siblings. The siblings ranged in age from 16 to one. The siblings she lived with were all older than her. Her two older sisters each had one child and were living in the home.

### **The Parents**

Sorenta's mother suffered from depression and anxiety. She finished the eighth grade and had no job skills. She received disability payments for herself and welfare for her children. She has been reported to child welfare many times. Child welfare placed the younger children in the homes of relatives and friends.

Sorenta's father suffered from depression and also has drug problems primarily with marijuana and methamphetamines. A few years before, he was convicted of malicious punishment of his four year-old daughter. He was convicted of armed robbery of a drug store a few years later and served four years in prison. While in prison, he attempted suicide. He was removed from prison and placed in a locked ward of a mental health facility. He had attempted suicide six other times. The father was physically assaultive of Sorenta's mother, who had obtained several orders of protection. The father had been out of the home for about three years when Sorenta became a client of EXCEL. He had a live-in girlfriend and a young child from that relationship. The father received mental health service and lived on disability payments.

A child protection social worker noted in a report, "There is a history of chronic neglect including education neglect, lack of follow through related to learning disabilities and lead poisoning of the children, domestic abuse, mental health issues, unstable housing, father's crack cocaine and alcohol abuse, and suspected marijuana and alcohol use by the mother. The family consistently refused child protection services. Termination of parental rights was considered but averted due to transfers of custody of six of the eight children to relatives (aunt, uncle, and grandmother)."

After the burglary incident, the mother got order for protection against the father. The EXCEL case manager first met with Sorenta's mother to discuss the program and explain what the case manager role would be. A few days later the case manager met Sorenta and found out the sorts of things that Sorenta enjoyed doing, like singing, reading and art. After that meeting the case manager looked into activities and resources close to Sorenta's home, got Sorenta enrolled in an after school program at the Y, got her a library card, and bought her some art supplies.

Throughout the fall the case manager and Sorenta did a number of indoor and outdoor activities together. They enjoyed each other's company. At times the case manager would notice that Sorenta "seemed more distracted than usual." The case manager also had many conversations with the mother who said that Sorenta "sees her father once in a while however it usually upsets her." In early November the family moved to a larger home where Sorenta could have her own bedroom. The case manager noted that Sorenta was a good reader and appeared to have no problems at school.

After several months involvement with EXCEL, Sorenta told her case manager that she "likes going to her dad's house and wants to live there" and she was "really bored at home." When the case manager visited school, the school nurse expressed concern about Sorenta's poor attendance. Sorenta told the case manager she didn't go to school sometimes because she didn't have clothes or didn't get up on time.

The case manager found some used clothes for Sorenta . The mother told the case manager that Sorenta and her brother's lead levels were high and they needed to be retested. She also said that she was going to a job workshop and planned to find a job. The case manager worked on a household budget with the mother.

In March the mother reported to the case manager that Sorenta had been having nightmares. The case manager discussed nightmares with Sorenta and got Sorenta to share hers by sharing one of her own. The case manager arranged for the mother to get some space heaters when the heat went out in their apartment.

### **Case Manager Relationship with Sorenta**

Throughout the year, the case manager did activities with Sorenta on a regular basis. Sorenta did well in school and had no behavioral issues there. At the end of the school year, the case manager found a mentor for Sorenta so that Sorenta received mentoring services over the summer. Over a two month period she met with her mentor eight times. They did many things together, such as going to Mall of America, going out to eat, and having their nails done. Her mentor felt that 'their relationship had grown since the time they met.'

Throughout the summer the case manager also met with Sorenta regularly and did activities with her. They frequently would go to the library and read books since Sorenta was a good reader and enjoyed reading. During June, Sorenta spent a week a month at her father's house, but that stopped when her father was sentenced to 60 days in the workhouse for a parole violation. In August Sorenta 's mother's electricity was cut off because of lack of payment of a large overdue bill. It was reconnected when the County and East Side Neighborhood each paid half the bill.

In September Sorenta 's father was released from the workhouse. The case manager made these notes regarding her behavior, "She was quiet today and not very engaging. She seemed to be happy to be going back to school. She was excited because her father is getting out of the workhouse. He will be taking Sorenta and her brother for the weekend. They are going to a birthday party of her cousin."

Sorenta started the fourth grade in September and she liked her teacher. In November the family moved to a new apartment. Since the mother had left most her furniture at the last place, the case manager helped her obtain furniture through social services. Day. The case manager also told the family that she was leaving EXCEL and she made arrangements for closure with Sorenta . At their final meeting in November, they went to a bookstore and the case manager bought Sorenta some books, and they had lunch. During Sorenta 's first semester of fourth grade, she was absent four days and tardy 24 days.

A new case manager took over Sorenta 's case in February of the following year. He met Sorenta and her mother early that month and a few days later went to Sorenta 's school to meet with her teacher. The mother asked the case manager for help in finding furniture and also expressed dissatisfaction with their current living situation. Once more the mother had a large electric bill that was unpaid and wanted help with it and also with an unpaid phone bill.

Throughout the winter the new case manager continued to take Sorenta to the library as the previous case manager had done. In April the case manager followed up on a report that Sorenta was slapped in the face by someone when she was at her sister's

house. The case manager also looked into summer school for Sorenta 's younger brother and some summer programs for both of them. The case manager also discussed the children's school attendance and tardiness with the mother. The mother reported that Sorenta missed some school recently due to strep throat. The case manager also talked with Sorenta about her swearing at school and her school tardiness. The case manager noted that Sorenta appeared embarrassed when her swearing was mentioned.

### **Mother's Struggles**

After several months on the job, the case manager talked with the mother about her struggles with her kids. The mother had not been getting her kids to bed on time, getting them up in time for school, and they were not obeying her. The case manager helped the kids make a plan so they could get to school on time and have breakfast at school. He picked them up for school several days in a row and ate breakfast with them at school in order to get them into the habit.

The mother admitted to the case manager that she sometimes gave Sorenta a 'whooping' for misbehaving. The mother mentioned that she could place them with their father or their older sister who were both more responsible than she. The mother also told the case manager that one of her older son sneaks into the house at night to mess around with his girlfriend. The mother also wanted to have a psychological evaluation done on her youngest son who had threatened to kill himself and Sorenta. The case manager arranged for the psych eval, helped the mother find payment for her utility bill, and made plans for summer camp for the children.

Although the mother had been interested in summer camp for her kids, a week later she told the case manager that both "kids are excited to stay with their dad for the summer. They will be safe." The mother complained that the kids called their father to complain about her and then the father called her and tried to start stuff. As soon as school was out in June the children went to live with their father. The father was comfortable with the case manager continuing to take the kids on outings.

In July Sorenta 's younger brother began therapy. When the case manager went to pick up Sorenta at her father's house the father asked the case manager for a small loan. The case manager explained that they did not have resources to do that. The case manager noted that Sorenta seemed much happier living with father and the father appeared to do a good job with his kids. His house was much less chaotic than his wife's. The father admitted to the case manager about his past and past failures with his children.

Sorenta was paired up with mentor for the summer. They spent time reading, on the internet, and doing activities. The case manager discovered that the mother had lied about son's appointment with a therapist because she wanted her son back in her home because the father gave the boy consequences for bad behavior. The father felt the mother's house was too chaotic. He wanted his son back in a more stable environment. Within a couple weeks the son was back at the father's home.

In August of that year, the father called the case manager to say someone stole a large sum of money from his girlfriend's purse and must have been his older daughter. He also told the case manager that he saw his wife smoking marijuana the week before when he was over there. The case manager helped the father look for job. The mother wanted to move again. She told the case manager that she needed money for a down payment and for new beds. The father didn't want the mother to have the kids at the end

of the summer because he believed “They did not eat well when they were there, she did not have beds for them, and because of her drug use, they only have chips to eat.” He didn’t want them to end up in foster care. The case manager suggested to the father that he call child protection. Sorenta overheard the conversation and was upset about the possibility of going back to foster care. Her father calmed her down and told case manager not to talk with the mother about the situation and he would handle it himself.

**Current Status: Tentative Good Outcome**

Sorenta is now in the fifth grade. She is doing well in school and is no longer tardy or truant. She is in the school choir and has shown great skill in basketball and soccer. Her father has been employed for two years, goes to a self-help group once a week, and has in general been a responsible father. He and his live-in girlfriend married. Sorenta reports a great affection for the girlfriend. Sorenta worries about her mother, who continues to change residence several times a year, has a series of live-in boyfriends, and abuses drugs. The EXCEL case manager is cautiously optimistic that Sorenta will continue to do well and will not become involved in the juvenile justice system.

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